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The Changing Face of Military Assistance and Techniques of Informal Penetration

<https://www.e-ir.info/2021/03/08/the-changing-face-of-military-assistance-and-techniques-of-informal-penetration/>

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Modern day intervention can be described as a sort of “geopolitics of plunder,” wherein external states become involved in civil conflicts and generate chaos, both intentionally and inadvertently. The literature on the effects of external intervention is extensive and primarily attempts to resolve whether foreign interventions are advantageous, and to what extent the international system is able to condition conflict intensity, outcomes, and technologies of rebellion. To advance a more nuanced area of this field, this paper will analyze how limited or covert foreign aid allows states to exacerbate civil conflicts through the construction of “spaces of exception” or “gray zones.” Through the study of scholarship on territorial sovereignty, competitive intervention, and proxy warfare, it will explore the degree to which the U.S. has appropriated limited intervention in the form of “unconventional warfare,” and how this has allowed states to violate territorial sovereignty via parastatal actors in the name of regional and international security. Ultimately, this paper will demonstrate how the U.S., as the epitome of a hegemonic state actor, is generating knowledge regarding security and violence that enables it to overstep international and domestic legal barriers in order to pursue wider geopolitical dominance and a “militarized regime of hypervisibility” (Gregory 2011).

This paper seeks to show the continuity and distinctiveness of current U.S. intervention strategy which emphasizes covert, limited military assistance but simultaneously espouses doctrines of transparent global security. Looking at U.S. foreign relations with and security aid to both Colombia and Somalia from 1991-2019, it will become clear that external aid has had a negative effect on both conflict termination and de-escalatory objectives. The indoctrination of U.S. geostrategic priorities via the propagation of arms sales and informal security operations within intrastate conflicts is indicative of how states are able to reproduce and expand regimes of securitization through the exploitation of subordinate client proxy actors.

The argument will proceed by first explaining how U.S. foreign policy has shifted from blatant interference to more nuanced “integration” tactics that anticipate the incorporation of local forces in multi-year campaigns and “diminish the perceived human costs of war” (Elden 2009, 28; Avant and Sigelman 2010, 256). Following this, it will delve into the concept of “security assistance” as a type of pseudo-intervention that permits states to penetrate territorial sovereignty and act as “agents of instability” by outsourcing violence to proxy actors who then escalate violence in “gray zones” (Strachan 2013; Votel et al. 2016). These zones are an elaboration of Giorgio Agamben’s “space of exception” theory and Derek Gregory’s “militarized regimes of hypervisibility,” both of which explore the idea that there are particular sites where the absence of a (legitimate) sovereign leads to the suspension of normal rule of law and opens up “legal gray areas” that states exploit in order to “project power without vulnerability (or) compunction” (Agamben 2005; Gregory 2011, 192).[1] The existence of these spaces is sustained by covert operations and surreptitious aid provided to groups (including formal governments), who then engage in extrajudicial violence that exacerbates and prolongs civil conflict. I therefore propose that external aid, specifically intended for training and arming proxy forces involved in intrastate conflicts, prolongs the duration of the conflict by destabilizing core capabilities and expectations of actors, while also injecting external agendas into spaces of contentious sovereignty.

In order to test this theory, levels of political legitimacy in Colombia and Somalia will be compared with amounts of appropriated U.S. aid in the form of “Stabilization Operations and Security Sector Reforms.” The expectation is that

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there is a negative correlation between the amount of U.S. “stabilization” aid and political legitimacy, based on various studies addressing the negative effects of third-party interventions on the termination of intrastate conflicts and the consolidation of sovereignty (See Byman et al. 2001; Regan 2002; Gregory 2011; Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; Anderson 2019). Political legitimacy is a recognized metric within the discipline of International Relations used to measure the internal stability of a country during intrastate conflict (Billerbeck and Gippert 2017). Comparing political legitimacy to levels of external aid within a given timeframe establishes the destabilizing effect of intervention, and advances the arguments regarding the escalation of violence and protraction of the conflict. Furthermore, examining various analogous features from the intrastate conflicts of both Colombia and Somalia exposes the instrumental role played by U.S. “security assistance” in the construction and exacerbation of ungoverned spaces and permanent instability.

By developing this argument, the paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship on the effects of covert operations and limited intervention in intrastate conflicts (Carson 2016; Matisek and Reno 2019; Kinsey and Olsen 2020), and complements existing work by advancing theoretically grounded propositions regarding the intricacies of informal actors and unconventional security operations within ungoverned, volatile spaces.

Extraterritorial Sovereignty

The link between the practice of intervention and sovereignty, in particular territorial sovereignty, is both underrated and undeniable. Since the end of the Second World War, an emphasis has been placed on the significance of territory and its implications on the consolidation of sovereignty; in fact, the terms are often synonymous, as control of space makes states possible by affording the sovereign a spatial sphere in which to manifest (Milano 2005, 66–67). The presumption of “territorial integrity” and “self-determination” as indicators of sovereignty provide states with “world-specific” terms that validate their problematic approach to occupation and governance over lands and peoples (UN General Assembly 1960; Milliken and Sylvan 1996, 341).[2] These same notions are endorsed by international legal principles such as *uti possidetis iuris*, which gave decolonizing governments the right to establish and enforce boundaries as well as resolve internal disputes without external interference or challenge (Ratner 1996). As Stuart Elden argues, “those in control of territory – states – can act in ways that those not in control of territory cannot” (Elden 2009, xxx). This goes for both states within their own defined territories as well as external states, such as the U.S., who see themselves as the “altruistic protectors” of state sovereignty (Milliken and Sylvan 1996, 334).

Sovereignty can be both a privilege and a liability, as states are able to invoke it as a legitimization for self-defense but must also enforce it to a higher (global) standard. This standard is predominantly set by the U.S., who safeguards the concept of territorial sovereignty against internal and external challengers around the world, but simultaneously partakes in flagrant violations to further its own geopolitical agenda. The establishment of an “American security perimeter” is an idea that Elden proposes to explain how and why the U.S. assumes extraterritorial[3] security operations that expose a clear derision for international law and domestic agency (2009, 14). Territory has become one of the constitutive dimensions of U.S. geopolitical struggle, made visible through projects of spatial domination and disciplinary subjugation of foreign bodies that provide an opening by which to influence the strategic outcome of civil conflict. This form of expeditionary, geostrategic approach advances the “globalization of Western forms of military discipline” by establishing a “global coercive infrastructure for purposes of power projection” (Barkawi 2017, 280).

