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Syria and Colombia: A Study of Intervention

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SYRIA AND COLOMBIA: A STUDY OF INTERVENTION

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Civil war has persisted as a relevant topic of debate concerning U.S. foreign policy. On the international stage, getting involved in another nation’s civil war has become highly contentious. Following intervention in Vietnam, Korea, Somalia, and later in Libya, many argue towards a more isolationist U.S. stance. One of the mostly highly debated cases of civil war today is the case of Syria. While many are pushing for the U.S. to do more, many are sending a warning to stay away. Much closer to home, Colombia sought to control a drug-fueled civil war that erupted to a level that the U.S. could no longer ignore. An intervention strategy was instated through Plan Colombia with mixed results. Nevertheless, the Colombian peace process which is now taking place may set the tone for the greatest level of nation-wide development yet. This manuscript will analyze the cases of Syria and Colombia, and what motivated an American intervention in these nations. Additionally, included is a breakdown of the effects of U.S. involvement on each civil war and finally concluding remarks.
Dedicated to my grandparents, for their light shines with me every day. In memory of Jean Weidner, Brooke Weidner, Julia Gomez, and Manuel Gomez. You are missed everyday…
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

My research topic of interest for this paper is the intervention of the United States in foreign civil wars. My motivation for doing this research is founded in a curiosity of American foreign policy and the circumstances under which the U.S. will provide assistance. There is an established interest regarding U.S. involvement in civil wars driven by private citizens, scholars, and governments.

This study highlights the cases of Syria and Colombia as outliers of traditional intervention theory. The specific question I will address is “What motivates the United States to intervene in a civil war?” For this paper, foreign intervention is defined as “the transfer of resources from an external state to a contesting party in a civil war”. Resources are broadly defined as any funds, weapons, equipment, materiel or personnel that have immediate or potential coercive value.\(^1\) This research question is important to answer in an analysis of current U.S. foreign policy and in selecting future policy.

A new security agenda has emerged in the Post-Cold War era along with new, 'non-traditional' security concerns. Issues such as drug trafficking, organized crime, resource scarcity, border security, cyber security, and the rise of violent extremism and terrorism. Unlike traditional security threats, not all modern threats can be termed as

\(^1\) Lockyer, Adam. “Foreign Intervention and Warfare in Civil Wars: The effect of exogenous resources on the course and nature of the Angolan and Afghan conflicts”. December, 2008. Department of Government and International Relations Faculty of Economics and Business; University of Sydney.
“external” or “foreign” or as “military” in nature. These challenges that have emerged are what may motivate U.S. intervention in the modern era.

**Literature Review**

The first set of literature I will mention covers the potential motivators for intervention into civil war. One trend in research is presented by Findley and Mitchell (2011), covering whether lootable natural resources motivate third-party intervention into civil wars. Their study considered the possibility that lootable natural resources motivate third parties to intervene into wars in order to access natural resources, benefitting the intervener. It is argued that when rebels have access to lootable resources, third parties will be more likely to intervene on the side of the rebels and less likely to intervene behind the government. The analysis found that lootable resources do provide a powerful incentive for third-party intervention, even after controlling for other political and strategic factors, thus underscoring the importance of economic motives for intervention.3

Bove (2016) presents the relationship of potential third-party interveners to the conflict country and variation in their costs and benefits of intervention. Third parties are placed into a model of civil conflict between a government and opposition forces, where conflict has implications for oil production and therefore prices for oil importers. While previous studies have often overlooked the role of economic factors and specifically oil,

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Bove argues that supply and demand factors increase the incentives for external military involvement, and finds empirical support for the argument.4

In another study, Regan (2002) presents research arguing that the main goal of third-party interventions is stopping the fighting between combatants. The United States has undertaken a number of efforts to intervene in intrastate conflicts, some more effective than others. Regan claims that interventions are undertaken when there is a reasonable expectation that the goals are attainable given the strategy for intervention and the conditions of the conflict.5

A different line of argument is presented by Kathman (2011), stating that third parties observe the geopolitical effects of civil wars. They assess the nature of a war’s contagious properties and the significance of regional states at risk of infection. Generally, third parties have incentives to contain hostilities from disrupting their vital foreign interests.6

Aydin (2010) compares state and IGO (intergovernmental organization) decision-making in civil war intervention. The author claims that states make strategic decisions by studying the behavior of other third-party states in order to judge the costs and risks associated with intervention. States often become hesitant and wait longer to take action

4 Bove, Vincenzo, Kristian Gleditsch, and Petros Sekeris. “‘Oil above Water’: Economic Interdependence and Third-party Intervention.” Journal of Conflict Resolution 60, no. 7 (2016).
in civil wars in which interventions that failed to influence combatant behavior have been attempted by other states. Additionally, Aydin argues that civil wars that persist despite substantial third-party involvement discourage other states from undertaking intervention efforts.\footnote{Aydin, Aysegul. "Where Do States Go? Strategy in Civil War Intervention." Conflict Management and Peace Science 27, no. 1 (2010): 47-66.}

