
Discussions and Reviews

Problems of inter-American neighborliness: a review

Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy*

William Manger, *Pan America in Crisis: The Future of the OAS*

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In quite different ways, these two authors have made notable and much needed contributions to our understanding of the complexities of inter-American relationships and, more broadly, the problems involved in developing relations between big and small states on some basis other than sheer domination. Wood provides a study in depth of the bilateral dealings between the United States and Latin American countries during the decade or so before World War II, out of which evolved the celebrated Good Neighbor policy of the United States. In this history, he finds the basis for a guarded optimism concerning the adequacy of this political foundation for a system of reasonably harmonious and constructive relationships in the Western Hemisphere. Manger's book deals with the institutional apparatus of the inter-American system, the Organization of American States, focusing on the postwar period, and it reflects a deeply pessimistic view of the state of the neighborhood.

These differences are not so fundamental as they might seem. The student of foreign policy, Wood, and the student of international organization, Manger (who comes to his study from long experience as a practicing official of the OAS), are agreed that the foreign policy of the United States has decisive importance for the multilateral institutions of Pan America. Manger's appraisal of the postwar OAS does not deny Wood's hopeful evaluation of the prewar Good Neighbor policy, but expresses disappointment at the failure of its promise to reach fulfillment. Most basically, the two authors approach their different tasks as perceptive political analysts, successfully determined to cut through diplomatic documentation and formal institutional structures and processes to the hard political rock of inter-American relationships. This kind of penetration is sufficiently rare, particularly in the literature pertaining to Pan America, to warrant three academic cheers for Wood and Manger.

I

Wood dips back into the 1920's, to the United States intervention in the chaotic politics of Nicaragua, to demonstrate that our Good Neighborly renunciation of intervention did not represent merely a burst of unwonted good will or a surrender under pressure to demands for moral reformation, but a wearied reaction to the "time-consuming and expensive, difficult and embarrassing" (Wood, 1961, p. 47) tasks which intervention involved. Latin American pressures and reactions doubtless helped United States officials to acquire a distaste for the job, but the shift away from coercive intervention into Latin American political affairs ultimately stemmed from the growing conviction in Washington that the national interest neither required nor justified the exertions which such action entailed. Wood's analysis of the Cuban experience of the early Franklin Roosevelt Administration traces the process by which the new State Department crew developed the incentive not to get involved in interventionist escapades, and learned to be wary of varieties of intermeddling that might lead to the necessity of intervention.

The Good Neighbor policy involved not merely abstention from coercive intervention, and a corresponding diminution in political meddling, but also the development of techniques of "peaceful protection" for private United States interests in Latin American countries. Wood stresses the point that the diplomatic apparatus of the United States in Latin America had traditionally served largely as a mechanism for the defense of the economic interests of United States citizens and corporations doing business in that area; the State Department had been a sort of law office representing United States concerns in their dealings with Latin governments. He presents detailed analyses of crises of expropriation and

near-expropriation of United States oil properties in Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela, showing how Washington's role and attitude shifted and how the techniques of protection were altered to fit the spirit of the Good Neighbor policy.

This analysis of potentially dangerous conflicts and their handling brings out two points that may be relevant to a developing theory of conflict resolution:

1. Amicable settlement of expropriation controversies was facilitated when the United States Government shifted its focus to the *national interest*. As Wood repeatedly indicates, the crucial element in this phase of the evolution of the Good Neighbor policy was Washington's recognition of the divergence between the interests of the oil companies and the nation, its determination to give priority to the latter interests, and its insistence that the oil companies acquiesce in the government's adopting that scheme of priorities, even though they might not adopt it themselves. The State Department became a mediator between United States companies and Latin governments, intent upon safeguarding the interests of the former within the limits set by the national interest in maintaining or developing good relations with the latter.

This should not be taken to indicate that international controversies can always be peacefully resolved if the states involved consistently take a clear and intelligent view of their national interests—that the real interests of states are invariably harmonizable. Nevertheless, it should inspire some caution regarding the axiom that a system in which sovereign units pursue their national interests is doomed by that pursuit to chaotic conflict. It should arouse some questioning of the doctrine that national interest orientation is the root of all international evil, and that only a ruling concern with the good of a supranational community can emanci-

pate the world from strife. The Good Neighbor experience suggests that the transcendence of subnational interests is the crucial step toward the resolution of international conflict in some cases.

2. The technical key to the solution of the cases involving actual expropriation was the abandonment by the United States of its customary demand for arbitration of conflicting positions regarding financial settlement. Force was eschewed; arbitration was not insisted upon; resort was had to political negotiations "in which the expropriator was on formally equal terms with the government representing the protesting corporations" (Wood, p. 329). For the Latin American countries, it was "a corollary of the renunciation of intervention that the procedure of arbitration also disappear in settlement of cases involving the protection of foreign nationals" (Wood, p. 236).

