

A New Statelessness? The Truman Doctrine, the Modern Latin American Mercenary, and the Economic Entrenchment of the Third World

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Abstract During the Cold War, the Truman doctrine guided America towards extensive involvement throughout Latin America. Today, American private security companies recruit heavily from this region, drawing some of the same men who the CIA had covertly trained in the 1970s–1980s to fight in the modern manifestation of other Cold War conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, both American and foreign proxy conflicts continue to expand while relying heavily on Latin American mercenaries, raising important questions on the status of Latin American fighters in the world and their influence on the character of modern warfare.

Keywords Cold war · Third world · Latin America · Iraq · Mercenary · Private military contractor

Introduction

During the Cold War, the USA conducted over a decade of dirty wars in Latin America that produced large numbers of mercenary fighters well trained in tactics of kidnapping, torture, assassination, and guerrilla warfare. Years later, in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, American private military contractors turned to Latin America to hire these experienced mercenary fighters in Iraq to aid in the removal of Saddam Hussein, who came to power as a result of a US-backed coup also during the Cold War. Now, 10 years later, these Latin American mercenaries are more popular than ever in Iraq fighting the fallout of Daesh, which rose from the shell of the Iraqi Baath party. Not only has the Cold War proved to be the source of both the problems and the fighters, but it has potentially set the stage for an economic trap in Latin America.

Despite America's overwhelming involvement in Latin America's political and security climate during the Cold War, one should not assume that the region was highly influential on

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the war itself. During this era, the term *Third World* came into use to refer to countries who either chose not to ally with the USA (*the First World*) or the Soviet Union (*the Second World*), or who were not economically or militarily powerful enough to provide substantive support to either. By and large, these countries were located in Latin America and Africa, which generally corresponds to countries that have experienced either delayed economic development or ongoing or repeated economic crises that have disrupted their development.

The continued reliance on Latin American mercenaries to fight American wars reflects a complicated political dynamic between the USA and the region. Latin America is certainly justified in feeling resentment (Dorfman 2016) towards the bloody history of coups, death squads, and guerrilla rebel militias that the USA sowed throughout the region, and the continued presence and encouragement of a new generation of mercenaries are undoubtedly a source of concern and arguably salt in the wounds to countries trying to move forward. Rather than facing consequences for their abuses, people see Pinochet's former military officers, or torturers, or kidnappers being well paid, flourishing, and training a new generation of themselves under American private-security companies. Moreover, the inability of Latin American countries to stop this practice further emphasizes their political and economic weakness in the world arena, deepening the third-world lines drawn up decades ago during the Cold War.

As men continue to pour into the Gulf, guns in hand, in search of better wages, with disregard for the betrayal to their countries' brutal history, one must question whether it will ever be possible for them to return home. There is arguably an air of mistrust around the concept of *mercenary*, regardless of the country of origin or destination, which increases the difficulties such men encounter in permanently settling in any new place. And yet, this history that they so openly violate and the present that they so clearly defy as their home countries unsuccessfully attempt to terminate the recruitment activities of private military contractors raises the question of whether they will be able to return.

In addition, in particular in the Gulf, we have seen the rise of proxy wars with governments such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and others sending fighters into Yemen, Syria, or Iraq to fight on their behalf. Evidence is coming to light that actors in these proxy wars are beginning to rely on private militias of well-paid mercenaries, as well as that some of these exorbitantly wealthy nations, such as United Arab Emirates, are commissioning private militias that consist almost entirely of Latin Americans. To better understand this phenomenon of the growing use of Latin American mercenaries in contemporary wars, particularly in the Middle East, we must first ask: Why Latin America? Although mercenaries can and do come from many other countries worldwide, Latin American countries have been the source of an overwhelming number of mercenaries in association with American-operated private military companies and now with Middle Eastern proxy wars such as in Yemen. Not only must one question the background and qualifications of these men and their countries of origin as reasons for their initial popularity, one must also wonder about their characteristics as mercenaries, which may create a new class of world citizen and in turn lend a new character to modern warfare. Given the questionability of settlement abroad and returning home, combined with the possibility of perpetual engagement in proxy wars for the foreseeable future and the abbreviated life spans of mercenary fighters, is it possible that the Cold War has contributed to a new era of statelessness for the modern Latin American mercenary? Moreover, is this statelessness in turn a factor in the rise of prolonged, brutal proxy warfare in the Gulf states?