According to Werner (2000), an important reason for intervention is the third party’s perception that the attacking country poses a significant threat to the status quo. Considering the aggressor’s aims in the war \textit{vis-à-vis} a particular target, the third party worries that the changes produced by the war will become too extreme.\footnote{Werner, Suzanne. "Deterring Intervention: The Stakes of War and Third-party Involvement." \textit{American Journal of Political Science} 44, no. 4 (2000): 720-32.}

The second set of literature focuses on the effects that intervention has on conflicts. A study done by Regan (2010) places focus on two specific aspects of intervention assessing the effectiveness of an intervening nations’ policies. First, he considers the duration of the war, and second, the extent of violence throughout the war. Regan then asserts four relevant conclusions: (1) interventions are not effective in decreasing the length of a civil war, (2) interventions are linked to increased violence between the opposing sides, (3) there is not clear evidence on whether supporting rebel groups increases or decreases their probability of victory prior to negotiations with regime forces, and (4) distanced negotiation can be more effective than military intervention. Regan mentions several studies which refute the above generalizations, and
attributes the differences in intervention literature an inconsistent definition of “intervention”.9

Theoretical Framework

This paper highlights American policy towards intervention, hypothesizing that these two cases are outliers of previously mentioned intervention theory. The previous literature enfolds many theories on intervention, however they do not pertain to Syria and Colombia. The inclusion of previous research, theories, variables and the case studies presented will help defend my rationale. What I expect to find in my research is that there is no relationship between the independent variables (previous motives for intervention) and the dependent variable when applied to the chosen cases.

This study is about how U.S. motivations have evolved and the changing security agenda. For these specific cases, it is not about oil, raw materials, stopping the fighting between combatants, significance of regional states at risk of infection, or threat to the status quo that motivated intervention as the previous literature argues. Intervention can range from a minimum to a maximum, such as small skirmishes to World War II.

The modern security framework results from an expansion of the security agenda to incorporate more than just the traditional military and political sectors. Developing a wider security agenda requires giving consideration to what is meant by security and

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applying that understanding to a range of dynamics different from the traditional military-political aspect, while still including traditional security studies.\textsuperscript{10}

Perceptions of threat and insecurity are not limited to states alone or to military competition. Threats can manifest themselves across a number of different policy contexts or “sectors”, including economic, environmental, cultural, and the more traditional military and political spheres.\textsuperscript{11} The idea of a wider security agenda has strengthened through the end of the Cold War and the rise of the market economy, global finance, investment, and production. Security concerns are less about rivalries between great powers and more about the consequences of how the open international system operates- a set of issues that affects the strong actors as much as it does the weaker ones.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Method}

Case analysis is centered on the notion that the case or cases will reveal a subject matter that has yet to be directly addressed in prior research. The goal is that the analysis will reveal important implications for future study. I believe that these two cases of Syria and Colombia are unique and justifiable outliers of intervention theory.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
An important single-case research design is the study of a deviant or outlier case. Research on deviant cases can help inductively identify variables and hypotheses that have been left out of existing theories.\textsuperscript{13} Significant research findings in the field of social science have come from single-case studies that presented anomalies for accepted theories. This study will use within-case analysis, with the goal that the chosen cases will add to existing research and theory.

As with this study, the purpose of a deviant case analysis is generally to search for new explanations. The objective is that causal processes within the deviant case will illustrate some causal factor that is applicable to other (deviant) cases. A deviant case study often closes in a general proposition that may be applied to other cases in the population.

Information collected through the research was obtained from a variety of academic scholars, press releases, and other government sources.

**Case Studies**

For this manuscript, I have chosen to base my analysis on two case studies. I chose these particular cases in order to fill what I would argue is a gap in current literature. The first case I will explore is Syria, a country riveted by a ferocious civil war in a region the U.S. has put immense focus on through the years. The second case up for

examination is Colombia, a nation which has faced one of the longest civil wars in history, but has finally moved forward with a peace deal.

**A Look into Civil War**

The study of civil war has become increasingly relevant in recent years. Economists, political scientists, intelligence analysts, and many others all share an interest in civil war and the causes and effects associated with it. Civil war, defined as an internal conflict that counts more than 1,000 battle deaths in a single year, has stricken one-third of all nations. When counting civil conflicts (those which have at least twenty-five battle deaths per year) the occurrence increases to more than half. Furthermore, twenty percent of all nations have encountered at least ten years of civil war between 1960 and 2006.\(^\text{14}\)

The percentage of nations entangled in civil conflict at a single point in time progressively increased through the last half of the twentieth century, peaking in the 1990s at over 20 percent (see figure 1). In 2006, there were merely thirty-two active conflicts, a major decline from a peak of fifty-one in 1992.\(^\text{15}\) The epidemic of internal wars is often attributed to poverty. Indeed, countries towards the bottom of the world income distribution, such as many African nations, have many more wars than those in the top quartile, while middle income countries still face considerable conflict risk.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.
Figure 1: Proportion of Countries with an Active Civil War or Civil Conflict, 1960–2006

Source: Data based on UCDP/PRIO armed conflict database.\(^\text{16}\)

Chapter 2: SYRIA

Background

In March of 2011, the chaos of the Arab Spring trickled into Syria, disrupting over 40 years of political stability and provoking a horrific civil war which still has no end in sight. Syria's ongoing civil war has displaced nearly seven million Syrians, left hundreds of thousands wounded or killed by violence, and created a vacuum in basic infrastructures that will trouble the region for countless years to come. Many scholars and government officials are questioning what role, if any, the U.S. should play in Syria.

