Operation Just Cause: The Invasion of Panama as a Case Study in Regime Change

A Monograph

by

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Operation Just Cause, the United States intervention in Panama that overthrew the regime of Manuel Noriega, was an outstanding operational success. It was quick, limited, and involved few casualties. The United States destroyed Panama's military, captured the seat of power, and installed a new government within the first few days. In addition, with the benefit of hindsight, it represented an unqualified strategic success. Panama is a stable democracy, and the United States enjoys good relations with it.

This monograph attempts to explain why. By examining the Panama case using a model of regime change, this monograph will consider whether the US intervention in Panama was truly successful, and (if so) what led to that success. It shows how the planning and execution of the operation interacted with other factors to determine the strategic outcome and identifies three cases where US actions were decisive to the outcome. Finally, it identifies two implications for future military planners dealing with regime change.

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Abstract

Operation Just Cause: The Invasion of Panama as a Case Study in Regime Change, by MAJ Robert A. Behrman, PhD, US Army, 58 pages.

Operation Just Cause, the United States intervention in Panama that overthrew the regime of Manuel Noriega, was an outstanding operational success. It was quick, limited, and involved few casualties. The United States destroyed Panama's military, captured the seat of power, and installed a new government within the first few days. In addition, with the benefit of hindsight, it represented an unqualified strategic success. Panama is a stable democracy, and the United States enjoys good relations with it.

This monograph attempts to explain why. By examining the Panama case using a model of regime change, this monograph will consider whether the US intervention in Panama was truly successful, and (if so) what led to that success. It shows how the planning and execution of the operation interacted with other factors to determine the strategic outcome and identifies three cases where US actions were decisive to the outcome. Finally, it identifies two implications for future military planners dealing with regime change.

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I would like to thank Major General William Hix, my boss for part of my tenure on the Army Staff, for the inspiration for this work. I had long been interested in doing some research on how regime change worked, and during a meeting with my wife and I before he promoted me to Major we talked about it. Major General Hix flatly stated “Panama. That’s what you need to look at.” And here we are.

I would also like to thank Dr. Anthony Carlson for his work advising this monograph, and COL Jason Curl for serving as my seminar leader during my time at the School of Advanced Military Studies. Dr. Carlson’s editorial hand improved both this monograph and my writing in general, and COL Curl’s attention to detail and encouragement made this a much better product than I could have produced. In addition, I would like to register my continued thanks to Dr. Dean Nowowiejski, Ike Skelton chair at the Command and General Staff College, for his continued mentorship and help.

My wife, Erin, continues to give her time and interest to support both my family and my persistent Army habit. Thank you. Finally, my father is a never-ending fountain of curiosity and intellectual interest, and his constant fascination with and pride in my work and career inspires me to make it worth it.

Acronyms

ADOC	Democratic Alliance of Civic Opposition
COLINA	Coalition for National Liberation
DEA	United States Drug Enforcement Agency
OAS	Organization of American States
PDF	Panama Defense Force
PRD	Partido Revolucionario Democratico (Democratic Revolution party)
PF	(Panamanian) Public Force
SOUTHCOM	United States Southern Command

Illustrations

Introduction

Power in Panama is like a viper; you must release it slowly or it will bite you.

—Panamanian Political Metaphor[1]

Compared to the United States' regime changes of the 21st century, Operation Just Cause (and its successive reconstruction operation, Operation Promote Liberty) in Panama was quick, limited, involved few casualties, and was uncontroversial. In addition, with the benefit of hindsight, it seems far more successful. Panama is a stable democracy, and the United States enjoys good relations with it and ongoing military cooperation.[2]

So, *why*? Was the US intervention in Panama truly successful, and if so what led to its success? Specifically, how did the planning and execution of these operations influence the strategic outcome? What other factors were relevant? Which were decisive? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are there any lessons from this operation that can be applied to other regime changes, or other operations in general?

This monograph attempts to answer the questions above. Showing how the planning and execution of the regime change in Panama influenced the strategic outcome in the region can shed light on potential challenges and opportunities of future regime changes. Future US military planners will consider operations to change foreign regimes, and the US experience in Panama from 1987 to 1994 is an instructive case. From 1987 to 1989 the United States confronted increasingly belligerent challenges from General Manuel Noriega, the *de facto* military dictator of Panama. After the United States overthrew him in Operation Just Cause, the United States faced the challenge of rebuilding a successor regime stable enough to control the Panama Canal after it would be returned to Panama in 1999.

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[1] Robert C. Harding, *Military Foundations of Panamanian Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 159.

[2] Michael L Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 119–140.

An examination of the intervention in Panama may offer important implications for future military planners. Though Operation Just Cause was a relatively small operation and the proximal objective, the overthrow of Noriega, was never in doubt, the operation was still a direct military intervention to impose a new government on a foreign country. The United States destroyed Panama's military, captured the seat of power, and installed a new government. Any operation that so thoroughly upends the political, military, and social institutions of another country risks unexpected outcomes that could prevent reaching the strategic objective. But that does not appear to have happened in this case, and it may be instructive to consider why.

Methodology

To answer these questions, this monograph studies Operation Just Cause as a case study in regime change. The case study traces the operation using the descriptive model of regime change explained in the author's previous work, "Planning for Regime Change and its Aftermath."[3] Using this descriptive lens offers a way to trace the effects of US actions on the overall strategic outcome and offers insights into the general process of regime change.

The model proposes that six basic elements describe attempts to impose regime change on another country:[4]

1. The difference between the original regime and the intent for the successor regime defines the strategic problem for regime change.

2. The nature of the original regime influences the available methods of overthrow.

3. The method of overthrow sets conditions for the restoration of state control and political reforms.

4. Overthrow of the original regime sets off a competition to determine the nature of the successor regime.

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[3] Robert Behrman, "Planning for Regime Change and Its Aftermath" (Master of Military Arts and Science (MMAS), United States Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC), 2017), 46–69.

[4] Ibid., 47–48.

5. The efforts to restore state control and achieve political reform interact with each other.

6. The political settlement of the competition determines the nature of the successor regime.

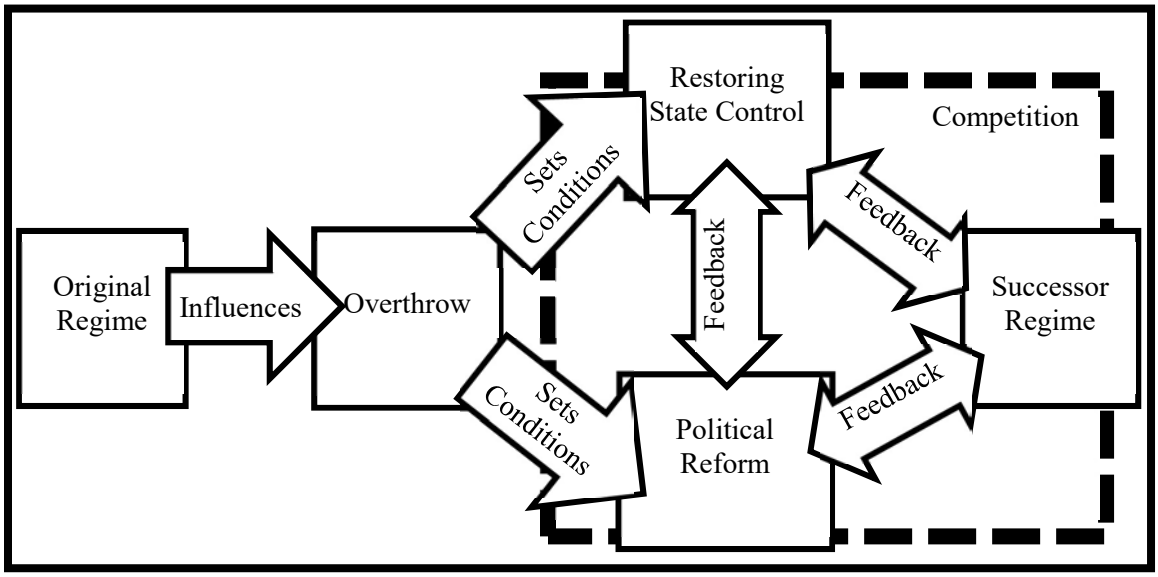

Figure 1. Basic model of regime change. Source: Robert Behrman, "Planning for Regime Change and Its Aftermath" (MMAS, US Army CGSC, 2017), 47

The model describes regime change from the point of view of the operational and strategic decisions of the intervening power. It shows the distinct elements of a regime change and how they are connected. It is a descriptive model, not a normative model, and it attempts to be broadly applicable to a variety of possible regime changes. The model reads from left to right, proceeding in sequence and generally over time (though some events may follow others closely).

By describing each element in terms of the historical experience and showing how each were linked in practice, the case study will show how the actions of the United States and other parties interacted to form produce outcome. By comparing what decision-makers planned to do, what they thought it would achieve, and what actually occurred, this method may yield implications about which factors in the intervention were decisive.

This requires detailed information about the planning process and decision-making, the progress of the operation itself, and its aftermath. Specifically, it must explore how the decision-makers assessed risk, the potential contingencies they envisioned, and which problems in

execution surprised them. As the following historiography section will show, the available sources offer sufficient data to inform the key elements of the model.

Outline

This monograph argues that Operation Just Cause is a valuable case study for examining a successful regime change; that its outcome occurred due to a combination of plans and actions before the operation started, some wise decisions, and some favorable external circumstances; and that certain lessons from the operation are useful for understanding regime change in general. The next section describes the historiography of Operation Just Cause. It shows the novelty of a regime change approach to studying the operation and that the available sources provide sufficient data to satisfy the model's methodology.

The three middle sections proceed through the model of regime change. The first of these describes the origin of the US policy of regime change in Panama and the actions between 1987-1989 to indirectly bring it about. It shows how these actions fit within the original strategic goals (proposition 1), shaped the nature of Noriega's regime, and led to the eventual decision to use major conventional combat forces to directly overthrow the dictatorship (proposition 2). The second section describes how the planning and execution of the intervention set conditions for the aftermath and the political struggle that followed (proposition 3). The third traces the competition for political power after the intervention (proposition 4), the interaction between the political reforms and the challenge of civil control (proposition 5), and the progress of the political settlement through the 1991-1994 elections and crises (proposition 6).

The final section of this monograph summarizes the operation in terms of the model, identifies three decisive points in the intervention that shaped the eventual outcome, and presents two recommendations for US operational design and strategy.

Historiography of the Operation

Operation Just Cause is not extensively studied. From a purely military standpoint, Operation Desert Storm slightly more than a year later overshadowed the tactical and operational accomplishments of Just Cause. This gives the historiography of Panama two unique features. First, attention has come in three major phases – a series of books and articles published within five years of the operation, a second wave of articles and books published around the turnover of the canal at the end of 1999, and a third phase starting around 2004 and continuing to the present, which focuses on implications for current operations. Second, the histories of the operation (especially in the 'first wave') vary substantially by theme based on the author's perspective.

In each series, the works tend to coalesce around one or more of three major themes: First, that Operation Just Cause was an unqualified military success as an example of low-intensity conflict. Second, that Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty were seriously flawed reconstruction operations. Third, that the Panamanian political process following the overthrow was the decisive factor in the favorable outcome. A separate tradition portrays the operation as an example of US imperialism.

