

ARMED INTERVENTION AND U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

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- INTERVENTION, REVOLUTION, AND POLITICS IN CUBA, 1913-1921.* By LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1978. Pp. 198. \$12.95.)
- GUARDIANS OF THE DYNASTY: A HISTORY OF THE U.S. CREATED GUARDIA NACIONAL DE NICARAGUA AND THE SOMOZA FAMILY.* By RICHARD MILLETT. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977. Pp. 284. \$6.95).
- DICTATORS NEVER DIE: A PORTRAIT OF NICARAGUA AND THE SOMOZAS.* By EDUARDO CRAWLEY. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979. Pp. 180. \$14.50).
- THE DOMINICAN CRISIS: THE 1965 CONSTITUTIONALIST REVOLT AND AMERICAN INTERVENTION.* By PIERO GLEIJESES. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. Pp. 460. \$22.50.)
- BRAZIL AND THE QUIET INTERVENTION, 1964.* By PHYLLIS R. PARKER. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979. Pp. 147. \$9.95.)
- THE HOVERING GIANT: U.S. RESPONSES TO REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA.* By COLE BLASIER. (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976. Pp. 315. \$15.95.)
- U.S. POLICY IN THE CARIBBEAN.* By JOHN BARTLOW MARTIN. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978. Pp. 420. \$19.00.)

In June 1979, the United States called for a meeting of the Organization of American States to consider, among other things, setting up machinery to send an international peacekeeping force to Nicaragua. Among U.S. policymakers, while some cautioned against involvement in "another Vietnam," there was concern that the final Sandinista offensive against the Somoza regime could result in "another Cuba." Most Latin American members of the OAS reacted strongly to the peacekeeping suggestion. Led by Mexico's foreign minister, they rejected what they interpreted to be a request to legitimize an effort to influence the outcome of the Nicaraguan conflict through armed intervention; instead, they joined in calling for the resignation of Somoza.¹ For the first time, the U.S. failed to win even grudging approval for a proposal to use armed force in the management of politics in the hemisphere.

In light of this Nicaraguan episode, it is timely to assess recent attempts to account for armed U.S. intervention in Latin America. What

perceptions—global, regional, domestic, and partisan—on the part of U.S. policymakers tend to trigger intervention? Who is influential in making the decision to send in the troops? Have motives and methods of intervention changed over time? What have been the consequences of U.S. armed interventions in Latin America? A number of recent books deal specifically with these and other questions. While the focus of each differs, and all but one fail to address larger comparative or theoretical issues, the studies present detailed and valuable lessons to students of U.S.-Latin American relations. They suggest, for example, the extent to which U.S. involvement has been manipulated to serve partisan interests in intraelite conflicts in various Latin American countries. They indicate that a decision to deploy troops in the contemporary period, because of its nonroutine nature, passes from the control of State Department functionaries to higher level policymakers who bring distinct perspectives to bear on decision making. They suggest that global issues have played a greater role in decision making about Latin America since World War II than in previous periods. They are emphatic in arguing that U.S. intervention has consistently and fundamentally altered the outcome of domestic Latin American conflicts and has had a lasting impact on political and economic development in the region.

Three recently published books focus on the most active phase of U.S. armed intervention in Latin America, the first three decades of this century. Louis A. Pérez, Jr., in *Intervention, Revolution, and Politics in Cuba, 1913–1921*, documents the impact of changing interpretations of the 1901 Platt Amendment on United States actions in Cuba. Initially understood to sanction intervention only in extreme cases of domestic turmoil when anarchy was considered to threaten, by 1916 the amendment was used as legal justification for intervention to support an incumbent regime and its officials during periods of partisan and electoral conflict. In Cuba, leaders of both the Liberal and Conservative parties sought to embroil the U.S. in their domestic rivalries when they thought it advantageous to advancing their goals; to do this they manipulated information and contacts with American officials in Havana and Washington. Moreover, when a decision to intervene was made in 1917, the diplomatic context of sending troops for “training exercises,” as well as commitments to incumbent officials, molded the use of the marines and resulted in a policy that further involved the U.S. in domestic politics. The decision to intervene itself was shaped by concern over the course of Cuban politics, although President Wilson and his advisers seemed also to have been influenced by the desire to forestall potential German influence in the Caribbean. This concern was also used by Cuban incumbents to heighten the possibility of U.S. support.

