

Exportation of the Carceral State

James V. Gibson, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Abstract

This article inquires the extent to which United States (US) security aid in Central America serves US interests and worsens humanitarian crises. Employing Foucauldian political theory, the author asserts that as a consequence of US foreign policy, a “carceral state” has appeared in a number of Central American countries. The carceral state is exemplified by *mano dura* (“heavy hand”, or, also, zero-tolerance) crime policies, which are manifested in the extrajudicial killings of suspected gang members. Such a form of Central American governmentality provides the US with an opportunity to externalize some of the costs of drug trafficking. Scholars hypothesize that such policies exacerbate existing problems by raising the price of illicit substances on underground markets, and prevent the rehabilitation of gang members. Moreover, expansive military and police spending in Central American countries is compounded upon by security aid transfers from the US and other multilateral entities; as per the quantitative analysis of researchers cited in this paper. Thus, aforementioned trends create an equilibrium whereby many Central American states continue to pursue *mano dura* policies, which ultimately exacerbates violence occurring in the region and empowers corruption regimes.

Introduction

The quality of human livelihoods in the present day are highly unequal across the world. In this sense, the variability of life yields differences in biophysical health across borders. Often, the root causes of such human degradation are political, and scholars understand the security of states, primarily according to its citizens' vulnerability to physical harm. In regards to biophysical vulnerability, states' actions are often a cause of and a response to, humanitarian crises. Responses to crises are borne from internal as well as external state actors. In an ever-globalized world, it has become increasingly difficult to disentangle the influence of such actors from one another.

Such is the case in Central America, where many countries are recipients of United States (US) security aid. The geographical location of Central America renders it vulnerable in regards to drug trafficking, as supply routes often both originate and run through Central America en route to the US. The influence of street gangs and organized crime grew pervasive throughout Central America during recent decades. As such, Central America has become an ideal testing ground for new securitized humanitarian agendas, which posit that the stability of states can be improved through the external provision of weapons, as well as the funding and training of both military and police forces.

Following the end of the Cold War, US foreign policy shifted as a response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre (hereafter called "9/11"). During the Cold War, international security threats were characterized as disequilibrium between bipolar state-alliances. In contrast, the 21st century, saw the rise of security threats becoming characterized as decentralized violence within states. I seek to address which global powers wield the influence to make such characterizations, and how US security aid has affected recipient countries in Central America.

First, I will provide a contextual background as to the political and social conditions in Central America. Second, I will explore how security aid corresponds with a liberal humanitarian order. Third, I will then counter the liberal view in favour of a realist outlook on aid securitisation in Central America. Fourth, I will explain how security aid has impacted state development in Central America. Lastly, I will provide an overview of how security aid encourages the dehumanisation of many of the intended beneficiaries. The central thesis of this paper is that US security aid in Central America serves the interests of the US national security agenda, at the same time as it exacerbates violence occurring in Central America and empowers corrupt regimes.

Contextual description of Central America

Following the end of multiple civil wars in the 1990s, many Central American countries began to formally transition to democratic rule. Up until this point, most of the countries were governed by military rule. Cruz (2015b) argues that, due to the relative youth of these democracies, Central American militaries have remained influential in regards to governance. In the Honduran case prior to 1998, the military remained an entirely autonomous and unaccountable institution (Cruz, 2015b, p. 44).

To the dismay of many Central Americans who ventured back to their home countries following the end of these civil wars, their countries failed to attain impressive rates of economic growth, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (as cited in Cruz, 2015b, p. 44). An array of neoliberal economic policies implemented in Central America focused on privatizing state enterprises, liberalizing trade barriers and labour laws, and implementing a value-added consumption tax (Cruz, 2015b, p. 45). These policies disproportionately affected the working classes in Central America, as the deregulation of labour laws resulted in an influx of growth in low-productivity sectors yielding low wages. Moreover,

cuts to public spending limited the benefits and total sum of jobs offered by former public industries which were now preyed upon by the private sector. In particular, youth became incapable of securing employment (Cruz, 2015b, p. 45).