For many, it seems that the Syrian conflict has become a proxy war between two opposing sides. There are the allies (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Turkey, etc.) and the opposition (Iran, Russia, Hezbollah) which supports Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria. Both sides seek to shift the regional balance of power either in favor of the West, or against it. Israel has an unmeasurable interest in the conflict. The outcome of the conflict is strategically important for Israel and how it may benefit its arch-enemy Iran.

Violence has continued to intensify inside Syria. Both sides of the war have carried out deliberate attacks on civilians in efforts to kill desired targets. Various armed groups have carried out as attacks on innocent Syrian civilians and employed child soldiers. The armed extremist group the Islamic State (commonly referred to as ISIS), and Al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, are responsible for methodical and widespread violations, including targeting civilians, kidnappings, and executions.
According to many local Syrian groups, as of October 2015, the death toll in the conflict climbed to 250,000, including over 100,000 civilians. Additionally, there are more than 640,000 citizens living under long-term siege in Syria. The conflict has led to a humanitarian disaster with an estimated 7.6 million internally displaced and 4.2 million refugees in bordering countries.\(^{17}\)

**Report of Chemical Weapons**

There are verified reports of chemical weapons being used in Syria, and notice of this led to a peak in the controversy over whether the U.S. should intervene in Syria’s gruesome civil war. Obama Administration officials, along with other foreign authorities, report that on August 21, 2013, forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al Assad struck opposition-controlled areas in the suburbs of Damascus with chemical weapons, killing hundreds of civilians, including women and children.\(^{18}\) The Syrian government has adamantly denied the accusations and instead blames the opposition for the attack. President Assad has claimed that the rebel fighters used the chemical weapons on civilians in an attempt to frame the Assad regime and gain international attention. Reports of the incident suggest that more than 1,000 people were killed, with symptoms correlated with exposure to the nerve agent sarin.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.
In April of 2017, The U.S. military launched a missile attack on a Syrian airfield in response to Bashar al-Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons a few days prior, marking the first time the U.S. used direct military action against the Assad regime.

**Public Argument for U.S. Involvement**

Members of Congress have conveyed a broad range of views on a U.S. response. There exists support for military action though many oppose or question how a military response would advance wider U.S. policy goals. Certain members of Congress have voiced concern that providing support to the Syrian opposition could empower anti-American extremist groups, while others worry that failure to back moderate forces could prolong fighting and bolster extremists. It is necessary to debate the prospective rewards and consequences of deeper U.S. involvement in Syria.

Many argue for intervening in Syria as a condition to preserve U.S. credibility and reputation as a great power, or to earn the respect of its allies and adversaries. There are humanitarian motives for intervention, and the suffering in Syria is undeniably horrifying. Images of children and families affected by the war have taken the hearts of many Americans, and Congress is facing calls for intervention. Following U.S. airstrikes in April of 2017 against the Assad regime, members of Congress on both sides have expressed support for President Trump’s initiative. House minority leader and Trump challenger, Nancy Pelosi, said the U.S. strike was “a proportional response to the regime’s use of chemical weapons”. Republicans are also speaking out and supporting the action.
Response of the Obama Administration

The Obama administration was not very interested in any major role in Syria. Many Americans are tired of trying to govern and “heal” war-torn countries. Foreign intervention became less popular following the Iraq War, and politicians fear a potential loss of support if they are found in favor of furthered intervention in the region. The administration stressed no boots on the ground and no major shipments of U.S. arms.

The Obama administration has however shown interest in covert action, which naturally tends to not attract much publicity. There have been reports that the Central Intelligence Agency is involved in vetting, aiding, and advising certain opposition groups.

The UN’s Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, asserted that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad’s regime used chlorine weapons against a rebel-held district. President Obama did not immediately warn of any looming consequences. Samantha Power, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations from 2013 to 2017, denounced the “horrific and continuous use of chemical weapons by Syria” without specifying whether any action would be taken against Assad.20

In September of 2012, President Obama stated in a press conference,

We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of

chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.\(^{21}\)

This statement made by the President seemed to send a message, one which threatened a reaction should the Assad regime use chemical weapons. Yet, in 2013, it was reported that the Assad government had massacred over 1,000 noncombatants with sarin gas outside of Damascus. President Obama, in what became a story of the “red line”, did not give the reaction he had once threatened to.

