

LAC from China's Eyes

The China-Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) relationship is largely analyzed through the eyes of U.S. or LAC scholars and researchers. While this perspective is important, it doesn't include how Chinese scholars view the region, creating a major blindspot for U.S. and LAC policymakers thinking about China's future in the region.

In *The Art of War*, Sunzi admonishes that "if you know yourself and know your enemy, you will never lose 100 battles" (知己知彼, 百战不殆). In this new section *LAC from China's Eyes*, I will attempt to "know my enemy" by translating and analyzing an article or report from a Chinese scholar who specializes in Latin American and Caribbean affairs. I hope that this provides interesting insights into how Chinese thought leaders view the region, and actionable open-source intelligence for U.S. and LAC practitioners alike.

–Leland Lazarus, Associate Director

Entry 1: Great Power Regional Strategy: Comparing the Soviet Union, the United States, and China

By Zhou Fangyin, Professor of International Relations, Guangdong Foreign Language and Foreign Trade University

In this report, Zhou compares the USSR, U.S. and Chinese foreign policies towards their neighboring countries and spheres of influence using four lenses: 1) interests, 2) when the country used coercive measures against their neighbors, 3) how the country systematized relations with its neighbors, and 4) ideology.

The United States

Zhou recognizes that the United States is a country "favored by nature." Its only two neighbors, Canada and Mexico, are close partners, and the Atlantic and Pacific oceans provide natural barriers. He also notes that the U.S. definition of its neighbors is quite expansive, often encompassing countries that are quite far away from U.S. territory. The history of U.S. relations with Latin America and the Caribbean can be summed up by three foreign policies: the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the Big Stick policy under Teddy Roosevelt (20th century) and Dollar Diplomacy (20th-21st century).

Zhou assesses that U.S. foreign policy in LAC is rather successful because it has managed to achieve its interests in the region without suffering a large economic burden from the region. The U.S. has used coercive measures with multiple military invasions in the region, although the U.S. for the most part sought to receive international support for the use of force as a last resort. The U.S. has also systematized its relations with its neighbors through the Organization of American States and trade agreements. The United States strongly emphasizes ideology in its

foreign policy, insisting that its neighbors adhere to democratic and capitalist norms. Zhou quotes another scholar who acknowledges that other countries can learn lessons from U.S. regional foreign policy.

The Soviet Union

Zhou notes that the USSR's foreign policy was less successful. Regarding interests, the USSR sought to support its Eastern European neighbors through the Economic Mutual Assistance Council, or Comecon. The issue, however, was that providing economic aid to its neighbors became an economic burden on the USSR. The Soviet Union also often used coercive measures to force its neighbors to abide by its rules; this created a persistent negative backlash against the country. The USSR had a systematized relationship with its neighbors through the Warsaw Pact. Finally, the USSR was so rigid in its communist ideology that it rejected other cultures and systems, and became obsolete.

China

Zhou praises China's regional foreign policy as upholding what Xi Jinping calls the "Community of Shared Destiny." In terms of interests, bilateral relations are always "win-win," and China has always emphasized reducing conflict and achieving harmony with its neighbors. He claims that China has never used coercive measures against its neighbors, and that it has settled border disputes with 12 of its 14 neighbors. China's relationship with its neighbors is highly systematized, according to Zhou, and the country is quite flexible regarding ideology. He even quotes Xi as saying "as to whether the shoes fit your feet, only you know." Zhou then states that in 2010 when the Obama administration implemented the "Pivot to Asia" policy, the U.S. began to encourage China's neighbors to try to restrict China's rise.

Assessment

I was surprised that Zhou wrote about U.S. foreign policy to LAC in a largely positive light, suggesting that scholars could learn important lessons from it. He even goes as far to say that the Monroe Doctrine was in theory quite anti-colonialism and very progressive in its time; but it was the implementation that led to U.S. imperialism. Zhou clearly sees the missteps from the USSR's foreign policy, concluding that when great powers consistently use coercive measures against their neighbors, "the gains don't compensate for the losses." He also notes that hueing too much to an ideology can also be dangerous and lead to stagnation.

But Zhou's blindspot is his assessment of his own country. He speaks about China's foreign relations in such rosy terms, completely glossing over the very real tensions that exist today. His claim that China has never used coercive measures flies in the face of history; he conveniently forgets to mention the Korean War, the 1962 border war with India, the 1969 Sino-Soviet border conflict, and the 1975 war with Vietnam. He puts all the blame on the U.S. for fomenting conflict between China and its neighbors, but doesn't talk about his own country's transition from "bide

one's time" to "wolf warrior diplomacy," or the various recent instances of Chinese economic coercion against its neighbors and other countries around the world.

All in all, Zhou's piece gives us an interesting insight into the lessons Chinese scholars draw from U.S. foreign policy in LAC.