
Anarchy and Hierarchy in International Relations: Examining South America's War-Prone Decade, 1932–41

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Abstract This article questions the validity of anarchy as an assumption in International Relations theory. Powerful states often provide public goods to smaller states in return for their acquiescence on matters of interest. This transactional provision of public goods is analogous to how central governments behave in domestic environments; thus the hierarchic structure of domestic politics is replicated in international politics. The anarchy-hierarchy distinction, which rests on a neat separation of international and domestic structures, is therefore highly contentious. One public good that great powers provide, largely ignored by the literature on hierarchy, is justice. Powerful states can provide a forum for aggrieved parties to settle their disputes, and thus contain conflicts before they escalate to war. If such a forum is no longer provided, the system reverts to anarchy, where escalation—and therefore, war—is more likely. South America's war-prone decade can be explained by the variation in structural conditions on the continent. Due to the Depression, its Good Neighbor policy, and the onset of World War II, the United States was less interested in South American affairs in the 1930s, resulting in a more anarchic structure and a higher propensity for war.

How should International Relations (IR) scholars think about the structure of the international system? The dominant answer has been that it is anarchic, that is, there is no overriding authority above states. This position is increasingly challenged by theorists who contend that the structure is not as cut-and-dried as orthodox IR would have us believe, and that hierarchy does obtain at certain times in certain places. This counterargument commonly points to the

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striking similarity of domestic-politics dynamics on the international sphere, thereby eroding the neat theoretical dividing line between anarchy and international politics on the one hand, and hierarchy and domestic politics on the other.

In this article, I join those who dispute the standard anarchy assumption in IR, arguing that anarchy is contingent both on a certain distribution of material capabilities, as well as the behavior of powerful actors. Specifically, how hegemony is practiced matters a great deal for the presence of anarchy or hierarchy. Anarchy is a result of the variables of capabilities and actions taking certain values; thus, it is a variable itself.

In a nutshell, hegemonic states can and do provide certain public goods to states under their umbrellas, and in so doing, establish a relationship of authority by which other states cede a degree of sovereignty. This is typical of the relationship between a state and its citizens in the domestic sphere, which IR theorists generally agree is hierarchic. The crucial point is that the provision of public goods by a powerful actor in return for acquiescence from less powerful actors—be they minor powers in the state system, or citizens in a nation-state—both reflects and constitutes a hierarchic order.

In contrast to conventional IR theory's understanding of anarchy, severe power differentials, coupled with paternalistic policies, such as those that involve the provision of public goods—even if these policies are instrumental or egoist—render moot the notion of states being “like units” and characterized by a lack of “functional differentiation.”¹ Stated differently, they render moot the international system's static anarchy, a belief both theoretically and empirically untenable even for the highly stylized view of IR theorists.

I make four contributions to the literature on hierarchy. First, I explicitly argue for treating the provision of public goods in the international sphere as analogous to their provision in domestic dispensations. Second, I claim that the idea of justice, or recourse to aggrieved parties, is a public good of great importance, and should be thought of in the same vein as other public goods hegemons provide, such as open trading systems or security guarantees. Third, I argue that in providing this public good, hegemons can maintain peaceful relations among states under its umbrella. The hegemon, by providing an avenue for redressing grievances, contains conflict before it escalates to a full-blown war. Fourth, I offer empirical findings from South America, a region oft-ignored by mainstream IR theory, to show that under conditions of hierarchy, conflict between South American states could be contained successfully by the United States. However, during the 1930s, the United States stopped behaving as a hierarchic power, thus making it more likely that minor conflicts would escalate into wars.

1. The terms are drawn from Waltz 1979.

Anarchy and Hierarchy in IR Theory

For twenty years after Waltz's seminal contribution,² the notion of anarchy in IR theory enjoyed a relatively unperturbed existence. Scholars accepted Waltz's formulation of international politics, even when they contested the implications he drew from it. In Mearsheimer's study of international politics, "the first assumption is that the international system is anarchic."³ Gilpin wrote that "international relations continue to be a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy."⁴

Even for nonrealists, anarchy is simply a fact of life. For neoliberals such as Oye, the point was not to quibble with anarchy but to explain how cooperation takes place under it.⁵ Constructivists argued that it is anarchy's implications—not anarchy itself—that should be the object of debate, claiming that "anarchy is what states make of it."⁶ This depth of consensus strongly affected how the field thought about conflict. One key implication of anarchy is that it abets war—particularly for neorealists—by acting as a permissive condition. "Among men as among states," Waltz writes, "anarchy, or the absence of government, is associated with the occurrence of violence."⁷

The logic of anarchy being intimately tied with conflict rests on self-help. Because states can entrust their survival only with themselves, they must guard against being attacked. Securing oneself can be, and often is, interpreted by others as the assumption of an offensive posture, which in turn drives them to ratchet up their security presence. States then constantly fear one another because at any given time, they can be the subject of aggression, without a safeguarding authority to turn to. This second feature carries the explanatory weight: intentions can never be perfectly ascertained, even in settings as mundane as visiting the neighborhood grocery store, but what is ostensibly different about the international sphere is the "911 problem"⁸—the lack of the aforementioned safeguarding authority—and its associated fears. Such fears make states less likely to cooperate and more likely to conflict with one another, or so the story goes.⁹ This view of international political structures has become increasingly contested in the last decade,¹⁰ particularly by focusing on the provision of public goods by hegemonic actors.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Mearsheimer 2001a, 30.

