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## Privatization of Force: A Comparison of Reagan's Cold War Doctrine in Colombia and Nicaragua Related to the Shift of US Policy Towards the Outsourcing of Military Services

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**Privatization of Force: A Comparison of Reagan's Cold War Doctrine in  
Colombia and Nicaragua Related to the Shift of US Policy Towards the  
Outsourcing of Military Services**



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## Introduction

War is often thought to be defined by the conflict between states, and the conflict resolution has traditionally thought to be handled by the state up until recently. The War in Iraq showed the US government and armed forces specifically deploy outsource different forms of its services to the private sector to achieve the goals of the stat. Let's backtrack to an earlier period, lesser known for private warfare, to the end of the 20th Century when the Cold War was in its latter stages, and the Soviet Union versus United States conflict has encompassed the entire globe. The emergence of Ronald Reagan's presidency shifted the trajectory of the Cold War, global system, and military conflicts. Latin America because of being the proverbial "backyard of the US" bore the brunt of the reemerged aggressiveness in US foreign policy under Ronald Reagan. Nicaragua became a central focus of the transnational fight against communism for the US at this time along with Colombia in a more regional scope. With US interests at stake in both countries military intervention in a traditional sense, US troops on the ground are expected to be on the scene but in Colombia, Nicaragua something different occurred.

The Reagan Administration introduced a theme to all of the general foreign policy goals across the board in Regan's first year in office which was to reassert the US as the premier force and to represent strength in the world. A title according to Republicans of the 1970's and 1980's that was lost under the Carter administration.<sup>1</sup> The President pledged to achieve this with the expansion of the US enterprise to promote free trade, assisting economic development in poorer nations, standing firmly by democratic allies and "keeping faith with anti-Communist revolutionaries."<sup>2</sup> The pledges made by President Reagan were made to reflect a greater American move to neoliberalism and privatization. Communist ideology directly threatened

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<sup>1</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 75-88.

<sup>2</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." 77.



privatization the overarching goal of America's dominant presence abroad. In Nicaragua, the Sandinista revolution, a socialist takeover of the political climate in the state happened in 1979 the year before Reagan was elected. With the Sandinistas in power of the proper Nicaraguan government, only a violent regime could attempt to sabotage or overthrow the regime. Around the same time during the late 1970's the global illegal cocaine trade took off to new heights centered around Colombian manufacturing flowing through Central America to its main destination of the United States. The cocaine epidemic in the United States became a central issue originally for domestic politics in the "War on Drugs" campaign but later a part of Reagan's foreign policy. Thus, two main features of what became known as the Reagan Doctrine would become fighting communism by all means in any capacity and protecting drugs from coming into the United States.

To achieve the main goals of American foreign policy under Reagan, the military budget of the US had to extend its resources. The US military, CIA, DEA under the greater umbrella of US defense spearheaded efforts in providing support to anti-communist political groups ready for armed conflict. However, in the spirit of privatization even defense historically a venture taken on directly by the state (representing the state directly) was up for change as well. Introduction of Private Military Companies and defense contracting seemed only natural. Though the history of the United States use of PMCs to augment the standard demands of regular military proceeds, the 1980's the change the value of these firms greatly increased at this time. Millions of dollars of were allocated between US defense departments to private firms willing and able to take on security measures of Western states. It's also important to note in the timing of the 1980's especially the latter half which was Reagan's second term that allowed for PMC's to be a more sought after option for members of Congress who had endured the previous decade.

Transitioning from the polarity of the Nixon/Carter decade defined Reagan's ability to convince the people of such Foreign Policy hinged on the notion that Carter led a weak US international image. Republicans portrayed Carter's exit strategy out of civil conflicts across the globe as the reason that left pockets of the world vulnerable to communist influence because of his refusal to support anti-communist regimes which often had shady human rights records. All came to a Given this negative imagery leading into the 1980 US presidential election, Reagan was able to push for a more interventionist strategy abroad to combat communism and other security threats. However, the sting of what was understood by the American people as a defeat in the Vietnam War left many lawmakers and constituents alike apprehensive towards committing swaths of troops to various areas of the "peripheral world."

In this paper I will examine then argue how the introduction of PMC's to wars in Latin America under Reagan may not have been the first attempt at privatizing warfare but the substantial trial in which changed the landscape of the US government's usage PMCs in the future. Overall the focus of the research is to provide a layout a potential answer to the successes and failures of replacing a traditionally government-handled job to the hands of actors in the private sectors. The United States during the 1980's during the two terms under President Ronald Reagan examined and the carrying out of US foreign policy through means of military contracting is the private case to be evaluated. Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia are all valuable regions to take as case studies of the privatization of war, but the US resurged no-nonsense approach in taking down leftist organizations in Latin America more intriguing. The paper will analyze US relations to Nicaragua and Central America anti-communist regimes which were the first region mentioned by Reagan's first ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick. Colombia is to be examined as well because the country provides a

unique case where different branches of the US different department working at the same time, originally to fight communism but in the later part of the 1980's the illegal cocaine monopolies in Colombia. The PMC's deployed by the US in Colombia followed a similar path originally implemented to attack leftist guerrilla organizations but later to curb drugs flowing out of Colombia.

An examination into the details of PMC's actions in a handful of roles contracted to do for US military interventions in Colombia and Nicaragua are not only significant to shed light on the history of the conflict but the potential trajectory of US military interventions in the future. It's a known fact amongst US foreign policy scholars and those who pay attention to any political news that PMC's has not only continued to contemporary US conflicts but increased proliferation. My argument to why PMC and mercenary usage rates have increased since Reagan's time in office is broken into three distinct explanations. My first argument about the increased contracting of PMC's by the US is the idea of the military industrial complex and how that not only shifted to the private sector during the 1980's but allowed the private security industry to flourish. My next reason is the factor of Plausible Deniability which is less concrete and means in the case of US foreign policy that Presidents in collaboration with their closest advisors can avoid accountability for the military actions they may directly be involved in because of the outsourcing with defense spending. Within this point, I want to examine transparency and the major shifts in the way that the Contra War and War on Drugs were reported to give any indication on the pressure put on Reagan's foreign policy decisions in the respective countries. The last explanation has to do directly with the success and failures of adding private contractors into combat which is the ability for PMC's to perform duties beyond the normal scope of what US military personnel does.

This project is constructed into three different sections with a conclusion following those three sections. The initial section will lay out the details of the Foreign Policy strategies laid out in Nicaragua and Colombia specifically. All vital actors in both the war against communism and “war on drugs” in both countries will be examined. Included in this section will be many of the major laid out initiatives that could define American foreign policy as precisely as possible to give indications of what would be indications of potential successes or failures post-operations. Holistically section I should give the project a sense of what to look for in later sections that will get into the depths of what happened in both countries during this specific period. Readers and I should have an understanding going into the conclusion standards set by the US administration itself on what would be a successful or failed campaign. The second section will explore DynCorp and its role in the conflicts in Latin America. The actions of the company and what can be associated with the private war separately from American military forces will be evaluated on its own about the state's conflicts. The emergence of mercenary usage within Nicaragua's Contra War will be reviewed in Section II with answers defining the knowledge of PMC deployment at the time also being kept in mind. The last section will include the data and evidence used in supporting claims of both success or failure of specific targets of Foreign Policy in Latin America in regards to the jobs done by PMCs. With the results of the military interventions within Colombia and Nicaragua during along with after the implementation of PMC force in regards to the broader narratives of stopping communism and cocaine trafficking. With the history understood about the historical outcomes about the Reagan Doctrine, my thesis regarding the trends of PMC proliferation is reflected with contextual evidence with Colombia and Nicaragua serving as both regional but intrinsically larger examples of US foreign policy.

## Chapter I: Reagan Doctrine: Central America and Colombia in Focus

In 1987 the annual federal budget proposal for that specific fiscal year was released by the U.S. government with a written message from President Reagan. The statement defined Privatization as a wholesale strategy representative of the major theme to underline all Reagan's policies which were defined by neoliberal intentions set out in concrete rhetoric that would define the shift in American grand strategy.<sup>3</sup> Reagan in his proposal stated the federal government's privatization policy push as, "a strategy to shift the production of goods and services from the Government to the private sector to reduce Government expenditures and to take of the efficiencies that normally [occur in the private marketplace]." Unlike many other budget proposals of past administrations, the implications of Reagan's strategies were to create a direct relationship between domestic and foreign policy. The benefits of tapping into the private sector in areas traditionally involving federal programs weren't just for the benefits of reduced spending but also what the Reagan Administration saw as potential outcomes from efficiency. The cutting of funding wasn't a part of the reduction of scope in the federal budget; military spending increased over every year in his first term from 1981-1984 which led to a larger surplus of spending."<sup>4</sup> In every department aside from the department of defense, the emphasis was on cutting funding towards programs and decreasing the role of individual departments. In the area of military expenditures and strategies, the emphasis was on efficient usage not downsizing or cutting defense spending. One of the major aspects of all commercial activities related to the US was the focus on cost-efficient production.<sup>5</sup> This type of production was supposed to take pressure off the Federal government from having to maintain its military assets for months to

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<sup>3</sup> Williams, Phil. "The Reagan Administration and Defence Policy." *The Reagan Presidency*, 1990, 199-230.

<sup>4</sup> Weiss, Linda. *America Inc.?: Innovation and Enterprise in the National Security State*. 22

<sup>5</sup> Solomon, Robert. "Budget Deficits and Federal Reserve Policy." *The Brookings Review* 2, no. 3 (1984): 22-55.

years after proposed spending on the resources. The way Reagan's administration was able to follow through with their lofty efficient military spending goals was the utilization of military contracts.<sup>6</sup> Following the greater purpose of privatization, contracting-out in defense terms means the federal government is asking a private company for material military production or military services. In the 1980's the services and production demand greatly increased which meant the suppliers, private military industry boomed as well.

Introduced earlier was the Reagan administration's rekindling of the fire for the US to exterminate the great enemy which was the Soviet Union and the communist ideology around the globe. The renewed heating of the Cold War meant that the initial tasks of the Reagan administration were to urge Congress from a lukewarm stance against fighting the Soviet influence to treating support of anti-communist fighters as self-defense. The complexity of the getting Congress to support funding such efforts of sending aid to Soviet resistance groups was a case by a case study that varied. A big issue was the regime type that the US was supporting abroad, totalitarian regimes were often cited by lawmakers 1970's as being incredibly problematic. The Human Rights decade of the 1970's brought on a new sense of awareness of the direct actions of US forces abroad and where US resources were going. Supporting democratic states wasn't a complicated process for Congress to cosign during the 1980's nor was fighting communist totalitarian regimes such as the government propped up in Afghanistan from 1979-89 by the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Confusion arose for the Reagan Administration and US officials early in Reagan's tenure when dealing with states in Central America. Many of the Latin American countries of the 1980's were a part of the so-called democratic revolution experience a

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<sup>6</sup> Petersohn, Ulrich. "The Impact of Mercenaries and Private Military and Security Companies on Civil War Severity between 1946 and 2002." *International Interactions* 40, no. 2 (2014): 191-215.

<sup>7</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (2006): 75-88.

reactionary movement supported by the US (in most cases) after post-colonial decades of political unrest and dictatorships. In Central America, countries leadership were supported by the US to combat communism and embrace Western values.<sup>8</sup> One of the major challenges early on for many of closest foreign policy advisors of Reagan such as Ambassador to the UN Jeane Kirkpatrick and CIA director William Casey was to make a case to attack democratic socialist or communist states. The Leftist Sandinista regime that overthrew the Somoza dictatorship of Nicaragua in 1979 was not a representation of this democratic socialist state on the onset but later proved to be. In 1984 over 60% of the Nicaraguan general election votes went to Daniel Ortega head of the FSLN party confirming the country's status as a democratic socialist type.<sup>9</sup> The barriers brought on by the actual practice of civil society pushed the Reagan Administration to new subversive heights and creative ways of intervention. Mercenaries or Private Military Companies allow for covert intervention arguably in ways that a pure state intervention can't.

The Civil Wars in Latin America especially Central America were blamed by conservative American politicians as the "Moscow-Havana axis." Fear of Cuba sparking communist revolutionaries and inciting hatred toward the US was another major reason the Reagan Administration felt the need to refocus its Foreign Policy agenda back on Latin America. The first major security strategy presented by the Reagan administration reflected those fears and emphasized the outcomes of guerrilla fighting. The U.S. National Security Strategy of 1982 stated that fighting back Soviet expansion was a chief aspect towards a foreign policy which included, "to increase costs of Soviet support and use of proxy, terrorist and subversive forces."<sup>10</sup> The strategy went beyond normal conditions of US practices of war but meeting the Soviet Union subversive tactics with subversive often controversial tactics of their own.

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<sup>8</sup> Close, David. "The Nicaraguan Elections of 1984." *Electoral Studies* 4, no. 2 (1985): 152-68.

<sup>9</sup> Close, David. "The Nicaraguan Elections of 1984." 155.

<sup>10</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." 82.