In March of 2015, President Obama supported and approved a UN Security Council Resolution which threatened the use of force if chlorine weapons were found to be used in Syria. One year later, a March 2016 report detailed that 161 chemical weapons attacks were responsible for the deaths of nearly 1,500 civilians and 14,581 injuries. Additionally, the report estimated that almost one-third of these used chlorine gas.\(^{22}\)

Critics claimed that President Obama made a mistake by “drawing a red line” but not following through with it. In an interview with Foreign Policy, former secretary of defense Chuck Hagel said of Obama’s August 2013 decision to back down, “There’s no question in my mind that it hurt the credibility of the president’s word when this occurred.”\(^{23}\) Hagel additionally stated that American counterparts throughout the world

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\(^{22}\) Ibid.

\(^{23}\) Ibid.
expressed that Obama’s decision to back away from his “red line” shook their confidence in the President.

Speaking in a national address on September 10, 2013, President Barack Obama stated:

Over the last few days, we've seen some encouraging signs, in part because of the credible threat of U.S. military action, as well as constructive talks that I had with President Putin. The Russian government has indicated a willingness to join with the international community in pushing Assad to give up his chemical weapons. The Assad regime has now admitted that it has these weapons and even said they'd join the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits their use. I've spoken to the leaders of two of our closest allies -- France and the United Kingdom - - and we will work together in consultation with Russia and China to put forward a resolution at the U.N. Security Council requiring Assad to give up his chemical weapons and to ultimately destroy them under international control.24

The Obama Administration has voiced support to the rebels in the form of “non-lethal” military assistance, such as equipment (body armor, night vision goggles, armored vehicles and advanced communications systems),25 American training of Syrian insurgents in Jordan, and support of a flow of arms from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey to the Free Syrian Army.

In a September 2013 hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, then United States Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel stated that the Obama

Administration is currently taking steps to provide arms to Syrian rebels under covert action authorities. In the same month, in a hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Secretary of State John Kerry stated, “We have seen the president take steps in response to the initial attacks of chemical weapons to increase lethal aid to the opposition. That is now known.” Covert action has shown to shape the Obama Administration policy in Syria.

**Indirect U.S. Involvement**

With assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency, various Arab governments have delivered military aid to Syria’s opposition fighters. There has been a secret transfer of arms and equipment provided for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries, as well as the accounts of rebel commanders.

The Obama administration may have publicly declined to provide more than “nonlethal” aid to the rebels, but participation of the CIA in various arms shipments has demonstrated a willingness to help Arab allies aid the lethal side of the war. From secret offices across the world, American intelligence officers have helped the Arab governments shop for weapons, including a large procurement from Croatia, and have

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vetted rebel commanders and groups to determine who should receive the weapons as they arrive.

American lawmakers have even argued that arming the rebels is essential, especially since Russian and Iranian forces are sending arms to the Assad government. These shipments underline the battle for control and influence over Syria and its role in the Middle East.

**Humanitarian Assistance**

The United States is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance within Syria, and is part of a vast international humanitarian operation. From 2012 to 2013, the United States distributed more than $1 billion to meet humanitarian needs using existing funding from global humanitarian accounts and some reprogrammed funding. These allocations are guided by concerns over: humanitarian protection within Syria, the enormous refugee flows out of Syria that stress the resources of neighboring countries, the potential negative impact on the overall stability of the region, and the possible escalation of the humanitarian emergency. Access inside Syria is severely constrained by ongoing violence as well as restrictions enforced by the Syrian government on the operations of humanitarian organizations.

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29 Ibid.
Reasons to Minimize U.S. Involvement

Shaping foreign policy requires assessing a nation's national interest. Some argue that the United States needs to move away from reliance on Middle Eastern oil, and in fact we are not as reliant on Middle Eastern oil today. Consequently, the Middle East may no longer be a focal point of American strategic interest. But even without the consideration of oil, the United States still views the survival of Israel as desirable. This means that as long as Iran is a threat to Israel, the U.S. will have strategic concern in the region.

There is also concern over getting involved in Syria without a clear, defined goal. As the U.S. becomes more entrenched in Syria, we need to assess: what is the objective? If the goal of intervention is purely for humanitarian reasons, then we can move forward. However, if our intention is to dismantle the Bashar Al-Assad regime, then we need to take a step back. The U.S. has been a hegemon in the world for arguably sixty or so years, and with this designation comes the capability to disassemble weak governments, if we so chose. But there is not great confidence in what would replace the Assad regime in Syria, and the power vacuum created may lead to an outcome which we favor less than the one we have now. This was a serious blunder when we invaded brought Saddam Hussein out of power in Iraq, as well as when we unseated Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya. We very successfully removed these leaders, but did not properly execute any plan.

30 Ricks, Thomas E. "Our new Middle East policy is emerging. It is: Just stand there." Foreign Policy. January 12, 2017.
to establish new ones. It must be assessed and approved, that the United States does in fact have the capacity and wisdom to progress the state of affairs at a tolerable expense.