Setting the Stage: The Truman Doctrine in The Gulf and Latin America

The Truman doctrine arose from a speech given by US President Harry S. Truman on March 12, 1947 (President 1947) at the outset of the Cold War. In this speech, President Truman called for the active US military, diplomatic, and economic involvement in limiting Soviet expansionism by aiding Greece and Turkey in their fight against internal Communist resistance movements. This speech marked not only the beginning of the Cold War, but also a new era in American foreign policy that would come to be characterized by widespread American military presence, covert intelligence operations, and interference with foreign governments and state sovereignty all the way from Latin America to the Persian Gulf and further to the East China Sea.

The 1970s and 1980s were a time of intense activity in Latin America. As in Iraq, the CIA was heavily involved in supporting and even at times participating in coups to remove leadership that they viewed as being Communist-leaning. In Nicaragua, the USA illegally funneled money from guns smuggled through Israel to an arms-embargoed Iran to the Contras, a rebel group that they were backing in opposition to the left-wing Sandinista junta. In Panama, the Bush administration overlooked Noriega's illicit dealings in drug trafficking and money laundering because he provided intelligence on other governments of interest, yet ultimately invaded Panama when the situation became untenable.

In Honduras, the CIA trained the infamous Battalion 3–16 in the art of the death squad to support their activities in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Tactics of guerrilla warfare were taught, along with training in torture, kidnapping, assassination, and other military activities associated with war crimes and human rights violations (The Truth America Owes Honduras 1996). In the 1970s, Argentina fought its own so-called Dirty War against communism that utilized death squads and tactics of disappearances and extreme violence to remove suspected revolutionaries. These human rights abuses were committed with the knowledge and sanction of US officials, including Henry Kissinger, who approved of Argentina's mission to remove Communist subversion in their country at any cost (Kissinger to Argentines on Dirty War: 'The Quicker You Succeed the Better' 2003). The lack of US consideration for human rights relative to politics in Latin America in this era was also abundantly clear in Chile, where a 1973 coup removed the popularly elected Allende government and installed General Pinochet. From the beginning, Pinochet's rule was marred by reports of disappearances, torture, murder, and other human rights abuses and signs of corruption (Kandell 2006).

For over a decade, the USA personally trained and supported the training of private militias and mercenaries in Latin America. After Korea and, presumably, Vietnam, it became clear that Cold War-era resistance would come in the form of guerrilla resistance and, thus, counterresistance must be trained in the same style of warfare or, to avoid heavily engaged warfare, through covertly backed coups. However, CIA- and Pinochet-backed fighters were well versed not just in low-intensity warfare, but also in exceptionally brutal tactics with little consideration for human rights.

Years later, America's Cold War actions in the Gulf also came to fruition, as the Iraqi Ba'ath party led by Saddam Hussein became one of the most brutal in the region, not only during the extremely bloody Iran–Iraq war and the aggressive invasion of Kuwait, but also by openly engaging in genocide and chemical warfare against Iraq's on the Kurdish population. In 2003, the USA made the decision to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power, a leader who quite possibly would not have achieved his status without the US-backed coup of the Cold War era that removed the Communist-friendly Qasim and brought the Ba'ath party to

power. To make matters more interesting, this war delivered America's conventional fighting forces an unexpected challenge: an insurgency and asymmetric style of warfare fought among the Iraqi people, which led to high civilian casualty rates and resounding resentment towards American presence that, combined with inadequacy of strategy and command, complicated and prolonged the war itself. To supplement its forces and security teams on the ground against insurgents using tactics, such as small attacks with light arms and bombs, including suicide bombings, US forces turned to private security companies, who in turn looked to Latin America to recruit mercenaries willing to fight. Many of these Latin American mercenaries were initially trained by the CIA during the Cold War (or were in turn trained by those who were). Thus, America was supplied with a multigenerational self-fulfilling security force and cyclical problems all arising from Cold War-era actions: when invading Iraq to deal with the problem of the Ba'ath party, US forces looked to mercenaries trained by the CIA during the same political era.

