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MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION IN COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

by

Leah Ortiz

March 2019

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The United States government has utilized leadership decapitation strategies to counter illicit or insurgent organizations since the kingpin strategy was first developed in the late 20th century by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Most critical analysis of this strategy, however, deals with terrorist organizations rather than transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). This thesis looks to the findings in these critical studies that may also be relevant to countering TCOs and, based on them, asks: what are the main factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership decapitation in countering TCOs? This thesis applies the four factors found in the literature to impact vulnerability to leadership decapitation—institutionalization, popular support, history of violent rivalry, and law enforcement efforts—to four TCOs. It finds that Medellin and Cali cartels did not gain an advantage from any of the factors. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) received protection from leadership decapitation from three of the four factors but ultimately was defeated. In the final case, the Sinaloa cartel, all four factors were present to provide the organization with protection from decapitation. These results are important for governments and law enforcement organizations to understand as they work to defeat TCOs.

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MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION IN COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The United States government has utilized leadership decapitation strategies to counter illicit or insurgent organizations since the kingpin strategy was first developed in the late 20th century by the Drug Enforcement Administration. Most critical analysis of this strategy, however, deals with terrorist organizations rather than transnational criminal organizations (TCOs). This thesis looks to the findings in these critical studies that may also be relevant to countering TCOs and, based on them, asks: what are the main factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership decapitation in countering TCOs? This thesis applies the four factors found in the literature to impact vulnerability to leadership decapitation—institutionalization, popular support, history of violent rivalry, and law enforcement efforts—to four TCOs. It finds that Medellin and Cali cartels did not gain an advantage from any of the factors. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) received protection from leadership decapitation from three of the four factors but ultimately was defeated. In the final case, the Sinaloa cartel, all four factors were present to provide the organization with protection from decapitation. These results are important for governments and law enforcement organizations to understand as they work to defeat TCOs.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFO	Tijuana/Arellano Felix organization
AUC	United Self Defense Forces of Colombia
CFO	Juárez/Vicente Carillo Fuentes organization
DTO	Drug Trafficking organization
ELN	National Liberation Army
EMC	*Estado Mayor Central* (General Staff)
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FTO	Foreign Terrorist organization
LOE	Line of Effort
Los PEPES	The People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar
MAS	*Muerte a Secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers)
PAN	National Action Party
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party
PCC	Colombian Communist Party
TCO	Transnational Criminal Organizations

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I. INDICATORS OF SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION OF A TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATION

The strategy of "leadership decapitation," also known as the kingpin strategy, has long been a foreign policy practice applied by the United States in the Middle East and Latin America and has only grown in prominence since 2001 and the hunt for Osama Bin Laden.[1] Leadership decapitation has various academic definitions, but, in this thesis, it refers to the removal, either by arrest or death, of a top leader of a terrorist organization or a Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO). Some literature in the field analyzes the removal of mid-level leaders, while this thesis focuses specifically on leadership change at the top.[2] This strategy is different from targeted assassination because the leaders targeted under leadership decapitation are all leaders of criminal enterprises and are themselves criminals or, in some cases, designated as terrorists.

The strategy of leadership decapitation has been utilized by the United States since the 1990s to counter TCOs such as the Medellin and Cali Cartels, but there has been little critical analysis of its effectiveness.[3] Due to the strategic interests of the United States post-9/11, much of the research into the effectiveness of "leadership decapitation" of criminal organizations has been focused on the Middle East. Despite the far-reaching implications of the prevalence of TCOs, which are organizations with

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[1] Jenna Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark: Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes," *International Security* 38, no 4 (Spring 2014), http://search.proquest.com/docview/1535269313/; H. Richard Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain: Law Enforcement Efforts and Mobility in Criminal Economies," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 41, no. 1 (February 2004): 53–77, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1023/B:CRIS.0000015328.82955.f0; Brian J. Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence? The Case of Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (February 2015): 324–336, https://doi.org/10.1086/680209; Bryan C. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (March 2012): 9–46, http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.nps.edu/stable/41428119; Michael Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama: Counter-terrorism Lessons from the War on Drugs," *Survival* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2003): 187–206, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2003.9688585.

[2] June S. Beittel, *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, CRS Report No. R41576 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2018), 1–8, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41576.pdf; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 325–333; Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 60–62.

[3] Robert J. Nieves, "Colombian Cocaine Cartels: Lessons from the Front," *Trends in Organized Crime* 2, no. 4 (June 1997), 36–39, http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s12117-997-1071-6.

diversified illicit business ventures and markets in multiple countries, very little academic research has addressed the long-term effectiveness of this strategy in countering Latin American-based TCOs.

This thesis thus asks the following question: what are the main factors that determine the effectiveness of leadership decapitation in countering TCOs? The case studies examined in this thesis are primarily Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) that diversified their illegal products to include human and arms trafficking, smuggling, counterfeiting, etc., and expanded into international markets, thereby becoming TCOs. Additionally, this thesis will answer the following sub-questions. Is leadership decapitation a viable strategy against these organizations? Are there instances or circumstances where "leadership decapitation" techniques are counter-productive?

Answering these questions is important because TCOs destabilize and erode the states where they are based, which, in turn, is of strategic importance to the United States.[4] Central and South America have consistently become the base of operations for TCOs due to their role as producers or transit zones of illicit goods, from drugs to counterfeit items; these groups also maintain a global reach operationally through transnational networks.[5] The presence of TCOs in the Latin American region undermines the welfare and stability of host states, both directly and indirectly. Through violence and intimidation, they undermine the rule of law; and because states must use valuable resources to combat TCOs, state capacity to support infrastructure and provide public goods is reduced.[6]

Whether or not leadership decapitation can be successfully utilized to counter modern Latin America-based TCOs is a critical knowledge gap for the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM Lines of Effort (LOE) to counter threat networks and defend homeland

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[4] Beittel, *Mexico*, 8–9; Angel Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, RR 1481-A (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2017), 1–12, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1400/RR1481/RAND_RR1481.pdf.

[5] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, xiv–xvi; Beittel, *Mexico*, 8–9.

[6] Beittel, *Mexico*, 8–9; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 188–189.

security.[7] The knowledge generated in this thesis can help to expand understanding of the operating environment as it pertains to countering these organizations and provide a critical understanding of when leadership decapitation may be a viable option to counter TCOs. This research could also help answer additional questions, such as whether the removal of key personnel other than leaders has the effect of disrupting or eliminating an organization and whether different methods of removal—death or imprisonment—have an impact on its effectiveness.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on decapitation focuses more on terrorist organizations than on TCOs. This literature review examines how effectiveness of leadership decapitation has been defined in previous research and then adapts that definition to this thesis. Then, it evaluates the studies on the application of leadership decapitation to terrorist organizations in order to assess their applicability to TCOs. Furthermore, it analyzes the critical internal and external factors that can be used to predict the effectiveness of leadership removal. Finally, this literature review assesses the long-term consequences of a successful leadership decapitation operation in terms of disrupting the target organization and various side effects.

1. Defining Effectiveness

Measuring the effectiveness of leadership decapitation strategies on TCOs depends largely on how that effectiveness is defined. Gonzalez defines the success of this strategy as the dissolution or disruption of the targeted group or its elimination from the host region.[8] Gonzalez' definition only examines the short-term effects of leadership removal, and while this analysis is important for measuring the success of individual operations, it does not account for the possible long-term consequences: after all, the

[7] "Mission Statement," NORTHCOM, accessed March 30, 2018, http://www.northcom.mil/About-USNORTHCOM/; "Countering Threat Networks," SOUTHCOM, accessed March 30, 2018, http://www.southcom.mil/Lines-of-Effort/Countering-Threat-Networks/; "Mission Statement," SOUTHCOM, accessed March 30, 2018, http://www.southcom.mil/About/.

[8] Edgar Gonzalez Jr, "On Drugs and Cartels: History and Strategy," *Harvard Political Review*, last modified April 9, 2016, http://harvardpolitics.com/world/cartels/.

group in question may have dissolved, but other groups may have taken up its operations. Other scholars in the field define success of leadership decapitation as a reduction in organized transnational criminal activities in the region in which the targeted organization predominantly operated.[9] Given the complex and lucrative environment that TCOs operate in, a definition of success that accounts for the long-term consequences of eliminating one group from a competitive market is more appropriate for this study. For that reason, this thesis will measure success as the long-term results in the target area (region, state, neighborhood) of the action taken by the state or other organization compared to the initial intent. For example, if the intent or purpose of forcing leadership change in a TCO was to remove the criminal element from the region or reduce the amount of trafficking there, then the strategy would be ineffective if the criminal operations were ongoing under a different TCO. This metric of success sets a high bar and may require a unified, whole-of-government approach because it requires a solution to the underlying problems that allow these groups to function. Discussion of those problems and how to solve them falls outside the scope of this research but are important points to consider when analyzing counter-TCO strategies.[10]

2. Utilizing Terrorism Research to Analyze TCOs

As was previously discussed, the literature on leadership decapitation is principally focused on terrorist organizations. This research is most applicable to this thesis when it accounts for the impact of different motivating factors—namely, a terrorist organization's values-driven motivation versus TCOs' profit-driven motivation. The majority of the research on terrorist organizations implies that the ideological foundations

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[9] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 9–12; Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain" 59–62; Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark."

[10] Stewart M. Patrick, "How to Attack Transnational Crime," *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified July 9, 2012, https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-attack-transnational-crime; Yuriy A. Voronin, "Measures to Control Transnational Organized Crime, Summary" (unpublished report, last modified October 5, 2000), https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/184773.pdf; Paulette Lloyd, Beth Simmons, and Brandon Stewart, "Combating Transnational Crime: The Role of Learning and Norm Diffusion in the Current Rule of Law Wave," in *The Dynamics of the Rule of Law*, eds. Andre Nolkaemper, Michael Zurn, and Randy Peerenboom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 153–180; James O. Finckenauer, "Meeting the Challenge of Transnational Crime," *National Institute of Justice Journal* (July 2000), https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000244b.pdf.

of these groups impact the effectiveness of the leadership decapitation strategy by making them more susceptible during their foundational period and less susceptible once those ideas are institutionalized.[11] While the research on terrorist organizations is useful for research such as case studies or quantitative methods, it is important to note that ideological, or values-driven, organizations such as terrorist groups and profit-driven TCOs are behaviorally and ideologically different and that, therefore, they may respond differently to leadership decapitation.[12] Price lays out the specific variables that differentiate terrorist organizations (values-based organizations) from TCOs (profit-based organizations).[13] He argues that values-based organizations are more susceptible to decapitation due to the higher level of importance they place on the individual leader in framing the vision of the organization. These leaders are transformational, charismatic, and crucial to a values-based organization's survivability and expansion. Price's study shows that values-based organizations are more likely to end after decapitation than other organizations; Phillips agrees with this assessment.[14] These studies suggest that decapitation may not be effective against profit-based organizations such as TCOs.

Scholars analyzing TCOs fall into two categories based on the motivations of the groups they are studying: ideological or profit. Regardless of their differences, some utility can be taken from applying lessons learned from ideological groups and their highly centralized operations as described by Price and Phillips. Price's and Phillips' studies on terrorist organizations are convincing when analyzing the TCOs most common today but are less compelling when discussing the dominant TCOs of the late 20th century. This difference in applicability is due to the adaptive nature of TCOs: before leadership decapitation was widely implemented to counter TCOs, these organizations

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[11] Jordan, "Why Terrorist Groups Survive Decapitation Strikes"; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 324–336.

[12] Anders Ulstein, "The Narco-terrorism Connection," EURAD, March 6, 2010, http://www.eurad.net/en/news/supply_reduction/The%20narco-terrorism%20connection.9UFRjY0z.ips; H. Richard Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 52, no. 3 (September 2009): 285–286, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1007/s10611-009-9202-4; Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 14–23.

[13] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 14–23.

[14] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 43–46; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 327.

tended toward centralized power and charismatic leaders. The structure of groups from this time period allow for a more direct analysis utilizing terrorism studies.

After the successful decapitation campaigns of the late 20th century, however, these organizations fragmented and established institutional structures aimed at reducing their susceptibility to leadership removal. For example, following the dissolution of the Medellin and Cali cartels, new groups developed different structures to minimize the vulnerability created by relying on a small number of leaders for all decision-making. Kenney's study examines this difference in the TCOs of the past versus the present by contrasting Colombian TCOs of the 1970s with Colombian TCOs of the 2000s.[15] He finds that the earlier TCOs were highly centralized wheel networks and highly susceptible to decapitation. When analyzing the TCOs that developed after the fall of the initial organizations, his findings agree with Price and Phillips: the newer groups were more likely to be decentralized chain networks with much less importance put on a specific leader.[16] This distinction between groups of the past and the present is essential when examining why a leadership removal strategy could have been successful in the recent past but may not enjoy the same level of success now. In other words, TCOs may have adapted to counter this strategy, while the strategy has not adapted to account for their changes.

3. Defining the Critical Internal Factors in Predicting Effectiveness

The literature suggests that internal and external factors are critical in predicting the results of leadership decapitation on a specific organization regardless of whether the underlying drivers for the group are values or profit.[17] Internally, if a TCO establishes and codifies strong institutions that uphold its bureaucracy and infrastructure, then it significantly reduces its susceptibility to leadership decapitation. Jordan, Price, and

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[15] Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 187–190.

[16] Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 326–329; Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 18–19, 22–23; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 194–196.

[17] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 9–46; Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 53–77; Brian J. Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits? Violent Rivalry and Terrorist Group Longevity," *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 1 (2015), 62–75, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343314550538.

Kenney agree that there is a correlation in terrorist organizations between these factors and the survivability of the organization.[18] Jordan argues that as a group ages, its institutions, bureaucracy, and infrastructure strengthen and that older groups are, therefore, more resilient to leadership decapitation.[19] Price furthers this point and asserts that once a group has reached the 20-year mark, the state or organization countering the TCO may need may need to consider alternative methods to achieve their desired results.[20]

Furthermore, some scholars argue that well-established bureaucratically structured organizations are unlikely to collapse due to a forced leadership change.[21] According to Beittel and Kenney, the leaders of modern TCOs are interchangeable due to their organizations' predominantly decentralized chain network framework, suggesting they would not be susceptible to a decapitation strategy.[22] These networks operate as separate cells, each cell conducting its business with other cells along a decentralized relay system, with the leader mainly in charge of oversight.[23] By contrast, this research suggests a TCO would be more susceptible to leadership decapitation if it emphasizes a charismatic leader or has a centralized bureaucracy with weak supporting institutions.

Unlike organizations that are dependent on a charismatic leader, however, today's TCOs typically rise from local crime syndicates or DTOs to a transnational level by modeling themselves after successful corporations and businesses.[24] This modeling means that by the time the organization develops into a TCO, it will have standardized

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[18] Beittel, Rabasa et al., and Friman state that these factors are also at work in TCOs, but it is not the subject of their research. Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 43–46; Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 194–198.

[19] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark."

[20] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark."

[21] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 333–334; Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 60–61.

[22] Beittel, *Mexico*, 24–28; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 192–196.

[23] Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 194–198.

[24] Beittel, *Mexico*, 5–9; Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 286–287; Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Channing May, "The Business of Transnational Crime," Global Financial Integrity, April 11, 2017, http://www.gfintegrity.org/buiness-transnational -crime/; Tom Wainwright, *Narco-nomics: How to Run a Drug Cartel* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2016), 2–7.

operating procedures and a clear chain of command. By promoting this level of institutionalization and defining a potential line of succession, the TCO can protect itself from the long-term effects of leadership decapitation. The founding leaders are integral to this process because they can determine the infrastructure, bureaucracy, and institutional strength of their organization and push the organization to a more decentralized structure.

However, Jordan and Price disagree about the importance of charismatic leaders in extremely violent organizations, with Jordan arguing that the leader's charisma becomes institutionalized as the organization ages. If a charismatic leader wants to guarantee their group's longevity past their own role, then it is in their best interests to use their charisma to develop strong institutions within their group with the goal of carrying out and supporting their vision. Price contends that the organization's vulnerability to the state or a rival group makes them more susceptible to instability during leadership change.[25] Furthermore, he reasons that leaders of these groups should resist the institutionalization posited by Jordan because it makes them more vulnerable to state infiltration or a coup from within the group.[26] While both studies offer potentially useful information, the TCOs of today appear to institutionalize charisma as a safeguard against law enforcement's and rival groups' efforts to force a leadership change. Overall, Jordan's argument could explain why the TCOs of today may be less reliant on a specific leader; Price's argument may explain why the TCOs of the late 20th century refused to decentralize even when it became apparent the leaders were at risk of forcible removal.