The presence of U.S. troops or influence (in the form of financial or military aid) in regions of conflict remains a critical visual expression of its status as both “guarantor of liberty and stability,” and as global hegemon in the post-Cold War era (Elden 2009, 14). Additionally, by playing the role of mediator and overseer of worldwide democratic stability, the U.S. is able to generate informal “gray zones” where violence is exported and concurrently deregulated as it serves to foment or dissipate civil discord (Puar 2017, 21). Various tools and avenues facilitate the evasion of democratic and international regulations, including the inflation of threats (to justify declaration of self-defense wars), clandestine operations and organizations (which lower transparency), reduction of legislative oversight (i.e. the executive branch circumventing or evading Congressional approval), and the use of irregular actors (non-state militias, paramilitaries, PMSCs) (Avant and Sigelman 2010). This paper addresses specifically the use of irregular forces as auxiliary and

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proxy agents by the U.S., and their function as extrajudicial enforcers of violence in the civil conflicts of Somalia and Colombia.

Delegation to Disguise

In order to avoid widespread critiques and accountability for violations of sovereignty that inevitably occur during interventions, the U.S. has declared a new strategy of “integration” to “(bring) countries into line with U.S. accepted standards and criteria, of making ‘them’ more like ‘us’” without deploying national forces (Elden 2009, 28; Kinsey and Olsen 2020). By moving away from the negative connotations attached to large-scale interventions, the U.S. is able to reproduce and relocate its war-making apparatus within the forces of local stakeholders involved in intrastate conflicts with minimal cost or risk. “The introduction of partner forces...mitigates US risk acceptance calculus and leads to anticipated, greater potential for enduring regional stability” (Garrett et al. 2018, 49). Furthermore, outsourcing its project of security enables the U.S. to enforce order and ensure its own survival by using disposable, untraceable actors fight on its behalf “or in conjunction with the state’s own armed actors, sometimes as formal or informal contract employees” (Davis 2009, 222; Abrahamsen and Williams 2010, 64).

Use of proxy forces is not a novel occurrence but has become more prevalent as international laws of war arrogate the decision to go to war (except in cases on national self-defense) to intergovernmental institutions such as the UN. This encourages states to defer from declaring war, “so as to avoid breaches of international law,” thereby engaging in “de-facto” or “unconventional” style warfare that ultimately deregulates war and compromises the international political standing of enemies regarded as failed states or rogue actors (Strachan 2013, 42). Literature on proxy warfare frequently points to the financial and political incentives for using non-state actors, while also indicating more strategic and calculated objectives; “non-state allies are important because they reduce the cost of American operations, enhance intelligence gathering capabilities, and strengthen American warfighting capabilities” (Grynawski 2018, 249). As Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham argue, “understanding external support for (non-state) organizations is important for the study of international relations since it constitutes a form of interstate conflict, albeit indirect” (2011, 710). Thus, the U.S. is implicated in the aggravation of intrastate conflicts where it provides direct and often continuous aid to local forces, since external interference, even when limited or of covert nature, affects the duration and intensity of conflicts.

The constraints facing conventional international operations encourage states to reduce financial and political risk through covert action, whilst still actively pursuing assertive geostrategic agendas (Carson 2016). Kinsey and Olsen advance the term “remote warfare” to explain specific limited intervention strategies where the “invisible hand of unofficial diplomacy” operates through extrajudicial actors in high-risk environments. These agents are ostensibly unattached to any legitimate state, and the lack of regulation often leads to actions that violate tenets of liberal democracy and escape the accountability generally relayed onto disciplined state forces (Kinsey and Olsen 2020). By moving within a spectrum of lethal and non-lethal action, these irregular forces are delegated the authority to “disguise,” performing vital non-combat roles such as coordinating with a range of actors, training and advising local forces, while also providing highly specialized combat skill sets and participating in security operations under informal external sponsorship (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015, 852).

This dynamic can be explained by the “Principal-Agent” theory, wherein “a principal wishes a given task to be executed but lacks the expertise or time to perform it and therefore delegates it to an agent, which gets the job done in exchange of remuneration” (Gilardi 2008, 29). Delegating the authority of violence to an empowered, third-party agent is a cost-saving device that reflects the ability of an external actor to shape and control informal, non-state groups while retaining foreign policy autonomy (Salehyan 2010, 501; Rauta 2016, 93). However, the transfer of authority to third parties in conflicts is often merely a “conditional grant of authority” to an agent to act on the behalf of the Principal (state), who is able to coerce and contractually oblige agents to do their “dirty jobs” with the “state’s covert blessing and support” (Byman and Kreps 2010, 3; Aliyev 2016, 501). The unreliable nature of such affiliations (by both principal and agent) is well documented in literature pertaining to the use of unlawful combatants and the impact of external support during civil conflicts (See Regan 2002; Scheipers 2015; Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015; Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017). Most of this scholarship finds that the creation of “precarious alliances” to rogue entities exacerbates violence by enhancing domestic combatants tactical and war-fighting

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capabilities, thereby “(increasing) uncertainty over relative strength and resolve” (Byman et al. 2001; Regan 2002; Anderson 2019, 704; Matisek and Reno 2019). For this reason, external aid, particularly in the form of unconventional warfare and covert assistance to non-state entities (such as paramilitaries) prolongs civil conflict by distorting domestic processes of resolution.

Another issue pertaining to the use of limited external aid is the lack of decisive military force actually provided to irregular actors. External actors are constantly calculating the risks associated with their contributions, particularly if the aid inherently changes the character and abilities of the recipient. Anderson points specifically to cases where states, wanting to fully support their clients/allies, enter into contracts with groups to provide military support and training, only to renege in the face of escalating violence that could complicate their relations with other external actors invested in the conflict (Anderson 2019). The “destructive potential” of both lethal and non-lethal aid “risks dangerous, permanent escalation” that is purposefully avoided by external actors intervening in civil conflicts, who consequently show restraint and inadvertently prolongs their own involvement as well as the duration of the conflict (Anderson 2019, 696). Local actors are incentivized to continue fighting due to the subsidized contracts and provision of arms allocated by external states invested in the outcome of internal disputes. This has been the case for both Colombia and Somalia, who receive increased benefits and improved trade relations with the U.S. in exchange for access to military bases and armed forces (militias) who do the bidding of the western power (Thrall, Cohen, and Dorminey 2020, 105).

Prevalence of arms transfers and the provision of assistance via external actors creates and maintains a war economy that implicates both benefactor and client in a cycle of dependency. Dependency reduces freedom of action due to an influx in outside measures of control in exchange for investment. “Outside government assistance helps insurgents improve their military power, recruiting base, diplomatic leverage, and other ingredients to success,” but ultimately confers violent capabilities that facilitate the privatization of violence, the rise of warlords, and the reproduction of exploitative, oppressive statist disciplinary components intensified by militarized hierarchical systems of control[4] (Byman et al. 2001, 20; Puar 2017, 24). The recipients of large amounts of state assistance remain active and operationally effective for extended periods of time, assuming the character of proxy states through the ambiguous and mutable range of the power and permission granted by external forces.

