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Introduction by Dustin Walcher

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Introduction by Dustin Walcher, Southern Oregon University

Although scholarship on U.S.-Latin American relations has undergone a renaissance in recent years, it is nonetheless true that the “emerging synthesis” Mark Gilderhus identified in 1995, in which historians “emphasiz[d] the disparities and divergences of national aims and aspirations” between North and South America remains largely intact.¹ Up through the mid 1990s, historians principally debated the causes of U.S. policy while at the same time leveling some degree of criticism of American actions. Studies were based largely, and more often than not exclusively, on U.S. sources. Scholarship on U.S.-Latin American relations produced over the intervening fifteen years remained overwhelmingly critical of the general thrust of U.S. policy toward the region over the course of the twentieth century. But as Max Paul Friedman observed in 2003, the scope of the discussion expanded considerably.² It has, for instance, become *de rigueur* for most inter-Americanists to conduct multi-archival research incorporating sources from available Latin American repositories. Scholars have come to analyze the ways in which Latin Americans from various walks of life resisted, cooperated, and negotiated with North American actors. They explore the ways in which cultural interaction has been an important component of inter-American relations. They examine more fully the limits of U.S. power. But even as they ask different questions, and analyze a wider variety of historical actors, they continue to find much to critique about U.S. actions in Latin America. For all that they debate the significance of culture to the examination of international affairs, or the relative importance of economic, political, and ideological factors of causation, most historians agree that too often the United States unnecessarily supported brutish and repressive dictators with disastrous consequences for ordinary people during the Cold War era.³

This background is vital because in *Latin America's Cold War*, Hal Brands seeks to revise that consensus. While, as Gilderhus in particular is careful to point out in his review, Brands does not endorse the violent Right, he does explain Rightist violence as a logical if

¹ Mark T. Gilderhus, “An Emerging Synthesis?: U.S.-Latin American Relations since the Second World War,” in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge, 1995): 424-461, quote on 461.

² Max Paul Friedman, “Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (November 2003), 621-636.

³ See for example Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham, 1998); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham, 2008); Kyle Longley, *The Sparrow and the Hawk: Costa Rica and the United States During the Rise of José Figueres* (Tuscaloosa, 1997); Eric Paul Roorda, *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* (Durham, 1998); Alan McPherson, *Yankee No!: Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA, 2003); Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, 2004); Jana K. Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley, 2009).

excessive response by Latin American conservatives to the very real threats manifested by the radical Left. For Brands, the Latin American Cold War constituted “a series of overlapping conflicts” that “fused together long-running clashes over social, political, and economic arrangements; the persistent tension between U.S. power and Latin American nationalism; the ideological ramifications of decolonization and the rise of the Third World; and the influence of the bipolar struggle for preeminence in the developing countries.” (7) The notion that the United States served as an architect of violence and repression, argues Brands, has been overstated by generations of historians. Latin American conservatives did not wage war against their ideological enemies because of encouragement from Washington; they did so because it was in their own interests. While the United States offered limited assistance for its own geostrategic reasons, ideological warfare was not in and of itself an American export. Moreover, U.S. aid was effectively matched by Soviet and Cuban support for Leftists throughout the hemisphere. “To a greater degree than is often recognized,” writes Brands, “there was substantial symmetry to the struggle for the soul of Latin America.” (262)

To advance his argument, Brands surveys U.S.-Latin American relations from the conclusion of World War II through the end of the 1980s. However, for Brands the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution brought an enhanced level of intensity to the Latin American Cold War (he covers all previous events in fifteen pages). Methodologically, *Latin America's Cold War* should be understood alongside other recent works of international history (as opposed to the history of U.S. foreign relations). Brands pursues conventional questions of high diplomacy, strategy, and the Cold War by embracing the multi-archival trends in the field, and traveled to archives in thirteen countries. He highlights Latin American agency, at least among elite political actors.

The four reviewers find much to praise in what Gilderhus calls a “feisty book,” and an “ambitious and masterful account.” Alan McPherson applauds it as “a triumph of both research and interpretation.” Jana Lipman finds that the book’s “ambitious scope is nothing short of impressive.” For Tanya Harmer, “the lively debate Brands has sparked among scholars and students is one of the most welcome attributes of *Latin America's Cold War*.” Harmer’s point is well taken. Although the reviewers express admiration for Brands’ work, they identify a number of areas of disagreement, as well as potential paths for future scholarship.

The reviewers give significant attention to the question of the origins of Latin America’s Cold War violence. Their attention is warranted; the connection between the Left-Right political binary and political violence comprises the most omnipresent theme in *Latin America's Cold War*. Brands holds that political violence was cyclical. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution constituted a watershed event that militarized the Cold War in the region. Providing his own variation on the *dos demonios* theory, Brands finds that in response to the rise of the Left, conservatives adopted strategies of repression. Violence begot violence. For Brands, the relative size and strength of the institutions that perpetrated various kinds of warfare is of limited significance for historians seeking to unpack Latin America’s Cold War. Here the reviewers harbor reservations. Lipman in particular was left “wanting a more nuanced analysis, rather than a dialectal one....The

dichotomy does not probe the level of proportionality,” she writes. Harmer agrees that “the question of the starting point for this mutually reinforcing spiral of radicalization and the issue of asymmetry are not fully dealt with or persuasively explained.” McPherson too criticizes the book’s “narrative waves,” which “always begin with the Left engaging in revolution – usually violent – and sparking counterrevolution from the Right.” He takes issue with Brands’ insistence on symmetry between Right and Left, arguing that Brands “does not insist enough on the asymmetry of violence.” For McPherson, the vast majority of the violence, “90 percent ... should be attributed to conservative military states.”

Related to the question of symmetry in the Left-Right binary is the question of agency. To paraphrase Max Paul Friedman, foreign relations historians have retired the puppets. Any notion that Latin American political leaders were merely marionettes controlled by elites in the United States has not survived scrutiny.⁴ Brands emphasizes Latin American agency by assigning responsibility for violence to those Latin Americans who endorsed and carried out violent acts. He ascribes less responsibility to external powers, but to the extent that they influenced the course of regional events Brands highlights Soviet and Cuban actions. Gilderhus observes that “[t]his emphasis on Soviet initiatives will probably elicit criticism as an overstatement,” but finds that “Brands presents a reasoned and defensible case.” Relative to other studies of Cold War Latin America, criticism of the United States as a sometimes enthusiastic supporter and enabler of Rightist violence is far more muted (albeit not altogether absent). Consequently, Brands, in Gilderhus’ view, “challenges traditional perspectives in many ways and moves the debate over how the Latin Americans experienced [the Cold War] and the kind of role carried out by the United States to a higher level.” In so doing, he positions himself as a revisionist in the classic sense of the term.⁵

The reviewers offer additional critiques of Brands’ overall conceptualization of the Latin American Cold War. Lipman and Harmer find that the definition of the Cold War in Latin America is an issue that is both central to, and underdeveloped within, *Latin America’s Cold War*. The point is not merely one of semantics. In their recently published book, *A Century of Revolution*, Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph posit that the Latin American Cold War extended back to the Mexican Revolution. For them, it was not merely a theatre in the larger U.S.-Soviet confrontation, but a violent ideological contest between the Right and Left featuring revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence that spanned the twentieth century and beyond. Rightists and oligarchs fought the popular sectors of society consistently whenever they sought to organize and accrue political power.⁶ Harmer in

⁴ Friedman, “Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In,” 621-636.

⁵ For a recent example of a more critical examination of U.S. support for Rightist violence, cited by Brands, see J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* (New York, 2005). Similarly, Stephen Rabe has produced a new synthesis of U.S.-Latin American relations during the Cold War era that is highly critical of U.S. policy; see Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York, 2011).

⁶ Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, eds. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America’s Long Cold War* (Durham, 2010).

particular probes this point. In light of the fact that, however defined chronologically, the Latin American Cold War was rarely cold raises the question of whether a different term is necessary. For McPherson, the book's chronological limitations are most apparent in Brands' "too brief" treatment of events between 1945 and 1959. Like Grandin and Joseph, he observes that "Latin America was fully engaged in Cold War-related ideology and violence for a full decade before the Cuban Revolution, if not earlier in places such as Mexico." However, McPherson is hopeful that Brands' work "should prompt more detailed research into the late 1940s and 1950s."

Indeed, McPherson and Harmer suggest other potentially fruitful lines of research that emanate from *Latin America's Cold War*. For instance, McPherson contends that Brands' efforts to link nationalist discourses of the Latin American Left to *tercermundismo* more broadly are "overdrawn," and that "[a] deeper inquiry might find that Latin Americans did *not* [emphasis in original] in fact invoke the decolonizing world as much as they might have." By contrast, Harmer finds that "the recurrent effect of the Vietnam War in Latin America jumped off the pages ... as an intriguing story to be explored further." Although they anticipate different conclusions, both McPherson and Harmer encourage new research into linkages between Latin America's Cold War and developments outside of the region. Additionally, Harmer believes that new scholarship exploring "relationships *between* [emphasis in original] Latin American countries" will build upon Brands' scholarship in useful ways.

