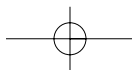
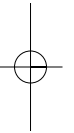
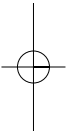
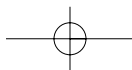
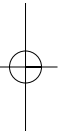
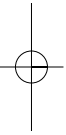


Introduction

Jorge Nef and Harry E. Vanden





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The field of inter-American relations is neither new, nor scanty, in terms of academic output. However, the literature in English sometimes has been intellectually dominated by vogues and paradigms that at times reproduced a ethnocentric perspective associated with the standpoint of the dominant power in the region – the United States. Simón Bolívar's warning about the possible dangers for Latin America from their neighbor to the north was perhaps prescient and suggestive of the unequal power relations in the decades that followed: 'The United States seems destined by Providence to plague Latin America with misery in the name of liberty'.

In the famous fable of *The Shark and the Sardines*, Juan José Arévalo tells of a shark and 20 sardines. It is a cautionary tale of the United States and the Latin American republics told by the constitutionally elected president of Guatemala after the democratic process initiated by his government was crushed by a CIA-sponsored coup in 1954. It is a scathing critique of the unequal balance of power in the inter-American system and an indictment of the toothless legal framework of the Organization of American States (OAS). The sardines were, it seems, lured into a system of unequal relations where they were told they would be protected from the avaricious appetite of the shark by the guarantees promised in the Charter of the Organization of American States. Given the juridical weakness of the OAS and the inability of the inter-American system to curb aggression by its most powerful member, the fate of all too many of the sardines was – as suggested by both magical realism and realpolitik – preordained.

As another systematic study of inter-American relations has developed in the English literature, it has often been described as a view 'from the North,' more concretely, from Washington. This paradigmatic bias has defined agendas and 'problems' that address US, not Latin American or Caribbean realities. Intellectually, this has meant a sort of academic underdevelopment, as the full range of issues, methodologies and possibilities has been kept persistently narrow, unable to formulate substantive questions and conjectures about the reality it is supposed to study.

For a long time, the predominant framework was the legal and institutional formalism that defined inter-American relations as synonymous with the OAS and its predecessor, the Pan American Union. Subsequently, with the Cuban Revolution, the paradigm emphasized a specific variation of 'realism' in the context of the Cold War. In it, the region was perceived as a problem for the US, in its struggle to prevent insurgency and contain what was then seen as the communist threat. From this vantage point, inter-American relations involved a unidirectional center-periphery model in which US foreign policies were proactive, while all the other national actors remained

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merely reactive to such policies. With the discrediting of realism and its corollary of National Security and as the Cold War drew to an end, there emerged a 'softer' neoliberal version of the same linear configuration: a hub and spokes form of economic bilateralism in which the hub defined the rules and the spokes simply played along.

Needless to say, neither conservative realism, nor 'neoliberal' notions of complex interdependence adequately explain how inter-American relations are seen by actors other than the United States. Nor can they account for other dimensions of the multi-sided patterns of such relations, including more 'horizontal' South-South inter-state interactions, and among sectors of the civil society in the Americas; resistance movements; or southern initiatives to transform the status quo.

Depending on which theoretical construct is used, there are questions which are asked and others which are excluded. In this sense, conventional western models tend to downplay critical questions about civil society, South-South, interactions, resistance and transformative potentials. Nor can they turn deeply seated biases and assumptions into refutable hypotheses that can be contested. For instance, where does US legitimacy lie? Are the interests of American elites compatible with those of their Latin American and Caribbean counterparts, and most important with those of their own people? What kind of democracy, development, transparency and human rights is being pursued by whom? How do the 'international' and the 'domestic' realm of policy intersect? Who do the different wars – on communism, on drugs, or terrorism – really serve? What is the 'national interest' and whose national interest is it?

Such concerns played a major part in eliciting different explorations, conceptual frameworks and critical forms of analysis that questioned the assumptions and postulates of conventional theory. These and related concerns are reflected in the essays selected for this special issue on inter-American relations. The views herein are not overly reflective of the official view from Washington. They are from the South and from different academic perspectives. A common theme is an attempt to assess the nature of inter-American relations after 11 September and the formulation of the Bush Doctrine. Like most of those in Latin America, the Middle East and Europe the essays will cast a critical eye on Washington's attempts to redefine the 'nature of things' in Latin America if not the world as a whole. Thus unilateralism, hegemony, free trade and preemption will be scrutinized in light of Latin American interests as well as those of Washington.

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