While the Dust Settled

Several authors published influential books within the first few years after the invasion. On the proximate origins of the crisis, Frederick Kempe's *Divorcing the Dictator* (1990) and John Dinges's *Our Man in Panama* (1990) were journalistic accounts, published during the year of the operation, that informed many of the other sources. Margaret Scranton's excellent political history of the crisis, *The Noriega Years* (1991), offers the most thorough and balanced review of the political evolution of the crisis inside of Panama. Bob Woodward's *The Commanders* (1991) shows the evolution of the crisis and the operation itself from the perspective of the White House. Kevin Buckley's *Panama: The Whole Story* (1992) focuses on United States-Panama and the origins of the crisis before 1987. These books generally focus on the origins of the conflict, and

where they comment on the intervention they generally gravitate to the themes that "Panamanian politics is decisive," and that there were serious flaws in the planning for reconstruction.[5]

Several other early works focus on the military aspects of the operation from the US perspective. One of the first and best of the immediate histories of the US perspective of the operation is *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* by Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker (1991). Others include E.M. Flanagan's *Battle for Panama: Inside Operation Just Cause* (1993), and an edited collection on the operation by Bruce Watson and Peter Tsouras (1991). The official Joint Staff history of the operation, Ronald Cole's *Operation Just Cause* (1995), also falls into this category. These tend to the "Just Cause is an unqualified success" theme (and generally attribute that success to operational art). Many of these do not discuss Operation Promote Liberty, or qualify their assessment when they do. Some other works argue a separate "sub-theme": not only was Operation Just Cause a success, but it was a success of a particular form of low-intensity conflict and its lessons are only of tangential import to the Army. RAND Arroyo's report, *Operation Just Cause: Lessons for Operations Other Than War* (1996), makes this case, and it was an opinion shared by the Joint Task Force commander at the time.[6]

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[5] Frederick Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator: America's Bungled Affair with Noriega* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1990); John Dinges, *Our Man in Panama: How General Noriega Used the United States and Made Millions in Drugs and Arms* (New York: Random House, 1990); Margaret E. Scranton, *The Noriega Years: U.S.-Panamanian Relations, 1981-1990* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner Publishers, 1991); Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Kevin Buckley, *Panama: The Whole Story* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

[6] Thomas Donnelly, Margaret Roth, and Caleb Baker, *Operation Just Cause: The Storming of Panama* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991); E. M. Flanagan, *Battle for Panama: Inside Operation Just Cause* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1993); Bruce W. Watson and Peter Tsouras, eds., *Operation Just Cause: The U.S. Intervention in Panama* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991); Ronald H. Cole, *Operation JUST CAUSE: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama, February 1988-January 1990* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995); Timothy Bloechl, "Operation Just Cause: An Application of Operational Art" (School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), US Army CGSC, 1993); Jennifer M. Taw, *Operation Just Cause: Lessons for Operations Other than War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996). Cole's work is most blatant for simply ignoring the aftermath of the operation – it dedicates four out of 90 pages to it. Lieutenant General Stiner, the commander of XVIII Airborne Corps and JTF-South, is quoted in Donnelly et al. p. 393 regarding lessons learned.

Two monograph-length treatises, published respectively by a planner and observer of the operation, argue that Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty were flawed in their plans for post-conflict reconstruction. John T. Fishel's excellent *Fog of Peace* describes the origin of the post-conflict plan, and how the development of the crisis and changes in command countered fundamental assumptions in the post-conflict plan. Richard Shultz's *In the Aftermath of War*, takes a critical stand on the development of Promote Liberty.[7]

Few books in the immediate period after the invasion cover the political transition of Panama after the operation, but several valuable academic journal articles do. The best book covering the period from 1990-1994 is Luis Murillo's massive *The Noriega Mess* (1995), a thorough but politically-biased treatment of the crisis and its aftermath. Margaret Scranton covered the 1992 constitutional referendum and 1994 general elections in detail. The 1992 edition of Michael Conniff's *Panama and the United States* evaluates the political history of US-Panama relations in sweeping scope, and later editions develop that history. These articles focus on the "Panamanian politics is decisive" theme, though they often integrate qualified assessments of the invasion and its aftermath. These articles also provide a more balanced view of the invasion and reconstruction than the US-centric critiques above.[8]

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[7] John T. Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1992); Richard H. Shultz, *In The Aftermath of War: US Support for Reconstruction and Nation-Building in Panama Following Just Cause* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 1993). See also Charles W. Robinson, "Panama: Military Victory, Interagency Failure: A Case Study of Policy Implementation" (SAMS, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1994).

[8] Luis E. Murillo, *The Noriega Mess: The Drugs, the Canal, and Why America Invaded* (Berkeley, CA: Video-Books, 1995); Margaret E. Scranton, "Consolidation after Imposition: Panama's 1992 Referendum," *Journal of Interamerican Studies & World Affairs* 35, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 65–102; Margaret E. Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election," *Journal of Interamerican Studies & World Affairs* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 69–100; Richard L. Millett, "The Aftermath of Intervention: Panama 1990," *Journal of Interamerican Studies & World Affairs* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 1; Michael L. Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The Forced Alliance*, The United States and the Americas (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992); Alma Guillermoprieto, "Letter from Panama," *The New Yorker*, August 17, 1992.

Limited primary sources are available. George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft co-written memoir, George P. Shultz's, and James Baker III's memoirs include reflections on Panama. In addition, Manuel Noriega published a memoir while in US prison.[9] The international election monitors for the May 1989 elections published a thorough report.[10] The US Army Military History Institute and the Fort Leavenworth Combined Arms Research Library maintain collections of original documents and oral histories regarding the intervention. The *Congressional Record*, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Department of State Freedom of Information Act archives, and the George Washington University National Security Archive house other American primary sources.

Looking Back

The long wars of the 21st century brought with them a renewed interest in short and successful wars, Operation Just Cause among them. These works share similar themes – that Operation Just Cause was an overall success despite the problems with the post-conflict reconstruction, and that the Panamanian political process was instrumental to that success.

Lawrence Yates's two-volume history of the intervention (2008 and 2014) is the most important and broadest history of the operation. It covers both the period of military and political confrontation in volume I, and the operation and the year following it in volume II. The Center of Military History campaign pamphlet written by R. Cody Phillips provides other valuable

[9] George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998); George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), accessed February 4, 2018, Scribd.com; James A. Baker and Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: Putnam, 1995); Manuel Antonio Noriega and Peter Eisner, *America's Prisoner: The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega* (New York: Random House, 1997).

[10] International Delegation Report, *The May 7, 1989 Panamanian Elections* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs & National Republican Institute for International Affairs, 1989), accessed February 4, 2018, https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/electionreports/democracy/finalreportpanama1989.pdf.

information. There is also a brief entry in René De La Pedraja's *Wars of Latin America, 1982-2013.* All three depict Operation Just Cause as a successful demonstration of operational art.[11]

Other academic works have focused on the political development of Panama. These treat the post-invasion political dynamic as part of a broader survey of Panamanian history. Two examples used in this work are Conniff's *United States and Panama* (2012) and Harding's *Military Foundations of Panamanian Politics* (2001). Some journal articles have focused specifically on the political effect of demilitarization in Panamanian politics, especially Caumartin's "'Depoliticisation' in the Reform of the Panamanian Security Apparatus" (2007).[12]

Several recent works sought to compare the experience in Panama to contemporary problems. The proceedings of a 2004 war termination conference include a panel discussion between planners of Operation Just Cause and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Both Stephen Kinzer's history of US regime changes and Nadia Schadlow's treatment of US Army post-conflict operations include substantial chapters on Panama. Sean Naylor's history of the Joint Special Operations Command includes a tactically-focused chapter on operations in Panama.[13]

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[11] Lawrence A. Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2008); Lawrence A. Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause, December 1989-January 1990* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2014); R. Cody Phillips, *Operation Just Cause: The Incursion into Panama* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 2004); René De La Pedraja Tomán, *Wars of Latin America, 1982-2013: The Path to Peace* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2013), 117–127.

[12] Michael L Conniff, *Panama and the United States: The End of the Alliance* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012; Harding; Corinne Caumartin, "'Depoliticization' in the Reform of the Panamanian Security Apparatus," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 1 (February 2007): 107–132. See also Fiona Macaulay, "Cycles of Police Reform in Latin America," in *Policing in Africa*, ed. David J. Francis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[13] John T. Fishel, "Planning for Post-Conflict Panama: What It Tells Us About Phase IV Operations," in *Turning Victory Into Success: Military Operations After the Campaign*, ed. Brian M. De Toy (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 169–178; Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*, (New York: Times Books, 2006), 239–259; Nadia Schadlow, *War and the Art of Governance: Consolidating Combat Success into Political Victory* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 194–208; Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 41–50.

The 'American Imperialism' School

A separate body of literature treats the history of Operation Just Cause as another chapter in a long-running saga of United States imperialist intentions in Latin America. The historical roots of this body of literature run deep; after all, the country of Panama was created by direct US intervention and sustained by several US interventions to maintain order.[14] This narrative argues that the true intent of the intervention was to depose a nationalist leader and keep military bases in the region to maintain military, political, and/or economic influence in the region. This is the explanation Noriega himself offers for US activity, as well as the report of the Independent Commission on the US Invasion of Panama.[15] Though works in this tradition have trouble explaining the reasons for the US intervention, they offer valuable insight into the economy of Panama and the ideas of Noriega's political base. Zimbalist and Weeks's *Panama at the Crossroads* discusses the effects of the Canal and foreign dominance on Panama's economy. Other works link the intervention to the War on Drugs, and its mixed record of success.[16]

Assessment

There is a small but robust literature on the overthrow of the Noriega regime, but the publications generally end at the overthrow, begin once Noriega is overthrown, or view the

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[14] Kinzer, 62; Richard F. Grimmett, *Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2009*, Report for Congress (Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service, January 27, 2010), 10–17, accessed May 17, 2017, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/crs/rl32170.pdf.

[15] Manuel Antonio Noriega and Peter Eisner, *America's Prisoner: The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega* (New York: Random House, 1997); Independent Commission of Inquiry on the U.S. Invasion of Panama, ed., *The U.S. Invasion of Panama: The Truth behind Operation "Just Cause"* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991). See also Guadalupe's interview of Noriega in Fernando Guadalupe, "The Mosquito and the Colossus: Operation Just Cause through the Eyes of General Manuel Antonio Noriega" (SAMS, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2008), 51–57.

[16] Andrew S. Zimbalist and John Weeks, *Panama at the Crossroads: Economic Development and Political Change in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Luis E. Murillo, *The Noriega Mess: The Drugs, the Canal, and Why America Invaded* (Berkeley: Video-Books, 1995); Jonathan Marshall, "Unjust Aftermath: Post-Noriega Panama," *Consortium News*, December 19, 2013, accessed November 5, 2017, https://consortiumnews.com/2013/12/19/unjust-aftermath-post-noriega-panama/.

overthrow as a discontinuity in a larger story. Few works draw an explicit connection between the events of the crisis, the conduct of the operation, the aftermath, and the strategic endstate. This monograph fills a gap in the existing analysis by focusing on how the interaction between US and Panamanian actions throughout the crisis and intervention led to the outcome.

The US-Panama Confrontation and Experiments at Overthrow

By the time of the invasion, the Bush administration's strategic goals were clear. As defined by the President, the operation would be "to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty."[17] These goals did not emerge from the administration fully formed; instead, the interplay between the actions of the Noriega regime and those of the US government shaped them over the course of several years of crisis and political pressure.

Proposition 1 of the model states that "the difference between the original regime and the intent for the successor regime defines the strategic problem for regime change." Proposition 2 states that "the nature of the original regime influences the available methods of overthrow."[18] Both held true in Panama in the lead-up to Just Cause. Over the years of the crisis, the escalating severity of the provocations would lead to progressively greater strategic demands, and the tightening grip on power of the Noriega regime would gradually reduce US options for overthrow. By the time of the final decision to invade on 17 December 1989, what had started as a gradual plan to pressure Noriega to resign ended up as a direct, unilateral invasion to overthrow the regime and end military rule in Panama. This section describes how the nature of the regime changed due to the progress of the crisis, and how that influenced both the strategic endstate and the available methods of overthrow.

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[17] George H. W. Bush, "Fighting in Panama: The President; A Transcript of Bush's Address on the Decision to Use Force in Panama," *New York Times*, December 21, 1989, accessed November 5, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/21/world/fighting-panama-president-transcript-bush-s-address-decision-use-force-panama.html.

[18] Behrman, 14–24.