4. Defining the Critical External Factors in Predicting Effectiveness

Studies have found that a terrorist organization or TCO's ability to survive leadership decapitation increases with high levels of popular support and a history of violent rivalry with law enforcement or competitors.[27] This finding is agreed upon by the central authors in the literature, with some analyzing the factors that could explain this trend. Jordan posits that there are six functions that popular support fulfills to increase the

[25] Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 18–23.

[26] Price, 18–23.

[27] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 27–28.

organization's chances of survival following an unexpected change in leadership.[28] First, popular support allows for a broader pool of candidates for recruitment. Second, the community can help protect the organization by aiding its members in avoiding security forces. Third, it provides the group with a measure of legitimacy for their actions. This legitimacy offers the basis for the fourth and fifth functions, which are the acceptance or promotion of the organization's use of violence by the populace and the endurance of its political or ideological relevance. Finally, community support provides for the organization by facilitating its acquisition of resources.[29]

Phillips further theorizes that groups that undergo conflict become more adaptive to change, open to innovation, flexible in their strategies, and cohesive in their member base.[30] His study indicates that violent competing groups tended to survive longer than those without violent rivalry. Because he was analyzing terrorist groups, which are ideologically driven, his findings show that rivalry did not influence a group's longevity when the organizations involved had the same goal or vision—for example, supporting a right-wing government. Conversely, TCOs are profit-driven and more likely to experience benefits from rivalry with each other despite both groups having a profit-maximizing goal. The profit incentive implies that TCOs will have more motivation to end the competition through elimination of the other group since this result means more potential profit for the surviving group. This theory agrees with Friman's argument that TCO's use violence to regulate their market and cement their interests. Law enforcement efforts can also act as another form of violent rivalry and, as such, should produce the same advantages. In sum, when violent rivalries occur between two TCOs, one group will have to cede to the other or risk being severely weakened or eliminated by the ensuing violence, but groups that survive this rivalry are likely to be less susceptible to leadership decapitation.

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[28] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark."

[29] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark."

[30] Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits?," 62–65.

5. Examining the Consequences

If leadership decapitation strategies are pursued to counter TCOs, there could be unintended side effects due to the creation of power vacuums, new vacancy chains as described by Friman, and increases in violence that, in turn, could compromise the potential for the success of this strategy. Friman, Jordan, Kenney, and Phillips agree that decapitation efforts that disrupt the targeted group create opportunities for rival and emerging groups by creating a power vacuum.[31] They posit that as these opportunities arise, there will be a corresponding rise in violence and criminal activity as rival and emerging groups compete to control new market opportunities. These groups can be expected to employ violence selectively as a market regulator since legal regulations are absent due to the illicit nature of the markets concerned.[32] TCOs are predominantly financially motivated, with large profit margins for leaders and other high-level members. Due to this monetary incentive, TCOs use violence selectively to protect market interests, territory, and networks, and, as a result, leadership decapitation will only affect violence in the region if the leader's removal disrupts the targeted group enough to create perceived market opportunities for rival groups.[33] When rival groups perceive the targeted group's hold on its piece of the market or its network to be weakening, there is likely to be a corresponding rise in violence as they vie for control of the targeted group's holdings. Once a group exerts steady control over those opportunities, the violence in the region will likely return to the status quo from before the instability caused by the decapitation.

Friman's vacancy chain theory furthers this argument by predicting that the disruption of the targeted group will cause it to relinquish some of its holdings in the market, which are desirable to other groups.[34] Those groups take the new opportunities

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[31] Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 58–61; Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 196; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 329–333.

[32] Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 286–288; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 325–326.

[33] Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 285–288.

[34] Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 58–61.

and, in doing so, abandon some of their less lucrative holdings for other groups to take, and this continues down the chain.[35] Additionally, he argues that decapitation creates a long vacancy chain within the targeted organization as intermediate-level members move up to top positions, which will eventually open entry-level positions at the lower levels. Friman's vacancy chain theory could explain the high levels of fragmentation seen following the decapitation of major DTOs (TCOs) in Central and South America.[36] These studies offer potentially relevant theories to explain the growth of TCOs in the Western Hemisphere despite focused elimination policies and tactics.

B. HYPOTHESES

TCOs are profit-driven organizations that operate and organize in ways similar to large licit transnational corporations.[37] Additionally, while the driving motivations behind TCOs are fundamentally different from those of terrorist organizations—with TCOs motivated by profit and terrorist organizations by values—the two share the same internal and external factors that determine their organizational resiliency. This thesis tests the factors that the literature shows are applicable to terrorist organizations on TCOs to see if they are generalizable to these groups and assesses their impact on the effectiveness of leadership decapitation. To conduct this assessment, this thesis analyzes historical cases of leadership decapitation on TCOs utilizing the identified factors and then determines which, if any, hold true with these types of organizations. While these factors are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they may, through application, display a cumulative effect. Furthermore, this thesis assesses whether the lucrativeness of the illicit market of TCOs creates an overriding drive such that leadership decapitation alone will not achieve long-term success in defeating the market supporting them.

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[35] Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 58–61.

[36] Beittel *Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations*, 24–28; Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 58–61.

[37] Wainwright, *Narco-nomics*, 2–7; Moises Naim, *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats are Hijacking the Global Economy* (United States of America: Anchor Books, 2006), 75–77; Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 286–287.

Ultimately, this thesis tests two hypotheses: First, it tests the hypothesis that decentralized TCOs high levels of popular support and a history of violent rivalries with other TCOs or the government will be less susceptible to a leadership decapitation strategy than those that are centralized with low levels of popular support and no history or violent rivalry. Second, it assesses whether the profitability of the enterprise makes TCOs less vulnerable to leadership decapitation than ideological groups.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis compares case studies of TCOs in Mexico and Colombia that have experienced leadership decapitation in their past. The four case studies are TCOs that have organized structures similar to large transnational corporations in the legal market: Medellin cartel, Cali cartel, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the Sinaloa cartel.[38] Following leadership decapitation, the Medellin and Cali cartels collapsed, the FARC entered into negotiations and transitioned into a legitimate organization, and the Sinaloa cartel continued operations. The Mexico- and Colombia-based TCOs were chosen due to the different backgrounds of groups originating from these areas, as Colombia-based groups mostly started as drug producing and trafficking organizations, while Mexico-based organizations mostly started as drug trafficking organizations. The Medellin cartel is included to showcase the evolution of TCOs, since it fell in the 1990s, and how that influenced the effectiveness of leadership decapitation as a strategy. The Cali cartel depicts the effects of surviving violent rivalry and multiple decapitations.[39] The relationship between the Medellin and Cali cartels also depicts the significance of allies and violent rivals in determining the organization's vulnerability to leadership decapitation. Meanwhile, the FARC illustrates the potential differences between profit-motivated TCOs such as the previously discussed organizations and politically driven organizations that expanded into TCOs. The Sinaloa cartel was selected due to the differences in revenue, origin, and longevity from the Colombian examples. The Sinaloa cartel originated as a drug trafficking organization, then diversified by

[38] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, xiv-xvi; Beittel, *Mexico*, 8–10.

[39] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 29; Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits?," 62–64; Friman, "Drug Markets and the Selective Use of Violence," 286–287; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama" 187–192.

focusing on lucrative markets such as counterfeiting, trafficking, and smuggling, and tends to avoid unnecessary violence.[40] The Sinaloa cartel is also an example of how TCOs are affected by multiple leadership changes and how police corruption can influence the effectiveness of decapitation.[41]

In analyzing each group, this thesis gives a brief background as well as an update on their current status and operations. Then, each chapter in this thesis utilizes each of the hypothesized key indicators for predicting the success of leadership decapitation (institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts) in regard to that organization and then predicts whether leadership decapitation should have been effective against that particular group and in the region. In cases where there are critical nuances for that organization such as cumulative decapitation or increased law enforcement efforts, this thesis discusses how those may or may not affect the predicted result. If an organization experienced multiple decapitations, this thesis only re-analyzes the cases where the organization changed in a way that could affect the prediction between decapitations. When it is probable that law enforcement efforts made a significant impact on an organization leading up to a decapitation, this impact is analyzed and taken into account in the final prediction. Finally, this thesis compares the prediction for each group to the historical reality; then the immediate results versus the long-term results are compared to evaluate the overall success. Following the case studies, this thesis addresses the findings and their corresponding implications for policy.

D. OUTLINE

This first chapter gives a theoretical background to the overarching discussion on the effectiveness of leadership decapitation and what potential factors could affect effectiveness. The second chapter analyzes the rise and fall of the two of the most infamous TCOs, the Medellin cartel led by Pablo Escobar and the Cali cartel. This chapter analyzes both organizations against the aforementioned key internal and external factors at their peak power in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Then, it examines the

[40] Beittel, *Mexico*, 13–15.

[41] Beittel, 13–15.

results of each indicator in relation to the groups' demise following the forcible removal of their respective leaders to determine if the indicators had any measurable effect on effectiveness of leadership decapitation. The third chapter shifts focus to the FARC and explains how the political motivation of this group impacted the counter-strategy before analyzing it and then comparing it to its reality following its legitimation. This case study is unique, in that, the peace agreement negotiated the survival of this group as a legitimate political party. The fourth chapter applies these same principles to the Sinaloa cartel and attempts to explain its resiliency in the face of multiple leadership decapitations. The fifth chapter concludes by arguing that leadership decapitation strategies are only effective when applied within a greater strategy to counter TCOs. Additionally, TCOs represent a global problem and, therefore, require a joint global solution.

II. MEDELLIN AND CALI CARTELS: SETTING THE PRECEDENT FOR LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION SUCCESS

The story of Colombia from the 1970s through the early 2000s was the story of narco-traffickers and their evolution into TCOs. Probably the most infamous were the Medellin and Cali Cartels: in 1988, former president Betancur stated with regard to the Medellin cartel that Colombia was "up against an organization stronger than the state."[42] This statement could just as easily be about the threat posed by these two groups as a whole. The Medellin and Cali cartels became the first transnational narcotic organizations and controlled the majority of the world's cocaine trade.[43] Both of these groups undertook violent campaigns against any perceived opposition, which, in the 1980s, led to the deaths of "3,000 soldiers and police officers, more than 1,000 public officials, 170 judicial employees, 50 lower judges, dozens of journalists, 12 Supreme Court judges, three presidential candidates, one attorney general, and one newspaper publisher."[44] This violence was by no means the only strategy employed by the Medellin and Cali cartels; they also engaged in a widespread campaign of extortion, bribery, and intimidation.[45] Generally, the Medellin cartel kept a higher profile and had a tendency toward violence, while the Cali cartel attempted to maintain a lower profile and tended to be more placating toward government authorities.[46]

These tendencies impacted the method of leadership removal for each: Pablo Escobar and most of the top leadership of the Medellin cartel were killed, whereas three of the four leaders of the Cali cartel were arrested, the fourth was killed, and one of the

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[42] Robert Filippone, "The Medellin Cartel: Why We Can't Win the Drug War," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 17, no. 4 (1994): 324, 10.1080/10576109408435960.

[43] Gus Martin, "Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime," in *Transnational Organized Crime*, ed. Jay Albanese and Philip Reichel (Washington, DC: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 182.

[44] Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Narco-terrorism: How Governments around the World have Used the Drug Trade to Finance and Further Terrorist Activities* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992), 86–87; Rensselaer W. Lee, III, "Colombia's Cocaine Syndicates," *Crime, Law, and Social Change* 16 (1991), 8, Proquest.

[45] Martin, "Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime," 182; Lee III, "Colombia's Cocaine Syndicate," 8.

[46] Lee III, "Colombia's Cocaine Syndicates," 9.

arrested was assassinated while in prison. Following these forced leadership changes, both organizations disintegrated; what remains of them is a mere shadow of their former selves. Due to the overwhelming effectiveness of leadership decapitation against these organizations, it became the default method of dealing with TCOs for the United States and many of its international partners, including Mexico and Colombia.[47]

This chapter analyzes the Medellin and Cali cartels comparatively and then examines how their relationship with each other, along with other internal and external factors—institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts—may have affected their vulnerability to leadership decapitation. The discussion begins with a brief overview of the Medellin and Cali cartels, their rise to power and period of dominance. Then it analyzes their theoretical vulnerability to leadership decapitation and whether those predictions align with the reality of their collapse. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the highly centralized structure of these organizations and the nature of the individuals at the top coupled with low levels of popular support created a critical vulnerability to leadership decapitation that was fully exploited by Colombian law enforcement efforts.

A. THE MEDELLIN CARTEL AND PABLO ESCOBAR

In the late 1980s, the Medellin cartel, led by Pablo Escobar, was one of the most lucrative businesses in the world and made Escobar the seventh richest man in the world.[48] The term cartel is misleading, however, as this organization operated more like a collective than a price-setting cartel as defined in economics. Its organizational structure came about largely because of the group's founding as *Muerte a Secuestradores* ("Death to Kidnappers," or MAS) in 1982.[49] MAS was an alliance of traffickers in the Medellin

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[47] "The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) 1990–1994," DEA, accessed December 10, 2018, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/1990-1994%20p%2067-76.pdf; Andrew Cockburn, "The Kingpin Strategy," *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/andrew-cockburn/the-kingpin-strategy_b_7161690.html.

[48] Halah Touryalai, "Watching Netflix's Narcos? Here's Pablo Escobar In Forbes' First-Ever Billionaire Issue In 1987," Forbes, last modified September 15, 2015, https://www.forbes.com/sites/halahtouryalai/2015/09/15/watching-netflixs-narcos-heres-pablo-escobar-in-forbes-first-ever-billionaire-issue-in-1987/#3f59308d4369.

[49] Filippone, "The Medellin Cartel," 325.

region of Colombia that joined together in response to the kidnapping of a member of the Ochoa family, who were prominent traffickers and colleagues of Escobar, by M-19.[50] The alliance proved lucrative to its members, as they were able to share security resources and increase overall capital, and so it continued on even after they had dealt with M-19 and the threat of kidnapping had decreased.[51] As the organization grew to encompass new business ventures and pooled resources to insure their shipments, it evolved beyond trafficking and self-protection to become the Medellin cartel, with branches dealing in all parts of the illicit economy as well as the legal system. The "Big Three," Pablo Escobar Gaviria, Jorge Ochoa Vasquez, and Carlos Ledher Rivas, controlled all operations of the Medellin cartel and approved any new enterprises or changes within the alliance.[52]

Despite having a clearly delineated hierarchical internal organization, the structure of the Medellin cartel was not readily apparent to outside sources, as was made apparent by the conflicting information on the Medellin hierarchy published in several contemporary magazines. In 1987, Pablo Escobar and Jorge Ochoa were featured in *Forbes'* first "international billionaires" issue—the only two Colombians to make the list.[53] Escobar owned 40 percent of the Medellin cartel by the late 1980s (the largest share held by one person), and Ochoa, with his brothers, owned 30%. By 1987, Forbes estimated Escobar to be worth over $2 billion, with the cartel netting more than $7 billion over the previous five years.[54] However, another member of the Medellin cartel, Jose Rodriguez Gacha, made the cover of *Fortune* magazine in 1989 and was estimated to be worth $5 billion.[55]

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[50] Filippone, "The Medellin Cartel," 325.

[51] Filippone, 340–342.

[52] Filippone, 326.

[53] Touryalai, "Watching Netflix's Narcos?."

[54] Escobar was named seven years in a row in Forbes "international billionaires" issue and Forbes estimated he was making approximately $3 billion. Touryalai, "Watching Netflix's Narcos?."

[55] Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001), 78.

These shifting numbers signaled observers' confusion about the profitability of the drug market. Because profits from the illicit economy leave no record in the form of tax forms or other legal paperwork, most media companies like *Forbes* and *Fortune* magazine estimated the cash flow or monetary worth of suspected traffickers using indirect measures such as drug interdictions, public expenses, and the average price of cocaine on the street. These companies' inability to agree on which trafficker had more net worth also highlights the overall lack of understanding most analysts struggled with on determining the hierarchal structure of the cartels.