According to Pérez, the experience of armed intervention in 1917

led the United States to reassess its interpretation of the Platt Amendment again. Now more concerned with protecting U.S. economic interests that had boomed as a result of World War I, the U.S. moved from concern with supporting specific individuals and parties to seeking actively to ensure the stability of the political system itself. This led policy-makers to advocate measures that drew the U.S. even more fully into the day-to-day politics of the country—overseeing the establishment of electoral procedures, carrying out a national census, monitoring elections, ensuring that transportation and other facilities were functioning smoothly to maintain the health of U.S. investments, securing rural areas, and acting to prevent labor unrest. It was expected that these activities would create political and economic stability and make armed intervention unnecessary. Implicit in the presentation is the contention that U.S. activities were of fundamental importance in shaping the future of Cuba and in prolonging the life of both a regime and its incumbents. This is particularly clear in terms of the economic development of Cuba that was so clearly dominated by foreign capital. While the requirements of the Platt Amendment were interpreted differently over time, Pérez maintains that intervention itself was inevitable, given U.S. proprietary concern over Cuba and its economy.

Pérez does an admirable job of integrating a discussion of policy concerns in Washington with domestic political activities in Havana. He deals with the role of U.S. private capital in specific decisions and the personalities and personal relations that helped shape policy decisions. It is therefore regrettable that the author did not seek to expand his discussion. This case study could easily have been integrated with a broader historical discussion of U.S.–Cuban relations centered on the Platt Amendment and it could have sought to compare Cuban intervention with those in other parts of the Caribbean occurring during the same period. Ultimately, although the book suggests fascinating ideas about manipulation of and constraints upon the U.S. and about policy change over time, it remains a specialized and narrowly focused history.

While the Pérez book includes considerable insight into change and continuity in U.S. perspectives on intervention, two recent books on U.S.–Nicaraguan relations are most successful in presenting “the view from Managua.” Richard Millett, in *Guardians of the Dynasty*, argues persuasively that U.S. armed intervention in Nicaragua, first in 1909, then in 1912—an intervention that was to last until 1925—and again from 1926 to 1933, had clear and harmful consequences for the course of the country’s development. The U.S. repeatedly tipped the scales in favor of one side or the other in a tangled history of conflict between Liberals and Conservatives and among various individual leaders. In the first three decades of the century, U.S. response frequently was

influenced by Nicaraguan leaders who correctly identified the success of their political ambitions with American support. This was clearly the case with the Somoza family and its dynasty built on control over the National Guard.

Beginning in 1911, and out of anxiety over the instability and internecine warfare in Nicaragua, the U.S. government began to press for the establishment of a strong, professional, and neutral military organization. Initial failures to create such a force under U.S. tutelage eventually gave way in 1925 to Nicaraguan commitment to establish and train a constabulary that was expected to bring peace to the country. Millett traces the early history of the constabulary and then of its successor, the Guardia Nacional, its war against Augusto Sandino, U.S. marine involvement in fighting the Sandinist rebellion, and the concern of the U.S. for ensuring that Anastasio Somoza García be established as Guardia commander in 1933 when the period of intervention ended. In the discussion of Somoza's "election" as president of the country in 1936, Millett is unequivocal in stating that, "The major share of the responsibility for Somoza's seizure of power . . . must rest with the United States" (p. 183). He is equally clear in arguing that since 1936, the consequences of earlier armed interventions have been reinforced by the deep political, economic, and cultural penetration of the country by the United States.