Initial Conditions

The first, tentative, official policy for regime change in Panama came from the US Senate. A 1986 article by Seymour Hersh highlighted both the repression of the regime and its relationships with the US government, and one of Noriega's rivals confessed the regime's crimes in international news. In addition, a Panamanian government crackdown on opposition protests spurred by those confessions demonstrated Noriega's capacity for repression. Over the course of a year, these events and others generated sufficient political pressure to spur action. On 26 June 1987, the Senate resolved that the Panamanian government should "direct the current commander of the Panama Defense Forces (PDF) [i.e., Noriega] and any other implicated officials to relinquish their duties pending the outcome of the independent investigation." [19]

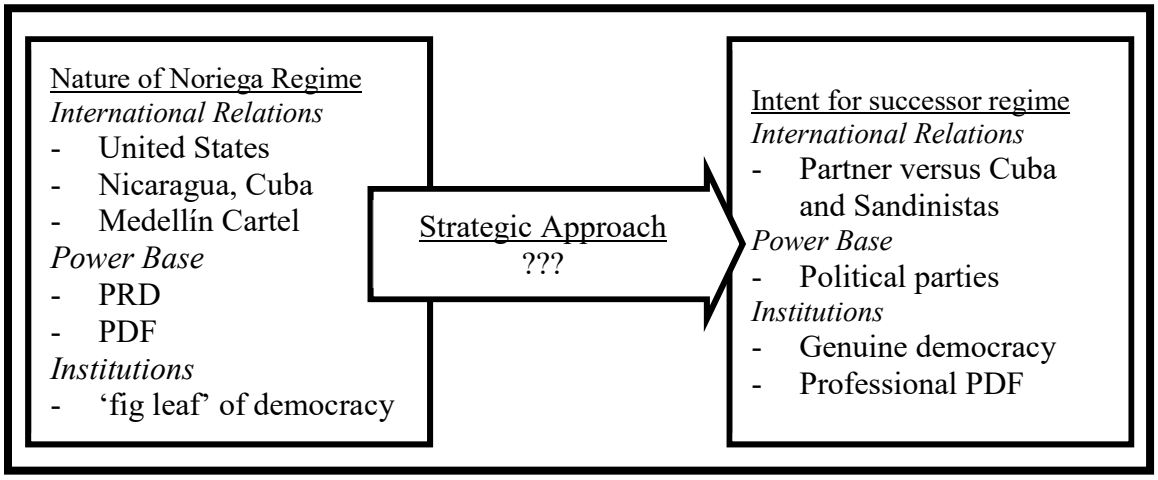

Figure 2. The nature of the original regime and intent for the successor regime. Source: Author.

This measure was symbolic since it did not include any provisions requiring the US Government to act, but it reflected a growing domestic political opposition to Noriega. Certain executive agencies, especially the Department of State (DoS) under George Shultz, began

[19] Seymour Hersh, "Panama Strongman Said to Trade in Drugs, Arms, and Illicit Money," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1986, accessed November 5, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/12/world/panama-strongman-said-to-trade-in-drugs-arms-and-illicit-money.html; Kempe, 211–212; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 105–106, 113–128. US Senate, *Senate Resolution 239 - Supporting Respect for Human Rights and Evolution of Democracy in Panama*, 100th Cong., 1st sess., 1987, 133 Cong. Rec. S 8905, accessed February 3, 2018, ProQuest Congressional.

attempts to negotiate Noriega's abdication. The US military and the CIA also suspended military aid to Panama and personal payments to Noriega but believed that direct confrontation would endanger US assets and limit any future influence on the regime.[20]

The net effect of this escalation was to make the confrontation between the US government and Noriega's regime overt and public, and to force both Panamanians and US agencies to pick sides. On 30 June, Panamanian government workers demonstrated near the US embassy, causing property damage without response from the watching PDF. In the meanwhile, opposition demonstrations continued, resulting in increasing PDF crackdowns on demonstrators and laws that curtailed political freedoms. These crackdowns simultaneously removed effective opposition to Noriega within the government, isolated Noriega from public support outside of the government, and cut Noriega off from his own political party (the Partido Revolucianario Democratico (PRD)).[21]

On the US side, the escalating confrontation also steadily eroded the position of those agencies that were willing to work with Noriega. Noriega's political crackdowns removed the moderate centrists in the Panamanian legislature and shifted it to the left, making Panama unwilling to aid US efforts against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Congress passed sanctions on 22 December 1987, and this led to the pro-Noriega demonstrations outside a US military installation on 9 January 1988. These demonstrations eroded the willingness of US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) to publicly support Noriega, though SOUTHCOM kept open unofficial communication channels to prevent escalation. By February 1988, Noriega remained firmly in control of Panama, but with little support outside of his own regime.[22]

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[20] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 115–128; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 19–21.

[21] Etyan Gilboa, "The Panama Invasion Revisited: Lessons for the Use of Force in the Post Cold War Era," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (Winter 95-96): 543–546; US Senate, *Senate Resolution 239 - Supporting Respect for Human Rights and Evolution of Democracy in Panama*; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 15–22; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 21–25.

[22] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 15–30; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 25.

The Florida Indictments

On 5 February 1988, two federal grand juries in Florida forced interagency consensus on the rest of the US government by indicting Noriega for drug trafficking, money laundering, and other crimes. These indictments eventually committed the Reagan and Bush administrations to a policy of removing Noriega. Over the course of the next two years, the United States would step up ongoing efforts to remove Noriega and start new lines of effort, each of which would fail individually but shape the ensuing conflict.[23]

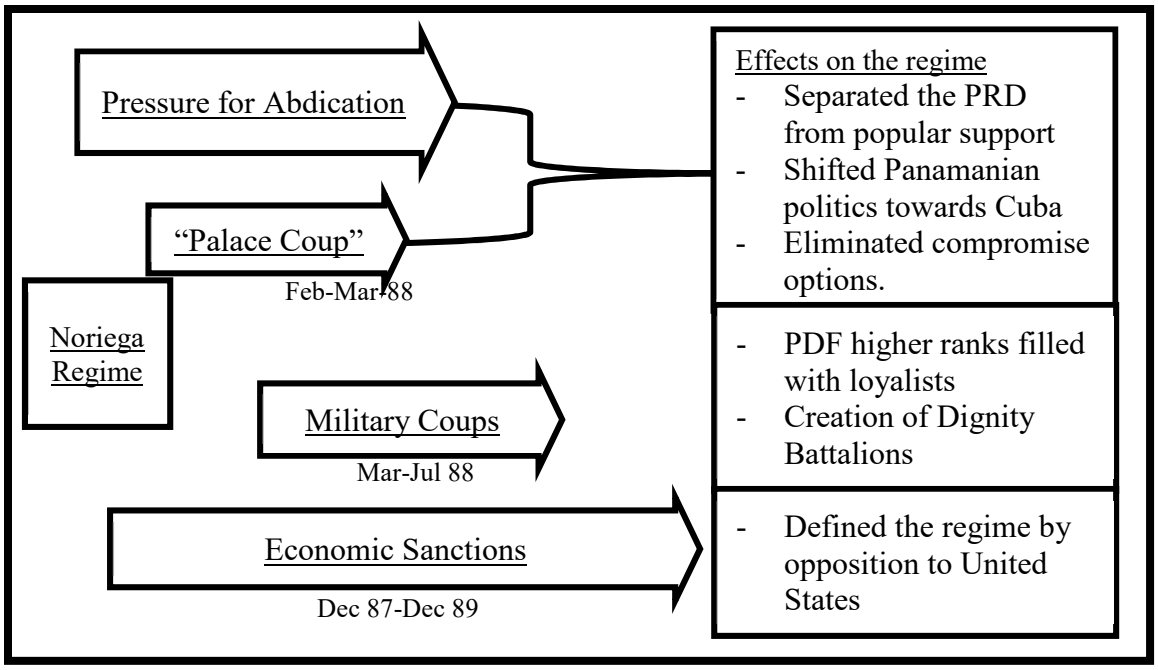

Figure 3. US efforts to remove Noriega, August 1987-May 1989. Source: Author.

The Reagan administration did not support direct action – even if covert - to capture or kill Noriega; but it tried every other imaginable option, including diplomatic, economic, political, and military pressure. The administration did not plan these efforts as a comprehensive policy for regime change. There was still poor interagency coordination, unclear guidance, and political inattention during the 1988 election, and Noriega was able to counter each effort in turn. [24]

[23] Kempe, 236–257; Buckley, 114–125; Woodward, 1991, 79–81.

[24] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 99–105.

However, Noriega's actions to counter these efforts changed the nature of his regime in ways that would be critical to the future success of the operation.

Pressure for Abdication. The United States made four separate attempts to convince Noriega to leave office. The first plan involved a deal negotiated through the Panamanian consul in New York, Jose Blandón; the second, a back-channel communication from a US dignitary operating unofficially; the third, a direct warning from Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage; and the fourth (after the indictments) involved a deal to cancel the indictments in exchange for Noriega's abdication.[25]

Each ultimately failed because of the schism between the political and military parts of Noriega's power base. Noriega's senior military officers feared that an individual deal would either open them to prosecution by the US government or retribution from newly-empowered Panamanian political parties. Noriega stated that his senior officers advised against accepting the last offer "because it would bring political and economic turmoil and the Americans would impose a new government with their own chosen members of the oligarchy." Then-Secretary of State Shultz blamed the final failure of a deal on the increasing nationalism of the PDF senior leadership. Noriega's repeated decisions to side with the PDF forced him to remove the PRD leaders with independent bases of support (including Blandón) and ensured that the leaders who remained depended on him. After the last effort failed in May 1988, both sides recognized that the only US options remaining involved forcing Noriega out.[26]

Arturo Delvalle's "Palace Coup." The United States also tried to get the President of Panama, Arturo Delvalle, to simply fire Noriega. Noriega, like his predecessor Omar Torrijos, was the commander of the PDF, not an elected political official. However, in keeping with the PDF's role as arbiter of Panamanian politics, he retained personal influence in all Panamanian

[25] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 118–152; Gilboa, 547–552.

[26] Noriega and Eisner, 126–139. quote on pp. 138-139. See also Shultz, 1752–1799.

political decisions and the support of the legislature. Delvalle himself had been Vice President under former President Barletta, whom the legislature dismissed after he opened an investigation into the murder of an opposition politician by the PDF. On 25 February 1988, in coordination with the United States, Delvalle announced he was ordering Noriega to step down.[27]

Delvalle's attempted "palace coup" failed immediately. Delvalle had no independent base of support in the PRD or PDF and he was despised by the opposition for his role in the June 1987 government crackdowns. Noriega was also prepared. A rump session of the Legislative Assembly, attended solely by Noriega's allies, convened that evening and voted to replace Delvalle with Noriega's appointee, Manuel Solis Palma. In addition, police were standing by to stop potential demonstrations. Delvalle went into hiding and eventually escaped to the United States. Taken together, the dismissals of Blandón and Delvalle had three important effects. First, they separated the PRD from any broad-based public support. Though Noriega was firmly in charge of the PRD, he had removed all other figures with any independent legitimacy and discredited the idea of independent Panamanian democracy. Second, the ouster of independent centrists and the dismissal of the president tilted Panamanian politics firmly to the left. After Delvalle's removal only Cuba and Nicaragua supported the Noriega regime. Third, the United States did not recognize the new president, making direct action against the regime more legitimate. Delvalle's removal initiated the first formal SOUTHCOM planning for intervention to remove Noriega.[28]

The Macias coup and the Herrera Hassan plot. From the start, US planners considered a military coup from within the PDF as the preferred way to force Noriega out if he would not go willingly. On 16 March 1988 a group of senior PDF officers attempted a coup synchronized with

[27] Kempe, 258–263; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 129–131; Buckley, 118–125; Noriega and Eisner, 131–132.

[28] Kempe, 258–263; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 129–131; Noriega and Eisner, 129–139; Harding, 174–175; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 30–32.

public protests over the dismissal of President Delvalle. Noriega anticipated the coup and quickly countered it, arresting all participants within hours. Though the coup was ineffective, it had profound implications on the structure of the PDF. First, Noriega carried out a widespread officer purge, saving key jobs for loyalists and alienating many professionals. Second, Noriega (with Cuban assistance) began training and arming a secondary paramilitary force to intimidate political opposition, the Dignity Battalions.[29]

It is not clear whether the US government supported the March coup. Noriega accused the US government of arranging the coup, based on some contacts between coup participants and US intelligence. In addition, some coup participants attended military training in the United States. Journalists' accounts differed - one reporter claimed that coup leader contacted SOUTHCOM but did not receive support; another stated that coup leader denied contacting SOUTHCOM.[30]

The United States did attempt to organize a coup plot, the third of five CIA operations to destabilize Noriega. The plan struggled to gain support in Washington. The front man for the US coup, Colonel Eduardo Herrera Hassan, was suspected of disloyalty, and removed from office before the plot could mature. The Reagan administration then balked at supporting an operation that would reinsert him into Panama, due to the risk of exposure during an election year. Despite its desire for a "Panamanian solution" to overthrow Noriega, the United States could not reconcile its desire for a simple solution with its desire to demilitarize Panamanian politics. The officers who could carry out a coup – nationalist officers close to Noriega – were least likely to sympathize with US policy goals.[31]

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[29] Kempe, 273–288; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 142–147.

[30] Noriega and Eisner, 126–127. The differing accounts of coup involvement stem from Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 143; Kempe, 276.