The confusion over the cartel's structure and leadership was not merely limited to magazines. In 1989, once the United States decided to take more direct action against the Medellin cartel, the U.S. agents in Colombia would also misidentify the leaders, naming Gacha as the top man.[56] Escobar was not revealed as the top leader until after Gacha's death, when agents noticed there was no change in or disruption to the Medellin cartel's operations but an increase in calls to Escobar from Gacha's associates.[57] The Big Three and their associates at the top of organization remained micromanagers in the organization until their eventual removal by law enforcement, at which point the organization fell into disarray and the Cali cartel moved in to fill the power vacuum for a short while before meeting a similar fate.

B. THE CALI CARTEL AND THE RODRIGUEZ OREJUELA BROTHERS

Whereas Escobar and the Medellin cartel gained significant notoriety from their violent actions, the Cali cartel preferred to keep violence in the realm of deniability, earning its leaders the nickname "the gentlemen from Cali."[58] These "gentlemen" were Gilberto Rodriguez Orejuela, Miguel Angel Rodriguez Orejuela, Jose Santa Cruz Londono, and Hélmer Herrera Buitrago. The brothers Gilberto and Miguel were bankers who operated in a higher class of society than their Medellin counterparts and owned a

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[56] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 78–80.

[57] Bowden, 83.

[58] Elaine Shannon Washington, "New Kings of Coke," *Time* 137, no. 26 (July 1, 1991): 28, http://search.proquest.com/docview/212694815/.

soccer team and a large pharmacy chain.[59] Their relationship with the Medellin cartel would evolve from suspicious peers in the U.S. drug market and occasional allies in the realm of Colombian politics to a bitter rivalry that continued until the Medellin cartel's demise.[60]

In keeping with their nickname, the leaders of the Cali cartel employed a large number of lawyers and preferred to fight their battles with the government in the courtroom rather than in the street.[61] Although they engaged in their share of violence against potential rival groups, they shied away from direct involvement in matters that would openly humiliate the Colombian government or police.[62] This lower-profile business model kept the "gentlemen of Cali" relatively safe from the measures being employed to catch Escobar. Therefore, at the end of the Medellin cartel's regional dominance, the Cali cartels assets were not seized, there were no large rewards posted, and there was no manhunt for them.[63] This oversight allowed the Cali cartel to take advantage of the Medellin cartel's weakness by slowly expanding into Medellin's territory before finally taking over as the dominant TCO in the world after the Medellin cartel's collapse. This victory for the gentlemen of Cali would only last for a few short years, however, before their organization would fall to the same fate.[64]

C. INDICATORS FOR LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION

This section will analyze the Medellin and Cali cartels internal and external factors that were defined in Chapter I—institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts—to determine if these factors may have

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[59] Ronald Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe: Taking down Colombia's Cali Drug Cartel* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 68–70.

[60] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 254–255.

[61] Chepesiuk, 254–255.

[62] Chepesiuk, 254–255.

[63] Lee III, "Colombia's Cocaine Syndicates," 31.

[64] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 255–259.

impacted the organizations' vulnerability to leadership decapitation. A comparative approach will be used to discuss each organization's similarities and differences for each factor and how that may have affected their respective responses to leadership decapitation.

1. Institutionalization

Both the Medellin and Cali cartels operated as highly centralized wheel networks, as depicted in Figure 1, which made them particularly vulnerable to leadership decapitation. The leaders, or core, controlled all aspects of the organization. Double-headed arrows represent groups that operate at similar levels within the organization and are accountable to each other, while single-headed arrows represent a distinct chain of command, with the core leaders holding the others accountable.[65] The amount of micromanagement varied from leader to leader: some gave objectives and allowed the subordinate to decide the means while others gave subordinates detailed instructions with no room for deviation. Regardless of leadership style, the result was the same: both organizations were heavily dependent on their leadership to continue day-to-day operations.[66]

[65] Michael Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking: Network Forms of Organization in the Colombian Cocaine Trade," *Global Crime* 8, no. 3 (2007), 244, 10.1080/17440570701507794.

[66] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 103–104; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 24–25, 46–49, 61, 88–89, 168.

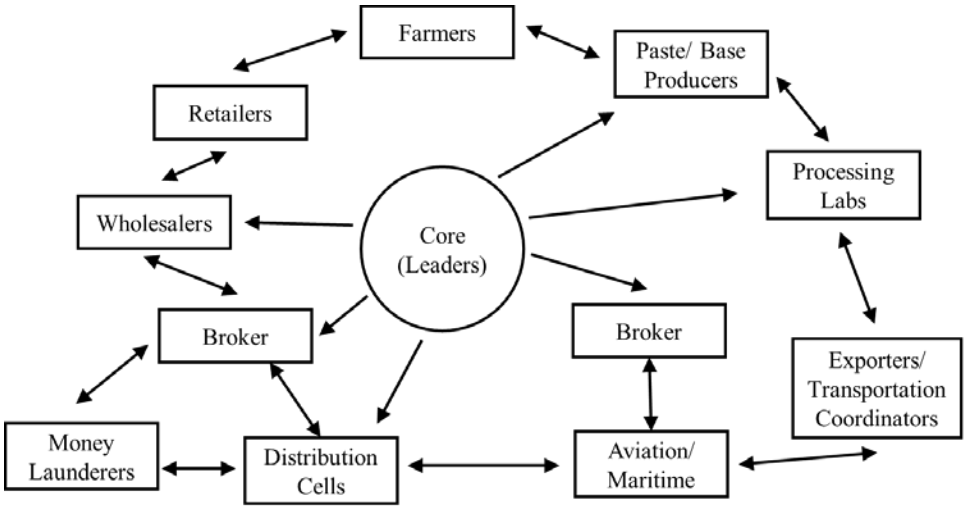

Figure 1. Wheel network for drug trafficking organizations.[67]

While the organization type depicted in Figure 1 may look structured, with open communication between the different operations, this was only true at the higher levels of the organization. Lower down, each type of activity in Medellin and Cali, whether assassinations, bribery, narcotics production or distribution, or political messaging, had its own branch separate from the rest of the organization and reported up its own chain of command to the core.[68] At the level of day-to-day operations, no one knew more than was necessary to complete their job, and only the leaders of the branch may have had the full picture of their segment of operations.

While the high levels of centralization exhibited by both the Medellin and Cali cartels theoretically made them more susceptible to leadership decapitation, how vulnerable they were differed due to the different power distribution at the top of each organization. The Medellin cartel was led heavily by Pablo Escobar; most decisions and operations were made or run by his authority. Upon the loss of other leaders, his response was to consolidate their responsibilities into his own. An example of how this kind of centralization plays out in leadership decapitation is found in the Medellin cartel with the death of Gacha. Although he was near the top and ran his own trafficking networks

[67] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 244.

[68] Filippone, "The Medellin Cartel," 327.

within the cartel, when he was gone, his responsibilities were taken over by Escobar, with barely any disturbance to operations.[69] Once the Ochoa brothers and Ledher were out of the picture, however, Escobar's paranoia spiked, and he further consolidated control and power to himself.[70] This move further increased the vulnerability of the Medellin cartel to leadership decapitation, as there were no contingency plans if anything happened to Escobar.[71] While this arrangement allowed Escobar a huge amount of control with regard to what the cartel was doing, when they were doing it, and to whom it was being done, it also made him a critical lynchpin in the system, thereby rendering the organization highly susceptible to leadership decapitation.

Conversely, the Cali cartel spread power among its leaders, with each being responsible for different operations, which made it slightly less vulnerable to leadership decapitation by having less concentrated power and authority than the Medellin cartel. For example, Gilberto was responsible for the financial branch, including money laundering, which he accomplished through his position as Chairman of the Board of *Banco de Trabajadores*.[72] The other cells of operation within the Cali cartel were narco-trafficking, military, political, and legal.[73] By splitting the responsibilities up among the leaders, the Cali cartel diffused the potential impact if one or two leaders were removed. If one or two leaders were eliminated, then operations may have been disrupted for a short time until a replacement was found or the responsibilities were redistributed. If all of the leaders were dispatched in a short time frame, then operations would likely be in disarray and result in a vacancy chain within the organization whereby upward mobility of personnel either fills the leadership positions or results in fragmentation due to disagreement over the successors. In reality, three of the Cali cartel's four leaders were

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[69] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 83.

[70] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 180–185; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 99, 124, 126.

[71] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 83, 180–185; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 99, 124, 126.

[72] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 23–26, 32, 64, 68, 118; Washington, "New Kings of Coke," 28.

[73] Nicholas Coghlan, *Saddest Country: On Assignment in Colombia* (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 132.

arrested within three months with the fourth negotiating his surrender shortly thereafter and the Cali cartel's multi-billion dollar business crumbled.[74]

2. Popular Support

The literature on leadership decapitation suggests that a group that enjoys widespread popular support will be more resilient following the removal of a leader. The massive popular support the Medellin and Cali cartels enjoyed in their respective bases may have provided enough protection to allow them to continue operations within those cities following leadership decapitation, but it was not enough to protect their holdings as transnational organizations. Their home bases provided a safe haven for the cartels to carry out operations with less fear of repercussions and also gave them a large recruitment pool. The loyalty Medellin and Cali instilled in these populations may have allowed enough stability post-decapitation for these organizations to rebound, but outside of their bases, it was a different story. The lack of support in the rest of the country greatly surpassed the slight protection the support of the home base provided; as a result, both organizations remained vulnerable to leadership decapitation.

The main difference between the two organizations was their preferred methods for dealing with opposition, and this difference affected the amount of popular support they received. The Medellin cartel tended toward violence against any opposition. Within Medellin, Escobar was renowned as a saint-like figure, known to give money to the people when he was in town. However, outside his base, Escobar basically trademarked the threat of "plata o plomo" (silver or lead, referring to the choice between a bribe or death) when dealing with obstacles, which alienated the populace outside the cartel's base and humiliated the Colombian government by showcasing its inability to provide security.[75] The Cali cartel tended toward appeasement and bribery in political circles and utilized violence when they had plausible deniability or when dealing with other illicit organizations.[76] This policy difference allowed them to cultivate allies and even fund a

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[74] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 218–220, 227–228, 233–234.

[75] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 24, 40, 50–53, 95.

[76] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 147, 189–190.

successful election campaign in 1994, resulting in President Samper's election. Cali's attempt at controlling the presidential office ultimately backfired because the scandal that erupted when Cali's involvement was revealed pressured Samper into being more aggressive in his approach to the Cali cartel and resulted in the arrests of the leaders and Cali's eventual downfall.[77] As a result of their failure to garner widespread popular support, neither group had enough popular support to stabilize their organization and enable their operations to continue after their respective decapitations.

3. Rivalries and Alliances

Another factor in determining an organization's resiliency to leadership decapitation is their history of violent rivalry: the evidence from the case studies of the Medellin and Cali cartels in mixed. Relationships played an important role in determining the resiliency of the Medellin and Cali cartels to leadership decapitation, especially their tendency to shift from friendly associate to aggressive competitor with each other. Whether they were allies or rivals, their relationship refined the tactics, techniques, and procedures within both cartels but also exacerbated their tendency to concentrate power at the top. This tendency ultimately left both organizations more vulnerable to leadership decapitation.

At the onset of their relationship, the cartels created an alliance based on a mutual political goal to end extradition to the United States. By the time this goal had been accomplished, the Cali cartel had outgrown its share of the U.S. drug market, and thus, its relationship with the Medellin cartel became one of violent economic competition.

The Medellin cartel was in a position of power at the onset of its relationship with the Cali cartel and continued to operate from this position throughout the relationship. Its inability to recognize and address the changing power dynamics created a weakness within the organization. As the Colombian government increased its efforts in the hunt for Escobar, the Cali cartel funded an organization called Los PEPEs (The People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar) that brutally hunted down members and facilities of the

[77] Chepesiuk, 189–190, 201–205.

Medellin cartel.[78] The Medellin cartel was now fighting a war on multiple fronts and Escobar was the only leader left and he did not trust anyone else to manage operations.[79] Between law enforcement, Los PEPEs, and Escobar's growing paranoia the Medellin cartel's vulnerability to leadership decapitation was growing as Escobar continued to consolidate operational authority for himself.[80]

The Cali cartel constantly assessed the Medellin cartel for potential weaknesses that would signal Cali's turn to rise to the top of the drug world and utilized lessons learned from its interactions with the Medellin cartel. Even the Cali cartel's business savvy did not guarantee its survival: it weathered its violent rivalry with Medellin only to be toppled by law enforcement.[81] Although studies have shown that groups that survive violent rivalries should be more resilient to leadership decapitation, the Cali case study implies that this is not always the case.[82] The Cali cartel's tendency to use proxies in its rivalry with the Medellin cartel make it difficult to ascertain the specifics of how that rivalry was conducted, but it is clear that the rivalry did not provide the added protection from leadership decapitation that the literature suggests.[83] The lack of added protection could have been due to their rivalry with the Medellin cartel being conducted more by proxy, or it could have been due to the individual personalities of the leaders and their disinclination to disperse power into different levels of the organization.[84] The literature suggests that a violent rivalry should draw the attention of the leaders to weaknesses in organization structure that need to be addressed. The Cali cartel case study suggests that either violent rivalries do not always result in solutions that fix deficiencies in the

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[78] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 187, 197.

[79] The Ochoa brothers negotiated a surrender to the Colombian government with the help of the Cali cartel shortly before Escobar turned himself in to serve time in a prison he built. Then, Escobar murdered two of his associates that were running operations for him while he was incarcerated in *La Catedral* shortly before his escape because he believed they may have cheated him. These situations probably fed his paranoia that he could not trust anyone else to run the Medellin cartel. Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 94–95, 181.

[80] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 181–187, 237–238.

[81] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 256–257.

[82] Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits?," 71–72.

[83] Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits?," 71–72; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 23, 63–64, 125–32.

[84] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 66–67, 124.

organizational structure, or these interactions are dependent on individual personalities to address vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is likely the violent rivalry between the Medellin and Cali cartels simply did not provide enough resiliency to cover the vulnerability created by the organizational structure of either organization.

4. Law Enforcement Efforts

Protracted law enforcement efforts that involve multiple lines of effort tend to produce an organization that is more resilient to decapitation. If the goal is to decrease vulnerability, law enforcement efforts should draw an organization's attention to its organizational vulnerabilities and then pressure the organization to take steps to address the vulnerability, much like the previous factor of violent rivalry. With this factor, the results for the case studies of the Medellin and Cali cartels are similar. Although the Medellin and Cali cartels survived the initial onset of violent rivalry with law enforcement, each organization eventually fragmented as a result of leadership decapitation efforts by law enforcement.[85] The length of their struggle and, for the Medellin case, the Colombian government's explicit goal of leadership decapitation should have signaled to both groups the need to take steps to reduce their vulnerability to this strategy. Instead, Escobar continued to consolidate power throughout his struggle against the Colombian government and law enforcement until his demise.[86] Without his leadership, the Medellin cartel quickly crumbled, and the Cali cartel took over key market shares.[87]

After the fall of the Medellin cartel, it should have been even more obvious to the Cali cartel that steps needed to be put in place to protect the business in the event of the leaders' removal. Instead, the leaders maintained their grip on power, made no plans for succession, and, when law enforcement was closing in, negotiated their surrender.[88] They may have intended to continue running operations from prison, much as

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[85] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 98–99, 124, 262.

[86] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 181–187, 237–238.

[87] Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 254–257.

[88] Chepesiuk, 254–259.

Escobar did from La Catedral; if this was their plan, it was unsuccessful. Following its leaders' incarceration, the Cali organization also fragmented and gave way to new organizations.[89]

The Medellin and Cali cartel case studies both suggest that law enforcements' blatant efforts at leadership decapitation may not always cause the TCO to respond in a predictable way—namely, taking precautions for the survival of the cartel. This finding also implies that it could be the organizational structure and type of leadership that determines this reaction: with power concentrated in a single figure or small group, an organization's response to leadership decapitation is effectively determined by the leaders' idiosyncratic response to the threat.

D. CONCLUSION

Due to their dependency on leaders for decision-making, a lack of popular support outside their bases, a breakdown in alliances, and multiple lines of effort by law enforcement, the Medellin and Cali cartels were both moderately to highly susceptible to a strategy of leadership decapitation. Pablo Escobar's move to consolidate power and micromanage all aspects of the organization made his death the death knell for the Medellin cartel; the Cali cartel's power-sharing among its leaders was not protection enough to shield their organization from forced leadership removal. In the cases of Medellin and Cali, the highly centralized structure of these TCOs kept them from taking steps to disperse power throughout the organization and, ultimately, left a fatal flaw that could not be protected against by other means.