The Big Three

There is a significant number of private military contractors active in Iraq, but three in particular stand out above the rest and, together, they shared one of the primary contracts in Iraq after the 2003 invasion: Blackwater (which later came to be known as Xe Services, then Academi due to legal and PR concerns), Dyncorp, and Triple Canopy.¹ All three of these companies have recruited heavily from Latin America. Blackwater, founded by Erik Prince in 1997, operates numerous subsidiaries, including one called ID Systems,² which is incorporated in Panama and headquartered in Colombia. ID systems cooperates directly with the Colombian army for training and recruitment, often to the ire of the Colombian government (Falconer and Schulman 2008). Dyncorp is also highly active in Latin America. With over \$3.4 billion in revenue each year and well over 10,000 employees, Dyncorp not only recruits heavily in the region, but has also been employed by local governments. In the early 2000s, Dyncorp was hired in Colombia to fight rebel groups, while in Peru, they have been hired for various anti-drug missions (McKenna and Johnson 2012; Gomez Del Prado 2010). However, Latin American countries hiring mercenaries for this type of work beg the question of whether this would be necessary if all were foreign private military companies not draining the continent of qualified men trained in military operations who might otherwise be employed in their own country's military, law enforcement, or other security infrastructure.

Triple Canopy, which takes its name from the jungle guerrilla training it markets itself as providing, is also known for having a highly visible presence in Central and Latin America. In Iraq, Triple Canopy is known for bringing in the largest number of non-American mercenary fighters (Goodman 2009) with the bulk of its forces coming from Uganda and Peru.³ Honduras, however, is the seat of some of its most controversial activities. Your Solutions, a subsidiary of Triple Canopy, had set up the base of its operations at a former CIA Battalion 3–16 training facility where they collaborated with former Pinochet military officers and Argentines with experience in the country's dirty wars to train a new Honduran unit to carry out political assassinations and torture of their opponents during the 1980s (Rohter 1995). In

¹ In 2014, Triple Canopy and Blackwater merged, forming a new company under the name Constellis Group.

² Technically, a subsidiary of Greystone, another subsidiary of Blackwater, thus a subsidiary twice removed.

³ McKenna and Johnson. A Look At The World's Most Powerful Mercenary Armies.

2005, Your Solutions trained 105 Chileans at this site, who they had brought to Honduras on tourist visas. The Honduran government labor and security ministries alleged that the company was not legally registered and gave them 72 h to leave the country. However, the Nicaraguans would not allow the Chileans across the border. When Your Solutions found itself unable to leave, it appealed to the Honduran government for an extension, which it received (from September 20 to October 7), along with a small fine of \$430 plus \$75 per Chilean trainee it had brought into the country. Honduras could not force them to leave sooner, as it could not afford the cost of tickets to expel them. The Honduran government then appealed to the government of Chile for a plane on which it could deport its citizens; however, the request was ignored (Hynds 2005). The Honduran government then found itself in the essentially powerless position of being unable to afford the costs of expelling Your Solutions from the country. Your Solutions ultimately did not leave Honduras in 2005, staying on with its trainees near Tegucigalpa.

The case of Your Solutions in Honduras is unfortunately representative of how many private military companies operate in South America. At times, local laws enable this inequality in power dynamics. For example, in Colombia, private contractors enjoy the same diplomatic immunity as members of the US embassy, which exempts them from national laws and investigation by the government (Capdevila 2008). Not only does this carry implications for the relations between the American companies, the nature of mercenary work and the history of those training them, and current government power and stability, but it can also have direct effects on the local community and economy. In Colombia, for example, private security companies are frequently hired by foreign companies that operate in resource extraction, in particular of oil and in mining facilities. These activities often take place on indigenous or community-owned lands, and private-security companies have been known to block local access not only to the lands, but even basic access to water supplies that may be located on them.⁴

Other countries demonstrate less enabling policies, yet private military companies operate despite opposition from the government. In Honduras, for example, despite vocal resistance from the government, US private military companies have reached profitable agreements with the local militaries for training and recruitment, sometimes even recruiting from active military staff (Uco 2005). The same deals have been achieved in Peru, in addition to deals with the Peruvian government, which has directly provided mercenaries to some of these companies.⁵

These problems suggest a much larger overall trend, not only of possible significant internal divisions growing between governments and their militaries, along with internal private militia-training contingencies being kept active within these countries' borders (and perhaps even militias remaining active themselves). Moreover, the drain of mercenaries by private American companies and the blatantly undiplomatic power dynamics at play raise the issue of third world lines becoming even more deeply entrenched in the era of globalization. In Latin America, not only are many of these countries having their sovereignty and history disrespected and superseded, it is being blatantly done at the hands of a corporation without so much as the thinly veiled machinations of state diplomacy from eras past. Not only are American private military companies draining Latin America of mercenaries that their own government trained decades ago to counter the contemporary fallout of mistakes made in other places during those same decades, but even on its own territory, the USA looks to Latin

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

America as an unlimited source of affordable migrant labor. Meanwhile, China has in many ways begun treating the continent as an economic colony, even more so since the start of its Go Global initiative in 2005.⁶ It can and has been argued many times that extractive colonization policies, as it appears have been in place here for some time on various levels, lead to depressed economic development.⁷ It could thus be argued that this current attitude of stronger, wealthier governments towards this region is impeding its domestic development, which in turn is likely fueling the movement of labor migrants, including men willing to be recruited by these private security corporations, regardless of the long-term effect on their home countries.