Cruz also notes that the introduction of a value-added sales tax led to a regressive taxation scheme, given that the poor spend most of what they earn, whereas the rich save a greater proportion of their earnings. According to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report (as cited in Bruneau, 2014), “stark wealth disparities provide criminals with both a justification (addressing social injustice) and an opportunity (wealth to steal) for their activities” (Bruneau, 2014, p. 155). As such, street gangs and organized crime networks offer young men opportunities for, albeit limited, social mobility. Every week, gang members earn up to \$1000 in protection rackets, seized through the extortion of neighbourhoods (Cruz, 2015b, p. 46). The scope of influence of organized crime in Central America is difficult to capture. For instance, in El Salvador, findings indicate that street gangs are active in 50 percent of neighbourhoods (Bruneau, 2014, p. 157) and are responsible for 40 percent of all violent deaths (Cruz, 2015b, p. 46). The homicide rates of Central American countries are among some of the highest in the world, as, during 2010, they ranged from 13 in 100 000 in Nicaragua, to 81 in 100 000 in Honduras (Bruneau, 2014, p. 159). By comparison, during the year 2010, the homicide rate in Canada was 1.64 per 100 000 (Statistics Canada, n.d.).

The precarity borne from such rampant violence and neighborhood intimidation often hollows out opportunities for individuals to prosper which, in turn, feeds the desperation that motivates so many Central Americans to turn to a life of crime. The following section will examine the discourse of liberal humanitarianism, and explore the extent to which liberalism is ill-equipped to counter stark desperation.

Problematizing aid securitisation as liberal humanitarianism

The relevance of liberalism can be expressed by the ideas of John Stuart Mill (1999), a prominent political philosopher who believed that: “the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others” (Mill, 1999, p. 133). In other words, liberalism can be understood as the belief in a political order which prioritizes individual liberty in most cases except its pragmatic use, in the few instances where the collective provision of liberty is threatened.

Reid-Henry (2014) draws a narrative as to how the development of the European state transitioned from an imperial to a liberal order through the influence of humanitarianism. Reid-Henry notes that the influence of such humanitarian organizations as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) informed state development in the late nineteenth century, attributing credit to humanitarian advocates for the protection of prisoners of war, as reflected in the Hague and Geneva Conventions (Reid-Henry, 2014, p. 423). Reid-Henry argues that “by the early 20th century, humanitarian endeavour was quite clearly a part of liberal political rationality more broadly, wherein it served as both an enabler and a limit on state powers” (Reid-Henry, 2014, p. 423).

However, Reid-Henry also notes that some scholars attribute the intensification of market discipline embedded within liberal thought, and not altruism, as to what lead to such humanitarian achievements. Reid-Henry makes the argument that the English abolitionist movement was motivated towards reconciling the suffering caused by slavery, but rather towards establishing a conception of the citizen as an autonomous and rational self-maximizer. These outwardly-altruistic initiatives epitomized:

“[a] turn towards the public allocation of moral responsibility ... [which was] essential if individual men were to become self-governing subjects in a new social order. But they were also central in ensuring that, as with states, these new forms of moral reasoning became both a driver for, and a limit upon, market relations” (Reid-Henry, 2014, p. 424).

With regard to institutions of liberal humanitarianism, Joachim and Schneiker (2012) examine the extent to which private military and security companies (PMSCs) appropriate liberal humanitarian rhetoric as marketing tools. According to representatives of the British Association of Private Security Companies (BAPSC), PMSCs self-stylize as humanitarian agents to “[distinguish] a company in a market that is growing and diversifying” (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 370). In a survey of the websites for 200 PSMCs, Joachim and Schneiker found that 25 percent of PSMCs either referred to themselves as humanitarian organizations or emphasized their humanitarian attributes (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 377).

To substantiate such a claim, many PMSCs have even taken to partnering with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and multilateral entities. For example, companies such as Cubic, Edinburgh International, Aegis, and Allied Security pride and advertise themselves for having won contracts with the UN (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 383). José L. Gómez del Prado of the United Nations Working Group on the Use of Mercenaries (as cited in Joachim & Schneiker, 2012) notes, with regard to the US-based PMSC Blackwater, that “one of the main objectives of the corporation, as indicated by its founder Erik Prince, would be to obtain for his own private military force a substantial piece of the current UN peacekeeping \$6–10 billion budget” (Joachim & Schneiker, 2012, p. 380). Intrinsic to the structure of private firms markets, Blackwater and other PMSCs are certain to prioritize the capture of such multilateral entities’ budgets and the expansion of their clientele, which ensures a dependable stream of revenues.

In this section, I do not aim to condemn profit-motivated PMSCs as intrinsically immoral. However, the profit motive, as opposed to an altruistic one, yields unfavourable developmental

results. Jespersen (2015) makes such a case as she asserts that the typical punitive approach to gang violence, as promoted by PMSCs, does little to decentivize organized crime, given that “[w]hen arrests are made, a long line of unemployed people [are] waiting to take their place” (Jespersen, 2015, p. 27).

