

HISTORIC PATTERNS
OF INTERVENTION:
U.S. Relations with Latin America

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- CUBA UNDER THE PLATT AMENDMENT, 1902–1934.* By LOUIS A. PEREZ, JR. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986. Pp. 410. \$39.95.)
- LATIN AMERICA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF U.S. STRATEGIC THOUGHT, 1936–1940.* By DAVID G. HAGLUND. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. Pp. 280. \$19.95.)
- THE PANAMA CANAL IN AMERICAN POLITICS: DOMESTIC ADVOCACY AND THE EVOLUTION OF POLICY.* By J. MICHAEL HOGAN. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986. Pp. 300. \$24.95.)
- PAN AMERICAN VISIONS: WOODROW WILSON IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, 1913–1921.* By MARK T. GILDERHUS. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986. Pp. 194. \$25.95.)
- THE SHADOW WAR: GERMAN ESPIONAGE AND UNITED STATES COUNTERESPIONAGE IN LATIN AMERICA DURING WORLD WAR II.* By LESLIE B. ROUT, JR., and JOHN F. BRATZEL. (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1986. Pp. 496. \$29.50.)
- UNDER THE BIG STICK: NICARAGUA AND THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1848.* By KARL BERMAN. (Boston: South End Press, 1986. Pp. 339. \$10.00.)
- U.S. POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA: FROM REGIONALISM TO GLOBALISM.* By HAROLD MOLINEU. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986. Pp. 242. \$35.00.)

As political scientist Harold Molineu has observed, “U.S. intervention in a variety of forms has continued and thereby remains the central unresolved issue in U.S.–Latin American relations.” Indeed, military intervention has been the most conspicuous feature of U.S. policy in Latin America. During the first third of the twentieth century, U.S. armed forces intervened some thirty-five times in the Caribbean Basin nations of Cuba, Panama, Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua. In response to bitter protests from Latin Americans, the United States began in 1933, under the aegis of the Good Neighbor Policy, to foreswear intervention as an instrument of policy in the West-

ern Hemisphere. This pledge was codified in 1948 in the charter of the Organization of the American States: Article 15 states unequivocally that “no state or group of states has the right to intervene directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state.” But during the Cold War era, the United States has repeatedly violated its treaty obligations. U.S. troops have landed in the Dominican Republic (1965) and Grenada (1983); the Central Intelligence Agency has sponsored covert military operations against Guatemala (1954) and Cuba (1960–1965); and the U.S. government has employed coercive political, economic, and military measures to destabilize popularly elected governments in Brazil (1964) and Chile (1970–1973). Finally, during the Reagan years, the United States has funded a war against the revolutionary government of Nicaragua.

Why the United States has repeatedly exercised its preponderant power against its southern neighbors is the theme that dominates these seven studies of inter-American relations. Scholars have long sought a definition or analytical model that could explain U.S. behavior in Latin America.¹ Although no consensus on the motivation, character, and significance of U.S. foreign policy emerges from the works under review, they nevertheless enrich the general understanding of inter-American relations and demonstrate that *intervention* signifies more than armed landings and military occupation. These studies also suggest that scholars must focus on the ramifications of U.S. policy in Latin America, not just on its formulation.

Harold Molineu's *U.S. Policy toward Latin America: From Regionalism to Globalism* is the only one of the seven works that considers U.S. relations with all of Latin America. Molineu offers six alternative perspectives to interpret the history of inter-American relations that in turn can be divided into the two broad categories of regionalist and globalist approaches. The regionalist category employs the concepts of the Western Hemisphere, the sphere of influence, and regional economic dominance. Molineu's global category rests on such ideas as the democratic mission, the strategic approach, and dependency economics. He employs these six perspectives to analyze events and policies ranging from the Spanish-American War to the guerrilla war in El Salvador and from dollar diplomacy to the Alliance for Progress.

Although Molineu admits that “no one of these perspectives is likely to provide a definitive explanation for U.S. behavior in Latin America,” he implicitly finds some perspectives less useful analytically than others. He tends to discount both ideology and economic imperatives. Molineu calls the Western Hemisphere or Pan American ideal a “persistent and important symbol” that lacks substance because the obvious disparities in wealth, power, and culture “make it difficult to discern a basis for community” between Latin America and the United

States. The United States periodically launches democratic or human rights campaigns in the hemisphere, but these impulses can best be classified as extensions of U.S. policy, not as a genuine goal. The persistent objective has not been democracy per se but eliminating extracontinental influences. The United States prefers a democratic Latin America because it presumably would be secure, stable, and loyal. Molineu's study of the movements against Jacobo Arbenz, João Goulart, and Salvador Allende have also convinced him that protecting U.S. trade and investment has not been the primary reason for intervening in Latin America.