Why Latin America?

It would be an oversimplification to explain Latin America as the source of such a large number of mercenaries by simply pointing to the Cold War and third world lines of economic development, or that recruitment numbers for the US military are low and getting lower.⁸ In fact, there are also significant cultural and tactical components to why American contractors seek to recruit from places like Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama.

Overall, in 2011, 11.4% of the active-duty US military was Hispanic and in 2013, 16.9% of new recruits were Hispanic (Sanchez 2013). A count from 2008 puts the percentage of Hispanics in the US army at 25%, while Latin America accounts for about 40% of US military training programs worldwide (Stoner 2008). By looking to Latin America, recruiters are able to find not only fighters who speak a common language, Spanish, with a significant part of the active American troops on the ground. Moreover, it is felt that Latin American mercenaries mix better culturally with not just soldiers of Hispanic descent, but Western troops as a whole compared to mercenaries from places like Uganda or Sudan.⁹

For recruiters, however, there is yet another draw. As with much of the blue-collar labor migration from Latin America to the USA, hired guns from Colombia, Peru, El Salvador, and elsewhere are willing to work for lower wages than their American peers. While the US government pays private firms \$500–1500 per day for American mercenaries, for a yearly salary in the range of \$150,000–250,000 per year, their Latin American equivalents typically earn around \$1000 per month, sometimes less,¹⁰ a salary roughly equivalent to an hourly wage

⁶ See, e.g., The Chinese Chequebook (2015 May 23). Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21651889-latin-america-needs-be-more-hard-headed-its-big-new-partner-chinese-chequebook>; The Dragon and the Gringo (2015 Jan. 17). Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21639549-latin-americas-shifting-geopolitics-dragon-and-gringo>; Pacific Pumas (2014 Nov. 15). Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21631801-americas-backyard-pacific-economies-are-learning-east-asia-pacific-pumas>.

⁷ See, e.g., Acemoglu, D; Johnson, S; and Robinson, J.A. (2001) The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation. *American Economic Review* 91(5), 1369–1401.

⁸ “As dimwitted as American teenagers are,” explains a Mexican–American army recruiter in Pomona, California, “they’re not stupid enough to fall for the crap we’re selling to get them to go to Iraq or Afghanistan. Don’t quote me.” [Landau, S. (2006 March–April) Latino Mercenaries for Bush. Retrieved from <https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/latino-mercenaries-for-bush-saul-landau>.]

⁹ McKenna and Johnson. A Look At The World’s Most Powerful Mercenary Armies; Mazzetti, M and Hager, E.B. (2011 May 14), Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater’s Founder. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/world/middleeast/15prince.html>.

¹⁰ Falconer and Schulman. Blackwater’s World of Warcraft.

of \$5.75, which is significantly lower than the current US minimum wage of \$7.25.¹¹ Many of these men work in order to send remittances back to their home countries, with some reporting sending as much as 90% of their earnings back to their families.¹² In addition, while US fighters are deployed for 90-day rotations, it is not uncommon for recruits from Latin America to remain on active duty for as long as a year without relief.¹³ However, for most Latin Americans, despite the more stressful rotations and unequal pay, mercenary work still provides significantly higher income than they could expect to earn in their home countries; so, they are willing to accept the wage gap.