“Plausible deniability” was an incredibly significant part of the ability for the higher chain of command of the US military and government to employ these controversial tactics. Deniability was what the Commander-in-Chief, Military Departments, and Generals sought to increase the strength of the morale of foreign “freedom” fighters in proxy conflicts without retributions from a skeptical post-Vietnam congress.<sup>11</sup> The contracting of private military firms to train these freedom fighters around the globe and provide security to their camps was directly a result of Plausible Deniability. The focus during Reagan’s first term in office was on results, and as long as American made weapons were killing Soviet-backed fighters, the fight was heading in the positive direction. As a result, through use of the coded language of deniability and the fact that there was a lack of physical American troops on the ground in places such as Nicaragua the funding for the National Security Strategy from 1982 to 1984 skyrocketed.<sup>12</sup>

The tenacity of the Reagan Doctrine throughout his terms in office is defined by the strong characters around him that led his agencies. Key agencies such as the CIA, DEA, and NSA often played an important part in defining the role of PMC’s. The CIA’s budget for overseas operations in countries of communist concern was enormous, and often it was the CIA going beyond analysis and into much of the training of anti-communist forces during the early 1980’s.<sup>13</sup> The CIA under William Casey was in sync with the defense department regarding its relentless commitment to combat Communism. The CIA was chiefly fixated on the Soviet Union, looking for ways in which “third-world” governments infrastructure could be damaged to lean away from US influence or were outright Soviet-supported. The CIA’s projects were supposed to be covert more under the radar compared to major military operations which needed

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<sup>11</sup> Petersohn, Ulrich. "The Impact of Mercenaries and Private Military and Security Companies on Civil War Severity between 1946 and 2002." 203.

<sup>12</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." 80.

<sup>13</sup> Weiss, Linda. *America Inc.?: Innovation and Enterprise in the National Security State*. 24.



a stronger consensus from not just Congress but a watchful International Community. A fast-paced start to the Reagan presidency led to the revelation of many of the secret operations of the US government through the CIA becoming not so secretive forcing congress members on both sides of the aisle to demand authorization for such ventures.<sup>14</sup> Operations involving subversive tactics that violated international norms, mainly accusations against the US for violating state rights of sovereignty with the meddling of Latin American nations governmental procedures. Consequentially, many plans of the CIA were done without knowledge or synchronization of all the department heads on board which meant the relationship between the private sector to the US federal departments were between representatives of departments to CEO's of companies rather than a co-signing of the entire government for decisions.<sup>15</sup> What makes foreign policy difficult to evaluate is when there isn't a succinct vision that represents broadly "US" as a whole. There were several divisions and struggled between members of the Reagan Administration chief among them Congress versus the various security actors including the defense department and the CIA. There were also divisions amongst the coordinating attacks on communism from the CIA and DEA, especially in Colombia.

The Drug Enforcement Agency under Ronald Reagan played a crucial role as well in the fruition of the Reagan Doctrine. Historically the DEA had been thought of as an agency that would receive funding as part of a larger domestic budget from the Federal Government. Under Reagan, the DEA turned into an agency not only interested law enforcement but thought of as larger domestic defense from drugs primarily coming from outside of US border. It was the DEA that saw the largest increase in funding over any other government agency in Reagan's, a 43%

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<sup>14</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy." 84..

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

increase in actual spending.<sup>16</sup> The increased DEA budget directly resulted in a spike of the number of DEA special agents available for groundwork in fighting drug traffickers, particularly in South Florida a destination for most of the US illegal cocaine, marijuana imports.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, there was also an increase in federal prison space because of the higher number of drug-related arrests during the early Reagan years. The first DEA administrator sworn in under Reagan was Francis Mullen who began his work in leading the agency in 1981.<sup>18</sup> Cooperation was a major feature of the DEA belief system under Mullen who wanted other defense agencies to work together to fight for justice in the “War on Drugs.” The cooperation Mullen appealed for would not only involve the sharing of classified information between the CIA, defense department, and DEA but make the drug problem an issue of foreign policy. Under Mullen, the plan wasn’t to allow the drugs to reach the US and deal with domestic drug handlers but to reach beyond Florida closer to the source of where the illegal substances were grown. Even with the increase in special agents, the DEA required more strength to reach the lofty goal of providing consistent pressure against such forces at the level of these Central, South American Cartels. Parallel to the time of the rise in power of the DEA the US military’s budget increased but remained focused on fighting Communism, which was thought to be a separate issue. The aspirations of Mullen provided PMC’s such as DynCorp at this time called Dynalectron an opportunity to fulfill a security role desired by the DEA in Colombia, the cocaine capital of the world in the 1980’s.<sup>19</sup>

Cocaine as a drug will always be associated with being the commodity that helped propel infamous figures such as Pablo Escobar or El Chapo and even story legends such as Scarface to power. Cocaine and its distribution are glamorized but what is often forgotten is the degree of

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<sup>16</sup> Williams, Phil. "The Reagan Administration and Defence Policy." 203.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, Phil. "The Reagan Administration and Defence Policy." 205.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, Phil. "The Reagan Administration and Defence Policy." 210.

<sup>19</sup> Petersohn, Ulrich. "The Impact of Mercenaries and Private Military and Security Companies on Civil War Severity between 1946 and 2002." 195.

violence that comes with the illicit drug trade. A common misconception of the conflicts brought on by drug trafficking is that a simple binary exists between some “federales” and the “banditos.” The conflict between the imagined Feds and the Drug criminals involves crazy shootouts that characterize the Wild West nature of the drug trafficking business. However, there is clear evidence to persuade those people just the opposite about the actors involved in the War on Drugs. Not only were the major actors involved on all sides of the Colombian to US trade tactical, thoughtful with every move made against their enemies, the binary that pitted the good side versus the bad side does not represent this case accurately. There was an assortment of actors in the early 1980’s that had a relationship with the sale of Colombian-based drugs and enemies couldn’t be discerned solely based on the group’s opinion on drug trafficking. At one point or another, even the highest authorities and justices were complicit with the sale of drugs putting even more importance on the study and understanding of the motivations of actors at each point in time.

Colombia during the end of the 1970’s and early 1980’s was the prime example of a problematic country that represented all the worries of Reagan’s foreign policy. The Colombia of 1981 was one of great turmoil and political instability. Colombia historically has been divided between a more established conservative group and a surge of various leftist groups who were ready to do almost anything to defend their causes. The main leftist political groups of the late 1970’s were the ELN, FARC, and M-19 who openly declared themselves Marxist or communist influenced. As if Colombia’s political climate wasn’t enough for the Reagan Administration to avert its attention to the region the trafficking of cocaine manufactured had a meteoric rise that paralleled the rise of Marxist groups.<sup>20</sup> By the standards set by the Reagan Doctrine in its efforts to eradicate communist influence in any vulnerable peripheral state, Colombia met all the

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<sup>20</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 1 (1988): 70-90.

checks. Regarding regions of focus for the US in its struggle to slow drug trade Colombia was at the center of it. Based on the ability of Colombia during the early 1980's to meet the criteria set by Reagan that require the intervention of some sort it's a surprise that thousands of troops didn't arrive at the Panamanian border after his inauguration. Despite, how clear the Colombian situation was as a threat to his US interests, the course of action for how the US would address Colombia's instability is complicated.

The inability to understand the behavior and alliances of actors in Colombia played a crucial role in the US ability to aid Colombia in how it aspired to. From the political side of the conflict, the governments represented a unified conservative, capitalist perspective. However, the presumed "enemy" of the US-backed Colombia state in 1981 led by Julio Turbay a former Colombian ambassador to the US had almost a dozen different leftist groups to combat.<sup>21</sup> Aside from the three main Left parties mentioned above, there were eight other guerrilla organizations reaching fighting operating Colombian military personnel in various locations. US enemies in Colombia were not unified during Reagan's time compared to the way the FARC dominates the voice of the leftist revolution in today's Colombia. The divided left meant that the number of conflicts was more frequent but smaller in scale on average. There was an almost systematic wave of violence and clashes between the Colombian military fighting in the rural outskirts far beyond the streets of Bogota. Peasants were the ones representing these Leftist groups recruited by educated, ideologically-motivated leaders like a Fidel Castro. Their rural areas were often homes to the guerilla fighting camps, and as a result, even bystanders were forced to take sides. The diversity of players in the ongoing Colombian civil war of the late 1970's and 1980's was in antithesis to the Vietnam War. The failure to eradicate a communist regime in a forceful nature by the US military under Nixon in Vietnam would only spell more trouble for a standing US

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<sup>21</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 75.

military presence in Colombia with similar fighting environments and less clear targets. What this meant for the conflict was that Reagan had to rely on extremely heavy aid including economic support to the Colombian government and American weaponry. What was lacking in this aid was often the intricate beneficial influence and training that could come normally come with US forces being stationed in a conflict zone. In other parts of Latin America, dictators such as Rios Montt and Military officials from all across Latin America would come to the US entering in places such as the infamous School of Americas for guidance on successfully suppressing communist opposition.<sup>22</sup> The turnover of Colombia's headship didn't allow for the coordination of meaningful US military training in the region. PMC's played a part in the training of Colombian military personnel, and smaller groups of mercenaries were used in the more regular but less intense skirmishes that could've required the overcommitment of US personnel. Mercenaries ability to more independently be broken down into small groups and flexibility is strategically advantageous for support in proxy wars.

The other side of the conflict or at least a different aspect to what historians call the same continued history of *La Violencia* which is the violence that plagued Colombia dating back to 1946, was the drug war. Massive success for Colombia drug manufacturers occurred in the 1970's and 1980's. The process of cocaine from coca plants of the Andean mountains, to the refined cocaine product in Colombia, and eventually the American consumer, was a transnational project requiring an extremely organized syndicate. These groups are called cartels, drug supplying businesses whose understanding of how to keep themselves and their profits intact meant far more than just being under the radar. In fact, the Cartels the US and the Colombian government were up against in the 1980's used the same sophisticated, subversive tactics. With

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<sup>22</sup> Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under General Efraim Rios Montt, 1982-1983*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

the money that was accumulated by the sale of drugs which was said to be up to billions of dollars, the Cartels positioned themselves to compete on a variety of different outside of engaging in gun-toting standoffs.

The Medellin Cartel led by the Ochoa Vasquez brothers and Pablo Escobar was the most powerful Drug Cartel in the world during the 1970's and 1980's.<sup>23</sup> Fortune Magazine famously included Escobar in its 1987 international billionaire's issue, when the Cartel was said to be making profit margins of over \$3 billion US Dollars per year during the decade.<sup>24</sup> To maintain and obtain those high level of figures Escobar's group had to operate in a way that allowed them to combat not only Latin American governments but the almighty U.S. reach of justice.

There are three main features of the Medellin Cartel to examine that made any US-Colombian attempt to take it down difficult. Firstly, the organization was incredibly decentralized. Despite many of the lords of the Cartel owning incredible wealth, the organization itself didn't put a plethora of responsibilities into one person or assets in one area. A difficult task for the US involvement in Colombia, especially the DEA, was that the Medellin Cartel required widespread attacking to cause serious trauma to the organization. The dispersion of the Cartel's wealth of assets also meant that similarly to the fight against communist groups an effective attack would need to be one involving numerous task forces and smaller combat groups. Secondly, the group employed tactics to control the Colombian judicial system and moreover the political system that went far beyond the traditional bounds of a crime syndicate. The Cartel used the traditional route of extortion to the corrupt local policeman, judges, and city officials.<sup>25</sup> However, Medellin used the services of independent assassins also known as sicarios,

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<sup>23</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 72.

<sup>24</sup> Jurney, Corinne. "The Richest Man in the World and 95 Also-Rans 1987." Forbes. April 14, 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/pictures/gkkh45fik/1987/#43f675692da7>.

<sup>25</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 76.

to kill off any government authorities formulating any plan of arrests or outing of Cartel members. By 1987 in less than 20 years, over “50 judges, at least dozen journalists, and more than 400 police and military personnel.” had been assassinated by Cartel affiliates.<sup>26</sup> Their ability to keep a keen eye out for any potential person who posed a threat to the Cartel meant that being a potential sympathizer to the government was almost as risky as being a communist sympathizer. The outreach of the Medellin Cartel and other drug trafficking organizations crippled the Colombian justice system. During the 1980’s it was almost impossible for Colombia's federal government to independently to reprimand even the most blatant and violators of Colombian law. Colombia’s incapability to apprehend drug dealers put more pressure on the US to handle in some form or fashion the biggest targets of the War on Drugs and a need for protection of its officials. The attacks on the Colombian government for the sake of avoiding prosecution weakened Colombia’s conservative regimes in power unintentionally benefiting the leftist guerrilla groups to at odds with the leadership in place.

The third feature of the Medellin Cartel which caused immense difficulties for US forces was its indirect tag team relationship to the communist guerrilla groups of Colombia. Often, there was violence between the guerrilla groups and drug cartels which relied on the usage of the same rural farmlands, for their strongholds. At other times, they were able to work simultaneously to become thorns in the sides of the government. The group M-19 began attacking police officials and famously stormed the Colombian Palace of Justice and held all the justices’ hostage in 1985.<sup>27</sup> This incredibly low point marked a low point of control for the Colombian government and what seemed like wasted US taxpayer money considering the additional aid from USAID that was being poured into Colombia. For the US, the battles fighting

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<sup>26</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 80.

<sup>27</sup> Treaster, Joseph R. "DOZENS SLAIN." The New York Times. November 08, 1985.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/08/world/colombian-troops-end-court-siege-dozens-slain.html>.

communism and drugs had officially converged during the event of the brief taking of the Colombian Supreme Court in 1985 by M-19.