While discussion of more recent armed interventions in Latin America have stressed the importance of global issues in the decision to intervene, Millett suggests that U.S. concern with events in Nicaragua itself was paramount, subject, of course, to interpretation and reporting by diplomatic and military personnel of the events they witnessed. Interest in the country as a site for a canal linking the Caribbean and the Pacific was of course of considerable importance. Beyond that, stability, international financial responsibility, preferences for specific politicians and their political parties, and protection of U.S. economic interests loom large in his discussion, as they do in Pérez' analysis of Cuba. Unfortunately, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, unlike the Pérez book, provides little extended discussion of the influence of U.S. business interests in shaping policy, or the mechanics and politics of decision making in Washington. Nevertheless, the book presents a detailed and well-researched analysis of the National Guard under American tutelage and its development as the strongest and most cohesive institution in a setting of continuously weak and divided civilian governments. In such a situation, a "neutral" and "apolitical" armed organization was clearly the key for whomever wished to acquire power, a point the American advisers seemed to ignore, but not the Nicaraguans who, in the 1920s

and 1930s, sought to control the military. The Somozas won, of course, and dominated the country for forty-three years.

A similar story is recounted in Eduardo Crawley's book, *Dictators Never Die*. A journalistic rather than scholarly history, and much less detailed than the Millett book, it nevertheless attests to the formative impact of the American intervention in Nicaragua. Crawley presents a broad history of the country from the preconquest period and provides insights into the personalities that have shaped its development since the 1930s. Like Millett, he indicates U.S. involvement, often through high level decision makers in Washington, in the day-to-day issues of Nicaraguan politics and in the competition among rival parties and politicians. His analysis is particularly insightful in the discussion of the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the Somoza family that finally turned much elite support into opposition to the regime after the 1972 earthquake. Both books offer readable and reliable histories of Nicaragua in the twentieth century, but Millett in particular can be recommended for the rich data he presents on U.S. actions in creating the Guardia, in fighting Sandino's forces, and in the long period of Somoza rule. He also offers valuable insights into factionalism and discontent within the military itself, and the book offers a bonus to Nicaragua watchers with an introductory essay by Miguel D'Escoto, written before he achieved international attention as the ambassador to the OAS for the Sandinist movement and then as foreign minister for the new revolutionary government.

Pérez, Millett, and Crawley, then, support an impression that U.S. intervention in and around the Caribbean in the early part of the century was motivated primarily by close and specific—if often misperceived—analysis of domestic political events and their impact on economic conditions in the countries involved. A different perspective is apparent in a study of political crises in the Dominican Republic in the early 1960s, culminating in the U.S. intervention in 1965. *The Dominican Crisis*, by Piero Gleijeses, deals in great detail with Dominican politics from the death of Rafael Trujillo in 1961 to the establishment of the first government of Joaquín Balaguer in 1966. In fact, Gleijeses has produced the most detailed analysis yet of the factions and forces involved in Dominican politics during this period, although it is to be questioned if much of the detail is either relevant or important.² Factions on the right, factions on the left, and opportunism and lack of direction everywhere suggest a complex and chaotic political arena. It might be surprising, then, that U.S. perceptions of the 1965 revolt of the constitutionalist officers and the subsequent revolution should have been so clear. But the Dominican drama was acted out in the shadow of Cuba and of

Washington's reevaluation of Latin America's vulnerability to Communist takeovers directed from Moscow. The Cold War, then, and the intense desire to prevent "another Cuba," rather than familiarity with domestic political events in the Dominican Republic, encouraged the U.S. to land the first of 23,000 troops on 30 April 1965.