Despite the prevailing acceptance of this situation on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, many Latin American recruits do not sign on with US private military companies expecting such unequal treatment. Many are in fact promised high-paying contracts up front that later fail to materialize, often after it is too late for recruits to back out. For example, Blackwater is known for having recruited a number of Colombians via its subsidiary ID Systems by promising them \$4000 per month for security work (not combat work) in Iraq. Several months after their recruitment and a brief refresher course on light arms, these men were called and asked to assemble at ID systems offices, where they were handed contracts and told to pack and come to the airport in 4 h to leave for Iraq. At that time, they were told they would be earning \$2700 per month, not \$4000, but they agreed anyway, as the salary is still substantial for Colombians. However, the contract they were given, which several of the men did not read until they were already on the plane, instead set the salary at \$1000 per month. Once on the ground in Baghdad, the men expressed anger at the 75% decrease in expected salary. They composed letters of complaint to ID Systems, its parent company Greystone, and Greystone's parent company Blackwater, demanding either a raise in pay or return tickets to Bogota. It took a full 3 months for the company to respond to the men's demands, and only then after reports of the scandal appeared in Colombia's most widely distributed news magazine, *Semana*. Ultimately, the men were provided with tickets home, and Blackwater continued to insist that the men had full advance knowledge of the changes in the terms of the contract.¹⁴

Truly, the demand for competitively cheap recruits seemed to know no bounds, as a Chilean businessman seeking to establish his on recruitment agency to supply private contractors was ultimately driven out of business by his provision of fair wages. Jose Miguel Pizarro ran a company called Grupo Tactico that was based in Santiago, though incorporated in Uruguay in order to circumvent Chile's laws restricting paramilitary activity. He began his recruitment activities with newspaper ads offering \$3000 per month and received over 1000 applications, some even from active Chilean military officers. Blackwater was instantly interested in his top recruits, and a relationship began by which Pizarro served as an intermediary for the local paramilitary scene and outside contractors including the big three: Blackwater, DynCorp, and Triple Canopy. At Grupo Tactico's peak, Pizarro was receiving a monthly fee of \$4500 per recruit from contractors, of which his recruits received \$3200. Ultimately, however, Pizarro was eventually driven out of business and wages for Chilean recruits leveled off to the regional standard as it became easier to find recruits from other Latin American countries willing to

¹¹ Uco. Latin American Mercenaries Guarding Baghdad's Green Zone.

¹² Falconer and Schulman. Blackwater's World of Warcraft.

¹³ Uco. Latin American Mercenaries Guarding Baghdad's Green Zone.

¹⁴ Falconer and Schulman. Blackwater's World of Warcraft; Paez, A. (2007 Nov. 6). Peru-Iraq: A Year in Hell for 1000 Dollars a Month. Retrieved from <http://www.ipsnews.net/2007/11/peru-iraq-a-year-in-hell-for-1000-dollars-a-month/>.

deploy for less. With some mercenaries willing to work for as little as \$700 per month, foreign contractors could hire five Colombians for the price of one Chilean.¹⁵

These scandals are but a couple of the many violations of Latin American recruits' labor rights. The UN Working Group has reported on widespread inequities, including "irregularities in contracts, harsh working conditions with excessive working hours, wages partially paid or unpaid, ill-treatment and isolation, and lack of basic necessities such as medical treatment and sanitation."¹⁶ As the Iraq war has dragged on, reports have continued to trickle in of Latin Americans recruited to work in Iraq's Green Zone, only to arrive in country to find themselves being sent to the Red Zone.¹⁷ Others have often found themselves without adequate access to health care or options for personal leave.¹⁸

All of these problems are compounded by a lack of opportunities for legal recourse, which is built into the structures of the private military corporations. As discussed above, many of these companies are composed of subsidiaries within subsidiaries; others, like Blackwater, have changed their names often to escape public infamy and carefully hedge contracts to avoid technical liability while providing little to no support for the immensely stressful and taxing work for which they are often paying below the American minimum wage. Moreover, it is not uncommon for companies like Jose Pizarro's Grupo Tactico, based in Chile but incorporated in Uruguay, or ID Systems, a subsidiary of Virginia-headquartered Blackwater that is headquartered in Colombia yet incorporated in less-restrictive Panama, to split up their legal and operational bases in order to skirt legal recourse from the countries in which they operate and from the men that they hire.

All of this further emphasizes issues raised in previous sections regarding the economic entrenchment not merely of the type of men hired for this work, but also of Latin America as a whole. While there have been highly vocal labor rights groups active in the USA lobbying for better treatment of labor migrants, both with and without legal documentation, mercenaries working for private military corporations in places like Iraq and Afghanistan hardly have the same even minimal societal protection and visibility of community support that typical labor migrants receive from both their home and host countries. To make matters more complex, perhaps the leading factor in recruitment from Latin America is the extensive military experience that private military companies are able to find among recruits. Not only have there been decades of civil wars, but the USA itself was heavily involved covertly training battalions of guerrilla fighters in extraordinarily brutal tactics, including kidnapping, torture, and assassination methods. This particular skillset has proved to be exceptionally valuable in Iraq, where the insurgency that developed in the 2000s has shifted the situation in the country to one of asymmetric warfare, where anywhere can be a battlefield and light arms are favored over conventional industrial weaponry, in particular the cheap, ubiquitous, and durable AK-47 and bombings, both suicide and otherwise. Above all, insurgent attacks in Iraq focus heavily on soft targets and conduct war amidst the population, with fighters embedding themselves among civilians to both confuse and control the tactical situation in battle and to raise the risk of civilian casualties. With their history of bloody, brutal, guerrilla warfare, Latin American recruits are extremely well suited to adapting to these environmental conditions. In fact, many