According to Molineu, political influence and security concerns motivate U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. Molineu prefers a "realist" approach to international relations based on the assumption that all nations pursue power and that relations between nations are consequently based almost entirely on power considerations. As he affirms, "great powers have always exerted hegemony over small neighbors, and they still do; we should not expect anything different." Throughout the twentieth century, the United States has preserved a sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. What has changed is that during the Cold War, the United States has interjected its fear of the Soviet Union into U.S. analyses of Latin American affairs. The United States now looks at its neighbors through a global, rather than a regional, prism.

Although Molineu accepts a *realpolitik* view of inter-American relations, he argues that intervention has proven to be counterproductive, that it has ultimately undermined the ability of the United States to protect its security interests in Cuba and Nicaragua. In offering a "noninterventionist critique," he calls instead for a policy of positive restraint. The United States should assist struggling democratic governments with their massive debt burdens. The United States should also develop a restrained, subtle policy that recognizes the appeal of revolutionary nationalism. In sum, the United States should create a benign, progressive sphere of influence.

Such was the goal of Woodrow Wilson, as outlined in Mark Gilderhus's concise *Pan American Visions*. Wilson wanted to replace the unilateral interventions of the Roosevelt Corollary and the special economic privileges and concessions of dollar diplomacy with "Pan Americanism." Wilson was convinced that if Latin American nations could be persuaded to accept a Pan American treaty (which called for collective security and compulsory arbitration) and to adopt free trade and investment policies, then peace and prosperity would reign throughout the hemisphere. A classical liberal, Wilson believed that the diffusion of U.S. interests in the region would have uplifting, beneficial effects. This "regional integration" would also spare the United States the oppo-

trium of unilateral intervention and strengthen the U.S. industrial economy.

Wilsonian advocates of Pan Americanism assumed a natural harmony of interests, a Western Hemisphere concept. But Latin Americans, frightened by the overwhelming power and wealth of the United States, felt ambivalent about embracing the Colossus of the North. Moreover, Wilson raised doubts about his commitment to peace and change by intervening repeatedly in the Mexican Revolution, and consequently, the major Latin American nations rejected the Pan American pact. Wilson's failure to achieve political collaboration and his inconsistent behavior also raised the question, as Gilderhus observes, of whether a strong, dynamic state can function as an equal in close partnership with weaker neighbors.

Restraint and respect for national sovereignty certainly have not characterized U.S. policy toward Cuba and Nicaragua. Karl Bermann appropriately entitled his survey of U.S.–Nicaraguan relations *Under the Big Stick* and calls it “a case study in intervention.” Bermann calculates that U.S. marines and sailors have landed eleven times since 1853 in Nicaragua, “a country whose political, economic, and social outlines have been formed by intervention.” The Sandinista Revolution is thus a product of past interventions. According to Bermann, “the very thing we are supposed to fear and hate bears the label ‘Made in the USA.’”

To prove that the U.S. role in Nicaragua has been deplorable and that the revolution is a justifiable response to the gross injustice and inequality fostered by the United States in Nicaragua, Bermann reviews U.S. policies: the filibustering expeditions of William Walker, the overthrow of President José Santos Zelaya, the war against Augusto Sandino, and the support of the Somoza family. For Bermann, the key event in Nicaraguan history occurred in 1909–10, when the Taft administration ousted Zelaya. The United States opposed this president because he favored nationalistic economic policies and wanted to avoid dependence on U.S. capital. Bermann theorizes that Zelaya's policies might have established the socioeconomic bases for a constitutional modern nation. Instead, the U.S. intervention “inaugurated a seventy-year dark age” for Nicaragua.

Bermann believes that in order to grasp “the real motive” for U.S. hostility to the Sandinistas, one must examine the historical record because present policies are “all retreats from the past.” Bermann heatedly disputes claims by the Reagan administration that the 1984 election was a sham and that Nicaragua has become a client state of the Soviet Union. He asserts that military security is not a valid concern of the United States and that the United States opposes the Sandinistas for the same reasons it intervened against Zelaya: if a nationalist experiment is allowed to succeed in Nicaragua, it would provide an attractive

alternative development model for other dependent Third World nations. Bermann concludes that the United States fears that Nicaragua's success would "cause the economic dominoes to fall rapidly."