Leveraging Ambiguity and Instruments of Influence

The primary means by which the U.S. provides limited and covert aid to non-state actors is through *security assistance*, a foreign policy approach that exposes foreign nationals to U.S. culture, values and institutions in order to contribute to the democratization of participating countries (Federation of American Scientists 2020). Under the official U.S. Security Assistance Training Program (SATP) are various other programs including International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Sales (FMS), the Professional Military Exchange Program (PME), Unit Exchange, and the Joint Combined Exercises and Training (JCET) program. These programs frequently foster repressive and volatile actors – found in both Colombia and Somalia – by sponsoring regimes and personnel that emulate U.S. military practices but simultaneously abuse their positions of power and access to U.S. support. “Security assistance” programs frequently lack transparency, and despite representing principal “instruments of influence,” are often inaccessible to the public and difficult for Congress to regulate. In helping “shape the doctrine, operating procedures, values, choice in weaponry (and) occasionally the policies of the recipient(s),” foreign security programs promote U.S. geopolitical objectives, but ultimately strengthen the capabilities of extrajudicial agents who operate in quasi-military roles that foment “gray zones” of contested sovereignty (Federation of American Scientists 2020).

The implementation of “security assistance” programs varies depending on the groups facilitating them (U.S. Special Operations Command, CIA), but are predominantly an interagency effort portrayed as “peacekeeping” or what the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) terms “unconventional warfare” (UW). The definition and purposes of UW vary depending on the type of conflict and source discussing its use but is fundamentally understood as “an indirect application of US power, one that leverages foreign population groups to maintain or advance US interests. It is a highly discretionary form of warfare that is most often conducted clandestinely (covertly) (...) it can be subtle or it can be aggressive” (Votel et al. 2016, 103). The DoD defines it as a “broad spectrum of military and paramilitary

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operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. *It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities and unconventional assisted recovery*" (U.S. Department of Defense 2009, 572; emphasis added).

The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) has adopted an operational approach of "by, with, and through" (BWT), a strategy of "unconventional warfare" wherein U.S. forces conduct military campaigns "primarily by employing partner maneuver forces with the support of U.S.-enabling forces through a coordinated legal and diplomatic framework" (Garrett et al. 2018, 55). The clandestine intelligence operations and paramilitary capabilities of the U.S. DoD Special Operations Command is conveyed as "operational preparation of the environment" activities, which fall under Title 10 of U.S. Code (USC) and are thereby "considered to be so sensitive that they are exempt from standard reporting requirement to the Congress" (Livermore 2019). In generating operational niches that are exempt from legislative approval and oversight, these programs advance the notion that certain objectives and action are exceptional, despite merely being a strategic extension of militarized U.S. foreign policy.

Training local troops builds relationships with local governments and indigenous peoples, giving states such as the U.S. a strategic opportunity to counter influence from its adversaries by creating assemblages of loyal (and dependent) forces. "The US-indigenous irregular benefactor-proxy relationship, if successful, achieves mutually beneficial objectives" (Votel et al. 2016, 103). However, use of unconventional warfare is problematic due to its nefarious nature and blatant disregard for the sovereignty of other nations, as well as its disregard for humanitarian practices and principles. By exporting its "warfighting functions" to proxy actors in fragile or collapsed states, the U.S. "unconventional warfare" strategy and Special Access Programs further delegitimize domestic sovereignty by implementing a westernized culture of warfare while appropriating local knowledge gained from local proxies regarding the environment, resources, and population.

The U.S. military personnel assigned to "security assistance" and UW operations are often "too focused on building an army in the absence of a viable state that has the institutional capacity and political willpower to sustain that army" (Matissek and Reno 2019, 66). Since intrastate conflicts generally arise in "extremely weak or collapsed states," empowering local, informal troops gives aided militias the opportunity to assume control of certain areas by delineating territory, commanding local economies (including illegal drug production and trafficking), and collaborating in the protection and propagation of the corrupt policies enforced by heads of state (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010, 419). The risk of external, covert aid leading to fragmented militias, unclear chains of command, foreign mercenaries, presidential oversight and human rights violations is amplified through the use of abstruse terminology such as "unconventional warfare" and "security assistance," which subsequently deem any action under those titles to fall outside the realm of conventional (regulated and disciplined) action. Informal delegation of violence to non-state actors such as militias makes it more difficult to hold perpetrators accountable, since these forces are more "deniable and opaque than formal government security forces" (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015, 852).

The literature on the risks involved in delegating violence and providing aid to informal proxy actors in collapsed or fragile countries details how these ties provide governments (both internal and external) with plausible deniability and lessen the perceived cost of war, both human and material (Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell 2015; Rauta 2016; Thrall, Cohen, and Dorminey 2020). Carson argues that covert action serves foreign intervention aims by concealing activity from outside audiences, allowing states to operate "backstage" in a modern "shadow war" that creates the illusion of a limited war and helps avoid further conflict escalation (Carson 2016). "Sequestering activity in the covert sphere reduces mobilization of external audiences, the reputational and domestic stakes involved in an incident, and hard-to-control escalation pressure" (Carson 2016, 105). This reiterates the argument that intervention is often not fully successful because of restraints meant to avoid crossing escalation thresholds, and promoting a "limited" conflict that discourages either side from "conferring decisive military advantages on their domestic clients" (Morgan et al. 2008, 14; Anderson 2019, 692).

However, the use of secrecy, while seemingly beneficial to democratic leaders who want to "deceive adversaries, obtain tactical and strategic advantages" or maintain an outlet to use force without antiwar domestic punishment or risk of retaliation, is counterproductive, since covert action decisions are often short-sighted and elitist (Carson 2016,

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108; Forsythe 1992). Using surrogate bodies as auxiliary or proxy manpower distorts the responsibility and danger inherent in conflict, and training or aiding these agents covertly increases the likelihood that their lives will be unaccounted for in death rates or other metrics of intensity pertaining to the conflict.[5] Ultimately, the existence of these actors in ungoverned “gray zones” has been fomented by military action, aid, and operations intended to furtively affect the conditions on the ground while not risking the reputation of the state benefactor.