¹⁵ Falconer and Schulman. *Blackwater's World of Warcraft*.

¹⁶ Human Rights Council. Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 Entitled 'Human Rights Council' Chairperson: Ms. Amada Benavides De Pérez Addendum Mission to Honduras A/HRC/4/42/Add.1. (2007 Feb. 7) Retrieved from http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=12,900.

¹⁷ Stoner. *Outsourcing the Iraq War: Mercenary Recruiters Turn to Latin America*.

¹⁸ Uco. *Latin American Mercenaries Guarding Baghdad's Green Zone*.

private companies seem to maintain a policy of the more brutal the better; the recruitment of former Pinochet military officers and known torturers, kidnappers, and death-squad members for both fighting and training new recruits has become notorious and widely reported on in Latin American newspapers.¹⁹ While the American private military corporations certainly have no excuse for abusing the rights of the Latin American mercenaries in their employ, nor for creating divisions within their ranks based on national origin or ethnicity,²⁰ the nature of mercenary work and the backgrounds of the soldiers themselves is no doubt a contributing factor in the lack of ardent lobbying on their behalf for improved working conditions.

Beyond Iraq: Private Militias and Proxy Wars

This guerrilla soldier background, the brutal training, the perceived ability to kidnap and torture with impunity, which is so feared and openly contested in Latin America and so highly sought after by American contractors, has also caught the attention of some of the wealthiest nations surrounding Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2011, the United Arab Emirates commissioned Erik Prince, founder of Blackwater, to build them a private army. Their preferred soldier: Colombian. For \$529 million, the United Arab Emirates received a well-trained private militia of 800 Colombians who were snuck into the country disguised as construction workers.²¹ However, the size of the militia has grown since its initial creation. In fact, since the project began, the United Arab Emirates has trained so many Colombians that the Colombian government attempted to directly broker a deal with the Emirati government in order to limit the huge outpouring of hired guns flowing out of the country (Hager and Mazzetti 2010). There are documents showing that, at the time of commissioning, the forces were nominally intended to be used to carry out primarily domestic special operations missions (though they may also be used outside the country), such as defending oil and gas pipelines and other infrastructure from terrorist attacks, as well as suppressing internal revolts. Presumably, the country was concerned not merely about the spread of terrorist threats in the region, but also the growing number of pro-democracy demonstrations and Arab Spring revolutions appearing throughout the Middle East and North Africa.²²

For the United Arab Emirates, the introduction of mercenaries into the Gulf created an opportunity to build a private army non-native to the region, with no investment in local politics that they could expect to have primary loyalty to their paychecks. Unlike American private security companies, the United Arab Emirates pays its Colombian private militia well: \$2000–3000 per month, much better than the approximately \$400 per month many of them could expect in their home country.²³ The first external deployment of this private militia was in November 2015 to the civil war in Yemen, which has expanded into an increasingly volatile and bloody proxy war with Sunni states like the Emirates, Saudis, and Qatar backing the Yemenite government, while Iran backs the Zaidi Shia Houthi resistance. While the UAE has reportedly deployed 450 mercenaries, primarily Colombians, but also Panamanians,

¹⁹ Landau. Latino Mercenaries for Bush.

²⁰ It should be further noted that Iraqi nationals hired by these same companies earn an average \$150 per month. That's approximately 1/10th of what Latin American and other so-called "third-country nationals" are paid, and around 1/100th of what their American counterparts are paid. [The Baghdad Boom. (2004 March 27). Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/2539816>.]

²¹ Mazzetti and Hager. Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder.

²² Mazzetti and Hager. Secret Desert Force Set Up by Blackwater's Founder.

²³ Hager and Mazzetti. Emirates Secretly Sends Colombian Mercenaries to Yemen Fight.

