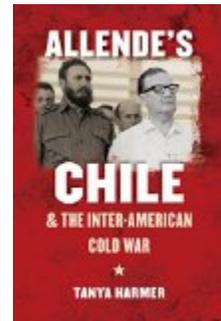


Tanya Harmer. *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. 375 S. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3495-4.

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T. Harmer: Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War

One of the central unresolved issues of research on the “Chilean way to socialism” and its abrupt end in September 1973 is the question in how far the United States was responsible or contributed to events in that distant country. From the very moment of the Putsch more or less wild theories about U.S. involvement have been discussed ranging from conspirational to apologetic versions. Serious scholarly approximations had to build on scattered and incomplete sources. Indeed, when I first published my book “Encountering with Yankee: North Americanization and Socio-Cultural Change in Chile, 1898-1990” in German in 2004 which is to be published by DIBAM in Santiago de Chile in Spanish next year I pointed out that the existing research was unsatisfactory.

With the recent rise of studies in Cold War history this situation slowly seems to change and Tanya Harmer's new book makes an important contribution. She starts with the observation that the short period of Allende's government was “sandwiched between” the Alliance for Progress and Operation Condor. Chile became a Cold War battleground when on a level superpower diplomacy “détente” presumably ruled the day. From a historical perspective this situation reminds of the “no peace beyond the line”-rule of the early modern period when the European great powers continuing wars in the New World not necessarily led to armed conflict in the Old World, too.

However, Harmer's study shows that the superpower rivalry is not all there is to know about the Cold War and that our blindness to events in the so-called periph-

ery have obscured important aspects. Harmer makes two central points: first we have to take actors in Latin America – in this case: Chile, Cuba, Brazil – seriously in their ability to influence the course of events. Second we have to look beyond the traditional confines of bilateral or trilateral relations when studying intricate problems as the fall of the Allende government. The author lives up to her own demands by doing multi-archival research and by integrating a wide range of oral history interviews into her interpretation. Of course these methodologies are not so new but the way Harmer uses them is innovative in that she includes Brazil – not amongst the usual group of suspects – in her analysis. This broadening of the scope and decentering of the perspective does make a difference. Contrary to what other specialists – be they pro or anti-American – have told us the United States did not act alone but rather trusted in regional players to share part of the “Cold War burden”. Thus she convincingly speaks of a “Latin Americanized” counterrevolutionary crusade” (p. 10).

The book is structured chronologically. In her first chapter Harmer gives an informed overview of the inter-American system before 1970. She focuses on the role played by revolutionary Cuba in the Latin American context and discusses the – close – relationship between Castro and Allende which dates from this period. Harmer then goes on to study the reaction to Allende's election both in Cuba and the United States. She makes the point that both approaches were shaped by regional factors. In the third chapter, Harmer changes her perspective and looks at the foreign policy scene in 1970 from a Chilean

perspective. As we all know, Allende's good fortune was not to last very long. Harmer discusses the rather rapid decline of his government despite the superficial success of the nationalization of the copper sector and of Castro's long visit to Chile. She demonstrates that the context in the Southern cone was at the same time dramatically worsening with the rise of the right in that region. Chapters 5 and 6 follow up with a thick description of events in 1972 and early 1973. In her final chapter, Harmer concentrates on the coup discussing the harsh treatment of Cuban representatives. She also proves conclusively that Washington encouraged the new military rulers to join forces with their neighbors in fighting the Left.

On the whole this is an important book on the foreign policy intricacies during the period of the Allende government. It offers a close look at the motives of actors ranging from the White House to Allende's 'Group of Personal Friends'. Of course, such a perspective has its limits, too. Harmer's actors are all members of a small elite of foreign policy makers. We do not learn anything about what the dramatic events meant to the people in Chile of the time. Neither do we get a feeling for the ambivalent attitudes that many Chileans harbored when it came to evaluating the United States or what was perceived to be typically 'norte americano'. Nevertheless, Harmer's book is a valuable contribution to the new literature on the history of the Cold War.

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