From a US military lens, there are many similarities in the fight against Cartels and the bout waged against communist groups. They both had bases, hierarchical structures, and relied on manipulating the everyday citizen to steer away from supporting the government. However, the main military strategies deployed against Cartels to strip away their power was fundamentally different. A key part of US-Colombia relations in taking away cartel leaders to further damage the group as a whole was a push for extraditions. In 1979, previous to Reagan coming into office the Carter Administration had signed a US-Colombia Extradition Treaty that allowed arrested Colombian criminals to be extradited to the US and prosecuted in American courts.<sup>28</sup> Being able to have Cartel members in US courts was a valued feature in taking down the Medellin Cartel. Not only would the US exercise an authorized practice of international legal force the idea was that Cartel members would give up more information to destroy their organizations if faced with a much more justice system and concrete punishment. Unsurprisingly, extraditions were a tough task for Colombian Judicial System on occasion they were able to capture a person of interest in a case related to the Medellin was keeping them long enough to extradite them.<sup>29</sup> The Cartels used bribery and intimidation in this realm as well to free major players from the holding cells. For example, Jorge Ochoa one of the grand leaders of the Medellin Cartel was in the process of Extradition after hiding out in Spain, was brought to Colombia but after bribes, a lower court judge unexpectedly released Ochoa before making it to the US.<sup>30</sup> Again, we see another example where the protection of judges and those related to the legal handling of Cartel members cases require protection. The importance of lower court judges

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<sup>28</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 76.

<sup>29</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 77

<sup>30</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 81.



and smaller figures meant that the US government wouldn't be able to extend those services to all officials needed thus the argument for private security, in this case, is more reasonable for the US desires. PMC's through advising and any given weaponry gave the Colombian vigilantes or defense groups called paramilitaries which will be discussed later in the chapter an improved chance to fight off Leftist groups.<sup>31</sup> The probability of US soldiers serving as some armed guard in the place of the Colombian police would be financially exhausting and difficult for the US. Across the Latin American spectrum, the needs to achieve the desires of US foreign policy varied and PMCs were able to fill in different ways.

The Nicaraguan Revolution that occurred over the course of the 1960's and 1970's ended the Somoza family dynasty's political rule in Nicaragua, a reign consistently supported by the US government throughout its tenure. The result of the overthrow of President Somoza was the rise of the FSLN known as the Sandinistas a socialist party. The fear of Sandinista regime for the US government was much more concrete than fear potential communist policies injected into the nation, but the FSLN was founded on opposing US intervention in Nicaragua at all in a rallying cry against new forms of colonialism.<sup>32</sup> The Reagan Doctrine and Reagan Advisor's commitment to the revival of containment were put to the absolute test in the case of Nicaragua. To give an even bigger incentive to the Reagan Administration's the Nicaraguan conflict was thought to be lost under Carter who cut aid to the conservative Somoza Regime after reports of Human Rights abuses by the Nicaraguan military were made public.<sup>33</sup> Immediately after coming into office the Reagan demanded aid for a rebel force, Las Contras, to undermine the new Sandinista regime. The theme of the Nicaraguan case study of 1980's about the Reagan Doctrine

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<sup>31</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964-1987*.45.

<sup>32</sup> Roberts, Kenneth. "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America." *International Security* 15, no. 2 (1990): 67-95.

<sup>33</sup> Scott, James M. "Interbranch Rivalry and the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua." *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 2 (1997): 190-237.

was the dance played between White House between the extent of aid to be authorized and what wouldn't. Despite a clear example to Reagan of the country that represented a threat to US interests and security abroad congress remained firm in its desire to push for diplomatic strategies over the military plans laid out by Reagan's top defense advisors.

Division amongst top decision-makers in the US government in regards to whether or not to attack the Sandinista government with diplomacy or physical forces shaped the practice of the Reagan Doctrine. Although Congress and outside pressures of international norms were against the funding of a Contra War, Reagan had the support of the defense department, of the CIA and other agencies. US agencies, in particular, the CIA could operate and stage covert operations aside from the direct military intervention so greatly feared by US lawmakers. In March of 1981, the Reagan Administration led by Director Casey had already formulated a covert program requiring 19 million dollars to support the fight in the "Central American Crisis."<sup>34</sup> Nicaragua feared that the state would serve as another Cuba and inspire countries around it to turn away from US relations. El Salvador, at the time, had a close relationship with the Sandinista government and was a target of the revolutionary group for potential collaboration. As a result, the US covert program against the Sandinista regime allowed the CIA to provide material aid such as food, weapon support, and advice to the rebels. Simultaneously, Reagan moved to cutting all Federal aid to Nicaragua if they continued to engage in strong El Salvadoran relations.<sup>35</sup> The ebb and flow of authorized support for means of combating of the Sandinista government meant that the CIA had to employ ad hoc programs to support the Contras continuously. US forces couldn't be streamlined into Nicaragua or surrounding states consistently enough to be stationed anywhere there needed to be military personnel able to be

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<sup>34</sup> Scott, James M. "Interbranch Rivalry and the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua." 198.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

ready on call in a sense. PMC personnel could replace ad hoc committees from a military personnel standpoint. Many of the Private Contracting firms were made up of retired military officials not just mercenaries and could provide services normally provided by commanders such as leading tactical missions from a base for a price. In an even more covert fashion that already used by way of the CIA, the Reagan Administration allowed for the use PMC contracting in various points of the Contra Wars.

Reagan throughout his entire campaign was relentless in sticking to the principles of his Doctrine and supporting the Contras in their anti-communist struggle. What made the Nicaraguan case even more defiant in its refusal to only rely on negotiation was the potential for “positive” residual effects. In the greater fight against communism which encompassed all Central American states, there were small victories to be obtained in the seclusion of Sandinista ideology. A portion of victory included the literal practice of containment which was the idea that even if the Sandinista regime was legitimized, the Reagan could limit its influence to only within its borders.<sup>36</sup> The CIA hoped that if they could produce a strong resistance to Sandinista influence in Central America in combination with the International isolation of Nicaragua economically, the country would cripple the regime. The destruction of the Sandinista regime in a sort of war of attrition would serve as a symbolic example for other countries thinking about opposing US involvement in their countries. The biggest slap in the face for the American empire was Nicaragua's removal of almost 80% of US business in the country in the five years after the time of the revolution in 1979 and take over of the country's economy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Roberts, Kenneth. "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America." 70.

<sup>37</sup> Roberts, Kenneth. "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America." *International Security* 15, no. 2 (1990): 80.

Honduras played a pivotal role in the infiltration of Nicaragua and a location of many of the Contra camps. The presence of US and Contra troops in Honduras territory was very controversial amongst Central American leadership, and Honduran President Azcona faced a major backlash.<sup>38</sup> The stationing of Contra troops paired with US troops in Honduras was far from subtle, and there was a shift over Reagan's tenure as president to absolute reprimanding covert operations resulting in illegal behavior. Two main failures during the 1980's related to the of US-Nicaraguan relations that created an attitude of condemnation from Congress was the costly Invasion of Grenada and Iran-Contra Affair.

The Invasion of Grenada in 1983 cost the Reagan Administration a lot of political capital and showed lawmakers why US troops should never be used in Latin American conflicts. In 1983 over 7,000 US troops were deployed to fight alongside remaining members of the former government to overthrow the leftist PRG regime that had taken over. Although, the troops were effective in destroying a significant amount of PRG's military over a hundred soldiers died, and an unprecedented amount of military assets were unleashed to make sure that outcome could happen.<sup>39</sup> Post-Invasion the US Congress and various Foreign governments shamed the haste in which the President declared to a commitment to the war in Granada. More importantly, however, US Congress was able to use Granada as a prime example of why not to support US military intervention in Latin America making it nearly impossible for Troops to be deployed for direct conflict for the remainder of the Reagan tenure. Reagan responded by advocating for the transfer of an increase in monetary aid to the Contras and weaponry rather continue the fight of Anti-Communism but avoid losing US troops. Unfortunately, US Congress was also being

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<sup>38</sup> Roberts, Kenneth. "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America." *International Security* 15, no. 2 (1990): 85.

<sup>39</sup> Connellâ Smith, Gordon. "The Grenada Invasion in Historical Perspective: From Monroe to Reagan." *Third World Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1984): 432-45.

influenced by outside pressures, particular transnational Human Rights organizations who reported on the civil rights abuses of the Contra groups on Nicaraguan citizens.<sup>40</sup> To this Reagan reached even stranger depths to preserve the fight against the Sandinista regime, shown in the Iran-Contra Affair. Entire projects could be dedicated to Iran-Contra scandal, but the CIA facilitated an illegal arms deal between Iran and Contra groups by being complicit with the Contra's obtainment of wealth through drug trafficking.<sup>41</sup> A bizarre incident led to the exposure of the Iran-Contra relationship and the CIA's complicity but again the concept of Plausible Deniability used to shield President Reagan's involvement. However, the evidence of top-down collaboration between Reagan's top advisers and actors involved in making the Iran-Contra affair work was overwhelming. The Reagan administration was faced with a situation where only the complete transfer of responsibilities to private military firms or mercenaries would fulfill the goals without putting his job completely at risk. PMC's in Nicaragua were used in a wide variety of capacities and often, with a very unspoken history.

When historians and political look back at the Reagan Doctrine they often refer to shadow armies backed by US economic and military support engaging in proxy war. Those secret armies are the ones mentioned previously in this section, the paramilitary groups of Colombia and the Contras. The "secret" armies, individuals, and organizations that will be explored in the subsequent sections are representing the private sector differently.

The covert forces to be evaluated in this research project are Private Military Companies are entities assigned to projects based on contracts with institutional forces inherently motivated by money rather than political purpose. As previously mentioned it became increasingly difficult for the straightforward tactical strategy to be discussed and for the Contras to work under Higher

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<sup>40</sup> Scott, James M. "Interbranch Rivalry and the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua." 208.

<sup>41</sup> Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Intelligence Committees that the US can deploy. The aid to Central America became increasingly limited for the rebel forces which resulted in a lack of basic leadership coordination in missions.<sup>42</sup> Along with the lack of leadership, the military hardware sent to Colombia and Nicaragua from the US often wasn't proficiently used because of the lack of education of US-made equipment such as tracking devices which would benefit Contras in rural fighting.<sup>43</sup> The Contras would greatly benefit from the presence of any military personnel that could help in these shortcomings. Even the CIA officials that were able to consistently play some part in US-Central American affairs early in the Reagan Administration before Congress' tight restrictions on foreign policy had trouble being able to assist with the wide range of military tasks asked by counterrevolutionaries. The emergence of capital for mercenary organizations and micro-management firms in the 1970's meant that PMCs could shoulder the load of military contracts in an expanded role from earlier Cold War conflicts.<sup>44</sup> What this also meant was that the mercenaries and military personnel contracted for Latin American were decisively more independent than past mercenary relationships for the US. Their independence showed a new light for President Reagan and future administrations to direct their energy towards pseudo-military organizations to combat in proxy wars given their independence and ability to organize themselves with the help of PMC advisors without US training. The US would have to deal with the unexpected consequences that could occur in a privatized the military industry. Chief among those concerns was the worry that the Reagan Administration could be held accountable for *all* actions of mercenaries were clumped into the actions of the Contras.

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<sup>42</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. Cold War History. (2015). 16:1. 37-60

<sup>43</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*.48.

<sup>44</sup> Petersohn, Ulrich. "The Impact of Mercenaries and Private Military and Security Companies on Civil War Severity between 1946 and 2002." *International Interactions* 40, no. 2 (2014): 191-215.

The next section will directly address how PMCs and mercenaries contracted by the US government to support anti-communist sides in civil wars were able to represent the Reagan Doctrine. The Colombian case will also address PMCs ability to protect government strongholds and officials from the reach of Drug Cartels as well. The Key features to look for are the outcomes of the skirmishes fought by US-supported groups, the plausible deniability surrounding US government-PMC relationships and PMC's can be responsible for in carrying out the vision of the Reagan Doctrine.

## **Chapter II: PMC's in Action**

### **Colombia's Relationship to PMC's**

When looking back at the rhetoric surrounding the Reagan Doctrine used to reaffirm the US' presence in Latin America, the US message towards Colombia had a strikingly different tone. The central American government's during the 1980's were plagued by internal, political skirmishes often intertwined in the greater ideological struggle of the Cold War. In Colombia, the PMC component to the greater puzzle to move the country forward is very confusing because of the stronger relationship between President Julio Ayala and President Reagan to start the 1980's. The broader relationship between the nations is based on the US being the main destination for Colombian exports and strong diplomatic ties, which brought Reagan's attention to the greater Colombian experience. Chapter one outlined the main actors in Colombia which reflected the range of potential security measures into which Reagan would try and address. In contrast to the US tumultuous relationship with leaders of Central America, the US maintained strong ties to Colombian leadership. The constant, sturdy diplomatic ties between the nations contributed to a US integration into Colombia that was more transparent and collaborative in strategic planning in comparison to Central America. Which begs the question of why the US felt the need to transition to use the Private Sector as an avenue to ensure US security aims in Colombia?

After 1982, Colombia's new president Belisario Betancur vowed to move towards a more independent Colombia. In post-election victory speeches, Betancur criticized many of the choices of past Colombian administrations for being too submissive to US foreign policy. He cited Colombia's desire to not be a satellite state for US sphere of influence and also a war zone



for US battle against drugs which was as he saw it, exacerbated by US Extradition Treaty.<sup>45</sup> Reagan's immediate worry in regards to a potential shift in policy was President Betancur commitment to fighting drug cartels and revolutionaries. If Colombian government were to change the level of the tenacity of security measures not up to US standards, then the US would need to switch its approach.

Insert into the picture DynCorp or as it was called up until 1987 DynaElectron, a private defense, military, and "global" service contractor for the US. Today the company makes over 3 billion dollars in revenue with over 95% of its business coming from US contracts ranging the state department to the DEA to NASA.<sup>46</sup> Given the circumstances surrounding Colombia's foreign policy shift in 1983, to step out of the US shadows, Reagan's Administration turned to DynaElectron to aid in its effort to find solutions to their problems of rising communism and drug trade in the region. What this meant was the Reagan Doctrine, and Jeane Kirkpatrick's vision would live on regardless of applying pressure on communist forces including ELN, FARC, and M-19 through physical means.