Salvadorans, and Chileans, other governments in the region are also reportedly revealing mercenary forces of their own. Saudi Arabia, for example, has recruited hundreds of Sudanese to join their coalition in Yemen, and a recent UN report alleges that some 400 Eritrean troops may be joining UAE soldiers in Yemen. If true, the latter would mean that the United Arab Emirates may violate a UN resolution that restricts Eritrean military activities following decades of extremely violent civil war that split the country from Ethiopia (Fitzgerald 2015).

The war in Yemen is an excellent microcosm that demonstrates the potential future of the modern Latin American mercenary. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have dragged on for over a decade and the recent emergence of Daesh from what remained of the Iraqi Ba'ath party (in connection with the sprawling proxy war that grew out of the Syrian civil war and follows largely the same divisions and patterns as the war in Yemen) have kept the mercenary business growing and expanding at an alarming rate. As the proxy wars in Syria and Yemen, not to mention Libya, have similarly grown and expanded in connection with these conflicts, we have seen rivalry between regional powers that begin to manifest through interference with localized conflicts. This regional competition has no doubt been exacerbated by prolonged uncertainty over whether and when the US military will finally and fully withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan, in addition to nuclear negotiations with Iran. Not only is Iran positioned to be a highly influential and fairly unpredictable state that could tip the balance of power in the region, but it has arguably the most powerful military complex in the Gulf. Its IRGC and Quds forces have been heavily involved in Iraq since the early appearance of Daesh, and its growing partnership with China has already led it to increase its security frontiers into Central Asia and Afghanistan (Tiezzi 2014), all before nuclear negotiations were completed and sanctions formally removed. Undoubtedly, when the United Arab Emirates was assembling its private militia, it was also thinking of its ability to contend militarily in the region and the need for a force that could not only function in today's shifting climate of covert operations and proxy wars, but also perhaps contend with the thuggish tactics of Iran's Quds forces and the overwhelming strength and authority of the IRGC. In this case, the employment of a mercenary force allowed for the rapid assembly of a highly competitive fighting force that required no additional training. Moreover, in a region of increasingly unstable alliances and rapidly rising stakes in the global power dynamic, where extensive splintering of military and religion factions has increased over time, retaining a fighting force with allegiance based primarily on pay, rather than politics or identity, has become an increasingly attractive option.

A New Statelessness?

In the context of sprawling regional conflicts that hinge on a precarious balance of power among states, as well as between states and their citizens, the importance of the background and status of mercenaries from Latin America becomes clearer. Regarding the forces themselves, we can see an extremely well trained elite force that is willing and able to function outside the constraints of a modern industrial army and, perhaps, outside the ethical constraints of humanitarian law. These men are willing to work for relatively little financial compensation under stressful and demanding living and working conditions. Moreover, many of them have complicated histories in their home countries that, despite how well they may be paid or how highly their skill set may be valued, could prevent them from returning home. One might easily expect that former Pinochet military officers, participants in Argentina's dirty wars, former members of death squads, or known torturers or kidnappers would hardly be welcome to return home, nor might they desire to do so. For men without this known history of direct involvement in the dirty wars of the Cold War

era, the situation may now be more complex. It is possible that they could return; after all, many of them work in order to send remittances back to their families, so it stands to reason that there may be a desire to go back 1 day. On the other hand, one must question the effect of mercenary status on such a person's social standing within his home country.

Given the divisions developing between militaries and governments concerning dealings with foreign private military companies, as well as their free and willing association with war criminals and former American-trained revolutionaries, one could expect that there may be a negative attitude toward men who left their home countries to work for these same criminals and revolutionaries and the Americans who trained them in the first place. In places where civil–military relations are unstable, returning mercenaries could exacerbate the problem by having an increasing percentage of the civilian population that is better trained in military operations than the local security forces, which could in turn lend itself to an insecure atmosphere in country, raising the risk of coups as well as the potential volatility of any given scenario of popular unrest.

In addition to attitudes in the home country, not only do Latin American mercenaries fighting in the Gulf likely face an abbreviated life expectancy, but they may find it easier socially, especially after the trauma of long exposure to war, to remain in a military environment, particularly when it is far more profitable than employment they could obtain at home. Thus, overall, it is reasonable to expect that a large number of Latin American mercenaries may not ultimately return or intend to return to their home country, either by preference of foreign employment, lack of opportunity due to shortened life expectancy, or by an unwelcome response in their home countries.

