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**THE CONTINUITY AND GOALS OF U.S. POLICY
TOWARD LATIN AMERICA
DURING THE COLD WAR**

US policy toward Latin America during the Cold War period has been interpreted by some as an historical aberration owing to the salience of security considerations and the revolutionary turmoil of that era.¹ But, just as the United States had been engaged in regime change much earlier than 2003 when it invaded Iraq,² I would argue that Washington's policies in the Cold War period represented to a large extent the continuation of a regional strategic project initiated by the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 – the quest to become the hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere. The Cold War period was unique not because US strategic goals were different but because policies in that period responded to an extra-hemispheric power and an ideological challenge that required more assertive and aggressive actions on the part of the United States. The strategic goal was the same – attaining hegemony – but the tactical policies had to be adjusted to account for a changing regional environment.

Scholars have also argued that a primary objective of US policies toward Latin America had simply been to preserve stability and order.³ A similar argument is that US policy was characterized by “benign neglect,” except under unusual

¹ There has been a relatively recent revival of studies dealing with the Cold War in Latin America. See, for example, Hal Brand, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, editors, *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War (American Encounters/Global Interactions)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); and Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

² See Stephen Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2006). Some of the regime change that Kinzer documents, of course, occurred in Latin America; for example, in Guatemala (1954) and Chile (1973).

³ See Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: US Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America, 1910-1985*, revised edition (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).



circumstances when crises sucked the United States into a whirlpool of action.⁴ However, US Cold War policies tended to favor maintaining the status quo only because most of the countries in the region were pro-US when the Cold War began in 1947. For example, Washington supported dictators such as Somoza in Nicaragua, Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Pinochet in Chile because those generals were highly anti-communist and aligned their countries with the strategic interests of the United States. The historical record shows, however, that when governments in the region challenged Washington's policies, the US government took measures to undermine those governments, sometimes leading to long-term violence and instability. Additionally, once the communist challenge had diminished, Washington was left with a large number of military-led regimes that, while pro-US, were inherently nationalist and statist. Although it had helped to put those regimes in power, Washington's second major policy initiative during the Cold War period was to rid the region of these types of regimes, even if it meant an increase in political turmoil.

These policy choices suggest that US relations with Latin America can best be understood by the notion of hegemony. What Washington wanted was to have a preponderance of military and economic power and convince the countries in the region to accept the US political and military models. This hegemony came in two steps – first a preponderance of power and, second, the promotion of electoral politics, with the “proper” economic policies.⁵ Washington had been the preponderant military power since the late 1800s, with its victory in the Spanish-American War in 1898. What Washington desired next was for the region to accept the US political and economic models – democracy and capitalism. The Cold War, however, represented a period where Soviet influence appeared to be increasing in the region and thus Washington saw this as an extra-hemispheric military and economic challenge. In the end, however, it seems that the Soviet threat was much

⁴ Robert A. Pastor, *Whirlpool: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁵ For a discussion of hegemony and US hegemony in Latin America, see Peter M. Sanchez, *Panama Lost? US Hegemony, Democracy, and the Canal* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

weaker than had been imagined⁶ and Washington was successful in essentially achieving regional hegemony. After the Cold War ended, Washington achieved its goal of hegemonic control since it could boast not only a preponderance of military and economic power but almost every country in the hemisphere had accepted the US models of democracy and neoliberal economic policies. In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the rise of US power in the hemisphere, examine US policies during the Cold War period, and then discuss the aftermath of this important historical period.

I. The Continuous U.S. Quest for Hegemony, 1823 to present

The 1823 Monroe Doctrine was a unilateral US pronouncement by President James Monroe warning European Powers that the Western Hemisphere was independent from Europe and that those Great Powers should not attempt to recolonize the hemisphere.⁷ The policy came at the heels of Latin America's wars of independence from Spain, so part of the pronouncement was aimed at ensuring that Spain would not attempt to recolonize the region. Washington, however, did not achieve a preponderance of military power, or start to become a major economic power, in the region until the early 1900s. As a result of the 1898 Spanish-American War, Washington forced Spain from its last colonies in the hemisphere – Cuba and Puerto Rico. Although Britain, France and Germany also had interests in the region, Washington was overshadowing those nations as well. To assert US influence further, President Theodore Roosevelt announced his “corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine stating that the US government had the right to serve as a “police power” in the region in cases of “wrongdoing or impotence,” vague terms that of course would be defined by Washington. This officious policy

⁶ For a recent exposition of the Soviet role in Latin America during the Cold War period, see Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). The authors point out that, while the USSR certainly became interested in Latin America owing to Castro's victory in 1959, for the most part Moscow was cautious about Latin America and it mostly shied away for becoming too enthusiastic in inspiring revolution in what it considered America's sphere of influence. See pp. 27-136.