Although many PMSCs and NGOs compare the impacts of organized crime to those of armed conflict, Jespersen asserts that each operates according to distinct motives and dynamics. Unlike the dynamics inherent to warring factions, the author claims that organized crime more so “[follow] efficient business principles and [are] driven by a desire for profit; [they seek] the path of least resistance and [aim] to make business transactions as simple and reliable as possible” (Jespersen, 2012, p. 26). As the costs of drug trafficking are heightened by barriers posed by the counternarcotic police forces, so too is the market price for said drugs (Jespersen, 2012). From this vantage point, we can better understand what Reid-Henry means when he refers to the English abolition of slavery, by claiming that “with respect to the market, humanitarianism worked back against some of the worst excesses of market exploitation, at the same time as it fed into the reproduction of a system that created suffering in the first place” (Reid-Henry, 2014, p. 425).

Realist conceptions of aid securitisation

As opposed to the ideals of liberal humanitarianism posited earlier, the following section suggests a different set of motivations driving US involvement in Central America. The realist school of thought, as defined by Park, forwards a view of the international system where “states may cooperate to achieve their interests, namely to ensure their own survival and power, [but] [o]nce the conditions favouring cooperation have changed, each state [will revert] to acting in its own interest” (Park, 2018, p. 21). Along these lines, I posit that the US and its allies provide security aid to benefit, first and foremost, their own security needs.

As noted in the introduction, Central America exists between what the UNODC (as cited in Bruneau, 2014) calls “drug supply and drug demand” (Bruneau, 2014, p. 155). In an attempt to counter the demand for illicit drugs in the US, numerous politicians have declared a “War on Drugs” in order to use police operations to destroy organized crime networks. An example of this policy on a domestic level is the rooting out of the intensely violent Californian street gang, “MS-13”. Specific laws were passed with the goal of incarcerating and deporting gang members and these laws included, but were not limited to, the 1994 three-strikes law and the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. Following this, deportations from the US increased by 400 percent since 1996 (Bruneau, 2014, p. 158). These actions correspond with Adi Ophir’s conception (as cited in Reid-Henry, 2014) of the primary functions of the state, claiming that:

“[f]or centuries, ... the main task of political authorities in the West in times of calamity was to contain the disaster; not to let it spread into the safer areas where the court and members of the elite found shelter ... [and eventually tasks would also include] the efficient management of the social space and the physical environment, the reduction of damages and injuries, and the political control and manipulation of the distribution of risks and losses” (Reid-Henry, 2014, p. 422).

Similarly, in his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1977) compares the sphere of state functions to a 17th century French procedure on quarantining towns infected by the plague. Therein, Foucault details the hierarchical order resulting from rigorous processes of surveillance and documentation of infected households. The state, in a similar manner, is said to exercise a ‘disciplinary mechanism’ to constrain and isolate such “contagions” as crime and rebellion. With regard to this penetrating effect of this mechanism, Foucault says:

“Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, [the disciplinary mechanism] call[s] for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an

organization in depth of surveillance and control, [and also] an intensification and a ramification of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 198).

I assert that under these pretenses, the incredible magnitude of US security aid appears as a proportionate response to the immense task of containing violence outside of its borders. Bruneau notes that US interest is further borne from the fact that federal law enforcement exists in many Central American states, which can more effectively combat organized crime than the US; a country that lacks any federal law enforcement entity, with the exception of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Second, Bruneau notes that some Central American states, such as Honduras, supplant law enforcement with the military itself, and are capable of applying aggressive force against organized crimes (Bruneau, 2014, p. 167). In 2011 the United States, the European Union, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank collectively committed \$1 billion in security aid to Central America (Bruneau, 2014, p. 166). Moreover, by mid-2013, the US allocated an additional \$1.2 billion in security aid towards their Central America Regional Security Initiative, or CARSI (Bruneau, 2014, p. 168).

In addition to shifting the violent elements of drug trafficking southwards and across its border, the US has also armed Central American policing efforts attempting to counter increasingly frequent and horrific crime. In some instances, Central American armaments yielded profits for private US firms. At the beginning of the organized crime surge of the 1990s, “the [US] government delivered \$376,000 in small arms to Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama, while in the same period more than \$66 million in authorized private sales from the [US] flowed to the same countries” (Stohl & Tuttle, 2008, p. 16). Moreover, the US is often a dissenting voice against stronger international arms controls, such as was the case with an Organization of American States (OAS) treaty called the Firearms Convention, which would have required

signatories to “establish procedures for importing, exporting, and tracing small arms, light weapons, and ammunition, and as well as mechanisms for enforcement (Stohl & Tuttle, 2008, pp. 18).

