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## Intervention or Neglect: The United States and Central America beyond the 1980s

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Beazley's envisaged goal of improving Australia's ability to defend itself.

The proposed solution to this litany of the militaristic threats to this serene and tranquil region is that Australia adopt a security policy stressing "just defense" and the Palme Commission's concept of "common security." Therefore, any offensive military capabilities would be abandoned, and, in the words of Peter King, Australia's security would be achieved by diplomatic, political, and moral means. And, oh yes!—all security treaties would be abrogated, and the U.S.–Australian joint intelligence and communications facilities in that country would be closed.

In view of this work's obvious political tilt, it can be expected that many are likely to dismiss it. But I would counsel to the contrary. Fortunately, with minor exceptions, these authors currently neither have a modicum of influence nor are they likely ever to reach positions where their views would hold sway; however, we ignore their efforts and messages at our peril. The authors have displayed considerable endurance over the years arguing their vision for Australian security.

The arguments in this text should not be rejected as insignificant but rather taken seriously, and read by anyone interested in U.S. alliance relations. To ignore the serious potential challenge put forth by these groups throughout the Western alliance and not dispute their arguments

vigorously, and publicly, is to lend them credibility by default.

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Robinson, Linda. *Intervention or Neglect: The United States and Central America beyond the 1980s*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1991. 223pp. \$14.95

Not since Howard Wiarda's 1984 *Rift and Revolution: The Central American Imbroglia* has an author so effectively captured the essence of U.S. foreign policy options in Central America. Reading like the best effort of a seasoned Latin American diplomat or C.I.A. station chief, Robinson's book explores the key historical, economic, political, and military events that have shaped present day Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama. Her reporting of the origins of these crises and her balanced portrayal of the errors in judgement of both Central and North American decision makers is especially noteworthy.

Robinson's discussion on Nicaragua builds upon the definitive work of Shirley Christian on the Sandinista revolution, *Nicaragua: Revolution in the Family*. Robinson offers an excellent presentation on the Sandinistas, the Contras, and the interaction between the U.S. and Central American soldiers and diplomats. But this reviewer takes issue with the author's assessment that the Contras played only a minimal role, as catalyst. She has played down the arrogance which

colored the Sandinistas' decision to hold open and observed elections. In addition, the Soviet pressure on Managua to submit to elections may have been based, as Robinson believes, on the Soviets' sincere desire to end the war. Probably, however, the Soviets were hoodwinked by Sandinista hubris and a misreading of the polls.

The segment on El Salvador is concise. The author observes without bias both the U.S. and Salvadoran perceptions and their options. Robinson's emphasis on the importance of arms interdictions as the key to finding a peaceful solution is a minor point of debate. This reviewer is not convinced, given the ambient levels of weaponry already in El Salvador, that the material aspect is as important as the psychological lift Fidel's support provides. The author may be optimistic regarding Fidel Castro's potential for playing a cooperative role. Those of us who have dealt with him and his works over the past three decades believe that the only thing to which he will respond are actual imperatives. Nevertheless, those who would understand El Salvador today will not find a better source.

In her Panama chapters Robinson avoids the errors of recent trendy journalists who blame the United States for Noriega. There are still a few of us who remember that Noriega came to power as a hood ornament on Torrijos's jeep during his triumphal passage from David to Panama City in 1968. Noriega was Torrijos's intelligence officer, not ours. I am also

reminded of my response to the SouthCom commander's question in 1974 about what our action should be if anything ever happened to Torrijos. I answered without hesitation, "Shoot Noriega."

Nowhere is the nature of the options that faced President Bush so well stated as in Robinson's examination of the bureaucratic snarls that preclude intradepartmental cooperation when dealing with Latin America in general, and Panama in particular. One of her more revealing insights is the description of the U.S. military's reluctance to use force in confronting Noriega. The Weinberger Doctrine not only resulted in a U.S. military hesitant to use the military option, but also, quite incredibly, made the Panamanian dictator aware of that reluctance, thereby showing him our "hole card." This was at a time when increasing his uncertainty might have helped.

Crisis managers tasked with working in this volatile region should read this book for a balanced perspective that they often find difficult to achieve when working under pressure. For the scholar, it should prove useful as a background source going beyond the current series of crises.

The title accurately reflects North American perceptions and choices regarding Central America. One way to avoid geometrically multiplying the error in Central America is to follow the author's prescription of both interest and pressure.

Robinson makes a case for continued U.S. interest rather than withdrawal until the next crisis. A

pro-active posture will avoid the need for intervention, while neglect simply will not make the problems go away. They will still be with us long after Fidel is just a memory.

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Ellis, John. *Brute Force: Allied Strategy and Tactics in the Second World War*. New York: Viking, 1990. 643pp. \$29.95

The author promotes two major theses in his survey of the global sweep of World War II: that victory for the Allies rested largely upon the immense resources in materiel, productive capacity, and manpower that they were finally able to deploy; and that the generalship, strategy, and tactics used to exploit that overwhelming force were often inept and maladroit. They relied upon brute force to batter the enemy into submission rather than resort to daring maneuver, surprise, and individual unit initiative to seize fleeting opportunities.

The author possesses a gift for the well-turned phrase. For example, speaking of the Allied response to the Nazi thrust through the Ardennes, he observes that "if the Allied commanders suffered from operational arthritis, the whole of their armed forces were beset by tactical palsy." But most impressive are the elaborate statistical tables that the author has garnered from a number of sources to reveal the comparative strengths of the participants at various junctures

throughout the war. If for no other reason, this volume will be consulted by students of warfare as a handy reference source for these statistical compilations (for which source citations are provided in the appendix).

Despite these strengths, however, this study suffers from what might be called the "Barbara Tuchman Syndrome." John Ellis is contemptuous of virtually all in command positions; he utterly ignores the fog of war, the difficulties of communicating over far-flung battlefields, and the inescapable problems of trying to execute intricate maneuvers with forces largely composed of partially trained, mostly inexperienced civilians in uniform—Christmas help: willing, well-meaning, often brave, but still learning while doing. The peacetime poverty of the armed forces meant not only that the essential cadre of noncommissioned officers was far too small to cope with the enormous expansion of wartime but also that there had been far too few full-scale maneuvers and fleet exercises to afford suitable training for senior leaders.

One searches in vain for evidence of sympathy or understanding of the uncertainties and unknowns confronting the decision makers. There were mistakes aplenty, readily evident in retrospect, but all too often Ellis excoriates commanders without exploring the circumstances in sufficient depth for the reader to judge whether or not alternative tactics were considered. He condemns *planning* on the basis of failed *results* without indicating whether the results were the