

Bachelor's project

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Bachelor i historie

Bachelor's project in Bachelor i historie

Supervisor: Michale J Geary

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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

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Abbreviations:

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
DOD: Department of Defense
KIA: Killed in Action
MP: Military Police
NSA: National Security Agency
NSC: National Security Council
OAS: Organization of American States
PDF: Panama Defense Force
SOUTCHOM: Southern Command
UN: United Nations
US: United states
USAF: United States Air Force
USG: United States Government
USSR: Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

1. Introduction:

When the US decided to invade Panama in late 1989 it was a culmination of a deteriorating relationship that would become all too familiar in later US foreign policy history. When President Bush finally put an end to the Noriega regime in Panama, he would broadcast the justification for the operation in a televised speech on the morning of December 20th 1989.

Last Friday, Noriega declared his military dictatorship to be in a state of war with the United States and publicly threatened the lives of Americans in Panama. The very next day, forces under his command shot and killed an unarmed American serviceman; wounded another; arrested and brutally beat a third American serviceman; and then brutally interrogated his wife; threatening her with sexual abuse. That was enough.¹

The significance of this address to the nation and President Bush's actions were to be a defining part of his presidency, having inherited the conflict from the former Reagan administration, Bush would have few other options to deal with the problem except through military action as the conflict escalated at the end of 1989.² The main question this thesis is trying to answer is why the United States invaded Panama in 1989, it also aims to examine both the US and Panamanian perspective on the events leading up to Operation Just Cause. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the US and Panama in the context of the cold war and US involvement in Latin America in the 20th century. Panama being a relatively young nation, only having existed for 86 years by the time of the invasion had been under the United States influence since its independence, this is apparent from the get go by the treaties signed between the countries such as the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty of 1903.³ It's not very hard to understand why the major interest for the US in the region, was the Panama Canal (a man-made canal connecting the Pacific with the Atlantic Ocean).⁴ The main problem for the US administration at the time, was the Carter-Torrijos Treaty granting Panama control over the canal by the year 2000.⁵ Now why had this become such a headache for the US by the late 1980s? The main reason for this was Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, a former intelligence officer who had risen to power after the death of former dictator Omar Torrijos. Noriega had been an important asset to the US in the cold war, giving the Pentagon bases, feeding the CIA intelligence on the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and selling out rivaling narco-traffickers to the DEA.⁶ In this way Noriega was able to serve the US' most narrow and expedient interests all the while gaining more and more power in his native Panama.

¹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 44

² Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 7 and 42

³ Hay, J. & Bunau-Varilla, P. J. (1903) *Convention for the Construction of a Ship Canal (Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty)* Washington, D.C.

⁴ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasion De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 76

⁵ Carter, J & Torrijos, O. (1977) *Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal, with Annexes and Protocol* Washington, D.C.

⁶ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons p. 420

The invasion of Panama is often overlooked or forgotten both in mainstream media and in contemporary education, although it was highly publicized as the events unfolded and was a highly significant event during the Bush administration.⁷ This thesis will also aim to contextualize the events leading up to the operation and the processes going on in both nations at the time of these events. The way the research question will be answered is through the examination of the main events that would in the end lead to military action by the United States against Panama.

1.1 Methodology:

When choosing how to approach the methodology regarding the question asked in the thesis, there is a lot of material to choose from. The press coverage is ample, there are public legal documents from the period showcasing the drug indictments against Manuel Noriega, there are official documents released by the joint chiefs of staff of the US after the operation, etc. The research material in the context of this dissertation will in other words mostly be of a qualitative nature, most of the research done has been done by reading and analyzing books, articles, reports and legal documents pertaining to the research question. When put in the context of a historiographic interpretation this conflict falls within the realm of political history, military history within the cold war and American history.⁸ The methods used in analyzing the data gathered from the source material has consisted of determining what material is significant and what events that are significant. The way this problem has been approached in this thesis has primarily been by looking at what has been deemed significant by the media at the time and what has been deemed significant in the works by Soler (*The Invasion of Panama By the United States: Neocolonialism in the post-cold war era*) and by Kempe (*Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*). Now there are some problems that need to be addressed when primarily depending on secondary sources as a means of understanding an event the likes of the crisis in Panama, but these two works gives the researcher a good understanding of the events unfolding while giving a nuanced perspective of the conflict.

The literature available to researchers on the topic of operation just cause, showcase why these events remain almost forgotten to mainstream public consciousness. The most recently published research done on the subject is Howard M. Hensel and Nelson Michaud's work *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama* published in 2011 covering both quantitatively and qualitatively the media-coverage of the conflict around the world.⁹ The perspectives portrayed are mostly from major actors in the cold war such as the US, the Soviet Union, China, and France it does however also include perspectives in Arabic media and in Portuguese media.¹⁰ The methodology used in the book is diverse, depending on the perspective studied, the methodology adapts. For example, US perspectives are highlighted in the context of the US being a direct actor in the conflict, as such the first chapter covers the rationale for war and how the Bush Administration

⁷ Sosa, J. B. (2020) *Operation Just Cause and Panama: A Pivotal Moment in the Life of a Nation*
Retrieved from: <https://www.georgeandbarbarabush.org/2020/02/operation-just-cause-and-panama-a-pivotal-moment-in-the-life-of-a-nation/>

⁸ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasion De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 76

⁹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 1-7

¹⁰ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 35, 83, 239 and 253

made the decision for military intervention.¹¹ In part two of this chapter the writers present American newspaper coverage of the invasion and major quantitative analysis of how the invasion was covered, how many articles are being written about the invasion, what are the perspectives of the media outlets, when was the invasion frontpage news etc.¹² The book is well written and has several contributors from different institutions, ranging from military schools to civilian professors from different universities.

Most of the other literature presented will be literature more contemporary to the events, the majority of the literature available is written by American writers, and thus often has an Americanized perspective on the events, to better explore the Panamanian perspective of the conflict the use of Ricaurte Soler's book: *The Invasion of Panama By the United States: Neocolonialism in the post-cold war era* has been valuable.¹³ Ricaurte Soler was a well-respected Panamanian Philosopher and professor, the author having seen the invasion firsthand has also influenced this book.¹⁴ The book is well researched bringing forth points about why the US invaded based on cold war neocolonialism and militarism, the conclusions draw focus to the United States unwillingness to honor the Torrijos-Carter agreement (an agreement between the US and Panama to cede the rights to the Panama Canal back to Panama in the year 2000) for fears of losing a militarily strategic key point in the region. The book in its original edition was published in 1991, barely two years after the invasion, so the conclusion may be dated, however the Panamanian perspectives on the events leading up to and during the invasion are still relevant. Lastly, it is critical to understand that the arguments made in this dissertation are a result of examining both primary and secondary sources, although secondary sources are used to gain an understanding of the events, primary sources are used where possible and relevant. In doing so this dissertation aims to produce a conclusion that gives concise answers to why the crisis in Panama happened and what consequences it had immediately and in the long term.