Moreover, multilateral security aid allocations further align with the interests of the US and its allies. Lazell and Petrikova (2017) conducted a quantitative analysis of aid flows from the United Nations Development Programme, the European Union’s European Commission, and the World Bank’s International Development Association. In particular, Lazell and Petrikova considered the extent to which Western concerns of terrorism affected the allocation of democratizing aid as compared to security aid. In their study, the authors conceptualize democratizing aid as conditional aid transfers allocated towards initiatives promoting democratic participation and civil society, women’s rights, and free media. Security aid is conceptualized as conditional aid transfers allocated towards surveillance technology, arms, military, or law enforcement. The authors posit that all of these organizations claim to, through the provision of aid, build “a solid, inclusive social contract [in recipient states], underpinned by democratic governance [that] can help maintain an equilibrium between competing interests and reduce fragility and the likelihood of organized violence” (Lazell & Petrikova, 2017, p. 496). The authors concluded that, running counter to such entities’ rhetoric, there was no correlation between the quantity of democratizing aid allocated and whether recipients were vulnerable, conflict-affected states (Lazell & Petrikova, 2017, p. 507). Crucially, the authors also discovered statistically significant positive relationships between the quantity of security aid allocated and the level of concern of Western donors. The level of concern of such donors was measured by refugee flows and frequency terrorist casualties occurring in recipient countries (Lazell & Petrikova, 2017, p.

508). In the following section, the effects of security aid on Central American state formation will be examined.

Perverse state formation in Central America

The carceral state

To guide the following discussion, I will employ Michel Foucault's theory of the carceral state. As mentioned prior, Foucault's seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, provides the foundation for the concept of the carceral state. Therein, Foucault compares the functioning of the modern state as akin to the physical structure of a Panopticon. The Panopticon, considered first by Jeremy Bentham, is a prison model whereby a guard tower sits in the centre of a circular wall of cells, and whereby guards can see prisoners, but the prisoners cannot see inside of the tower. The effectiveness of the Panopticon resides in its omnipresence and the continuous possibility of surveillance in the minds of the prisoners (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The carceral state adopts this model, and other aforementioned Foucauldian theories of state function, to atomize constituents and expand the potential for state force, as well as the threat of state force, as widely as possible. Displays of violence and other methods of coercion are meant to incubate self-regulation among the populous, and render them docile subjects.

In more precise terms, Jiwani (2011) describes the application of Foucault's carceral state theory as:

“exemplified by a ‘law and order’ approach in which crime is the lens through which governance is exercised. This form of governmentality ... employs not only a wide array of disciplinary technologies to subject and produce docile subjects but also, through the deployment of juridical power and biopower, serves to manage, contain and/or annihilate those who are perceived to be threats to society” (Jiwani, 2011, p. 15).

As mentioned in the section prior, Bruneau argues that the US is motivated towards providing security aid in Central America due to the wide-reaching mandate of many countries' police forces. I argue that the provision of US security aid has allowed for the proliferation of the Foucauldian carceral state in Central America.

To this end, the stated aims of the CARSI are to “support development of strong and accountable governments, raise the effective presence of states in communities at risk, and foster enhanced levels of security and rule of law” (Bruneau, 2014, p. 168). It is not unreasonable to assume that the priorities of such vast quantities of security aid would also guide the priorities of Central American government agendas more generally. This claim becomes all the more likely when one accounts for the fact that the United Nations Development Programme (as cited in Stohl & Tuttle, 2008) reports that El Salvador spends 11.5 percent of its Gross Domestic Product on the effects of violence (Stohl & Tuttle, 2008, p. 16). The burden of violence on many such Central American states likely makes external revenues, even those packaged as US security aid, a crucial influence upon the prioritization of law enforcement and security initiatives over other areas of government expenditure.