In the final analysis, Brands has produced a provocative and intriguing book. It is difficult to predict precisely where the debates that he has ignited will go from here. Certainly Brands forces scholars of inter-American relations to re-examine many broadly accepted interpretations. Few specialists are likely to be fully persuaded by his arguments, but the exercise of rethinking shibboleths nonetheless promises to be salutary.

Participants:

Hal Brands is Assistant Professor of Public Policy at Duke University. He is also the author of *From Berlin to Baghdad: America's Search for Purpose in the Post-Cold War World* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

Dustin Walcher is Assistant Professor of History at Southern Oregon University and a review editor for H-Diplo. He received his Ph.D. in 2007 from the Ohio State University. A specialist in the history of U.S. foreign relations, his current project examines the failure of U.S.-led development initiatives and the rise of political violence in Argentina between the 1950s and 1960s.

Mark T. Gilderhus is the Lyndon B. Johnson Chair in U.S. History at Texas Christian University. He has published various articles, essays, and books, including *The Second Century: U.S.-Latin American Relations since 1889* (2000) and *History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction* (7th ed.; 2010).

Tanya Harmer is a lecturer in International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her book, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*, will be published by the University of North Carolina later this year.

Jana K. Lipman is an Assistant Professor of History at Tulane University. Her book, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (University California Press, 2009), was the 2009 Co-Winner of the Taft Prize in Labor History. She holds Tulane's Andrew Mellon Junior Professorship in the Humanities.

Alan McPherson is associate professor of international and area studies and ConocoPhillips Chair in Latin American Studies at the School of International and Area Studies, University of Oklahoma. He is the author of *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Harvard, 2003) and *Intimate Ties, Bitter Struggles: The United States and Latin America* (Potomac, 2006).

The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the ensuing opening on a selective basis of archival materials in formerly Eastern bloc countries meant that historians in the West had to rethink much of what they thought they knew about international relations in the post-World War II era. No longer restricted to documents in English located primarily in the United States, scholars now had access to a much broader range of primary sources, and consequently many secondary works published before 1995 lost their relevance. Questions concerned with the causes, conduct, and consequences of the Cold War in Latin America took on new importance, and historians such as Hal Brands have stood ready to illuminate them. His feisty book, *Latin America's Cold War*, challenges traditional perspectives in many ways and moves the debate over how Latin Americans experienced these tumultuous years and the kind of role carried out by the United States to a higher level. Sorting out and filing in the details should occupy historians [in the future] for many years. Moreover, the magnitude of savage forms of civil strife and brutal repression will challenge their capacity to understand and explain unbelievable aspects of mistreatment by one group of humans against others. Hal Brands' valiant attempt to do so will arouse admiration and controversy.

Brands' breakthrough book, an exquisite piece of research and analysis, sensitively and perceptively examines the course of the "long war" in Latin America while setting it in contrast with "the long peace" in relations between the two super powers. Engaged in a period of "stability" and stasis," the Americans and the Soviets "never waged war on one another," while Latin Americans embarked upon a volatile era during which "East-West struggles mixed with unstable local politics to promote polarization and bloodshed." As the author explains, "violence, conflict, and upheaval prevailed in the global south," for example, in Latin America, where "[the] postwar period, and especially the three decades following the Cuban revolution in 1959, saw internal and external turmoil become permanent features." In his words, "Superpower rivalry, foreign intervention, and inter-American diplomatic strife dominated Latin America's external relations; ideological polarization, rapid swings between dictatorship and democracy, and acute internal violence constituted the essential features of domestic politics." It was "a period of intense and often bloody upheaval."(1-2)

Although scholars have produced a vast literature on U.S. policy and Latin American politics, culture, and society, according to Brands, it focuses extensively on the view from Washington. "Fortunately," he writes, recent developments make possible "a multiarchival, international perspective to various aspects of the Cold War in Latin America." Since the mid-1990s, "a profusion of new sources" have become available in Latin America, the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet bloc." These illuminate many issues, among them "Latin American governance and statecraft; U.S., Cuban, and Soviet policies; right- and left-wing violence; and the texture of regional politics, society, and economy." Although some archives remain closed, enough declassified material has emerged to make possible "a fuller, better-integrated story . . . than has heretofore been possible." Brands' assessment draws on the archives of a dozen countries and makes wonderfully effective use of the

contents. Seeking “to reconstruct the history of Latin America’s Cold War” in a way that is “multinational,” he attempts to deal “seriously with all sides” and to present a “multilayered” account that “integrates perspectives from diverse realms” comprising the global, the regional, and the local.” (2-3)

In this ambitiously masterful account, the author correctly argues that Cold War tensions in Latin America took on “peak intensity” in the three decades after the Cuban revolution in 1959. This had the effect of exacerbating *yanquiphobia* in Latin America, intensifying superpower competition, and magnifying the militancy of Left and Right. As Brands remarks, “[i]nsurgencies informed by domestic grievances and energized by the Cuban example waged destructive campaigns throughout Central and South America. Internal instability fostered external meddling: the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union competed fiercely to manage or exploit this turmoil and guide the evolution of Latin American society.” (3) Havana and Moscow formed a kind of alliance and aided various guerrilla groups in various hotspots with revolutionary potential, while the United States employed economic aid in conjunction with counterinsurgency, covert action, and direct military intervention to frustrate its perceived enemies on the Left, all of which had “profound effects,” sometimes very much at variance with the outcomes intended by the instigators. (3)

In the Introduction, Brands underscores the two principal themes of his book. First, “the intensity of Latin America’s Cold War was a product of its complexity.” He makes clear that it “was not a single conflict . . . but a series of overlapping conflicts.” In his words, “[i]t fused together long-running clashes over social, political, and economic arrangements; the persistent tension between U.S. power and Latin American nationalism; the ideological ramifications of decolonization and the rise of the Third World; and the influence of the bipolar struggle for preeminence in the developing countries.” (7) Second, the prevailing interpretations cry out in need of revision. “Conservative pundits and American officials have described Latin America’s Cold War as proof of the good that can come from U.S. intervention and democracy-promotion programs.” On the other hand, “many scholars . . . interpret the Cold War as a ‘savage crusade,’ conducted by the United States and local reactionaries, that broke popular movements, ravaged the Left, and eviscerated Latin American democracy.” (7) In Brands’ view, both interpretations simplify “a more tangled, complicated affair.” Unquestionably “a tragedy for many who experienced it,” the Cold War in Latin America produced “profound polarization,” the massive bloodshed of the “dirty wars” in Central America and the Southern Cone, and the suppression of democracy, all of which “reveal the superficiality of triumphalist assessments.” Too much emphasis on “the malignity of a single group of actors” obscures “the multisided and mutually reinforcing nature of the conflicts.” Brands characterize them as the outcome of foreign intervention, internal instability, and ideological extremism on both Left and Right. “[T]hese influences fed on and fueled one another . . . and the outcome was often ruinous.” (8)

Brands makes clear his understanding of the long history of U.S. interventionist activity in Latin America and describes it as “neither a purely benevolent nor an entirely exploitative influence.” Infusions of U.S. technology and capital provoked resentment in some instances, especially among groups learning toward the Left, but arguably produced “modest

economic gains” in some countries toward progress and modernization. “Yet,” Brands argues, “U.S. policy hardly determined the conservative ascendancy” beginning in the late 1940s. Military dictators such as Marcos Pérez Jimenez in Venezuela and Manuel Odría in Peru needed persuasion. Indeed, in his view, “to the extent that U.S. policy figured in the conservative restoration, it was as a matter of neglect and indifference, rather than pro-authoritarian intervention.” (15)

Nevertheless, as Cold War tensions intensified, perceptions of threat emanating from the Soviet Union and later from Cuba took hold in the United States. Decolonization in the Third World introduced opportunities and risks. According to Brands’ careful account, “Moscow and Washington did not simply barge into the underdeveloped regions”; in many cases they received invitations from nationalist leaders in the 1950s and 60s who hoped for support from the superpowers in the postcolonial era. Often anxious to indulge in Cold War gamesmanship by playing the United States and USSR against one another, leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru of India flirted with each in hopes of garnering rewards. The United States and the Soviet Union, meanwhile, “strove to mold the internal development and external orientation of the Third World.” (22) Indeed, according to the leaders of each bloc, political struggles in the former colonial world would resolve the world-historical clash between communism and capitalism. Such expectations provided reasons for destabilizing unfriendly regimes while supporting friendly ones with trade, aid, and technology. According to Khrushchev, decolonization would “bring imperialism to its knees,” a danger to which Kennedy drew attention by designating “the whole southern half of the globe” as “the great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today.” Brands remarks, “[a]s the Third World took shape, so did the contours of the Cold War.”(22-23)