¹¹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 45-46

¹² Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 53

¹³ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores

¹⁴ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 11-12

Chapter 1:

2.1: Introduction

The Iran-Contras affair was one of the largest Presidential scandals in the history of the United States, the affair was a complex ploy by the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and the DOD (Department of Defense) to arm the right wing paramilitary group; the contras through an arms deal with Iran.¹⁵

The purpose of this chapter is not to explain the Iran-Contras Affair in depth, but to better understand why it is significant in the context of Us-Panama relations and why it along with the assassination of political opponent Hugo Spadafora was one of the major reasons for the start of the conflict. The Contras where a right-wing military and political movement that arose after the Nicaraguan revolution in the late 1970s, the revolution had led to a new revolutionary government called the Sandinistas, named after 1930s revolutionary Augusto Cesar Sandino. The Contras where not a homogenous group when they first emerged and consisted mainly of three groups: soldiers and officers from the former military Somoza dictatorship, former Sandinistas disillusioned by the revolution or Nicaraguans who opposed the Sandinistas.¹⁶ At the start of the Nicaraguan civil war the Contras had limited resources for fighting the Sandinista government, to counter this the Contras utilized guerilla warfare, drug trafficking and psychological warfare.¹⁷ At the start of the Contra war this lead to minor operations such as assassinations of political opponents, however by 1985 a major sabotage operation was conducted inside the capital Managua targeting Sandinista military installations. How did the Contra organization manage to gain intelligence and expertise to conduct this operation when it had been mostly unsuccessful in larger operations since the early 1980s? The answer lies with Noriega and Panama. At the time of the incident the CIA had been involved in Nicaragua since the Sandinistas came to power, yet they were outclassed by the only foreign intelligence agency within Nicaragua that had the know how to execute this kind of operation and it belonged to Manuel Noriega.¹⁸

2.2: Main body

To gain favors with the US Noriega gave the CIA the minimum amount of help to gain the maximum amount of political protection in return.¹⁹ Noriega's involvement in Iran contra would come to light later, during the Iran-Contra hearings where principally Oliver North (Deputy Director for political-military affairs assigned to the National Security Council) would mention Noriega during his testimony in-front of the US senate.²⁰ During autumn 1985 the same year as the Contra operation in Managua Noriega was involved in an incident that would mark a major shift in US and Panamanian public opinion, in an event

¹⁵ Tower, J. (1987) *Excerpts from the Tower Commission Report*

Washington, D.C.: Tower Commission Retrieved from: <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/textual/snof/towerboa.pdf>

¹⁶ Gill, T. D. (1989) *Litigation Strategy at the International Court a Case Study of the Nicaraguan v. United States Dispute* Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers p. 204

¹⁷ Kirkpatrick, J. (alias) (1984) *Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare (sanitized by CIA 2010/05/28)* Langley, Virginia: Central Intelligence Agency Article 4 Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86M00886R001300010029-9.pdf>

¹⁸ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons p. 157-158

¹⁹ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons p. 158-159

²⁰ North, O (1986) *Message from Oliver North to John Poindexter, "Iran" August 23, 1986*

White House, Washington D.C. | Retrieved from: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4463973-Document-06-White-House-PROFS-e-mail-message>

known as the Spadafora-Incident. Hugo Spadafora was an interesting character, an educated doctor turned guerilla-fighter turned minister of health in the Panamanian Torrijos government during the 1970s. He would however become disillusioned by what he perceived as the regimes corruption and joined the Nicaraguan Sandinista revolution in the late 1970s.²¹ By the time he returned to Panama in January 1981 it was apparent Noriega was attempting to cease power in Panama, after having openly accused Noriega of being both involved in drug and arms trafficking in front of Omar Torrijos (then leader of Panama) he had cemented himself as an enemy of Noriega.²² Spadafora would become a thorn in Noriega's side when he did a series of radio interviews several months after Torrijos suspicious death (July 1981), publicly stating that Noriega was involved in drug trafficking, blackmail, and extortion all to become Chief of Staff for the PDF (Panama Defense Force). When Noriega eventually became leader of the PDF (and subsequently de-facto leader of Panama) in 1984 Spadafora again took to the ether to spread his message warning the population of what he perceived as a corrupt and tyrannical leader causing Panama and its people great harm. ²³ Spadafora had chosen to exile himself in 1982, having only returned to Panama sporadically to continue his feud with Noriega, by September 1985 he had contacted the United States DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) and felt he had an insurmountable amount of evidence against Noriega. On the morning of September 15th Spadafora tried crossing the border between Panama and Costa Rica only to be detained by Panamanian police. In a phone-call that would later be picked up by the NSA (National Security Agency) between the police and Noriega the dictator indirectly ordered the police officers to kill Spadafora, having said to the local chief of police "what does one do with a dog that has rabies?".²⁴ His body would be found between the border of Panama and Costa Rica brutally tortured, with his head decapitated and missing²⁵ The Spadafora murder was witnessed by several people, he had been publicly arrested, and witnesses had seen him getting tortured by Noriega's violent henchmen as such, it would not be easy for Noriega to cover it up.²⁶

The Spadafora murder was in many ways just a climax to a series of mounting human rights violations conducted by Noriega after taking power, politically motivated murder had become more commonplace after allegations of election fraud after the 1984 election.²⁷ As a means to try and calm the situation and media outrage that followed the Spadafora murder Panamanian President Nicholas Barletta tried to appoint an independent commission to investigate the murder, a decision that would lead to his forced resignation only days later.²⁸ The events and consequences of the Spadafora murder had in other words led to unwanted publicity for the human rights violations

²¹ Zamorano, J (1993) *Panama Murder Trial to Open - -Noriega Among 10 Defendants in 1985 slaying* Seattle, WA: Seattle Times | Retrieved from: <https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19930701&slug=1709007>

²² Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 126-127

²³ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 130

²⁴ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 126

²⁵ Unknow Author (1986) *Army Commander Linked to Drugs, Death and Cuba* New York, NY: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/c69eaf370de9884f907a39efd90337d3>

²⁶ Long, W. R. (1985) *Panama Shaken by Killing of Swashbuckling Doctor* Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times | Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-10-04-mn-4931-story.html>