⁷ Gaddis Smith, *The Last Years of the Monroe Doctrine, 1945-1993* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).



led to over 30 US military interventions in the hemisphere in the early 1900s.⁸ The exercise of US military power to keep European Powers out of the hemisphere and to compel the countries in the region to comply with Washington's wishes was essential in establishing the United States as the preponderant military power in the hemisphere.

The United States also began its rise as the dominant economic power in the hemisphere in the early 1900s, at first in Central America and the Caribbean.⁹ In 1914, only Great Britain had more direct investments in the region than did Washington, almost three times the US amount; however, the United States was already the largest investor in Costa Rica and Cuba.¹⁰ Over the years, direct investments, increased trade (especially after the Panama Canal was finished in 1914), and loans helped to make the United States the major economic actor in the hemisphere. By the mid-1950s, even South America had extensive economic ties to Washington. When the Cold War reached the hemisphere in earnest, Washington was worried about two major effects of increased Soviet influence. First, Soviet ties with Latin America would undermine Washington's strategic interests in that US military preponderance would be challenged. Second, increased Soviet economic ties would harm US economic interests. Washington saw the Soviet challenge during the Cold War, therefore, as both a military and economic affront. Communist ideology, after all, was inimical to capitalism, the US economic model.

II. The Soviet-Communist Challenge in the Western Hemisphere: The 1950s to 1970s

At the end of World War II, the United States was at the height of its global power, and seemed poised to become the hegemonic power in the Western Hemisphere. No other Great Power came out of the war with as much economic and military strength and potential. In Latin America there was hope that

⁸ For a discussion of the corollary and US interventions see Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, The United States and the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 39, 51-52.

⁹ See, for example, Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schoonover, *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries & Entrepreneurs in Central America, 1880-1930* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995).

¹⁰ Frederick Stirton Weaver, *Latin America in the World Economy: Mercantile Colonialism to Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), pg. 67.



democracy would flower, and indeed it seemed to be a time of the “twilight of tyrants.”¹¹ If the Western Hemisphere became democratic, the United States would have achieved not only a preponderance of military power but would also become the ideological leader of the region, with the regional emulation of the US political and economic models of democracy and capitalism. Optimism ran through the halls of power in Washington. Even though the Cold War had reared its head onto the world stage by 1947, the Western Hemisphere, as President Monroe had hoped, was taking form as Washington’s sphere of influence or what some called “America’s back yard.” But this optimism soon turned to despair.

For Washington, the democratic revolution in Guatemala of 1944, and its subsequent modernizing-social democratic governments, represented a communist putsch in the hemisphere. For a would-be hegemon, this turn of events had to be dealt with quickly and effectively. The result was Operation PB Success, a CIA covert operation to overthrow the second democratically elected president in Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz, whom US policy-makers saw as a communist.¹² President Arbenz had nationalized fallow land held by the United Fruit Company, a US multinational firm, so that the Guatemalan peasant could subsist. Additionally, he nationalized other economic ventures dominated by United Fruit, such as the only port and the only railroad in the country. When Washington refused to sell weapons to the Guatemalan military, Arbenz turned to Eastern Europe. The result was that Washington contracted a retired Guatemalan colonel, Armando Castillo Armas, to raise a small army for the purpose of invading Guatemala from Honduras and overthrow President Arbenz. But Washington also orchestrated a psychological operations campaign using a radio station, helped to bomb Guatemala City, and convinced some of Arbenz’ supporters that the socialist president had no future in the country. This covert operation is seen by the intelligence community as a huge success, since, with little effort and financing, the United States was able to overthrow a president that seemed to be anti-American and pro-communist. This “success,” however, resulted in the destruction of Guatemala’s first democratic system, led to a civil war that lasted until 1996, resulting in the death of perhaps as many as 300,000, and to the displacement of

¹¹ Tad Szulc, *Twilight of the Tyrants* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959).