The decisions made on both the US and Colombian leadership sides were able to happen because of the historical, political diversity of the country. Betancur was able to rise to power while facing a very divided liberal party and being the moderate conservative. The elections of Colombia were often problematic with politicians ties being so deeply rooted in corrupt organizations. However, the elections reflected a democratic process nonetheless. As a result, Betancur was able to be candid with Washington about his vision of a Colombia as a country that

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<sup>45</sup> Bagley, Bruce Michael., and Juan Gabriel Tokatliain. *Colombian Foreign Policy in the 1980's: The Search for Leverage*. Washington, D.C.: School of Advanced International Studies, 1985.

<sup>46</sup> "DynCorp International." DynCorp International. Accessed January 15, 2018. <http://www.dyn-intl.com/>.

needed to focus on institutional repair before the needs of outside actors.<sup>47</sup> Reagan met with Betancur on Capitol Hill in August of 1982 which would be a turning point for both nations in regards to future problem-solving in Colombia. Betancur administration was quick to call out US relations to Colombia especially under the guise of the IMF as problematic for the growth of Colombia's economy as well as the potential for Colombia to be a legitimate nation. Legitimacy for Colombia and Latin American nations, in general, was an important feature to strive for which also included security. Betancur took an even greater leap for Colombian independence by signing on off the Non-Aligned Movement pact which granted membership to Colombia which integrated Colombia back into relations with the rest of the "Global South" and more importantly smaller economies who often resisted US influence.<sup>48</sup> One of the nations that quickly sparked relations with Colombia after the Non-Aligned signing in early 1983 was Cuba. Colombia post-1982 elections were beginning to become a threat to US interests invested in the country but also security at large.<sup>49</sup> However, the sheer volume of actors in Colombia over the course of the 20th century up until 1982 gave Reagan and US agencies options to work with to achieve their strategic goals.

When President Betancur won the election in 1982, he did so as an independent conservative, a moderate with little to say about major reforms but small changes to Colombia's attitude. That wasn't always the case for Betancur; he was originally a supporter of the ultra-right-wing party led by *Caudillo*, Laureano Gomez, which put a stricter emphasis on law and order, along with the demand of stronger respect for the leaders in power. Given the history of Colombia's Caudillo rule and struggle with extremist politics on both sides of the political

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<sup>47</sup> Bagley, Bruce Michael., and Juan Gabriel Tokatliain. *Colombian Foreign Policy in the 1980's: The Search for Leverage*. 30

<sup>48</sup> Bagley, Bruce Michael., and Juan Gabriel Tokatliain. *Colombian Foreign Policy in the 1980's: The Search for Leverage*. 35

<sup>49</sup> Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*. 36

spectrum, Betancur took advantage by appearing as the rational actor during campaigns. Caudillo support and right-wing nationalism remained prevalent throughout the 20th century, and right-wing groups began organizing similarly to its leftist counterparts. Disenchanted with the idea that the Colombian government many actors in Colombia formed coalitions and their armies to protect their interests.

The Colombian Public saw paramilitaries as a sort of bodyguard defense for Cartels and armies funded by the likes of Pablo Escobar surrounding giant ranches. However, some US officials including members of the CIA Department of Defense, and FBI found ways to get connected in other coalitions of paramilitaries committed more squarely on ideological beliefs.<sup>50</sup> Within the US relationship with Colombia, one can see the infringing problem with the US shift towards alliances with paramilitaries. The goals of the Reagan administration were to not only subdue the growth of communism in all Latin America but Colombia halt the growth of cartels as manufacturing hubs. The departments of the US military would be hard pressed to be able to provide for two different wars in Colombia. The DEA had to pick up for much of the legwork for the operations related to Drug Cartels, and while they were able to conduct thorough investigations needed ground support for clashes with Drug Cartels.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately for the DEA, many of the larger right-wing paramilitaries who were natural allies of Reagan's advisors keen on attacking leftist guerrillas were often funded by Drug Barons.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the US agencies were often divided in how they interacted with private actors in Colombia. DynElectron through orders, sometimes supported right-wing bases and armies funded by Cartels with

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<sup>50</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 50.

<sup>51</sup> Santina, Peter. "Army of Terror: The Legacy of US-Backed Human Rights Abuses in Colombia." *Harvard International Review* 21, no. 1 (1998): 40-53.

<sup>52</sup> Santina, Peter. "Army of Terror: The Legacy of US-Backed Human Rights Abuses in Colombia." 41.

members that were often criminals of some sort themselves.<sup>53</sup> Simultaneously, the DEA and other narcotics agencies attempted to use PMC's to logistically undermine the power which held up some of these Cartels including their intelligence networks, material resources, and headquarters of Cartels. The greater Foreign Policy question in this context is how do great powers decide to act on actions that could boost one side of its interests but hurt another? In this case, I want to explore the way in which the US illicit involvement with right-wing paramilitaries under Reagan was affected by Danelectro and the private sector's ability to absolve itself from political restraints.

In several cases throughout the 20th century involving the US military extending into Latin America both physically and through its training, a surrogate army of sorts is supported. In said Latin American cases often, inner political turmoil within the country will pit one side in favor of openness towards foreign intervention to progress by integrating with the globe and revolutionary movements. In this binary, it's clear to see which side would be supported by the US in Latin American conflicts. Those opposing revolution, will be exposed to swaths of aid and support directly from the US military budget in a direct exchange to continually fight guerrilla armies.<sup>54</sup> The Nicaraguan struggle for the US post-Sandinista Revolution under Reagan fits the mold which makes hypotheses about the rationale obvious for why PMC use can be attractive since the work seems straightforward. However, in Colombia, the web of actors and deeply rooted violence would not be able to go away during the 1980's in an end-all war or a war of attrition. There needed to be something different in the case of Colombian halting of communist

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<sup>53</sup> Santina, Peter. "Army of Terror: The Legacy of US-Backed Human Rights Abuses in Colombia." *Harvard International Review* 21, no. 1 (1998): 40-43.

<sup>54</sup> Roberts, Kenneth. "Bullying and Bargaining: The United States, Nicaragua, and Conflict Resolution in Central America." *International Security* 15, no. 2 (1990): 83.

influence in efforts to protect US interests by the Reagan staff that show a less predictable side to the usage of PMC's.

A major feature of the wars between Colombian Government forces, the ideological guerrillas, and drug cartels is their ability to occupy the land. The firepower and casualties attributed to Colombian conflict were higher than normal incidents of violence in Latin American civil wars because of the resources at the disposal of Drug Cartels. For instance, the Medellin Cartel was known for its large settlements occupied by sometimes hundreds of workers far outside of the urban center Medellin. Cartel settlements had aircraft for smuggling drugs and during that period a sophisticated web of communication which allowed for the Cartel to operate logistically at the same standard of investigative police.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to FARC or M-19, the greater Drug Baron's relied heavily on physical material, and it's assets not only to continue to money but to fight off insurgent groups trying to stop them. The larger than the imaginable profile of organizations like the Medellin Cartel forced the DEA in collaboration with other agencies to attack beyond physical measures but attempt to undo the fabric of these syndicates. Around the US border defense of drug trafficking there was no change towards a private contracting of organizations but rather DEA in conjunction with the US Coast Guard and State police. The contracting of Dynaelectron by the US government was solely focused on the internal operations of groups within Colombia. The main belief and focus ironically were for through logistical support from veteran intel within Dynaelectron made up of ex-officers who had served in Vietnam was to provide intelligence to right-wing paramilitaries to match the level of organization the Drug Cartels were able to afford.

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<sup>55</sup> Reuters. "Colombians Seize Drug Ring Suspect and 134 Aircraft." *New York Times* (New York), August 29, 1989.

The motivation of the Reagan Government for Dynalectron against Drug Cartels was to stop the production of drug crops. The original focus of Dynalectron was original to serve as aviation support because of its history of ex-air force pilots within its corporate leadership. Knowing the ability of Dynalectron expertise during the beginning of the 1980's, Reagan's administration reached out to the company about using US military planes and materials to destroy the fields that grew marijuana protected by Cartels.<sup>56</sup> Later in the history of PMC's with expanded services and increased contracting from US military's we see the formation of larger paramilitaries such as MAS which have an expansive relationship with US-based PMC's. The War on Drugs in Colombia showed a more direct approach with DEA and Narcotics units of PMC pilots to destroy reserves of crops surrounding Drug havens in Medellin. The success of Drug Cartels was not affected by US and Colombian forces attempt to eradicate the production of Coca. Despite during the mid-1980's only having 12-14% of the globe's Coca production but was responsible for 80% of Cocaine being trafficked which was processed at a higher rate following Reagan's tenure than before.<sup>57</sup> The usage of PMC's didn't seem to have a major effect on the production of the War on Drugs in Colombia or the violence but did manage to slow down crop production at Coca fields in Colombia between 1982 up until present day where eradication is still supported and practiced.

On the other side of the foreign policy aims of Reagan's Doctrine, we see an approach that is more problematic for scholars which are the role of PMC's infighting Leftist Guerilla organizations. FARC and M-19 were well known for their larger attempts at overthrowing the government with events such as the "Palace of Justice Siege" when M-19 members in 1985 took

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<sup>56</sup> Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*. 38.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. *World Drug Report 2009*. Report. New York City: United Nations Publications, 2009.

the Colombian Supreme Court hostage.<sup>58</sup> However, revolutionary groups whereabouts were concentrated in northwest, southwest regions of Colombia near the base of the Andean mountains away from major population centers. The regions occupied by FARC and M-19 represented a poorer Colombian class, stationed in rural communities of farmers. As a result, the more common but also deadly clashes that happened closer to Guerilla strongholds away from the cities were less reported. An unintended consequence of supporting right-wing paramilitaries and these former Caudillo actors during the 1980<sup>59</sup>'s was that Reagan had to accept the potential for civilian harm.

If American agents or soldiers were to be held responsible for the death of bystanders in combat that could've done major harm to Reagan's greater ability to convince Congress and the public of his ventures. Already by the end of Reagan's first term, he dealt with the deaths of over 240 troops caught up in the Lebanese conflict and drew considerable criticism for the support of Central American dictators such as Rios Montt accused of human rights abuses.<sup>60</sup> The idea of Plausible Deniability returns to the conversation when we dig into ideas about how International regulations are surrounding military conduct and codes which if violated with direct linkage back to US intelligence at the head of operations could cripple administrations. DynCorp and PMC's were able to fill leadership roles in operations in rural areas and were key in shaping the logistics of guerilla interaction.

During the years between 1982-87, there was the US began being heavily involved in a full-on private war with Guerilla organizations. Right Wing paramilitary forces specifically focused more on counter-insurgency operations beginning on the 1980's with the support of the

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<sup>58</sup> Cassman, Daniel. "April 19 Movement." April 19 Movement | Mapping Militant Organizations. August 21, 2015. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/91>.

<sup>59</sup> Cassman, Daniel. "April 19 Movement." April 19 Movement | Mapping Militant Organizations.

<sup>60</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 56.

US. It has been stated by many political historians that in comparison of Presidential foreign policy behavior in the past in regards to the rise of Marxism and Soviet influence that changed with Reagan from Defense to a more preemptive approach to fighting adversaries.<sup>61</sup> Reagan, CIA Director William Casey, and Jeane Kirkpatrick crafted language that serves as the basis for the US support of counterinsurgency operations in Colombia as a guide for private companies. In early 1985, Reagan signed off on a 14 million dollar military package to be sent directly to insurgents fighting FARC and M-19. Colombia was also receiving hundreds of millions of dollars as a nation in federal aid from USAID during the 1980's, showing the heavy investment into the region without direct occupation or control of Colombian operations in civil war or handling of Drug Dealers. However, the paramilitaries themselves struggled in tactical warfare against FARC and ELN in particular during the 1980's as both organizations grew to become experts at kidnapping, organizing its leadership, and recruiting youth members to their causes.<sup>62</sup> Where resources fell short, the government led by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had reached out to AirScan, Inc, and Dynaelectron to boost the effectiveness of counterinsurgency from 1982, increasing funding in 1985.<sup>63</sup>

Airscan Inc. had a small impact regarding the physical presence or employee interaction with Colombian paramilitaries, but the known interactions showed the consequences of Airscan Inc. influence. Stories of skirmishes between right-wing paramilitaries and guerrillas often involved civilian casualties. Paramilitaries often had to seize control of loading zones to take in these military grade helicopters and other aviation equipment but in doing so had to take out

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, Robert H. "Misguided Morality: Ethics and the Reagan Doctrine." *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (August 1988): 509.

<sup>62</sup> Cassman, Daniel. "FARC" | Mapping Militant Organizations. August 21, 2015. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/91>.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



angry civilians accusing the right wing groups of allowing “gringo exploitation.”<sup>64</sup> Seizure of land became a huge topic of emphasis as well for right-wing groups relationship with Dynaelectron whose employees were often intelligence advisors advocating for tactics against the Guerilla fighters which involved camping in private farmland.

Dynaelectron employees went beyond the airborne surveillance and aircraft intel which other PMC’s had been aiding Colombian forces against Guerilla groups. Paramilitary groups benefited greatly from military training from Dynaelectron and even in collaboration with the Colombian military. Post-1994 within Colombia and elsewhere around the world DynCorp would use their professionally licensed personnel to directly provide security training along with mentoring capabilities to maximize advantages normally reserved for US intel.<sup>65</sup> The groundwork for the company’s close relationship with the Colombian army as a trusted US brand comes from DynCorp’s original relationship with paramilitary groups.