²⁷ Hersh, S. M. (1986) *Panama Regime Stole Election, U.S. Finds* Washington, D.C.: New York Times News Service | Retrieved from: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1986-06-22-8602140397-story.html>

being perpetrated, and although both the resignation and the murder was being reported in US media and in Panamanian media the USG (United States Government) did not consider actions against Noriega because of the short term results he was producing for them in Nicaragua.²⁹ The Iran-Contra affair however would come to light after a media investigation by the Lebanese magazine Ash-Shiraa revealed a US-Iranian plot to exchange weapons for US hostages.³⁰ The process would however drag on for several years as more information was gathered both by the President Reagan's Tower Commission and the Congressional Committees investigation of the affair. The Contra affair had been necessary for Noriega in large part to curry favor with Washington, as problems in Panama escalated Noriega became more and more willing to give the US more help in the Contra war, even going as far as suggesting murdering the Sandinista leadership.³¹ The Panama-Nicaragua relation would not be public knowledge until 1987, by which point Noriega was falling out of favor with the US as the Reagan administration's foreign policy focus in Latin America had changed from fighting communism to focusing on defeating the drug trade.³²

In June 1987, another scandal rocked US-Panama relations in an event that would be known as "the Herrera crisis". The crisis had its origins in a deal signed between colonel Roberto Diaz Herrera, Manuel Noriega and two other PDF officers signed in 1981. The deal stipulated that Noriega was scheduled to step down in 1987, what happened instead was the forced resignation of Roberto Herrera as chief of staff 1st of June 1987, Noriega then announced he would remain commander of the PDF for another 5 years.³³ Herrera called a press conference the following day, publicly denouncing Noriega, and the crimes committed by the regime, he implied Noriega was implicated in the plane crash that led to Omar Torrijos death in 1981, that the election in 1984 was rigged and that Noriega was responsible for the Spadafora murder in 1985.³⁴ What shocked the Panamanian people was not just the accusations themselves, but the fact that someone from within the regime had made them publicly. The repercussions were large protests in the streets, with tens of thousands of people in large demonstrations, Noriega called in his new special riot police known as the Dobermans, brutally repressing the protests with beating, arresting and detaining protestors.³⁵

The handling of the crisis was seriously detrimental to the relations between the US and Panama and Noriega was falling out of favor rapidly with the Reagan administration, but what was the US response to the Herrera incident? On June 26th, 1987, the Senate voted

²⁸ Unknown Author (1985) *Ardito Barletta's Cabinet Resigns*

Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-09-28-mn-17370-story.html>

²⁹ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 158

³⁰ Cave, G. (1994) *Why Secret 198 US-Iran "Arms for Hostages" Negotiations Failed*

Washington, D.C.: Washington Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.wrmea.org/1994-september-october/why-secret-1986-us-iran-arms-for-hostages-negotiations-failed.html>

³¹ North, O (1986) *Message from Oliver North to John Poindexter, "Iran" August 23, 1986*

White House, Washington D.C. | Retrieved from: <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4463973-Document-06-White-House-PROFS-e-mail-message>

³² United States (1989) *Drugs, Law Enforcement, and Foreign Policy: A report of the Subcommittee on Narcotics, Terrorism and International Operations.*

Washington, D.C.: The Subcommittee p. 79

³³ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*,

Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 14

³⁴ Pastor, R (2001) *Exiting the Whirlpool: US Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean* Boulder, CO: Westview Press p. 204

³⁵ Brennan, B. (1987) *Panama Explodes After Year of Political Tension*

Panama City, Panama: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/a1d4c59192b78255b1ed21aa5fe006cf>

on resolution 239, to give an ultimatum to the government of Panama regarding the lack of democratic processes in the country.³⁶ The resolution was intended to put pressure on Noriega, at the same time, the Reagan administration had started looking at ways to oust Noriega from power and saw any alternative as favorable over Noriega.³⁷ As a way to get Noriega to step down and instigate proper democratic principle according to the Panamanian constitution, the Reagan administration would start negotiations with Noriega through the Panamanian consul in New York; José Blandon.³⁸ By October 1987 he had drawn up the Blandon Plan, as a way of giving Noriega a chance to step down at a date of his choice, but no later than the first week of April 1988. The US Senate would however go out of its way in late 1987 to enact a bill stating that:

1. The government of Panama has demonstrated substantial progress in efforts to assure civilian control of the armed forces and that the PDF and its leaders have been removed from non-military activities and institutions.
2. Freedom of the press and other constitutional guarantees, including due process of law, are restored to the Panamanian people.
3. A satisfactory agreement has been reached between the governing authorities and representatives of the opposition forces on conditions for free and fair elections.
4. The Government of Panama is conducting an impartial investigation into allegations of illegal actions by members of the PDF.³⁹

What is of peculiar note is that in the last months of 1987 it was mostly the US Congress that was using formal channels to try to deal with the Panamanian problem, while the White House used a more direct route to Noriega; trying to negotiate with the dictator. Noriega would however turn down all offers in the end, and by December 30th Noriega was confronted by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, David Armitage. Armitage came with a quite strong proposal, saying it was time to 'Step down and be a part of the solution instead of being a part of the problem'.⁴⁰

2.3 Conclusion:

³⁶ Durenberger, D (1987) *Senate Resolution 239, 100th Congress (1987-1988)* Washington, D.C: Congress

³⁷ Scranton, M. E. (1991) *The Noriega Years: US-Panamanian Relations, 1981-1990*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers p.

³⁸ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 118-119

³⁹ D'Amato, A (1988) *A Bill to Restrict United States Assistance for Panama (S.1614)* Washington, D.C.: US Senate

⁴⁰ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 18

By 1987 US Panama relations had already deteriorated due the failed foreign policy of the US, wherein short-term goals and expedient measures were taken to achieve their goals in Central America. It is apparent that Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega was very willing to give the US resources in Nicaragua, in return for relative political safety. It is only when the Iran-Contras affair is leaked that Noriega starts to fall out of favor with the USG (United States Government), due to the Senate seeing that he too has been involved in the scandal. However, the Reagan administration fails to implement actual policy changes on its own, being forced to respond only when Congress acts against Noriega.⁴¹ This is also a significant example of the Reagan administration simply ignoring policy put in place by the Senate and the House of Representatives, just as they had done in regards to the Boland amendment leading up to the Iran-Contra affair.⁴² When the press starts putting pressure on both the White House and Congress neither of them has any option but to act against the Panamanian Government under Noriega, especially when one of Noriega's own men come out against him in public interviews making claims that the regime is corrupt. However, the response had little actual effect in Panama where the regime would use violence in response to protests and political demonstrations. Regarding the political murder of Hugo Spadafora, the US had actual intelligence pinpointing Noriega being involved in the murder, if not outright ordering it.⁴³ When this would lead to the removal of a troublesome president the US would still not act unanimously until yet another crisis would occur. By the time of the Diaz Herrera would publicly speak up against Noriega, the US would still not respond with actual change in policy, it would be only after the massive and violent suppression of the protests that followed that actual policy would be implemented, again not by the executive branch, but by the Senate.⁴⁴ As a conclusion we can discern that initial US response was too slow, too late and too weak to make an actual difference, as a result the regime could claim that the US was using interventionism to further their own political agenda.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the US was not being consistent in its initial response to the Panamanian question and the handling of other similar cases, as he soviets would later point out (after the US invasion), asking questions as to why they let Pinochet in Chile and Stroessner in Paraguay govern for so long if democracy had been so important.⁴⁶ Noriega would exploit this to consolidate more power, seeing his only real obstacle as the US, he would change out the politicians to suit his own needs, and not the people.⁴⁷