¹² Pietro Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).



around 1 million Guatemalans. The human and economic cost for the country was enormous. Washington, however, put in place a government that rolled back the reforms of the democratically elected presidents, hunted down suspected communists, and assisted Washington with its regional policies. Clearly, maintaining order or preserving democracy were not the principal goals of US policy in Guatemala. The goals were to keep what Washington saw as the influence of communist ideology out of Guatemala since that ideology could open the door to Soviet influence and harm US economic interests.

The 1959 Cuban Revolution turned out very differently for the United States. Washington tried to minimize the influence of Fidel Castro's band of revolutionaries in the post-Batista government, but once Castro took power, carried out major reforms, and aligned himself with the Soviet Union, the US government decided to carry out an invasion of Cuba much like it had done in Guatemala six years earlier.¹³ The 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, however, was a resounding failure.¹⁴ The Castro government was much more solidly entrenched than Washington assumed, the invading force was easily defeated by the Cuban revolutionary armed forces, and the planning for the invasion was mediocre at best. In Guatemala, Washington had been able to overthrow President Arbenz at least partly because the U.S. military and U.S. embassy had good relations with the Guatemalan armed forces. In Cuba, however, General Fulgencio Batistas' armed forces had been eliminated by the revolutionary government installing a new revolutionary military in its place. Washington's ability to influence the means of coercion in Cuba was thus minimal. The failure to bring down the Cuban regime, led Washington to develop a new, more forceful strategy for the region that relied more on close ties with the militaries of the region.

Washington put together a new set of policies for the region for the purpose of both winning friends and destroying enemies. President John F. Kennedy promulgated the Alliance for Progress in 1961, a policy that promised to provide large amounts of economic aid to the region, with the hopes that modernization and

¹³ See Thomas G. Patterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁴ See Jim Resenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro, and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs* (New York: Scribner, 2011).

reform would halt revolution that could lead to communism.¹⁵ Along with this economic aid policy, the Kennedy administration offered extensive military aid to the armed forces of the region. In addition to economic and military aid, the US Congress changed its foreign assistance legislation to allow the countries of the region to use military aid for the purpose of internal defense,¹⁶ since the goal of the increased assistance was to help the Latin American armed forces to eliminate the Castroite guerrilla groups that were emerging throughout the region or to oust a president deemed sympathetic to communism. The result was that in the 1960s and 1970s a number of countries in the region succumbed to institutional military rule, including Brazil in 1964, Argentina in 1966, Peru and Panama in 1969, and Chile and Uruguay in 1973. Washington helped to install, embraced, and supported military regimes as long as the generals helped to prevent communism from gaining influence in their countries. Militarism in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, therefore, was most likely a direct result of US hegemonic policies meant to prevent a second Cuba.¹⁷ The “order” that Washington promoted helped lead to innumerable human rights violations and continued conflict.

In addition to shoring up the armed forces of the region, Washington carried out direct and covert operations that helped to put military, pro-US regimes in power. The most well-known of these efforts are the operations in Guatemala in 1954 and the overthrow of Chile’s President Salvador Allende in 1973. Most likely a number of other covert operations took place in the region that helped to place generals in political power, such as in Brazil in 1964.¹⁸ In 1965, the United States invaded the Dominican Republic to prevent President Juan Bosch, leader of the Dominican Revolutionary Party, from resuming power. Bosch had been elected in

¹⁵ Peter M. Sanchez, “Continuity and Change in US Foreign Policy Toward Latin America: The Alliance For Progress Under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson,” *Journal of the Third World Spectrum* 2 (Fall 1995).

¹⁶ William F. Barber, and C. Neil Ronning, *Internal Security and Military Power: Counterinsurgency and Civic Action in Latin America* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1966).

¹⁷ See Peter M. Sanchez, “Bringing the International Back In: US Hegemonic Maintenance and Latin America’s Democratic Breakdown during the 1960s and 1970s,” *International Politics* 40, no. 2 (2003): 223-248.