A noteworthy paramilitary MAS, Muerte a Secuestradores or death to kidnapers, conceived by wealthy landowners and drug lords who were threatened by Guerrilla organizations ability to hold valuable hostage people. Resource-based companies were also threatened by the resurgence of Guerilla groups in rural Colombia which led US-based companies such as Texaco to spend funds to MAS defense. In late 1981 following the kidnapping of drug lord Jorge Ochoa’s daughter, MAS began exercising its power and influence to kill hundreds of members of FARC along with other leftist revolutionaries as a defense mechanism for cartels.<sup>66</sup> The group shifted due to visibility issues and linkage of the killing of innocent people including community leaders that were thought to communist sympathizers. As the augmentation of MAS occurred so

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<sup>64</sup> Tate, Winifred. "Repeating Past Mistakes: Aiding Counterinsurgency in Colombia." NACLA. September 25, 2007. <https://nacla.org/article/repeating-past-mistakes-aiding-counterinsurgency-colombia>.

<sup>65</sup> "Training." DynCorp International. Accessed January 15, 2018. <http://www.dyn-intl.com/what-we-do/training/>.

<sup>66</sup> Cassman, Daniel. "FARC" | Mapping Militant Organizations. August 21, 2015. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/91>.

did the US agencies interest in using its members to carry out a more focused assault on Guerilla groups. One of the biggest advantages Dynaelectron was able to do through government contracting was provide pilots who had experience in flying combat planes. At paramilitary training centers funded largely by drug trafficking money, Dynaelectron employees were able to teach paramilitary soldiers how to man complicated planes such as the OV-10 Bronco into Andean mountain regions.<sup>67</sup> The growth of paramilitary violence grew for a variety of reasons within Colombia but MAS relationship with US-based PMC's was a key factor in the increase in bloodshed in the Colombian civil war. Logistically, there was a military presence that was able to be felt through the support of paramilitaries which gave a bode of confidence to the US, while Dyna Electrons aerial crop-killing support provided direct intervention. Colombia provided the grounds for future administrations to see ways in which guided missions can be accomplished with US military grade expertise because of the personnel that represented Dynaelectron being former Air Force members with experience. The trust factor that was gained in this era for PMC usage can in large part be cited to the attempts, whether successful or not, by PMC to empower paramilitaries and destroy thousands of acres of coca crops.

### **Nicaragua's Relationship to PMC's: Mercenary Inclusion**

Fast-forward to the year 1981 past the bloody civil war that led to the fall of President's Somoza regime in 1979 to new President Reagan's authorization of Decision Directive 17 a decree by the Commander-in-Chief to support Anti-Sandinista forces. UN ambassador Kirkpatrick, CIA Director Weinberger, and President Reagan would together embark on a six-year commitment to take down the leftist Sandinista regime from power. The Nicaraguan

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<sup>67</sup> Hristov, Jasmin. *Blood and Capital the Paramilitarization of Colombia*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014.

mission in comparison to the multi-faceted Colombian civil war and the attempt to overthrow the Nicaraguan government of the 1980's is simply a simple intrusion. The conflict of the 1970's and transition in power to the Sandinista regime left Nicaragua in ruins, with hundreds of thousands of local refugees fleeing, and an unrecognized constitution.<sup>68</sup> The Sandinista regime in which Reagan had set his sights on was tasked with building from the ground up, extremely passionate about their cause and mission but with several gaping weaknesses in power.

The US saw an opportunity for a hands-on approach to Nicaragua in 1982 in a reversal of Jimmy Carter's foreign policy of a willingness to work with the new Sandinista government. The dichotomy that existed between the stance towards Latin American sovereignty by Carter and Reagan. Under Reagan's administration another factor in its war and all US surrogates took on was a hostile population that didn't support US intervention in the general population. A part of the came from the Sandinista rhetoric led by Daniel Ortega who was able to channel the Sandinista energy into specific ideological campaigns with new newspapers such as *La Voz de la Sanisimo*.<sup>69</sup> Another key factor into what a decade-long power struggle in Nicaragua would be was the US cutting of holistic stoppage of sending aid to the country. Despite the incredible tension of the Nicaraguan revolution in 1978, Jimmy Carter called upon Congress for almost \$75 million in aid to send to the Somoza ruling party for the refugees and victims of the war.<sup>70</sup> Reagan decided at the beginning of his first term in 1982 that no aid would be going to Nicaragua during Sandinista rule. What this meant was that US-Nicaraguan diplomatic ties had been severed by 1982 and all operations of Nicaraguan government would have to come from opposition without any form of legitimate power within the state. The US would not be able to

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<sup>68</sup> Esch, Cheryl L. "Exiting the Whirlpool: U.S. Foreign Policy toward Latin America and the Caribbean. 2nd Ed." *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): 1051-1059.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.lavozdelsandinismo.com/>.

<sup>70</sup> Office of the Historian. "Central America, 1977-80." U.S. Department of State. Accessed January 17th, 2018. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/central-america-carter>.

divide the state within its leadership because the Sandinista rule was of military dictatorship or what is described in Latin American context as *Junta* rule.

The Counterrevolution groups that fought against the Sandinista regime during and after the revolution were made up of mainly political dissidents at the head who opposed Left Wing policies and former national guard members under Somoza regime.<sup>71</sup> The Contras became the name of the several organized political and paramilitary groups during the majority of the 1980's who fought against Sandinista rule. Their organization and numbers were great in might because of their military history in power and ruling Nicaragua; these insurgents had experience in ground combat. Contras early on in the 1980's weren't unified and into a single force which made their cause weaker in the beginning stages of the conflict. Reagan's administration and the agencies surrounding the White House led by the CIA were adamant about strengthening contra operations in what was an uphill battle against communism against the Sandinistas by the mid-1980's.

From the onset the Reagan Doctrine and Kirkpatrick vision never wanted to evolve into a pure dismantle of power or in simpler terms, to not create a vacuum through US intervention but prop up an existing militant opposition to replace power. Kirkpatrick in a written article, *Dictatorships and Double Standards*, discussed the nature of the struggle of democratic institutions to be built under the "wrong" social, political, and cultural climate.<sup>72</sup> I note this to say that in light of the mission laid out by the UN ambassador of removing the Sandinistas from power through Right Wing revolutionaries, the result that was seen was autocratic power. Unlike Carter's foreign policy with a multifaceted humanitarian focus to aid Nicaragua in a multitude of problems, Reagan's government would solely push towards regime change and military

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<sup>71</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* vol. 7. no. 3. June 1987. ISSN 1715-5673. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/JCS/article/view/14764>.

<sup>72</sup> Kirkpatrick, Jeane J. "Dictatorships & Double Standards." *Commentary Magazine*, November 1, 1979.

diplomacy. A central belief of the Reagan Administration was that if a successful counterrevolution to the revolution of Nicaragua the US support of the Contras would have to occur covertly.<sup>73</sup> Part of the reason was that of the common sense understanding within International Affairs that a transparent connection between Contras and the US would require the Reagan Administration to answer for whatever actions of the Contras. The initial response to this would be the injection of outside actors that could potentially help manifest a counter to the Sandinista army with logistical training but also in field warfare at a scale much different than Colombia. In taking down the Nicaraguan army, Reagan was tasked with going towards the heart of Managua, the capital city, versus the hills where leftist Guerrillas hid in Colombia.

In 1982 the CIA independently with its budget began spending upwards of \$20 million US dollars in aid to counter-revolutionaries in Nicaragua which increased by over \$5 million in each of the consecutive three years following. The CIA was able to equip, finance, and train Contra groups, in particular, the Nicaraguan Defense Force, FDN, which was led by a former national guard colonel.<sup>74</sup> Despite the increase in US support for the Contras and increased attacking capabilities for those insurgents by the end of 1983 after several attempts to occupy towns within Nicaragua, the Contras owned no significant territory.<sup>75</sup> The Contra's tactics switched significantly after several failures up until 1984 to a strategy that involved targeting civilians and economic centers within Colombia to incite a civil war that involved the uprising of civilians.<sup>76</sup> The US military influence was only able to increase the statistical edge of the FDN, but the group lacked other factors to bring successful outcomes and gain territory. Reagan and

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<sup>73</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 6

<sup>74</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 8

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Scott, James M. "Interbranch Rivalry and the Reagan Doctrine in Nicaragua." 233.

the CIA forces would turn up its military aid secretly to \$100 million. However, it was private sector activity that also created a spark in the war.

Unlike the civil war in Colombia, the usage of PMC's against Drug Cartels as crop killers or against Leftist Guerrillas as tactical support was much less clear. Mercenary usage became an important factor in the attempt to overthrow the Sandinista occupancy ranging from retired generals to trained and paid assassins. In the same vein in which Reagan saw an opportunity to bring in paramilitary use, he in cooperation with Heritage Foundation and other conservative politics agents saw mercenaries as a rational alternative to committing US military personnel to the region. In a statement at joint security session Heritage foundation stated, "such fighters [mercenaries] could be utilized to keep anti-communist rebel groups alive and strengthen their efforts in low-intensity warfare environments like Nicaragua."<sup>77</sup> Tactically Mercenaries were sought for the low-risk, low-cost, and high reward value which made going towards this market incredibly attractive. The key questions become, what happens to the success in these "low-risk" conflicts and the US responsibility for the actions of their paid for soldiers of arms abroad? The question of responsibility can be answered in a term brought up in section I called "Plausible Deniability." The success of Mercenaries and PMCs in Nicaragua during the Cold War that would give positive signs for continued use of private combat support in future US interventions abroad is up in more questionable.

The CIA and the National Security Council from 1982-1987 used the money they obtained illegally to not only support the contras but send Private support. The support included private military advisors that flew down to bases in Honduras mainly to strategize with insurgents moving across the northern Nicaraguan border. Along with the advisors there were privately contracted mercenaries who were able to assist in campaigns of the highest scale as in

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<sup>77</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 45

occupying towns to kidnapping and threatening important Sandinista allies or family members.<sup>78</sup> Separately and together in collaboration with Contra forces, private military actors were not only complicit in the civil war but responsible for some of the accusations of human rights violations against Nicaraguan civilians.

A key figure in the story of the use of mercenaries in Nicaragua and necessary for our understanding of private contracting at all is Lt. Oliver North a former marine. North would later be the central figure in the Iran-Contra Affair which will be addressed later in this section, which unveiled a lot of the classified inner workings of the US Defense Department, CIA, and Contras. Most notably North's arrest for his role in the Iran-Contra Affair unveiled a small circle of actors that played a part in bringing mercenaries who had served in past proxy Cold wars from Angola, Congo, and Rhodesia.<sup>79</sup>

The Contras compared to other backed US insurgents in the region of conflict had the numbers and passion from the Sandinista revolution but lacked direction. The mercenaries brought into The Contra War were not frontline soldiers but generals and often leading strategists on co-opted missions. For example, in 1988, seven men a part of various US private paramilitary organizations such as Civilian Military Assistance, who supported the contras were indicted for bringing assault weapons from Miami to Nicaragua and training Contra soldiers on how to use the weapons.<sup>80</sup> The Contras would then work with US-based advisors with the US arms they received to understand efficient insurgency from former US military Generals and Marines who had retired to work in private military firms. Another aspect of mercenary usage was in organized groups to perform small operations that were more for special operations. For

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<sup>78</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 55

<sup>79</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 52

<sup>80</sup> Volsky, George. "7 Indicted in Miami on Charges of Arming Mercenaries in Nicaragua." *The New York Times*. July 14, 1988. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/07/14/world/7-indicted-in-miami-on-charges-of-arming-mercenaries-in-nicaragua.html>.

example, former navy independent contractors collected into small insurgent units to attack the western coast of Nicaragua and Managua, the capital, from Lago de Managua to destabilize Sandinista coastal defenses which were the first line of defense.<sup>81</sup> Overall, one could say that mercenaries were specialists and worked as the technicians for more specific operations. However, research has proven that many mercenaries and contractors were foot soldiers who blended into the Contra armies. The network of mercenaries was divided into different divisions that all served individual purposes and with a fighter with different motivations. Regardless of how mercenaries were selected by US contractors, the result was the same: support the Contras in their fight against communism.

In one of the most interesting discoveries in research surrounding the US-PMC relationship, Nicaragua had a lot domestic US support for their cause. Many American organizations during the 1980's were structured as political movements with the resources and power to also independent support for foreign organizations. The most notable independent movement that supported conservative actors in Central America was the "religious right" led by televangelist preachers such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Although the reactionary "religious right" movement which started in the 1970's wasn't a PMC or aided any Central American regimes with military support, they embodied the connection between ideologues of America and US foreign policy. Many military firms had greater political aspirations compared to a global security company such as DynCorp who was motivated primarily by trading labor for money.

Groups such as the Civilian Military Assistance based in Decatur, Alabama were accounted for in 1987 for independently taking on Leftists Guerrilla groups in their stance against communism. Two American bodies were found after being shot out of a helicopter by

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<sup>81</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 56



Sandinista forces in 1987.<sup>82</sup> The recovery of the bodies raised questions for the general public's understanding of the Cold War, the transparency of the use of the private sector in American proxy wars wasn't clear at the time. The American's were a part of the Civilian Military Assistance (CMA) and had personally decided to join the FDN in its fight against communism while also hoping to deliver military aid which their organization collected from a variety of private citizens help. What makes the CMA odd in their role in the private sector is that they weren't contracted by the US government, yet are fulfilled the same duties as paid-mercenaries aiming to attack leftist guerilla camps. In the case of these independently passionate private organizations, scholars find it difficult to figure out their role in the Cold War conflicts and also Reagan's influence on national support from conservatives for the Contras. Despite, the complex, layered reasoning behind the motivations of such conservative groups to use their resources for battles, we know that they often filled a similar role of PMC's which requires them to be accounted for within Reagan's Foreign Policy.