Gleijeses joins other analysts of the Dominican intervention by pointing clearly to the conclusion that Washington's perceptions of Dominican politics, particularly its evaluation of the weak and divided far left, were greatly in error and clouded by its views of global political issues. Moreover, decision makers in Washington were captive of the faulty information available to them. Thus, in his useful concluding analysis, Gleijeses states, "Johnson and his advisers, 'liberal' or 'conservative,' could judge only according to the evidence they had. This evidence was provided by the embassy and the CIA reports, all unanimous in stressing that a rebel victory would lead to a Communist takeover, and that such a victory was imminent" (p. 293). With global concerns so clearly paramount for Washington, Dominican political and military personnel were therefore able to use the fear of communism to their advantage in acquiring U.S. support. In addition, he maintains that U.S. response to Dominican events was not significantly different in the Kennedy and Johnson years, shaped overwhelmingly as it was by a commitment to avoid "another Cuba." Thus, the Dominican intervention cannot be explained in terms of the perceptions or personalities of individual decision makers; rather, a "set of perceptions common to both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and largely shared by liberals and conservatives alike," is responsible (p. 294).

The focus of *The Dominican Crisis* is on a close and often tedious analysis of domestic Dominican politics and on the superficiality of American intelligence information that surrounded decision making. The book provides little specific analysis of decision making processes in Washington, however; the interaction of the White House, the State Department, and Congressional leaders is largely ignored. Nor is there much indication of the role of U.S. business interests in the decisional process. Were such interests not important because of the overarching importance of global political perspectives and fears that subordinated economic considerations, or were U.S. economic concerns fundamental in shaping the political perspectives themselves? Students of U.S.–Latin American relations must return to books such as Abraham Lowenthal's *The Dominican Intervention* for more thorough consideration of these questions.³ The Gleijeses work, written with a sardonic style that makes it difficult to follow the narrative and with a distracting overabundance of quotation marks, succeeds in tying U.S. actions to perceptions of linkages between domestic and global politics. He emphasizes, as have

others, that the American intervention clearly determined the outcome of events in the Dominican Republic and that the U.S. must bear the responsibility for ending a popular revolt in favor of constitutional and democratic processes.⁴ He also suggests, however, that democratic aspirations had an uphill battle in a country that had never experienced truly popular or legitimate government for any extended period and that had a large mass of its citizenry that was scarcely involved in politics. The Dominican people, he contends, have yet to express themselves politically.

Concern with global issues was also evident in an almost-but-not-quite intervention at the time of the Brazilian coup of 1964. In *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention, 1964*, Phyllis R. Parker indicates that intervention in aid of the Brazilian military did not materialize more because of the rapid success of the conspirators than because of any forbearance on the part of the U.S. As with the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Communist influence seemed to have been overwhelmingly important in the U.S. assessment of events in Brazil. It was certainly central in conditioning Alliance for Progress aid for Brazil and for establishing the extent of support for the economic and political changes sought by the Goulart administration. Using documents from the Kennedy and Johnson years, as well as interviews with those involved in U.S.–Brazilian relations during Goulart's presidency,⁵ Parker links the views of Brazilian leaders to those in Washington. She also traces the personal interaction of American and Brazilian policymakers and military personnel, suggesting the collaboration of opponents of Goulart, especially in the military, with American interest in limiting the influence of communism. While she finds no evidence that the U.S. was involved in planning or executing the coup, Parker demonstrates the consistent support given by the U.S. to the conspirators, clearly encouraging them to take the actions they did. The rapid and supportive response of the U.S. to the coup is also used to indicate Washington's influence on the course of Brazilian politics.

This book presents rich new sources of information and provides considerable detail on the interaction of U.S. diplomatic and military officials with Brazilian military and political elites. Unfortunately, the author is reluctant to develop the implications of the material she presents. Other than a few simple points that are made in the final chapter concerning the dynamics of Brazilian politics and U.S.–Brazilian relations, broader perspectives on international politics or a familiarity with the history of U.S.–Latin American relations do not illuminate the presentation. The data deserve a more sophisticated analysis.