The triumph of the revolution in Cuba in 1959, followed by the possibility of similar outcomes elsewhere, unnerved U.S. policymakers and put them on guard. They wondered what would happen if revolutionaries in league with Cuban and Soviet communists sponsored sedition, precipitated violent outbreaks, and tried, much as in Southeast Asia, to topple dominos all over the place. Richard C. Patterson, the ambassador to Guatemala, supposedly said, it would be like getting nibbled to death by ducks, a slow, agonizing process, draining away strength and vitality until helplessness ensued. As Brands observes, “[t]he radicalization of the Cuban revolution and the outbreak of insurgencies across Latin America reinforced these fears, causing near panic in official circles.” (27) The “single, dominant rhetorical trope of the Cuban revolution,” so characteristic of Fidel Castro’s public discourse, affirmed both “anti-imperialism” and “anti-Americanism (28) In some political circles, the preferred usage would employ *antiyanquismo* (anti-Yankeeism) in conjunction with an emphasis on *tercermundista* (Third World) affiliations to underscore ties with other Third World dissidents who rebelled against imperialism, exploitation, and right-wing dictatorships. (29)

Although Castro’s ideological commitments initially endorsed the nationalism of Jose Marti, *el barbado* (the bearded one) later expanded his objectives to include the liberation of exploited people in other countries from imperial domination. This “missionary impulse” encouraged Cuban intervention elsewhere in Latin America and also in Africa. It also

served strategic purposes by “promoting revolution as a counter to U.S. hostility and a means of diverting Washington’s attention.” Though initially dubious about Castro’s capabilities as a revolutionary leader, Khrushchev eventually came around with support for Cuba’s revolution, in part to counter Chinese competition for leadership in the socialist world and also because “Soviet leaders saw real benefit in Castro’s activities.” (41)

This emphasis on Soviet initiatives will probably elicit criticism as an overstatement. Nevertheless, Brands presents a reasoned and defensible case. In his words, “Soviet policy . . . fit squarely within a Marxist-Leninist framework. Cuba’s revolution exhilarated Soviet leaders reviving the thesis (largely neglected by Stalin) that the Third World would inevitably turn to socialism.” Moscow and Havana, accordingly, “pursued a two-pronged approach to Latin America.” First, they built up defenses against external attack and tried to make Cuba a model of achievement to serve as inspiration for others. They also attempted to destabilize governments and to promote insurgent movements. Such endeavors had horrendous consequences. (41-43)

Brands’ discussion of the counterinsurgency struggle merits close reading. Instead of sweeping the southern continent in triumph, rebel insurgencies elicited fanatical and merciless reactions by military leaders who embraced the ideas associated with National Security Doctrine as divinely inspired. Conceived in response to guerrilla challenges to the status quo, so he argues, the main premise held that proponents of sedition and insurgency had unleashed a global struggle, a permanent war between communism and the West in which the tenets of nihilism and atheism menaced the values of Western and Christian civilization with extinction. (73) The stakes meant no quarter. The generals proposed to wipe out the purveyors of cultural deviance by whatever means. Kidnapping, torture, assassination, summary execution, and mass murder became accepted means for silencing the opposition. The notion that “you can’t kill an idea” had limitations. Possibly you could if you killed most the people who affirmed it. (74-75)

Though strong and committed in his opposition to the inhumanity of National Security Doctrine as implemented in Central and South America, Brands also seeks clarification and exactitude in his discussion of military politics. “Of all the myths and misconceptions surrounding National Security Doctrine,” he insists, “none has proven more durable than the idea that the doctrine was the creation of the United States.” (78) According to various critics, among them politicians, diplomats, and scholars, the gringos in the White House created military Frankenstein’s monsters in efforts to prevent communist revolutions in the Western hemisphere. Not so according to Brands. In a carefully constructed logical analysis backed by documentary evidence, the author allows that U.S. policy and the National Security Doctrine shared the same basic thrust, defined as “a preoccupation with subversion and the corresponding need for an energetic and even brutal response . . . to hold back the Left.” (78) To be sure, “U.S. policy fostered a climate friendly to the ideas that shaped Latin American military politics during the 1960s.” Yet, as he explains, “correlation is not causation, and upon further inspection, the argument . . . falls apart.” Latin American strategic thinkers had identified sedition and insurgence as primary threats in the 1950s before Kennedy made the same point. They happily accepted U.S. training and equipment, but based on what they knew of the experience in Vietnam, regarded U.S.

counterinsurgency programs as “ineffective,” “flawed,” and “incomplete.” When Latin American military officers drew on foreign ideas, “they did so selectively and independently.” Brands also notes that no statistical relationship exists military assistance from the United States and military takeovers, that military governments sometimes pursued objectives at odds with U.S. preferences, and that Latin Americans officers “needed no coaching” on internal dangers. To think so denies them the prerogatives of “agency” and reduces them to the status of “mere ciphers.” (79) They had the capacity to behave monstrously all on their own.

Skeptics will probably criticize Brands on three counts: 1) that he exaggerates the role of Cubans and Russians as causes of trouble in the region; 2) that he underrates the complicity of the United States in the right-wing terror; 3) and that he empathizes too much with right-wing generals. The first two allow for legitimate debate, because they involve divergent points of emphasis and different but legitimate readings of the evidence. The third has no credence. True, Brands makes extraordinary efforts to grasp the essentials of National Security Doctrine, not because he sympathizes with it, but because he thinks it necessary to get inside the worldview of people who can think such reprehensible things. This is a subtle book, open perhaps to misreading at various points. When taking it on, readers should prepare to face up to some intellectual challenges.

In a sweeping overview of what he calls *Latin America's Cold War*, Hal Brands has opened up the field of the region's Cold War history. He asks questions others have not wanted or dared to ask, and his multi-archival research throughout Latin America is remarkable. The book is also provocative and has already become the subject of many an enthusiastic discussion over coffee, dinner, and e-mail. In fact, the lively debate Brands has sparked among scholars and students is one of the most welcome attributes of *Latin America's Cold War* and I am happy to have the opportunity to participate in it here.

Before getting down to this debate, however, let me first outline what Brands is trying to do in his book and how he goes about doing it. As he rightly argues, "prevailing interpretations" of the Cold War in Latin America "need revision." In his words, they have oversimplified what was in reality "a more tangled, complicated affair" and have focused too much on the United States while treating Latin Americans as passive puppets or innocent victims. Brands has a good point here. I agree with him that the Cold War in Latin America was a complex interplay of dynamic, interactive relationships that went in two or more directions. It had a logic of its own that was shaped by regional and local actors and events. Brands' call for a more de-centered, multilayered, and multidimensional narrative is therefore astute. "The upheaval that afflicted Latin America during the postwar period was the result not simply of the malignity of a single group of actors [i.e. the United States and its reactionary puppets]," he argues, "but rather of the multisided and mutually reinforcing nature of the conflicts that comprised Latin America's Cold War. Foreign intervention, internal instability, and ideological extremism on both the Left and Right: these influences fed on and fueled one another during the Cold War, and the outcome was often ruinous for the region's population. The history of Latin America's Cold War is rich and nuanced, if indeed tragic" (7-8).

Brands focuses on this tragic complexity throughout the book. Arranged thematically in a rough chronological framework, he deals with interwoven ideas, trends, and conflicts that shaped international relations in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century such as the National Security Doctrine, Dependency Theory, guerrilla warfare, and the struggle for democracy. A significant portion of the book deals with the 1960s – what Brands describes as having been a disastrous and self-defeating decade for all involved in fighting to shape regional politics and society. He then discusses the rise of urban guerrilla movements and right-wing dictatorships in South America in the 1970s along with the Latin American diplomatic Third Worldist challenge to the United States, before turning to the Central American revolutionary upheavals and wars of the 1980s– what he calls as "the culmination of Latin America's Cold War" – and the rise of the so-called 'Washington Consensus' at the end of that decade (189).