Chapter 2:

⁴¹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited p. 18

⁴² Margasak, L. (1988) *Indictment: Conspiracy Developed from Reagans Arms-for Hostages Deals* Washington, D.C: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/9b4508fc1ab35d918191dc360f00eda3>

⁴³ Long, W. R. (1985) *Panama Shaken by Killing of Swashbuckling Doctor* Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times | Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-10-04-mn-4931-story.html>

⁴⁴ D'Amato, A (1988) *A Bill to Restrict United States Assistance for Panama (S.1614)* Washington, D.C.: US Senate

⁴⁵ Mabry, D. J. (1991) *Panamas Policy Toward the United States: Living with Big Brother*, in *Operation Just cause: The US intervention in Panama*, Edited by Bruce W. Watson and Peter Tsouras. Boulder CO: Westview Press p. 12

⁴⁶ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 119

⁴⁷ Long, W. R (1985) *New Panama President Replaces Ardito Barletta* Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times | Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-09-29-mn-18701-story.html>

3.1: Introduction

On February 4th, 1988, two federal grand juries in Florida (one in Tampa Bay and one in Miami) announced indictments against Noriega and 16 associates on accounts of drug smuggling and money laundering. The accusations made against Noriega included accepting bribes from the Medellin cartel, allowing smugglers to use Panama to smuggle Cocaine into the US and conspiracy to smuggle marijuana into the US. ⁴⁸

The indictments were however not a coordinated tactic by the USG and the state of Florida, the USG was at the time divided on how to deal with the problem in Panama, however the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed US SOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command) to make contingency plans for dealing with the situation if things were to become violent.⁴⁹ This marked a significant shift in US foreign policy against Panama, it was becoming evident that political pressure alone would not be enough to deal with the problem. Contingency plans were developed by SOUTHCOM, increasing US troops in Panama to intimidate PDF leaders under Noriega to overthrow him, or if that failed provide a sufficient force to invade Panama and overthrow the PDF if the opportunity were to arise. ⁵⁰ The main goal of the contingency plan was to safeguard US citizens in Panama either through evacuation or direct protection and to establish a plan to assist any government that may replace Noriega's. ⁵¹ On February 25th, 1988, then President of Panama Eric Arturo Delvalle made an announcement to the Panamanian people dismissing General Noriega from his position as commander of the PDF. ⁵² He named Colonel Marcos Justines as his successor, the reasoning for this was mainly to create a constitutional crisis to force the national assembly to act against Noriega.⁵³ However, when Justines declined Delvalle's offer and on February 26th the national assembly voted to oust the President from power and replace him with minister of education Manuel Solis Palma.⁵⁴ This event clearly shows the power Noriega and the military had over the political processes going on in Panama, it had gotten to the point that presidents during the Noriega regime were known as "Kleenex Presidents" for their disposability. ⁵⁵

3.2: Main Body

⁴⁸ The New York Times (1990) *Noriega's Surrender Indictments: Drug Importing Charges*
New York, NY: New York Times

⁴⁹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*
Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 7

⁵⁰ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*
Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 7

⁵¹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*
Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 7

⁵² Fitzwater, M (1988) *Statement by Assistant to the President for Press Relations Fitzwater on General Manuel Noriega of Panama* Washington, D.C.: White House

⁵³ Unknown Author (1988) *Chronology of Events in Panama with PM-Panama*
Panama City, Panama: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/c606918a7a7b84b93bb01c5d7a8bd227>

⁵⁴ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*,
Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 19

⁵⁵ Buckley, K (1991) *Panama the Whole Story*
New York, NY: Touchstone P. 127

Although Delvalle had tried to mobilize both the people of Panama to get international help, few countries other than the US rallied under him. The problem was that Delvalle was perceived as a poor president, this was due to him having acted as Noriega's pawn after the ousting of Barletta in 1985.⁵⁶ As a direct consequence to these events, Panama was de-certified for military and economic aid by the USG under the Anti-Drug Abuse act on the 1st of March 1988.⁵⁷ A significant event as it clearly showed the US would take a stand against the Noriega regime. Delvalle now in hiding saw a last opportunity to make a change and made a statement saying that all financial arrangements made with Noriega's regime would not be recognized as having been made with the government of Panama. The following day Assistant Secretary of State, Elliot Abrams would freeze \$50 million worth of deposits in American banks made by the Panamanian Government, as a direct consequence no government employee's in Panama (except for the PDF) received full pay for the period of March 15th.⁵⁸ Disgruntled with the state of the Panamanian economy teachers and other government employees went on strike, on March 16th Chief of Police Colonel Leonidas Macias lead a failed coup against the Noriega government. In his 1997 biography Noriega would state that the US had been close to the coup leaders from the beginning and that it was a coordinated effort between the CIA and SOUTHCOM in Panama.⁵⁹ When the coup failed the US would again try to negotiate with Noriega to leave on his own, a meeting was set up with two US diplomats: William Walker and Michael Kozak. The meeting was held in a building inside a US army base named Fort Clayton, one of the bases to be turned over to the Panamanians under provisions of the Canal Treaties.⁶⁰ The US diplomats were eager to present a solution where Noriega would leave the country for Spain stating they had a plane "gassed and ready to go" even offering him a medal for his service to the US.⁶¹ Noriega took great insult to the offer and declined it after having had lunch with the men, even after having been offered \$2 million and sanctuary in Spain he would not budge stating that the men had underestimated him.⁶²

The US would put pressure on Noriega through increasing sanctions on Panamanian export, the Noriega regime would in response bypass the sanctions put on military aid by purchasing weapons from Cuba.⁶³ The effects of the sanctions were however devastating for the Panamanian economy, causing a recession, high unemployment, and lack of market for many agricultural items such as sugar, now in essence being over produced⁶⁴ The regimes response was in large part to try to make the country as self-sufficient as possible within the means it could. Since the US discouraged trading with

