

RESENHA

INTER-AMERICAN RELATIONS AFTER 9/11: OVERCOMING NEGLECT

Book Review

BIEGON, RUBRICK. US POWER IN LATIN AMERICA. RENEWING HEGEMONY. ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN US FOREIGN POLICY. 2017. OXON: NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 194P. ISBN 9781138185418.

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The US Foreign Policy turn to the Middle East during the 2000s and the coming to power of left-leaning governments in Latin America was widely interpreted as a US neglect of the region and the beginning of a post-hegemonic era in the Western Hemisphere. Hakim (2006) argued that the US was losing interest to the region and Riggigorozzi and Tussie (2012) claimed the US decompression opened space to Latin American regionalism. These ideas became common sense, but they were rarely demonstrated (LONG, 2016). The recent reversion of that scenario, with the coming to power of right-wing governments and the US pressure on the Bolivarian Venezuelan government, makes clear that more research on the post 9/11 US policies to South America is needed.

That is precisely what Rubrick Biegon proposes in *US Power in Latin America*, in which he aims to contest the neglect narrative. The author argues that during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations the US has sought to protect and strengthen its hegemony, reacting to the counter-hegemony

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practiced by the left-leaning governments in Latin America, which he names the New Latin-American Left (NLL).

He claims that this political trend was not present in the whole region and the Colombia and Mexican alignment with the US was of the most importance. The NLL was not a uniform movement, and Biegón divides them into anti-neoliberals and neoliberal reformers. Although they were not anticapitalistic, these governments sought to increase the role of the state in the economy and the autonomy in relation to the US.

Biegón's theoretical assumptions are delineated on the second chapter and come largely from the Gramscian concept of hegemony, defined as an asymmetrical social relationship, combining ideological and material coercion. He seeks to advance the concept showing "how different forms of power coalesce as hegemony" (BIEGÓN, 2017, p. 48). He proposes a framework to understand the different types of power from a Gramscian perspective, dividing power into its structural, coercive, institutional and ideological forms.

Structural power relates to economic structures. Coercive power is defined as the ability to make others do one's will and correlates to the use of violence and physical force. Institutional power relates to mediation and involves the creation of rules and procedures and the creation of consensus. Ideological power is manifest through discourses and the way they shape interests and identities.

Biegón divides the book chapters by this framework and attempts to explain how the US sought to exert its influence towards Latin America in these various power dimensions. In the Third Chapter, he analyzes the US promotion of free trade in the Americas as a way to advance economic neoliberalism and lock in Latin-American governments to neoliberal policies. He enhances the understanding of US trade policy in the region by emphasizing the US role on the creation of the Pacific Arc, an economic bloc that united the neoliberal governments in the region and promoted a multilateral dimension to free trade. He also claims that the extension of the Transpacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations to Latin America was a means to contain China.

The fourth chapter investigates US military policy to the region, examining the role of the Southern Command in advancing the American influence. He mentions the US attempts to establish military bases in the region and the recreation of the 4th Fleet. It states that the US did not retreat from the region and that it endeavored to create partnerships and maintain physical access to South America. It also analyses the *coup d'état* in Honduras, indicating the US ambiguous position and its eventual support to the destitution of the elected president. He shows the underlying conflict with the Latin American governments regarding this episode.

On the fifth chapter, he analyses the institutional face of power through an investigation of the momentary diminishing US influence in the Organization of American States (OAS). He emphasizes the election of the NLL-backed candidate, José Insulza, as Secretary-General in 2005 as evidence of US losses. Biegón also addresses the construction of regional institutions that excluded the hemispheric power. However, he shows that the US government sought to reform the OAS core functions and is still able to use it to advance some of its interests. The US intention was to recover the OAS central role as the leading

organization in hemispheric cooperation. He maintains that Washington efforts to reconstruct its coercive power affected negatively its institutional power in Latin America

Finally, in the sixth chapter, he describes how the US sought to characterize the NLL governments as populists, in a movement intended to delegitimize them and advance its ideological power. That narrative was applied especially to the anti-neoliberal branch of the NLL, coalesced into the ALBA bloc. Through discourse, the US government sought to promote a binary divide between the modern liberal democracy promoted by itself and the authoritarian and obsolete economic policies advocated by that group. Biegon highlights that the US narrative was politically motivated since Alvaro Uribe's authoritarian actions were never described as populists. Therefore, the term populism was used to describe anti-American and anti-neoliberal governments.

Biegon concludes that the lack of US direct interventions in the region in the post-Cold War period does not mean that the hemisphere became post-hegemonic. In his perspective, the US reacted to the counter-hegemony movements that appeared in the first decade of the 21st century. His statements and empirical findings are relevant to understand the current moment. Nowadays, there is a reversion in the Latin American autonomy and in the promotion of sub-regional institutions. Therefore, more studies on the US Foreign Policy to the region are needed to understand the international context that led to this scenario.

In general, Biegon is effective in proving his point about the US actions to maintain its hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, even when faced by a challenging context. He is successful in attesting that the US power is not equal to its institutional aspect and that the loss of power in this realm does not necessarily apply to the other dimensions. Nevertheless, there are some operationalization problems, since his choices to exemplify the power dimensions are limited. In his analyses, the structural power is almost equal to the trade arrangements, with no examination of lending, foreign direct investment or the dollar hegemony. When it comes to coercive power, the aspect of arms transfers and the production of major weapons is reified, as well as the existence of old partnership between the militaries in the Hemisphere.

As Biegon himself points out, the book also lacks a more detailed investigation about how the US reacted to the presence of external powers in the region. Since the Monroe Doctrine, the US maintained its hegemony by containing challenges from non-hemispheric actors. Therefore, the US reactions towards the headways of China and Russia in Latin America is a critical factor in understanding the renewal of its hegemony. In spite of these issues, the book makes significant steps in the understanding of US policies to the hemisphere during the Bush and Obama administrations.

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