intersection of the national and the international, the global and the local, shaped Latin America during the twentieth century. For that reason alone, this set of essays is worth the read.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **41** (2009). doi:10.1017/S0022216X0999023X

Todd Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Lessons from Central America* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), pp. xiii+196, $49.95; £27.95, pb.

In this concise volume, Todd Greentree, a former US foreign service officer who served in Central America during the civil conflicts of the 1980s, explores the lessons that those conflicts hold for understanding the dynamics of 'small wars' and US intervention. In less than 200 pages, Greentree does a remarkable job of covering the basic dynamics of the 1979 Nicaraguan revolution, the stalemated civil war in El Salvador, and the Contra insurgency in Nicaragua. His sophisticated analysis provides a much-needed antidote to the facile analogies drawn by some commentators and politicians, most notably former vice-president Dick Cheney, between Central America's wars and the US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Greentree's intent is to examine Central America 'as a case study of the dynamics, dilemmas, problems, and patterns of intervention and irregular war' (p. 8). His main conclusion is not a new one, but it bears repeating since policymakers cannot seem to internalise it: insurgencies, insurrections and revolutions are fundamentally political phenomena. They have military dimensions, but they cannot be won by either side on the battlefield alone. Regimes face serious uprisings because of their political failures; they mishandle crises through incompetence and lose legitimacy, thus clearing the way for insurgents to challenge their right to govern. Insurgents are successful when they effectively subordinate their military strategy to the primacy of the political, establishing themselves in the eyes of the public as a more legitimate political authority than the rulers they seek to overthrow.

Turning to the example of Nicaragua, Greentree catalogues the failings of the dictator Anastasio Somoza: his greed, his brutality, his unwillingness to allow the slightest political opening even for upper-class opponents. Greentree commends the Sandinistas' insurrectionary strategy, which aimed first and foremost at mobilising a broad political coalition against Somoza and positioning themselves as the only alternative to the discredited regime. They put politics in command. Once in power, however, the Sandinistas were not much more politically competent than Somoza, in Greentree's view. They alienated large swaths of the rural peasantry with their collective agrarian policies and large segments of the urban population through their anti-democratic and anti-Catholic style. However, the Contras had no political programme and 'no coherent political identity at all' (p. 121). Thus they could never successfully exploit the opportunity that Sandinista political failures offered them.

Greentree's assessment of President Carter's policy during the Nicaraguan insurrection is scathing: 'an object lesson in political incompetence', he calls it (p. 65). Had Carter acted sooner and more decisively to force Somoza to face the writing on the wall, before polarisation had installed the Sandinistas as the leaders of the anti-Somoza movement, the insurrection might have been avoided. While I have made a similar argument myself, it is worth noting that we critics benefit from 20/20 hindsight. In real time, it is extremely difficult even for farsighted policymakers to make the case that a friendly dictator who faces no urgent threat should be removed in the hope that stable democratic institutions will replace him. By the time the dictator faces a serious enough challenge to make his removal seem unavoidable, the chance for a peaceful and stable transition has often been missed. From Fulgencio Batista in Cuba to Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, the Shah of Iran, and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, the United States has faced this same dilemma over and over again. Greentree himself notes that Carter's half-hearted efforts to press Somoza to reform or depart only accelerated his collapse by encouraging his opponents.

Ronald Reagan's administration faced a parallel problem in El Salvador, opted for a more conservative strategy, and paid a different kind of price. Hoping to avoid a repeat of Somoza's collapse, Reagan allied US policy inextricably with the Salvadorean military. Not wanting to endanger the coherence of the regime, Washington could not or would not press its military allies too hard to end the bloody violence of the death squads. Thus Washington 'became associated with El Salvador's own dark and violent history, and became complicit in it' (p. 74). Nevertheless, the infusion of military aid was enough to prevent the Salvadorean guerrillas from being able to find 'a strategic solution to the problem of decisive force' (p. 85): that is, it kept them from winning. Instead, with the war stalemated, the programme of political reform that Washington forced down the throats of the Salvadorean oligarchy and army created an electoral system which, despite its manifest shortcomings, offered the weary population an alternative to war. As these new institutions gained legitimacy, popular support for the guerrillas waned.