By 1987, the Sandinista government remained in control of Nicaragua although the relentless insurgencies from US-backed Contras and other paramilitaries opposing the Sandinista regime. An even worse turn of events that spoke a lot about the inner workings of the US government especially CIA developed a relationship with the Contras and private military actors happened in 1987 described as the Iran-Contra Affair. At the center of the Iran-Contra Affair was Lt. Oliver North who orchestrated more than just getting former generals and ex-military to act as advisors for the Contras as previously mentioned, but covert, illegal funding for the fight against the Sandinistas. What was revealed in the Iran Contra scandal, which plagued the Reagan administration, was the covert nature of funding and the more "true" path of some of the people

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<sup>82</sup> Taubman, Philip. "PRIVATE AID TO LATIN REBELS AT ISSUE." The New York Times. December 13, 1984. <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/13/world/private-aid-to-latin-rebels-at-issue.html>.

that worked closely with the operations. The vagueness of presidential foreign policy doctrines such as the Reagan Doctrine, leave historians often confused with what encompasses the actual vision of the US administration and how individuals such as Oliver North put their effects on US management abroad.

During the latter years of the Contra war as mentioned in Chapter one, it became increasingly difficult for “war hawks” in Congress and Reagan to allocate more federal monetary aid to the Contras. As a result, the CIA through a handful of individual agents, chief among them Oliver North embarked on a scandalous operation to get funds to the Contras to obtain arms and other weaponry. There is a larger story within the Iran-Contra that also is representative of the hypocritical nature of Reagan’s foreign policy in the Middle East, which is the sale of arms under the table to Hezbollah a paramilitary ally to the state of Iran who was fighting the US-backed Iraq government of 1985-87. The tens of millions made from 3rd party deals to Irani affiliates went to offshore Swiss bank accounts before being turned into usable weapons for the Contras during the mid-1980’s.<sup>83</sup> The outcome from a very simplistic nature in the scope of this essay is that the Contra-Sandinista war was able to continue past at a vibrant level, relentless attacks including hundreds of casualties in Nicaragua past 1984 when Congress tried to stop funding of the war by the US. The continuation of the Contra War came at the price of potentially compromising at least in some part to the US support of Iraqi forces against Iran and negotiations with Iran. The compromises that the US government makes to support conflicting or in this case a taken opportunity to risk one situation for the sake of interests, elsewhere reveals a lot about US foreign policy under Reagan, which is a lot more complicated than written strategies or speeches given at international summits. A lesser-known fact that came out of the

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<sup>83</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 13

exposed communication dialogues between Caspar Weinberger, Oliver North, and other CIA officials was the money allocated to mercenaries.

Oliver North as an ex-official himself by the time he played a major part in the Contra War beginning in 1983 had an extensive connection with private military advisors and mercenaries who operated in the Angolan of the 1970's in another Cold War proxy conflict involving Soviet influence.<sup>84</sup> A major part of the scheme to take money from military equipment sales into the Middle East during the Iran-Contra connection was to have flexible money for CIA controlled forces to use beyond weapons. Mercenaries could lead ground forces in low-intensity conflicts as they are often framed by military scholars involving personnel in the low hundreds or often much less on the battlefields of Nicaragua. It was a known secret amongst the CIA officials under Reagan that similarly to the Angolan Civil War, that mercenaries and PMC advisors would lead these battles in Nicaragua against Sandinista strongholds almost as a US defacto army.<sup>85</sup> Control, was a major theme of the US-Nicaraguan relationship when it came to the connection between the Contras and privately contracted organizations via US influence. The word private didn't necessarily spell to reflect the "private" sector or somehow independent of government influence in the Nicaraguan civil warfare during the 1980's but rather a shift in liability. The question that arises in the case of Nicaragua, much different than the case in the complicated circumstances of Colombia, is a rather simple one: did the covert insertion of the private military to the aid of the Contra's produce successful results based on the aims of the Reagan Doctrine.

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<sup>84</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 58

<sup>85</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 56

### Chapter III: Analyzing the Conflicts, Understanding the Future

In a review of the US involvement in Colombian and Nicaraguan internal conflicts from 1981-1989, the influence of Reagan's emphasis on privatizing various sectors of the US government was felt heavily. The implementation of privately contracted companies uses of equipment, fighters, and personnel into US intervention provided contradicting results for the doctrines of the Reagan Administration along with the aims of the US-backed right-wing groups. The contradictions of goals for Reagan were felt strongly in a few different revisionist perspectives. When looking at the specific proxy conflicts in Colombia and Nicaragua for the US compared to US military faults in Vietnam, many mistakes that were US officials were looking to avoid repeating were. Before examining the different measurements of how PMC use fit into the product that the Reagan Doctrine vision created or this period's place in greater history, it's important for us to understand what exactly changed in policy and warfare for the US during its transition to private military contracting.

One of the major features highlighted in scholarship for those condemning the Vietnam War was the large amounts of soldiers stationed in battle with heavy artillery and equipment stationary costing the government millions of dollars. Many of battles of Vietnam were not fought in "traditional" or any clear battlefields but rather attacking Viet Cong and guerrilla fighters in jungles where US superior weaponry was neutralized.<sup>86</sup> As a result of one of the main differences in which I noticed, the US attempted to take advantage was to trust, whether intentionally or not, the Contra's self-defense in bases from a manpower standpoint to not waste troops. American soldiers were not brought into Nicaragua in droves, but instead, higher ranked lieutenants in collaboration with Advisors from PMC were brought in as US extension in the

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<sup>86</sup> Klaas, Vol. *Plausibly deniable: mercenaries in US covert interventions during the Cold War, 1964–1987*. 48

region. The goal was with a smaller pool of US personnel to focus on breaking down the war into smaller skirmishes that were “lower risk.” What is shown in many of the newspaper articles and reactionary primary sources of the 1980’s was that despite the lower intensity of the wars high-risk situations still arose.

Civilian casualties are a major point of emphasis when discussing military intervention in foreign countries because of non-combatant deaths ability to bring more attention to conflict or a magnifying glass to covert operations. Another reason is the way in which civilian casualties being a clear sign of disrespect of sovereignty and the international system. When Reagan came into office in 1981, his inaugural year in office and the following year a combined total of 167 people considered civilians were killed by Contra attacks. However, in 1983 “the number of deaths rose sharply to 1,030 and then rose again to 1339 in 1984 and 1463 in 1985” all years where there was increased funding of the Contras but also increased the presence of privately contracted military personnel in Nicaragua.<sup>87</sup> These deaths were mainly directed to government workers or civilians with ties to the Sandinista regime. It’s not unusual whatsoever to imagine the soldiers of a sovereign state in another or even military within their home state patrolling areas not deemed to be the “battlefield.” However, it’s unusual and problematic when relooking at conflicts where the civilians in countries of war became the targets. It’s truly hard to measure the repercussions of having civilians blood being directly related back the government, or in this case, the hands of the CIA’s contracted fighters during the 1980’s.

We know though with the growth of human rights organizations during the 1970’s that the trajectory would only continue into the 1980’s despite a major change in presidential seats after Carter. The 1980’s are also known for being the decade of neo-liberalism starting in major markets such as the UK deregulation under Thatcher and of course Reagan’s tendency to favor

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<sup>87</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 12.

laissez-faire policies. Access and exchanges of not only business but also information for a multitude of technical reasons as well became easier. I would argue the rapid spreading of information hurt the secrecy of Reagan's covert operations and rallied opposition against known conflicts like the Contra War. Opposition came in droves during the latter years of Reagan's tenure from newspaper editorials to reports from organizations of the stature of Amnesty International who called out not only the Contra army but mercenaries as well for Human Rights abuses. A group called the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights had a New York Times wrote about a report they made in 1987 claiming to show the Sandinista regime's relentless campaign of detaining those who supported the Contras and Contra fighters violence against civilians.<sup>88</sup> This instance gives insight into the public's direct access to information that would directly implicate the US' government support of guerilla terrorist group is shocking on the onset but more significant for another reason.

The various human rights reports and subsequent international trials that came after involving US-backed rebels along with dictators depending on the country in Central America showed the overall sloppiness of the intended lowkey nature operations. "Low Intensity" conflicts as described in section 2 quickly escalated to endanger larger communities, and through various organizations, conflicts were exposed for their abuses of civilians. My view is that Iran-Contra Affair and illicit support of right-wing paramilitaries were directly coming back to Washington the use of PMC's had to change. In combination with some reasons which I will discuss later including the new emerging market which incentivized PMC's to grow larger and diverse in capabilities, how the 1980's under Reagan under Reagan gave pretense for the privatization of the military.

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<sup>88</sup> Freitag, Michael. "Sandinistas and Contras Accused of Rights Abuses." The New York Times. November 18, 1987. <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/11/18/world/sandinistas-and-contras-accused-of-rights-abuses.html>.

During the Reagan Administration, his foreign policy in Latin America specifically against drug cartels in Colombia and response to the Sandinista revolution may have been having been the focus of this project, but the US military as always was stretched around the globe during the 1980's. Reagan's strategy of a sort of "new containment" was financially more supported in Latin American countries where his foreign policy advisors saw the biggest threat but Asia, Africa, and Middle East internal conflicts were addressed as well. The most famous case of the "hot" nature of the Cold War was the US support of Afghan mujahideen militants who were trained by US soldiers to expel Soviet fighters who were physically occupying a propped up communist regime in Kabul.<sup>89</sup> The US response to Soviet Union's occupation and influence in much of Afghanistan cost the government upwards of 20 billion dollars in federal aid from 1981 until the Geneva Accords of 1988 when Soviet leadership agreed to leave Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> High amounts of federal spending weren't only allocated to interventions in the Middle East under Reagan but also Angola and Cambodia in similar levels of intensity. In Angola, members of the Heritage Foundation along with other American conservative leadership had close ties to the right-wing UNITA movement and leader Jonas Savimbi. Service in support of Savimbi's troops went so far as to arm his guerilla fighters with stinger missiles amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars aimed at communist fighters in Angola including 30,000 Cuban soldiers stationed in Angola.<sup>91</sup> Tens of millions of US dollars were being spent directly from the CIA's budget and USAID's budget towards supporting a competing rebel group in Cambodia after a Vietnamese invasion backed by the Soviet Union led to an unstable political climate. Overall, the 1980's foreign interventions were not solely based on Central

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<sup>89</sup> Pach, Chester. "The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy.". 82.

<sup>90</sup> "1977-1980 Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan." U.S. Department of State. February 15, 2018. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/soviet-invasion-afghanistan>.

<sup>91</sup> "Who Gets Stung in Angola?" The New York Times. April 08, 1986. <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/08/opinion/who-gets-stung-in-angola.html>.

America although that is where as Ambassador Kirkpatrick wrote in her “Dictatorship's & Double Standards” would be the focus of US foreign containment policy.

Understanding the indifferent approach to how involved the US would be in conflicts abroad despite what seemed like a regionally specific focus of the Reagan Doctrine is important to understanding the military interventions under Reagan. To look at the scope of the US interventions abroad provides insight to combat one of my earlier hypothesis on the use of PMC usage. I hypothesized that part of the benefit of a move towards outsourcing military responsibilities to the private sector would be a decrease in federal military spending while still supplying the force needed for communist defense abroad. Surprisingly, despite various covert operations around the globe including the illicit off-the-book funding of Contras in Nicaragua and right-wing paramilitaries in Colombia, the federal military budget increased significantly under Reagan each year in office. President Reagan’s budget proposals from 1981 to 1984 saw an increase not only of defense spending by over 20% but an increase in the budget despite enacting massive tax cuts for middle and upper-class Americans at the same time.<sup>92</sup> The findings are surprising, given the alleged theme of the Reagan tenure being to promote privatization of all public spheres of influence and a smaller government more efficient. The transition towards an increased amount of government to private military firm contracts under Reagan didn’t equate to a smaller federal military budget or a more efficient focused military spending.

Another feature of Reagan’s foreign policy wrapped up in the fighting that occurred in Latin America is the immigration of Central Americans to the US as a result of the increased violence of the civil wars during the 1980’s. US people are caught coming over the US-Mexican border there is an assumption that the immigrants coming into the US are of Mexican coming for a more traditionally motivated reason such as work opportunity. The “immigrants” were refugees

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<sup>92</sup> Solomon, Robert. "Budget Deficits and Federal Reserve Policy." *The Brookings Review* 2, no. 3 (1984): 22-55



of civil wars, mostly from Central American origins during the 1980's from El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua amongst other countries below Mexico. The US support of rebel groups to increase the intensity of the war on communism under Reagan meant an increase of illegal immigrants as they were described by the US government in the 1980's because of the danger civilians were put in. On the one hand, Reagan's foreign policy put a newfound pressure on his immigration policy as the demographic coming into the US changed dramatically to a majority Latin American pool of people coming in. The Central American population within the US tripled from 1980 to 1990 and continued to increase to this days following years of unstable governance stemming from the Contra War amongst other US involved conflicts.<sup>93</sup> As mentioned earlier Reagan granted amnesty to three million Central American refugees in his Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 which is major foreign policy. The increased migrant population who were refugees of US involved civil wars in Central America, put a magnifying glass out on Border Patrol as Americans shifted interest to border security. Similarly to other defense forces, under Reagan, we see the birth of a Public-Private partnership led by the US government to independent Border Security companies.<sup>94</sup> The Mexican border post-1986 began an upward trajectory towards a total crackdown on future immigrants despite what seemed like a transition towards recognition of US own accountability in fueling the wars that caused hundreds of thousands of Central Americans to flee their homes. A byproduct of the Reagan Doctrine was the increased funding towards Border Security for the US-Mexican border.