If each of the books discussed above falls short of a broad comparative understanding of U.S. interventions in Latin America, the

search for such an approach is well rewarded in a book by Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant*. Analyzing U.S. actions in Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Cuba in detail, and briefly in the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Chile, Blasier is able to consider factors that trigger armed interventions as opposed to other forms of international pressure and to analyze whether U.S. business interests or "bureaucratic politics" are more able to explain U.S. actions. He addresses key issues for evaluating how decisions are made in Washington and how they affect political and economic elites in Latin America.

Blasier develops a three-phase theory of revolutionary change and U.S. response to it. In the cases of Mexico, Bolivia, Guatemala, and Cuba, the U.S. tended to be flexible toward rebel movements, especially when global political questions were not raised. With the takeover of power by the rebels and initial attempts to reform social, political, and economic structures, the U.S. became increasingly cool toward the new governments in the same four cases, in large part because of the impact of change on American economic interests. U.S. policy differed with regard to the third phase, when revolutionary changes were undertaken, favoring conciliation in Mexico and Bolivia, but hostility and intervention in Cuba and Guatemala. The difference is explained to result from perceptions of whether settlement of disputes could be achieved with the revolutionary government in question and whether "such a relationship would preclude the interference of a hostile Great Power in the hemisphere. . . . When the answers to both these questions were affirmative, U.S. leaders adopted a conciliatory posture. When either was negative, U.S. leaders initiated covert operations against the revolutionary government" (p. 216). He suggests that U.S. armed intervention is likely in situations in which incumbent politicians in Latin American countries fail to maintain the united support of the armed forces, a generalization that would seem to fit the earlier Cuban and Nicaraguan cases, as well as the more recent Dominican and Brazilian crises.

Furthermore, he argues, the Cold War had an enduring impact on American perceptions of political and economic events in Latin America. In his discussion of events since World War II, he indicates the extent to which American perceptions were molded, most especially in the cases of Guatemala, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, by the fear of the contagion of communism. Usefully, he relates this enduring fear to domestic electoral and congressional politics in the United States and indicates the impact that it had on responses to Latin America in the 1960s. In an evaluation of U.S. actions toward Chile, Blasier indicates that hostility to Allende was more inspired by a commitment to maintain a strong U.S. influence in the hemisphere than by strict anticommunism or fear of the Soviet Union. This, he suggests, is indicative of American

perspectives toward Latin America in the 1970s, an interesting hypothesis to apply to the recent Nicaraguan near-intervention.

In the analysis of who has influence in foreign policy decision making, Blasier argues that the power of U.S. economic interests is most important where strategic and global political issues are not perceived to be paramount in Washington. Moreover, decisions that are the outcome of the "bureaucratic politics" of normal policymaking are distinct from decisions when presidents and secretaries of state become involved; high level officials tend to evaluate decisions in terms of global politics. Thus, Blasier contends that presidential or secretarial interest is needed to achieve outcomes that oppose U.S. business interests that dominate policymaking toward Latin America under normal conditions. However, he does not address the issue of how business interests may be able to manipulate global views to their advantage, spurring intervention in cases where it might benefit them, as in the cases of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.

The Hovering Giant is clearly the most comprehensive and consciously theoretical of the books considered here. Blasier focuses fully on American perceptions of events in Latin America and explores a range of alternative courses of action open to the United States, developing a series of propositions about the determinants of its choices under different conditions. Moreover, Blasier has added to the on-going discussion of the role of economic power in international relations. The book is well related to the literature on international and hemispheric relations and the case studies are used to develop broader insights. It is a book that is to be recommended for its capacity to link domestic and international politics, for its insights into how foreign policy decisions get made, and for its analysis of how policy change occurs.