Greentree sees Central America's wars as a kind of bridge between Vietnam and contemporary conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Washington managed to avoid repeating the mistakes of Vietnam in Central America because the wounds of Vietnam were still fresh. The Congress, backed by stubborn public opinion, enforced limits on President Reagan's ability to send US combat troops to the region. An open war with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua was politically unpalatable, so Washington launched a covert war instead. To prevent the military advisory mission in El Salvador from escalating to the deployment of combat troops, as it did in Vietnam, Congress imposed a limit of 55 military advisers. The Reagan administration used every trick in the book to exceed the limit, but it could not 'Americanise' the war by deploying combat units – something that military analysts look back on as one of the reasons why Washington's political strategy enjoyed a degree of success.

Unfortunately, the lesson that US experience in Central America could have taught policymakers – that limiting US military involvement and focusing on political rather than military factors is the key to successful counterinsurgency and nation building – was not learned. Instead, policymakers saw Central America as an unmitigated success, erasing the cautionary tales from the Vietnam experience and restoring their faith in Washington's ability to remake other nations in its own image. Add to that conceit the successful direct interventions in Grenada, Panama, Haiti and the first Gulf War, and the stage was set for direct intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Greentree is at great pains to qualify just how successful US intervention was in Central America. 'Strictly in terms of its stated goals, US intervention was a success', he writes, 'although at a high cost and without victory' (p. 160). In the conclusion he asks poignantly, 'Did anyone benefit from these prolonged conflicts?' (p. 159). Authoritarian regimes were replaced by nominally democratic ones, but good governance was still hard to find and the social problems that gave rise to the conflicts in the first place have yet to be redressed. Greentree wants the reader to take away from the Central American experience a better understanding of just how complex, difficult and costly even small wars can be. He hopes to inoculate future policymakers against grandiose theories about how they can and should use military force to transform the world in the image of the United States. We should wish him every success.

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J. Lat. Amer. Stud. **41** (2009). doi:10.1017/S0022216X09990241

Ronn Pineo, *Ecuador and the United States: Useful Strangers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), pp. xiii + 260, $24.95, pb.

The diplomatic history of Ecuador, most especially its prolonged and often difficult relationship with the United States, has been little studied and is poorly understood. Therefore, this interpretative analysis by Ronn Pineo, a professor of history at Towson University, is a most welcome addition to the literature. His book is the latest in a series of similar studies published by the University of Georgia Press and dedicated to a wider understanding of the forces and issues that have shaped the western hemisphere's experience. Like many of its predecessors, *Ecuador and the United States: Useful Strangers* is a clear and readable account that deserves a wide audience.

In the introduction to the book, the author sets out to tell how Ecuador has often bested the United States in an unequal relationship that began soon after Ecuador gained independence from Spain in 1822. As he says in the introduction, 'This book is about the dynamics of power in the relations between a very large if distracted nation when dealing with a very small but determined nation, an investigation that reveals a great deal about both' (p. 2). Consistent with the other volumes in this series, Pineo's focus is on economic and political relations; however, he also examines the social and cultural side of this bilateral relationship. In so doing, he argues that Ecuador provides a useful context to explore critical issues in the broader US–Latin American relationship.

The author's treatment of the subject is largely chronological, with selected themes developed in each chapter and summarised at the end. The first two chapters focus on the nineteenth century, a time in which bilateral ties between Ecuador and the United States were at a formative stage and remained limited. In addition to his discussion of Ecuadorian relations with the United States, the author does an admirable job of analysing Ecuador's relations with neighbouring Colombia and Peru during this period. As he points out, 'Ecuador's foreign relations officers [at this time] did not spend much time thinking about the United States; they were much more concerned about Peru and Colombia' (p. 61). Diplomatic intercourse between Colombia, Ecuador and Peru in the nineteenth century had a direct and lasting impact on the course of Ecuadorian history as well as on Ecuador's future relations with the United States.

Chapter 3 takes the reader into the twentieth century with an emphasis on US involvement in the railway construction boom that began in Ecuador in the late