The costs of external, covert aid outweigh the benefits, and can lead to corruption, a loss of domestic credibility, an erosion of both local and international support (especially if human rights abuses occur), and ultimately “contribute to internal discord” (Byman et al. 2001, xviii). The introduction of extrajudicial actors armed with foreign provided military weapons and technology destabilizes intrastate conflicts by generating uncertainty about the capabilities of participants and manufacturing “spaces of exception” (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017). These “gray zones” are characterized by “intense political, economic, informational and military competition more fervent in nature than normal steady-state diplomacy, yet short of conventional war” (Votel et al. 2016, 102). In order to understand the propagation of these spaces, and the devastating impact they have on intrastate conflicts, the cases of U.S. aid to Colombia and Somalia will be considered.

Colombia and Somalia: the fomentation of strife

Colombia

Since 1948, the Colombian Government has been engaged in an intrastate conflict with leftist insurgents who primarily operate as guerrilla movements. The main dissident group in Colombia, the FARC (*The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army*), was established in 1964 as a direct challenge to the two-party presidential system (called the National Front) which marginalized and neglected the rural populace. From the onset of U.S. aid to Colombia, the government denounced all insurgent movements as narco-terrorist groups unable to be negotiated with, a perspective that continues despite the 2016 FARC demobilization and transition to a political party. This contentious stance has facilitated the rise of paramilitary groups, who have operated under the guise of state auxiliary forces deployed to combat the guerrilla groups. By allocating aid and military assistance to official Colombian armed forces, the U.S. has unintentionally supported these paramilitary groups, and the extensive (and public) ties between illicit armed groups and the state armed forces has gone mostly unchecked (Stokes 2005).

The origins of U.S. covert action and intervention in Colombia trace back to 1964 and Plan Lazo. Plan Lazo – a joint U.S.-Colombia counterinsurgency operation that targeted peasant rebel groups in rural regions – was originally named “Plan LASO,” an acronym for Latin American Security Operation, designed by the U.S. Pentagon. It was also referred to as “Operation Sovereignty” in classified documents, indicating the role it played in JFK’s “Alliance for Progress” program that tried to install U.S. regulated democratic governments in the Western Hemisphere (Pearce 1990). This original counterinsurgency operation was targeted at the “communist subversion” posed by the FARC, advancing the U.S. Cold War strategy of containment through direct intervention of fragile states who were coerced into compliance with U.S. hegemonic objectives.

Throughout the Colombian civil war, the U.S. strategy evolved from counter-insurgency to counter-narcotics to counter-terrorism, each opportunely presented as a chance to consolidate state security and improve hemispheric stability (Pearce 1990). The rhetoric and strategy used in Colombia have been reminiscent of U.S. arguments promoting involvement in Vietnam; with U.S. help, the conflict would devolve and become a breeding ground for “terrorists” and other threats to national security. “In failing to guard the independence of a small country attacked from the (inside), the US will no longer be able to ensure the future of the weaker and less stable nations everywhere in the world” (Milliken and Sylvan 1996, 334). However, as opposed to the full-bodied expeditionary U.S. troop deployment to Vietnam, the approach in Colombia was much more nuanced and tactical, especially as the U.S. looked to shift its reputation and provide more “peacekeeping” services.

U.S. assistance to Colombia has played a role in increasing political violence and undermining domestic political sovereignty by indirectly financing pro-government paramilitaries. The “United Self-Defenses of Colombia” (AUC) began as a far-right drug trafficking paramilitary group, made up of various vigilante groups and anti-guerrilla

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dissidents brought together by the Castaña brothers in 1997. After Pablo Escobar died in 1993 and left drug trafficking in Colombia up for grabs, the Castaña brothers formed the cartel “Los Pepes,” which consequently became the ACCU and later on the CONVIVIR, a Spanish acronym for “Special Vigilance and Private Security Services” (Colombia Reports 2016). These became part and parcel of the AUC umbrella group, which was backed by the national government and security forces who saw them as a more effective (efficient) way to fight the FARC guerrilla group. Around Colombia, cattle ranchers, mining and petroleum companies, and international fruit companies (such as Chiquita) blamed the government for failing to protect them from the violence and looked instead to the AUC to provide protection.

The AUC has committed countless massacres, partaken in “tens of thousands of cases of kidnappings, rape, extortion, drug trafficking and displacement, among other crimes” (Colombia Reports 2016). The militia groups benefitted from “extensive ties to the Colombian lawmakers and public officials,” a practice commonly known as “parapolitics” (Colombia Reports 2016). According to the Colombian Prosecutor General’s Office, more than 11,000 politicians, wealthy businessmen, and landowners are suspected of having made pacts with the AUC (Verdad Abierta 2012). Despite being internationally denounced, the AUC was supported by several authorities including Colombian President Uribe himself, and its members have been consistently granted impunity based on the extensive networks existing between state agents and paramilitaries (Sanín 2008, 18). This backing has continued to provide the illicit, vigilante paramilitary group with legitimacy and safe haven, and incidental access to U.S. military aid.

The hypocrisy of the U.S. involvement in Colombia is that despite having a publicly stated “counternarcotic” foreign policy, the state-parallel AUC paramilitary group has been able to garner support and receive congressional representation, despite being almost fully funded by drug trade. The U.S. has consistently engaged and supported non-state actors operating in the shadows of corrupt governments, providing weapons – ostensibly for counter-narcotics efforts –

to Colombian military units with records of continuing human rights violations. “Colombian officers trained by the U.S. and employed as military instructors have been implicated in serious human rights violations, including massacres committed by combined military-paramilitary groups” (Human Rights Watch 1996). In 1996, the United States deployed at least two teams of fifty-two U.S. Army Special Forces personnel to Colombia for two-month missions; deployments continue to occur, the latest being a team of Security Force Assistance Brigades in June 2020 whose mission is “to support U.S. enhanced counter-narcotics cooperation with Colombian security forces” by training host units and strengthening capabilities (Power 2020; McCullum 2020). This training has been authorized by a law that “does not require U.S. troops to abide by a State Department policy in which military aid is restricted to Colombian units that have been cleared of any involvement in human rights abuses” (Washington Post Staff Writers 1998). Waiving the legislative vetting processes provides these security forces and the groups they train a “virtual card blanche,” wherein complicity between the military and paramilitary forces can continue to manifest without due conviction (Vivanco 2001).