One argument for the United States minimizing involvement in Syria is that sadly enough, Syria is only one of many humanitarian tragedies. The United States has chosen not to intervene in other cases of civil catastrophe. During the bloodshed in El Salvador and Guatemala, the Argentine “dirty war” between 1976 and 1983, and the Iran-Iraq War (in which roughly one million people died), the United States did not make strong stance for humanitarian issues and hindering violence. In 1994, Bill Clinton famously announced that the United States would not intervene to halt the Rwandan genocide. Furthermore, the U.S. elected to stay out of the various wars which have engulfed the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where approximately 5 million people lost their lives.31

Problems with Intervention

The current situation in Syria is unsurprisingly complex. Similar to other Middle Eastern nations the U.S. has intervened in, there is not a single group which is guaranteed to further our interests. At one point, Syria presented an opportunity for the U.S. to alter regional alliances, while seeming to intervene to aid popular demand for regime change. Toppling the Syrian regime would shift the regional balance of power against Iran, but it is unknown if the succeeding government would be supportive of Western values.

Partnering with the Assad regime would provide a common ally in the fight against the Islamic State, an enemy that countless nations share, however the Assad regime is not a true ally of the U.S. Additionally, direct intervention to secure or destroy chemical weapons caches will do little to address the primary concern and threat facing civilians.

Toppling the Assad regime is not what is best right now, for Syria or the United States. If the U.S. were to attempt to topple the regime militarily, it would dramatically intensify destruction in the country which would result in greater civilian casualties. Additionally, it may only worsen the internal conflict in Syria and create a power vacuum, resulting in a similar chaos as in Libya. The result would be a profoundly destabilized Syria bordering on Israel, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. There is also the potential for a heightened, extended proxy war between regional Sunni and Shia political forces within Syria and in other states.\(^32\)

**Prospects for Peace**

I believe there is always an opportunity for peace, although certain cases encompass more obstacles to peace than others. In Syria, the international community must ensure a transition process that safeguards the security of all communities, including Alawites. Any prospective Syrian government must take action to preserve the territorial integrity

of Syria and prevent minority killings. Forming an inclusive democratic society would give a fractured nation a chance to heal and unite under common goals.

In addition, a viable political solution must include international parties on all sides. Essentially, negotiations must include not only internal parties but also the external players involved such as Iran and Russia.33 Because both states have stakes in the Assad government, their participation and satisfaction with the peace process may be a major factor in sustained peace.

Given the immense complexities of the Syrian conflict, a solution often seems unmanageable. The associated regional consequences of U.S. intervention remain a matter of intense debate. Throughout his presidency, President Obama stressed his opinion that broad, sustained U.S. military intervention to shape the outcome of Syria’s civil conflict was an undesirable feat. Former and current U.S. military leaders have warned that U.S. military involvement “cannot resolve the underlying and historic ethnic, religious and tribal issues that are fueling this conflict.” Under the current Trump administration, intervention in Syria is growing, and this may either increase or decrease immediate prospects for peace.

Chapter 3: COLOMBIA

Background

Colombia has continually been cherished by the United States as a successful democracy and a stable economy in Latin America. However, the Colombian conflict that began in the early 1960’s had become increasingly relevant into the 1990’s and 2000’s. U.S. aid began flowing to Colombia in the early 1970s in an effort to help the Colombian military, the National Police, along with various law enforcement and civilian agencies in an attempt to drive down illegal drug production and trafficking.\(^{34}\) Despite everything, Colombia was the world’s leading producer of cocaine in the 1990’s. It had additionally become a leading source of the heroin abundance within the United States.

The drug trade in this period was dominated by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (known by its Spanish acronym, FARC), the Army of National Liberation (ELN), and paramilitary groups (primarily, the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia or AUC). These groups were expanding control of the coca and opium poppy growing areas of the country, imposing violence and human rights abuses that vibrated effects throughout the entire country. Colombia suffered an economic recession in the late 1990s due to the overwhelming strength of these illegal armed groups, and levels of murder, kidnapping, extortion, economic sabotage, and the growing rate of drug trafficking.

According to U.S. State Department, in the 7 years prior to Plan Colombia, coca cultivation had increased by over 300 percent and opium poppy cultivation had increased by 75 percent.\(^{35}\)

The crisis had persisted too long and the U.S. was ready to intervene. As a result, in October of 1999 the Colombian government released a 6-year strategy to address the crisis, to be called Plan Colombia. Though announced in 1999, it would officially go into effect in 2000. The framework of Plan Colombia was to (1) reduce the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illicit narcotics in Colombia by 50 percent over a 6-year period, and (2) improve the security climate in Colombia by reclaiming control of areas held by various rebel groups.\(^{36}\) The rebel groups had been survived financially mainly through drug trade profits, therefore the two strategies went hand in hand.