⁵⁶ Long, W. R. (1985) *New Panama President Replaces Ardito Barletta*
Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Times | Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-09-29-mn-18701-story.html>

⁵⁷ Leich, M. L. (1988) *American Journal of international Law*
Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press P. 566-579

⁵⁸ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*,
Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 20

⁵⁹ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega Americas Prisoner*
New York, N.Y.: Random House New York p. 126

⁶⁰ Torrijos, O. & Carter, J. (1977) *Treaty Concerning the Permanent Neutrality and Operation of the Panama Canal*
Washington D.C.: US State Department and Panamanian Government under Omar Torrijos Article V

⁶¹ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner*
New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 128

⁶² Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner*
New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 128

⁶³ Unknow Author (1988) *Defector Pilot Says Noriega Stockpiling Cuban Weapons*
Washington, D.C.: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/34285aef95bcec960f92471f1321fd67>

⁶⁴ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner*
New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 134

Panama to its allies in the west and in Asia, Panama largely turned to the other side of the cold war, establishing ties to Libya, North Korea, the Soviet Union, and other Warsaw Pact nations.⁶⁵ These acts further escalated the conflict, as the US viewed Panama as becoming a new Cuba in its backyard. By late May tensions were even being felt within the White House, the first public dispute between President Reagan and Vice-President Bush had surfaced after Reagan had proposed negotiating for a trade of the US drug indictments for the dictator's resignation.⁶⁶ Bush however was dependent on coming out on top of the US presidential election that year, and his aides had convinced him it would be political suicide to go soft on the "drug dictator".⁶⁷ As negotiations continued the dictator and Reagan's star boy Michael Kozak would finally reach an agreement where Noriega would step down on August 12th, 1988, however Noriega did not give a clear answer as to when he would leave the country.⁶⁸ Noriega has confirmed the possibility for this scenario in his biography stating the reason to be him "growing weary of all the pressure".⁶⁹ The reason for the negotiations failure would however be the timing of current events, on May 25th Noriega was given a deadline, the reason was twofold, Reagan wanted to have a political answer to Gorbachev's call for perestroika with "making peace in Latin America" as his example, and the Republicans election was coming up at the end of autumn 1988.⁷⁰ The ultimatum presented was all or nothing, head negotiator Michael Kozak where to pull the entire deal if the general had not agreed within the day. Noriega stalled as was typical of him when it came time to make decisions, he would however make a proposal to sign the deal that day if he could implement it in two weeks.⁷¹ Reagan was on his way to Finland for the Moscow summit at the time, in his place Acting Secretary of State Michael Armacost was talking to the negotiators, in Armacost's mind the situation had become too hot to handle politically, and his distrust for Noriega's sincerity led him to call off the deal without asking Reagan.⁷² To avoid any more political problems for the Republicans presidential campaign the Panamanian matter would-be put-on hold for the next six months.⁷³ Giving Noriega peace-of-mind to prepare for the next years Panamanian election.

The major actions for the rest of the year would be what the Panamanians perceived as US aggression through US military exercises on Panamanian soil, waters and airspace, the Panamanian response was to detain US troops, seize military equipment or stop the delivery of mail to the bases.⁷⁴⁷⁵ The way the entire debacle was handled by Washington could be an interesting case study in and of itself on the executive branches foreign

⁶⁵ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 135

⁶⁶ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 308

⁶⁷ Sosa, J. B. (2020) *Operation Just Cause and Panama: A Pivotal Moment in the Life of a Nation* Retrieved from: <https://www.georgeandbarbarabush.org/2020/02/operation-just-cause-and-panama-a-pivotal-moment-in-the-life-of-a-nation/>

⁶⁸ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 320-321

⁶⁹ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P.137

⁷⁰ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P.138

⁷¹ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 330

⁷² Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 330

⁷³ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 332

policy in election years, wherein national security interests come second to that of the results of the Presidential elections. When George H. W. Bush won the 1988 election, it was apparent that the Panamanian question would be a defining part of his presidency stating that "The days of the dictator is over" during his inaugural speech.⁷⁶ At end of 1988 the US was conducting covert operations in Panama, setting up radio stations to manipulate the Panamanian elections scheduled for May 1989, this came to light when the PDF detained an American communications specialist named Kurt Muse.⁷⁷ The capture was so significant to the US that his release was one of the first operations planned in case the US were to invade Panama, the task being given to the most elite unit of the US army: Delta Force.⁷⁸ The 1989 Panamanian election would however be the catalyst the Bush administration had been waiting for in the low intensity conflict, according to the Panamanian Constitution an election had to be held every five years on the first Sunday of May.⁷⁹ To prevent election fraud as had happened in 1984, the Bush administration mandated four international delegates to monitor the elections, one of which happened to be former President Jimmy Carter.⁸⁰ Noriega had problems regarding public support, as most Panamanians had suffered under the regime's regressive actions over the last few years, especially due to the economic sanctions perpetrated by the US.⁸¹ On May 7th, the international delegation would denounce the fraud they would witness perpetrated by the Panamanian government during the election, and when Noriega's candidate won on May 10th the Panamanian public and the opposition was outraged and took to the streets to protest.⁸² It was during this day that freelance journalist named Ron Haviv would take some highly influential photographs of Vice-President elect Guillermo Ford, covered in the blood of his bodyguard and being brutally beaten by a mob of Noriega's paramilitary groups, the "Dignity Battalions".⁸³ The election fraud led to Panama being more isolated than ever, 11 countries had denounced the Noriega government, and the Mexican government officially claimed proclaimed Noriega to be responsible for the worsening of the country's situation.⁸⁴ Throughout the summer and early autumn, President Bush would order 1900 combat troops to Panama through Operation Nimrod Dancer, even though policymakers were still

⁷⁴ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 139-140

⁷⁵ Kempe, F (1990) *Divorcing the Dictator: Americas Bungled Affair with Noriega*, New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam's Sons P. 333

⁷⁶ Sosa, J. B. (2020) *Operation Just Cause and Panama: A Pivotal Moment in the Life of a Nation* Retrieved from: <https://www.georgeandbarbarabush.org/2020/02/operation-just-cause-and-panama-a-pivotal-moment-in-the-life-of-a-nation/>

⁷⁷ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 141-142

⁷⁸ Noriega, M & Eisner, P. (1997) *The Memoirs of Manuel Noriega, Americas Prisoner* New York, N.Y.: Random House New York P. 142-143

⁷⁹ Panamanian government (1972) *Panamas Constitution of 1972 with amendments through 1983* Panama City, Panama: National Legislative Council | Article 133

⁸⁰ Aguilar, E. O. (1989) *Congressional Observers Welcomed With PM-Panama-Election* Colon, Panama; Associated press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/f1503027ac164be0715f5a2de0ce7b13>

⁸¹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 23

⁸² Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 24

⁸³ Haviv, R (2015) *Magazine Read: Panama, 1989* Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/05/magazine-read-panama-1989-150521084631350.html>

⁸⁴ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 24

trying to persuade Noriega to resign peacefully.⁸⁵ Throughout the summer and autumn, the US would keep updating the situation on the ground even dismissing the head of SOUTHCOM in favor of a more "combat oriented" general by the name of Maxwell Thurman.⁸⁶ Thurman would be instrumental to the outcome of the events that were to follow.