As *Latin America's Cold War* makes abundantly clear, there is absolutely nothing to celebrate when it comes to the region's history in these decades. True, democracy emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, but the suffering and the death toll at the end of the Cold War were so horrific that any suggestion that this was a happy-ever-after ending is perverse. As

Brands reminds readers at the beginning of the book, the Cold War in Latin America (and many other parts of the Third World) was “an era of febrile volatility...polarization and bloodshed” (1). It was intense and violent, and characterized – in Brands’s florid language – by “spasms,” “convulsions,” “tectonic plates,” and “eruptions.” Unsurprisingly, as he acknowledges, the Cold War and the violence it entailed left “deep scars” that many in the region “are still struggling to come to grips with” (126). One Salvadoran guerrilla’s experience of the Cold War, recounted by Brands, offered a particularly vivid and haunting snapshot of the scale of the human tragedy and carnage involved: “First they killed my mother and sister and threw them in a hole. Then they killed my husband and his parents. Then they killed my father and my brothers. So I fought harder for the [insurgents]” (193).

Brands argues that this carnage was caused by a cycle of violence: “extremism begat extremism” on all sides of the political spectrum, he says, condemning the region to ever more bloodshed and poverty (97). Brands reserves particular criticism for those beholden to the Cuban revolutionary ideal, Che Guevara’s call to arms, and the promise that the guerrilla *foco* could bring about revolution. Not only did *foquistas* divide the Left, Brands explains, but the idea of *foquismo* was “not relevant to Latin American societies,” Guevaristas failed to “relate to the basic needs of the rural poor,” and their “emphasis on exemplary violence” was “thuggish” and even “terroristic.” In challenging all aspects of the romanticism often associated with Che Guevara and Latin America’s revolutionary insurgents, he also condemns the *foco* as having been a devastating failure, “better suited to radicalizing the Right than radicalizing the masses” (52-55). Indeed, Brands accords repressive right-wing dictatorships that became so characteristic of the Cold War in Latin America the explanation of having been born out of chaos, instability, and violence, caused by *foquistas* and urban guerrilla insurgents. “While utterly deplorable,” he writes, “the right-wing extremism that occurred during this period can only be understood as part of larger cycle of radicalism and reaction” (127).

It is here that Brands is most contentious, suggesting that the counter-revolutionary crusades unleashed by military dictatorships with support from the United States were direct responses to revolutionary provocations. He also concludes that alongside the Left, the extreme Right was also a victim of the Cold War– not because its crusades failed, but precisely because they succeeded. Having brutally decimated their enemies (and many others caught up in the middle), military regimes’ *raison d’être* quite simply disappeared; they became superfluous and anachronistic in a new post-Cold War world that merely condemned them for the failure of their economic policies in the wake of the debt crisis of the 1980s. As Brands explains, a growing trend towards democratization overtook them and made them – and the Cold War cycle of revolution and reaction – redundant.

Given the broad-brush approach that Brands has employed to cover the story of the Cold War in Latin America, there is nothing particularly surprising for the specialist on Latin American history or U.S.-Latin American relations in the content of *Latin America’s Cold War*. Brands has drawn on many of the excellent secondary works on late twentieth century Latin American and U.S.-Latin American history, as well as the work being done on the global Cold War, to piece together the story and provide evidence for his revisionist argument. However, the new archival sources he has used to flesh out this story are

impressive and innovative. In preparation for writing the book, he consulted a staggering array of interviews and private letters, secret governmental documents, and speeches from archives as far apart as the United States, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Chile, Venezuela, Paraguay, El Salvador, Canada, Mexico, and Brazil. One only wishes he had had a bit more time in each country to delve a bit more into the archives, but I will come to why this might have been helpful in a minute.

In many respects, Brands's revision of existing interpretations is compelling. I am fully persuaded of his repeated contention that we need to move away from U.S.-centered narratives and avoid characterizations of the United States as a powerful puppet master during the Cold War (258). Instead, as he suggests, we need to consider other influences on those who later went on to lead right-wing counterinsurgency crusades both in the shape of French and British ideas, national histories, and the concrete challenge from the radical Left however exaggerated this was. As he puts it, "no Latin American officer needed to be told to be anticommunist" even if military leaders throughout the region happily accepted U.S. weapons and assistance (47-48). When it comes to oft-cited correlation between U.S. military assistance and training on the one hand, and the rise of right-wing repressive regimes on the other, Brands also asks why Venezuela – the recipient of more military assistance than either Guatemala or El Salvador under Kennedy – emerged relatively more democratic than countries where the United States was less involved (259). Brands is not the first to call on historians to retire the idea of Latin America being scattered with U.S. puppets or to write about the United States' limitations when it came to shaping Latin American politics and society. Indeed, the more scholars have looked into the Latin American dimensions of U.S.-Latin American relations in recent years, the more they have tended to reveal the limitations of the United States' ability to enforce an agenda or to shape events on the ground regardless of U.S. policymakers' intentions.¹ In bringing different case studies and examples together, however, Brands's synthesis underlines the point forcefully.

Throughout the book he also rightly argues that the United States and the Soviet Union were not the only foreign powers to have intervened in a range of Latin American countries during the Cold War era, but rather that Cuba joined them as *the* other significant 'foreign power' in the region. Although he argues that Cuba's outreach to the Soviet Union in the immediate aftermath of the revolution was far more pre-determined and pro-active than others have suggested (31-32), he recognizes Cuba's autonomous involvement in Latin America. As he puts it, the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba all "engaged in parallel quests to shape Latin American politics and society" and I wholeheartedly agree with him (37). Brands's suggestion that the Cubans played a pivotal role in exacerbating a cyclical and reinforcing conflict is also mostly persuasive. True, this may be an uncomfortable

¹ See for example, M. P. Friedman, "Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States-Latin American Relations." *Diplomatic History*, Vol.27, No.5, 2003: 621-636; M. Spektor, *Kissinger e o Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2009; R. Wesson, *The United States and Brazil: Limits of Influence*. New York: Praeger, 1981; Z. Karabell, *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World and the Cold War, 1946-1962*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999; or Gustafson K. "Double-Blind: Predicting the Pinochet Coup." *The RUSI Journal*, Vol.150, No.6, 2005: 78-83.

observation for the revolutionary generations of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that saw the Cuban revolution as a valiant alternative to the overwhelming power of U.S. hegemony in the Americas. But there is no doubt that in many cases, Cuba's methods of fighting for revolutionary change and a fairer society in Latin America ultimately ended up strengthening its enemies. From my own research on Chile during the early 1970s, for example, it is plain that Cuban support for Salvador Allende's government did radicalize the Right despite Havana's leaders being very conscious that this was precisely *not* what they wanted to do.

And yet beyond being uncomfortable, Brands's argument that the rise of National Security Doctrine, the emergence of the likes of Pinochet in South America, and Central America's counter-revolutionary onslaught were simply logical reactions to "the insurgencies that erupted following the Cuban revolution" is not entirely convincing (48). On the one hand, there is more that could have been said about this. Brands rightly suggests that the Cuban-based left-wing Organization of Latin America Solidarity (OLAS) was ineffectual and yet he says relatively little about those who feared it in particular and why they so dramatically overestimated its strength (p.44). On the other hand, the question of the starting point for this mutually reinforcing spiral of radicalization and the issue of asymmetry are not fully dealt with or persuasively explained. This is essentially a question of which came first: the chicken or the egg, or in the case of the Cold War, the revolutionaries or the reactionaries. Brands comes down saying that it was the Cuban revolution and the radicalization of the Left that provoked the brutal backlash and repression that followed. But in doing so he fails to mention longer-term origins of repression *against* the Left and anti-communism before the Cuban Revolution (about which more in a moment). He also does not accord the question of asymmetry between forces and victims on the Left and Right enough space in his overall argument that sees all sides as roughly equal in their responsibility for the Cold War's cycle of violence. When Brands notes that the Tupamaros numbered 2,000 out of a population of 2.8 million, for example, he writes that the armed forces "had only 12,000 members" (103-4). But surely this was still *six times* the strength of the Tupamaros? When it comes to Venezuela, he could have certainly looked at the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship and U.S. support for it in more depth. And the devastating Dirty Wars of the 1970s and 1980s in the Southern Cone are also curiously and conspicuously dealt with sparingly when compared to his accounts of urban guerrillas, the Nicaraguan Revolution, or the instability and chaos in Chile before the coup of 1973.

As another scholar of the Cold War in Latin America has written in a review of *Latin America's Cold War*, Brands is one of a new generation of American scholars working on U.S.-Latin American history that does not appear to be burdened with a sense of guilt when it comes to his/her country's relationship with countries south of the Rio Grande.² Brands is certainly explicit about rejecting a "morality-play feel" that he sees as having obscured interpretations of Latin America's Cold War, dismissing those who disagree with him as being "blinded" by the moral implications of the subject (271). While I am sympathetic to Brands calling for a detached perspective and questioning the aims and consequences of

² Review by Vanni Pettina, *Marine Corps University Journal*, December 2010.

the radical Left's actions in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, my sense is he goes too far in trying to be objective and will have a hard time winning over established scholars of U.S.-Latin American relations. However, I am sure others will comment on this aspect of the book and whether or not the moral implications of history can or should be set aside, so let me move on to some of the other aspects of *Latin America's Cold War* that I found particularly interesting and thought provoking.