**History of Colombian Assistance**

There is an intricate history between U.S. policy and Colombia’s civil war. Involvement has escalated in stages since the original counterinsurgency program was devised under the Kennedy administration. An initial stage was the 1962 creation of a CIA and Special Forces program for training police and paramilitary groups (autodefensas) in counterinsurgency techniques, such as in sabotage and terror. Over


\(^{36}\) Ibid.
twenty years later in 1986, National Security Decision Directive 221 was passed. It was the first time drug trafficking was defined as a national security matter, and in 1991 allowed for U.S. troops to work in Colombia in cooperation with the CIA.\textsuperscript{37} The biggest year was 2000, when President Bill Clinton approved a $1.3 billion aid program in support of Plan Colombia. The following year President George W. Bush took initiative to expand the U.S. role outside of counter-narcotics, such as a program to underwrite Colombian army security for oil pipelines.\textsuperscript{38}

**Possible Reasons for U.S. Interest**

Colombia has remained a top priority in U.S. aid packages and foreign policy. However, American securities and assistance to a nation seldom come without conditions or underlying motives. In the case of Colombia, one explanation for the degree of U.S. involvement is interest in Colombian oil, including a major oil pipeline which runs through guerrilla territory.\textsuperscript{39} In addition, the U.S. proclaimed fight against the “War on Drugs” has an interest in weakening the guerrillas and illicit drug production in Colombia. Therefore, assisting the Colombians in their civil war contributes to wider U.S. interests.


\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

Plan Colombia

Plan Colombia’s counter-narcotics strategy focused on eradication of illicit crops along with establishing alternative development endeavors aimed to offer farmers an alternative to growing coca and opium poppy. Plan Colombia would aim to recover territory dominated by the rebel groups through organized military engagement with insurgent groups, and an expanded police presence throughout the country. In addition, Plan Colombia addressed several social, economic, and judicial reform programs intended to support the overall drug and security objectives.

U.S. diplomats, Colombian officials, and rebel commanders all speak in harmony in saying that Plan Colombia marked a turning point, both militarily and psychologically, in the conflict. In January 2007, the Colombians delivered a 6-year (2007-2013) secondary plan, referred to as the Plan Colombia Consolidation Phase (PCCP), which incorporates many of the same strategies and programs introduced through Plan Colombia.


Details of U.S. Aid

U.S. assistance, totaling nearly $4.9 billion since 2000, has provided the Colombian military and National Police with a range of capabilities, specifically air mobility, which is needed to pursue Plan Colombia’s counter-narcotics and security goals. Assistance to the Colombian military included supplying 72 helicopters to the

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43 Ibid.
Army’s Aviation Brigade as well as assisting Navy and Marine programs devised to confiscate illegal drugs as they travel through Colombia’s coastal waters and rivers.\textsuperscript{44}

Assistance to the Colombian National Police has consisted of projects such as funding for a police commando unit concentrated on counter-narcotics and counterterrorism objectives, in addition to establishment of rural police squadrons in 169 municipalities. Since Plan Colombia’s initiation in 2000, U.S. assistance has helped the National Police to eradicate over a million hectares (equivalent to 10,000 square meters/2.471 acres) of coca and opium poppy, demolish several hundred cocaine hydrochloride laboratories, and confiscate thousands of metric tons of cocaine and heroin.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{Challenges}

Within Colombia, both the military and the National Police encounter an array of challenges. One of the most difficult challenges is how to bring down Coca Cultivation levels. These levels have increased since the implementation of Plan Colombia largely because of the countermeasures taken by coca farmers. Many are packing up and moving to more remote parts of the country, where there is minimal aerial detection and fewer counter-narcotics operations taking place.


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
Nearly $1.3 billion in U.S. aid has been devoted to non-military programs since 2000. These programs have succeeded in some areas, but have struggled in other efforts. The greatest portion of American nonmilitary assistance has been devoted to the development of legal economic opportunities, provided to hundreds of thousands of Colombians. Unfortunately, these alternative development programs lack the ability to measure whether or not they further USAID’s goal of reducing the production of illicit narcotics.46

The USAID’s assistance has reached millions of Colombian’s displaced by violence, but unfortunately many of these displaced persons cannot access this assistance. In the political sphere, USAID democracy and human rights programs have increased access to the democratic process for Colombian citizens, though it is still a process which will require time and continued effort. USAID assistance has improved the rule of law in Colombia, though progress has been hindered by Colombian judicial authorities’ restricted ability in addressing the large number of criminal cases they are dealt, which includes an insufficient transport capacity required to investigate crimes in remote and insecure locations.47

United States military assistance in Colombia is often supported as a facet of the "War on Drugs." When American lawmakers equate guerrillas and drug traffickers, they

47 Ibid.
see supporting the army as a proper solution for the global (and U.S.) drug problem. The reality is not so simple however, and evidence reveals that the military resolution does not halt the drug wave. There has been a 17-fold spending increase on the U.S. drug war since 1980, yet illicit drugs are more powerful and more accessible than when the "War on Drugs" launched.

Peace Deal

Many trumped a looming Colombian peace deal as a light at the end of the tunnel; it was an end to the FARC’s half-century campaign of rebellion against the Colombian government, and an end to a war that killed two hundred thousand, and displaced five million.

