

 **Article REVIEW**

Mark T. Hove. “The Arbenz Factor: Salvador Allende, U.S.-Chilean Relations, and the 1954 U.S. Intervention in Guatemala.” *Diplomatic History* 31.4 (September 2007): 623-663. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7709.2007.00656.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2007.00656.x> .

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There are a number of reasons why Mark T. Hove’s examination of U.S.-Chilean relations in the context of Washington’s intervention in Guatemala is refreshing and inspiring. It departs from the all too popular 1970-1973 – or even the post Cuban revolution – timeframe generally adopted by scholars dealing with U.S. policy towards Salvador Allende. The article also skilfully shows how relatively little we know about the inter-American dynamics related to Cold War crises that shook the region or Latin American perspectives on these issues.¹ To be sure, we know that there were wide-scale protests against U.S. policy towards Latin America as a result of the Guatemalan coup, most obviously evidenced by the demonstrations against Vice President Richard Nixon when he toured the region four years later in 1958. But by looking at Chilean reactions to U.S. efforts to isolate Jacobo Arbenz’s government and the instantaneous broad condemnation of Washington in Chile after Arbenz was overthrown, Hove presents an in-depth “case study” of the immediate fallout; what he terms the United States’s “self-inflicted wound” (662). As U.S. officials acknowledged at the time, Washington paid a “price in terms of [regional] prestige and good-will” when they sponsored, accelerated and cheered Arbenz’s downfall. Hove aims to determine what exactly that price was in the short-term and how U.S. intervention “harmed U.S. ties with key Latin American states” (623-4).

Hove concludes that in Chile the price was steep and the harm serious. The article is therefore one more example of the way U.S. counterrevolutionary policies during the Cold War did more to galvanise opposition against the United States than the movements or governments they opposed did to attract support. In focusing on Chile and 1954 as a case study, Hove notes that Chilean demonstrations against the Eisenhower administration’s intervention in Guatemala were “more extensive and organized than previously recognized”, that politicians from across Chile’s political spectrum played a key role in trying to encourage a “collective voice of opposition to the United States”

¹ Valuable exceptions to this are Jim Hershberg, “The United States, Brazil and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962” (Parts 1 and 2), *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol.6, nos. 2 and 3 (Spring and Summer 2004) and Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

throughout the continent and that Chile was where – at least from Washington’s perspective – the most violent” Latin American protests against the U.S. intervention took place (they were actually peaceful despite one incident of flag burning) (624, 650-1). The article also suggests the revulsion of Chilean left-wing leaders towards U.S. intervention in Guatemala had a profound effect on their thinking and orientation towards Washington. Indeed, for Hove, 1954 was a watershed moment with monumental consequences not only in Chile, but also for the Cold War in the Americas. On the one hand, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara drew the conclusion that revolutionary struggle was imperative and that the Cuban revolution could not suffer Arbenz’s fate. On the other hand, Hove notes that Allende immediately booked a ticket to Moscow and seized an “opportunity to position himself as a national leader” while Washington carelessly “lost the battle for Chilean hearts and minds” (662, 639). Repeatedly, “The Arbenz Factor” argues that U.S. intervention in Guatemala “badly eroded what little Chilean sympathy existed for the U.S. position” (635) following the gains that had been made by Roosevelt’s Good Neighbour policy and “created doubt in Chile about the United States’s adherence to the ideals of protecting democracy and freedom” (662). To underline his point, Hove quotes the Chilean Socialist Oscar Waiss (PS) who proclaimed while the U.S. “recovered a lot of hectares of bananas” by intervening against Arbenz, it “lost forever the friendship of the peoples of Latin America” (662).

A spiral of mistrust followed. Hove explains that the “surge of anti-Americanism” in Chile dramatically altered Washington’s policy towards that country and led U.S. officials to wonder whether democratic Chile would become a “the next Guatemala” (625). A cross-party group’s decision to burn one U.S. flag in Santiago, it would seem, caught the State Department’s attention and was deemed testament to the threat of communism and subversion of a whole nation. Crucially, Hove maintains this was a turning point; for Washington, “the Allende threat and the Cold War struggle for Chile began with its intervention in Guatemala” (663). Prior to 1954, “The Arbenz Factor” depicts State Department officials and Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower as being “anxious” to retain friendly ties with democratic Chile (626) and pleased with the direction of U.S.-Chilean relations during the early 1950s (627). If they worried about Chilean politics as a potential threat to U.S. interests, this had more to do with Chile’s mounting economic difficulties or fears of a “rightist/Peronist” style military regime in the shape of President Carlos Ibáñez del Campo (1952-1958) than the potential for left-wing influence in Chile’s democratic society. Then, in 1954, Hove argues that fears of a “leftist/communist threat” took over (625). Whereas in early 1954, U.S. diplomats had appreciated Allende as a “friend” – an “able, anti-Communist politician” – throughout the course of the year, Washington began fearing him first as “a fellow-travelling leftist” and then as a “commie-liner” (662). Wiping out a perceived threat in Guatemala had therefore ironically “helped spur a new threat to U.S. interests in the region” (663). And rather than trying to appease its critics, Washington launched a vicious counterattack against those who had criticised U.S. action in Guatemala. Indeed, Hove contends that the United States missed a “prime opportunity to cultivate” Allende through funds or an invitation to the U.S. (643).