First, there is the question of precisely what we mean – and should be referring to – when we talk about the 'Cold War' in Latin America. This is not merely a question of semantics, but a question that gets to the very core of what it is Brands is aiming to write about. Quite simply, as he explains throughout his book and Gilbert Joseph has written elsewhere, the Cold War in Latin America was "rarely cold."³ So should we be referring to a *Cold War* at all? There are some scholars who would say no both on the grounds that the period was incredibly violent and that this is essentially a foreign term that has been appropriated from a different context.⁴ But if not a Cold War (and I still use the term myself) what should scholars call the ideological conflict that polarized peoples across Latin America and tore the region apart? One alternative that sprung to my mind as I was reading Brands's book, and I began questioning the use of the term, would be to reconceptualize the Cold War in terms of a regional civil war, much as the conflicts that ravaged Europe in the early twentieth century are often examined as having been part of a broader 'European Civil War'.

However, even if we omit the term 'Cold War' and replace it with 'civil war', we are still left with the question of what this civil war was about. Having read Brands' book, I was not entirely sure. On the one hand, he relishes the multilayered stories of a cycle of extremism and radicalization exacerbated by East-West tensions and spun out of control by the Cuban Revolution. On the other hand, he gives the impression that what he calls Latin America's Cold War was about a direct struggle against U.S. imperialism that had more in common with Third World nationalism and the North-South divide of global politics than it did to do with the ideological struggle between capitalism and communism, albeit broadly defined. Brands writes that "the effects of *tercermundismo* heightened internal turmoil and provoked occasionally dramatic shifts in the hemispheric diplomatic climate" that then "elicited foreign intervention" (255). But as I read about diplomatic shifts and inter-American tensions during the 1970s in chapter 5, or the debt crisis and the rise of neoliberalism in chapter 8, I was left wondering what the precise connection was between these developments and the Cold War Brands describes elsewhere. Indeed, at times, *Latin America's Cold War* drifted toward a broader survey of U.S.-Latin American relations during the *Cold War era* that left the notion of what the Cold War and how it ended – or the extent

³ G. Joseph, "What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies" in *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War* edited by G. Joseph and D. Spenser, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008, 3.

⁴ A. Stephanson, "Fourteen Notes On the Very Concept of the Cold War." *H-Diplo: Essays*, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/PDF/stephanson-14notes.pdf>

to which it should be regarded as an exceptional narrative in the history of inter-American relations – a little ambiguous.

Beyond the question of whether ‘Cold War’ is the most appropriate term to describe Latin America’s twentieth century upheavals and what it does or does not include, there is also the question of whose upheaval this was, who its main protagonists were, and how it related to broader global dynamics. In this respect, I was not sure whether *Latin America’s Cold War* was the most appropriate title for the book or indeed whether it is the most suitable term to describe the field of scholarship that Brands has so ably and significantly contributed to. The concept of a ‘Latin American Cold War’ is very different from studying ‘The Cold War in Latin America’, ‘The Cold War and Latin America’, ‘The Cold War in the Americas’, or the ‘Inter-American Cold War’ (as I tend to refer to it): it implies ownership and the predominance of Latin American agency in shaping the conflicts. And overall Brands does an impressive job of persuasively illustrating the importance of looking at Latin American actors, motives, and consequences. Yet, the enduring emphasis on the United States – and even on disproving the United States’ puppetry – in *Latin America’s Cold War* means that it is not nearly as de-centered as it aims to be or as focused on Latin America’s story as one might expect from the title.

A further question I had that is intricately tied to the question of how we conceptualize the Cold War in Latin America is whether the book’s main story begins too late. Brands gets to the Cuban revolution on page 24, leaving very little room for a discussion of the late 1940s and 1950s (let alone the decades before this where I believe the origins of the inter-American Cold War lie). Given the new work being done on the 1950s and the decade’s significance in the evolving polarization of regional politics – not to mention the Cuban revolutionaries’ own formation and insurrection – this is a shame. The book also skips rapidly through the multilayered and multidimensional Cold War patterns that imprinted themselves on inter-American relations during the late 1940s, and the way in which anti-communism triumphed over democratic openings and pluralism. These developments were important, not least because they closed off non-violent routes for those who wanted to challenge the elite-led status quo. More importantly for those seeking to explore the particularly Latin American dimensions of the Cold War in the Americas, this earlier period is crucial for understanding the indigenous roots of anti-communism (and communism) in Latin America and the motives that led regional leaders to clamp down on working class and left wing movements.⁵ In sum, Brands is right in saying that the Cuban revolution marked a turning point – and that it brought together diverse layers of conflict that had been brewing in Latin America for a decade and a half following World War II – but my feeling is that scholars need to widen the chronological framework they are dealing with when examining Cold War in the Americas to understand why the Cuban revolution had the impact it did.

⁵ See for example, *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948* edited by L. Bethell and I. Roxborough, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, and Paulo Drinot, “Creole Anti-Communism: Labor, the Peruvian Communist Party and APRA, 1930-1934”, *Hispanic American Historical Review* (forthcoming).

Of course, a survey of the type and scope that Brands has produced cannot cover everything, nor should it. What it does do very effectively is provide its readers with an invaluable opportunity to pause, think, revise, and be inspired to embark upon new research projects. So let me finish by briefly outlining two avenues for future research on the Cold War in the Americas that occurred to me as I was reading *Latin America's Cold War*. One is the considerable scope that exists for examining relationships *between* Latin American countries and the way in which events in one Latin American country were perceived in others. This is not just a question of Cuba's relationship with other countries or movements in the region – although there is still considerably more to be learnt about the relationships between Havana and Latin American countries. It is also about how a variety of different elites and populations viewed the Cold War and Cold War developments in the Americas, the way in which they spoke to each other about them in domestic and in inter-American forums, and the way in which they also intervened as 'foreign powers' in other countries' domestic affairs. Recent scholarship on Brazil's relationship and interaction with Spanish America has offered a glimpse of one particular example of the intra-regional relationships that future research needs to focus on.⁶ But there are other examples of both international and transnational relationships within Latin America that need further investigation. Brands incorporates Che Guevara's well-known reaction to Arbenz's overthrow and the impact that Guatemalan events had on domestic Chilean politics into his narrative but more research needs to be done on how this event reverberated around Latin America (17).⁷ And although Brands provides a snapshot of Mexican reactions to the Cuban Missile Crisis, we need to know far more about other Latin American responses as well as the way in which governments and peoples throughout Latin America reacted to the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965. Now that Brands has shown what can be done when it comes to consulting documents throughout Latin America – and the incredible wealth of sources that are available – new research will undoubtedly follow in his direction. As Brands argues, the Cold War in Latin America was multilayered and multidimensional, and there are far more intra-regional layers and dimensions still to be explored.

Finally, the recurrent effect of the Vietnam War in Latin America jumped off the pages of *Latin America's Cold War* as an intriguing story begging to be explored further. Brands provides fascinating glimpses of Latin American reactions to what was happening Southeast Asia: the Mexicans who formed pro-Viet Cong committees, the Costa Rican students who "quit their studies and travelled to Southeast Asia to join the fighting" (85), the anger that the U.S. intervention in Vietnam provoked among the Uruguayan Left or the lessons urban guerrillas in Montevideo drew from the conflict (102), and the breathing

⁶ See for example, "Brazil Conspired with U.S. to Overthrow Allende," edited by P. Kornbluh, August 2009, online at the National Security Archive, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB282/index.htm>. On Brazil's place within Latin America, see L. Bethell, "Brazil and 'Latin America'", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol.42, 457:485.

⁷ For a Uruguayan view, see R. Garcia Ferreira, "El Caso de Guatemala": Arévalo, Árbenz y la Izquierda Uruguaya, 1950-1971", *Mesoamérica*, Vol. 49, 2007.

space the conflict afforded the Cubans (105). Beyond being intriguing stories in themselves, these snapshots suggest another challenge ahead for historians of the Cold War in Latin America: the need to work out how the internal, indigenous logics of the multidimensional and multilayered Cold War in the region fit within broader narratives of the global Cold War.

But that is all still to come. Brands has opened the field of Cold War scholarship on Latin America up considerably both by showing the kind of archival material that is awaiting researchers in Latin American archives, by sparking questions for discussion, and by provoking the kind of widespread debate that is so needed if scholarship on the Cold War in the Americas is to advance. And for that he deserves huge praise and heartfelt thanks. The future of the subject, thanks to *Latin America's Cold War*, is now wide open and established.