A deal was set for September 26th, and the deal was accepted by both sides. However, President Santos chose to seek approval from his citizens and sought a referendum. In the October 2nd referendum, voters turned down—by a margin of just 0.4 percentage points—the peace accord President Santos had signed with the FARC. The result came as a shock to many on both sides, and sent President Santos and his administration anxious for a new resolution. On November 24th, President Santos and and the guerrillas’ leader, Rodrigo “Timochenko” Londoño, signed a revised deal. Congress ratified the deal, and on December 6th the FARC’s nearly 6,000 troops began moving

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from their established homes in the jungle to demobilization zones, to disarm and organize for a new life as civilians\textsuperscript{50}. President Santos will be written in the history books for ending the longest-lasting conflict in the Americas, at last.

\textsuperscript{50} Economist contributor. "Colombia's peace deal has taken effect, but the country remains divided." The Economist. December 10, 2016.
Chapter 4: EFFECTS

Effect of U.S. Involvement in Syria

Response to Chemical Weapons

On April 6th, 2017, under the orders of President Donald J. Trump, the U.S. military conducted a cruise missile strike in Syria. The Syrian airbase targeted is alleged to be where Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad sent aircraft off for a deadly chemical attack against civilians. According to officials, the U.S. military action was meant to "deter the regime from using chemical weapons and so the proportionality is measured against that outcome. We do not believe it's acceptable for the Syrian regime to use chemical weapons." The strike is believed to be responsible for the destruction of approximately 20 aircraft, destruction of surface-to-air missile systems, and the destruction or damage of targeted hangars.51

U.S. Airstrikes

The United States, the United Kingdom, and France, with the support of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab partners, have directed over fourteen thousand air strikes in the fight against the Islamic State. In August of 2016, U.S.-backed rebels supported with coalition air strikes liberated the critical north Syrian city of Manbij from the Islamic

State. This victory essentially cut off smuggling routes to the north and supply routes between Aleppo and Raqqa\(^{52}\), the headquarters of the Islamic State.

A U.S. airstrike conducted in northwest Syria November 18\(^{th}\), 2016, successfully killed Abu Ayyub al-Masri, a senior al-Qaida leader in Syria, as confirmed by former Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook (under President Obama). Al-Masri was an Egyptian who joined al-Qaida in Afghanistan and later relocated to its Syrian affiliate. Cook stated al-Masri “had ties to terrorist groups operating throughout Southwest Asia, including groups responsible for attacking U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan and those plotting to attack the West,” remarking that al-Masri’s absence from the battlefield is a significant hit to al-Qaida in Syria.

Syrian Democratic Forces worked to seize and clear territory north of Raqqa in preparation for the city's liberation. Cook stated “Those SDF forces are now 20 kilometers from Raqqa. The SDF has essentially closed a pocket of ISIL forces now encircled by their advance and they are clearing that pocket in preparation for future operations”. In just 24 hours, the Western coalition has conducted 11 strikes delivering 35 munitions in support of the SDF's drive on Raqqa.\(^{53}\)

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U.S. Role in a Peace Deal

As a global superpower, the U.S. has the capability to end violence in exchange for Assad’s departure. It would not be ideal to pursue regime change through pure military escalation. The U.S. should support negotiations for a political transition that incorporates elements of the Assad regime and satisfies all groups in a new Syria.

Effect of U.S. Involvement in Colombia

Plan Colombia brought both success and frustration. While overall security improved, cocaine production levels staggered. Between 2000 and 2007, the Colombian government reported that the total numbers for murders and kidnappings were reduced by at least one-third, and oil pipeline attacks were reduced to almost zero.54 Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the homicide and kidnapping rates in Colombia between 2000 and 2007, with a continual decrease in both since 2003.

Figure 3: Homicides in Colombia 2000-2007

Source: Colombian Ministry of Defense

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Plan Colombia’s target of reducing the cultivation, processing, and distribution of illegal narcotics by 50 percent in 6 years (2000-2006) was not completely accomplished although great progress was attained. From 2000 to 2006, opium poppy cultivation and heroin production declined nearly 50 percent. Conversely, estimated coca cultivation was about 15 percent greater in 2006 than in 2000, because coca farmers began moving to more remote parts of Colombia in order to avoid detection. Figure 5 illustrates how

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57 Ibid.
estimated cocaine production was about 4 percent greater in 2006 than in 2000, with 550 metric tons produced in 2006 compared to 530 metric tons in 2000. U.S. embassy officials argued that security improvements will become more appealing when the rebel groups become a local law enforcement problem rather than a central government threat.

Figure 5: Estimated Pure Cocaine Production in Colombia 2000-2007

Source: 2006 and 2007 (interim) IACM and ONDCP.58

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U.S. Credit to Peace

While the U.S. part in ending the civil war is significant, the credit is deserved by Colombia’s leaders, military, and police whom took a stand and persisted in battle. However, U.S. intervention did tip the war, psychologically and militarily. The country was provided with the means necessary to track down the rebels, and the air power to hunt them from the sky. Three years after Plan Colombia, the U.S. embassy in Bogota held almost 5,000 staff members and private contractors, making it at the time the largest American embassy in the world,\(^5^9\) and demonstrating the American commitment to Colombia. Additionally, U.S. officials maintain that Plan Colombia helped advance the Colombian military’s human rights record, largely because it only provided support and training to properly vetted units found clean of abuse charges.