The fall of these organizations did not, however, mean an end to the problem of drug trafficking in Colombia. In fact, the fate of the Cali and Medellin cartels provides newer cartels with lessons on how to avoid a similar fate, and most seem to have established themselves accordingly. As Martin states:

> With the supplanting of the Cali and Medellin cartels, Colombian drug traffickers moderated their operational resistance to the government and

[89] Chepesiuk, 254–259.

> they have not resumed narco-terrorism to the same degree as the large cartels. This has brought a measure of stability from the perspective of Colombian transnational organized crime, because drugs continue to flood the illicit market and Colombian gangs continue to prosper from the demand for drugs in Europe and the United States.[90]

The case studies of the Medellin and Cali cartels suggest both the promise and the limitations of a decapitation strategy. Although the two TCO's are gone, the illicit economy they developed is still thriving under new leadership. Leadership decapitation was successful in both cases at dismantling the large TCOs, but it was unsuccessful at stopping the drug trade.

[90] Martin, "Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime," 183.

III. THE FARC AND COLOMBIA: A DECAPITATION SUCCESS

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is an important case for this thesis because it represents a successful use of a decapitation strategy as a piece of a grander strategy. The FARC is an insurgency, not a traditional Transnational Criminal Organization (TCO)—it is the only insurgency covered in this thesis—but this case has important lessons for this thesis because it illuminates how the prevalent terrorist and insurgency studies could be generalizable to TCOs. As was discussed in the first chapter, the core motivation of the FARC is a political ideology rather than the profit motive that characterizes the other case studies. This difference is critical to acknowledge when compiling a counter-strategy for these organizations because a national government can leverage the political organization's stated goals and objectives in peace negotiations. The government's willingness to engage politically with an insurgency has implications for the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations as well as for the insurgency's social resources and recruitment bases—all of which has been true in the case of the FARC.

The FARC conducted an insurgency campaign that lasted approximately 52 years, until officially ending its existence as an armed group in 2017 as part of a peace deal.[91] President Santos was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for work in achieving this historic agreement.[92] Since the peace agreement was signed, the Colombian economy has been

[91] "Colombia Timeline—Profile," *BBC*, last modified August 1, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19390164; "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly," *The Economist*, last modified July 28, 2018, https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2018/07/28/history-will-judge-colombias-outgoing-president-kindly.

[92] Nicholas Casey, "Colombia's President, Juan Manuel Santos, Is Awarded Nobel Peace Prize," *New York Times*, last modified October 7, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/world/americas/nobel-peace-prize-juan-manuel-santos-colombia.html.

steadily growing.[93] Colombia has marketed this economic success as well as the peace deal to improve their international image as a reliable partner.[94]

To explain how Colombia successfully utilized leadership decapitation as an element of the government's strategy to bring the FARC to the negotiating table, this chapter first gives a brief background on the rise of the FARC in Colombia. Then it examines the government's changing counterinsurgency strategies under President Pastrana (1998–2002), President Uribe (2002–2010), and President Santos (2010–2018). This history establishes how leadership decapitation evolved within these strategies before becoming its own objective. It then discusses internal and external features of the FARC that bore on the eventual success of leadership decapitation and may help predict the effectiveness of this strategy in the future. Finally, it analyzes the role of leadership decapitation in bringing the FARC to the negotiating table as well as its impact on the FARC as an organization.

A. THE RISE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (1948–1998)

The FARC evolved over time from a political party to an armed insurgency fighting a self-proclaimed "people's war" before eventually being labelled a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States.[95] It is important to examine the roots of this organization and its changes to understand how it justified its violent actions against the

[93] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

[94] "Colombia Peace Would Boost GDP, Triple Foreign Investment -Government," *Reuters*, last modified December 9, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/colombia-economy-peace-idUSL1N13Y1UQ20151209; Francisco Serrano, "The Economics of the Colombian-FARC Peace Accord," *Foreign Affairs*, last modified August 30, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas/2017-08-30/economics-colombia-farc-peace-accord.

[95] "Colombia: International Religious Freedom Report 2005," United States Department of State, 2005, https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51632.htm; "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," United States Department of State, accessed November 30, 2018, https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm.

Colombian government and the implications for non-combatants. The origin of the FARC is found in the period of Colombian history from 1948–1958 known as La Violencia.[96] This conflict was a civil war that raged between Conservative and Liberal parties and resulted in between 200,000-400,000 casualties, or approximately four percent of the total population.[97] The FARC gained experience and tactics in this conflict that they would use throughout their insurgency, and this level of violence set a standard that was later emulated by narco-traffickers and insurgent organizations throughout the country.[98]

Following La Violencia, the Colombian Communist Party (PCC) resettled disgruntled members of their party into rural areas of the country; these pockets of support formed the foundation of support for the FARC. Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas, members of the PCC, founded the FARC as a political movement with the stated objective of pushing reforms that would allow for the election of a Leftist government.[99] The FARC's proposed reforms and objectives included the possibility of using military force to overtake the Colombian government and force social reforms that addressed the country's rampant inequality.[100] By 1964, the FARC, as they are known today, expanded beyond their previous role as the armed wing of the PCC.[101] To fund its underlying political goals and arm a rebellion, the FARC resorted to trafficking in narcotics, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and hijackings.[102]

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[96] June S. Beittel, *Colombia: Background, U.S. Relations, and Congressional Interest*, CRS Report No. RL32250 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32250.pdf, 12–15.

[97] Mary Roldan, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia 1946–1953* (United States of America: Duke University Press, 2002), 315.

[98] Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, 11–15; June S. Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, CRS Report R42982 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 2–3, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42982.pdf.

[99] Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3.

[100] Beittel, 3.

[101] Beittel, 3.

[102] Beittel, 3.

Concurrently with these domestic struggles, Colombia was developing as a prominent producer of both heroin and cocaine.[103] Colombia's prominence in the illicit drug market exacerbated its internal instability and made it a near-perfect environment for various insurgencies, including the FARC, to grow and gain power.[104]

While the FARC was developing as an armed leftist organization, Colombia was earning its reputation as a narco-state from the 1970s through the 1990s. While Colombia had been violent previous to this period, especially throughout La Violencia, the 1990s saw an increasing amount of political assassination, corruption, and extortion by drug cartels, paramilitaries, and left-wing groups.[105] The rising pattern of violence in Colombia is depicted in the Figure 2. Notably, violence rose from the late 1980s until the 1990s and did not significantly ebb until 2003. A portion of this violence was carried out by paramilitary groups that were formed and supported by the wealthy landowners to protect them from the threat posed by the FARC.[106] These groups had mostly joined together by 1990 and formed the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).[107] Shortly after the AUC was formed, the United States government labelled it and the FARC as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) due to their pattern of involvement in drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom.[108]

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[103] Beittel, 2.

[104] Beittel, 2–4.

[105] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 43, 51–59, 71–72; "Colombia Timeline—Profile."

[106] Beittel, *Colombia*, 2.

[107] Beittel, 2.

[108] Beittel, 2.

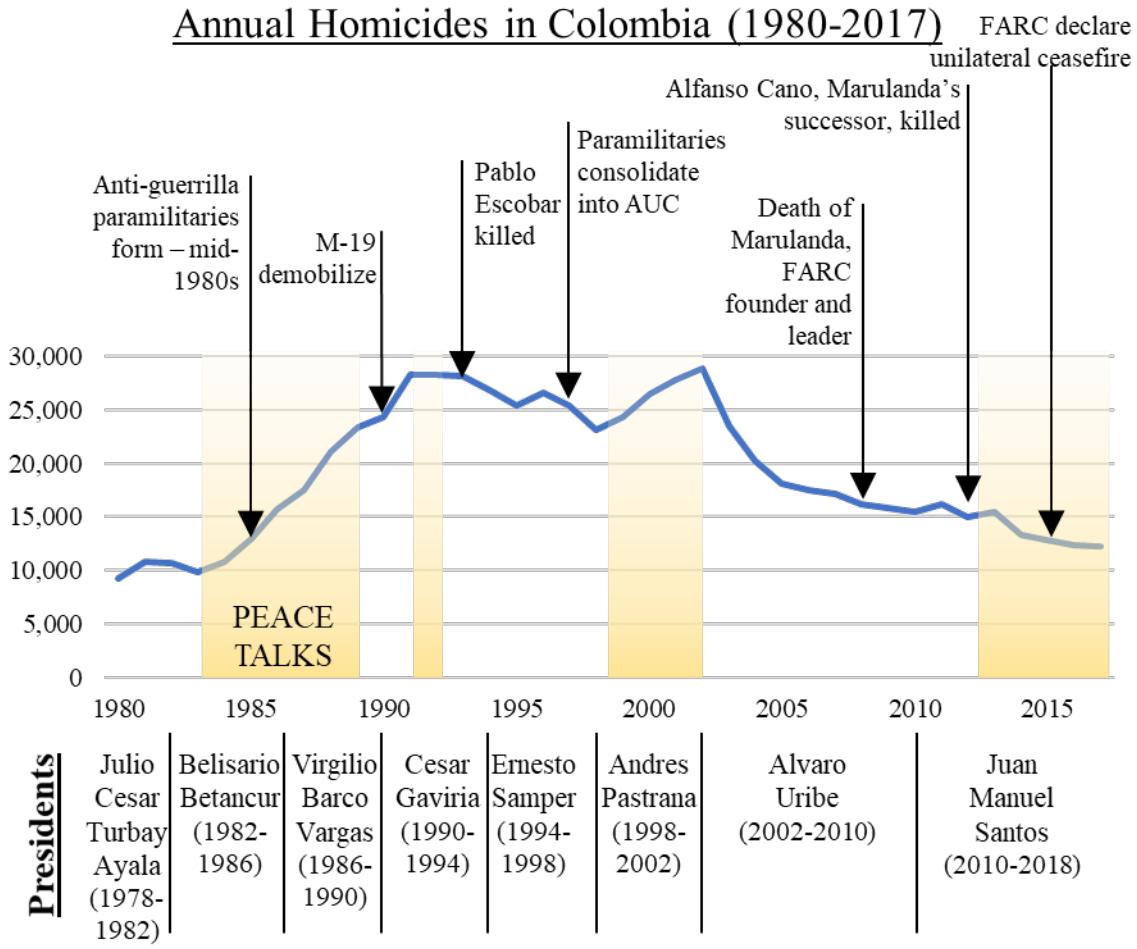

Figure 2. Timeline juxtaposing key events with presidential terms and annual homicides in Colombia.[109]

[109] Observtorio del Programa Presidencial de Derechos Humanos y DIH, *Caracterizacion del Homicidio en Colombia 1995–2006* (Bogota, DC: 2009), http://historico.derechoshumanos.gov.co/Observatorio/Publicaciones/documents/2010/estu_tematicos/CaracterizacionHomicidio95-06.pdf; Viceministerio para las Politicas y Asuntos Internacionales Direccion de Estudias Estrategicos—Grupo de Informacion Estadistica, *Logros de la Politica de Defensa y Seguridad* (Bogota, DC: MINDEFENSA, 2018), https://www.mindefensa.gov.co/irj/go/km/docs/Mindefensa/Documentos/descargas/estudios_sectoriales/info_estadistica/Logros_Sector_Defensa.pdf.

B. COLOMBIA'S CHANGING COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGIES.

Colombia's counter-FARC strategies shifted from the 1980s until 2012. Initially, peace negotiations were favored by the Colombian government, but the FARC proved duplicitous and used these talks to gain more power and territory. Once the negotiations proved unsuccessful, the government pursued a number of military options. Eventually, in the early 2000s, the Colombian government would settle on a plan that favored the use of military force to achieve the end states of regaining territory and removing FARC leadership.

1. Colombia's Counterinsurgency Efforts (1980–1998)

Colombia's counter-FARC strategies developed from the unsuccessful peace negotiations in the 1990s to the use of military force to achieve the end states of regaining territory and removing FARC leadership in the early 2000s. The first attempts at peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government occurred in the 1980s under President Belisario Bentancur.[110] Under the auspice of these negotiations, the FARC formed a political party, the Patriotic Union, and ran for office. Their success in the voting polls was short-lived as the party was mostly wiped out by targeted assassinations by paramilitaries, Colombian security forces, and, to a lesser degree, rogue elements of the FARC.[111] Following this setback, the FARC withdrew its diplomatic plans to refocus on military action.[112] The federal government faced a similar setback in power and legitimacy following this election when the former DEA office chief in Colombia, Joe Toft, accused newly elected President Samper of taking money from the Cali cartel to fund his campaign and released tapes as proof to the media.[113] These accusations led to a drawn-out impeachment process that ended only when President

[110] Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3.

[111] Beittel, 3.

[112] Beittel, 3.

[113] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 272.

Samper's term in office concluded in 1998.[114] The publicity surrounding these hearings damaged the government's efforts to promote the legitimacy of its future counter-narcos and counter-insurgency campaigns to the public; as a result the Pastrana administration began its strategy already at a disadvantage in terms of popular support.

2. The FARC under the Pastrana Administration (1998–2002)

President Pastrana, in his attempts to counter the FARC throughout his presidency, largely focused on diplomatic and political solutions and ignored military solutions, which unintentionally gave the FARC space to grow in power. Throughout his time in office, President Pastrana attempted a succession of unsuccessful peace talks with the FARC and even negotiated a safe haven of approximately 42,000 square miles, in the municipality of La Uribe, in which the FARC could operate in the interim and where the negotiations would take place.[115] Instead of utilizing this safe haven in good faith and within the terms of the negotiations, however, the FARC used it as a place to regroup and rearm in relative safety.[116]

This pattern of failure in peace negotiations caused a deterioration in popular and military support for President Pastrana.[117] Pastrana's neglect of military solutions deepened the schism between the government and military in the country's strategic planning and made for a disjointed strategy for counterinsurgency. Every agency involved, whether civilian or military, developed its own set of objectives and courses of action; consequently, there was very little unity of effort under the Pastrana administration.[118]

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[114] Arlene B. Tickner, "Colombia: Chronicle of a Crisis Foretold," *Current History* 97, no. 616 (February 1998): 64, http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/200749108?accountid=12702.

[115] Winifred Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats: U.S. Policymaking in Colombia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 145–146; "Colombia Timeline—Profile"; Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3; 4; 14.

[116] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 145–146; "Colombia Timeline—Profile"; Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3; 4; 14.

[117] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 145–146; "Colombia Timeline—Profile"; Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3.

[118] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 145–147.

The main exception to President Pastrana's disregard for the military was his pursuit of aid from the United States in the form of Plan Colombia. This aid was negotiated between the Pastrana and Clinton administrations under the auspice of the United States' War on Drugs.[119] Pastrana wanted to utilize this aid to contain the FARC by tying it to narco activities. This correlation was not difficult to prove, as by the early 2000s the FARC's involvement in the drug trade had expanded to include all the steps from cultivation to production and even some distribution; analysts estimated the FARC controlled approximately 60 percent of cocaine leaving Colombia.[120]

While the initial agreement provided a significant contribution of almost $1 billion in aid in the first year, it was only partially successful: this aid was mostly military equipment, and all assistance was explicitly earmarked for counter-narcotics.[121] This allocation made it mostly unavailable for counterinsurgency operations unless the targets could be tied to the drug trade. The arrangement made sense politically, as it catered to the interests of the United States in the region to garner a large amount of aid, but also illustrates how the lacking unity of effort between the administration and the military negatively impacted access to funding for non-drug related counter-insurgency operations.[122] Due in part to these complications and a lack of attention and maybe even interest from the Pastrana administration, the military instituted a number of restructuring reforms to combat these narco-insurgencies on their own. Ultimately, President Pastrana did not recognize the power of a joint civil–military plan; as a result, his plan was riddled with inconsistencies and inefficiencies.[123]

While Pastrana's administration continued to pursue diplomatic solutions, it failed to pass new legislation to allow for increased intelligence collection efforts by law

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[119] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats, 139–145*; Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3.

[120] Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 3.

[121] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 2–3; Thomas A. Marks, "Regaining the Initiative: Colombia Versus the FARC Insurgency," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, 2d ed., eds. Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian (New York: Osprey, 2010), 213–215; Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 4.

[122] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 152–163.