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1962, was thrown out by conservative military officers seven months later, and when civil war broke out and pro-Bosh forces were about to take the country's capital, Washington sent in 25,000 Marines to "restore order." The outcome was an authoritarian, pro-US regime that did not turn power over to an opposition party until 1978.¹⁹

By the late 1970s, the Cold War in Latin America seemed to have abated. Globally, the US and the USSR were engaged in détente. And, in Latin America, the threat of another Cuba seemed remote. Leftist presidents had been removed from power, and the Soviet challenge seemed to be limited to the establishment of diplomatic ties with the countries of the region.²⁰ In this sense, US Cold War policies were successful in preventing the spread of Soviet and communist influence and preserving US dominance in the hemisphere. Naturally, the United States did not accomplish this alone. Economic elites, military officers, government officials, even Catholic Church leaders, helped to preserve US dominance by keeping communists out of power.²¹ Revolution was also not as easily carried out as Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara had envisioned. The Cuban revolution, rather than being a harbinger of things to come, proved to be an historical aberration. Communism in hindsight was much less popular and the Soviet challenge much more meager than leaders in Washington had feared. Nevertheless, the policies that Washington designed and carried out after the Cuban revolution seemed to have been successful in keeping out the communist challenge and thus maintain US hegemony in the region – until the renewal of the Cold War in 1979.

III. The Second Communist Challenge: The 1980s

¹⁹ Jerome Slater, *Intervention and Negotiation: The United States and the Dominican Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

²⁰ Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

²¹ While I focus on US strategic choices I do not intend to imply that the United States, even as a hegemonic power, can determine the politics of Latin America. I would argue, however, that the global environment does indeed have an important effect on the domestic politics of particularly weaker nation-states.

The “second Cuba” came in 1979 when the Sandinista National Revolutionary Front, FSLN, overthrew the US-supported Somoza dynasty that had ruled the country since 1936. This revolution, along with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, in the same year, revived the Cold War. But the U.S. response in the 1980s was quite different than in the earlier decades. A new economic aid plan was created, the Caribbean Basin Initiative, and military aid flowed just as before. However, the assistance that Washington distributed in the 1980s was mostly aimed at Central America, rather than all of Latin America, as had been the case in the 1960s. The Salvadoran government, which was under assault by the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, received enormous levels of US aid, in a per capita basis.²² Guatemala, also under attack by a guerrilla front, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity, received less aid partly because the aid did not start flowing until 1983, since the Guatemalan government had rejected aid in 1977 owing to State Department reports that accused the government of human rights violations.²³ Honduras also received a great deal of aid but mainly because Washington built a large military base and airport in the country to assist with its military operations in Central America. Honduras was also home to the “contras,” Nicaraguan guerrillas, trained and armed by the United States, that were trying to bring down the Sandinista government.

A new element in the revolutionary struggles of Central America was the involvement of the Catholic Church, which had embraced the so-called “preferential option for the poor,” after Vatican II (1962-1965) and the Conference of Latin American Bishops, at Medellin, Colombia (1968). Catholic priests, nuns, and lay workers helped to organize the poor in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in ways that raised the political consciousness of countless of peasants who began demanding their political and economic rights.²⁴ While Washington’s fear centered on the possibility that progressive church leaders would aid

²² See Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: From Civil Strife to Civil Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

²³ Although official US aid stopped in 1977, Washington found other ways, via the Israeli government and the CIA to ensure that the Guatemalan military received help. See Susanne Jonas, *The battle for Guatemala: rebels, death squads, and U.S. power* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

²⁴ See Scott Mainwaring and Alexander Wilde, editors, *The Progressive Church in Latin America* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).



communists, the preferential option for the poor was also highly influenced by a belief that private property should be used for a social purpose. The Catholic Church, starting with the Papal Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, began to question capitalism and the selfish use of private property. In the 1960s, the Vatican's criticisms of capitalism and of the affluent world (the so-called North) reached a fever pitch.²⁵ The United States saw progressive Catholics and communists as a common enemy because they both supported socialism, and thus the repressive regimes that Washington supported in El Salvador and Guatemala attacked the Catholic Church resulting in the death of priests, nuns, and Catholic lay-workers, who were by no means communists.