In a recent report, the UN Office of Human Rights (OHCHR) stated that Colombian federal security forces have been “colluding” with illegal armed groups, despite the supposedly successful demobilization of the AUC in 2006 by President Uribe. “The military high command continues to organize, encourage, and deploy paramilitaries to fight a covert war against those it suspects of support for guerrillas” (UN Security Council 2020). Furthermore, the military has been reported of moving paramilitaries around the country to carry out political killings. This revelation comes during a time when human rights defenders, indigenous groups, and staff from Colombia’s National Nature Parks (PNN) are being increasingly attacked and threatened by hostile militias, and cases of arbitrary killings are rising (Selibas 2020; Alsema 2020).[6] The failure to establish appropriate screening mechanisms to ensure that U.S. aid is not used by illicit militias to commit indiscriminate violence is due in part to the covert nature of the “security assistance” forces, whose “small-footprint, low-visibility” operations are conducted in “gray zones” that conceal the scale of support and capabilities granted (Votel et al. 2016, 102).[7] The potential abuse of U.S. military aid and weaponry by security force units is undeniably linked to the inadvertent escalation of violence, as paramilitaries gain capabilities and resources not previously held, further destabilizing internal conditions.

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Somalia

Since the fall of the military regime of Mohamed Siyad Barre in 1991, there have been numerous attempts to establish central, legitimate governments in Somalia. The success of the 2012 Federal Government of Somalia has been problematic, given the persistent humanitarian issues such as poverty, internally displaced persons and famines, as well as the widespread violence stemming from clan warfare, ideological strife and human rights abuses (several purportedly carried out by the government).

While the range of insurgent groups in Somalia has varied since the onset of the civil war, the most notable opponent and internationally recognized has been al Shabaab (*Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin*), which arose as a political Islamic dissident group after the 2004 Transitional Federal Government (TFG) opposed and delegitimized the widely popular Islamic Courts Union (ICU) (Menkhaus 2016). The ICU started out as community-based Sharia courts funded by local businessmen, and gained traction through regional consolidation using “Shari’a and Islam as part of a grander nation-building strategy for Somalia that sought to erode clan divisions” (Stremlau 2019). In 2007, the TFG, backed by Ethiopian and U.S. troops, denounced the ICU as a radical terrorist movement, effectively creating an international prejudice against the predominantly moderate Islamic group that was recognized as the governing authority in southern Somalia (Harper 2012). “The effect of overthrowing the ICU served to galvanize and radicalize Somalis, the youth in particular,” leading to the formation of al Shabaab and an exacerbation of internal instability (Stremlau 2019). Disillusion with the internationally recognized federal state increased as federal armed forces and auxiliary forces repeatedly repressed civil society and neglected marginalized minorities in peripheral regions. Furthermore, amid recent reports concerning human rights abuses and corruption within the current Federal Government of Somalia, the U.S. has once again been implicated in the misappropriation of limited military aid. This accusation has been reinforced by the prevalence of covert operations and extensive provision of “security assistance” within Somalia that fuels the current war of attrition between rival clans (Menkhaus 2016).

In 2019, the U.S. Africa Command reported that there was “no significant progress towards the goal of creating a ‘security cocoon’ around the capital, Mogadishu” (Fine 2019, 24). “Airstrikes, support to partner-led ground operations, and information operations” were the primary mechanisms through which “security assistance” was implemented, which rendered very low levels of trust in U.S. forces and involvement (Schmitt and Savage 2019; Williams 2020).[8] There is a deep distrust of Somali authorities and the Somali National Army (SNA), who are seen “as more of a conglomeration of militias than as a competent State security service” (Felbab-Brown 2020). The SNA, which has received the majority of the foreign military assistance from the U.S., is notoriously unreliable, often displaying more loyalty to local clans or communities than to the federal government (Szuba 2020b). Additionally, it has been reported that the weapons and resources of the SNA have been used to “abuse and exploit rival clans,” leading to widespread instability as communities attempt to bolster their own security (Felbab-Brown 2020). There have also been several botched attempts at rehabilitating and demobilizing al Shabaab defectors, reflecting the lack of “appetite for political dialogue” in federal government bodies who refuse to negotiate or compromise with the insurgent group or other regional administrations (Williams 2020). Al Shabaab has remained “adaptive, resilient, and capable of attacking Western and partner interests in Somalia and East Africa,” especially amid the propagation of informal militias serving as auxiliaries to the Somali National Army (SNA) (Williams 2020).

The international and domestic rhetoric regarding the Somali civil war continues to focus on victory – brought about by annihilating or outlasting the other side – which has had deleterious effects on the prospects of peace making and compromise. However, without the presence of a sovereign authority that can control the violence and instability rampant in the country, the likelihood of military success being sustainable is low (Menkhaus 1997). U.S. security aid should therefore focus less on increasing the capabilities on armed forces, given the prevalence of corruption and collusion among militia groups, and more on supporting a unified, genuine governance body composed of the federal system and member states. This will require dialogue and political compromise, which can be reinforced by the U.S. making its support (financial and military) conditional on settlements that delegitimize violence and show of force. However, if the U.S. deprives the current federal government of military aid, even in its limited and often covert capacity, it could signal to other groups vying for political legitimacy that the largest external power no longer backs the (problematic) leadership in Mogadishu, and open up the floodgates for more violence and undermined supervision.

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A Strategy of Impunity

Colombia and Somalia represent two pertinent cases where the U.S. has provided limited, covert intervention during intrastate conflicts. Both countries are located in geopolitically significant regions (South America and East Africa), and have experienced extensive internal conflicts which have larger implications on regional and international stability. The rationales for U.S. involvement in Colombia as well as Somalia have stemmed primarily from geostrategic concerns, ideological tensions, and resource competitions, generated and sustained by multi-year campaigns that exploited political fragility and proliferated violence.

Colombia and Somalia are also two of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign military aid.[9] As previously argued, high levels of foreign aid, especially in the form of “security assistance” and “unconventional warfare,” are conducive to protracted conflicts (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017). In both cases, the aid provided has manifested in the form of “direct limited aid to unspecified elements,” indicating the presence of Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs) that train and provide weapons to local armed groups (Power 2020; Szuba 2020b). Despite U.S. recognition of the legitimacy of the current central governments in Somalia and Colombia, the concerted effort to inject “security assistance” in the shape of special force operatives inside the territories reveals a more complex situation with regards to recognition of territorial sovereignty and the incapacity of domestic forces to advance comprehensive security.

Questions of sovereignty in relation to extraterritorial military operations have profound implications on the cohesion and capabilities of central governments. In Colombia, reports from the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense have consistently indicated that “the security forces’ readiness and capabilities have been eroded by longstanding funding limitations and lack of clear guidance” (Director of Central Intelligence 2013, 20). In Somalia, recent reports from the U.S. Pentagon have stated that “Somali National Army forces are not yet ready on their own to hold territory captured from Shabaab south of Mogadishu” (Szuba 2020a). The rhetoric in both reports suggest that U.S. forces are necessary to support and train largely incapable domestic armed forces. “We believe that substantial improvements could be made in security force performance, especially if foreign assistance is obtained, by focusing improved training on operations planning, intelligence gathering and exploitation, and small-unit counterinsurgency tactics” (Director of Central Intelligence 2013, 22).