[123] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 213–215.

enforcement or the military against the FARC.[124] As the state continued to operate under peacetime legislation, the military adapted and instituted widespread reform that included better training, an increased corps of non-commissioned officers, more efficient processes to absorb and quickly implement lessons learned, and a reorganization into geographic divisions.[125] The military pursued these reforms after suffering a number of defeats at the hands of the FARC. These reforms parallel many institutions and practices found in the United States military and could be credited to the counter-narcotics funding and training the military received from the United States under Plan Colombia.[126] The Colombian military undertook these steps primarily due to Major General (MG) Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle, Army Chief of Operations and Inspector General of Armed Forces, his commander, General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, Commander of the Colombian Army, and General Fernando Tapias Stahelin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Colombian Armed Forces.[127] According to Thomas A. Marks, "[T]hese officers shared . . . a correct understanding of Colombia's war and a well-developed approach to institutional transformation and operational art."[128] Nevertheless, despite these military reforms, the restraints of peacetime legislation blocked the military from engaging in intelligence collection efforts.[129] While the unique opportunities made possible by these reforms could not be fully utilized under the Pastrana administration, these officers' reforms set the military up to integrate neatly into President Uribe's comprehensive strategy.[130]

3. The FARC under the Uribe Administration (2002–2010)

Alvaro Uribe promised during his campaign that he would make defeating guerrilla organizations, mainly the FARC, his top priority. This promise played on the

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[124] Marks, 214–215.

[125] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 214–215.

[126] Carlos G. Berrios, "Critical Ingredient: U.S. Aid to Counterinsurgency in Colombia," *Small War and Insurgencies* 28, no. 3 (May 2017): 547–550, 10.1080/09592318.2017.1307610.

[127] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 215.

[128] Marks, 215.

[129] Marks, 214.

[130] Marks, 215–216.

public sentiment that the government had not been trustworthy or effective in its past attempts at counterinsurgency.[131] The fact that he was a political outsider, nationally, prior to his election in 2002 only strengthened his campaign. He was elected and took office in May 2002; shortly thereafter, he declared a state of emergency that allowed the military and law enforcement greater counterinsurgency authorities, while he pushed through new legislation and doctrine to support both institutions.[132]

Uribe's new "Democratic Security and Defense Policy" focused on increasing state capacity to enhance security under rule of law in the rural areas of the country.[133] This policy established primary objectives in its counter-insurgency efforts that lasted through the end of the conflict. These objectives were to end the armed conflict, increase state capacity, increase security under rule of law, and promote stability to develop into a South American regional power.[134] To this end, President Uribe worked with the United States to restructure Plan Colombia in a way that allowed the resources to be used more effectively toward his goal through nation-building.[135]

President Uribe further capitalized on the restructured military by switching to a predominantly volunteer force rather than draftees. This reform allowed him to utilize an old 1940s law that allowed volunteers to opt to serve in their hometowns, thereby preserving local knowledge and connections.[136] The improved local forces significantly increased the quality and quantity of intelligence collection in both civil and military institutions by capitalizing on their knowledge of the local dialects. The new Joint Command then consolidated the gathered intelligence and disseminated it across the

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[131] Winifred Tate, "Colombia the Right Gathers Momentum," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 35, no. 6 (May 2002): 13–14; 51–52, 10.1080/10714839.2002.11722519; Ana Maria Bejarano, "Protracted Conflict, Multiple Protagonists, and Staggered Negotiations: Colombia, 1982–2002," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 28, no. 55–56 (January 2003): 241–243, 10.1080/08263663.2003.10816842.

[132] "Colombia Timeline—Profile."

[133] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 216.

[134] Marks, 216–217.

[135] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 215–217; Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 189–190.

[136] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 218–219.

entire civil-military enterprise.[137] As the military utilized the local forces to hold territory and reestablish security under rule of law, they expanded out from this territory to push the FARC further into the mountains and conducted landmine removal operations as they went.[138]

Ultimately, President Uribe recognized that a comprehensive plan required both armed action and a strong narrative to break the FARC down enough to be willing to negotiate on the state's terms.[139] The administration's information operations strategy attacked the FARC's narrative that they were waging a "people's war" by focusing news coverage on the acts of terror they conducted, the number of civilian deaths they caused, their ties to the cartels and the drug trade, their continued use of kidnapping for ransom, and their propensity to use landmines around their territory.[140] These information operations were so successful that the FARC began complaining that if even one civilian died as a result of their political actions, they would be unable to get recognition for the political statement.[141] Instead, all focus would be on the FARC's responsibility for civilian casualties. Arguably, the FARC had lost popular support due to its own actions prior to the implementation of President's Uribe's campaign, as will be discussed later. The success of this narrative continues to the present, as the populace recently (2018) voted against the initial peace deal and accused it of being too lenient.[142]

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[137] Marks, 217–220.

[138] Marks, 221.

[139] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 224.

[140] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 224, 226; "War and Peace: Colombia's Unreconciled Narratives," *Al-Jazeera*, last modified June 5, 2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/listeningpost/2016/06/war-peace-colombia-unreconciled-narratives-160605091511282.html; Thomas Ricks, "The Lesson of Colombia's Demobilization of FARC Can Help Us Work Against ISIS," *Foreign Policy*, last modified January 28, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/28/the-lesson-of-colombias-demobilization-of-farc-can-help-us-work-against-isis/; Richard McColl, "Colombia's Anti-FARC Battle Play Out on Airwaves, Social Media," *Dialogo: Digital Military Magazine*, last modified October 8, 2012, https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/colombias-anti-farc-battle-plays-out-airwaves-social-media; Berrios, "Critical Ingredient," 550–553.

[141] "War and Peace."

[142] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

Plan Patriota defined the military's course of action under Uribe's policy and further organized the military and defined new phases of operations for dealing with the FARC. Its prioritization of the FARC aligned with the shifting post-9/11 priorities of the United States toward counter-terrorism; the shift also led the United States to authorize the use of counter-narcotics funding for counter-terrorism missions.[143] Plan Patriota had two defined end states: regain control of territory and remove FARC leadership.[144] The Colombian Army created a new special operations command to accomplish the mission of deposing key leaders within the FARC.[145] The Colombian military's proposed scheme of maneuver was to push the FARC out of its claimed territory through the use of force and utilize guerrilla tactics to infiltrate FARC strongholds and capture or kill the leaders.[146] The shared objective of leadership decapitation in both in the national strategy and the operational plan highlighted the importance being placed on it by both the administration and the military. The United States provided key support throughout this process by filling capability gaps, sharing intelligence, and providing training and expertise.[147] With every military and narrative success, President Uribe won more popular support away from the FARC.

Simultaneous to these operations, President Uribe was advocating for an amendment to the constitution that would allow him to run for reelection. President Uribe's ambition exacerbated the already substantial pressure on his administration, domestically and internationally, to show metrics of success for his counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics campaigns.[148] These metrics were dissatisfactory because the counter-narcotics estimates that the United States needed to legitimize the amounts of aid

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[143] U.S. assistance to Colombia increased from $111,672,809 in 1999 to $231,933905 in 2006. Berrios, "Critical Ingredient," 553–555.

[144] Berrios, "Critical Ingredient," 551–552.

[145] Berrios, 551.

[146] Berrios, 551–559.

[147] Berrios, 553–559.

[148] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 41–48; Naim, *Illicit*, 29, 70; Jennifer L. Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus: An Alliance of International Drug Cartels, Organized Crime, and Terror Groups* (Boca Raton, Florida: CRC Press, 2013), 32–35, 39–40, 296–298; Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 224.

it was sending only showed a small piece of the whole problem.[149] Conversely, operations that had a tremendous impact on the FARC and their ability to operate did not necessarily have a counter-narcotics impact. When Uribe began his re-election campaign, the political opposition used some of the counter-narcotics metrics to show that his counterinsurgency strategy was flawed; however, this publicity almost backfired by giving the FARC a chance for strategic reversal by restoring some power over the narrative.[150]

Still, by the end of Uribe's second term in office, in 2010, his military and narrative strategy had forced the FARC deep into the periphery, significantly impacted their supply chains, and limited them to small-scale politically motivated attacks.[151] Despite the many successes of Uribe's grand strategy, it was not without scandal and there were still many casualties suffered by both sides and civilians. Today, his counter-insurgency legacy is tainted by allegations of support for right-wing paramilitary death squads, witness tampering, and extortion within his Congress.[152]

4. The FARC under the Santos Administration (2010–2018)

President Santos continued utilizing Uribe's official national strategy, of which leadership decapitation was a piece, throughout his first term in office (2010–2014). This continuity in strategy and policy allowed for more advanced intelligence collection, planning, and eventually the leadership decapitation of two consecutive FARC leaders, Mono Jojoy and Alfonso Cano. During his second term in office, Santos actively pursued

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[149] While coca cultivation may have fallen, that did not mean the FARC was dramatically diminished.

[150] Marks, "Regaining the Initiative," 222–224.

[151] Marks, 224–225.

[152] Amy Braunschweiger and Maria McFarland Sanchez-Moreno, "Interview: Murder and Corruption in Colombia," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified March 13, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/13/interview-murder-and-corruption-colombia; "Colombia: Uribe-Linked Massacres Deemed Crimes Against Humanity," *Telesur*, last modified June 1, 2018, https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Colombia-Uribe-Linked-Massacres-Deemed-Crimes-Against-Humanity-20180601-0006.html; "Supreme Court Urges Investigation of Colombia's Ex-President Over Spying Ring," *The Guardian*, last modified April 30, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/30/colombia-high-court-president-spying; "Colombia's Alvaro Uribe Steps Down to Face Charges," *BBC*, last modified July 26, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44962050.

peace negotiations that began with a one-month unilateral ceasefire by the FARC before becoming a bilateral ceasefire that eventually led to disarmament.[153] While President Santos was awarded the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in creating a peace deal that both sides agreed upon, the deal was rejected when it was put to a national referendum.[154] President Santos' ratings dropped significantly, he was accused of being too lenient and the media indicated that the public had a strong desire to see members of the FARC punished for their crimes.[155] His administration worked out a revised peace deal with the FARC that included an agreement by both sides to pay reparations to victims of the conflict, established a court that would try crimes of the conflict, and guaranteed the FARC ten seats in Congress.[156] The punishments, however, would only be symbolic and carry no significant consequences.[157] The public decried the symbolic punishments as once again too lenient, but President Santos defended these terms by stating that they were non-negotiable for the FARC's agreement.[158]

The Colombian Congress passed the revised peace agreement in 2016 without a referendum, and the people's discontent over the terms was reflected in the 2018 presidential and senate elections. Although the FARC was guaranteed ten seats in Congress, their leaders were hopeful that the election results would give those seats legitimacy.[159] The opposite held true, and they received very few votes. Moreover, in the presidential election, Ivan Duque was elected on a platform that condemned the peace

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[153] "Colombia Timeline—Profile"; "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

[154] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly"; "Colombia Referendum: Voters Reject FARC Peace Deal," *BBC*, last modified October 3, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37537252.

[155] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

[156] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

[157] More specifics on the negotiated peace agreement can be found in the following two sources: "Summary of Colombia's Agreement to End Conflict and Build Peace," Presidencia de la Republica, accessed December 16, 2018, http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/summary-of-colombias-peace-agreement.pdf; "Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace," last modified November 24, 2016, http://especiales.presidencia.gov.co/Documents/20170620-dejacion-armas/acuerdos/acuerdo-final-ingles.pdf.

[158] "History Will Judge Colombia's Outgoing President Kindly."

[159] "Colombia Election: FARC Fails to Win Support in First National Vote," *BBC*, last modified March 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-43367222.

plan as it was passed and promised change.[160] As of 2018, the peace deal appeared on unsteady ground, and the affected parties are awaiting President Duque's official policy for any potential changes.[161]

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the deal following the failed referendum and then President Duque's election, the FARC has disarmed according to the stipulated timetable.[162] Probably directly linked to the FARC's disarmament is a corresponding spike in coca cultivation and related violence being reported in previously FARC-controlled land.[163] It seems likely that other armed groups have begun vying for control over these lands in the FARC's absence. These circumstances lend further credibility to the argument that Colombia's problems are complex, and one solution or peace deal will not solve them all. To further complicate matters, some segments of the FARC have refused to disarm or acknowledge the legitimacy of the peace deal. These fragments are continuing operations, such as the kidnapping and murder of Ecuadorian reporters earlier this year.[164]

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[160] Former president Uribe was another public critic of the peace deal and a vocal support of Duque's bid for the presidency. Uribe's support likely bolstered Duque's presidential campaign. Helen Murphy and Steven Grattan, "Colombia President-elect Vows to Unite Nation, Alter Peace Deal," *Reuters*, last modified June 16, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-election/colombia-president-elect-vows-to-unite-nation-alter-peace-deal-idUSKBN1JD03R; William Worley, "Colombian Election: Ivan Duque Vows to 'Correct' Peace Accord After Comfortable Win," *Telegraph*, last modified June 18, 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/18/ivan-duque-winscolombian-election-promise-reform-peace-accord/.

[161] Murphy and Grattan, "Colombia President-elect Vows to Unite Nation, Alter Peace Deal"; Worley, "Colombian Election."

[162] "Colombia's FARC Concludes Weapons Disarmament," *BBC*, last modified August 16, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40944329; Nicolas Casey and Joe Parkin Daniels, "'Goodbye, Weapons!' FARC Disarmament in Colombia Signals New Era," *New York Times*, last modified June 27, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/world/americas/colombia-farc-rebels-disarmament.html.

[163] The Data Team, "Opium and Cocaine Production Has Reached Record Levels," *The Economist*, last modified June 28, 2018, https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/06/28/opium-and-cocaine-production-has-reached-record-levels.

[164] Alexandra Valencia, "Ecuadorean Journalists Held by Colombian Rebels Confirmed Dead," *Reuters*, last modified April 13, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ecuador-colombia-kidnapping/ecuadorean-journalists-held-by-colombian-rebels-confirmed-dead-idUSKBN1HK2L0; "Ecuadorian Hostages Held by President's Colombian Rebels Plead for President's Help," *The Guardian*, last modified April 17, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/17/ecuador-hostages-colombia-kidnapping-farc-rebels-new-video.

C. THE ROLE OF DECAPITATION IN DEFEATING THE FARC

The FARC survived various counter-insurgency strategies throughout its 50 plus year lifespan before finally agreeing to a genuine peace deal in 2011. This deal was tied to the success of President Uribe's strategy to build state power in the periphery while utilizing the military to retake territory controlled by the FARC and—important for this thesis—to capture or kill their leadership as previously discussed. Uribe's blended strategy of military actions and information operations caused widespread disruption within the FARC and dealt a critical blow to its popular support even before the deaths of three of the five founding members of the Secretariat, including the Commander-in-Chief Manuel Marulanda. This section tests the hypothesis that the success of leadership decapitation is dependent on the organization's institutionalization, popular support, its history of alliances and violent rivalries, and its reactions to law enforcement efforts.[165]

1. Institutionalization

The first factor identified in the literature as associated with a successful decapitation campaign is that the organization is highly structured and institutionalized. Such an organization scheme is seen as allowing the organization to survive the killing of one of its leaders. The FARC did codify a highly structured and hierarchical chain of command that should have provided protection against leadership decapitation. The FARC's bureaucracy distributes command by utilizing regional and functional blocs similar to the United States Department of Defense's Combatant and Functional Commands.[166] The FARC is controlled by a Central High Command composed of a commander-in-chief, a seven-member Secretariat, and the Estado Mayor Central (EMC), also known as the General Staff. This grouping is outlined in red in Figure 3. The Central High Command is led by the commander-in-chief, and this person determines overarching strategic guidance and policy, with the Secretariat and EMC playing an

[165] Leadership decapitation was a piece of a broader strategy and not the only factor to bring the FARC to the negotiating table as previously discussed. These indicators are meant to show whether leadership decapitation could destabilize the organization enough to convince them to negotiate.