The issue of change in U.S.–Latin American relations is also addressed by John Bartlow Martin in *U.S. Policy in the Caribbean*. In this book, the author focuses on changes in policy that ought to occur if the U.S. is to retain its influence in the region. In much the same vein as the earlier Linowitz report on Latin America, Martin argues for new attitudes and policies on the part of the United States toward the Caribbean: less paternalism, more partnership; less disdain, more interest; less muscle, more understanding; less conflict, more conciliation; less global politics, more specific knowledge.⁷

The book, organized chronologically in terms of administration-by-administration policy, describes interventions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, as well as a large number of other issues pertinent to relations with "the American sea." The discussion of intervention focuses on differences in wealth and power of the countries involved; even lack of policy can constitute intervention under such conditions.

Martin's policy prescriptions suggest repudiating armed intervention because of its long term counterproductivity. Instead, he urges that the United States intervene continuously, "through discussions, compromises, painstaking arrangements, symbolic gestures, giving a bit of aid quickly here, withholding it for a time there" (pp. 291–92). Far from objecting to the possessive attitude that has characterized U.S. relations with the Caribbean in the past, he indicates that it is a reasonable response to increasing independence, or third-worldism, in the area.

In terms of the specific cases he considers, it is disappointing that Martin, with time for reflective analysis since his 1966 book on the Dominican intervention, has not provided more insights into either the dynamics of policymaking or the specific perceptions of decision makers who frame policy responses.⁶ *U.S. Policy in the Caribbean* presents a compendium of specific events and issues in U.S. foreign policy and a general description of policies toward the Caribbean from Eisenhower to Ford, but students of U.S.–Latin American relations will not find it helpful for understanding the dynamics of the politics of interventionism, either in Washington or in the various capitals of the Caribbean countries themselves. Without greater analysis of how policies are established and how change has occurred in the past, it is difficult to understand what role the policy prescriptions would have in influencing policymakers.

As suggested by several of the books reviewed here, the issue of change itself is central to a consideration of U.S. armed intervention in Latin America. Certainly it appears that the perceptions that tend to trigger intervention changed after World War II, becoming more dominated by concern for the relationship of events in Latin America to issues of global politics. Underlying these perceptions, however, is a more enduring proprietary attitude of the U.S. toward Latin America, whether in the guise of ensuring stability, preventing the advance of communism, or maintaining dominance in a recognized "sphere of influence." In spite of the much touted impact of Vietnam on U.S. foreign policy, the recent Nicaraguan near-intervention suggests that the United States remains ready to consider sending in the troops when the issues involved are perceived in terms of Cuban (formerly Soviet) influence in hemispheric affairs or in terms of threats to U.S. influence. Nevertheless, these books also indicate that armed intervention, however dramatic, has been neither the preferred nor the most frequent means for the U.S. to influence the course of Latin American political and economic development, although it certainly has been of major importance in shaping popular and academic perceptions of the United States in Latin America. Thus, while other forms of influence are more common, it remains true that U.S. actions in the Caribbean in the early part of this

century, and in Guatemala, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic may have more of an influence on attitudes toward the “Colossus of the North” than a long history of rhetorical commitment to good neighborliness, alliances for progress, special relationships, new dialogues, and good partnerships. The books considered here begin to suggest why this is so.

NOTES

1. The OAS resolution, eventually supported by the United States, explicitly rejected intervention in the conflict.
2. A recent book published in Spanish in the Dominican Republic also covers much of the internal politics that led up to the revolt and intervention. It is less comprehensive, however, in discussing the decision to intervene. See Eduardo Latorre, *Política dominicana contemporánea* (Santo Domingo: Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, 1979).
3. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972).
4. For an extensive listing and discussion of literature on the Dominican Republic and the 1965 crisis, see the valuable bibliographic essay and appendices that follow the Gleijeses study.
5. In particular, with Lincoln Gordon, the U.S. ambassador during Goulart’s presidency.
6. See his *Overtaken by Events: The Dominican Crisis from the Death of Trujillo to the Civil War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).
7. Commission on United States–Latin American Relations, *The Americas in a Changing World* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1975).