[31] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 153–156; Kempe, 289–304; Buckley, 163–168. Kempe highlights the tense interagency battles over the Hassan plot.

Economic Sanctions. The United States also imposed a series of economic sanctions, starting with limited measures in December 1987 and major sanctions beginning April 1988, intended to either pressure Noriega to step down or coerce Panamanians to remove him. These sanctions remain the most controversial of the pre-invasion efforts because of their massive consequences for the Panamanian economy and society and their failure to achieve their stated objectives. The sanctions started in December with limited measures to cut off US support for the PDF and CIA payments to Noriega. These measures signaled opposition to Noriega, but they did not have significant effects on either his personal or the country's finances.

After Delvalle's ousting, opposition leaders representing the Delvalle government-in-exile contacted a private law firm in Washington DC and began a series of actions to cut off Panama's access to currency. Because Panama's currency was the US dollar, and the US government did not recognize the Solis Palma government, the lawyers prevented the Panamanian government's access to cash in US banks. These actions were immediately effective, and the cash-flow crisis forced Noriega to choose between paying the PDF and civil government salaries. Noriega's choice of the PDF led to civil worker protests and Macias's coup attempt (see above). They also forced Noriega to resort to inventive methods and foreign sponsors, including Cuba and Libya, to keep his regime afloat.

By April 1988, the Panamanian government had partially resolved its cash crisis, and the United States doubled down by threatening a full sanction under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act. The State Department delayed implementation of the full sanctions to give its negotiators for Noriega's departure additional leverage and to minimize the effects on US citizens and businesses. The United States eventually implemented the full sanctions package in June of 1988.[32]

[32] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 40–43; Buckley, 127–136; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 136–140; Noriega and Eisner, 134–139; Shultz, 1755–1791.

The sanctions crippled the Panamanian economy, especially the business classes that constituted the backbone of the opposition to Noriega. The Panamanian economy was uniquely vulnerable to US sanctions, and the effectiveness of the sanctions forced the regime to take drastic measures to keep paying its bills. However, the sanctions failed to achieve their stated goals because they worked at cross-purposes. Once the Noriega government weathered the cash-flow crisis caused by the early sanctions, the sanctions no longer threatened his base of support and therefore no longer incentivized them to carry out a coup. In addition, once the US efforts to persuade him to abdicate failed, Noriega cast the sanctions as a US plot to destroy the Panamanian economy and championed himself as the defender of Panamanian dignity.[33]

The sanctions' immediate effects "ruined a healthy capitalist economy, weakened the pro-American middle class, and created the conditions in Panama for growing Communist influence."[34] The operational effect was to frame the narrative as "Noriega versus the United States." Combined with the crackdowns on political freedoms following the Macias coup attempt and the purges of the PDF and government, Noriega's policy of contesting the sanctions further isolated the regime from the populace.[35]

The May Elections

Aside from a military coup, the elections scheduled for May 1989 were the best chance for the United States to force Noriega out. Both sides recognized their significance. If Noriega's slate won, he would be positioned to bargain favorable terms with the United States. An opposition victory would remove Noriega from power and potentially lead to his extradition and imprisonment. Figure four on the following page depicts the efforts to shape the May election and their results.

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[33] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 137–140; Shultz, 1782–1790; Noriega and Eisner, 134–137; Independent Commission of Inquiry on the U.S. Invasion of Panama, 23–25.

[34] Buckley, 136.

[35] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 38–39.

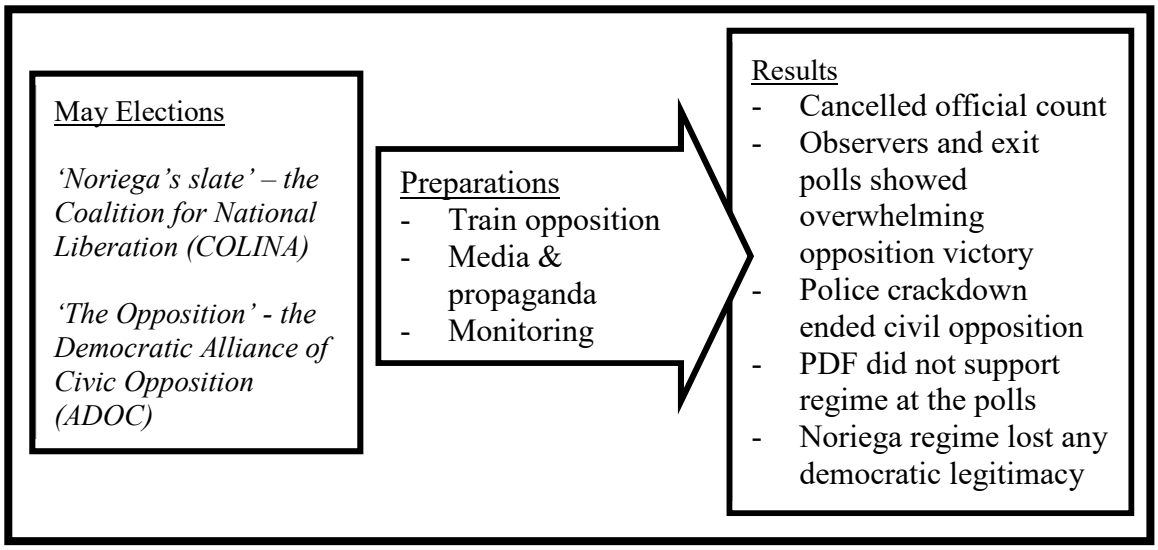

Figure 4. Efforts to shape the May election and their results. Source: Author.

At least one of the five CIA covert operations involved supporting the political opposition to Noriega. These operations had two objectives. First, they intended strengthen the growing opposition as a viable counter to Noriega. Second, they aimed to prevent Noriega from tampering with the election results or to force any tampering to be widespread and obvious. It is unclear what specific measures the CIA took during these operations, but they included direct broadcasts of opposition messages within Panama City. Noriega accused the US government of training opposition parties in street demonstration and protest tactics. Opposition leaders also used covert means of distributing newspapers and radio broadcasts from outside the country.[36]

An overt monitoring campaign supplemented these efforts, including a US congressional delegation, a separate US delegation including former Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, observers from the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Catholic Church. These efforts took active steps to prevent fraud. On election day, the Church secured ballots from PDF and Dignity Battalion teams that sought to destroy the results from opposition-heavy voting sites.

[36] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 141, 153–158; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 158–161; Noriega and Eisner, 133–134; Murillo, 684–685; Independent Commission of Inquiry on the U.S. Invasion of Panama, 23–25.

Former President Carter personally intruded on the central counting station to observe the process (Carter was popular in Panama for his stewardship of the 1977 Panama Canal treaties).[37]

The covert support to the opposition suffered tactical setbacks when the PDF arrested an opposition radio operator using CIA-provided equipment and when the US Drug Enforcement Agency arrested the businessman responsible for distributing funds to the opposition. However, the regime was unable to use these setbacks to discredit the opposition because both parties cast the election as a referendum on Noriega's leadership. The opposition candidates had little in common because different political parties formed the ticket, and the process of coalition formation meant the final decision on candidates was a last-minute compromise.[38]

Polls leading into the election favored the opposition by a two-to-one margin, and both election observers and exit polls confirmed this estimate. As election day closed on 7 May 1989 regime forces raided some regional counting sites to destroy tally sheets, and citizens secured the boxes for some sites at churches. The next day the opposition staged a demonstration, the church announced an ADOC victory in their poll, and President Carter accused the regime of "taking the election by fraud" after visiting the counting station. The government posted the official count on 9 May, two days afterward, which put the results at two to one in the government's favor.[39]

On 10 May 1989 the opposition staged a final demonstration. During this demonstration, members of the Dignity Battalions armed with sticks and pistols attacked the crowds, killing the bodyguards of both Guillermo Endara (ADOC presidential candidate) and Guillermo "Billy" Ford (ADOC second vice president) and injuring both candidates and hundreds of others. Both local and international observers blamed the government for the attack. Members of the

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[37] Murillo, 733–735; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 160–163; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 161–167; Fishel, *The Fog of Peace*, 2–3.

[38] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 137–161.

[39] International Delegation Report, 49–57; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 165–168; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 160–170.

opposition identified photos of PDF members in the Dignity Battalions, and the uniformed PDF did not stop the attacks. At 10:55 PM that day, the government annulled the election results.[40]

The failure of the May elections and the public suppression of the opposition ended any pretense of democratic legitimacy for Noriega's regime, but it also eliminated any effective civil opposition. Both direct opposition-PDF talks and talks mediated by the Organization of American States (OAS) from May to September failed in acrimony. After this point, the only entities that could remove Noriega were the United States or the PDF.[41]

The Giroldi Coup

The suppression of the elections also raised the ire of the United States and prompted President Bush to adopt a more aggressive stance. Several US Congressmen observing the election accused General Woerner of weakness for failing to stop the attacks, which may have led to the decision to remove him. [42] The administration put a more aggressive policy in the hands of General Maxwell Thurman, who took command of SOUTHCOM on 30 September 1989. Almost simultaneously, General Colin Powell became the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They would not have an easy introduction to their jobs. On 1 October 1989, while Generals Powell and Thurman were on the first day of their new jobs, PDF Major Moises Giroldi contacted SOUTHCOM to seek support for a coup attempt. Giroldi's coup offered the last opportunity for a "Panamanian Solution" to the crisis.[43]

Major Giroldi was a Panamanian nationalist officer who commanded the company that guarded Noriega's headquarters, the Comandancia. He contacted US forces on 1 October through his wife, who was friends with a civilian employee at SOUTHCOM. Over the next two days of awkward and tortuous negotiations characterized by mutual distrust, Major Giroldi and

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[40] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 167–188.

[41] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 160–170.

[42] Woodward, 78.

[43] Kempe, 360–400.

SOUTHCOM eventually agreed that SOUTHCOM would not intervene to stop the coup, that it would hold exercises at two locations to stop reinforcements to the Comandancia, and that the United States would take custody of Major Giroldi's wife and children in case the coup failed. However, Major Giroldi did not agree to turn Noriega over to the United States or to make guarantees about supporting a democratic transition. Giroldi's planning seemed to reflect a deep-seated unwillingness to harm Noriega, an ambivalence that undermined his credibility in the eyes of General Thurman.[44]

Giroldi staged the coup on 3 October 1989. The initial stages of the coup were successful, but Noriega was able to make at least one phone call before the coup plotters took him into custody. US forces blocked the requested avenues of approach but did not prevent landings at Paitilla airport or other reinforcements. The coup plotters offered to turn over Noriega to US forces as reinforcements began to assemble, but the coup collapsed before the plotters and SOUTHCOM reached a deal. Either Noriega's forces or Noriega himself killed Giroldi, and the chance of any PDF action to remove Noriega died with him.[45]

The principals were ambivalent about US support for Giroldi's coup from the start. Thurman did not believe Giroldi had a realistic plan or the dedication to carry it through. Both the CIA and Thurman suspected the coup might be a deception operation, and the White House was unhappy with Giroldi's lukewarm commitment to democracy and unwillingness to turn over Noriega. The third point is critical. By the time Giroldi's coup transpired, US policy had shifted to requiring a commitment to elected democracy and civilian leadership, while Panamanian politics had shifted to the point where the remaining PDF leadership were militant nationalists. [46] Even if Giroldi's coup had succeeded, with or without US assistance, it would not have led to the

[44] Woodward, 78–95; Kempe, 381–382.

[45] Kempe, 367–399; Woodward, 78–95; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 253–263.

[46] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 190–192.

desired endstate that had shifted along with the crisis. Thurman's own inexperience (the coup transpired on his first three days in command), the lack of a standing plan for a coup, and the plotters nationalist desire to distance themselves from American support all contributed to its failure. Afterwards, purges of the officer corps prevented another coup and left US intervention as the only remaining option.

Planning for Attack and Reconstruction

SOUTHCOM began planning for the military overthrow of Noriega shortly after the Florida indictments. In February 1988, General Woerner began contingency planning for operations against a hostile PDF, and established Joint Task Force Panama under Brigadier General Bernard Loeffke in April to manage the crisis. The military plans evolved with the crisis, and changed alongside US policy and the perspectives of Generals Woerner and Thurman.[47]

The fact that two different commanders planned the overthrow of the Noriega regime makes the Panama case study uniquely interesting for regime change. It is not a perfect comparison because the regime Thurman planned to overthrow was different from the regime Woerner planned to overthrow, and Woerner's views influenced Thurman. But both commanders viewed *prima facie* similar problems and developed two different solutions. The primary difference between their plans revolved around how the combatant commanders thought the PDF would challenge the United States for control during and after the overthrow. This section compares the plans using the model, starting first with the strategic context, then comparing the plans themselves, and ending with a description of the execution.