The manner in which these conflicts and the domestic armed forces have been framed by U.S. policymakers illustrates to a certain degree how the discrediting or misrepresenting of local actors and non-state proxy groups cultivates a sense of patronage, wherein recipients of U.S. aid are permanently subject to and reliant on foreign aid to maintain internal stability. Concurrently, U.S. agents have recognized that their presence is unlikely to improve situations of intrastate conflict, “particularly if US government personnel become more involved in antiterrorism training and anti-drug efforts in the host countries” (Director of Central Intelligence 2013, 22). This is due to an anticipated increase in targeting of foreign personnel by rebels, who relish in the opportunity to strike at reviled “imperialist” U.S. forces. According to U.S. declassified reports, the deterioration of stability and escalation of violence caused by U.S. presence in conflict zones could jeopardize U.S. interest in those countries, in particular the “institutionalization of democratic rule” (Director of Central Intelligence 2013, 22). Despite this acknowledgement, as well as recurring backlash from domestic and international audiences (including armed retaliation from insurgent groups), U.S. presence in Somalia and Colombia has continued unabated from 1991 to 2019.

Features of Instability

In order to understand the destabilizing effect of U.S. “security assistance” in intrastate conflicts, various features found in both Colombia and Somalia will be examined. These include a) U.S. foreign policy and the directives of aid, b) the prevalence of humanitarian crises and failure of central governments to provide assistance to rural/peripheral regions of country, c) the pervasive political corruption and U.S. ties to implicated regime leaders, and d) the regional geopolitical rivalries and consequent instability.

The U.S. has played a controversial role throughout both the Colombian and Somali civil wars, providing humanitarian aid and simultaneously deploying “security assistance” operations using Special Forces. U.S. foreign

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policy objectives in both regions have centered on preventing the rise of terrorism, albeit in divergent capacities (narco-terrorism in Colombia and Islamic terrorism in Somalia), and establishing a cooperative, effective sovereign government.

In Colombia there has been a concerted effort to support military capabilities through various Mutual Defense Assistance treaties that “promote the defense and maintain the peace of the Western Hemisphere” (United States Government 1952). Nevertheless, the influx of U.S. military assistance has been shown to negatively impact political legitimacy, human rights, democracy and peacemaking (Dube and Naidu 2014). Domestic issues such as the lack of transparency and tenuous cooperation between adversaries reflects a historic and deeply ingrained pattern of instability in Colombia’s political, social and economic systems.

Since the early twentieth century, rural agrarian and indigenous communities have revolted against widespread government land expropriations, and have suffered from the neglect of the government to provide services and security (as well as political representation) to peripheral regions (Pearce 1990). Additionally, corruption in politics has fueled the creation of private armies (paramilitaries) and the externalization of military support (tasked with eradicating leftist rebels), further contributing to internal instability and aggravated dissatisfaction with the central government (Mazzuca and Robinson 2009, 286). In Colombia, more than 40 percent of the country’s territory has been under the control of armed non-state actors, and around 2.1 million citizens have been internally displaced by violence (Paul J. Angelo 2019).

The western Amazon region, historically protected by the indigenous groups, – many of whom have joined forces to establish the National Organization of the Colombian Amazon’s Indigenous Peoples (OPIAC) – has been vulnerable to physical and cultural extermination, evident in the constant attacks on natural resources and people living in highly biodiverse areas (Brilman 2018; Selibas 2020). People in these rural areas have reported “direct harassment, kidnappings, robberies, the presence of anti-personal mines, the inability to express themselves or move freely, and even being scared to have their children stay with them in case they were forcibly recruited by criminal groups” (Selibas 2020). To make matters worse, President Duque has recently slashed the budgets for the land restitution programs and various rural developments projects that incorporated transitional justice, instead focusing on “*Zonas Estratégicas de Intervención Integral*” (ZEII), where armed forces intervene to interfere and replace illicit crop cultivation with subsidized alternatives (Cruz 2020). Focusing solely on these militarized “Zonas Futuros,” has allowed the government to overlook and neglect areas where the rule of law has failed to be reestablished after the FARC demobilized, and where assassinations and human rights violations have been taking place against civilians fighting the appropriation of resources and land by informal militias.[10]

In Somalia, the U.S. has pursued a foreign policy to “promote political and economic stability, prevent the use of Somalia as a safe haven for international terrorism, and alleviate the humanitarian crisis caused by years of conflict, drought, flooding, and poor governance” (Bureau of African Affairs 2019). The largest obstacles for U.S. security assistance have been the absence of an effective and legitimate sovereign authority, and the predatory nature of local leaders. Somalia’s civil conflict has many facets, including “a large urban population trapped in a war over Mogadishu, rural farming communities subjected to endemic banditry, and assaults by roving militias,” as well as the collapse of the entire economy amidst extensive looting (Menkhaus 1997, 138).

Due to the apparent “statelessness” of Somalia, land has often been expropriated by “politically empowered clans and civil servants,” who demarcate zones for internationally funded rural development projects that disregard any cohesive land-tenure system, and trigger struggles for control over resources (Besteman and Cassanelli 1996). The failure of the central government and its armed forces to provide security and sustenance to groups in rural regions (especially Northern Somalia) has incentivized the U.S. to assist in securing specific areas using Special Operations Forces (backed by air support), “until local Somali Federal Government forces can hold the territory on their own and fill governance needs outside the capital” (Szuba 2020a).[11] The contentious nature of sovereignty throughout Somalia has been consistently provoked by the presence of external entities, to which the volatile and uncertain moments of violence and peace can be partially attributed (either as reactionary or causal).

U.S. policy in Somalia has been notably marked by “neglect, miscalculation and failed attempts to use warlords to

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build indigenous counterterrorism capacity” (Scahill 2014). Similarly in Colombia, U.S. policy has advanced the “conscious strategy (of the U.S.) to inculcate counter-insurgency discourse within the Colombian military,” and convince the government that any and all insurgent movements within the rural populace represent a threat to democratic (American) values (Stokes 2005, 71). By relying on counterterrorism or counterinsurgency strategies and injecting trained proxy forces into intrastate conflict zones, the U.S. has unintentionally strengthened “the hand of the very groups it purports to oppose, and inadvertently aided the rise of militant groups” such as al Shabaab and previously the FARC (Harris 2017). Both groups have adamantly used anti-corruption, anti-imperialist and anti-U.S. arguments to garner support in their countries, evoking disdain for the external power’s intervention and fueling violence towards suspected supporters or sympathizers.