While Latin American mercenaries may legally remain citizens of their home countries, if they are unwilling or unable to return home, the question of statelessness begins to emerge. In his work on war-torn societies, Sultan Barakat defines *civil societies* as logically referring to the inhabitants of a particular state in various groupings as distinct from their ruling institutions, including military, ecclesiastical institutions, governing bodies, etc. (Barakat and Chard 2002). Maintaining a mercenary unit allows the military strata within a country to remain separate not only from civil society but also from the governing class, a professional form of statelessness, so to speak. This suits the culture of the war in Yemen, for example, in which the Arab Coalition involves no ground troops of its own, limiting its deployments to extensive aerial bombing campaigns. (Gaudin 2016).

In his study of Colombian mercenaries in Yemen, Andres Gaudin explores the appeal of mercenaries to the Emirates, suggesting that, to Emiratis, where half of the population is composed of foreign laborers, the war in Yemen is not one in which citizens feel personally invested.²⁴ Lack of civilian interest in military service in the Emirates certainly contributes to the ease of maintaining a mercenary force in Emirates. Moreover, for mercenaries in the UAE who serve in Yemen, salaries can reach 6000–7000 USD/month, easily seven to eight times what a retired military officer in Colombia could earn. To those men who survive the exceedingly brutal ground war in Yemen, today characterized by a proliferation of light arms and IEDs and little to no international policing, Emirates has reportedly offered the possibility to transport their families into the country, where they might obtain citizenship and where their children might enroll in university. Should the high risk of fatality prevail, Emirates also provides a life insurance policy to secure the futures of the mercenary's family in their home country.²⁵ While the possibility of granting citizenship and education to a mercenary's family

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

would clearly remove them from any type of stateless status, one must nevertheless question the appeal of such an offer to many families living thousands of miles away, as well as the number of mercenaries who survive to take advantage of the opportunity. Moreover, it is important to note that this offer of citizenship or familial relocation would come only after the completion of a mercenary's military service and not during. During service, a mercenary's status is firmly set as noncitizen and wholly nonintegrated into his host country.

It could be argued then that the modern Latin American mercenary exists in a new form of professional statelessness that is fueled by the current long-term wars and proxy wars, which rely heavily on the type of warfare in which they specialize. Many scholars, such as Geraint Hughes, have argued that the increasing use of mercenaries wars has led to the expansion and escalation of modern wars and the popularization of proxy warfare, including via factors such as greater factionalization due to competition between competing commanders and escalation due to the increased flow of foreign arms into a warring country, greater numbers of ground-troop involvement, and a decreased sensitivity to losses incurred, as the deaths of hired mercenaries are perceived to be less costly than losses among national military forces composed of citizens (Hughes 2014). In other long-term conflicts such as America's involvement in Iraq, the role of private companies in the country has proved to be equally problematic in prolonging warfare and encouraging the use of mercenaries. According to a study by Bjork and Jones, for Iraqi citizens, the line between privatized humanitarian aid and privatized security is heavily blurred, particularly when representatives of both groups are heavily armed and poorly effective at improving the country's infrastructure and safety (Bjork and Jones 2005). Moreover, as Bergen (Bergen 2001) and Byman (Byman 2003) have pointed out that foreign occupation has become a major mobilizing factor for Islamist groups in the Middle East, and the presence of private military contractors, many of whom are heavily armed in a way that is directly reminiscent of the Ba'athist Death Squads that they displaced, drives, and prolongs the conflict on a greater scale. It seems that, in this modern context, not only does the use of mercenaries enable wars to be escalated by foreign powers, but their presence on the ground can at times encourage greater resentment and escalation among the population as well. Under these conditions, it seems likely that, without international intervention, the demand for mercenaries will remain high for the foreseeable future. Moreover, it appears quite likely that their use by wealthy governments is enabling the prolongation of the type of proxy warfare being carried out in the Gulf States, as exemplified by the conflicts in Yemen and Syria.

Conclusion

Proxy conflicts rely on mercenaries precisely because they are noncitizens, and by their very nature do not call the host country that employs them "home" in any cultural or social sense of the word outside of the professional domain. Moreover, this same professional status can alienate hired fighters from their home countries due to the long, bloody histories based in the Cold War; exploitation by economic and military superpowers, in particular the United States, along third-world economic and geopolitical lines; and fear of destabilization upon their return. All of these factors combined have created an environment in which many of these men have no home behind them and no home ahead of them, so long as mercenary status bears decisive influence on ability to settle. In this new era of professional statelessness, home is where the war is.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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Ethical Approval This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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