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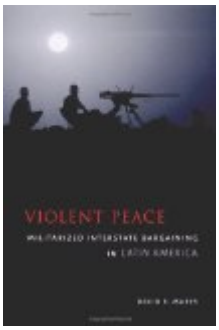

David R. Mares. *Violent Peace: Militarized Interstate Bargaining in Latin America.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. 398 pp. $83.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-231-11186-7.

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In Violent Peace, David R. Mares examines the ebb and flow of relations among Latin American nations, focusing specifically on why those relations sometimes turn violent. This excellent book deals with one very big issue that ought to interest those who read it: how might leaders prevent their interactions with other countries from degenerating into militarized confrontations?

Mares contends that, "whether a state will engage in militarized bargaining depends in part upon its ability to provide benefits to a leader's domestic constituencies at a cost they are willing to pay" (p. 24). He utilizes a series of "focused case studies" to weigh and compare the proclivity of heads of state in various political systems to engage in military confrontations. Is a personalized dictatorship (like Somoza) more likely to resort to violence than a fixed-term authoritarian regime (Castro, for example)? What about nations where the head of state has a fixed term and is subject to constitutional checks and balances-and where reelection is an unavoidable part of the political equation (United States, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile)?

Before turning specifically to militarized bargaining between Latin American states, Mares challenges the notion (in U.S. literature, anyway) of Latin America as a region where violence is a uniquely common political currency. While Europe and the United States have frequently resorted to military force to settle interstate disagreements, Mares contends that Latin American countries have tended historically to "de-legitimize" the use of force: "In a rebuke to European practice, Latin American diplomats and jurists formulated the first attempts to legally limit the ability of nations to use force to collect debts owed their national citizens by foreign governments" (p. 48). Mares continues:

"Latin American efforts to limit the use of force extended to the U.S. as well. In the early 1900s the U.S. claimed to be promoting civilization, democracy, and stability by refusing to recognize governments which had come to power in nondemocratic ways. Recognition was critical since the Marines and Navy were dispatched throughout the world when no 'legitimate' gov-

ernment was in place to protect the lives and property of U.S. citizens" (p. 48).

Having challenged the mythical image of Latin Americans as uniquely weapons-yielding bandidos, Mares examines three scholarly explanations for the use of militarized bargaining in Latin America: hegemonic management by the United States (chapter 3), democratic peace (chapter 4), and the military distribution of power (chapter 5).

When considering the United States and its role as the dominant regional power (hegemon), Mares uses as his point of departure Bryce Wood's "hegemonic management thesis": once the European powers lost their influence following WWI, the United States. became the sole dominant force in the region, using military intervention to unilaterally arbitrate its interests throughout the Americas. Mares writes:

"For a time the U.S. was willing to provide diplomatic leadership, economic incentives and military interventions to maintain peace, but the costs proved too great and the U.S. retreated behind the Good Neighbor Policy after 1933. In the 1932-1954 period of the Good Neighbor Policy the U.S. ceased military intervention and diplomatic interference in Latin American affairs" (p. 68).

Mares provides various examples from the 1920s and 1930s to challenge those who would over-emphasize the United States' influence in these matters, arguing that "U.S. leadership was not the key" reason that the 1930s became a bloody decade in Latin America, "unlike any other." While acknowledging Washington's ongoing role as an irritant and bully in regional affairs, Mares looks instead to domestic factors within each country to explain militarized confrontations between Latin American nations. Thankfully, he uses little time pointing fingers, opting instead to flesh out reasons why Latin American leaders might consider military force as an acceptable foreign policy tool. In the process, he deals substantively with how this violence might be avoided.

Mares' rebuttal of U.S. determinism is convincing and refreshing. However, like Wood and others, he exaggerates Washington's good neighborliness in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, tens of thousands American troops occupied Panama during this period, culminating in the early 1940s when 60,000 GIs were stationed there. While American scholars tend to dismiss this fact because it does not fit comfortably into their analyses, Panamanian scholars rightfully challenge the conclusion that "the U.S. ceased military intervention and diplomatic interference in Latin American affairs" in the 1930s and 1940s. Should not this reality be considered when weighing Washington's reach in Inter-American affairs? Can any discussion of American hegemony in the 1930s and 1940s be entirely accurate without considering this ongoing military occupation?

At this point, further consideration might also be given to the 1907 and 1923 Treaties of Peace and Amity, wherein the U.S. and the Central American governments agreed not to recognize governments that had come to power through extraconstitutional means. Mares refers briefly to these treaties (p. 63), but his discussion (particularly pp. 48-62) and analytical breadth would have benefited from an earlier explanation of the 1907 treaty and why an identical treaty was necessary again in 1923. More to the point, the violent 1930s found American diplomats (Sumner Welles and many others) reinterpreting the 1923 treaty in order to justify a significant shift in American foreign policy toward Central America. Welles' proposal of a "defensive alliance against Communism" in the Americas marked an important point of departure for American diplomacy and hegemony in the region. This shift in policy is relevant and merits treatment beyond that afforded it in *Violent Peace*.

Violent Peace is strongest in its treatment of South America, where Mares does a superb job

utilizing case studies to demonstrate the complexities of militarized confrontations in the region. He shows, for example, that democracies are not necessarily more peaceful than other forms of government (p. 103). Moreover, considered alone, military parity (or lack thereof) cannot explain why international relations would degenerate into violence (pp. 130, 153).

If U.S. interference and military parity among nations cannot explain militarized bargaining, why would a Latin American leader resort to military force to resolve diplomatic differences with another nation? Mares contends that various factors must be considered when answering this question, including: political-military strategy, strategic balance, the nature of the force to be used, the constituent willingness to accept the costs of war, and political accountability. These five factors constitute part of a "militarized bargaining model," and they exist to a greater or lesser extent in all countries. The manner in which they coexist determines when and how a government may respond to international exigencies. Peaceful negotiations occur between Latin American states when the costs of militarized confrontation exceed its benefits. Conversely, Mares concludes that relations among countries turn violent when constituencies (civilian or military) determine that the benefits of war outweigh its costs (pp. 201-205).

How, then, can nations avoid using violence as a diplomatic tool? How might analysts explain the use of violence (in practice or in threat) in diplomatic bargaining? Those seeking to answer this critical question will benefit enormously from Mares' work. As ***Violent Peace*** so clearly demonstrates, the understanding and avoidance of military confrontations cannot be accomplished by looking for quick fixes or scapegoats. Instead, measured consideration of a country's government, its constituency, and its military can help determine the volatility of diplomatic crises, and perhaps, help avoid violent confrontation.

David Mares has written a masterful book that challenges many old notions while suggesting new approaches to the study of contemporary Latin America. ***Violent Peace*** will be required reading for students at all levels, for experts in things Latin American, and for diplomats interested in avoiding militarized confrontations.

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