Notably, both Colombian President Ivan Duque and Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (*Farmaajo*) were partially educated and worked in the United States at some point; Duque studied at American University in Washington D.C., and worked for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), while *Farmaajo* studied at the University of Buffalo in New York, and worked in both the Somali Embassy in D.C. and the New York Department of Transportation (Gee 2017). The exposure to American culture and lifestyle proved significant enough that when these individuals came to power, they ensured their countries had good relationships with the U.S, essentially providing free reign through trade negotiations, aid contracts and access to military bases. This is a common occurrence among world leaders, many of whom have received formal education at U.S. universities (including Mohamed Morsi from Egypt, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, King Abdullah of Jordan, former U.N. Secretary-General Ko Annan, Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto) (Wolfgang 2012).

Another avenue to receive education or training has been the U.S. DoD’s International Military Education and Training Program (IMET), labeled conspicuously under “security assistance” programs offered to prospective individuals from fragile or collapsed states. As a form of “soft power,” IMET was designed primarily to “strengthen foreign militaries through the provision of skills (and exposure to values) that are necessary for the proper functioning of a civilian controlled, apolitical, and professional military” (Federation of American Scientists 2020). The expectation is that these individuals will eventually occupy the “upper echelons” of their country’s military and political institutions, and “lead to more interaction and (...) stronger relations” between U.S. armed forces and these foreign counterparts; “more interaction translates into more U.S. access to foreign military facilities and bases, which in turn allows the U.S. to establish a military presence in more regions and facilitates the use of military force, or the threat of military force, to address regional threats” (Federation of American Scientists 2020). There have been various reported cases of brutal and undemocratic regimes lead by graduates of the programs (such as Mugabe in Zimbabwe), as well as graduates from another U.S. Pentagon sponsored institution, the School of the Americas (which has been closed and renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC) because of the egregious human rights abuses committed by graduates).[12] It can be argued that the extensive ties created by Western education of individuals are almost as effective as military training and advisement, and both benefit the U.S. by providing an alternative avenue for power projection and influence. Furthermore, this exportation of U.S. values via specific actors is another instance of the reproduction of its regime of securitization, found explicitly in foreign bodies who exist at the behest of U.S. regional interests and extraterritorial objectives.[13]

Conclusion: The Reproduction of Permanent Violence

U.S. “security assistance” in Colombia and Somalia has been defined by haphazard attempts to conduct missions by aiding and training non-state militia groups. These pro-government militias (PGMs) and state-parallel militias are the immediate products of U.S. efforts to militarize foreign aid in fragile countries and influence the outcome of intrastate conflicts. The military-paramilitary partnership seen in countries experiencing a civil war, especially if there is a lack of central authority or governance, can lead to “oligopolies of violence,” whereby the number of competing and cooperating actors of violence constantly fluctuates, generating uncertainty and provoking more widespread volatility (Kasfir, Frerks, and Terpstra 2017). Furthermore, illicit militias are used as “extermination groups” within ungoverned spaces, fueled by fungible external support that makes conflict resolution harder (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017, 1191). Limited, covert military assistance undermines the ability of rebels to credibly commit to settlements, and reduces “ability of the state to identify possible agreements that might end the war” (Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017, 1194). Paramilitary forces become proxy actors that imitate western security forces, reproducing both

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the scale of violence and character of permanent war that has defined western-imperialist expeditionary military action for the last century.

It is also interesting to note that both al Shabaab and the FARC are more than merely militant dissident groups; both resistance movements have political objectives, and have engaged in governance (in the form of tax collection, clearing roadblocks, providing highly erratic and often flawed justice, and offering “some degree of welfare and security to certain segments of different communities” (Sanín 2008; Stremlau 2019).

The ending of the conflict in Colombia (between the government and the FARC), can be somewhat instructive for the current crisis in Somalia. Establishing a bilateral peace agreement that included a transitional justice framework and political mobility for the FARC allowed for the focus to be placed on moving forward instead of retribution. In Somalia, a collaborative focus on negotiation and “on achieving political reconciliation between Somalia’s main conflict parties” could encourage the unification of Somali authorities to the extent that no non-state or dissident actor could challenge the power of the central government (Williams 2020). However, in order to do this, the federal government must look to regional administrations for legitimacy and promote national consolidation efforts aimed at eliminating violence as a permissive exercise of protest or discontent, and at compromising with al Shabaab over viable goals such as an extension of political representation or collaborative governance.

In “Strong militias, weak states, and armed violence,” Huseyn Aliyev (2016) distinguishes between state-manipulated militias and state-parallel militias. State-parallel paramilitaries are understood as parastatal forces operating in conjunction with the government, “mobilized in the midst of a conflict” in an effort to preserve the state and ruling elites (Aliyev 2016, 502). Looking at state-parallel militias in both Colombia and Somalia, it is clear that these militias “would eagerly and violently suppress all forms of dissident in order to safeguard the state from collapse,” but only as long as they are subsidized with weapons that paradoxically allow them to disregard the government (Aliyev 2016, 503). The capacity to replace or substitute for the state is what makes these militias so attractive to foreign security assistance forces, who can rely on them as principle counterinsurgency forces and afford them legal representation and status. However, the ability to grant these groups legitimacy and justify their actions as backed by the state ultimately creates an ungoverned space parallel to the sovereign authority of the central government, where paramilitaries can thrive off ineffective, inefficient systems of governance by providing alternative conceptions of law and order. Aliyev discusses how these state-parallel militias “flourish at the expense of state weakness and pose a direct existential threat to governments;” however, they are deemed necessary and emerge as the political will of domestic and international actors, in support of unconventional economies of war and conflict (Aliyev 2016, 505). The ability to move freely, directly challenge the government, and confront the dominant regime are afforded to militias in fragile or collapsed states, mainly due to the accusations of corruption and nepotism within government forces. “Weak states provide environments conducive to insurgency and terrorism and can create humanitarian crises that contribute to domestic political instability,” and ultimately cannot maintain the function of security and stability needed to keep militias in check (Matisek and Reno 2019, 68).

The cyclical dilemma posed by the creation and maintenance of these groups and the threat they pose both to consolidation of sovereignty and internal security is exacerbated by the presence of foreign security assistance. Training, assisting, and increasing the performativity or capability of these groups allows them a higher capacity to engage in violence, escalating conflicts and complicating peacemaking efforts. Violations of state sovereignty by U.S. Special Forces operations are less problematic (or might even go undetected) where a central government either does not exist or is unable to extend its authority to large sections of the country (Elden 2009, 103). Furthermore, “western militaries try to create an apolitical host-nation military designed for a liberalized democratic state,” but newly trained forces often believe themselves superior to governing politicians, and the lack of a dominating central authority leads to destabilization and informal structures of governance (through fluctuating networks, surveillance, and kinship) (Matisek and Reno 2019).