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<sup>93</sup> Lesser, Jeanne Batalova Gabriel, and Jeanne Batalova. "Central American Immigrants in the United States." Migrationpolicy.org. August 03, 2017. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>

<sup>94</sup> "Public-Private Partnerships." Public-Private Partnerships | U.S. Customs and Border Protection. February 17, 2018. Accessed April 26, 2018. <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/ports-entry/resource-opt-strategy/public-private-partnerships>.

Before looking at the future trajectories of the US Public-Private relationship of military contractors, Colombia and Nicaraguan cases should be reexamined to understand what ended up happening to the goals of Reagan. In Colombia, the broader vision of Reagan's War on Drugs was to eliminate the size and influence of Drug Cartels in not only Latin America but their US presence. Kirkpatrick and other foreign ambassadors also aimed to re-strengthen right-wing authorities in places with the major organized communist opposition. To measure the success of these two significant missions of US policy we have to separate them and look at the available data points that could quantify the progress of the conflicts that show either a favorable or negative direction of US interests during the 1980's. The War on Drugs revival during the 1980's, specifically the cocaine usage outburst in major cities in the US translated into a surge in research to understand the distribution of drugs. The central attributes to highlight in the progress of the "War on Drugs" during Reagan's tenure are the rates in which cocaine was trafficked into the US, the rates of production of cocaine by the Medellin and Cali Cartels, and the ability for DEA supported forces in Colombia to take down Cartel leadership.

Sources from reports from independent think tanks data to known DEA seizures to estimates from field analysts from around the world who had been in Colombia all showed one thing in common throughout their work in the 1980's: Cocaine trafficking out of Colombia at no point slowed down during the decade. A multi-part series was released by the Wall Street Journal in collaboration with the Netflix series, *Narcos*, which summed up the Medellin Cartel at their peak. No matter what the DEA was able to do regarding intrusion including, "seizures of tons of Cocaine in the US failed to dent the supply."<sup>95</sup> The Supply chain was much stronger than it seemed even the US government could imagine mainly due to the prices that the US consumer

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<sup>95</sup> Green, Peter S. "Cocainonomics." The Wall Street Journal. February 25, 2018.  
<https://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainonomics>.

market was willing to pay which gave rise to tens of billion-dollar industry far beyond any drug supply the world had seen. The inclusion of private contracting had no bearing on the amount of cocaine that was trafficked over the Reagan years because it is very apparent any US-backed operation including the literal removal of tons of cocaine off the market didn't slow sales for a variety of reasons. However, the specifically targeted major cartels of Colombia especially the Medellin Cartel infrastructures were damaged by strategies under the Reagan Administration.

By the end of the 1980's, it was a known fact the Colombian government was almost incapable of arresting and holding the major Drug Barons, but extradition to the US put fear into the likes of Escobar and the Ochoa Brothers. Getting individuals farther away from Colombia, away from law and a judicial system where Drug Lords were above seemed to be the only way to hold them accountable to a make a push towards slowing down their businesses. In Section I, we examined the way in which the 1982 extradition treaty allowed agents and PMC supported to right-wing paramilitary soldiers were able to put pressure on the bases of the Cartels beyond trying to catch the Crime bosses in public or transit.

The effects of the extradition treaty and willingness of the US government to surpass sovereign rights or belief in the Colombian quickly brought positive results under Reagan. Many Drug lords left Colombia as a result of the pressure being put on by the DEA and their new status not just of enemies of the state but global criminals. A major part of the extradition treaty and any cases where individuals are arrested to be sent to another country for trial is that it's up to the authorities of the said country to make the arrest. Normally, based on the early attempts at the beginning of the Cocaine empire in the late 1970's and early 1980's the extradition treaty would serve almost no purpose.<sup>96</sup> However, during the period between 1982 and 1987 during the 49

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<sup>96</sup> Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

major members of Cocaine empire had been extradited to the US including Carlos Lehder a co-founder of the Medellin Cartel.<sup>97</sup> Part of the success can be attributed to the DEA's relentlessness to send investigators and agents into Bogota amongst other cities to aid Colombian law enforcement in their efforts to destabilize the cartels. Another major part less known but shown in much of the scholarship is the ability of right-wing paramilitaries and former national guard members to put physical pressure on cartel strongholds. The lack of public support for the Colombian Congress during the 1980's included an unfavorable view of US intrusion into Colombia meant that US troops being visible on the ground could potentially increase support for Cartels even more. Private contracting allowed for paramilitaries and Colombian military to receive American equipment along with organized training which allowed Cartels to be overwhelmed in some skirmishes which led to extraditions for traffickers trying to escape the country. Overall, evidence has shown the continuation of the massive sale of drugs continue throughout the 1980's, but the leadership of the Medellin Cartel began to crumble going into 1990's.

The other side of the US foreign policy in Colombia was the ability of Colombian military forces to subdue the spread of communist support from ELN and FARC influence. ELN and FARC war against the Colombian government considering the history of La Violencia was never meant to be solved overnight or even during Reagan's tenure. The US foreign advisors to Latin America under Reagan hoped to curb specific goals of the Leftist Guerrillas. The two main goals of US security in Colombia within the containment strategy in my view demonstrate success or failure is the ability for FARC to move their forces from remote mountainous region to medium-sized cities and casualties comparing Guerilla groups to Colombian Military losses.

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<sup>97</sup> Graham, Bradley. "COLOMBIAN SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS EXTRADITION PACT WITH U.S." The Washington Post. June 27, 1987. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/06/27/colombian-supreme-court-overturms-extraditon-pact-with-us/5cf3c673-4134-4321-9005-e54f0670ca79/?utm\\_term=.5d555606652d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/06/27/colombian-supreme-court-overturms-extraditon-pact-with-us/5cf3c673-4134-4321-9005-e54f0670ca79/?utm_term=.5d555606652d).

By looking at the shift in ELN/FARC presence from rural areas to bigger cities, we can get a sense of the shift in support for the established Colombian government and a potential change in political ideology throughout Colombia. The casualties disparity between the opposing sides of the proxy war represents the effectiveness of US contracted PMC aid in combination with the high volume of advisors in Colombia versus Soviet-backed leftist guerrillas.

FARC leadership had extensive training from the Soviet Union and the main weapon of usage for FARC infantry during the 1980's was the AK-47 famously used by Vietnamese Guerrillas as well.<sup>98</sup> Right-wing paramilitary groups were armed with American made rifles and ex-generals who worked in Dynallectron were able to provide strategic support. The usage of PMC's also provided a different avenue of support that wasn't available to the Soviet Union who was unable to commit troops to the region or provide eyes on the ground. FARC's desire to move into the larger cities was supplemented by the major boom in the informal Colombian drug economy and the newfound resources it produced. An unintended factor is a way that the Leftist Guerrillas got into the drug business eventually working with traffickers and dealers in the 1990's to present day, but its origins were more based on its leftist connections with Soviet benefactors. The answer to the question of the success and failure of isolating the FARC regime to the outskirts by the US supported Colombian military is complicated, but we know based on the transition towards the end of the decade FARC was unsatisfied with their power. From 1984-87 the Colombian government under Betancur agreed to a ceasefire with ELN and FARC leadership. The Leftist Guerrilla groups were unhappy with the amount of power they wielded from trying to attain power through the political machine with parliament seats and elections because over 4,000 kidnappings by FARC-EP occurred starting in 1986 until the end of the

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<sup>98</sup> Erler, Carolyn. "Targeting Plan Colombia: A Critical Analysis of Ideological and Political Visual Narratives by the Beehive Collective and the Drug Enforcement Administration Museum." *Studies in Art Education* 50, no. 1 (2008): 83-97.

decade.<sup>99</sup> In my view, the continued kidnappings and willingness by the FARC to reap the benefits of the drug business despite risking the support of everyday middle-class Colombians comes from the fear of the growth of the paramilitaries.

The growing capabilities of the paramilitaries were directly related to the ability to the CIA led by Caspar Weinberger's ability to secure funds to make sure privately contracted advisors from Dynalectron along with then-current military generals from the Vietnam war could work with Colombian military soldiers. Political climate plays an important role in the necessity of PMC usage; visibility played a much different part in Colombian power struggles than Nicaragua. The Colombian struggle needed the support of the people because of the strength and history of different party leanings versus smaller countries with less established party lines such as Nicaragua. In this case, PMC's were very effective in aiding allies to eliminate Lefist Guerilla heads including over half of the known UP, Union Patriótica party elected officials in which FARC integrated themselves into were murdered mysteriously undermining the growth of leftist politics in Bogota.<sup>100</sup> Understanding the dangerous and often violent ways the US supported Colombian military was able to neutralize Communist violence is an example of ways where greater US intervention of conventional means would be less effective.

Not only were FARC political allies and leaders under threat the group itself experienced an incredible amount of losses while it's ascension to power in the late 1980's. Commissions investigating the violence in Colombia have emerged more recently that put together complete estimates on the numbers of lives lost and people displaced during the 1980's and 1990's.<sup>101</sup> The

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<sup>99</sup> Center, Arroyo, and Stephen Watts. *The Uses and Limits of Small-scale Military Interventions (RAND Corporation Monograph Series)*. Rand Corporation, 2012.

<sup>100</sup> Braun, Herbert. *Our Guerrillas, Our Sidewalks: A Journey into the Violence of Colombia*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

<sup>101</sup> ¡Basta Ya! *Colombia: Memorias De Guerra Y De Dignidad*. Report. Bogota D.C.: Grupo De Memoria Historica, 2013.

reports show the violence which has consistently been prevalent in the various waves of political conflict in Colombia peaked after 1982 with the emergence of right-wing paramilitaries banded to fight. Guerrilla groups bought out by Cartels and backed by US funds.<sup>102</sup> The peak in violence can obviously be attributed to the spark in money coming into the Colombian economy through drug trafficking, but the ability for smaller armed paramilitaries to conduct damage on populations is heavily influenced by their use of military grade weapons. Of the over 2,000 recorded incidents between 1982 to the year 2000, Over 60% were committed by paramilitaries killing many innocent civilians but also devastating FARC forces. PMC influence was felt at large, and the groundwork for future contracting was laid in the bed made by right-wing paramilitaries ruthless attacks on rural Guerilla bases in Colombia.

The use of PMC's and mercenaries within Nicaragua on behalf of the US showed less promise and much more confusion for the resulting takeaway of the Contra War. The conflict in Nicaragua in the onset was staged with a more toned down sense of urgency from Washington but quickly resembled a smaller scale Vietnam situation. How could a country, the United States, that's so large with so much power do so little with so such weak resistance, struggle to exert its will in the "third world"? Lack of efficiency of military interventions in the "third world" was a common criticism of the failures of the war in Vietnam. The US during the first few decades had either overcommitted troops and resources to no avail or not stayed involved enough in the proxy war region. The struggle between the two paths arose again as was visited in the early sections about Congress's refusal to continue to send large blocks of aid to Nicaragua for military purposes versus President Reagan's desires to escalate combat. A strategic advantage was previously mentioned about PMC's ability to work as a counteracting force against political

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<sup>102</sup> ¡Basta Ya! Colombia: Memorias De Guerra Y De Dignidad. Report. Bogota D.C.: Grupo De Memoria Historica, 2013.

opponents who don't want to deploy US troops on the ground abroad, but little was said about the magnitude. Did the inclusion of PMC aid and mercenaries by US generals into the Contra Forces turn the Cold War in Nicaragua hotter? The easy answer is yes but how that put pressure on the Sandinista military and give hope to possible regime change is a bigger question.

The few detailed examples of covert missions such as American helicopter pilots delivering Contra soldiers or mercenaries leading operations into Nicaraguan cities shed light on how entrenched the US was in the Cold War without being held accountable. I want to push that research given the examples of the Contras benefitted from PMC involvement through the US to understand linkage to the Sandinista military reign. The bigger picture shows that up until the very end of Reagan's presidency on January 20th, 1989 the Sandinista Military had predominant control of Nicaragua it's major cities, economy, and political control over its citizens. Changes from Somoza regime were extreme, but not all of them were "for all the people" as they may seem including suppression of free press in the first half of the 1980's.<sup>103</sup> I see this as a major benefit for US covert operations that ended up playing into the favor of the nature of the mercenary helping the Contras known to brash in decision making and treating civilians like combatants. A major issue of mercenary use and supporting rebel armies is their threat to innocent civilians, putting blood on the hands of US federal lawmakers. Another aspect to Nicaragua and its bordering countries compared to other communist states in contention was their lack of defiant leadership of the likes of a Ho Chi Minh, or Fidel Castro left the Sandinista regime less supported by the general public. FDN was able to organize with other counterrevolutionaries in Guatemala and Honduras at the beginning of the 1980's with advisors pouring in from the US. Despite the explosion of US interest in boosting the strength and morale

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<sup>103</sup> Prevost, Gary. "The Status of the Sandinista Revolutionary Project." *The Undermining of the Sandinista Revolution*, 1997, 9-44



of FDN forces up until 1984 counterrevolutionaries were unable to acquire any significant town or city under their control.<sup>104</sup>

As mentioned previously, the worst aspect to the failed attempts by the Contras in attempting to gain territory in Nicaragua northern borders especially a town such as Japala of a lower spotlight was that civilians were the primary victims of the bloodshed. Tactically, US advisors and ex-military officers brought into Central American countries to train soldiers by Oliver North himself struggled with penetrating Sandinista defenses. The war became a battle on two fronts with the main FDN forces coming from the Northwest region of the Honduran-Nicaraguan aimed at the more populated cities of Western Nicaragua. At some point to my understanding, the only thing that was lacking from other wars and situations where ground forces aren't making headway is some aerial support or missiles. I bring up secondary options not to say that missiles were necessary or even on the table considering the lack of support for military intervention in Nicaragua during Reagan's time in office to being with but to show the Contra War was a losing effort for the first half of the 1980's. PMC's helped train the soldiers, but a factor that wasn't considered and makes me re-evaluate the potential use of PMC's is the inability of the Contras to create a civil war climate or engage the population in believing that this was still an issue of who's in control.<sup>105</sup> The Contra's tactics reflected the lack of effectiveness of the aid and months of retraining they received from US officials in neighboring countries to Nicaragua. Soon after 1983, FDN was reported to resorting to high amounts of kidnappings of government family members and showed signs of desperation. In 1985 the Counter-Revolutionaries death toll reached over 5,000 for the year significantly more than any

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<sup>104</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 9.