Hal Brands' new book is decidedly titled, *Latin America's Cold War*, and not "The United States, Latin America, and the Cold War," or some variation on U.S.-Latin American Cold War politics. *Latin America's Cold War* possesses a provocative tone, and Brands critiques leading contemporary scholars, such as Steve Stern, Greg Grandin, Lesley Gill, and Daniela Spenser for what he faults as an overly U.S.-centered and deterministic denouement of Cold War politics. He argues that historians of Latin America have placed far too much weight on U.S. government policies, which in turn has undermined the very agency and political acumen of Latin American actors themselves. Throughout the book, Brands embraces what he hopes will be a controversial, yet fresh, new paradigm for Latin American history. He characterizes his own scholarship as recognizing "ideological extremism on both Left and Right" and thus adding complexity to the narrative (8).

Brands' book will spark lively debate, and its ambitious scope is nothing short of impressive. Brands' work moves deftly between Cuba, the Southern Cone, Central America, and Mexico, demonstrating a breadth of research and analysis. His goal is a synthesis based on archival sources, and he incorporates international politics, domestic governance, and ideological contests. I agree with Brands' overarching thesis that historians need to pay greater attention to the complexity of the Cold War and refrain from analyses that gloss over or ignore painful, contradictory, or politically troubling facts. That said, I ultimately found myself disagreeing with Brands' analysis more than I agreed with it. First, Brands reinscribes Cold War binaries of "Left" and "Right" as dialectical and seemingly equivalent forces. Second, by focusing on traditional diplomatic actors, he cuts off evidence that could better serve his claims and open up new fields of inquiry. In short, it's even more complicated than Brands suggests.

Case in point, the cover photo of *Latin America's Cold War* begs for analysis, as it reveals just the type of hidden complexities that disrupt the traditional Cold War narrative. A group of men appear together, young and old, bearded and clean-shaven, guns held casually, yet ready for conflict, while one beret-wearing man looks off into space with a Che-like gaze. The caption on the inside flap reads: "Fighters for the Castro regime train in hiding in the Escambray Mountains of Cuba in 1962." The image reinforces Latin America's revolutionary iconography with fighters, presumably Cuban guerillas no less, standing beneath the title: "Latin America's Cold War."

However, the photograph is not so simple. Why were the Cuban fighters training in the Escambray in 1962, three years after the "triumph of the revolution"? Perhaps they were training to spread the revolution abroad, but just as possible, they were training to fight against Cuban "counter-revolutionaries" in the central Cuban region of the Escambray. The Cuban government has been very successful at burying the history of anti-revolutionary resistance in the Escambray, but armed conflict persisted in central Cuba well into the early

1960s.¹ A coalition of large landholders and *campesinos* fought the new government with the shared goal of anti-communism. Who were these photographed fighters for the Castro regime? Were they members of the new revolutionary army, and who were they fighting against? How did international showdowns like the Cuban Missile Crisis intersect with the regional campaign in the Escambray? How did the families and communities in central Cuba negotiate with a new revolutionary government? I recognize that authors do not always choose the covers of their books, and that may well be the case here, as there is no commentary on the photo or the Escambray in the text. Still, the cover photo opens avenues that could be fruitful to Brands' larger thesis. By privileging diplomatic actors, there is a missed opportunity to measure the ways in which popular support waxed and waned and the ways in which politicians and non-state actors navigated the stark binaries of the Cold War.

Brands' book opens with an overview of Latin American politics in the 1940s and 1950s, an era punctuated by the Cuban revolution. He argues these years set the stage for profound changes in Latin America, which included the emergence of the middle classes, decolonization, anti-Americanism, and *tercermundismo*. Brands examines the emergence of right-wing governments in the 1930s and 1940s, and he concludes, "to the extent that U.S. policy figured in the conservative restoration, it was a matter of neglect and indifference, rather than pro-authoritarian intervention" (15). In a strikingly revisionist paragraph, he glosses over the 1954 coup in Guatemala and argues that the "U.S. role in this episode was less decisive than is often assumed." (16-17). Brands seems to misread Piero Gleijeses' *Shattered Hope* and Nick Cullather's *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala*. Both of these books reveal a truly complicated field of Guatemalan politics and actors, but they do not shy away from U.S. accountability or intervention.² Moreover, Brands' analysis does not consider the political legacies of U.S. interventions in Central America and the Caribbean from the early twentieth century. Instead, quickly moving past the 1954 coup, Brands turns to the origins of the Cuban revolution, which he correctly attributes to a "middle-class revolt" (24). In many ways, this is where Brands' story really begins, as he is most interested in Cold War Latin America after 1959.

Brands continues comparing the Alliance for Progress with Cuban and Soviet influences in Latin America. He states that the Cubans and Soviets had an active agenda in Latin America, and to that end, they helped communist revolutionaries pose a real threat to established governments. Brands provides multiple examples of Cuba over-playing its

¹ Joanna Beth Swanger, "Land Rebellion: Oriente and Escambray Encountering Cuban State Formation, 1934-1974" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1999), 375-447.

² Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-54* with an Introduction by the Author and an Afterword by Piero Gleijeses (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), vii and xxiii-xxxvi. Also see Gleijeses' conclusion in *Shattered Hope*, "Nowhere in Central America or the Caribbean has U.S. intervention been so decisive and so baneful in shaping the future of a country (381)." Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

revolutionary hand. He documents the failures of left-wing guerrilla movements, which lacked popular support and remained plagued by internal divisions: "While it is often argued that US intervention and counterinsurgency were decisive in defeating the radical Left, the reality is that the guerrillas did an excellent job beating themselves." (55) While there is much truth in this statement, there is also much to be said for the U.S. complicity with torture, interrogations, and executions. Brands is cognizant of this reality, and he demonstrates how the Alliance for Progress became a cover for military aid and intervention. He concludes by arguing for an ironic symmetry, whereby the USSR, Cuba, and the United States, all attempted to expand their influence, but succeeded only in creating blowback (68).

One of Brands' central arguments is dialectical, whereby left-wing extremism begot right-wing extremism and back again. (97) For example, in his analysis of Allende's election and Pinochet's subsequent coup, he attributes an equal level of blame for Chile's political instability: "While utterly deplorable, the right-wing extremism that occurred during this period can only be understood as part of a larger cycle of radicalism and reaction." (127) Throughout his analysis, Brands argues that anticommunism was a legitimate response to the specter of revolution. He provides substantial documentation on urban guerrilla movements alongside repressive governments, yet his conclusion left me wanting a more nuanced analysis, rather than a dialectal one. The dichotomy does not probe the level of proportionality, the multiple registers of "revolution," or the redefinition of all political opposition as "radical." In the discussion of Operation Condor, he curiously does not mention the assassination of Orlando Letelier in the United States. While one could argue that the Letelier assassination supports Brands' argument, since it demonstrates how U.S. allies acted outside of Washington's desired parameters, Brands does not make this case. Given the synthetic and sweeping nature of his account, this absence is notable because it demonstrates the extent of moral and legal license the United States gave to the Chilean dictatorship.

The chapter on Nicaragua and Central America is perhaps the most provocative, as Brands addresses popular politics far more directly than he does in other chapters. He argues that U.S. support and influence was most apparent and the most brutal in Central America. He also provides a more descriptive analysis of the Sandinistas' popular support, and demonstrates the large and broad-based reasons for their successes and failures. In this section, unlike with South American nations, Brands argues that violence was disproportionately anti-guerrilla and funded by the United States. The final chapter discusses Latin America's move toward democratization: "If there was a positive outcome of the civil wars, this move toward democratization was it" (221). However, what was democracy, and who was defining it? Brands states that Reagan's concept of democracy was "often shallow, sometimes repressive, and above all, anticommunist." (247) Given this narrow concept of "democracy," Brands' thin optimism strikes me as unwarranted. Given Brands' research and examples, there seems to be a much greater case that the Cold War at best delayed, and at worst stymied democracy in the region.

In conclusion, Brands' book makes a general claim for an objective assessment of the excesses of the Right and Left during the Cold War. But what was the "Left" or the "Right"?