Influenced largely by the crime policies of New York City, many Central American political leaders advocated for, and implemented, *mano dura* (“heavy hand” or also, zero-tolerance) crime policies (Bruneau, 2014, p. 157). Such *mano dura* policies are commonly characterized, across countries, for their deregulation of policing and expanding the grounds for legal conviction and detention on the grounds of gang affiliation. For example in El Salvador, the “Ley Antimaras” Act of 2003 allowed police to “use the presence of tattoos, hand signals, some dress codes, and physical appearance as evidence of gang membership” (Bruneau, 2014, p. 161). Brenneman (2014) details how, by focusing on the problem of gang violence, “Central American

politicians have been able to scapegoat the gangs and direct attention away from the more complex social and political sources of violence” (Brenneman, 2014, p. 114). As such, Brenneman cites survey data suggesting that 60 percent of Hondurans support the extrajudicial killing of gang members in a campaign of “social cleansing” (Brenneman, 2014, p. 114). To illustrate the breadth of such police misconduct, Cruz notes that, in 2012, a Guatemalan police chief was arrested for her involvement in a series of extrajudicial killings (Cruz, 2015b, pp. 251-252). Even among rehabilitated gang members, full reintegration to society is nearly impossible due to the omnipresent threat that their tattoos, as well as other visible signifiers, will elicit legal persecution or physical mutilation by the police (Brenneman, 2014).

State corruption and the non-monopolization of violence

Pearce (2010) describes Latin American state formation as being “perverse” (Pearce, 2010, p. 286). As such, the author compares the experience of European state formation with that of Latin America. Pearce refers to a series of other authors, including Charles Tilly and Manuel Elsnner, to assert the claim that European state formation was characterized by the monopolization of violence. Moreover, Pearce refers to the notion of the “man of honour” a cultural archetype which, during the 18th and 19th centuries, encouraged European elites to endorse liberal outlooks on governance focused upon rules-based procedures and benevolence (Pearce, 2010, pp. 297-298). Pearce contrasts this with the Latin American context, wherein states “are [still] unable to persuade their elites to pay taxes” (Pearce, 2010, p. 298).

Similarly, Foucault’s conception of power:

“has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; [but rather] in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught. ... [Thus,] it does not matter who exercises

power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine” (Foucault, 1977, p. 202).

Pearce suggests that the legitimacy of Latin American states are not dependent on the monopolization of violence, but instead, the non-monopolization of violence by the state. For example, returning to the Guatemalan case, the country’s police chief and head of the anti-narcotics unit was arrested in 2010 due to his involvement in drug trafficking (Cruz, 2015a, p. 251). Pearce notes that, five years prior, a former Guatemalan police chief was also arrested on similar grounds (Pearce, 2010, p. 299). As such, he suggests that the rampant corruption and alliances between Central American states and various elites, criminal organizations, and other stakeholders provides evidence that the goal of these states was never to monopolize violence. Pearce states: “[r]ather than [finding] solutions to [gang violence], the state gains huge political capital from its ongoing confrontations at the same time as it allies with pathological and corrupt violent actors outside the state in order to gain temporary victories” (Pearce, 2010, p. 299). He understands that internal conflicts consolidate, rather than weaken, the legitimacy of Central American states.

The diversification of state functions, rather than their consolidation, is most absurdly illustrated by reports of gangs in El Salvador, who force women unaffiliated with the gangs to take care of their members’ children. These ‘makeshift mothers’ are oftentimes threatened with violence if they refuse to follow their demands. In a sense, gangs are increasingly adopting the social welfare functions of the state by providing childcare services through unconventional and threatening measures (Avelar, 2018).

The findings of Cruz (2015a) partially corroborate Pearce’s claim in regards to political capital. In a qualitative study of survey data, Cruz found that in Honduras, there is a positive yet statistically insignificant, relationship between survey participants’ crime victimization (defined

as whether a participant was victim to crime in the 12 months prior to the survey) and support for both the regime and government (Cruz, 2015a, p. 266). Cruz explains that phenomenon with the suggestion that “relentlessly high levels of crime and increasing political turmoil in Honduras may have rendered the public more cynical and more accustomed to tolerating insecurity and criminality as features of their daily social life” (Cruz, 2015a, p. 279). In the following section, I will continue to examine the extent to which securitized agendas in Central America bolster the state’s legitimacy, as well as the US’ image as a global humanitarian force.

Legitimacy and dehumanization

With regard to the ascent of the carceral state in many Central American countries, I have illustrated how scapegoating and ‘cleansing’ operations of the state serves to further its legitimacy. Pearce notes that the functional purpose of *mano dura* policies are to foster a conception of democracy within which exists citizens, those worthy of state-provided public goods, and “‘non-citizens’, ... who can be subjected to the pure violence of the state” (Pearce, 2010, p. 299). I claim that the US model of spatially containing security threats has been most explicitly transmitted to Nicaragua, which has observed a proliferation of gated communities, thus segregating the upper socioeconomic class from the rest of society. Such communities act as “newly designed geographical securitization measures which separate citizens and non-citizens and simultaneously securitize democracy by controlling who participates in it” (Pearce, 2010, p. 300).