<sup>105</sup> Prevost, Gary. *The "Contra" War in Nicaragua. Journal of Conflict Studies.* 13

other year of conflict.<sup>106</sup> Despite the US created efforts in Nicaragua failing and independent FDN reclaiming of territory along with support from the Nicaraguan people hitting a brick wall by 1985 Reagan reasserted the US backing of the Contras. Hence, the Iran-Contra scandal to bring even more weapons for the Contra soldiers, mercenaries, and rare peasant sympathizers against the communist agrarian reforms. Unfortunately for the Reagan Doctrine and war hawks in D.C. during the 1980's relishing in the idea of plausible deniability through trusted private military advisors leading the Contra War, the support didn't provide positive results for the FDN resurgence. So why possibly would continue to wholesale pledge millions and even billions of dollars to the private contracting today not just for regime change in Iraq similarly to Nicaragua but continue to fight the "War on Drugs" with PMC's leading the cause?

The future of PMC and mercenaries' role in American conflicts beyond Reagan's Latin American doctrine was shocking based on the outcomes of the goals he set. The "War on Drugs" continued today through an American aid initiative called PLAN Colombia which again put DynCorp at the center of military operations. The turmoil in Nicaragua hasn't necessarily subsided at all looking at post-Reagan Nicaraguan violence, but US interest has turned elsewhere towards the Middle East most prominently. US military intervention into Iraq under President George W. Bush infamously included military contracting through Halliburton and other private parties which has been dramatized in movies such as 'War Dogs.' Amongst the general public who follow the news or are up-to-date in the US presence abroad including the 'War on Terror,' there is no surprise that private contracting dominates the military landscape. I return to a set of explanations that I argue bridges the gap between the known effects of outsourcing military responsibilities at the end of the Cold War under Reagan and heavy usage of PMC's today. The reasons I propose for PMC use flourishing post-1989 are the ability to sustain US presence

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

abroad in areas of conflict or where US bases are lacking when troops are not deployed, plausible deniability in the age of increased transparency, and military industrial complex that was well documented in the Public Sector shifting to the private sector. Before we explore each reason, I want to briefly discuss PLAN Colombia and Halliburton's service in the War in Iraq as points of reference.

PLAN Colombia ironically lays out everything described by Reagan in speeches and from his administration's press releases in very concrete terms which would be signed into an agreement by Colombian President Andres Pastrana and President Bill Clinton.<sup>107</sup> The irony is that the initiative which gave the US rejuvenated access to fighting Colombian drug cartels and left-wing insurgents, the FARC never died out in the 1980's or 1990's's, they haven't received since Reagan's term.<sup>108</sup> For US military intervention scholars it's ironic because if one was to look at what the objectives of PLAN Colombia it would seem that this was the US first attempt to bring the War on Drugs down to Colombia. President Pastrana pushed for an economical solution which would allow foreign investors and US aid to come into Colombia to give farmers alternatives to producing drug crops. The US strategy quickly shifted to arming the Colombian Military with advanced weaponry and helicopters to push into Southern Colombian strongholds for Guerilla opposition. Under Bush Jr., the US invested over 2 billion dollars in funds towards US-led Colombian military programs including a contract with DynCorp worth over 450 million dollars for aviation support to eradicate drug crops.<sup>109</sup> During the Bush administration, the Colombian Military benefitted from having the latest US equipment such as night-vision goggles

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<sup>107</sup> Hylton Forrest. "Plan Colombia: The Measure of Success." *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 17, no. 1 (2010): 99-115.

<sup>108</sup> Hylton, Forrest. "Plan Colombia: The Measure of Success.". 105.

<sup>109</sup> Carpenter, Ted Galen. *Bad Neighbor Policy: Washington's Futile War on Drugs in Latin America*. 30

and night tracking surveillance but still were unsuccessful in slowing down the sale of drugs in the slightest bit.

In fact, although cocaine usage among Americans has decreased in the last few decades, the Cocaine market has opened up because of Colombian traffickers connection to Europe which has empowered Trafficking Cartels and FARC.<sup>110</sup> US policy objectives seemed to have come up short once again, by the end of 2008 cocaine usage was down in value significantly by over 8 billion dollars from an estimated 43 billion dollars in market value to \$35 million, but trafficking into Europe canceled out much of the losses for Colombian traffickers. FARC by the end of 2008 hadn't agreed to any cease-fire or surrender and wouldn't until in 2016 a year after the end of PLAN Colombia. During this time, DynCorp made anywhere from \$1 billion to 4.4 billion dollars in annual revenue and by 2015 grew to over 20,000 employees with over 550 locations being the world's largest military contractor in Latin America.<sup>111</sup> In parallel with DynCorp rise to prominence and wealth, the company was being more publicly exposed. Eventually, DynCorp found itself being sued by a variety of sources most notably Colombian farmers poisoned by the reckless nature in which pesticide flown by DynCorp contracted pilots were spraying in the Northern Colombian border.<sup>112</sup> Given the Reagan Era as a blueprint for PMC involvement in Colombia, I would argue that the biggest beneficiary of the US intervention into the Colombian civil war was DynCorp.

In the war in Iraq, the presence of Private contractors is much more complicated regarding US responsibility because of the amount of money allocated to putting individual contractors on the ground as soldiers compared to relying on private companies for services.

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<sup>110</sup> Green, Peter S. "Cocainonomics." *The Wall Street Journal*. February 25, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainonomics>.

<sup>111</sup> Dunigan, Molly. *The Markets for Morce: Privatization of Security Across World Regions*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

Hundreds of private military contractors, who negotiated with the US, from all over the world but mainly from the US and UK were killed in combat of some sorts.<sup>113</sup> The contractors that were killed in Iraq during the 2000's were known deaths of PMC workers whose names were never brought out to the media or formally recognized by the military since they weren't technically members.<sup>114</sup> Unofficial combatant deaths not claimed by the US is a clear example of the Plausible Deniability factor from Reagan's tenure coming into effect under Bush not having to confront retributions of mishandled operations by contractors who have been excluded from general public discourse surrounding the mistakes of operation "Iraqi Freedom."

Halliburton is a multinational oil-field service company based in Houston known for contracting work to extract natural resources and energy from around the world. The two main points about Halliburton for this research is that firstly Halliburton was the CEO of Halliburton leading up to his run as Vice President in the year 2000.<sup>115</sup> Secondly, Halliburton through its subsidiary at the time KBR at the in 2001 was awarded a LOGCAP contract. The KBR contract asked for a variety of military services primarily the attacking of terrorist bases in Iraq including a transition scheme with the President and future administrations to ease troops out of the region and use contractors while still training Iraqi soldier pushing regime change in their country.<sup>116</sup> These awarded contracts are worth hundreds of millions of dollars often and provide countless job opportunities to expanding private firms such as KBR. With incentivized businesses and a growing private military industry, it's hard to expect that there isn't pressure outside of D.C. to conduct business with PMC's despite whatever outcomes are on the other side. The effects of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 105.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>115</sup> Norris, Floyd. "THE 2000 CAMPAIGN: THE REPUBLICAN RUNNING MATE; Cheney Has Now Cashed In Most of His Stake in Halliburton." The New York Times. September 13, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/13/us/2000-campaign-republican-running-mate-cheney-has-now-cashed-most-his-stake.html>.

<sup>116</sup> "LOGCAP III Task Order Continues Support in Iraq." [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil). Accessed April 27, 2018. [https://www.army.mil/article/38607/logcap\\_iii\\_task\\_order\\_continues\\_support\\_in\\_iraq](https://www.army.mil/article/38607/logcap_iii_task_order_continues_support_in_iraq).

PMC contractors in Iraq are still being understood to this day as the War on Terrorism, and Iraq's political stability itself continues to unfold but what scholars know for a fact is that the amount of PMC available in the Middle East contracted by the US increased tremendously from 2003 to 2010. The strategies were providing unchanging results in the War on Drugs and even deteriorated results such as higher military spending or civilian casualties associated with PMCs in Nicaragua along with the later Iraq conflict. The more entrenched US got into military interventions abroad no matter the result PMC is trending as a more prevalent option in US military interventions then, and in the future, we should expect even less of a role from US military personnel in American wars abroad.

## Conclusion

Ronald Reagan's inauguration into office on January 20th of 1981 was the dawn of a new era and direction for US governance in many ways. There are a variety of different policies produced out of Washington's bureaucracy during the 1980's which would affect the lives of Americans at home and across the world, but through this project, we understand just how related these seemingly widespread goals were. Underneath the era of Neoliberalism led by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and other leaders interested in changing global dynamics directly with what in contemporary discourse termed globalism, was the shift in all facets of governmental practice. The military often thought of as the almighty branch of the US federal body began the shift towards relinquishing its duties to represent the US as a world power in foreign interventions. The transition to outsourcing military duties is proven in the very aggressive, consequential involvement of PMC's in Colombia and Nicaragua.

By using the Reagan Doctrine and the broad values of the US intent to subdue communist influence in their proverbial backyard of Central America along with the US determination to slow the flow of drugs into US borders, we can understand the areas of war in which PMC's were included for. However, it's the specific case studies of the shortcomings of the agencies such as the CIA and DEA to make any tactical adjustments to effectively achieve US stated missions that reveal more about the usage of PMC's. The implementation of PMC's and their continued increase have gone beyond the outcomes of the conflicts. Whether we're looking at the failure to shut down the "War on Drugs" in Colombia which has seen two different major attempts an over a decade apart to stop or the non-removal of the Sandinista rule, Latin American interventions were overall unsuccessful under Reagan on the surface. Beneath the surface, the groundwork was laid out for the potential of PMC and another mercenary usage that

did prove to have some advantages for US interests despite not being pivotal to destroying the opposition completely.

Firstly, PMC has grown in their capabilities regarding the flexibility to do whatever is asked of US military. The competitiveness of the private sector and experience that can be gained from working in PMC's allows for their professionals to perform at a high level. The main part of this is the maintenance of the war, which was highlighted in the history of DynCorp in Colombia which brought aviation equipment and pilots into the "War on Drugs" to attack drug farms.<sup>117</sup> The ability for contractors to become experts in areas and occupy dangerous regions beyond when US military involvement is apparent is another key factor in the positive results of outsourcing military services. Next, looking at the plausible deniability of politicians and US government responsibility within military interventions PMC's are a clear advantage over the deployment of US personnel. Globalism has had an upwards trajectory with technology which has led to a new world of accountability and transparency. In the modern political climate much is being revealed to the average citizen around the world making leaders interested in ventures involving military intervention much more hesitant in their approach to deploying force. The unwillingness to put US troops on the ground abroad has been reflected in US intervention in Syria today with the common theme being airstrikes often with unmanned jets.<sup>118</sup> All signs have pointed to a "modernized" less involved US military regarding actual physical cost while still applying the same pressure against adversaries as before.

The profiting off of wars and more opportunities for money to be made through the business of preparation of going into combat for the US isn't a new idea. In 1961, during his farewell presidential address, Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warned his viewers and listeners

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<sup>117</sup> Bagley, Bruce M. "Colombia and the War on Drugs." 85.

<sup>118</sup> Dunigan, Molly. *The Markets for More: Privatization of Security Across World Regions*. 105.



of the dangers of the military-industrial complex.<sup>119</sup> The idea that the cyclical nature of an improved economy after the war and the need to feed an industry that requires US conflict abroad has fluctuated in scope due to the shift towards outsourcing military duties to companies. These PMC's based in the US have made billions of dollars through military contract almost exclusively since DynCorp was able to land its contract in Colombia which sparked the frequency of major security deals.<sup>120</sup> The Invasion in Iraq and Halliburton's role as a security contractor in various Iraqi regions for US forces but also energy companies is the perfect example of the blurred line between US security interests or US economic opportunities for the private sector. PMC proliferation is concretely tied into the military industrial complex under a different way for security firms to take advantage of conflict in greater scope than weapon manufacturers during the 1950's in the Korean War under Eisenhower.

The US involvement in the Contra War and covert intervention into Colombian civil conflicts are the foundation for all post-1980's PMC involvement in US foreign intervention in addition to any future combat. Nicaragua's "low intensity" nature or at least how it was described under the first years of Reagan allowed for an avenue for PMC and Mercenary effective to be tested in a much different way then inclusion in Colombia's internal issues. Reagan's ascension to the president as the candidate to reverse Carter era policies and push for privatization is also in the fabric of shifting military operations. The 1980's led to a sharp increase in PMC contracts and the money generated in the private military sector from the continued War on Drugs to regime change in the Middle East. The future of US foreign policy that includes military intervention based on the trends of the PMC industry can expect to be even

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<sup>119</sup> Eisenhower, Dwight D. Avalon Project - Military-Industrial Complex Speech, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1961. January 17, 2018. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/eisenhower001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/eisenhower001.asp).

<sup>120</sup> Dunigan, Molly. *The Markets for More: Privatization of Security Across World Regions*. 107.

more reliant on outsourcing of services that will put into question what the role of the US Military branches will even be in the years to come.

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