Strategic and Political Context

The first flurry of activity after the indictments (including Delvalle's palace coup, Macias's actual coup, and the early sanctions) shaped Woerner's early planning. He envisioned military intervention as a response to a sufficiently aggressive Panamanian provocation,

[47] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 33–51.

understanding that any intervention at that point would remove the regime. From February through May, the White House thought the non-military pressure on Noriega had a credible chance at leading to a negotiated solution. SOUTHCOM was to support the policy of applying pressure to Noriega's regime and protect US lives and property in Panama, as part of an overall strategic approach to encourage a "Panamanian solution to a Panamanian problem."[48]

From May 1988 to November 1988, the US elections put pressure on General Woerner to keep the Panamanian crisis out of the news. This forced SOUTHCOM to balance its military responses to PDF provocations (intensifying since April 1988) between keeping pressure on Noriega's regime, avoiding escalation into a decisive military confrontation, and protecting US military personnel and dependents living in Panama. General Woerner believed this approach could work through 1988, if the US government could execute comprehensive civil and military pressure on the regime. But the US government could not because there were multiple exceptions in the sanctions and key provisions never escaped the bureaucracy for decision.[49]

These constraints put the SOUTHCOM commander in the lead of two national-level strategic and policy decisions: the decision to recommend to the President that provocation was enough to justify military intervention, and the decision about what the successor regime would be. The decision on whether to intervene effectively put the decision to execute the military overthrow of the Noriega regime in the hands of the SOUTHCOM commander. The second decision, who the successor would be, followed from the first. If the United States intervened to support a Panamanian coup, the SOUTHCOM commander would have to set terms for post-coup governance to the organizers.

General Woerner viewed the Reagan administration's intent towards Panama as not to force the removal of the regime, so he was able to limit provocations below the threshold of

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[48] Ibid., 37.

[49] Kempe, 333; Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, 35–36; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 97–109.

intervention. General Woerner was unsuccessful at reading the Bush administration's policy. Indeed, some White House advisors viewed Woerner's arguments that he had not received clear policy guidance as opposition to regime change. General Thurman understood from the beginning that he was likely to have to force the overthrow of Noriega.[50]

Blue Spoon under Generals Woerner and Thurman

General Woerner's intervention plan had four parts – a troop buildup, a noncombatant evacuation, combat operations against the PDF, and a post-overthrow phase. The last two – "Blue Spoon" and "Blind Logic" respectively – formed the military plan to overthrow Noriega.

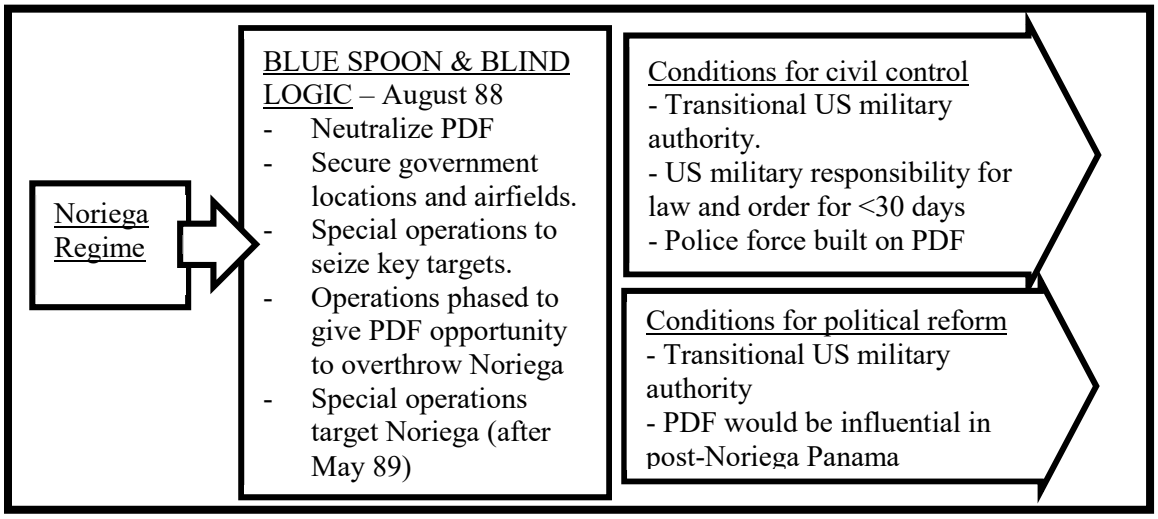

Figure 5. Blue Spoon and Blind Logic under General Woerner. Source: Author.

General Woerner's version of the overthrow incorporated build-up of forces and Special Operations strikes against key regime targets and critical infrastructure, followed by conventional operations to neutralize the PDF. General Woerner considered the decisive event in the overthrow to be taking control of the cities or a PDF mutiny against Noriega, not capturing Noriega himself. Woerner added the capture of Noriega as a target after the May 1989 elections to prevent Noriega from supporting an insurgency or 'political mischief' against the successor regime, not because

[50] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 105–106, 135–139; Woodward, 78–93.

he viewed the capture as essential to the overthrow.[51] Following the overthrow, the United States would establish a transitional military government or turn over authority to a Panamanian government. After the May elections, General Woerner concluded that a government under Endara, Arias Calderón, and Ford would be the best successor regime, but this conclusion never entered Blind Logic.[52] General Woerner believed that most combat operations would be unnecessary, as the build-up of forces combined with direct appeals to PDF leadership would lead to a coup against Noriega and trigger the post-conflict phase.[53]

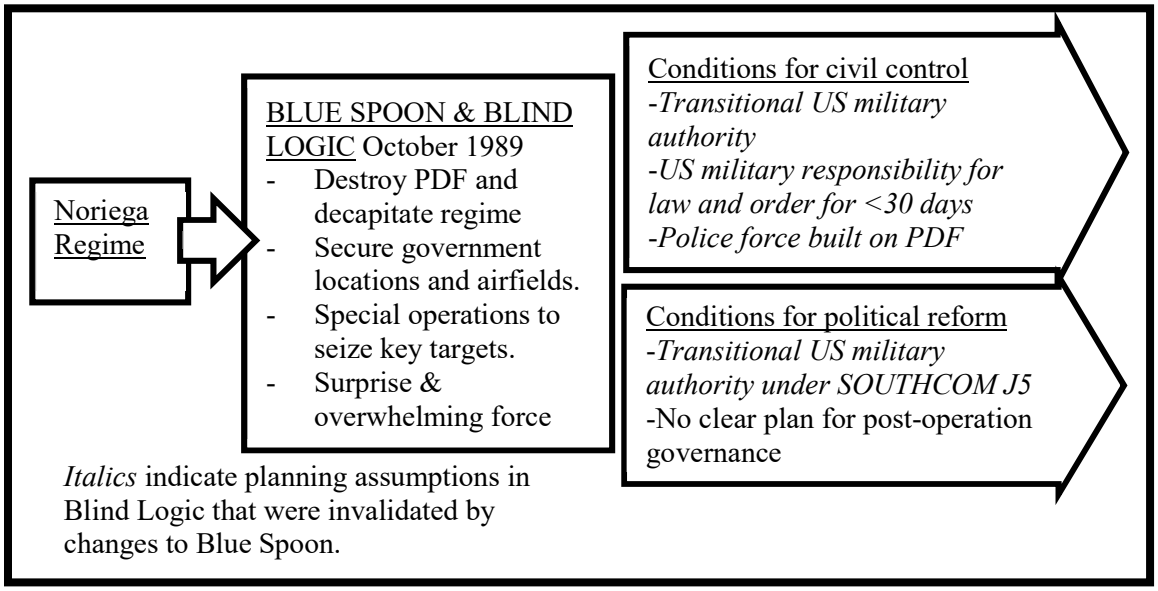

Figure 6. Blue Spoon and Blind Logic under General Thurman. Source: Author.

General Thurman delegated the lead for contingency planning to Lieutenant General Carl Stiner of the XVIII Airborne Corps. Neither of them reviewed the post-conflict plan in detail, and their changes to the combat phase invalidated certain assumptions in the post-conflict phase. First, Generals Thurman and Stiner rejected General Woerner's gradual buildup of forces. After

[51] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 90–91; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 70–71; Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 25.

[52] Buckley, 188–190; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 70–71; Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 33–34.

[53] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 32–34, 264.

Giroldi's coup, Thurman, the State Department, and the White House had agreed that the intervention must destroy the PDF instead of neutralizing it.[54] Thus Woerner's extended build-up—to put pressure on the PDF to overthrow Noriega—became a liability instead of a feature. Instead, General Thurman's plan focused on surprise and overwhelming force to prevent the PDF from either waging a guerilla war or taking American hostages.[55] Second, the decision to turn over power to the ADOC candidates invalidated Blind Logic's assumption of a US military government. Instead, SOUTHCOM would support a civilian government with face legitimacy but no real capability. Third, the new objective to destroy the PDF changed post-war plans to restore public order. By dedicating the preponderance of combat forces to targets outside of urban areas, the plan left fewer forces in Panama City and Colón than were required to ensure order. [56]

Neither Generals Thurman nor Stiner were fully aware of the consequences of these changes before execution. In the two months between the Giroldi coup and the execution of Operation Just Cause, General Thurman focused on his hemispheric responsibilities as SOUTHCOM commander. General Stiner viewed his role as the contingency commander solely to conduct the overthrow, and the XVIII Airborne Corps staff did not incorporate any requirements from Blind Logic into their contingency plan. At the time of execution, SOUTHCOM operated under a hastily-updated plan and without certain resources (especially mobilized reserves) in place.[57]

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[54] Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, 64–65; Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 21; Carl W. Stiner, *Joint Task Force South in Operation Just Cause*, Oral History Interview (XVIII Airborne Corps, March 1990), 3, accessed December 12, 2017, https://history.army.mil/documents/panama/JCIT/JCIT24.htm; Woodward, 145–150; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Origins*, 264–265.

[55] Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, 52–61.

[56] Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 27–32.

[57] Ibid., 20–21, 31–32.

Executing Just Cause

The overthrow of the regime went mostly according to plan. Conventional operations struck Noriega's command center and the loyal PDF leaders and units. A combination of conventional and special operations struck targets to isolate the theater, including ports and harbors, both ends of the canal, the airports, and the avenues of approach to the major cities. Other operations targeted key targets such as a CIA prisoner at Carcel Modelo and political prisoners at Renacer Prison. Follow-on operations focused on securing the city of Colón and securing the surrender of PDF units in the countryside. Stiner's plan relied on surprise and overwhelming force to prevent the PDF from taking American hostages or retiring to the jungle to fight as guerillas.

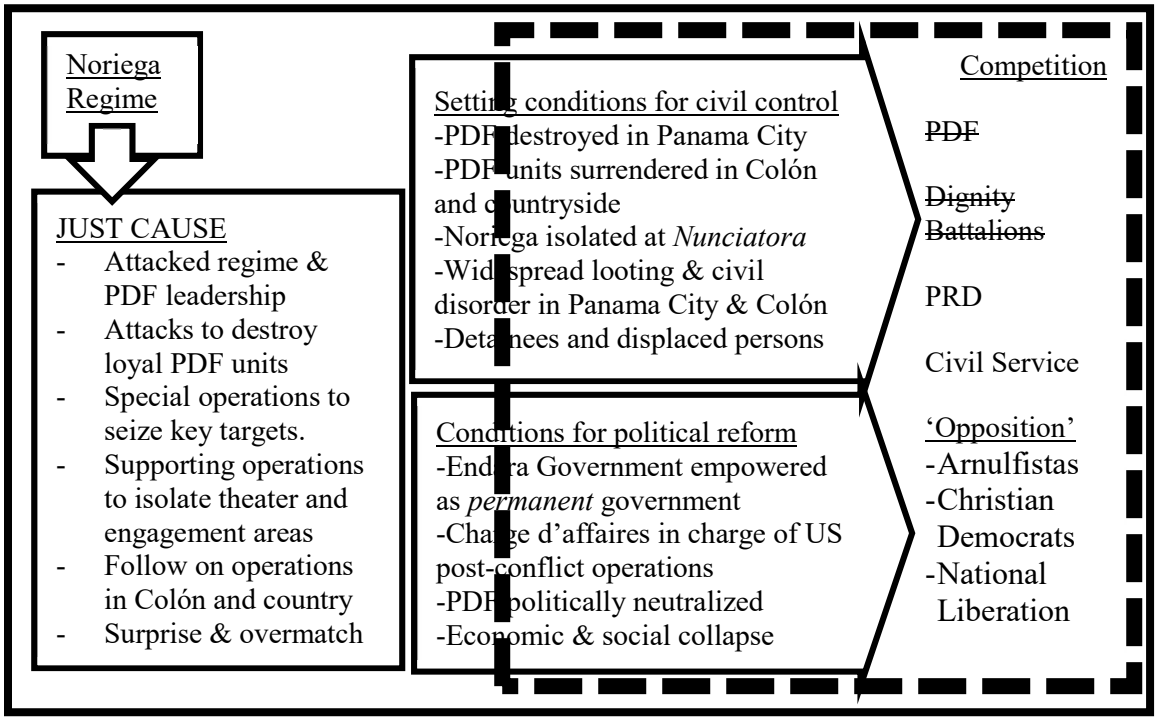

Figure 7. Conditions for civil control and political reform as of 25 December 1989.