[166] Dan Cunningham, Sean Everton, Greg Wilson, Carlos Padilla, and Doug Zimmerman, "Brokers and Key Players in the Internalization of the FARC," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 36, no. 6 (June 2013): 482–483, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2013.784603.

advisory role. Theoretically, the Secretariat reports to the EMC; in practice, the opposite is true: the Secretariat guides the EMC, and the EMC is divided into groups that problem-solve the Secretariat's concerns.[167]

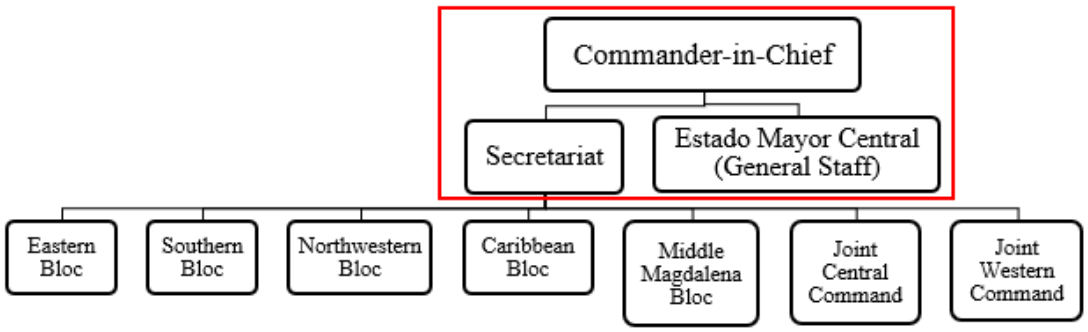

Figure 3. FARC chain of command

The separation of responsibilities into regional blocks with a delineated chain of command gives the FARC a codified protection against leadership turnover. Losing one or two leaders in a short time should be easily overcome within the structure of the organization. Below the Central High Command and subordinate to the Secretariat are the five regional blocs and two functional blocs: Eastern, Southern, Northwestern, Caribbean, Middle Magdalena, Joint Central Command, and Joint Western Command.[168] Each bloc is theoretically led by a member of the Secretariat and has similar political/military goals decided by the Central High Command, but no overlapping territory.[169] In practice, some members of the Secretariat may control more than one bloc. For example, Jorge Briceno Suarez, aka Mono Jojoy, controlled the Eastern Bloc but also gave guidance to the Southern Bloc.[170] Each geographical bloc consists of at least five

[167] John A. Gentry and David E. Spencer, "Colombia's FARC: A Portrait of Insurgent Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 4 (August 2010): 458, https://doi.org/10.1080/02684527.2010.537024.

[168] Cunningham et al., "Brokers and Key Players in the Internalization of the FARC," 482–483.

[169] Gentry and Spencer, "Colombia's FARC," 457.

[170] Gentry and Spencer, "Colombia's FARC," 458.

fronts that can have anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred fighters.[171] The joint commands have fewer fronts attached to them because they consist of areas where the FARC are relatively weak.[172] The joint commands and the blocs also have mobile companies under their purview that are not permanently tied to a geographic area.[173]

While the Central High Command operates at the strategic level of war, the joint commands and bloc are responsible for the operational level of war, as well as for providing tactical-level guidance for their subordinates in the fronts and companies.[174] In practice, the Central High Command would decide the types and number of attacks or desired objective to be undertaken by each joint command or bloc. The leaders of each respective bloc or joint command would then consult with the leaders of their fronts to decide on a timeline and specific targets using the FARC's target-selection criteria. The individual fronts would then carry out the decided-upon operations and related planning under their own leadership.[175] If the operation fell outside of normal operating procedures or was not confined within a single bloc, the Central High Command would create a specific task force, usually named after a martyr, to carry out the desired objective.[176] Because the FARC has traditionally held land, it also, in theory, performs state-like functions; however, in practice, it is plagued by a chronic deficiency its ability to carry out these functions.[177] Within their purview as a military organization, however, the FARC's structure and clear delineation of responsibility gives them some protection against leadership decapitation.

In conclusion, the structure of the FARC as an institution is well-defined and operationally decentralized, so it should, in theory, easily overcome leadership change. While the original leader, Marulanda, was instrumental in establishing the ideological

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[171] Gentry and Spencer, 457.

[172] Gentry and Spencer, 457.

[173] Gentry and Spencer, 457–458.

[174] Gentry and Spencer, 457–458.

[175] Gentry and Spencer, 458–459.

[176] Gentry and Spencer, 459.

[177] Gentry and Spencer, 461.

makeup of the organization as it developed, his tendency to rely on the Secretariat and EMC for operational guidance led to consistently decentralized operations. Furthermore, the clear chain of command with at least seven people involved in deciding on strategy gives the organization a cushion to accommodate for the loss of a few leaders. Based on these observations, the FARC does not seem to be a likely candidate for dissolution by leadership decapitation unless there was a significant disruption to their operational capacity.

2. Popular Support

The literature suggests that an organization that possesses popular support should be more resilient to leadership decapitation operations; however, the FARC's tactics weakened their popular support and it did not benefit from the advantages popular support could have provided such as a greater recruitment base, greater access to resources, and an extended safe haven for operations.[178] Although the FARC consistently portrays itself as a people's movement, it undermined this image through its involvement in narcotics, imposition of "taxes" on civilians, and its increasingly violent operations. While the first two of these operations provided funding for the organization to expand its reach and political goals, they have also created a culture that alienates public support. Indeed, briefly, in the 1990s, the term "narco-guerrilla" surpassed "communist" as an identifier of one of the biggest enemies of the free world.[179] (This sentiment was quickly overtaken by the notion of the "terrorist" in the aftermath of 9/11.) The tactics employed by guerilla groups, including the FARC, relied heavily on fear and targets of opportunity. Additionally, the FARC were never casualty-averse in their attacks.

According to a study by Restrepo and Spagat, the primary lethal attacks carried out by Colombian guerrilla groups were indiscriminate bombings that typically included

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[178] Phillips, "Enemies with Benefits?," 71–72.

[179] Lesley Gill, "War and Peace in Colombia (Report)," *Social Analysis* 52, no. 2 (June 2008): 132, DOI: 10.3167/sa.2008.520208.

a high civilian casualty ratio.[180] These types of attacks, coupled with the high civilian casualties, provided a strong counter-narrative to the FARC's insistence that it carries out a people's war. Additionally, this data provided President Uribe with compelling evidence to use against the FARC in the court of public opinion as previously discussed.

Beginning in the 1980s, the FARC increased its "taxation" policies, to include the narcotics trade, to further expand its reach.[181] This shift was accompanied by a simultaneous shift in strategy from guerrilla warfare to more conventional warfare and controlling territory.[182] The new taxation—*gramaje*—was a charge per gram of coca paste. First, the FARC applied taxes to the middle managers and traffickers, but eventually taxed the peasant farmers as well. Finally, the FARC began offering its services to trafficking organizations as a protection service and expanded their operations to include some coca processing by the 1990s.[183] By 2000, the FARC passed new laws to codify new operational strategies, such as expropriating land, taxing U.S. assets, kidnapping for ransom, and taking and holding prisoners of war.[184] As previously discussed, these actions ultimately contributed to the erosion of public support for the FARC.

The FARC remained more of a guerrilla group than a narcotics organization from its conception until the early 2000s.[185] Despite its minor involvement in the overall narcotics economy, which is massive in scope and value, the Colombian government estimated the FARC received approximately $783 million in 2003 in cocaine profits alone and approximately 50% of its annual revenue comes directly from its involvement with narcotics.[186] Overall, as the FARC expanded its involvement in the illicit economy,

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[180] Jorge Restrepo and Michael Spagat, "Civilian Casualties in the Colombian Conflict: A New Approach to Human Security," October 2004 (Davidson Institute), https://personal.rhul.ac.uk/uhte/014/HS%20in%20Colombia%20Civil%20Conflict.pdf.

[181] Tate, *Drugs, Thugs, and Diplomats*, 50.

[182] Tate, 50.

[183] Tate, 51.

[184] Tate, 52.

[185] Tate, 50–53.

[186] Naim, *Illicit*, 29, 70.

it lost its legitimacy as a people's movement and eventually lost popular support. The lack of popular support made the FARC less resilient to leadership decapitation operations.

3. Rivalries and Alliances

The literature suggests that an organization's ability to build alliances and outlast rivalries results in it taking steps that decrease its vulnerability to leadership decapitation. The FARC case study illustrates some of these advantages during its 50+ year tenure as an insurgency. It gained experience through building alliances and surviving rivalries; both types of relationship provided useful survival tactics, techniques, and procedures that the FARC would internalize throughout their lifespan as an insurgency. This section will discuss some of the significant alliances and rivalries that shaped the FARC, but is not to be taken as a comprehensive list.

The majority of the FARC's rivalries were a type of inter-field rivalry; a violent rivalry with groups that had disparate views from the FARC that resulted in kinetic actions being taken. The inter-field rivalries include altercations with the Cali and Medellin cartels as discussed in Chapter II, as well as with the paramilitaries (AUC); intra-field rivalries were also common with groups such as the National Liberation Army (ELN). These rivalries pushed the FARC to develop new counter-strategies and dispersal tactics. One of the most prevalent of these tactics was the laying of mine fields to protect their key territory. While this did have the desired effect of deterring rivals from pursuit, this tactic also had a negative impact on popular support and their projected image as a people's army as previously discussed.

The FARC's vast system of alliances exemplifies the danger of a terrorist-criminal nexus. Their allies spanned the globe to include support from Chavez in Venezuela which led to ties with Hezbollah and al Qaeda operations in Africa and with the ETA, IRA, and Russian Mafia in Europe.[187] These alliances opened a global illicit economy to the FARC and broadened their resources for potential training and assistance

[187] Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, 85–87.

from more experienced groups in bomb making and political attacks. This complex alliance system provided the support necessary for the FARC to grow from a domestic insurgency to a transnational criminal organization. According to Hesterman, "FARC's illegal activities net $500 to $600 million annually, one-half from drug cultivation and trafficking, with the remainder coming from kidnapping, extortion, and other criminal activities. Fifty percent of the world's cocaine comes from Colombia."[188]

The FARC created a complex alliance system of both intra-field (other leftists) and inter-field (narco-trafficking) organizations. Their ties to organizations such as the Russian mafia for arms trafficking, the IRA for weapons and tactics training, Norte Valle cartel and other Mexican cartels for drug trafficking, and Peru for assault rifles made it difficult for them to portray their desired image as a legitimate political organization.[189] Despite the negative associations tied to these alliances, they provided the training and resources necessary for the FARC to continue their operations and combat their rivals, particularly the paramilitaries and the cartels. It helped the FARC's survivability that the organizations they were allied with had also survived various rivalries and government attempts to dissolve them. It is highly probable that they shared lessons learned and training among these alliances much like their counterparts in the national military would do with their partners.

The line between rivals and allies is thin and in near constant flux with all of the case studies covered in this thesis. For the FARC specifically, they were more often allies of similar leftist organizations outside of Colombia and rivals of the cartels, and this consistency sets them apart from the other cases studies. Surviving these rivalries strengthened their organization and provided experience that was later used to overcome law enforcement efforts. This finding coincides with research done by Friman and Phillips on terrorist organizations that groups selectively use violence as a market regulator and are less likely to do so against groups with a similar ideology.[190] The

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[188] Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, 86.

[189] "Foreign Terrorist Organizations"; Naim, *Illicit*, 55–56, 70.

[190] Friman, "Forging the Vacancy Chain," 58–61; Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Kenney, "From Pablo to Osama," 196; Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence?," 325–326.

FARC's survival of numerous rivalries and its strategic use of alliances allowed it to strengthen its organizational structure and define some lines of succession. Ultimately, these gains should have allowed the FARC to be more resilient against leadership decapitation.

4. Law Enforcement Efforts

As the literature discusses, concentrated and long-term law enforcement efforts should provide the same advantages to an organization as the allies and violent rivalries previously discussed. Section B details the changing law enforcement efforts of the Colombian government to counter the FARC. Previous to the Uribe administration, the Colombian police forces were prone to corruption and easily manipulated by the various cartels and insurgent groups in their respective regions.[191] This coupled with the negotiated safe haven from the Pastrana administration allowed the FARC to operate with impunity in its various strongholds within that safe haven. As previously discussed, the military reforms that began under the Pastrana administration began to strip away that impunity and set up a system that could effectively enact counter-insurgency operations. Plan Patriota, begun in 2004, was the main effort by the Colombian military to disrupt and defeat the FARC. Since its implementation, all of the original members of the Central High Command are deceased or incarcerated. Additionally, there have been two turnovers at the position of commander-in-chief. Because the military played a large part in law enforcement efforts to counter the FARC, they are included in those efforts for the discussion in this section.[192] This section discusses the significant efforts made by law enforcement and hypothesizes as to why Plan Patriota required so many years before succeeding in forcing the FARC into peace negotiations. Although there have been

[191] Beittel, *Peace Talks in Colombia*, 12, 35; Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 243.

[192] The Colombian police are a part of the Ministry of Defense and, therefore, law enforcement efforts fall under the overall military plan.

allegations of human rights violations resulting from these operations, this section will not discuss those or their implications.[193]

As discussed in the counter-insurgency section, Plan Patriota had two desired end states: reclaim FARC-controlled territory for the state and capture/ kill FARC leadership. While in the previous case studies, the law enforcement efforts through the Search Bloc forced quick adaptations to standard operating procedures in the cartels, the law enforcement efforts against the FARC were not robust until Plan Patriota. Due to law enforcement efforts being focused on the Medellin and Cali cartels previous to this strategy, Plan Patriota experienced initial success in countering the FARC. This advantage did not last long, as the FARC's experience with violent rivalries had strengthened its overall organization and acclimatized it to rapid changes. However, these efforts did keep the FARC from gaining any competitive edge from their experience with law enforcement and eventually limited its adaptability. The FARC's inability to continue adapting to law enforcement efforts left a vulnerability in the organization for leadership decapitation to be effective. This vulnerability was fully exploited through Plan Patriota operations and led to the deaths and arrests of not only leaders within the Secretariat, but also leaders of their regional blocs. These capture/ kill successes for law enforcement exacerbated the disruption caused by the reclamation of territory that, in turn, forced them into genuine peace talks in 2011.

D. CONCLUSION

Forced leadership change at the commander-in-chief position would not have critically damaged the FARC by itself, but when coupled with other destabilizing actions it resulted in instability and uncertainty that critically undermined the organization's ability to effectively continue operations. Other major disruptions in operations, such as the removal of the regional bloc commanders and policy makers, increased the FARC's need for strong and consistent leadership. Utilizing a counterinsurgency strategy that

[193] "Colombia Human Rights Certification III," *Human Rights Watch*, last modified February 5, 2002, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/press/2002/02/colombia0205.htm; Cunningham et al., "Brokers and Key Players in the Internalization of the FARC," 480; "Colombia: Uribe-Linked Massacres Deemed Crimes Against Humanity."

forced instability throughout all levels of the organization while working to remove key leadership, damaged the FARC enough to convince the organization to join in peace negotiations. The FARC was ultimately susceptible to leadership decapitation as carried out through Plan Patriota because the high levels of institutionalization did not provide enough protection to cover the vulnerabilities from the other factors. This case study suggests that while the advantages of a highly institutionalized organization may provide some protection from leadership decapitation, the successive decapitation of multiple leaders can eventually overcome this protection. However, the FARC's method of surrender through peace negotiations may not be as generalizable to TCOs due to its basis in addressing the FARC's political grievances that most TCOs do not share.

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IV. THE SINALOA FEDERATION: THE RESTRICTIONS OF LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION AS A MODERN STRATEGY

The final case study examines a more recent application of leadership decapitation against the Sinaloa cartel to determine whether the same factors—institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts—impact the organizational resiliency to this strategy. Mexico has a long and complex relationship with narco-traffickers, originating in the 1940s.[194] The Mexican government under the control of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) practiced a policy of accommodation that allowed these narco-organizations to entrench themselves in society.[195] During its 71-year rule, the PRI accepted bribes and allowed these organizations to operate and expand with almost no repercussions from law enforcement or other government agencies. In 2000, however, the PRI was voted out of office in favor of Vincente Fox, a candidate from the National Action Party (PAN).[196] This party change complicated the relationship between government officials and organized crime: officials could no longer guarantee that an illicit organization would be able to operate freely in their region of responsibility.[197] President Calderon of the National Action Party party, who succeeded Fox, entered office in 2006 and escalated this policy, beginning an

[194] Beittel, *Mexico*, 7–9.

[195] Beittel, 7–9.

[196] Beittel, 8.