More dispassionate than Bermann, but no less critical of U.S. interventionism, is Louis Pérez in *Cuba under the Platt Amendment*. Pérez presents the Platt Amendment as "an organic document, evolving and changing as circumstances dictated." As originally interpreted by Secretary of War Elihu Root, the Platt Amendment was intended to preserve Cuban independence (and the hegemony of the United States in the Caribbean). But "the exercise of hegemony created an auspicious environment for U.S. investment in the region." As U.S. direct investments in Cuba grew to two hundred million dollars by 1911 and exceeded one billion by 1925, the Platt Amendment came to mean the defense of U.S. capital interests. U.S. investors demanded stability and docile workers, and accordingly, the United States vetoed national development projects, set national budgets, and interfered in labor disputes. So pervasive was U.S. influence that Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan actually protested changes in Cuban divorce laws, fearing that such changes would foment political disorder.

What particularly distinguishes *Cuba under the Platt Amendment* is that Pérez goes beyond merely proving that the Platt Amendment served the political economy of the United States. He analyzes the consequences of U.S. intervention, the long-term effects of the Platt Amendment, and Cuban responses to U.S. intervention. Pérez finds that the results of the U.S. presence in Cuba were "debased political institutions, deformed social formations, and dependent economic relations." Because foreigners controlled the means of production, traditional avenues of wealth were closed to ambitious Cubans. Control over political office became the primary source of security and wealth. Government service in Cuba became primarily an economic pursuit, and predictably, corruption, graft, and patronage flourished. Moreover, with the stakes so high, Cubans competed fiercely for political power and often used the Platt Amendment for the purpose of entangling the United States in their partisan struggles, thereby stunting the growth of national independence and self-reliance.

The United States abrogated the Platt Amendment in 1934, although it retained leverage over Cuba by means of trade treaties and sugar quotas. But although the United States no longer formally regulated Cuban affairs, Cubans like Fulgencio Batista continued to display behavior conditioned by the years under the Platt Amendment. As Pérez concludes, the amendment's "impact on Cuban culture survived one more generation," inevitably "galvanizing the very forces it sought to contain: nationalism and revolution."

Not all of the authors under review here focus on the manifesta-

tions of U.S. hegemony or the roots of revolution. The remaining authors suggest that U.S. hemispheric policies, including intervention, can be motivated by legitimate security concerns. In *Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought*, David Haglund explores the role of U.S.–Latin American relations in the decision by U.S. officials to abandon the policy of noninvolvement in European affairs and enter into a de facto alliance with Great Britain in the late summer of 1940. Haglund’s central thesis is that a “necessary condition for American intervention in World War II was the uncertainty that the Latin American republics could or would resist the combined political, economic and military threats and blandishments of a Germany that, by the middle of 1940, looked to be conqueror of all Europe” (p. 34). As a result of this view, the Monroe Doctrine and the Western Hemisphere concept had to be turned on their heads: the United States had to intervene in the Old World in order to preserve the New.

In defending his thesis, Haglund disputes isolationist critics of Franklin Roosevelt who have claimed that the president fabricated the Nazi threat to the Western Hemisphere in order to prepare public opinion for an eventual war against Germany. Haglund concedes that no hemispheric invasion plan was ever found in German archives, but the question remains open as to what aggression the Germans might have planned, had they defeated the British. In any case, Roosevelt and his advisors perceived a threat to the physical security of the Americas because, between 1936 and 1940, the Nazis were “boring from within,” organizing German nationals, propagandizing, and expanding trade contacts.

Support for the accuracy of the Roosevelt administration’s perception of German intentions comes from Leslie Rout and John Bratzel in their detailed study, *The Shadow War: German Espionage and United States Counterespionage in Latin America during World War II*. The authors tracked down spying activities in Latin America by examining archives in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States and by interviewing former FBI agents, retired diplomats, and former German spies. Rout and Bratzel demonstrate conclusively that German clandestine intelligence operations in Latin America were widespread, albeit ineffective. The mission of some five hundred German agents in Latin America was to report on U.S. ship movements, collect data on U.S. war production, and smuggle vital raw materials (such as industrial diamonds) back to Germany. But the German spy network was hastily built, poorly funded, and badly organized. Moreover, U.S. agents, under the direction of J. Edgar Hoover, methodically exposed and undermined the German spy rings.

In authorizing Hoover’s intelligence unit to operate secretly in

Latin America, President Roosevelt violated the nonintervention principle of his Good Neighbor Policy. Rout and Bratzel defend Roosevelt, however, noting that “self-defense is the first law of nations.” According to the authors, the United States took unilateral action because Latin Americans were indifferent to or incapable of taking effective counterintelligence measures. Argentina, for example, officially pursued a neutralist course, although some Argentine officials aided German intelligence. Mexico, on the other hand, was vigorously antifascist but did not prosecute its Nazi spy ring because it did not want to be perceived as bowing to U.S. pressure. Although Rout and Bratzel understand the president’s decision, they also recognize that Roosevelt set a precedent for future interventions: Hoover’s agents laid the groundwork for the emergence of the CIA in Latin America in the postwar period.

Potential intervention is a central concern of J. Michael Hogan’s *The Panama Canal in American Politics: Domestic Advocacy and the Evolution of Policy*. Hogan dissects the furious domestic debate of the late 1970s over the canal treaties. His purpose is not to determine the “reality” of the controversy but rather to examine the “perceived realities” that U.S. citizens were persuaded to believe. The debate over the canal involved more than scrutinizing a commercial and strategic asset because the canal has always been symbolically significant in U.S. history. For most observers, the building of the Panama Canal (between 1904 and 1914) represented the United States at its best—powerful, decisive, and forward-looking. According to this view, Theodore Roosevelt had justifiably advanced “civilization” by pursuing the “higher law” of national self-interest. By traveling to Panama in 1906 and mythicizing the construction of the canal, Roosevelt also ensured the project’s transformation “into a symbol of national greatness.” To a minority, however, the construction of the canal showed the United States at its interventionist worst. Roosevelt’s detaching Panama from Colombia was “a classic, enduring symbol of American ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’ in the underdeveloped world.”

To sell the canal treaties in the late 1970s, advocates led by President Jimmy Carter lobbied foreign-policy elites and “opinion makers.” Hogan persuasively demonstrates that the Carter administration never convinced a majority of U.S. citizens to support Senate ratification. Throughout the debate, advocates remained on the defensive, not wishing to besmirch Theodore Roosevelt or U.S. history. They emphasized instead that ratifying the treaties would enhance the image of the United States, particularly in Latin America. Treaty opponents, led by political conservatives (especially the “New Right”), lost the struggle to block ratification but ultimately triumphed. By rallying popular opposition to the treaties, the New Right used the issue to build a mass politi-

cal base. In the view of the New Right, it had championed the “interests of ‘average citizens’ against a liberal establishment controlled by special interests.”

Although Hogan professes to be neutral about the debate, he is particularly critical of treaty proponents. He argues that the public was misled when told that amendments attached to the treaties by the Senate “guaranteed America’s right to defend the canal.” These military provisions are ambiguous in also stating that they are not to be interpreted as a right of intervention. Hogan predicts that this confusion could lead to conflict in U.S.–Panamanian relations after the year 2000, when Panama assumes full control over the canal. Hogan also thinks that the Carter administration may have contributed to alienating U.S. citizens from their government by misleading them on the intervention issue. In offering this critique, Hogan chooses not to speculate about what an explicit right of intervention, if written into the treaties, would have done to the political health of Panama.

Taken together, these seven studies demonstrate that throughout the twentieth century the United States has characteristically exercised its superior power in the Western Hemisphere and pursued its own self-interest. How U.S. officials define that interest remains an unresolved issue, however. Perhaps it is best to avoid suggesting that “the real motive” can be ferreted out, as Bermann does, or attempting to isolate motivations, as Molineu does. Gilderhus is particularly effective in showing how the Wilsonian vision of Pan Americanism encompassed strategic, economic, and ideological drives. Pérez, too, is excellent at proving that intervention was a process, not an event—that economic imperatives flowed naturally from strategic and political concerns. These studies also reveal that scholars are increasingly concerned with the consequences of U.S. intervention. Although Bermann’s sanguine views of the Sandinistas are controversial, his central thesis that U.S. policies have had long-term, deleterious effects on Nicaragua seems unassailable. Pérez’s analysis of the Platt Amendment and Rout and Bratzel’s account of the growth of the U.S. spy network in Latin America similarly demonstrate a concern for the impact of U.S. power. Historians of inter-American relations should continue to devote attention to both the pursuit and the effects of U.S. policy in Latin America.

NOTE

1. Three good reviews of the historiography of inter-American relations are: Jorge I. Domínguez, “Consensus and Divergence: The State of Literature on Inter-American Relations in the 1970s,” *LARR* 13, no. 1 (1978):87–126; Abraham F. Lowenthal, “United States Policy toward Latin America: ‘Liberal,’ ‘Radical,’ and ‘Bureaucratic’ Perspectives,” *LARR* 8, no. 3 (1974):3–25; and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Intervention, Hegemony, and Dependency: The United States in the Circum-Caribbean, 1898–1980,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51 (May 1982):165–94.