Overall, Hove’s article effectively shows the way in which events in one area of the Americas impacted not only upon U.S.-Latin American bilateral relationships but also on the domestic politics of other regional countries. Although not as extensive, parliamentary groups like Chile’s ‘Friends of Guatemala’ sprung up in El Salvador, Cuba and Mexico (631). As Hove explains, it was not only the Chilean Left that made up such a group, but rather a spectrum of politicians (one third of all Chilean deputies). Crucially, however, Hove’s article demonstrates that the diversity of this collective group was also its weakness when confronted with a telling-off from the U.S. And the varied responses to Washington’s open rebuke presented by Hove show that the U.S.’s heavy-handed response apparently worked: By threatening a deterioration in relations, it prompted the Chilean government to try and win back Washington’s trust, whilst also sparking remorse from certain members of the group, including Chile’s future president, Eduardo Frei Montalva. (647-8).

The merits of Hove’s article notwithstanding, I would like to raise a few questions/reservations. The first has to do with 1954 as a key turning point. On the one hand, the article depicts the NSC radically reassessing leftist threats in Latin America concluding on “the increasing importance of helping Latin America to reverse those trends which offer opportunities for Communist penetration” (655). However, Hove also clearly states that with Arbenz gone, winning over Latin America became “less urgent” to President Eisenhower. Indeed, as far as Eisenhower was concerned, South America was not “directly open to assault” from international communism, unlike Burma, Thailand, and the remaining parts of Indochina. (654) With this in mind, exactly how important a watershed for U.S. policies was 1954? (Was it not 1958 when Nixon faced Latin American protestors that the Eisenhower administration began worrying more seriously about widespread anti-Americanism in the hemisphere?) On the other hand, I wondered whether Hove overplays the idea that the U.S had not been afraid of leftist influences in Chile before 1954. As Hove acknowledges, Chile’s 1948 ‘Law for the Permanent Defence of Democracy’, which outlawed the Communist Party, persuaded Washington that the Communists were no longer as much of a threat. But Hove fails to mention or underline the fact that the Truman administration’s pressure (economic and diplomatic) against Chile’s Radical President Gabriel González Videla was at least partly responsible for his decision to exclude the Chilean Communist Party from his government coalition and then to move aggressively against it and intern thousands of its members. Would it not be more accurate to say that the Cold War struggle over Chile began *before* 1954, in the late 1940s?

The second issue the article raises is exactly what type of ‘relationship’ “The Arbenz Factor” was intending to examine and, more broadly, how international historians approach the study of inter-American ‘relations’. Hove conducted extensive research to support his argument, drawing on documents from Eisenhower Presidential Library, NARA, the Chilean and U.S. press, and collated volumes of speeches. His use of the Chilean press is particularly useful in giving the reader a feeling for the anti-U.S.

demonstrations and part of the Chilean perspective on events. Yet the article was less revealing on other parts of the Chilean side of the story. Clearly, there are far more sources open in the United States for historians of the Cold War period than there are in Latin America and limitations – for example, the disappearance of Allende’s private papers in 1973 – that make a more in-depth analysis of the Chilean angle difficult. However, since the article seeks to assess U.S.-Chilean diplomatic relations, it would have been useful to see reference to Chilean government sources readily available in Santiago. Delving into Chilean governmental documents might well have offered more clarification on the ‘Chilean perspective’ that Hove was hoping to offer. For example, the article depicts Chilean diplomatic representatives being shocked by sweeping definitions of any form of dissent as being evidence of ‘communism’. But Hove has to infer more than he presents evidence for. We learn that one diplomat was “probably caught...off guard” and “may have wondered whether he, too, was deemed a Communist sympathizer” when he confronted the State Department about its alarmist response to the demonstrations (647). Was he and did he, one wonders. In his analysis, Hove also sometimes confuses the reader as to what “Chilean” means (opposition politicians, the government or public opinion?). To whom does he refer when he states that the fallout from Washington’s intervention in Guatemala was “profoundly damaging” for U.S.-Chilean relations (661)? After backing the Organisation of American States’ anti-communist Caracas resolution in 1954, Ibáñez exerted considerable effort to improve relations with Washington, bringing Chilean industry ever closer to private U.S. enterprise and U.S. loans. Given these developments, how “profoundly” damaged were state-to-state relations? The Chilean historian, Joaquín Fermandois, for example, has called Ibáñez’s presidency a time of Chile’s “maximum alignment” with the United States.² Certainly, for many years later, and despite opposition politicians’ open disapproval, U.S.-Chilean governmental relations grew more intimate and dependent.