In addition to aid being distributed in a more localized manner after the Nicaraguan Revolution, Washington also had decided that supporting democratic governments that were pro-US and anti-communist was preferable, and more effective, than supporting authoritarian, military regimes. For example, the few countries that had maintained democracy in the 1960s and 1970s – Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela – had shown that democracy was more effective than military governments at keeping communists out of power. Consequently, the United States urged the Salvadoran and Guatemalan generals to democratize. In 1984, elections in El Salvador brought the Christian Democrat Jose Napoleon Duarte to the presidency. Although the election was held while a civil war was raging and left-of-center parties did not participate in the electoral contest, Washington boasted that democracy had flourished in the country and that those who rejected the elections were terrorists. In Guatemala, elections were held in 1985, leading to the election of Vinicio Cerezo, another Christian Democrat. Interestingly enough, the Sandinista regime also held elections in 1984, but Washington deemed them as non-democratic, partly because the right-of-center parties did not participate.²⁶

The renewed Cold War in the 1980s also brought some direct US military interventions. In 1983, Washington ordered the invasion of the small island of Grenada. A leftist government had taken power, developed close ties with Cuba

²⁵ See David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006).

²⁶ For a good overview of the crises in Central America, see John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change*, fourth edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006).

and had begun to construct a runway that was deemed capable of handling long-range Soviet bombers. Six years later, in December 1989, Washington ordered the invasion of Panama, after several years of tensions with the military-dominated government of General Manuel Antonio Noriega. That invasion is not often perceived as a Cold War-inspired intervention but we must remember that, although the Berlin Wall had come down a few months earlier, the Soviet Union still existed, the conflicts in Guatemala and El Salvador were still raging, the Sandinistas were still in power in Nicaragua, and General Noriega had developed friendly ties with Fidel Castro. Noriega also rejected US attempts to keep military bases past the year 1999, as stipulated in the 1977 Panama Canal Treaties. Washington saw these bases as necessary for maintaining US strategic interests in Latin America, particularly since the conflicts in Central America had not been resolved.

IV. The U.S. Assault on the Non-Communist Economic Challenge, 1980s

The Cold War is naturally seen as a strategic and ideological conflict. As it applied to Latin America, the fundamental US goals were to keep communist ideology and Soviet military power out of the Western Hemisphere. But these goals also had a strong economic imperative. Soviet influence in the region, as demonstrated by Cuba, meant that Havana would trade with Moscow and not with Washington. If more countries in the region emulated the Cuban example, US trade with, and investments in, Latin America would suffer. Additionally, as Cuba became communist, US economic interests on the island suffered, owing to nationalization and expropriation. Since Washington was by far the biggest market for Latin American goods and held the largest share of foreign investment in the region, a substantial tilt toward communism would not just mean a security threat but an economic disaster. Thus while realists have tended to emphasize security considerations in Great Power politics, security cannot be isolated from economic strength, since military power is impossible without economic might.

Although Washington's military and economic aid policies inaugurated in the early 1960s may have helped to prevent a second Cuba in the 1960s and most of the 1970s, they ushered in a number of military and authoritarian regimes that, while pro-US and anticommunist, tended to be nationalist and statist. The generals in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Chile believed in the state as an engine for modernization and economic development. State industries and state economic



planning were the norm for most of the military regimes, save for the Pinochet regime once it decided to liberalize the Chilean economy in the mid-1980s. While communism was the principal enemy, economic nationalism was also a “threat” to US economic interests, since Washington relied on access to trade and resources in Latin America in a free market system. Communism was the most extreme form of economic nationalism but military regimes also threatened to undermine Washington’s desire for freer trade and minimal barriers to US capital and direct investments. And, as we have seen, even the Catholic Church loomed as a threat to US economic interests when it criticized capitalism and organized the poor to demand their economic rights.

