Addicted to Failure: U.S. Security Policy in Latin America and the Andean Region

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banditry, criminality, and interethnic violence must be altered, by force if necessary, if Western governments and organizations expect to make failed, war-torn states into bona fide members of the international community.

One only wishes that this little gem of a book had been published earlier.

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It does not take exceptional analytical talent to recognize that U.S. policies in the Andean region of South America face severe challenges, especially those dealing with the war on drugs. Neither does it take an exceptional historian to recognize that the United States has all too often paid insufficient attention to its regional neighbors and partners. Finally, it takes no exceptional mastery of international relations to recognize that South America is becoming increasingly important to the safety, well-being, and future prosperity of the United States. For all these reasons, a clear explanation of U.S. policies in the region and evaluation of those policies’ track records and potential future consequences are especially welcome.

To a degree, and despite a somewhat incendiary title, Addicted to Failure provides a portion of the needed understanding. Its editor asked a rather impressively credentialed group of analysts to examine each of the countries in the Andean region and the role that U.S. policy has had in shaping those states’ political futures. These analyses follow Brian Loveman’s own overview of U.S. policies in the entire region. A chapter devoted to the European Union’s efforts follows a state-by-state review, and the book concludes with an examination of a possible preemptive U.S. intervention in Colombia on the scale of operations currently being conducted in Iraq.

However, this volume is not a resounding success. Loveman’s introductory chapter is a case in point. His basic argument seems to be that U.S. policy, whether crafted by Republican or Democratic presidents, formed during or after the Cold War, altruistic or operational in nature, intentional or accidental, has been consistently wrong. U.S. policy, Loveman argues, has for decades made matters worse for Andean states. There are two problems here. First, Loveman’s disdain for past and present U.S. actions actually begins to obstruct and detract from his central argument. Readers expecting to find a more academic and objective analysis may question the objectivity of the author at the expense of the merit of his argument. The second problem is even more serious. Loveman seeks to prove his contention with official U.S. reports and documents, but the quotations are highly selective and all too often presented without context. Indeed, had an equally passionate voice argued the distaff side of Loveman’s argument, this would have been a most interesting volume.

Luckily, the next six chapters are different. Authored by well known and respected scholars, they draw a compelling picture of U.S. policy in the Andean region. Although all are worthy, Orlando Perez’s evaluation of U.S.-Venezuelan policy and Enrique Obando’s analysis...
of Peruvian-U.S. relations are the high points of the book. Obando does an especially fine job reviewing the successes and eventual failures of U.S. antidrug policies.

*Addicted to Failure* effectively raises several significant issues for the reader to mull over. Has the U.S. counterdrug policy been a costly failure that has made the rise of populist leaders such as Hugo Chavez and Ernesto Morales easier? Does the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) pose threats to the United States beyond those associated with drug trafficking? If the current policies are counterproductive, what are the correct policies? Loveman does not providing convincing answers to the first two questions and does not address the third.

At the end of the day, *Addicted to Failure* is a book that should not be disregarded. It encourages readers to plunge deeper into the complexities of South America. For while Loveman and his authors may not offer any answers, it is clear that the United States will face increasingly complex challenges from this part of the world in the years ahead.

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In *Shining Path* Lewis Taylor provides compelling evidence that the attitude of the people can be decisive in war. That point will not surprise students of warfare; they will recall that two great strategists stressed the central importance of having the people on your side. Focusing primarily on state-to-state conflict, Carl von Clausewitz coined the notion that war’s dominant tendencies make a “paradoxical trinity,” of which one pole comprises primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, a blind natural force. The passions, Clausewitz wrote, “that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people.” Concentrating on guerrilla warfare, Mao Tse-tung famously wrote that “in the relationship that should exist between the people and the troops, the former may be likened to water and the latter to the fish that inhabit it.”

In the Peruvian case, repeated failure to understand and respect the rural population on the parts of the guerrillas (the Sendero Luminoso, or “Shining Path”) led by Abimael Guzmán and of the government of Peru came close to dooming the efforts of both sides in the bloody conflict. After the end of hostilities, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission concluded that more than sixty-nine thousand Peruvians had been killed in the fighting, with Maoist rebels of the Shining Path responsible for the majority of deaths. Both Clausewitz and Mao made clear that the end of warfare was not destruction but policy. Lewis Taylor shows how close the combatants came, through their own excesses, to defeating their own causes.

Regrettably, Taylor, a lecturer in Latin American sociology at the University of Liverpool, does not adequately highlight the strategic implications of his subject. In fact, reading his book leaves unanswered the questions of why he wrote it and for whom. Taylor focuses his study narrowly on the northern highlands of Peru, which were a particularly brutal locus of armed action. Although he acknowledges that generalized