Colombian soldiers collected the knowledge and technology needed to challenge the guerrillas, no longer daunted by the FARC’s power. With the help of American Black Hawk helicopters, they were trained how to deploy effectively into unforgiving guerrilla terrain. Over time, the guerillas were pushed farther and farther back. “We were no longer in a confrontation with the Colombian army,” Lucas Carvajal, a member of the FARC’s negotiating team, said in an interview. “We were facing an international intervention, and it took a toll.”\(^6^0\)


\(^6^0\) Ibid.
Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS

Analysis

The main goal of this research was to assess under what circumstances the United States will directly intervene in a civil war. I am concluding that there is sufficient evidence supporting the null hypothesis.

The Syrian case is not the typical case for U.S. intervention. The use of chemical weapons, and more specifically the action of a government using chemical weapons on its own population, was a humanitarian disaster. While chemical weapons were common in both World Wars, since then they have only been used a handful of times. Additionally, the U.S. has not been faced with a case of repeated use of chemical weapons as a motive for intervention. The argument presented is that the use of chemical weapons in Syria motivated U.S. intervention, and the continued use of chemical weapons led to furthered U.S. intervention.

The Colombian case is also an outlier of intervention theory. The U.S. was motivated to act because of drugs. The spillover of drugs into the mainland United States was unprecedented and Colombia was largely responsible. It was not due to oil or any lootable resource. Colombia, like Syria, is not even a significant oil producer. The drug war in Colombia had reached the U.S. in unimaginable lengths.
Is Oil Significant?

Previous literature has argued that lootable resources, specifically oil, is a strong motivator for third party intervention in civil war. I would disagree following this analysis. In 2015, for “crude oil exports” Syria ranked 112 in the world, and Colombia ranked 20. For “crude oil production” Syria ranked 64, and Colombia ranked 20.\(^{61}\) There is no significant mark in these factors that would be a direct link to intervention.

Findley and Mitchell (2011) considered the possibility that lootable natural resources motivate third parties to intervene into wars in order to access natural resources, benefitting the intervener. They argue that when rebels have access to lootable resources, third parties will be more likely to intervene on the side of the rebels and less likely to intervene behind the government. For the role of the U.S., this would be contradicted with Colombia, and further with Syria.

Remarks

Both cases of Colombia and Syria involve an undeniably complex civil war. Colombia is now overcoming one of the longest civil wars in history, and I believe the role of the United States in Plan Colombia can be attributed to reaching a peace deal. In order to hunt the groups within unknown territory in the jungle, the Colombian military needed airpower. The Black Hawk helicopters provided by the U.S. gave the Colombian

military the extra edge they needed. Furthermore, U.S. officials affirm that Plan Colombia advanced the Colombian military’s human rights record, which also advances respect of Colombia on the international stage. The Colombian case demonstrates that even the longest and hardest civil wars can be overcome. Plan Colombia was a systematic and proper way to intervene and alter the war.

Although Colombia possessed a democracy, the FARC were not eligible participants. And in Syria, the same family, with the same values, has been in power for nearly five decades. The father of Bashar Al-Assad, Hafez al-Assad, used the network he had built in posts as commander of the Syrian air force and minister of defense in order to seize power in 1970.62 When Bashar took office in 2000, many Syrians thought change may come with a younger, more modern Assad in power. But when the Arab Spring hit in 2010, the Syrian people saw an opportunity to join in an uprising. Had an inclusive democracy with free and fair elections been established, the civil war may have not existed or not reached the point it has. But then again, the U.S. attempted to establish a better government in Iraq and the long term result has not been pleasant.

Syria has not even come close to reaching a peace deal. The Syrians will likely see a long, drawn-out civil war similar to what Colombia experienced. Both cases involve

multiple armed groups and a demand for government change. It is plausible to say that if Colombia could overcome its civil war, then Syria may be able to also.

**Closing**

In conclusion, this study analyzed how the Syrian and Colombian cases are two cases on their own, not explained by existing intervention theory. Ultimately, it was the use of chemical weapons that led both President Obama and President Trump into taking action in Syria. In Colombia it was the infiltration of drugs into the U.S. that initiated and furthered intervention.

This paper contributes to relevant literature in that previously argued factors do not necessarily motivate intervention, such as: 1) oil production, 2) lootable resources, 3) stopping the fighting between combatants, 4) significance of border states, or 5) threat to the status quo. The use of chemical weapons motivated the U.S. to intervene in Syria and the mass amounts of drugs motivated the U.S. to intervene in Colombia. This conclusion should hold true if another comparable case were to be analyzed.

Globalization has effectively created a “smaller” world with a heightened sense of exposure. Diminishment of the Cold War confrontation has given increasing attention to often pre-existing nontraditional security threats revealing themselves even louder in the twenty-first century.
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