Here, indeed, is something for the idealizers of the "Rule of Law" to chew on! For that matter, it is also a tough morsel for those self-styled realists who identify legalism with moralism and both with a "soft" policy in international affairs. In the common view, resort to judicial settlement (whether by an established court or by an *ad hoc* tribunal) is the civilized alternative to the arbitrament of force; to propose settlement by legal process is to offer evidence of willingness to do the decent, fair, and just thing. Wood shows, however, that in the cases described, insistence by the United States on procedures associated with the rule of law would have been interpreted not as a soft position but as a hard, uncompromising one; Uncle Sam would have been dubbed not Uncle Softie but Uncle Shylock. A friendly, reasonable Washington would not put Latin American governments in the dock as defendants, but welcome them to the conference table as equals, having legitimate interests to uphold against

private North American interests. Getting away from judicial settlement in these instances meant having the State Department emancipate itself "from the legal straitjacket that for decades had impeded political settlements and friendly relationships with Mexico and other Latin American countries" (Wood, p. 236). In short, these cases suggest that the rule of law is limited not only as to attainability, from the standpoint of the realist, but also as to advisability, from the standpoint of the idealist. Political settlement of disputes is not always an inferior substitute which realism decrees must be accepted; it is sometimes a superior method which idealism suggests should be preferred.

II

Manger's book meets a crying need for a study of the Organization of American States that is something other than a sight-seer's description of its institutional architecture or an admirer's rhapsody on its documentary treasures (Manger, 1961). Manger presents a useful survey of the evolutionary process which produced the postwar structure of the inter-American system, but he is not overwhelmingly concerned with the organization's forms and formalities. He raises questions as to the meaningfulness of the OAS and the significance of its operations, and he comes up unhappily with quite negative answers. The virtue of this book is not that Manger's political analysis is necessarily unchallengeable, but that it is political.

The trouble with the OAS is United States foreign policy; this oversimplifies Manger's position somewhat, but does not misstate his emphasis. As Wood indicates, the United States policy of the Good Neighbor laid the foundation for an effective regional organization. It remains for Manger to argue that the United States has undermined the

organization by its postwar policy with respect to Latin America.

This is not really to say that the United States has reversed itself, or reverted to the bad old habits of the pre-Good Neighbor era. Manger criticizes the tendency of the United States to abjure collective action within the hemisphere in favor of dealing bilaterally with Latin American states—which is to say, in favor of acting unilaterally toward them. This sort of bilateralism was, it should be noted, the standard pattern of the Good Neighbor policy; that policy may have laid the foundation for possible multilateralism, but it was not itself an expression of this approach to diplomacy. Manger cites the revival of thinly concealed intervention by the United States in such cases as Guatemala and Cuba. Wood's analysis of Good Neighborly nonintervention suggests that it was based upon the interwar conviction that the national interest of the United States neither demanded nor justified coercive interference in the politics of Latin American countries; our interventions since World War II reflect not a change of policy but, rightly or wrongly, a change in our appraisal of the dictates of national interest in the new circumstances of the Cold War era. Manger lays particular emphasis upon the failure of the United States to gear its economic policy to the needs of Latin America, either in the sense of collaborating to stabilize commodity markets or in the sense of giving developmental aid. As Wood makes clear, the successes of the Good Neighbor policy were largely negative; the experience of the 'thirties did not provide evidence of definite prospects for positive, constructive

action by the United States on behalf of the economic interests of its neighbors. The Good Neighbor was not a particularly Helpful Neighbor, but a Less Domineering and More Tolerant Neighbor than formerly. Thus, to a considerable degree, the aspects of United States policy which Manger considers detrimental to the effectiveness of the OAS are consistent with the actualities of the Good Neighbor policy. They represent a carry-over from that policy, a failure to transcend its limitations, a failure to realize the possibilities which it seemed to open up—but not a sharp deviation from its operative features.

In any case, whether more largely because of domineering policy or dominant position, the United States has a decisive role in the OAS. Manger's analysis of the politics of the organization stresses the North American-Latin American dualism, the interplay between the One and the Twenty. He sees some hope that the economic initiatives of the Kennedy Administration may breathe life into the OAS. He leaves no doubt of his conviction that the basic requirement is for the negatively Good Neighbor to become a positively Helpful Neighbor. Manger has served us well in opening up the critical study of the political realities behind the institutional formalities of the inter-American system.

REFERENCES

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