4. Gilpin 1981, 7.

5. Oye 1985.

6. Wendt 1992.

7. Waltz 1979, 102. See Wendt 1999, especially chap. 6, for why anarchy may not necessarily be related to conflict.

8. Mearsheimer 2001a, 32.

9. Herz 1950; and Jervis 1978 are the canonical pieces on the security dilemma.

10. See Buzan and Little 2000; Donnelly 2009; Hobson and Sharman 2005; Lake 2007 and 2009; Milner 1991; Weber 2000; and Wendt and Friedheim 1995.

If It Quacks Like a State: The Replication of Domestic Dynamics in International Politics

A fruitful starting point for the challenge to anarchy is the double-dichotomy¹¹ frequently deployed by anarchophiles. The conventional wisdom holds that international systems are decentralized and anarchic, while domestic systems are centralized and hierarchic.¹² The former are marked by formal equality among units; the latter by ranked orders, with super- and subordinate units responsible for different functions. This functional differentiation drives the conceptual engine of hierarchic orders, and its absence in international politics is held responsible for anarchy.

But is there really a lack of functional differentiation in international politics? The hegemonic stability school, without self-consciously being aware of it, launched an important critique of the anarchy assumption by focusing on the wide disparity in capabilities that sometimes marks the international system.¹³ Hegemonic stability theory, drawn primarily from the conduct of the United States in the “first world” during the Cold War, rests on the assertion that overwhelmingly powerful states provide public goods for minor states to ensure a better-running system. In return for public goods, such as a robust trading and financial system, the hegemon receives minor powers’ acquiescence on its core interests.¹⁴ As Gilpin notes, “the rule of the dominant power is frequently accepted because it provides certain public goods, such as a beneficial economic order or international security.”¹⁵

This view of international politics mirrors political-economic theories of the state, which place great importance on the state’s role as a provider of public goods.¹⁶ These conceptions of the state rest upon a grand bargain: citizens pay taxes and obey the law in return for security and trading rights from the state, the exact claim hegemonic stability theorists forward about the international realm. So already we see the imposing edifice of the anarchy assumption collapsing under its own weight. When IR theorists observe overly strict distinctions between the international and domestic spheres, any replication of domestic dynamics in the former bring into question the core assumption from which their analyses depart. Waltz’s plea that we not confuse wide divergences in capabilities with ranked orders makes little sense if we consider that such differences in capabilities often

11. The term is from Donnelly 2009.

12. Waltz 1979, 88. Milner 1991 cogently problematizes the neat division in ordering principles between international and domestic politics.

13. See Kindleberger 1973; Gilpin 1981; Keohane 1984; and Ikenberry 2001. Ikenberry would perhaps chafe under the label of hegemonic stability theorist, but his logic of strategic restraint managed through institutions in return for acquiescence is quite similar to the transactional underpinnings of hegemonic stability theory.

14. Buzan and Albert 2010 would call this “stratificatory differentiation” as much as functional differentiation.

15. Gilpin 1981, 34.

16. See Milgrom, North, and Weingast 1990; and Olson 1993.

drive the functional differentiation in domestic politics that is central to his project.¹⁷

Others problematize anarchy not by focusing on system-wide effects but on dyadic relations, employing a “social”¹⁸ or “relational”¹⁹ approach. Certain dyads are marked by a “bargain”²⁰ or a “division of labor”²¹ such that a superordinate state provides something a minor power needs but cannot produce on its own—usually security—in return for influence or control over some of the subordinate’s actions or policies. In other words, sovereignty is traded for security.²²

The focus for these scholars is not on differences in capabilities among states, which they take for granted, but the social conventions underpinning relations between them.²³ The key notion is authority. Legitimacy is crucial for hierarchy. It allows preponderant powers to command, and minor powers to obey, within a set of commonly understood social conventions that form the bases of the subsystem. Though hierarchic settings are based upon material capabilities, they are not ultimately reducible to them. Various forms of consent and legitimacy are necessary for, and analytically distinct causes of, a social order in which certain states assume managerial positions.²⁴

Before I proceed, it would be useful to lay out the broad areas of agreement among scholars of hierarchy, none of which should be controversial to IR theorists. First, at certain times and places,²⁵ systems of relations between states are marked by great inequality in capabilities. Second, divergences in capabilities lead to the possibility of an informal ranked order within certain subsystems, with preponderant powers providing certain public goods for the price of minor powers’ acquiescence. That is, functional differentiation holds. Third, for such an order to develop, and to be conceptually distinguished from coercion, a reservoir of legitimacy or authority must exist, whereby there are stable expectations from both sets of parties on the roles they occupy in the order.

This set of propositions presents a challenge to the standard anarchy assumption. When hierarchy operates between dyads or among groups of states, it relegates the status of anarchy to an outcome to be explained, rather than a truism to be assumed. Admittedly, for hierarchy to obtain, certain conditions of power, practice, and positioning have to be met. The theoretical and empirical literature on hierarchy has shown, however, that the same can be said for anarchy. