

THE TROUBLED AND
MISUNDERSTOOD RELATIONSHIP:
The United States and Latin America

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- A HEMISPHERE APART: THE FOUNDATIONS OF UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA.* By John J. Johnson. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Pp. 271. \$32.50.)
- U.S. POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA: THE ENDLESS DEBATE.* By Dario Moreno. (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990. Pp. 186. \$26.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.)
- ARGENTINA AND THE UNITED STATES: A CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIP.* By Joseph S. Tulchin. (Boston, Mass.: Twayne, 1990. Pp. 193. \$26.95 paper.)
- U.S. POLICY TOWARD LATIN AMERICA: FROM REGIONALISM TO GLOBALISM.* Second edition. By Harold Molineu. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990. Pp. 274. \$46.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)
- INTERVENTION OR NEGLECT: THE UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL AMERICA BEYOND THE 1980s.* By Linda Robinson. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1991. Pp. 223. \$14.95 paper.)
- COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE AMERICAS: NEW DIRECTIONS.* Statement of an Inter-American Working Group. (Boston, Mass.: World Peace Foundation, 1988. Pp. 14. Free.)
- HEMISPHERE TO ITSELF: A HISTORY OF U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS.* By Frank Niess, translated by Harry Drost. (London: Zed, 1990. Pp. 229. \$55.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES: TIES OF SINGULAR INTIMACY.* By Louis A. Pérez, Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990. Pp. 314. \$30.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.)
- ELUSIVE FRIENDSHIP: A SURVEY OF U.S.-CHILEAN RELATIONS.* By Heraldo Muñoz and Carlos Portales, translated by Orlando García Valverde. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1991. Pp. 110. \$22.00.)

Many international relationships are complex and fraught with misunderstanding and distrust. The nine books under examination here are a mixed lot: some deal with the relationship between the United States and a single Latin American country; some with the relationship between the United States and a region of Latin America; others deal with the

United States and Latin America as a whole. But all of them confirm that historically as well as today, misunderstanding and distrust have characterized U.S.–Latin American relations. This outcome stems from how U.S. decision makers have looked at Latin America, how Latin American decision makers have looked at the United States, and differing historical experiences and national interests.

Since its origins, the United States has only occasionally paid much attention to Latin America but has always regarded the region as special and somehow important to its own interests. The United States has also regarded its neighbors to the south as a rightful sphere of influence. This sentiment has been expressed from the earliest days of the United States and was first spelled out formally in 1823 in the Monroe Doctrine. It was later elaborated in the Cleveland–Olney extension to that doctrine, in which the United States claimed virtual sovereignty over the hemisphere. This attitude was further enunciated in the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, in which the United States proclaimed for itself the role of hemispheric policeman.¹

Abraham Lowenthal has labeled these attitudes and associated actions as the “hegemonic presumption,” a belief on the part of U.S. officials and the general public that Latin America is and always has been the rightful sphere of influence of the United States, that no political figure or group unfriendly to Washington should come to power, and that any who do should not survive.²

In *Hemisphere to Itself: A History of U.S.–Latin American Relations*, Frank Niess shares Lowenthal’s perception but describes the situation in much stronger terms. He perceives the U.S.–Latin American relationship as an asymmetry of power in which the United States continually uses its superior might to exploit the whole of Latin America. Niess finds that the measures taken have been justifiable in some cases but reprehensible in others and that all of them have been carried out to advance U.S. economic and political interests. As Niess concludes in the final sentence of his book, “The Colossus of the North had changed little since the rise of American Imperialism . . .” (p. 204).³

Dependency theorists will have no trouble accepting Niess’s argument. Most other analysts will agree with the facts he cites, although not

1. J. Lloyd Mecham, *A Survey of United States Latin American Relations* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), chap. 3.

2. Abraham F. Lowenthal, “The United States and Latin America: Ending the Hegemonic Presumption,” *Foreign Affairs* 55 (Oct. 1976):199–213.

3. Not all authors would agree that the United States has acted as hegemon for all of Latin America for two centuries. See James R. Kurth, “The United States, Latin America, and the World: The Changing International Contest,” in *The United States and Latin America in the 1980s: Contending Perspectives on a Decade of Crisis*, edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook and Carlos Rico (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 61–86.

with all of his interpretations and conclusions. To be sure, many U.S. actions toward Latin America have been deliberately imperialistic (despite U.S. avoidance of that term): the seizing of Mexican territory, numerous military interventions (overt and covert) executed to influence the course of political events in specific countries, the Platt Amendment, and the protectorate over Panama, to cite only a few of the most obvious examples. Other U.S. actions, private and public, may have had imperialistic effects even if domination was not the intent, such as certain U.S. private investments in Latin America and U.S. government efforts to limit Latin American acquisition of arms. Still other U.S. actions that are perceived by Niess, dependency theorists, and many Latin Americans as imperialism are more reasonably interpreted as the results of the vast disparity in power and wealth between the United States and the Latin American countries, individually and collectively. Moreover, in emphasizing real or alleged U.S. imperialism, Niess overlooks the fact that Washington has not always succeeded in working its will in Latin America. Although some readers may disagree with the analysis and conclusions of *Hemisphere to Itself*, the book is nonetheless well worth reading because the argument made is one that is widely held. The volume can also be recommended for its extensive and valuable bibliographical essay and appendix.

John Johnson's similarly titled *A Hemisphere Apart: The Foundations of United States Policy toward Latin America* focuses on what he considers to be a crucial period, 1815 to 1830, perhaps *the* crucial period in the formulation of U.S. relations with Latin America. Johnson argues persuasively that geographical accident alone made the United States and Latin America neighbors, albeit neighbors who have not always found their relationship comfortable or mutually beneficial. In Johnson's view, developments between 1815 and 1830 shaped U.S. policy and relations with Latin America throughout the twentieth century.

Two basic interpretive themes emerge from Johnson's study. One is his contention that U.S. racial and cultural misperceptions or misunderstandings of Latin America have resulted in a lack of knowledge in the United States about Latin America. That ignorance has in turn led to U.S. policy failures in Latin America, strained relations between the United States and Latin America, and bitterness on the part of many Latin Americans and some U.S. citizens as well. The general lack of U.S. knowledge about Latin America is irrefutable. Most U.S. citizens, including most public officials, possess only sketchy knowledge of other regions of the world, especially Latin America and Africa. But it should also be added that misperceptions and lack of knowledge are not confined to the U.S. side of the relationship—they exist on the Latin side as well.

The second theme that emerges from *A Hemisphere Apart* is Johnson's point that British involvement in Latin America between 1815 and

1830 influenced U.S. policy toward Latin America in the early years of the U.S.–Latin American relationship. As Johnson explains in his introduction:

Following their emancipation the ex-colonists looked to Great Britain, not the United States, as their military protector, as their source of investment capital, manufactured goods, including war materials, and as an arbiter of their disputes. . . . Although London followed Washington's lead in acknowledging the sovereignty of the new States, because of Great Britain's paramount standing with the republics, in most cases Washington reacted to what London did, or was thought to be doing in respect to Latin America, rather than the reverse. (P. 4)

A host of U.S. actions and policy statements confirm that assertion. U.S. concern—even alarm—over British involvement in Latin America in the period from 1815 to 1830 emanated from U.S. aspirations that could not be achieved at the time for lack of resources. Almost from its inception, the United States wanted to make Latin America its sphere of influence, a goal not fully achieved until the end of World War II. Another U.S. desire has been to keep hostile foreign powers out of the Western Hemisphere. British involvement constituted a threat to both U.S. objectives, all the more so because the United States and Britain were not close allies during this period. Johnson documents this and other portions of his study with many source citations and also provides an extensive bibliographical essay.

The second edition of Molineu's fine textbook, *U.S. Policy toward Latin America: From Regionalism to Globalism*, is a substantially revised and updated version of the first edition. The revisions cover Reagan and Bush administration policies toward Central America (including the Iran-Contra scandal), U.S. economic relations with Latin America (particularly regarding debt), and the U.S. intervention in Panama to oust Noriega. Molineu too is critical of U.S. policy but less consistently than Niess.

Molineu's objective is to explain U.S.–Latin American relations, especially U.S. problems, difficulties, and failures in interacting with its neighbors to the south. He contends correctly that "In order to grasp the dynamics of today's difficulties . . . , it is necessary to divide the history of U.S.–Latin American relations into meaningful components" (p. 34). Molineu views Washington's approach to Latin America as falling into two broad categories that he calls regionalist and globalist. The regionalist approach was based on the idea of the Western Hemisphere (which is not well defined by any of the works under review here); the sphere of influence (defined well by Niess and Lowenthal); and regional economic domination (an argument made by many authors, especially dependency theorists). Molineu deals with each approach in detail. He also identifies and examines three main global policies that the United States has applied to Latin America: the democratic mission or promotion of democracy abroad,

the strategic approach, and economic dependency.⁴ As Molineu comments, "No one of these perspectives is likely to provide a definitive explanation of U.S. behavior in Latin America. Instead, it should be clear that a variety of approaches have influenced U.S. policies and can be used to explain them" (p. 3). Molineu evidently understands, but does not altogether endorse, these policy vacillations, which have not always advanced U.S. interests or promoted cordial relations with the countries of Latin America. The vacillating has resulted from shifts in the focus of U.S. foreign policy.

Regardless of the approach taken, U.S. objectives and the means employed to achieve them have been consistent over time. Molineu identifies six major U.S. objectives in Latin America: first, preventing any Soviet capability of launching strategic weapons at the United States via submarines and land bases (given the changes in the USSR since the book was written, this goal might not be as high a U.S. priority now);⁵ preventing the establishment of hostile military bases in the region (a constant goal since the inception of the United States); maintaining access to strategic resources; maintaining access to the Panama Canal; containing or destabilizing revolutionary forces or subversion; and encouraging the growth of U.S. trade and investment (p. 111).

Few if any students of inter-American relations would challenge these as Washington's primary objectives, although they might phrase some of them differently and add additional objectives. Washington has emphasized different aims at different times, and some objectives have been achieved to a greater extent than others.

To realize these objectives, according to Molineu, Washington has pursued a variety of means: establishing close ties with friendly governments and their military forces;⁶ using military and economic assistance to promote political stability; providing training and materiel to countries threatened with subversion being imported from outside; resisting efforts to nationalize U.S. private investment;⁷ educating Latin

4. Exceptions to that generalization can be cited, and Molineu would probably concur because the exceptions are in line with the overall thrust of his propositions.

5. This goal has been mainly a post-World War II phenomenon. It has been aimed at real or perceived Soviet-sponsored subversion or Cuban subversion backed by Moscow. But this goal has also surfaced at other times in reference to other powers.

6. This point is generally true, but there are exceptions. In the early 1960s, when the United States did not have especially close relations with Brazilian governments, it maintained cordial relations with the Brazilian military. Similarly, while the United States did not maintain friendly relations with the Allende government in Chile, it maintained very cordial relations with the Chilean military.

7. To be sure, the United States does not look with favor on the nationalization or expropriation of private U.S. investment in Latin America (or anywhere else). It has, however, largely accommodated itself to that practice in Latin America. See Paul E. Sigmund, *Multinationals in Latin America: The Politics of Nationalization* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980).

Americans about external threats to the hemisphere; and promoting democratic processes (p. 11).⁸

It is difficult to take issue with Molineu's identification of either U.S. objectives or means. But it should be noted that different means have been stressed at various times, depending on the objectives currently being given high priority. The final chapter of *U.S. Policy toward Latin America* offers a thoughtful critique of the theme of nonintervention, demonstrating that intervention versus nonintervention is a complex issue more likely to involve gray areas than black and white ones. In most historical instances, a case can be made both for and against a particular act of U.S. intervention or nonintervention.

The thesis of Heraldo Muñoz's and Carlos Portales's *Elusive Friendship: A Survey of U.S.-Chilean Relations* may surprise some in the United States (including some U.S. Latin American specialists), especially given the seeming closeness of the two countries during Eduardo Frei's presidency and the large sums of money Washington sent to Chile in the 1960s to make that country (along with Costa Rica and Venezuela) a "showcase of democracy" in Latin America in the wake of the Cuban Revolution. Muñoz and Portales convincingly argue that "the periods during which the aims of both countries have fully coincided have been an exception" (p. 1). In other words, tensions and divergences have been more common than cooperation. Nor is that state of affairs peculiar to the U.S.-Chilean relationship. Indeed, it characterizes the U.S. relationship with most of the larger and some of the smaller Latin American states. Muñoz and Portales begin their study by explaining their choice of title:

Of the factors that explain what we call an "elusive friendship" . . . , the following are worthy of mention: (1) the remnants from the past of a confrontation between [the] two that became adversaries as they sought influence in South America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; (2) the existence of U.S. economic interests in Chile . . . which clashed with the policies and concepts of Chilean national development; (3) the emergence . . . of a strong anti-American political culture . . . ; (4) an interventionist attitude on the part of the United States; (5) the emergence in Chile of a military-technocratic model . . . whose basic political feature . . . was contradictory to certain basic orientations and interests of U.S. foreign policy. (P. 2)

Other contributing factors that should perhaps be added to the list are sheer geographical distance and differing political cultures. A substantial portion of *Elusive Friendship* focuses on U.S. relations with Chile during the period of military rule. Muñoz and Portales contend that in consider-

8. Promotion of democracy has really been a secondary U.S. objective vis-à-vis Latin America, despite official U.S. verbiage to the contrary. It is an objective that Washington desires but pursues vigorously only in times of noncrisis. See Howard J. Wiarda, *In Search of Policy: The United States and Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984).

ing “the balance of relations between the United States and Chile during the military regime . . . , bilateral conflict and tension prevailed over cooperation and understanding” (p. 93). Strains in the sometime friendship were also manifested when at the outset of World War II, Chile hesitated to break its ties with the Axis countries for fear of exposing its extensive coastline to Japanese attack. Another manifestation was Chile’s resistance in the 1960s to some U.S.-backed hard-line measures against Castro’s Cuba. (In both instances, however, Chile eventually came around to the U.S. position.) Differences also surfaced when Salvador Allende expropriated various U.S.-owned properties and at many other junctures in this “elusive friendship” between the United States and Chile.

Elusive Friendship lacks a bibliography, although most chapters contain detailed notes with extensive citations to source material in English and Spanish. Overall, this small but informative book will provide its readers with many insights into the U.S.-Chilean relationship.

Joseph Tulchin’s *Argentina and the United States* presents a line of analysis similar to that of Muñoz and Portales in some respects. Tulchin observes at the outset, “The history of relations between the United States and Argentina is one of repeated misunderstandings, extended periods of tension, and minimal opportunities for cooperation and friendship” (p. xv). Tulchin lays the responsibility for missed opportunities at the doorsteps of both Washington and Buenos Aires. The difficulties in relations have spanned two centuries and have prevailed whether Democrats, Republicans, or some combination of both have been in power in Washington and regardless of whether the regime ruling Argentina was military, populist, oligarchic, or civilian and democratic.

Tulchin perceives fundamental structural reasons for this state of affairs: “The obvious, simple fact, too often lost from view . . . , is that the two nations had different historical experiences from their . . . beginnings. . . . [T]hey have continued to see the world from different perspectives. . . . Geography is another factor dividing the two. . . . [F]or the last . . . hundred years, economics have been another factor that set the two nations against one another, as they have produced [some] of the same goods for the international market” (p. xv).

Tulchin examines in detail the political, economic, and geographic factors that have structured the conflictual relationship between the two countries. The strains cannot be exaggerated and were only exacerbated when the United States sided with the United Kingdom in the Falklands conflict, something that the Argentine military regime apparently did not anticipate (although it should have). Each chapter contains extensive notes drawing on a wealth of data. Tulchin also supplies a chronology of U.S.-Argentine relations from 1810 to 1989 as well as a useful bibliographical essay.

Louis Pérez’s basic theme in *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* is both similar to and different from those of Tulchin, Muñoz

and Portales, and Johnson. Pérez observes in his preface, "Relations between Cuba and the United States seemed destined from the beginning to be close and complicated. Before both were separate and sovereign nations, even as they continued as European colonies, circumstances . . . created needs in each that only the other could meet" (p. xiii). Pérez takes his subtitle from U.S. President William McKinley's description of U.S.-Cuban relations as "ties of singular intimacy." That characterization, however, has been a less accurate description of U.S.-Cuban relations since the Castro revolution.

Starting with the eighteenth century, Pérez identifies and analyzes the junctures at which the two countries have made contact—economic, political, and cultural. *Cuba and the United States* carefully examines the dilemmas that Cuba's extreme proximity to the United States has posed for Cuba and Cubans. Such physical closeness and contact with the United States did much to mold Cuba's political institutions, political culture, social structure, and economic development—and also created among Cubans a longstanding ambivalence toward the United States, a genuine love-hate relationship.

Pérez presents an interesting argument. For most of its history, Cuba yielded out of necessity to the power and influence of the Colossus of the North. But Pérez argues persuasively that Cuba also learned how to manipulate the United States with successful ingenuity, despite U.S. power and the U.S.-imposed Platt Amendment to the Cuban Constitution. This decree compelled Cuba to grant the United States the right to intervene at will in Cuban affairs and was invoked frequently by Washington until it was finally abrogated in the 1930s as part of the Good Neighbor Policy. According to Pérez's thesis, "Cuban power contenders accepted the reality of U.S. hegemony and on occasion reinforced it through collaboration. Just as often, however, and at every opportunity possible and expedient, they exploited the North American presence to their own advantage" (p. 152).

The other studies under review here pay little if any attention to Latin American manipulation or exploitation of the United States. But other instances can be cited. One would be the refusal of Brazil and several other Latin American states to grant full-jurisdiction military bases to the United States during World War II. Another case in point is the Panamanian demand that the 1903 canal treaty with the United States be revised. Yet another instance is Mexico's expropriation of the petroleum holdings of foreigners in the early part of the twentieth century. All these actions point to the ability on the part of smaller, weaker states to say no in certain situations, to deny something to a much more powerful country.⁹

9. On the breakdown of the foreign-policy consensus, see the authoritative work of Ole R. Holsti and James N. Rosenau, *American Leadership in World Affairs: Vietnam and the Breakdown of Consensus* (Boston, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

That aspect of inter-American relations and international relations in general has too often been glossed over or overlooked.

According to Pérez, the intimate and intense interaction between Cuba and the United States substantially affected Cubans and Cuban political culture, national identity, social structure, and economy. His final chapter analyzes the Cuban Revolution and U.S.-Cuban relations afterward. The revolution and the direction it took can be attributed in no small measure to the "ties of singular intimacy" between the United States and Cuba. Pérez says of the revolution, "Cubans had challenged a repressive regime on its own terms and succeeded—unconditionally and unassisted. This was a Cuban solution, one from which North Americans had been largely excluded and hence one over which the United States had little control" (p. 238). Surveying the vast changes in recent years in the former Soviet Union and in Soviet-Cuban relations, Pérez concludes his study with the following forecast: "It would seem to be consistent that the logic of historic and geographic factors that so long provided the context for singular intimacy will one day dictate a resumption of relations, on terms satisfactory to both Cuba and the United States" (p. 263). Perhaps so, but as of late 1992, no visible moves have been made in that direction by either Havana or Washington, especially the latter. Only time will reveal whether Pérez is correct on this count. In any case, no Latin Americanist with an interest in international relations should neglect *Cuba and the United States*, including its excellent bibliographical essay.

The two books on Central America under review address a subject of much interest in the 1970s and 1980s: the crisis in Central America, which has generated at least as much literature as public debate. Dario Moreno's *U.S. Policy in Central America: The Endless Debate* does not attempt to pass judgment on recent U.S. policy toward Central America, focusing instead on how policy toward Central America was formulated. Moreno explains, "In doing so . . . , the book seeks to show that the failure of policy was due in large part to the lack of a consensus that plagues the American foreign policy establishment" (p. ix). Few would disagree about the failure of the U.S. Central American policy under both Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. And few if any U.S. specialists on foreign policy would challenge the assertion that U.S. foreign-policy consensus has broken down. Consensus about the necessity of containing the USSR and Communism emerged shortly after World War II but crumbled due to the U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam and its effective defeat there.¹⁰ Since that time, no new consensus embraced by the whole country has yet emerged.

10. See *Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (New York: Macmillan, 1984). Also see William LeoGrande, "Through the Looking Glass: The Kissinger Report on Central America," *World Policy Journal* 1 (Winter 1984):181-200.

U.S. Policy in Central America describes how Presidents Carter and Reagan pursued very different approaches to Central America. Carter opted for what Moreno terms a “liberal internationalist approach,” one that “sees the world in multipolar perspective, views North-South issues as possibly of greater importance than East-West issues, and believes that the roots of the Central American crisis are embedded in that region’s problems of development” (pp. ix–x). Reagan, in contrast, opted for what Moreno calls the “cold warrior approach,” which held that “revolutions in Central America were the results of Soviet-Cuban efforts to destabilize the region and expand their influence” (p. 6) and that those efforts must be turned back, by military action if need be. Neither approach succeeded because neither fully comprehended the reality of revolutionary change in Central America (or elsewhere, for that matter). According to Moreno’s analysis, Carter’s policy failed because of divisions within his administration, the shifting of policy control between departments and officials, and vacillation between emphasizing human rights and security (a problem that bedeviled Carter’s foreign policy generally).

In contrast, the Reagan administration imposed ideological conformity on its officials in dealing with Central America. But this administration failed to convince the U.S. public or Congress. As Moreno explains, “Reagan’s initial policy in the region led to both a congressional and public backlash against his administration. Although he was able to obtain greater ideological consistency in his Central American policy than Carter, he was no more successful in developing a nationwide consensus on foreign policy. . . . Public opposition to Reagan’s Central American policy was symptomatic of the breakdown of the foreign policy consensus” (p. 113). The Reagan administration recognized the lack of public and congressional support for its Central American policy fairly quickly and attempted to marshal a consensus for its policy. To this end, Reagan appointed the bipartisan Kissinger Commission to investigate and publish a report on the Central American crisis. Its charge (unpublicized to be sure) was to produce a document that would build congressional and public support for Reagan administration policy. The commission failed to produce the desired consensus, however. Despite its distinguished membership, the commission was not an effort to produce a balanced and impartial account.¹¹

The final chapter of *U.S. Policy in Central America* deals with President George Bush’s treatment of Central America. According to Moreno, Bush viewed settlement of the crisis as a prerequisite for reestablishing a foreign-policy consensus. To this end, Bush adopted a nonconfrontational approach to the Central American crisis. Most observers would probably agree, but not all the change in U.S. policy is attributable to President

11. It is difficult to disagree with these recommendations, but the solution to the drug problem in the United States is that of usage and demand, not supply.

Bush. Some of it has to do with events in Central America, especially the moves toward greater democracy and lesser violence. Moreno identifies three such events: expansion of political and economic freedom in Nicaragua, indication by Salvadoran guerrillas of possible participation in negotiations, and the increased viability of the peace process in Central America.

Moreno concludes in his final paragraph: "Bush and [Secretary of State James] Baker hope that this nonconfrontational strategy will allow them to put the Central American crisis on the back burner. They believe that by avoiding the arguments that derailed the policies of the two previous administrations, foreign policy can move on to more important regions and issues. Preventing another ideological split on Central America will be the first step in the administration's plan to rebuild the foreign policy consensus that has eluded all U.S. administrations since Vietnam" (p. 149). Bush's nonconfrontational approach has indeed avoided an ideological split within the United States. It is not clear, however, that any new foreign-policy consensus has been created.

In writing *U.S. Policy in Central America*, Moreno relied heavily on memoirs, interviews, and articles by participants in both the Carter and Reagan administrations as well as on interviews with major actors in the United States and Central America and government documents. Each chapter is heavily documented, and the book is rounded off with a large bibliography.

Linda Robinson's *Intervention or Neglect: The United States and Central America beyond the 1980s* provides detailed examinations of Panama, El Salvador, and Nicaragua as well as less detailed profiles of Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Robinson comments early on, "The record suggests that [U.S.] intervention as traditionally defined—through provisions of military aid or troops—can have only limited success, primarily in forestalling worse-case outcomes. Diplomacy has been relied upon too infrequently as the means for avoiding, or ending conflicts" (p. 4). Certainly, many of the authors—U.S., European, and Latin American—who have analyzed U.S. policy toward the Central American crisis would agree with this assessment. Only those who made U.S. policy in the 1970s and 1980s would strongly disagree, and perhaps even some of them might, with the benefit of hindsight and reflection, be more inclined to agree. Robinson's sound judgment applies not only to U.S. relations with Central America. But the painful and hard reality is that Washington has often found intervention in Central America and the Caribbean easier than diplomacy.

Intervention or Neglect reviews and analyzes U.S. foreign-policy failures and successes in Central America during the 1980s. According to Robinson, the basic U.S. objectives vis-à-vis Central America have been to stimulate economic development of the region, promote democracy, and

maintain security in the region (for the benefit of the United States). She comments on these objectives: "The U.S. policy of supporting democracy-building efforts has been vindicated, but old assumptions about U.S. security interests are in need of reexamination. . . . The most serious impediment to the consolidation of democracy in the region is economic. While the United States cannot foot the entire bill, it has a major role to play in fostering the economic basis for political stability" (p. 5). Most observers would agree that this is the price the United States must pay for its long-term domination of Central America.