[197] Corruption within law enforcement and the government was never fully exterminated and still being found within these institutions. Beittel, *Mexico*, 7–8.

aggressive campaign against narco-organizations, with support and backing from the United States, that increased tensions and had only limited results.[198]

During this time, there were four major drug trafficking organizations—the Tijuana/Arellano Felix organization (AFO), the Sinaloa cartel, the Juárez/Vicente Carillo Fuentes organization (CFO), and the Gulf cartel—and Calderon's strategy had minimal impact on the Sinaloa cartel compared to the others.[199] This gap in the strategy allowed the Sinaloa cartel to expand and led to allegations of corruption within the government, namely that the Sinaloa cartel was enjoying a privileged relationship that shielded them from these efforts.[200] By 2010, the four organizations had expanded to seven major drug trafficking organizations—Sinaloa, Los Zetas, Tijuana/AFO, Juárez/CFO, Beltrán Leyva, Gulf, and La Familia Michoacana—although some estimates include up to 20 major organizations and countless small organizations.[201] A possible factor for the rise of these organizations is the break-up of the Colombian cartels, discussed in Chapter II. As the Colombian groups crumbled and lost their hold on trafficking routes, Mexican trafficking organizations, including the Sinaloa cartel, collected those market shares and expanded their trafficking networks.[202] These groups were especially competitive after the demise of the Colombian groups because of their expertise in trafficking, connections with the producers, and proximity to the United States.

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[198] Talks between the Bush administration in the United States and the Calderon administration in Mexico ultimately led to funding for the Merida Initiative beginning in 2008. This initiative was considered a partnership between the two countries to further their shared interest of combatting drug trafficking organizations. The initial deal allotted $1.4 billion USD over the course of three years. Eric L. Olson, "The Merida Initiative and Shared Responsibility in U.S.-Mexico Security Relations," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Winter 2017), https://wilsonquarterly.com/quarterly/after-the-storm-in-u-s-mexico-relations/the-m-rida-initiative-and-shared-responsibility-in-u-s-mexico-security-relations/; Eduardo Guerrero, "Towards a Transformation of Mexico's Security Strategy," *The RUSI Journal* 158, no. 3 (June/July 2013), 6–12, DOI: 10.1080/03071847.2013.807579

[199] Malcolm Beith, "A Broken Mexico: Allegations of Collusion Between the Sinaloa Cartel and Mexican Political Parties," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 22, no. 5 (2011), 787–806, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2011.620813.

[200] Beith, "A Broken Mexico," 787–790; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 55–56.

[201] Beittel, *Mexico*, 2–9.

[202] Beittel, 8.

This chapter examines the Sinaloa cartel (sometimes referred to as the Sinaloa Federation), which appears to have resisted Mexican government efforts against it, including the use of a decapitation strategy.[203] It reviews how the cartel's internal and external factors—institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts—may have protected it from leadership decapitation. This assessment begins with a brief background on the Sinaloa cartel, its rise to power, and dominance in the region in which it operates. Then it analyzes the Sinaloa cartel's hypothetical vulnerability to leadership decapitation against the reality of its resiliency to this strategy. To conclude, this chapter argues that the Sinaloa cartel demonstrates how modern organizations can develop protection against leadership decapitation.

A. THE SINALOA CARTEL AND JOAQUIN "EL CHAPO" GUZMAN LOERA

In 1989, the Mexican federal police arrested the leader of the Gulf cartel, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, and a young lieutenant, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loera, saw his chance to break away and utilize his expertise in his own organization.[204] He quickly established the Sinaloa cartel and began developing its interests within the cocaine supply chain from Colombia and distribution network in the United States.[205] After the fall of the Medellin and Cali cartels, the market further opened up, and Sinaloa expanded its

[203] As this thesis was being completed, El Chapo was sentenced, and there is little indication that his capture or sentencing has had a negative impact on the organization. Maria Verza, and Mark Stevenson, "Sinaloa Cartel Marches on After El Chapo Arrest, Conviction," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/sinaloa-cartel-marches-on-after-el-chapo-arrest-conviction/2019/02/12/5d4aa83a-2f01-11e9-8781-763619f12cb4_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.d8137e806ac6; Ed Vulliamy, "Will El Chapo's Conviction Change Anything in the Drug Trade?," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/13/el-chapo-conviction-drug-war-drug-trade; Kevin McCoy, "After El Chapo: Sinaloa, Other Mexican Drug Cartels Still Strong, and Now Diversifying," *USA Today*, February 22, 2019, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/02/22/joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-loera-sinaloa-jalisco-nueva-generacion-cartel/2885199002/.

[204] George W. Grayson, *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico's Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and their Impact on U.S. Security* (United States of America: Praeger, 2014), 66–67.

[205] Grayson, *The Cartels*, 67–69; Stephen P. Hull, "Sinaloa World: The Dark Mirror of the Global Drugs Trade," *CLAMANTIS: The MALS Journal* 1, no. 4 (May 2018), 11–14, https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/clamantis/vol1/iss4/4.

interests to cocaine production and overseas markets.[206] It has since grown in scope and size to be one of the largest and most well-established transnational criminal organizations.[207] The Sinaloa cartel has a larger international footprint than other Mexican DTOs, with annual profits estimated at $3 billion.[208]

It is likely that, when Guzman built the Sinaloa cartel, he incorporated lessons learned from observing the fall of the Medellin and Cali cartels, as well as from the demise of his employer's cartel.[209] Some of these lessons were implemented in familiar ways, such as a tendency to avoid violence with the government and a heavy reliance on bribes and extortion, while others are more discreet, such as the highly decentralized structure of the Sinaloa cartel and the leaders' decision to avoid flashy purchases and lifestyles.[210] The lower profile of the leaders of the Sinaloa cartel makes them harder to track and apprehend, the leaders' familiarity and support within the Sinaloa region creates a type of safe haven, and the cartel's organizational decentralization increases the organization's resiliency to leadership decapitation.

B. INDICATORS FOR LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION

The Sinaloa cartel has survived the loss of leaders multiple times, perhaps most notoriously with the arrests and subsequent escapes of Guzman prior to his extradition to

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[206] Grayson, *The Cartels*, 69–72; Hull, "Sinaloa World," 11–14; Samuel Logan, "The Sinaloa Federation's International Presence," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 6, no. 4 (April 2013), 7–9, https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/04/CTCSentinel-Vol6Iss46.pdf.

[207] Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, 139; Grayson *The Cartels*, 67–72; Hull, "Sinaloa World," 1–4; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 46.

[208] James O. Finckenauer, and Jay Albanese, "Transnational Organized Crime in North America," in *Transnational Organized Crime: An Overview from Six Continents*, ed. Jay Albanese and Philip Reichel (Sage Publications: United States of America, 2014), 47; "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," Drug Enforcement Administration, accessed January 20, 2018, 97, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-11/DIR-032-18%202018%20NDTA%20final%20low%20resolution.pdf.

[209] This assessment is an educated guess based upon the extensive research conducted for this thesis and seems to be supported by the current evidence from Guzman's trial.

[210] Luz E. Nagle, "Corruption of Politicians, Law Enforcement, and the Judiciary in Mexico and the Complicity Across the Border," in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels, and Mercenaries*, ed. Robert J. Bunker (New York: Routledge, 2011), 108–109; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 53–54; Beittel, *Mexico*, 28.

the United States.[211] This analysis examines the Sinaloa cartel's internal and external factors as they were defined in Chapter 1—institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts—to determine if these factors may have impacted the organizations' vulnerability to leadership decapitation. Unlike the previous case studies, this organization is still operating as a TCO and it is likely that more detailed information about its inner workings may be released to the public or analyzed following Guzman's trial or if/when the organization is defeated than is available at this time.

1. Institutionalization

The Sinaloa cartel is highly decentralized, with an alliance-based chain network that compartmentalizes operations; this structure provides significant protection from leadership decapitation strategies. Authority and responsibility are spread horizontally throughout the organization, so maintaining daily operations requires very little input from top leaders.[212] Guzman and other top leaders have adopted low profiles and delegated their authority to lieutenants for most day-to-day activities. These leaders also implement strict operational security by limiting their electronic footprint and limiting new associations.[213] Figure 4 depicts how this structure would look for the organization as a whole. A different small group or network would be contracted to have operational control over each cell in the chain, although some groups may have responsibility for

[211] Brian J. Phillips, "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence? The Case of Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico, Online Appendix," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (April 2015), https://www-journals-uchicago-edu.libproxy.nps.edu/doi/suppl/10.1086/680209/suppl_file/00933apa.pdf; Beittel, *Mexico*, 13–14; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56.

[212] Whether intentional or coincidental, most alliances are further solidified in the Sinaloa cartel by marriage which further increases loyalty and trust within the organization. Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56; Grayson, *The Cartels*, 68–69; Beittel, *Mexico*, 14.

[213] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 53–54.

multiple cells.[214] This chain structure makes it easier for the Sinaloa cartel to replace pieces when they break off or become less efficient. These cells are apportioned out to different leaders for accountability and coordination as depicted in Figure 5. Then, these leaders are held accountable to each other for their piece of the cartel's operations.[215] Double-headed arrows represent groups that operate at similar levels within the organization and are accountable to each other, while single-headed arrows represent a distinct chain of command, with the core leaders holding the others accountable.[216] Dotted lines represent groups that are may or may not be present in the structure and could be either leader or mission dependent.[217] That said, the leaders represented in Figure 5 are not necessarily top leaders within the cartel, and there could be an additional component at the top representing a reporting requirement from these leaders to Guzman and his colleagues. This additional level of reporting is caused by the Sinaloa cartel's tendency to contract out specialty work (software management, accounting, violent enforcement) to other organizations.[218] The contracts, in turn, offered increased protection from leadership decapitation since they are fully operational on their own.

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[214] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56; Hull, "Sinaloa World" 20.

[215] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56.

[216] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 244.

[217] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 244–249; Grayson, *The Cartels*, 67–69; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 53–55.

[218] Wainwright, *Narco-nomics*, 139–141; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56; Hull, "Sinaloa World," 20.

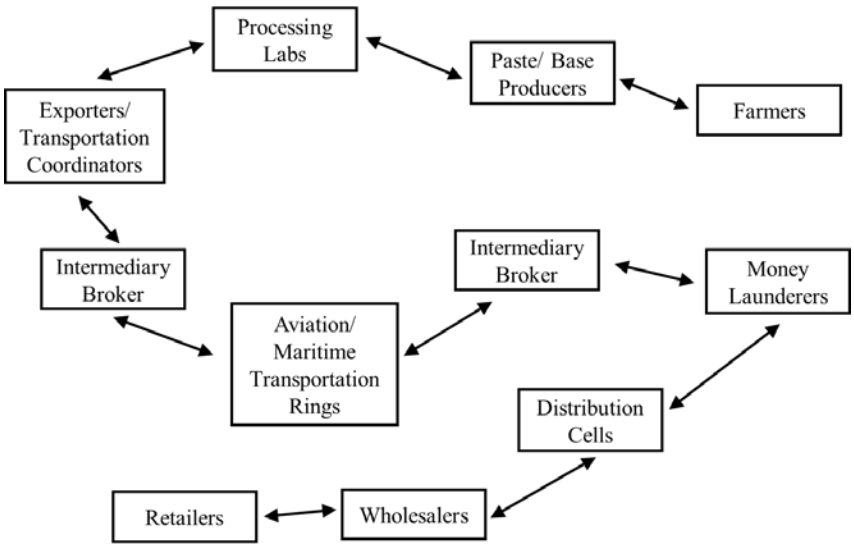

Figure 4. Chain network for modern drug trafficking organizations.[219]

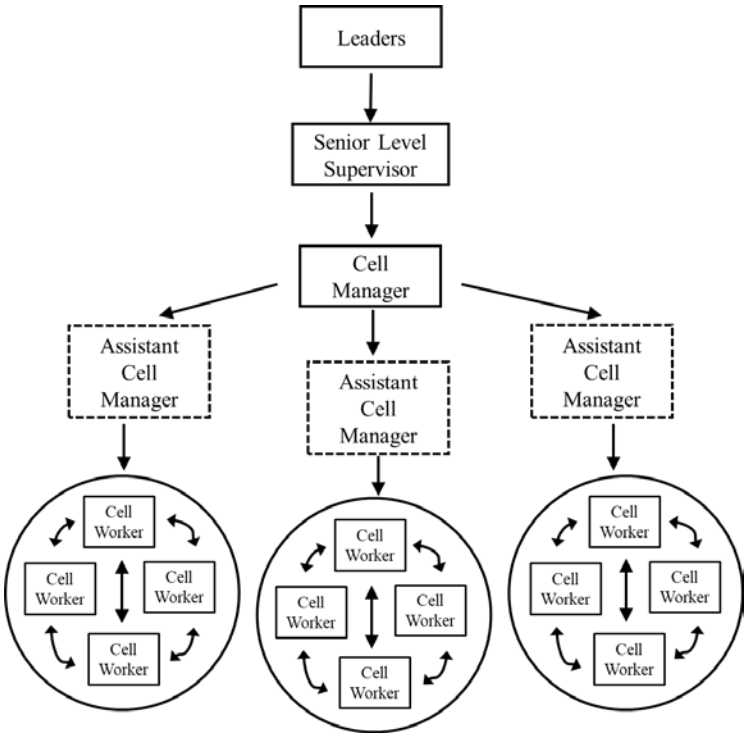

Figure 5. Cellular structure for modern drug trafficking organizations.[220]

[219] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 246.

[220] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 249.

The three arrests of Guzman, in 1993, 2014, and 2016, and the lack of measurable response in the Sinaloa cartel's operations suggests that his role may not be a critical weakness of the organization and adds some degree of certainty to the previously discussed structure. Mexican TCOs, including the Sinaloa cartel, were named in the DEA's National Drug Threat Assessment for the past few years as prominent traffickers in the United States even after Guzman's extradition.[221] The Sinaloa cartel's continued dominance of the drug trade while Guzman was being actively pursued by Mexican authorities and after his extradition may also suggest that he may have handed over his role to a successor prior to these events. In either case, the Sinaloa cartel gained additional protection from leadership decapitation through its decentralized cellular organizational structure.

The Sinaloa cartel's institutional structure thus provides a large amount of protection from leadership decapitation. While Guzman may have been instrumental in organizing the initial organization and building partnerships, he is less likely to be a vulnerability to the organization's ability to conduct operations. This lack of dependency is further evidenced by the group's continued lifespan and proliferation past Guzman's arrest and extradition in 2016.[222] Due to these institutional conditions, it is unlikely that further leadership decapitation would have a lasting impact on the Sinaloa cartel.

2. Popular Support

Mexican cartels, such as the Sinaloa cartel, clearly recognize the benefits of popular support, with its implications for protection from leadership decapitation efforts and protection for the organization post-decapitation. Courting popular support by handing out donations is so prevalent in Mexico that it even has a name, *narcolimonas*, or

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[221] "2017 National Drug Threat Assessment," Drug Enforcement Administration, accessed January 20, 2019, 2, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/DIR-040-17_2017-NDTA.pdf; "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," vi.

[222] "2015 National Drug Threat Assessment," Drug Enforcement Administration, accessed January 20, 2019, 2, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/2015%20NDTA%20Report.pdf ; "2016 National Drug Threat Assessment," Drug Enforcement Administration, accessed January 20, 2019, 1–2, https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2018-07/DIR-001-17_2016_NDTA_Summary.pdf; "2017 National Drug Threat Assessment," 2; "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," vi; Verza, and Stevenson, "Sinaloa Cartel Marches on After El Chapo Arrest, Conviction"; Vulliamy, "Will El Chapo's Conviction Change Anything in the Drug Trade?"; McCoy, "After El Chapo."

drug alms.[223] According to Wainwright, cartels conduct marketing campaigns to influence two audiences: the public and the government.[224] The Sinaloa cartel is especially savvy at messaging campaigns and has a history of framing other organizations for violent actions while promoting their violence as acts for the good of Mexico; these actions are likely to make it less vulnerable to leadership decapitation.[225]

In 2014, when Guzman was arrested for the first time, it became apparent that he enjoyed widespread popular support. A nationwide poll showed that only 53 percent of the country agreed with his arrest, while 28 percent were actively against it.[226] The day after his arrest, people flooded the streets of his home state, waving banners and wearing shirts that proclaimed their support for Guzman. While it is hard to calculate how much of this support was forced by members of the Sinaloa cartel, given the survey responses and its likely credibility, it is clear that he enjoyed some level of support throughout the country. While the level of certainty is unclear, in this example it seems plausible that popular support had a stabilizing effect on the Sinaloa cartel that provides added protection against leadership decapitation relative to the other case studies.