It ought to be recognized that in recent years within Nicaragua, the US military has developed a presence deploying medical aid to vulnerable communities. Bryan (2015) describes how the USS *Kearsarge* was employed with a humanitarian mandate through Operation Continuing Promise, to provide for individuals’ ‘basic needs’ along the Latin American coastline. Bryan notes that the mission of the *Kearsarge* sought to provide essential aid to those in need, thus

primarily serving US national interests as it aims to foster goodwill among the citizens of states deemed unstable or insecure, and to project an image of US benevolence on the world stage. The campaign has endured criticism as Bryan depicts:

“[t]he controversy sparked by the *Kearsarge* ... captures the paradox of military humanitarianism. Its emphasis on protecting life obscures underlying strategic questions about which lives are worth saving. Rather than demonstrating a universal commitment to life, that question is answered in terms of U.S. national security. ... It reflects a general paradox of humanitarianism as caught between a desire to “do good” and its propensity to ignore and even reinforce the inequalities that make some populations more likely to need aid, and others more capable of delivering it” (Bryan, 2015, p. 34).

In addition to ignoring its role causing insecurity in states, the US, inadvertently or not, also takes a position as to who deserves to live or die through the provision of humanitarian aid. As the US acts to affirm its role as a humanitarian force for good, it, as a matter of course, dehumanizes and excludes. In the case of Central America, the recipients of aid must be geographically distant enough from the US such that the major burdens associated with crisis and insecurity are contained outside of its borders. In contrast to the humanitarian efforts in Nicaragua, Green (2011) notes that, as soon as citizens of Central American countries arrive in the US as migrants, refugees, or asylum-seekers, “federal and state laws are used to transform migrants into illegal human beings” (Green, 2011, p. 377). Green conducted a series of 150 interviews with citizens of Tucson, Arizona, of which the “majority felt that a key factor in their support for denying migrants any rights, including in some cases humanitarian aid, was their illegality” (Green, 2011, p. 378).

Conclusion

The problems of drug trafficking pose detrimental threats to both the US and Central America. However, the US response to the drug trade, has largely been to shift the greatest costs

of narcotic trafficking across its southern border. Rather than working to decriminalize illegal substances, the US has chosen to proliferate violence through the use of the force of state. Recognizing the social and economic costs of this approach, the US engaged in a widespread practice of deporting gang members throughout the 1990s. Following 9/11, the global community increased its concern and focus upon decentralized violence in conflict-affected and post-conflict states. The United States then chose to orchestrate an humanitarian response to these anxieties which aimed to strengthen the rule of law in Central American states ravaged by the effects of organized crime and gang violence. However, the US failed to resolve the extent to which this violence was caused by the enforcement and implementation of American zero-tolerance crime and drug policies themselves, as well as policies in Central America.

The influence of PMSCs and arms manufacturers play a role in continuing the ‘War on Drugs,’ as these firms frame themselves as the arms of a larger global humanitarian arsenal. The market forces and respect for law that the liberal world order sought to encourage across the world through humanitarianism ultimately served to entrench and intensify destabilization in Central America. With or without the understanding that elites are incentivized to perpetuate violence in order to legitimate the status quo (as well as for the purpose of personal gain), the US has regardless empowered corrupt governments to lead to a dehumanization campaign against many their own citizens and, decidedly, has exported the carceral state. Rather than providing a greater array of public goods and services, Central American states have focused upon policing neighbourhoods, while gangs, strangely, have increasingly provided welfare for their members.

The phenomenon of the US to use through migration controls and deportation in order to exclude individuals seen as ‘contagions’ alludes to Foucault’s allegory of the plague-ridden town, and thus, constitutes a trans-continental degree of separation and isolation. The extent to which

such individuals are seen as subhuman among the US population is a result of political calculus on the part of American legislators, and tangibly benefits the US by reducing its own policing costs and providing revenue to PSMCs, many of which reside in the US. If the current regimes of aid securitisation are to continue, then improving the stability of states and reducing vulnerabilities will be unlikely because, as Noam Chomsky (as cited in Polychroniou, 2015) says: “[w]hen all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

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