Foreign aid “can make a movement far more effective, prolong the war, increase the scale and lethality of its struggle, and may even transform a civil conflict into an international war” (Byman et al. 2001, 3). As a notoriously unpredictable foreign policy tool, “security assistance,” as argued above, has the potential to weaken host governments and exacerbate uncertainty through newfound capabilities of contentious actors. Despite the concerted

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effort to downplay the military connotation of U.S. foreign policy, a culture of “security assistance” has been engendered that fails to afford proportional stability to recipient states. External states have been able to construct objects of governance via the exportation of a scopic regime that undermines local authority and fuels oligopolies of violence, which ultimately subvert geostrategic agendas and prolong conflicts. As intrastate conflicts become internationalized, and forces receive support from other governments actively seeking to affect a certain outcome, the idea of sovereignty is undermined and diluted. The deployment of foreign armed forces, even in a covert capacity aimed at training or advising local actors, can be recognized as an indication of both the failure of the state itself, and the dissolution of territorial sovereignty as an international principle of security.

The arguments made throughout this paper, as well as the cases examined, have important implications for the realm of foreign aid to non-state actors. In particular, as states move away from conventional action and look to alternative ways to influence the outcomes of crises, non-state, informal agents will continue to be utilized and supported. This has particular importance for intrastate conflicts, which are prone to external intervention and a consortium of stakeholders. Syria serves as a contemporary case where the U.S. has been injecting covert military assistance to local militias, despite the volatile conditions and ongoing humanitarian crises that are exacerbated by external competitive interventions. The regional and international interests of states such as the U.S. remain highly indicative of whether foreign assistance will be provided in countries experiencing civil conflict; as “war on terror” continues to be disseminated globally, the U.S. has a strong incentive to intervene or at least establish proxy actors in spaces where sovereignty is contentious, uncertainty is rampant and violence is unrestrained. The question remains, however, whether external democratic states (such as the U.S.) should resist intervening in foreign affairs, or if this is counterintuitive to its hegemonic agenda? Does foreign aid propagate violence? And what does this mean for a world increasingly interconnected and interdependent?

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Notes

[1] Gregory explores how "regimes of hypervisibility" are elaborated through "scopic regimes" that incorporate aerial strikes (UAVs) and tactical surveillance which abolish the distinctions between "permission and prohibition, presence and absence" in the "spatiality of the war zone" to create an optical detachment allowing for greater (and more problematic) accuracy (Gregory 2011, 190–93).

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[2] Milliken and Sylvan (1996) argue that objects and relations explicitly situated using “world-specific” language. These verbal cues and stances have life and death consequences, often disregarded by scholars and policymakers who don’t recognize the “irruption of one world into another,” implicating objects, people, and relations in the word choices that often include contentious terminology and underlying meanings (Milliken and Sylvan 1996, 342)

[3] Extraterritoriality refers to the special status accorded to spaces and/or people making them exempt or excluded from customary territorial jurisdiction; this vulnerability often provides justification for states to pursue aggressive action abroad, in the name of self-defense. Elden explains it as the notion that “actions affecting U.S. citizens, business interests, or national security abroad legitimate action as if it had happened at home” (Elden 2009, 25).

[4] Puar explores Foucault and Deleuze’s notions of control and disciplinary societies in the context of bodies that are subjected to persistent exploitative practices originating from an outside source of authority; some bodies are “subjected” while others are “incorporated” into violent projects in these societies, which “operate covertly by deploying disciplinary power to keep or deflect our attention around the subjection of the subject, thus allowing control to manifest unhindered” (Puar 2017, 24)

[5] Using death count as a metric for intensity in irregular warfare is not very useful, due to the twenty-first century “market for force,” a trend originating in the 1990s where states employed the services of private military and security companies (PMSCs) and militias to provide a range of services including operational and logistical support, military advice and training, site security, crime prevention, and intelligence gathering. These entities were illicitly contracted, in order for states to avoid debates regarding military deployment, and culpability for engaging in “politically fraught policy” (Avant and Sigelman 2010, 253)

[6] In 2020 the OHCHR reported 36 massacres, with a total of 133 victims; this marks the highest number of civilian deaths since 2014. It also found that the COVID19 pandemic was not slowing killings, and has been exploited by groups violently enforcing their own prevention measures (Alsema 2020).

[7] Various U.S. Military Advisory Group End-Use Monitoring Reports, published after investigations of units implicated in human rights abuses who had also received U.S. aid, certified that the US assistance was being “effectively employed against narcotics activities,” and was in compliance with U.S. FMS legislation (Human Rights Watch 1996; Human Rights Council 2018)

[8] Currently, there are around 500 U.S. special operations forces in Somalia that assist in training SNA forces to combat al Shabaab, focused mainly in the southern regions and capital (Mogadishu).

[9] In 2019, U.S. Foreign Assistance: Somalia received \$409.75Million USD (56% for Stabilization Operations and Security Sector Reform/Counterterrorism) and Colombia received \$424.87Million USD (63% for Stabilizations Operations and Security Sector Reform/Counter-Narcotics) (U.S. Department of State and USAID 2020)

[10] These zones, signed into law in December of 2019, describe 32 thousand hectares of land where the Government of Colombia and partner forces are allowed to intervene, purportedly to advance the 2016 Peace Agreement PDET programs. The municipalities originally included in the section of the agreement titled “Development Programs with Territorial Focus” (PDET), have emphasized decentralized, cooperative policies and projects; Duque has disregarded and upset these efforts by incorporating foreign military bodies (specifically U.S. SFABs) without prior Congressional or public knowledge or endorsement (Power 2020).

[11] Since 2014, the Federal Government of Somalia SNA forces have controlled “roughly thirty square miles of territory in Mogadishu thanks in large part to the US-funded and -armed forces (...) much of the rest of the city is under the control of the Shabab or warlords” (Scahill 2014)

[12] The School of the Americas gave participants a notorious manual that contained instructions on how to “neutralize” political opponents pre-emptively, on the use of coercive torture and beatings, and on various other methods of retaining supremacy (Federation of American Scientists 2020)

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[13] This is not to discredit the local and national incentives of elites or foreign leaders to exploit U.S. reliance and security assistance for personal use (such as claiming trade ports and extracting resources from militias)

Written at: London School of Economics and Political Science

Written for: IR-499

Date written: 08/2020