Latin America's Cold War would have benefited from consulting Eric Zolov's important new work, which argues for a redefinition of the "Left" to include middle-class youth and countercultural practices that operated apart from armed guerillas. Zolov's analysis forces historians to stretch traditional definitions which have narrowly defined the "Left," and instead to include a far greater number of actors.³ Like many of the historians he critiques, Brands also laments lost opportunities in Latin America, albeit from a "centrist" position:

Too often the Center could not hold. During the Cold War conservatives blamed the Left for making democracy impossible. Since then, scholars have largely faulted the Right for the violence and political illiberalism of the time. In reality, responsibility for internal polarization in Latin America was not the peculiar province of either end of the political spectrum." (264)

Perhaps I have been too inundated with pleas for bipartisanship in recent months, but Brands' statement struck me as wishing Cold War Latin American politics conformed to U.S. electoral divisions of Left, Right, and Center. Brands never discusses or defines what this Center might be, nor does he grant substantial attention to the Christian Democratic parties, which also found themselves under fire from authoritarian governments, which he notes only in passing (192). Is Brands' "Center" definitively "capitalist," or would it allow for an elusive "neutral," "democratic socialist," or "third way"? It is also worth noting Gleijeses' wry point in *Shattered Hope*, that at least in Arbenz's Guatemala: "There was no way, however, that the United States could have replaced Arbenz with a centrist, moderate government – even if it had truly wanted to – for the center and the moderates had supported Arbenz."⁴

I learned a great deal from Brands' book, and it clearly succeeded in raising many questions. The strength of *Latin America's Cold War* rests in its hemispheric reach and ambition. However, if one wants to get a handle on the true messiness and contradictions of the Cold War, I would also suggest paying closer attention to the political choices and everyday lives of men and women from Montevideo to Mexico City to the mountains of the Escambray.

³ Eric Zolov, "Shifting our Conceptual Horizons: The Shift from an Old Left to a New Left in Latin America," *Contra Corriente: A Journal on Social History and Literature in Latin America* 5 (2) 2008: 47-73, http://www.ncsu.edu/project/contracorriente/winter_08/documents/Zolov.pdf (accessed January 31, 2011).

⁴ Gleijeses, 381.

This is the book many historians of U.S.-Latin American relations have been waiting for. Finally we have a regional counterpart to Odd Arne Westad's momentous *The Global Cold War*, one that uses a multiarchival method and international perspectives to tell the sweeping story of the hemisphere's encounter with the East-West conflict. Hal Brands's new book is a stunning achievement. Based on massive archival research, bold questions, and penetrating insights, this provocative study slays many sacred cows of the academy and promises to spark many a productive debate among scholars.

In such a broad volume, clear arguments can be hard to come by. While Brands writes accurately of the "complexity" of "overlapping conflicts" in Cold War Latin America — struggles for resources, the nationalist rejection of U.S. imperialism, the influence of decolonization and ideology — his dominant argument seems to be that conservatism triumphed over revolutionary fervor. Yet Brands is careful to add another major theme — besides "complexity" — that of Latin American agency on both the Left and the Right. What he calls the "tragedy" of the violence, he adds, "cannot be reduced to a story dominated by Right repression and U.S. complicity" (8). The Left is also at fault.

Brands's findings play out in three core decades — the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

One of Brands's arguments, that the Cold War was most defining in Latin America in the 1960s, does not rest solely on the usual narrative of the expansion of Cuban influence. He does explain that expansion, but qualifies it in two ways. First, he writes that direct Cuban aid to exiled guerrillas was limited to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama (I would add that none came close to succeeding and that the Panama "invasion" of April 1959 was among the more ludicrous). Second, Brands emphasizes equally the conservative response by Latin American military regimes. He carefully charts the rise of the National Security Doctrine, the idea that states must view all dissent as subversion and that a sophisticated state security apparatus must be designed to crush that dissent without mercy. Brands argues, contrary to perhaps more cynical historians, that military leaders exaggerated the threats against them but nevertheless responded to real security threats by violent revolutionaries. He makes the additional points that contrary to what most believe, Latin American militaries learned counterinsurgency not from the United States, but rather from France and Britain, and that anti-communism was also not a U.S. import but rather long in existence in Latin America and sincerely integrated into the Right's ideology.

Despite his attention to the National Security Doctrine, Brands does not let Havana or Moscow off the hook, making full use of new evidence from the Soviet bloc to make the case that Castro's financial, training, and propaganda aid to insurgents throughout the hemisphere not only destabilized regimes but was Castro's own doing more than that of the Soviets. Many of the failures of leftists were self-inflicted, for instance the Cuban Missile Crisis and the discovery of a Cuban arms cache in Venezuela, which together took the

bloom off the revolutionary rose. Unconcerned or uncommunicative with peasants and often even “thuggish” and “terroristic,” he writes, “the guerrillas did an excellent job of beating themselves” (55).

A similar dynamic took place in the 1970s. Radicalism emerged first in the guise of the urban guerrilla. Brands argues forcefully that historians have underappreciated urban guerrillas, who drew from liberation theology and dependency theory and expressed the economic and social disaffection of student activists, labor leaders, and others. Urban leftists were also more successful than their rural counterparts, creating a persistent and serious state of insecurity in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Uruguay, and Argentina. Here Brands treads on sensitive ground, being careful to note that urban guerrillas also responded to the new repression from the state. Yet his analysis runs counter to Greg Grandin’s emphasis on rural resistance, which now appears no less tragic but perhaps less representative since Grandin somewhat extrapolated his findings hemisphere-wide from the extreme case of Guatemala.¹

Still in the 1970s, a parallel process took shape in diplomacy, as Latin Americans carved out a more independent sphere away from the United States. Peru’s leaders nationalized the International Petroleum Company, the Organization of American States ended its sanctions against Cuba, and individual states explored extra-hemispheric ties both diplomatic and economic. However, concludes Brands, few trade pacts or partnerships with Europe, the Soviet Union, or China amounted to much and the United States remained the only influential outside player. And there was little of the hoped-for solidarity between Latin American nations, which remained as chauvinistic as ever.

As a measure of the Left’s failure, the first successful socialist revolution after Cuba came twenty years later, with the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in 1979. Yet in the 1980s, “dreams of radical social revolution were once again disappointed” (6). Nicaragua’s conditions were unique, and anyway the arrival of Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office made life impossible for would-be revolutionaries elsewhere. And as usual, Reagan’s conservatism only reinforced existing tendencies rather than creating them. Even a liberal human rights approach like that of Jimmy Carter met with limited success and much frustration. Nicaragua’s violence was actually relatively restrained — its 30,000 victims were massive relative to its population but not to the “apocalyptic” deaths in El Salvador (70,000) and Guatemala (200,000) (189). In all these states, conservatism eventually triumphed and authoritarianism plagued the Left. Brands stops short of suggesting that Reagan was justified in fighting devastating proxy wars and instead emphasizes “the guiding hand of Moscow and Havana” (their aid to Managua amounted to billions, compared to the \$322 million given to the *contras*) (198). And as for the United States, the 1980s presented no “simple morality play” (220). Washington both backed conservative violence but also restrained it and sincerely promoted democracy.

¹ Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Latin America's Cold War is a triumph of both research and interpretation. Brands has carefully read just about everything written about the Cold War. He has also taken full advantage of newly opened collections and conducted research in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, and elsewhere. For a young scholar he advances his conclusion with aplomb and authority.

The book is not flawless. Brands surveys the pre-1959 period in a too-brief fifteen pages. Certainly he is right that the Cold War reached “peak intensity only after the Cuban Revolution,” and he makes the important points that “U.S. policy hardly determined the conservative ascendancy” in the late 1940s and that the Arbenz overthrow in 1954 killed the “Popular Front” strategy of the Left in favor of violent revolution (3, 15). Yet Latin America was fully engaged in Cold War-related ideology and violence for a full decade before the Cuban Revolution, if not earlier in places such as Mexico. Brands devotes practically no space to the repression that followed the Truman Doctrine in 1947-1948, for instance in the Dominican Republic. He also makes what will surely be a controversial comment for some, that “it would oversimplify matters to say that the United States overthrew Arbenz” (16). If anything, his chapter on this “context” to the Cuban Revolution should prompt more detailed research into the late 1940s and the 1950s, especially the extent to which major disagreements over social and economic arrangements weighed against more ideological disputes (24).

The focus on the Cuban Revolution lies at the root of a more subtle problem with the book. Its narrative waves always begin with the Left engaging in revolution — usually violent — and sparking counterrevolution from the Right. Brands is at times careful to state that right-wing retribution was outsized, but he does not call it paranoid and does not insist enough on the asymmetry of violence. On the contrary, he argues that “some appreciation of symmetry is necessary” and concludes that “Latin America’s dueling radicalisms exacerbated one another” (263, 264). Stephen Rabe’s forthcoming survey, on the other hand, often reminds the reader that the overwhelming (think 90 percent) burden of the violence should be attributed to conservative military states.² Inattentive readers, therefore, may take away from the book’s organization the lesson that Latin America’s Cold War violence may not have existed had the Left not “started it.” Historian Gil Joseph, among others, might suggest that more attention be paid to why the Left resorted to violence.³ Just as historians of the Cold War have learned not to believe in moral parity between the United States and the Soviet Union, neither should they conclude in favor of parity between Left and Right violence in Latin America.

² Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³ Joseph, “What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies,” in *In From the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 3-46.