3. Rivalries and Alliances

A history of violent rivalry and various alliances have provided the Sinaloa cartel with another level of protection against leadership decapitation by revealing vulnerabilities within the organization, which it then addressed, thereby making it even less vulnerable to leadership decapitation. The Sinaloa cartel's primary competitor for territory and market shares is Los Zetas, with other rivalries including the AFO and

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[223] Wainwright, *Narco-nomics,* 91.

[224] Wainwright, 86.

[225] A thesis was published in December 2012 on this topic by Ashleigh Fugate titled "Narcocultura: A Threat to Mexican National Security?" that discussed the impact of these tactics on the local communities and the potential for exploitation of this culture to curtail DTOs by the government of Mexico. Wainwright, *Narco-nomics,* 80–81; Silvestre Flores Gamboa, and Víctor Vladimir Sánchez Mendoza, "Turismo Oscuro en Mazatlán, Sinaloa en las Huellas del Chapo Guzmán," *Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos – ABET* 8, no. 2 (2018), 82–88, ojs2.ufjf.emnuvens.com.br/abet/article/view/3216/1188.

[226] Wainwright, *Narco-nomics,* 78; Christopher Woody, "'We are cheerful': Drug lord El Chapo Guzmán remains a fugitive, and some people in Mexico like it that way," *Business Insider*, September 29, 2015, https://www.businessinsider.com/el-chapo-popularity-in-mexico-2015-7.

CFO.[227] The Sinaloa cartel gained numerous advantages by surviving its rivalries and internalizing tactics, techniques, and procedures that allowed operations to run as smoothly as possible during hostilities. Additionally, its domestic and international alliances afforded it protection from leadership decapitation by providing operational stability.

The Sinaloa cartel's rivalries were generally over territory or market shares in the illicit economy. Typically, its rivals would be of a similar background, with similar operational tendencies. For example, with the decline of Los Zetas due to an aggressive campaign by the Mexican government and a separate violent campaign by the Sinaloa cartel, the Sinaloa cartel's newest rivals are the Cartel Jalisco-New Generation, split from the Sinaloa cartel and rose in the narcotics economy over the last five years.[228] The Sinaloa cartel and its rivals were playing from the same rulebook and, therefore, needed to adapt quickly to overcome any weaknesses the other could exploit. The Sinaloa cartel's ability to contract out and quickly develop new skills or replace pieces of the organization, such as replacing the New Generation after its split, allowed it to remain dominant throughout these many rivalries.[229]

Furthermore, with a presence in approximately 50 countries and ties to numerous street gangs within the United States, including the Mexican Mafia, Hell's Angels, and the Crips, the Sinaloa cartel's alliance structure is vast and varied.[230] As with counterparts in the legitimate economy, these partnerships are mostly based on expanding the brand and entering new markets to sustain a competitive edge. These networks provide operational stability within the Sinaloa cartel. Because of its highly decentralized structure, ripples of change at the top of the organization are unlikely to affect these

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[227] Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 48–50.

[228] The New Generation was originally the armed enforcement wing of the Sinaloa cartel and the main unit engaged in operations against Los Zetas. Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., "Firefights, Raids, and Assassinations: Tactical Forms of Cartel Violence and their Underpinnings," in *Narcos Over the Border: Gangs, Cartels, and Mercenaries*, ed. Robert J. Bunker (New York: Routledge, 2011), 135; Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, 140; Beittel, *Mexico*, 10, 13–14.

[229] Beittel, *Mexico*, 13–15; Wainwright, *Narco-nomics*, 139–141; Rabasa et al., *Counternetwork*, 54–56; Hull, "Sinaloa World," 20.

[230] Beittel, *Mexico*, 13–15; "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," 116.

business relationships, and operations are likely to continue as normal. Furthermore, this network provides an extra layer of protection for the business of the cartel from leadership decapitation by limiting the impact of any changes at the top.

4. Law Enforcement Efforts

Law enforcement efforts should have impacted the Sinaloa cartel and produced similar results to those from violent rivalry; however, in this case it was not the presence of sustained law enforcement pressure that reduced the cartel's vulnerability to decapitation, but just the opposite, as the lack of police pressure had the same effect. It is likely that rampant corruption throughout the government of Mexico and its police force have provided protection for the cartel and its leaders.[231] This protection provided a shield from leadership decapitation through shared intelligence and force multiplication. The intelligence could warn the cartel of pending leadership decapitation attempts or compromised locations, while the cartel may feed information to the police forces on rival cartels. This quasi-symbiotic relationship is subversive to rule of law and counter-TCO efforts and make the organization less vulnerable to leadership decapitation attempts. In Guzman's trial in the United States, phone records were submitted that captured him telling his lieutenants not to bother the police because they were allied with the cartel.[232] In another call, he contacted a lieutenant to make sure the commander of the police force had received his bribe, and the commander was put on the phone to say he would take good care of Guzman's business.[233] Both of these instances paint a picture of the police force as an ally to the Sinaloa cartel rather than a violent rival as discussed in the previous case studies.

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[231] Alan Feuer, "El Chapo Trial: How a Colombian I.T. Guy Helped U.S. Authorities Take Down the Kingpin," *The New York Times*, January 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/08/nyregion/el-chapo-trial.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article&region=Footer; Alan Feuer, and Emily Palmer, "Inside El Chapo's Vast Network: What We Know After the Trial's First Week," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/18/nyregion/el-chapo-trial.html; Brendan Pierson, "El Chapo Paid Former Mexican President $100 Million Bribe: Trial Witness," *Reuters*, January 15, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-mexico-el-chapo-idUSKCN1P92OS; Monica Serrano, and Maria Celia Toro, "From Drug Trafficking to Transnational Organized Crime in Latin America," in *Transnational Organized Crime and International Security: Business as Usual?*, eds. Mats Berdal and Monica Serrano (United States of America: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2002), 171.

[232] Feuer, "El Chapo Trial."

[233] Feuer.

It is clear from these interactions that the Sinaloa cartel derived benefits from its relationship with law enforcement. It is likely that Guzman was notified when certain elements of the police force were notified of the location of his business interests or key personnel. It is even more likely that the Sinaloa cartel utilized this relationship in its other rivalries. When the Sinaloa cartel was expanding to new territory, it could give information to the police force on the locations of rivals' key facilities that would need to be seized before it could wrest control. This relationship would give the police measurable results to pass to the superiors while opening the market for the expansion of the Sinaloa cartel.

Although the Sinaloa cartel did not benefit from law enforcement efforts in a traditional manner as another type of violent rivalry, it nonetheless capitalized on its relationship with law enforcement to gain further protection from leadership decapitation by way of increased indications and warning of possible decapitation attempts.

C. CONCLUSION

Due to its decentralized structure, widespread popular support, history of incorporating lessons from violent rivalries, and capitalizing on corruption within law enforcement, the Sinaloa cartel was able to fortify its organization against vulnerabilities associated with leadership decapitation. In the business of narco-trafficking and transnational criminal behavior, this case study suggests that similarly structured organizations that employ the same tactics in regard to popular support, rivalries, and law enforcement, may not fall as easily following the arrest or death of their leaders. In 2017, approximately eight months after Guzman had been extradited to the United States, 66 kilograms of fentanyl was seized in New York and linked back to the Sinaloa cartel.[234] This seizure was the largest recorded single seizure of fentanyl.[235] This information, coupled with the DEA's recent recognition of the Sinaloa cartel as one of the most significant Mexican TCOs in the United States, suggests that Guzman's arrest has had

[234] "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," 33–34.

[235] "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," 33–34.

minimal impact on the organization.[236] The fall of Guzman did not spell the end of the Sinaloa cartel, and it seems unlikely, based on the findings in this thesis and current evidence from Guzman's trial, that his recent sentencing in the United States will have any further impact on its operations.[237]

[236] "2018 National Drug Threat Assessment," 97; Verza, and Stevenson, "Sinaloa Cartel Marches on After El Chapo Arrest, Conviction"; Vulliamy, "Will El Chapo's Conviction Change Anything in the Drug Trade?"; McCoy, "After El Chapo."

[237] Verza, and Stevenson, "Sinaloa Cartel Marches on After El Chapo Arrest, Conviction"; Vulliamy, "Will El Chapo's Conviction Change Anything in the Drug Trade?"; McCoy, "After El Chapo."

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to answer two main questions: First, whether factors defined by literature on terrorist organizations could be applicable to analyzing the vulnerability of TCOs to leadership decapitation. Second, whether differences in core motivation—profit or ideology—had a significant impact on the vulnerability to leadership decapitation. While the results were not fully measurable in all case studies, there are overall observable results in each of these factors in each case study.[238]

A. RESULTS

Chapter I hypothesized that the same four factors that determine a terrorist organization's vulnerability to leadership decapitation would be applicable to TCOs. Similarly, there is a potential for ancillary results based on the different motivations of the organizations-profit or ideology-that impact how the organization responds to leadership decapitation efforts: peace negotiations versus a fight until the end. Additionally, this chapter examined and defined the different factors from the literature and their potential to impact the vulnerability to leadership decapitation of the chosen case studies.

[238] Due to the illegality of these organizations, some information is likely to remain hidden unless it is revealed by members or it is uncovered through surveillance and reconnaissance. For example, Guzman's trial data is likely to reveal data on the inner workings and profits of the Sinaloa cartel, but it may not become immediately available to the public.

Overall Findings by Factor					
TCO	INSTITUTIONALIZATION	POPULAR SUPPORT	RIVALS/ ALLIES	LAW ENFORCEMENT	OUTCOME
Medellin	High institutionalization: Vulnerable	Localized: Vulnerable	Led to higher centralization: Vulnerable	Led to higher centralization: Vulnerable	Defeated
Cali	High institutionalization: Vulnerable	Localized: Vulnerable	Did not resolve organizational issues: Vulnerable	Did not resolve organizational issues: Vulnerable	Defeated
FARC	Highly structured with some decentralization: Protected	Small pockets: Vulnerable	Instituted changes in accordance with lessons learned: Protected	Instituted changes in accordance with lessons learned: Protected	Defeated*
Sinaloa	Highly decentralized with flexible structure: Protected	Widespread: Protected	Instituted changes in accordance with lessons learned: Protected	Instituted changes in accordance with lessons learned: Protected	Survived

*Still exists as a political organization, although based on the last congressional election it is not a popular one.[239]

Figure 6. Table of overall thesis findings for TCOs and the factors that impacted their vulnerability to leadership decapitation

Chapters II through IV analyze historical case studies and determine their relevance in predicting the effectiveness of leadership decapitation. Figure 6 contains a summary of these findings, whether each factor contributed to the organization's vulnerability to or protection from leadership decapitation, and the ultimate outcome. The Medellin and Cali cartels were defeated by leadership decapitation and were made vulnerable by all of the defined factors. Both organizations were highly centralized wheel networks with all power and authority held at the top of the organization before filtering down.[240] This structure made them highly susceptible to leadership decapitation. The popular support for both groups was varied throughout Colombia's population and tended to be localized rather than widespread leading to further vulnerability to leadership

[239] "Colombia Election: FARC Fails to Win Support in First National Vote."

[240] Kenney, "The Architecture of Drug Trafficking," 244; Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 103–104; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 24–25, 46–49, 61, 88–89, 168.

decapitation.[241] Despite having long histories of violent rivalries and protracted law enforcement efforts and well-developed alliance structures, neither the Medellin or Cali cartel gained protection from leadership decapitation from these factors. The literature suggested that these relationships should have highlighted organizational and operational vulnerabilities and then provided the operating space for them to make changes and adapt.[242] However, neither organization addressed their organizational vulnerabilities and ultimately this led to a fatal vulnerability to leadership decapitation that was exploited by the Colombian strategy.

The FARC case study highlighted some of the differences in outcome caused by a different core motivation. This organization was a violent insurgency with stated political goals that was funded through the illicit economy.[243] It was still highly structured, but it did have a defined line of succession.[244] Similar to the previous case studies, the FARC only enjoyed localized popular support, but it did apply lessons learned from violent rivalries and law enforcement to protect its organization. The FARC enjoyed protection from leadership decapitation in three of the four factors, but after multiple iterations of the decapitation strategy that led to the arrest or death of all seven members of the original Secretariat, the Colombian government was able to convince the FARC to engage in peace negotiations and eventually disarmament.[245] The transitional outcome was likely only possible because of the political motivations of this organization that were used as a starting point for negotiations. It is unlikely this resolution would have been the same is the FARC's motivation had been purely profit-driven.

The Sinaloa case study in Chapter four analyzes these factors against what is currently the largest drug trafficking organization in the world. This cartel benefitted from protection against leadership decapitation in all four factors. This finding as well as the Sinaloa cartel's continued operations past the arrest and extradition of its

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[241] Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 24, 40, 50–53, 95; Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 147, 189–190.

[242] Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark"; Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 27–28.

[243] "Colombia: International Religious Freedom Report 2005"; "Foreign Terrorist Organizations."

[244] Cunningham et al., "Brokers and Key Players in the Internalization of the FARC."

[245] Berrios, "Critical Ingredient," 551–559.

leader suggests that when all four factors are present, effective leadership decapitation to dissolve an organization is unlikely. And most significantly, the case of the Sinaloa cartel suggests that if other modern illicit organizations model themselves similarly, it is possible that the age of effective leadership decapitation to counter TCOs may come to an end.

While the factors examined in this thesis are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they did, through application, display a cumulative effect. In these case studies, institutionalization had the greatest impact to an organization's vulnerability to leadership decapitation and, in cases where the organization is heavily dependent on a handful of people for all decision-making, the other three factors cannot cumulatively overcome this flaw.

B. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As this thesis is being written, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman's trial is wrapping up and new information and findings about the Sinaloa cartel is being released.[246] While this thesis incorporated as much of this material as was available, it is likely that additional and more detailed evidence could be used to further analyze this organization and provide more insight on why leadership decapitation failed to critically impact it.

Furthermore, this thesis could provide a basis for research into the effectiveness of leadership decapitation as a public relations maneuver rather than a counter-TCO strategy. That is to say, could capturing or killing the leader of a TCO provide enough public backing to support an upcoming election or political policy? While the strategy may not impact the underlying issues or the overall organization, leadership decapitation could have secondary or tertiary order effects that are beneficial for foreign policy or domestic politics.

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[246] Feuer, "El Chapo Trial"; Verza, and Stevenson, "Sinaloa Cartel Marches on After El Chapo Arrest, Conviction"; Vulliamy, "Will El Chapo's Conviction Change Anything in the Drug Trade?"; McCoy, "After El Chapo"; Feuer, and Palmer, "Inside El Chapo's Vast Network"; Pierson, "El Chapo Paid Former Mexican President $100 Million Bribe."

Finally, the knowledge generated in this thesis could be utilized in future research to help to expand the understanding of the operating environment as it pertains to countering these organizations and providing a critical understanding of when, where, and how to best counter TCOs along with those organizations' efforts and resources. Additionally, future research could expand on the research contained in this thesis to determine whether the removal of key personnel, other than leaders, has an effect of disrupting or eliminating an organization and whether different methods of removal—death or imprisonment—have an impact on its effectiveness. Moreover, future research could apply the same framework and factors to additional case studies or other areas of the international drug trade to determine its applicability across the field of study.

C. CONCLUSION

Overall, this thesis' findings support the following four assessments. First, that the key factors of institutionalization, popular support, history with rivals and allies, and law enforcement efforts can assist in determining the potential effectiveness of leadership decapitation against a TCO. Second, that the outcome of leadership decapitation, whether negotiations can be employed to address concerns and the organization can peacefully transition to a legitimate organization, is heavily dependent on the inherent motivation of the organization. Third, the organization's institutional structure is likely the most important factor when determining the organization's vulnerability to leadership decapitation. Fourth, there can be a cumulative effect of the defined factors when determining the vulnerability to leadership decapitation.

Leadership decapitation has been an effective strategy against transnational criminal organizations in the past, but history shows that this effectiveness is far from certain. As TCOs learn and adapt to government strategies, governments must continue to reevaluate their tactics for effectiveness. This thesis argues that governments and law enforcement organizations must learn from this history, or they may lose what has been an effective weapon in the fight against TCOs.

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