General Thurman's decision to rely on surprise and speed accepted some risk, because a noncombatant evacuation would have signaled the invasion. It was only partly successful. Noriega learned of the operation a few hours before it started. This gave him enough time to go

into hiding and prepared some PDF units for the impending fight.[58] However, the loyal PDF units did not have time to retire to the countryside and few units were able to take hostages.

By Christmas 1989, US forces concluded major combat against the PDF. The formal end to major combat operations came with the decision to stand down JTF-South (the warfighting headquarters under the XVIII Airborne Corps) and return operational control to JTF-Panama. Noriega sought refuge in the house of the Papal representative to Panama, and US forces surrounded and isolated him there. He later surrendered on 3 January. By the 22nd of December, US forces occupied both Panama City and Colón. The last major counterattack occurred that day at of the Directorate of Traffic and Transportation in Panama City, when former PDF and/or Dignity Battalion members attacked a group of several hundred Panamanians (mostly former PDF) trying to join the new US-backed police. By this time the last of the major towns, all nine of Panama's provincial commanders, and over 5,000 PDF had surrendered. [59]

This left the United States in charge of a country "in economic and social collapse."[60] By the end of the 20th and 22nd respectively, US forces became *de facto* responsible for law and order in Panama City and Colón. In both cities, the fall of the regime sparked widespread looting. Because US forces did not concentrate power in Panama City (except for the Comandancia), they had to move additional units into the city after the units struck their D-day targets or arrived in theater. In the case of Colón, Major General Cisneros's prudent decision to delay storming the city allowed most of the PDF to surrender but left the city victim to two days of unrestrained looting in the free trade zone. In addition, multiple observers allege that Dignity Battalion members and some civil servants set fire to government buildings to destroy records. In total, the looting and fires caused millions of dollars in damage to the Panamanian economy, possibly up to

[58] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 64–67.

[59] Stiner, 53–56; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 378–393.

[60] Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, 381.

$400 million. But this this damage pales in comparison to the damage done by the sanctions, estimated at $900 million (17% of GDP) in 1988 alone.[61]

The United States destroyed the PDF both as a fighting force and as a political institution. The PRD had been the primary political party in Panamanian politics since 1978, and with the destruction of the PDF it lost its sole base of political support. Because the PDF and the PRD controlled all effective governing institutions, their removal from power eliminated all central political control. In addition, by this point the Panamanian people despised both institutions and supported efforts to have prominent former members charged and imprisoned for their real and/or suspected crimes. The US invasion and the installation of the Endara government brought high hopes of reform.

Congratulations, You are Now President

The US charge d'affaires John Bushnell invited Guillermo Endara, Ricardo Arias Calderón, and Billy Ford to dinner at Fort Clayton on the evening of 19 December 1989. There, he informed them that the United States would be invading Panama in a few hours, and that the United States wanted to make them President and Vice Presidents, respectively – the offices they had campaigned for. That night, the men swore their oaths of office in front of a Panamanian justice and became the government of a country that the United States was about to invade.[62]

US post-conflict efforts in Panama suffered problems familiar to other post-conflict efforts: flawed plans, troop shortages, little political interest or involvement, insufficient resources, difficulty spending reconstruction money effectively, unclear organization, interagency arguments, and so forth. The new Government of Panama (GOP) was even more unprepared, as operational security concerns prevented US authorities from coordinating with Endara and his Vice Presidents before the launch of the operation. Despite this, over the five years following the

[61] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 456, 477; Zimbalist and Weeks, 150–155; Murillo, 834–836.

[62] Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 76–77.

invasion there was only one organized challenge to the government's authority and the political competition in the government did not undermine the original goals of the intervention.

Operational Decisions that Became Policy

General Thurman ordered SOUTHCOM to execute the reconstruction plan, Operation Promote Liberty, the day of the invasion despite his misgivings about the command and control arrangements because the ongoing operation required providing humanitarian assistance and efforts to maintain civil order. The Joint Chiefs approved the hastily updated plan the next day, but events had already overtaken it. As a result, some of the most critical policy decisions of the aftermath of the war were based on operational and strategic decisions made (or not made) by General Thurman, charge d'affaires Bushnell, and Endara's fledgling government.

The most fundamental US policy decision about the political nature of the successor regime was simply not made – what was the status of the Endara government? The Panamanian people viewed the Endara government as legitimate, though the election was not official. However, Endara's government worked under General Torrijos's 1972 constitution which concentrated power in the executive branch and military. The goal of ending military dictatorship unified the governing coalition before the invasion. Afterwards, it had to finalize that goal while operating under militarist rules. Because the United States did not have a policy for what *kind* of democracy Panama should be, Endara's government became the legitimate government in US eyes regardless of how it was installed. The United States did not consider other options, like a transitional regime to draft a new constitution or new elections to validate the May 1989 result.[63]

The United States and Panamanian government made their second critical policy decision, to recruit former members of the PDF into the new police force, under the pressures of widespread looting and large numbers of displaced civilians. Endara and his Vice Presidents

[63] Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 43; Harding, 175–177; Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State, and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90–95; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 226–231.

recognized it as a compromise between their political goals of a professional, uncorrupted, and apolitical police force and the immediate need to keep civil order. Endara announced the disbanding of the PDF and began recruiting the new Panamanian Public Force (PF) beginning 22 December 1989, two days after the invasion and before the PDF was completely neutralized. The PDF and Dignity Battalions attacked the recruiting center that day, in what would be the last major organized attack of the operation.[64]

Third, the United States decided, almost by default, to treat Endara's government as a fully-capable sovereign government from the inauguration ceremony at Fort Clayton the night before the invasion. This decision occurred because the various executive agencies had not incorporated President Bush's policy decision to install a Panamanian government into the reconstruction plan, and General Thurman had not had time prior to the operation to focus on post-conflict requirements. This created the impression among some senior US military and political leaders that the Panamanian government consisting of three men with no resources could assume responsibility for governance. This decision primarily affected the authority under which US forces conducting operation Promote Liberty operated. General Thurman put stability operations under the effective control of the charge d'affaires, which ensured unity of command in the early stages. Legislation passed in February forbade military aid to the PF and put police reform efforts under the purview of a US Department of Justice program designed for police assistance to more stable countries.[65]

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[64] Caumartin, 110–111; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 429–432.

[65] Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 40–72; John T. Fishel and Richard Downie, "Taking Responsibility for Our Actions: Establishing Order and Stability in Panama," *Military Review* 72, no. 4 (April 1992): 75–77.

Demilitarization, Depoliticization, and Mutiny

The issue of military reform dominated the five years of the Endara administration and the 1994 election. Even before the invasion, the political dominance of the military was fraying, indicated by the substantial number of PDF votes for the opposition in the May 1989 elections. Afterwards, the issue would break up Endara's coalition and cost it the 1994 elections.[66]

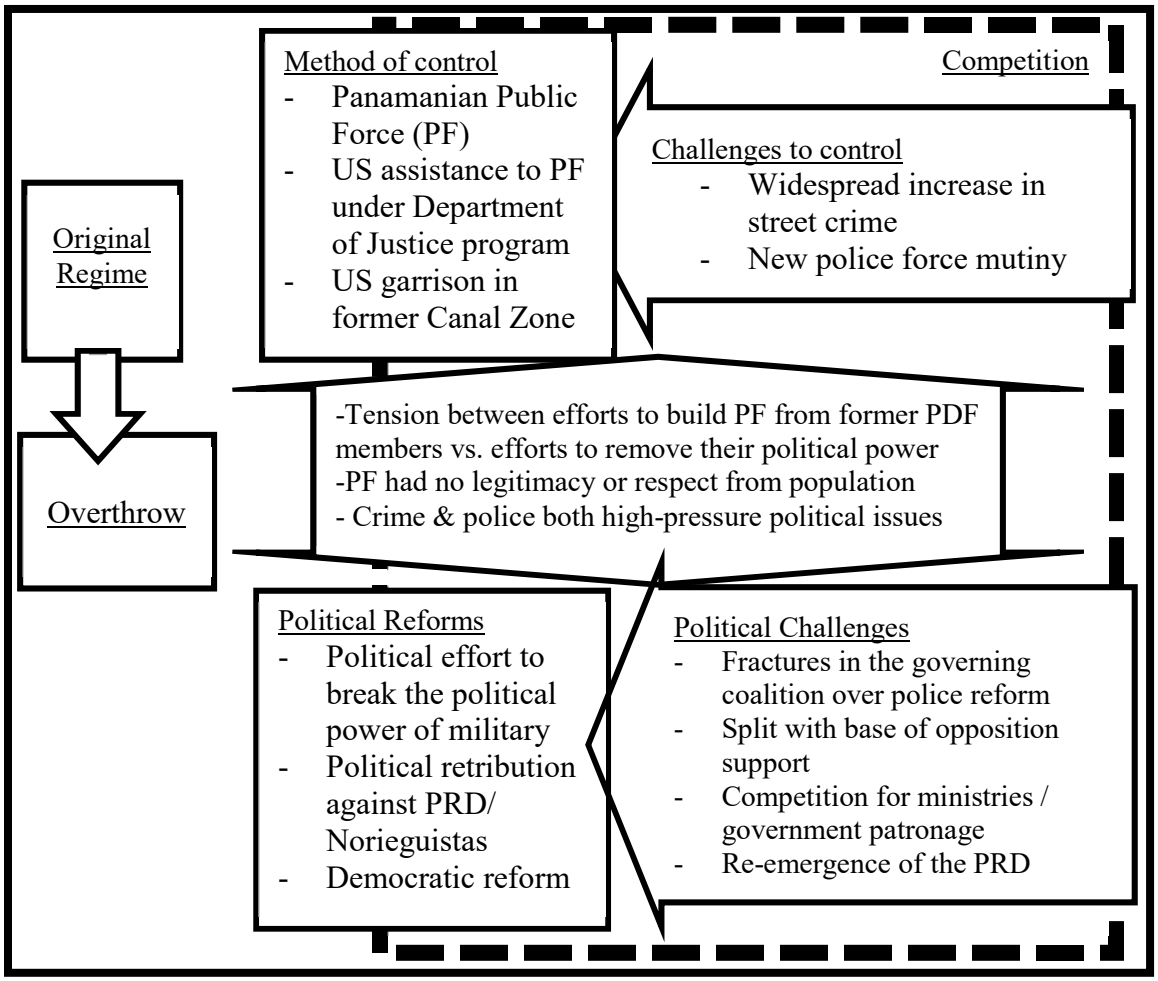

Figure 8. Competition and interaction for civil control and political reform. Source: Author.