Robinson also offers a strategy for Central American reform: "The traditional U.S. crisis approach to Central America should be discarded in favor of a more methodical strategy for regional reform" (p. 136). She makes six major policy recommendations. First, give top priority to seeking diplomatic solutions to the remaining security threats in El Salvador and Cuba left over from the Cold War era. Second, respond vigorously to the major security threat posed by drug-trafficking by increasing assistance in detection, enforcement, and eradication that is strictly tied to the dismissal of local officials engaged in trafficking.¹² Third, support a general process of demilitarization that drastically reduces local military establishments (and U.S. aid to them) and replaces them with smaller, better-trained police forces under civilian leadership.¹³ Fourth, require specific, verifiable programs in human rights and improvements in local judicial systems as a condition of continued economic aid. Fifth, reduce trade barriers precluding Central American products and encourage non-traditional exports and regional economic integration.¹⁴ Finally, support more equitable development by funding basic-needs programs in the areas of health, education, and housing (p. 136).

These are ideal recommendations. But questions arise as to how politically realistic the recommendations are in both the United States and Central America. Many of Robinson's recommendations also run counter to entrenched U.S. foreign-policy traditions that are hard to change. Yet the failure to pursue such objectives in the past has created major difficulties for U.S. policies in Central America and will probably continue to do so in the future.

The little monograph entitled *Collective Security in the Americas* (a pamphlet, really) focuses on reviving cooperation between the United

12. This recommendation is a fine one, but it runs counter to the military tradition entrenched in Central America (except in Costa Rica). That tradition thrives with or without U.S. military aid, and thus the United States cannot change it even by reducing military assistance.

13. See James D. Cochrane, *The Politics of Regional Integration: The Central American Case* (New Orleans, La.: Tulane Studies in Political Science, 1969).

14. Economic integration is a sound recommendation, but it must not wholly follow the free-market model of the Central American Common Market of the 1950s and 1960s. See *ibid.*

States and Latin America in meeting security problems and issues. A book-length study on the same topic has also been published by the Inter-American Working Group of the World Peace Foundation as *Alternatives to Intervention: A New U.S.–Latin American Security Relationship*.¹⁵ The shorter publication comments at the outset:

The security of Latin America and the Caribbean is today at risk. The huge external debt, deep economic depression, and pervasive inequities threaten the social fabric and political cohesion of many countries. Insurgencies, civil wars, and external interventions cripple much of Central America and the Andean region. . . . The trade in narcotics has become a deadly plague that destroys thousands of lives and threatens the integrity of the state itself. Terrorism, by governments as well as by their enemies, is a scourge in a number of countries. Massive migration—people fleeing repression or hardship—strains the capacity of receiving nations to cope. (P. 1)

For the most part, these security threats are nontraditional ones that most countries—including the United States and those in Latin America—are poorly prepared to cope with. Near the end of *Collective Security in the Americas*, the authors correctly observe that “Latin American and Caribbean efforts to deal with security problems will be more likely to succeed if they have the cooperation of the United States” (p. 9). The authors argue further for a renewed, reinvigorated inter-American system—the Organization of American States—to deal with traditional and nontraditional security threats. Although one cannot refute the desirability of such a development, it must be said that the Organization of American States has been largely moribund and even discredited for several decades. That regrettable situation might be changing, however. The OAS seemed to take on renewed life in the fall of 1991 in dealing with the coup that ousted Haiti’s first democratically elected president. Such a revival might mean that the organization will tackle other difficult issues in inter-American relations in the future. But that remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The troubles and misunderstandings in U.S.–Latin American relations have resulted from several factors, none of them the fault of any one country. The first is the basic asymmetry of power that exists between the United States and Latin America. That enduring factor cannot be overestimated because it inevitably conditions relations and creates strains in them. The second has been diverging historical experiences that hinder harmonious relations and foster misunderstanding. Third is a divergence of

15. The full-length version, edited by Richard J. Bloomfield and Gregory F. Treverton, was published in 1990 by Lynne Rienner in Boulder, Colorado.

interests between the United States and Latin America. These differences have stemmed from factors that cannot be resolved quickly, if at all. Finally, there is a vast difference in political culture between the United States and most of Latin America, a potent barrier that will not disappear.¹⁶ These factors are ingrained differences. They cannot be wished away.

16. On political culture and foreign policy, see Roland H. Ebel, Raymond Taras, and James D. Cochrane, *Political Culture and Foreign Policy in Latin America: Case Studies from the Circum-Caribbean* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1991).