A final gripe with the book is less central but noteworthy — the emphasis on decolonization as an inspiration to Leftists. Brands generously cites my study of Panamanians as evidence, and I did find that nationalists there called for native ownership of “their” canal after the 1956 Suez Canal crisis. Yet Panama may be an aberration because of the very existence of the canal. In other cases Brands presents practically no hard evidence, relying apparently on his faith that the Cuban Revolution *must* have inspired *tercermundismo*. The argument seems overdrawn, and points to another area that needs additional research. A deeper inquiry might find that Latin Americans did *not* in fact invoke the decolonizing world as much as they might have.

In tacking many of the difficult questions of the Cold War in Latin America, Hal Brands has done historians a fine service. The questions he raises and arguments he proposes point the way to the future of research in U.S.-Latin American relations.

Author's Response by Hal Brands, Duke University

Many thanks to Dustin Walcher for organizing this roundtable, and to Tanya Harmer, Jana Lipman, Alan McPherson, and Mark Gilderhus for their contributions. It is an honor to have my book reviewed by such excellent scholars, and I greatly appreciate their comments and analysis. The reviewers raise a number of key points regarding the book and its subject matter. In my response, I will briefly address several of these.

Let me begin by discussing the issue raised by Professors Harmer and Lipman: What was Latin America's Cold War? They suggest, quite rightly, that there are a number of different definitions for this phrase. The definition that I used was a simple one: the ways that Latin America experienced and participated in the broader global conflict known as the Cold War. Or, to put it a different way, the question that guided my research and analysis was this: Why was the period of the global Cold War, and especially the period between 1959 and 1991, such a traumatic period for Latin America?

To answer this question, I think, you have to pull together a number of analytical strands, some that reach back deep into Latin American history, others of which were more particular to the postwar decades. Part of the answer, as Professor Harmer rightly suggests, is that Latin America was indeed experiencing a sort of regional civil war, the same one that had been playing out in one form or another ever since independence and perhaps even before. Yet this is not the whole answer, because during the postwar era, the course of that regional civil war was profoundly influenced by several other conflicts – the ideological and diplomatic upheaval occasions by the rise of a Third World identity (more on that shortly), recurring tensions in U.S.-Latin American relations, and frictions caused by the broader, global Cold War. Thus the point I make in the introduction and conclusion of the book – that to understand "Latin America's Cold War," you have to understand that this was not any single conflict, but rather several overlapping conflicts that, more often than not, interacted with one another in ways that fueled the turbulence and bloodshed that plagued postwar Latin America.

Professor McPherson raises the question of how important one of these issues – the rise of *tercermundismo* – really was in provoking Latin American upheaval, suggesting that Panama may have been an exception in this regard. I would agree that, of the four conflicts mentioned above, the issue of *tercermundismo* was probably the least immediate (perhaps because it was the most intellectual) in stirring political radicalism during the postwar era. Yet to argue against its relevance is still to miss something essential about this period. As I document in several instances, many of the groups that agitated against the diplomatic, political, and economic status quo in Latin America had a strong sense that they were part of a larger uprising against an unjust international order dominated by the rich countries. Participants in both peaceful and violent dissent in the Southern Cone clearly believed as much during the late 1960s and 1970s; so did the academics, politicians, and students who seized upon dependency theory; and so did the students who rallied in support of the Communist cause in Vietnam. In fact, this dynamic was present even at the

highest levels of certain Latin American governments, as diplomats like Edgardo Mercado sought to reorient regional diplomacy along a north-south axis rather than an east-west axis. The conclusion that I came to after reviewing a variety of sources, archival and otherwise, is that the intellectual links between Latin American activists and broader Third-World causes were probably stronger than we often realize, not simply in Panama but in many parts of the region.

With respect to method, Professor Lipman argues that the book focuses excessively on diplomatic actors. It is true that I consider the actions of government officials (not just diplomats) to be crucially important in shaping the history of Cold War Latin America. To argue otherwise would be odd indeed, given the power that governments wield. Even so, I would contest the assertion that the book is unconcerned with the way that "normal people" lived the Cold War. One of the major aims of the book was to connect high politics with low politics, and there is considerable discussion, in nearly every chapter (chapter 5 being one exception, chapter 2 being a partial exception), on the ways that the people of Latin America lived, responded to, and often shaped Cold War conflict in the region. The political mobilization of students and trade unionists, the actions of campesino federations and guerrilla groups, the growth of urban and rural protest in countries across the region, the rise of the "new Right" in the 1970s and 1980s, the immense suffering inflicted on innocent civilians: all of these dynamics are discussed, often at some length, and they bear directly on the question of how Latin America's Cold War influenced and was influenced by the inhabitants of the region.

Perhaps the thorniest issue raised in the book, and by the reviewers as well, is the question of responsibility for the atrocities that occurred across Latin America during the Cold War (or, to paraphrase Professor McPherson, the issue of who started it). I certainly do not condone the military brutality of the period, nor do I deny that, in nearly all cases, the preponderance of the violence was committed by governments and their semi-official allies. (This point is clearly made in the book, but in light of the subject matter, it bears restating.) The argument, rather, is that this violence did not occur in a vacuum, but rather was the result of a dialectical process of intensification. Right-wing repression spurred left-wing revolt, which in turned produced greater repression, and so on.

I do, therefore, assign greater responsibility to the violent Left for the tragedies of the period than do many other authors. But this is not the same as saying that the Left started it. As I point out in chapter 1, the cycle of repression and revolt in Latin America dates back to well before the Cold War, going back to the inequitable socio-economic and political structures that emerged following independence. In a more immediate sense, the primary catalyst of leftist radicalism during the late 1950s and after was the shutting off of democratic reform during the decade following World War II, most notably in Guatemala but in other countries as well. The emergence of the violent Left was, in this sense, a reaction to the failure of the peaceful Left.

There is thus no denying that the 1940s and early 1950s were a very important period in Latin American history, as several of the reviewers point out. As I argue in the book, the impact of the Cuban Revolution was so explosive in large part because it occurred amid a

variety of trends that took root before anyone had ever heard of Fidel – the movement of the Cold War into the Third World, the radicalization of the Left in Latin America, the growth of anti-Americanism in the late 1940s and 1950s, and so on. I gave this period less emphasis than others primarily because I would argue that the peak intensity of Latin America's Cold War came during the three decades after 1959, but it is certainly correct to note that the foundations of that upheaval can be traced back, in part, to this earlier period. Much exciting work is being done on this era, and I expect that it will go a good deal further than my own in tracing and unpacking the dynamics of the period.

In addition to these issues, there are two subsidiary questions that I would like to address. The first point has to do with the issue of troop ratios in counter-insurgency. Professor Harmer notes that the Uruguayan security forces outnumbered the Tupamaros by roughly six to one, suggesting that this disparity calls into question the severity of the guerrilla challenge. Yet most counter-insurgency practitioners and experts would not deem a six-to-one ratio to be much of an advantage in dealing with an insurgency, especially one in which the participants were virtually indistinguishable from the broader population. In fact, it is generally accepted that counter-insurgents should strive for a 10:1 superiority over the insurgents, because the latter enjoy great advantages in terms of mobility, concealment, and tactical surprise.¹ So yes, the Uruguayan security forces had the Tupamaros outnumbered by quite a bit, but no, this was not much cause for comfort for the authorities.

The second issue has to do with my comment, at the close of chapter 7, that the partial democratization that occurred in Central America during the 1980s was the one positive legacy of the civil wars. Professor Lipman believes that this is too upbeat an assessment, given that democratization in Central America (and in much of Latin America) was superficial and incomplete. My sense, though, is that there is no real disagreement here. The whole point of the chapter in question was to point out how devastating the civil wars were – how internal and external forces fused to wreak massive social, political, cultural, and economic destruction on these countries. And nowhere do I exaggerate the quality of Latin American democracy. I describe Latin American democratization as an incomplete transition, one that hardly got the region back to where it had started decades earlier. The point I was making was a simple one – that one of the byproducts of the Central American maelstrom was this turn toward democratization, a change that, however limited it was, was still better than the undisguised, brutal military rule that preceded it.

I will close with an observation that, while obvious, is nonetheless worth restating: Latin America's Cold War was a bloody, violent, and often tragic experience for the region. The goal of my book was to pull apart the various layers of that tragedy and grapple with the complexity of the factors that caused it. As the reviews by Professors Harmer, Lipman, Gilderhus, and McPherson amply show, there is much to debate in my arguments, as well as

¹ See, for instance, Richard K. Betts, "The Soft Underbelly of American Primacy: Tactical Advantages of Terror," *Political Science Quarterly* 117 (Spring 2002), 29.

in the history of the period as a whole. As they and other scholars produce new and insightful works on this era, I very much look forward to seeing how the debate unfolds.

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