After the invasion, the United States and the Endara government faced the tension between the goals of creating an effective police force, reducing corruption, eliminating the political power of the military, and reducing the footprint of US forces. The various stakeholders

[66] Caumartin, 115–116.

weighted these goals differently. The United States was more interested in public order and reducing its visible commitment, while others were more interested in a professional police force free of PDF corruption or retribution against the PDF and PRD. This led, first, to the decision to recruit former PDF, and second to US assistance programs to train and equip the force.[67]

Politically, the United States and Endara government followed the establishment of the PF with corruption investigations against the PDF and PRD, a parade of police chiefs and senior officers removed for various charges, and laws designed to restrict the political power of the police. The PF faced open hostility from the Panamanian public, who viewed it as the same old thugs wearing different uniforms. The corruption investigations reinforced this perception. The first police chief, Roberto Armijo, resigned after two weeks when an investigation revealed that he had millions of dollars in offshore bank accounts. The second police chief, Eduardo Herrera Hassan (originally recruited by the United States to overthrow Noriega in 1988), attempted to rehabilitate the political power of the police by announcing the formation of a security forces trade union. After he was subsequently dismissed, the government filled the position of security director with civilians and ended all collective bargaining rights for police.[68]

The tension between these forces came to a head in November and December 1990, when PF officers broke Colonel Hassan out of prison and flew him to the Panamanian police headquarters. From there, he announced that he controlled the PF and issued demands for better treatment of police officers. Hassan's action, described at the time as a revolt, a mutiny, or a potential coup, represented a direct military challenge to the authority of Endara's government and required an appeal to US forces on the peninsula to suppress it. Though both Endara's

[67] Murillo, 844–846; John T. Fishel, "The Institutional Reconversion of the Panamanian Defense Forces," in *Post-Invasion Panama: The Challenges of Democratization in the New World Order*, ed. Orlando J. Pérez (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2000), 11.

[68] Murillo, 838–855; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 218–219; Caumartin, 112–114; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 430–436.

government and Colonel Herrera Hassan both denied after the fact that the action threatened to overthrow the Panamanian government, it is not clear at all what would have happened had US forces been absent. As Murillo points out, "most garrison commanders waited to see how the gringos would react. Had the gringos vacillated, sending a veiled message that Endara was not worth the worry, the fragile administration would have been toppled."[69] While it is impossible to evaluate Murillo's counterfactual, the fact that he said it as a contemporary observer of Panamanian politics and that it resembles PDF behavior during Giroldi's coup indicates its potential significance.[70]

Regardless, after the action the Endara government further purged the officer corps of the PF and neutralized its ability to execute a coup against the Panamanian government. The government appointed a civilian Director General of the PF, which completed depoliticization of the officer corps but made the police force leadership a political position. When the Christian Democrats left the governing coalition, the government fired the director of the PF (a Christian Democrat appointee) for political reasons instead of as part of a depoliticization policy.[71]

US forces' presence on the peninsula, and the neutralization of the PF, was key to preventing the formation of significant domestic opposition and deterring foreign intervention. Though US forces kept a low public profile, they oversaw successful disarmament and weapon buyback programs, destroyed arms caches in the countryside, and prevented the PF from challenging the government. In addition, the decision to hire former PDF members into the PF prevented them from retiring to the countryside to challenge the regime. On the other hand, US

[69] Murillo, *The Noriega Mess*, 854.

[70] Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Helps Quell Revolt in Panama," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1990, accessed November 24, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/1990/12/06/us/us-helps-quell-revolt-in-panama.html; Murillo, 853–854; Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 50–51; Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 218–219; Fishel, "The Institutional Reconversion of the Panamanian Defense Forces," 19–20; Harding, 183.

[71] Fishel, "The Institutional Reconversion of the Panamanian Defense Forces," 17–20.

forces and the PF were unable to prevent spiraling crime, and the PF suffered from low morale for years afterwards, which undermined support for the government and put increasing pressure on the ties between members of the governing coalition.[72]

Settlement – the 1992 Referendum and the 1994 Elections

Without Noriega to oppose, the three parties of the governing coalition started to drift apart. The first major signs of political trouble for the regime came when five of the nine seats at issue in local elections in January 1991 went to the PRD, four went to the President's coalition rivals, and none to Endara's party. Differences in the governing coalition revolved around differences in policy toward security reform and the prosecution of former PDF members, with most former allies during the opposition feeling the government was not doing enough. Other scandals revolved around reports that political ministers would use the Panamanian National Police intelligence capabilities for political purposes. This tension erupted into open hostility between Endara's Arnulfistas and the Christian Democrats in April, when the latter called for a vote to impeach Endara. Following the rupture, Endara dismissed Vice President Arias Calderón from his appointment as Minister of Justice and fired several of the Christian Democrat appointees. The loss of the governing coalition would have serious political ramifications, preventing an organized campaign to support the constitutional referendum of 1992 and splitting the "moderate" vote in the 1994 elections.[73]

While the governing coalition fell apart, the PRD waged a skillful campaign to rehabilitate its image and separate itself from its previous support for Noriega. The parties in the governing coalition drew their support from the white upper-middle class urban population, while the PRD originally drew its support from the lower class and mestizo population. The post-

[72] Fishel and Downie, "Taking Responsibility for Our Actions: Establishing Order and Stability in Panama," 66–77; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 464–466.

[73] Scranton, *The Noriega Years*, 220–225; Scranton, "Consolidation after Imposition;" Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election;" Murillo, 844–864; Fishel, "The Institutional Reconversion of the Panamanian Defense Forces," 20–21; Caumartin, 114–117.

invasion governing coalition was unable to pull that support away from the PRD's base. More importantly, however, the reforms that brought the PF under politically-appointed civilian control removed the identity of the PRD as the "military party" and shifted it to the governing coalition. This, combined with corruption indictments of dedicated Norieguistas, removed internal opposition to the moderate Torrijista faction of the party.

The 1992 referendum and 1994 elections presented an opportunity to establish a popularly-accepted, democratic political settlement. The first of these, the 1992 referendum, sought to change the constitution to incorporate the police and military reforms the government had enacted by law and executive degree. Legally, the referendum could only ratify reforms already in place, making it only procedurally significant. As a result, the opposition was able to successfully cast the vote as a referendum on the performance of Endara's government. The results went overwhelmingly against the government: sixty-five percent against, with a sixty-two percent abstention/turn-away rate at the polls in a country with generally high turnout. More notably, the referendum itself was an extraordinary example of successful democratic process as there were no deaths or riots, the government did not cancel the vote, and both internal and international observes described it as successful. In addition, the government prevented even the appearance of political influence by the security forces by turning formal authority for the PF over to the Electoral Tribunal for the week before the election.[74]

The success of the 1992 referendum demonstrated that the electoral process could cultivate a legitimate and acceptable political settlement because all parties perceived the elections as free and fair and the party in power did use that power to influence the result. All parties recognized that the 1994 elections constituted the key test of the process, and all the competitors in the 1994 elections were able to organize, campaign, and observe the 1992 election. The United States declined to support any individual party or take a position on the outcome.

[74] Scranton, "Consolidation after Imposition," 10–13; Caumartin, 120–121.

Three factors shaped the result of the 1994 election. First, the incumbent parties were unpopular due to corruption and rampant crime. Second, the political infighting between the incumbent parties prevented them from forming a coalition against the PRD. Finally, the government refused to use extralegal means to influence the election. The government's reforms prevented incumbents from exclusively benefiting from state resources. For example, the administration ordered the presidential security service to safeguard candidates from all parties.[75]

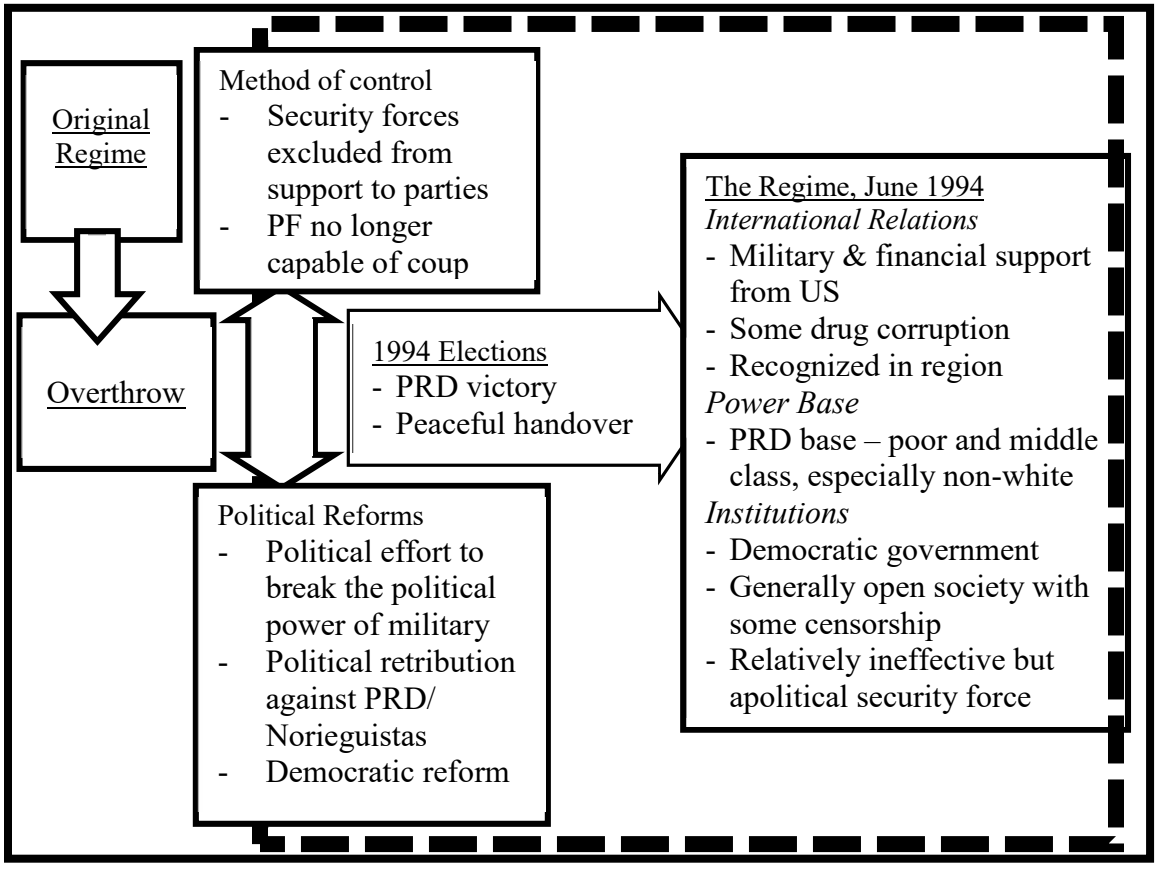

Figure 9. The political settlement in the 1994 election. Source: Author.

The 1994 elections were the first time since 1960 that election results determined presidential succession in Panama. The PRD immediately ratified the constitutional amendment formalizing the military reforms of the Endara government, institutionalizing the PRD's promised separation from its military past.[76]

[75] Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election;" Caumartin.

[76] Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election," 69–75.

Overview and Implications

> You got the police working; not too well, but working. Second, you got the government ministries working.
>
> —Panamanian Businessman, 1991[77]

The three sections above described the evolution of the US regime change in Panama from the beginning of the confrontation in 1987, to the invasion and overthrow in 1989-1990, and the peaceful handover of power 1994. Within this time period, the operation seemed successful. The military operation was quick and relatively painless, the dictator overthrown, and Panama had no significant outbreak of conflict afterwards. Returning now to the question that opened this monograph – was the US intervention in Panama truly successful, and, if so, what led to its success?

President Bush set four objectives: "to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty." The only objective the intervention unequivocally succeeded at accomplishing was the "defense of democracy in Panama." Noticing that there was never a healthy democracy in Panama to defend prior to the invasion magnifies the nature of this achievement. "Safeguarding the lives of Americans" must be viewed as pre-emptive. Though the invasion killed more Americans than the twenty-one years of military dictatorship preceding it, policymakers clearly thought more lives would be at risk absent an intervention. Protecting "the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty" was not directly applicable since the Panama Canal was never in danger. The only aspect of the canal treaty in jeopardy was Washington's potential unwillingness to turn over authority of the canal to a Noriega appointee.