Finally, I was unconvinced by the idea that Allende was ever ‘cultivable’. Hove himself recognises that “whether bringing Allende to the United States would have modified Allende’s views is uncertain”, but also strongly implies that “trying” may have worked (644). Like so many others, this case of a ‘missed opportunity’ in the history of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War belies the strength of other actors’ convictions, ideology, and experience and gives the United States all the initiative. Certainly, Allende craved and expected respect for his commitment to democracy from Washington. But way before 1954, Allende believed that the U.S. was responsible for poverty, dictatorship and underdevelopment in Latin America and that socialism would provide the answer to the region’s economic, social and political challenges. Those who have examined Allende’s speeches from the 1930s onwards will therefore be unsurprised to learn that Allende believed U.S. rhetoric of democracy was nothing but a “veneer” (652). And they might be a little surprised by Hove’s assertion that when Allende described U.S. intervention against Arbenz as an “instrument of the Cold War” and likened Guatemala

² Joaquín Fermandois, *Mundo y Fin de Mundo: Chile en la Política Mundial 1900-2004*, (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile, 2004), 264.

to David facing Goliath, “This was harsh criticism from a young political leader whom U.S. officials respected” (634-5). By this stage, Allende had been in politics for over two decades, was 46 years old and, as Hove himself notes, viewed events in Guatemala as merely “another lesson” in the U.S.’s anti-democratic policies in the region (652). At the beginning of the article, Hove asks whether the “surges” of distrust were “old-fashioned anti-Americanism or...something new and different” (624). Whilst the size and makeup of the protests were obviously significant, I was left unsure about the decisive shift in Left’s critique of U.S. policy.

All of which brings me on to the inspiring aspect of Hove’s article: The number of questions that remain unanswered and the vast scope for research into the Cold War in the Americas. Clearly, Arbenz’s overthrow conditioned Che’s thinking with regards to what needed to be done to launch successful revolutionary change. But what Allende took away from 1954 is less clear. Considering Allende’s later hope that the U.S. would respect his democratic government, the lessons he failed to learn by looking at Arbenz’s experience are intriguing. Indeed, perhaps the key issue that arises from this article is Latin American politicians’ limited potential for changing either their own government’s dependent relationship with Washington or U.S policies in Latin America. What, in the end, did political demonstrations, regional conferences and burning a U.S. flag achieve? On the broader topic of the Cold War in the Americas, the article brilliantly illustrates the interconnectedness of Latin American events whilst demonstrating how much remains uncovered in histories of the period. Inter-American relations were not merely rooted through Washington or shaped by U.S.-Latin American relationships even if Washington’s policies created unsettling reverberations around the continent. Instead, they were shaped by reactions to what was occurring in other parts of the continent. But it would be interesting to know more about Chilean analyses of Arbenz’s government and reforms, and more generally, how Latin Americans viewed different developments in the Americas.

As Hove suggests, considering the impact Arbenz’ overthrow had and the widespread condemnation of U.S. policies towards Guatemala that ensued throughout Latin America, it is surprising that not more has been written on this subject before. The same could be said for any number of Cold War developments in the region, all of which deserve greater attention. When Allende complained in 1948 that one could protect neither democracy nor liberty by destroying it, he hit the tragedy of U.S Cold War policy on the head. But the Cold War in the Americas was a multipolar struggle between, within and for reasons pertaining to Latin American – as well as U.S – concerns. By looking at the history of inter-American relations from new angles, this article raises questions and outlines necessary areas for new research that will, one hopes, go way beyond the common Washington-centred focus of the Cold War in the Americas, and towards a greater understanding of how that struggle evolved, developed and was fought.

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