On October 3rd, Major Moisés Giroldi would instigate an armed coup against general Noriega, the coup however was depending on US forces conducting an exercise along a few key roads leading to the *Commandancia* (the command headquarters of the PDF), where Noriega would be held.⁸⁷ Thurman however did not agree with the plan, as it was a recipe for a counterrevolution, in his own words it was "ill-conceived, ill-motivated and ill-led."⁸⁸ As the ill-fated coup commenced without US support Noriega was able to contact loyal forces forcing the coup-makers to surrender, leading Giroldi to be tortured and eventually killed.⁸⁹ Again the US had failed on an opportunity to get rid of their Noriega problem, and was highly criticized for having failed to assist Giroldi, Noriega on the other hand was able to cash in on the coup to retaliate against any opponents, further consolidating his own power.

3.3 Conclusion:

When analyzing the events of 1988-1989 it's hard not to speculate on what could have been, the US being given an opportunity to put a lot of pressure on Noriega at the beginning of the year, but failing to take advantage of it because of an election year. The way the US acted can also be seen in relation to changing foreign policy at the end of the 1980s, with fighting communism becoming second rate to fighting the war on drugs, it is understandable that the US would take a harder line against Panama under Noriega. When 1989 would roll around the US would have a new and more determined administration it would seem, but again the US would be embarrassed by the crisis in Panama, failing to act on election fraud and a coup attempt. For Noriega's Panama the lack of US action would lead to even more aggressive repression of political rights, through the media the world would witness human rights violation after human rights violation being perpetrated by the regime.⁹⁰

Could there have been a different outcome had the negotiations not failed? It is possible that the Reagan administration had gotten rid of their main vendetta with general Noriega, it is however important to note that it would not have guaranteed democracy or even change in Panama. The problems in Panama were rooted deeper than just the

⁸⁵ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 10-11

⁸⁶ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 13

⁸⁷ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 15

⁸⁸ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990* Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 15

⁸⁹ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 24

⁹⁰ Mine, D. G. (1989) *Opposition Leaders Defy Government, take to Streets with AM* Panama City, Panama: Associated press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/54d4e243f7aac8983e8d5aaf5bb113d6>

head of state, at least that was the rationale being given by SOUTHCOM, when making contingency plans in February 1988.⁹¹

To conclude we can examine the situation as it pertains to the autumn of 1989, Panama under Noriega has thoroughly isolated itself from most former allies in the region, however the US responses have been largely ineffective at achieving it's own goals of getting rid of the Noriega problem. Even indirectly giving Noriega an opportunity to rid himself of political opponents in the PDF, by not supporting the October coup. Seeing as this was another embarrassment to US foreign policy, it would clearly shape what was to come.

Chapter 3:

4.1 Introduction:

The weeks following the failed Coup would be marked by an almost eerie calm, US military exercises preparing for codename Operation *Blue Spoon* would be conducted

⁹¹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*
Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 12-14

under the cover of being regular "Freedom of movement Drills".⁹² On December 15th, the Panamanian National Assembly would designate Noriega as the 'Maximum Leader' of Panama and adopted a statement that a state of war existed between the US and Panama.⁹³ This signaled three things to the us, firstly it signaled that the established civilian government no longer held any real power, secondly it signaled that the US forces stationed in Panama would be threatened by the regime and thirdly and most importantly it jeopardized the canal treaties and US control over the Panama canal. The following day PDF soldiers would open fire at a car that did not stop at a checkpoint, the car was filled with American service men on leave, one of the men was killed and another one was injured. A US navy officer had been witnessing the incident with his wife, both would promptly be arrested by the PDF, the US officer was beaten, and his wife was threatened with sexual assault by the PDF officers.⁹⁴ The American officer would however not answer the interrogators questions, infuriated they would beat the man until unconscious, later turning him over to US Military Police at fort Clayton.⁹⁵ The Bush administration was now thoroughly fed up with the entire situation, on December 17 the administration established five objectives to deal with the dictator and the PDF. The operational goals would be to safeguard the lives of 30 000 American citizens living in Panama, protect the integrity of the Panama Canal and the 142 US defense sites in the country, to help the Panamanian opposition establish genuine democracy and to bring Noriega to justice.⁹⁶ In other words, the justification for invading a country with a standing army of 4000 regular troops, was self-defense. To justify the large operation to the President, and to assure him that there would be no blunders comparable to what had happened in Iran in 1980 and in Grenada in 1983, chief of staff general Powell would assure that simply dealing with Noriega alone would not solve the problem.⁹⁷

4.2 Main body:

The operation was to be the largest US military operation since the Vietnam war, it would encompass several branches under one unified command, and it would have an unprecedented number of women taking part in active combat.⁹⁸ The operation received

⁹² Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 17-18

⁹³ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 25

⁹⁴ McConnell, M. (1991) *Just Cause: The Real Story of America's High-Tech Invasion of Panama*, New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press P. 19

⁹⁵ McConnell, M. (1991) *Just Cause: The Real Story of America's High-Tech Invasion of Panama*, New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press P. 18-19

⁹⁶ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 29-30

⁹⁷ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 30

⁹⁸ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 1

the go-ahead on December 17th, giving the different branches of the US military 60 hours to prepare for H-Hour at 0100 on the morning of December 20th.⁹⁹

US Secretary of Defense, Dick Cheney would follow the execution of *BLUE SPOON* closely wanting to avoid the costly mistakes made in previous contingency plans for US military operations, as had happened in Grenada and Lebanon under the Reagan administration. The way the operation was being conducted and planned was to use overwhelming firepower and manpower to demoralize the enemy and to isolate resistance as much as possible, it was also important to avoid civilian casualties to prevent anti US sentiment among the population.¹⁰⁰ It was during this planning phase that the operation would be renamed from *Blue Spoon* to *Just Cause*, the reason for this was that it would underscore the purpose of the operation to US forces and the public at home.¹⁰¹