The oil crisis of 1973 and its aftermath provided an opening for Washington to push back the advances of economic nationalism under military regimes. The debt crisis that resulted from increasing petroleum prices put the nations of Latin America in a vulnerable financial situation, allowing the IMF to use conditionality in administering loans that were so sorely needed by states to prevent liquidity crises. The so-called “Washington consensus” led to what is now known as neoliberal policies that called on the Latin American countries to liberalize trade and investment, privatize state firms, and carry out austerity measures.²⁷ Although these policies generated a great deal of political turmoil and human suffering, they were instrumental in opening up the economies of the region to Western investment and imports. These economic policies and the pressure for democratic elections that ousted military governments were essential elements of Washington’s effort to retake the hemisphere from the influence of ideologies that were inimical to political and economic liberalism.

The end of Pinochet’s military regime in Chile serves as a good example. In 1973, Washington had helped to orchestrate the destruction of Salvador Allende’s socialist government and Pinochet’s entrance onto the Chilean political stage. A little over a decade later, Washington helped to force General Pinochet from power as well, although in a gentle, diplomatic manner. By 1986, the US government had begun to court the democratic opposition in Chile, “obstructed loans from the

²⁷ Peter H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Latin America, the United States, and the World*, 4th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

multination development banks, and voted to censure Chile in the United Nations.”²⁸

Since hegemony requires subordinate states to embrace the economic model of the hegemonic power, anti-communism was simply not enough. Once the communist challenge was effectively contained, Washington could then focus on its longer-term goal of bringing neoliberalism (global capitalism) to the region. To accomplish this task, nationalism and socialism also had to be tamed. The economic policies of nationalization and import substitution industrialization that had become popular in the 1930s and continued to flourish to some extent until the 1970s were inimical to the new neoliberal project. And thus, part of Washington’s Cold War policies included attacks against nationalism, both political and economic, and socialism, even the social democratic variety.²⁹

V. U.S. Hegemony Achieved, 1991 and beyond

By the 1990s, the Latin American region had been sprayed by the third wave of democracy. While in the mid-1970s most governments in the hemisphere were authoritarian, many with generals as heads of state, by the mid-1990s, most of the countries in the hemisphere had returned to civilian governments elected by voters. Even if some of the governments could be classified as illiberal, the region had finally emulated the US political model of competitive elections. Most of the countries of the region had rejected both the Cuban model and military rule. Additionally, the countries of the region had embraced, even if somewhat reluctantly, the Washington consensus, so that freer trade, fewer constraints on investment, and limited government spending became the only economic game in town. When the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the threat from an extra-hemispheric power inimical to the United States disappeared. If U.S. hegemony ever existed in Latin America it most certainly emerged in the 1990s. At no other time in hemispheric history did the United States possess so much economic and military power while at the same

²⁸ Brands, *Latin America’s Cold War*, *op. cit.*, pg. 249.

²⁹ Brand, *ibid*, argues that part of the Cold War included “a persistent tension between U.S. power and Latin American nationalism,” pg. 7; and Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*, *op. cit.*, opines that the Cold War was an anti-revolutionary and anti-social democratic effort on the part of the United States, as much as it was an anti-Soviet effort.

time most of the governments of the region embrace the US political and economic models of democracy and neoliberalism.

The implication of using hegemony to explain US policies in the hemisphere is that Washington will continue to view Latin America as its sphere of influence and thus will continue to carry out policies that at minimum maintain, and at maximum enhance, US economic, military and political power in the region. When extra-hemispheric powers attempt to gain influence, when nationalist leaders assert their influence, or when ideas that undermine liberal economic policies or politics emerge, then we should expect Washington to assert its power. One very important change has taken place, however: most of Latin America has embraced democracy. How will Washington react when it believes that its interests are at danger because of the actions of a democratic government? In two recent cases, Venezuela in 2002 and Honduras in 2009, Washington accepted the results of a military coup d'état by very quickly giving diplomatic recognition to the governments that replaced Hugo Chavez and Manuel Zelaya. Both presidents were left-of-center and nationalists. Washington justified their ouster by arguing that these heads of state had violated the democratic rules of the game. The other countries of Latin America, however, were critical of the military involvement and the ouster of democratically elected presidents. Certainly, Chavez and Zelaya did not pose much of a strategic or economic threat to US power in the hemisphere. If Washington recognizes military intervention so rapidly in such a secure environment, what will US action be like if it perceives a serious threat in the hemisphere again, even if all the countries of the region are fully democratic? Most likely, history will repeat itself and the lessons of the Cold War will have to be learned once more.

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