The operation failed at "combatting drug trafficking." Though Noriega and some PDF officials with ties to cartels were arrested or relieved of duty, both drugs and illicit financial

[77] Quoted in Fishel, *The Fog of Peace: Planning and Executing the Restoration of Panama*, 63.

activities pervaded Panama afterwards. At time of writing, another Panamanian president is in US jail pending extradition to Panama on corruption charges and the 2016 "Panama Papers" scandal revealed the international scope of illicit Panamanian banking activities. Nevertheless, this objective was never a feature of the planning for Just Cause or Promote Liberty. Few of the sources on Panama mention drugs, and General Thurman argued that the purpose of the operation was to resolve the crisis in order to let SOUTHCOM "get on with the drug war."[78]

Taking a longer view, the operation seems a remarkable operational and strategic success. Less than ten years after the end of Just Cause, the United States turned over control of the Panama Canal to a stable government and closed the garrisons that had both guaranteed the security of the canal and served as a constant irritant in US-Panama relations for the entire history of that country.[79]

Panama in the Regime Change Model

This monograph used a conceptual model of regime change from the author's previous work as a lens to evaluate how the intervention set the conditions that enabled the successful outcome. Starting in 1987, the model depicted how the nature of Noriega's regime influenced the US objectives and efforts to overthrow it, and how those in turn shaped the regime itself (propositions 1 and 2). After October 1989, the United States' only remaining option to overthrow Noriega was direct action against the regime and capturing of the seat of power (proposition 2). This action, Operation Just Cause, installed a legitimate government with no real capability to govern and destroyed the prior regime's tools for maintaining civil control (proposition 3). Over the course of the ensuing years, efforts to depoliticize the armed forces

[78] Karma Allen, "Former Panamanian President Arrested in Florida," *ABC News*, June 13, 2017, accessed January 23, 2018, http://abcnews.go.com/International/panamanian-president-arrested-florida/story?id=47999852; BBC News, "Panama Papers Q&A: What Is the Scandal About?," *BBC News*, April 6, 2016, World edition, accessed January 23, 2018, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-35954224; Yates, *US Military Intervention in Panama: Operation Just Cause*, 456.

[79] Conniff, *Panama and the United States*, chap. 11.

would provoke a mutiny in the PF and intense competition in the government (propositions 4 and 5). The 1992 elections would demonstrate the viability of a peaceful political settlement to this competition, and the 1994 elections would constitute the first example of that settlement (proposition 6).

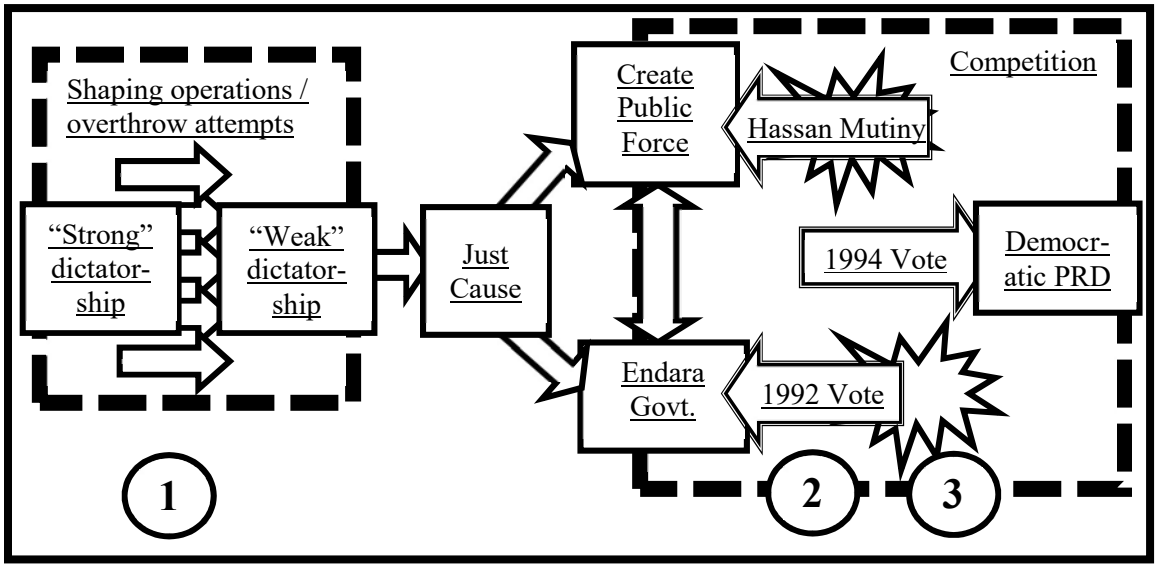

Figure 10. Regime Change in Panama viewed through the model. Source: Author.

Three decisive events determined the course of this process. First, the indirect attempts at overthrow from 1987-1989 shaped the Noriega regime and eliminated potential sources of opposition afterwards. Second, the presence of US forces after the end of direct military assistance precluded a military coup against the government. Third, the Endara administration's military and political reforms and the US policy of non-intervention allowed the opposition a viable peaceful channel for competition with the government.

Shaping the Noriega Regime. The Panamanian government at the start of the crisis in 1987 was radically different from the government the United States overthrew in December 1989. US actions and Noriega's responses over that period changed the nature of the regime.

The principals and decision makers did not conceive of these as shaping operations. Instead, they viewed them as independent operations, each intended to be decisive, that failed.

This perception contributed to General Woerner's relief after the May elections and increased the pressure on the Bush administration to act after Giroldi's coup failed.

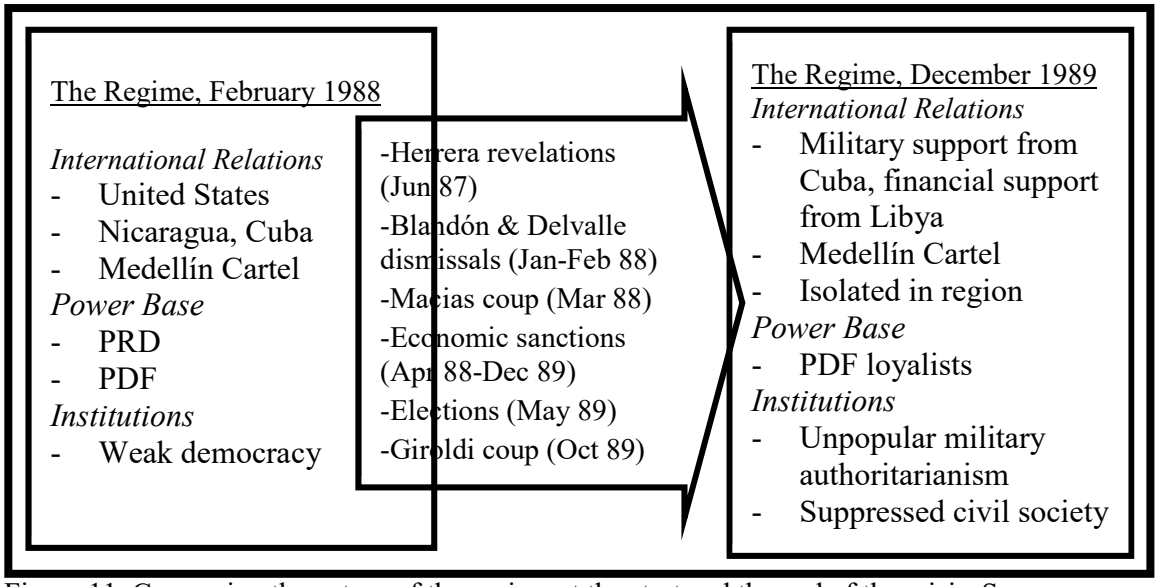

Figure 11. Comparing the nature of the regime at the start and the end of the crisis. Source: Author.

This narrative misses the effects of these activities on the nature of Noriega's regime. Noriega lost the popular legacy he inherited from Torrijos's party when he ousted Blandón and Delvalle, and the ensuing shift to the political left isolated Panama regionally from anyone except Cuba. The purges after Macias's and Girlodi's coups turned the PDF into an elite military oligarchy and led to the creation of the political goon squads of the Dignity Battalions. The sanctions imposed the costs of the US-Noriega confrontation on the Panamanian people. Finally, the May elections ended any veneer of democratic legitimacy.

These developments decreased the challenges for consolidating control and instituting political reforms in the aftermath. By May 1989, Noriega was so unpopular that most of his army would not even vote for him, much less retire to the jungle to carry on a guerilla war. The elections created a government-in-exile with face legitimacy, and the purges created a group of capable officers willing to lead the post-overthrow PF.

The second event requires less explanation. As described above, had the United States failed to respond to Colonel Herrera Hassan's mutiny, it is likely that the military would have

interfered in the Panamanian political settlement. By December 1990, Endara's approval ratings were less than 32%; the government was isolated in a single city with no competing power centers; the country had no history of legitimate governance; and the police force held a monopoly on legitimate violence, an institutional grievance with the administration, and a history of coup-plotting (Herrera Hassan had been selected by the US CIA for one of the abortive attempts to overthrow Noriega). These conditions increased the probability of military coups, or (at minimum) the political demonstration for PF political power that Colonel Herrera Hassan said he intended.[80] The quick and decisive nature of the US response deterred fence-sitters from joining the mutiny and prevented a wider challenge to the Panamanian government. This is, in part, because the need to garrison the Panama Canal and SOUTHCOM headquarters ensured that there was a substantial combat force permanently available. Had it been a different country, those combat forces may have redeployed by the time of Hassan's mutiny.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the actions of the Endara government and the official policy of US non-intervention in the 1994 election ensured that the opposition had viable political grounds to compete. The Clinton administration did not place as high a priority on Latin America as the Bush and Reagan administration had, and Clinton's ambassador was familiar with the PRD from the negotiation of the 1977 Canal Treaty. Therefore, the United States did not take any substantial action to prevent the PRD from organizing or to oppose it in the election. In addition, the success of the 1992 elections justified the expectation that the 1994 elections would be similarly open and transparent. Finally, Endara's electoral reforms ensured both fair ground to compete and supported a multi-party competition. Each of these factors paved the way for a viable opposition political contest. The PRD's victory came as a surprise to US observers, but its systematic efforts to distance itself from its Noriega legacy diminished the potential that it would

[80] Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'état: A Practical Handbook*, revised edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Murillo, 860–861.

return to militarism. In addition, the four-party contest in the 1994 elections ensured that the PRD could not win a majority of the legislature, forcing a compromise government. Had the United States or the Endara administration taken stronger measures to oppose the PRD, such as political support to the Arnulfistas or more vigorous prosecution of corruption during the Noriega era, it could have undermined the legitimacy of the election or shifted the PRD's support to more radical opposition parties.[81]

Implications

The first finding, that the initial attempts to persuade Noriega out of office or indirectly support his removal ended up decisively influencing the post-overthrow environment, has significant implications for current doctrinal concepts of shaping operations. Army doctrine defines a shaping operation as "an operation that establishes conditions for the decisive operation."[82] The Panama case shows an example where pre-intervention efforts created important effects during the phase *after* the decisive operation. While the US leaders did not conceive of them as shaping operations, they effected the environment in ways that both established conditions for the overthrow and its aftermath. In this case, some of these effects were entirely predictable beforehand, including that a failed coup would lead to purges in the officer corps or that an annulled election would give some face legitimacy to the opposition. This leads to the following: Recommendation 1: Future research should attempt to determine if there are consistent trends for how pre-intervention actions can shape conditions after major combat.

Second, the Panama case highlights the value of a detailed stability and governance plan that the United States can execute either as a follow-on operation to regime change or

[81] Scranton, "Consolidation after Imposition: Panama's 1992 Referendum;" Scranton, "Panama's First Post-Transition Election;" George Priestley, "Panama: The Opposition Returns to Power" (North American Congress on Latin America, 2014), accessed January 23, 2018, https://nacla.org/article/panama-opposition-returns-power; Mark P. Sullivan, *Panama-US Relations: Continuing Policy Concerns*, CRS Issue Brief (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 4, 1994).

[82] US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-0: *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 1-12.

independently in the case of regime collapse. The SOUTHCOM staff completed the first version of Blind Logic in March 1988, over a year and a half before they would execute it as Operation Promote Liberty. Simply having the plan on hand allowed the SOUTHCOM staff to rapidly transition to stability operations, even though major assumptions from the plan were obsolete and the circumstances of the overthrow were different than envisioned. Most notably, Blind Logic's assumption that the SOUTHCOM commander would assume military government responsibility for thirty days following regime change ensured that they built a full package of force requirements and organization into the plan. This leads to the second recommendation: Recommendation 2: Combatant Commands should begin detailed planning for stability operations under military authority after regime collapse as early as possible alongside planning for combat operations. This recommendation, if enacted, also has the potential to support recommendation one, above, by providing an operational approach to assess shaping operations against.

Conclusion

Though its tactical outcome was never in doubt, the overthrow of Noriega's regime and the installation of a new, democratic Panamanian government could have easily failed. This monograph has suggested that, considering the operation as a whole, the planners and executors of the operation took several steps that set conditions for a stable security and political environment after the overthrow. These actions, combined with the rapid and flexible initiation of stability operations even before the fighting stopped, kept the post-conflict competition from undermining civil control in Panama or endangering US forces.

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