When the operation commenced just before 1:00 a.m. on December 20th, 1989, the respective military forces were unequal both in quality and quantity, the US troops were vastly superior in numbers and in actual training. The US would send 27 000 troops to fight the PDF's 4000 active combat troops, the reasoning for this was as stated earlier that the US would not let the operation become a failure or a half-hearted victory.¹⁰² The US troops would additionally have air support and air superiority, with over 200 aircraft participating, as the PDF had only a nominal air force consisting of a few old helicopters and training aircraft this may seem "overkill", however the reasoning for this commitment of airpower was to deter Cuban or Nicaraguan interference.¹⁰³ The first bombs dropped on Panamanian soil in Panama City would be picked up by the seismograph at the University of Panama at 0:46 a.m., over the course of the night it would register 417 major explosions in the city center alone.¹⁰⁴ One of the main US targets in Panama City was the *Commandancia* where the PDF central command was located, the *Commandancia* was built around a poor area known as *El Chorillo*, the area was mostly built up of wooden houses, as a result of US air force incendiary bombs the entire area would burn down leaving over 14 000 Panamanians homeless.¹⁰⁵ The *Commandancia* itself was guarded by Noriega's most loyal soldiers who had come to his rescue during the October 3rd coup, all of whom died in the fighting. In Ricaurte Soler's book the consequences of the attack on the *Commandancia* are described by eyewitnesses saying "the Americans would pay \$6 per corpse collected."¹⁰⁶ Army Combat photographer Glenn Sierra would enter the building after the fighting had ended to document the findings, stating that "the stench of the dead turns my stomach, it makes

⁹⁹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 30

¹⁰⁰ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 31

¹⁰¹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 32

¹⁰² Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*,

Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 25

¹⁰³ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 33

¹⁰⁴ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 89

¹⁰⁵ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 97

¹⁰⁶ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 93

my eyes water".¹⁰⁷ In just the fighting around the *Commandancia* it is estimated that 400 Panamanians would die, 250 of which were civilians, observers described gruesome images of corpses in the streets being driven over by US armored vehicles.¹⁰⁸ Organized resistance by the PDF would end within days of the operation, by December 23rd with the remainder of the PDF surrendering, only sporadic attacks by lone snipers or dignity battalions would follow.¹⁰⁹ Noriega on the other hand had disappeared, only to be found hiding in the Vatican embassy on December 24th by US special forces, the reasoning for Noriega being granted asylum by the Vatican was that Monsignor Laboa wanting an end to the bloodshed.¹¹⁰ The presence of Noriega in the Vatican embassy would prove a major headache to the US forces in Panama, seeing as Noriega was residing within the embassy of a foreign nation US troops could not enter unless the Monsignor of the embassy granted them permission.¹¹¹ Another problem was that the situation preferably be handled by the new Panamanian government under Guillermo Endara, so only Vatican representatives or one of four government officials would be cleared for entry into the embassy by US troops cordoning off the area.¹¹² When general Thurman would visit on Christmas morning to talk to Monsignor Laboa a reported would shout "good morning" to the general from the window of a nearby hotel, fearing the press might eavesdrop on the negotiations the general ordered a sound barrier around the perimeter to play music.¹¹³ This would lead US troops to blare rock music at high volume at all hours of the day and night, coincidentally Noriega hated rock music, seeing it as a valuable psychological tool General Thurman would keep the music playing despite protests from the catholic church and the media.¹¹⁴ In the end Noriega would surrender to the US DEA on January 3rd 1990, leaving the country to be tried for the 1988 indictments, operation Just Cause was over, in its place operation Promote Liberty would continue into the end of the year.

When questioning the justification for just Cause the American explanation and legal justification has been article 51 of the United Nations Charter, and article 21 of the Organization of American States, recognizing the right of self-defense entitling the US to defend US military personnel, US citizens and US installations.¹¹⁵ The UN and the OAS however criticized the operation, the UN going so far as to pass a resolution on

¹⁰⁷ Sierra, G. (1989) *Operation Just Cause*

Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISgeNxHb1vo&t=1s 8:07>

¹⁰⁸ Soler, R. (1999) *La Invasión De Estados Unidos a Panama: Neocolonialismo en la Posguerra fría*, Panama City, Panama: Siglo Veintiuno Editores p. 91 and 97

¹⁰⁹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 51-52

¹¹⁰ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 56

¹¹¹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 57

¹¹² Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 57-58

¹¹³ Mine, D. G. (1989) *Embassies Ringed by Troops, Barbed Wire and Rock Music*

Panama City, Panama: Associated Press | Retrieved from: <https://apnews.com/f4638abe90d3fed0f414373664cd23a5>

¹¹⁴ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 59-60

¹¹⁵ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P. 43

December 28th asking for immediate cessation of the intervention and the withdrawal of the armed invasion forces from Panama, by the United States.¹¹⁶

In regard to the 'pat on the back' JUST CAUSE had been as a military success for the US it made up for it in showcasing the failure of US foreign policy leading up to and during the crisis.

4.3 Conclusion

Just Cause marked a significant shift in the way the US would handle foreign affairs for the next decades, dealing with troublesome dictators and regimes through military power, either directly or indirectly. The way the war was fought was a success regarding casualties for the US, having lost "only" 23 men killed in action compared to the PDF's 300+ KIA, for the civilians of Panama the statistics would look a lot grimmer, with numbers ranging from 200 to 3000 casualties.¹¹⁷ When it comes time to ask if it was worth it, First-Hand Witness commission member Juan Planells would say "For Panamanians, nothing justifies the death of a civilian".¹¹⁸

Conclusions:

When explaining the conclusions made from this thesis, we must make a framework wherein the conclusions can be examined, the way this will be done is by examining what the US was trying to achieve, and what it was actually achieving through its actions.

When the first rumors of Noriega being involved in corruption, human trafficking, drug trafficking and other criminal activities came to light in the early 1980s it was hardly anything new for Washington to deal with criminals and dictators to achieve its short

¹¹⁶ Hensel, H. M. & Michaud, N. (2011) *Global Media Perspectives on the Crisis in Panama*, Surrey, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited P. 26

¹¹⁷ Unknown Author (2016) *Number of Victims of US Invasion of Panama Unknown 27 Years On* Panama City, Panama: Telesur English | Retrieved from: <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Number-of-Victims-of-US-Invasion-of-Panama-Unknown-27-Years-On-20161220-0011.html>

¹¹⁸ nknown Author (2016) *Number of Victims of US Invasion of Panama Unknown 27 Years On* Panama City, Panama: Telesur English | Retrieved from: <https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Number-of-Victims-of-US-Invasion-of-Panama-Unknown-27-Years-On-20161220-0011.html>

term goals in Central and Latin America. The problems the US were facing in the 1980s were however different than before. After the Sandinista takeover in Nicaragua one of the strategies sought out by the Reagan administration was to use Noriega's Panama as an ally in the fight. Swapping Panamanian intelligence to the Contras and the CIA in Nicaragua, for domestic safety in Panama for Noriega. The beginnings of the crisis in Panama can in other words largely be attributed to the US sacrificing its democratic principles for short term foreign-policy goals. Although this was not something new or extraordinary in US foreign policy, what was new was the way it was dealt with, in the end using over 26 000 US combat troops to implement a government friendly to the US. The major point of interest for the US in the region was indeed the Panama Canal, the canal was scheduled to be given to Panama on new years eve 1999. The US, however, was reluctant to give away such a valuable resource to what Washington deemed a common criminal, fearing Noriega may have been in a position to use the canal as a hostage in later negotiations with the US. In a more contemporary study by Jane K. Cramer it has even been suggested that the use of force by the United States was an act of diversionary war because of domestic political reasons.¹¹⁹ With these points in mind, what can we discern the reason or reasons for the US invasion to be? The justifications presented by the Bush administration was as presented in *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990* where:

1. To safeguard the lives of nearly 30 000 US citizens residing in Panama
2. To protect the integrity of the Panama Canal and 142 US defensive sites
3. To help the Panamanian opposition establish genuine democracy
4. To neutralize the PDF and to bring Noriega to justice¹²⁰

At first glance this reasoning seems fair enough, however when we look at what processes were going on within the Pentagon and the White house, it is apparent that the decision lay heavy even for the decision makers. The reason being doubts by policymakers regarding if the shooting of US service personnel could prove to be justified by the PDF in some way.¹²¹

To conclude the reason to intervene in Panama militarily came as a response to several years of failed US foreign policy against Panama under General Noriega, the US using half-hearted economic sanctions, inconsistent negotiations, scare tactics with US forces and eventually military intervention. The escalation of the conflict can be compared to an infected sore, first being only left to fester, and when emergency medical care would fail, only amputation would prove suitable. One can also make the argument that the US chose to make an example of the dictatorship in Panama when they realized there would be no other solution to the problem. The Bush administration would through this strategy prove to the world

¹¹⁹ Cramer, J. K. (2006) «*Just Cause*» or just Politics? *U.S. Panama Invasion and Standardizing Qualitative Tests for Diversionary War*

Eugene, OR: University of Oregon | Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0095327X05277899> p. 198

¹²⁰ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P.29

¹²¹ Cole, R. H., (1995) *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988 – January 1990*

Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff P.29

both the might of the US military and what the future where to hold, the age of the totalitarian era would be over, and in its place would emerge a New World Order. A world wherein free government and free enterprise would reign supreme over the old and dated ways of the totalitarian dictatorship, even if it was to be implemented through the scope of a rifle.

Summary:

On December 20th, 1989, the United States would invade Panama with an invasion force consisting of more than 26 000 of all branches of the US military, this thesis aims to examine why this massive operation happened. To achieve this the thesis will first aim to explore the background to the events unfolding, such as US involvement in the arming of the Contras in Nicaragua, Panamanian involvement in the Nicaraguan civil war and the political events happening in Panama at the time. On the morning of September 15th,

1985, Hugo Spadafora would disappear after having been arrested by the Panama Defense Force on the border with Costa Rica, Spadafora was a vocal critic of the regime controlled by Panamanian intelligence officer Manuel Noriega. Noriega had taken control after the death of former dictator Omar Torrijos in 1981 and was quickly consolidating power by outmaneuvering his opposition. However, when Panamanian president, Nicholas Barletta wanted to open an independent investigation of the Spadafora disappearance, turned murder he was quickly sacked by Noriega. By 1987 an incident regarding Noriega giving away his seat as Chief of Staff of the PDF, to his deputy Diaz Herrera, would lead to Noriega dismissing Herrera and keeping the position for himself. In response Herrera would publicly make statements that Noriega had been involved in the murder of Spadafora, the drug trade and election fraud. This event along with the breaking of the Iran-Contra affair in international media would lead to Noriega's name mentioned several times regarding Iran contra. In Panama at the same time protests and political demonstrations would plague the country, in response to the Herrera crisis. Noriega would use special riot police to put down these demonstrations, further damaging US-Panama Relations as the US Senate would enforce sanctions against Panama and Noriega. By 1988 two US federal courts would indict Noriega on drug charges, this along with more dismissal of Panamanian presidents would further deteriorate US – panama relations. Until finally negotiations for Noriega's resignation would be traded for the drug indictments. When these fell through the US domestic situation during the election of 1988 would let Noriega do as he wanted without many consequences. Following the electoral fraud of 1989, the US would implement stronger sanctions, by December 1989 a failed Coup had left the Panamanian dictator feeling invincible. When a US marine officer was killed by the PDF at a checkpoint in Panama, the Bush administration had finally had enough of the crisis in Panama and would start preparations, invading sixty hours after the murder. Aiming to safeguard the 30 000 US citizens that lived in Panama and destroying the PDF, the US armed forces would invade in the largest military operation conducted by the US since Vietnam. The operation named Just Cause to gain public consent, was a huge success regarding the tactical and strategical goals, for the US. The Panamanians would on the other hand report the US for excessive use of force and killing civilians. By the end of the operation all major operational goals would be reached by the US.

Sammendrag:

Den 20. desember 1989 invaderte USA Panama, invasionsstyrken besto av mer enn 26 000 soldater fra alle bransjene i det amerikanske militæret. Denne oppgaven kommer til å evaluere hvorfor denne massive operasjonen skjedde. For å oppnå dette vil oppgaven først utforske bakgrunnen for hendelsene som kom til å påvirke krisen, som for eksempel amerikansk bevæpning av Contra-bevegelsen i Nicaragua, Panamansk involvering i den Nicaraguanske borgerkrigen og Panamansk innenrikspolitikk i perioden.

Morgenen 15. september 1985 ble den panamanske dissidenten Hugo Spadafora bortført av medlemmer av den Panamanske hæren. Spadafora hadde vært en kritiker av regimer til Manuel Noriega, en etterretningsoffiser i den Panamanske hæren, som hadde tatt kontroll over landet etter døden til general Omar Torrijos, Panamas forrige leder. Når Panamas president Hugo Barletta uttrykte ønsker om å utføre en selvstendig etterforskning av forsvinningen, og til sist drapet på Spadafora, ble han sagt opp fra stillingen sin. Senere, i 1987 ville Noriega avskjedige sin arvtaker som leder av den Panamanske hæren; Diaz Herrera, noe som igjen ville føre til politiske problemer da Herrera gikk til media og fortalte om valgfusk, forsvinningen av Spadafora og narkotikahandel. Panamas befolkning var rasende og sammen med avsløringen av Iran Contra og Noriegas involvering i denne saken ville USAs senatet utføre sanksjoner mot Noriega.

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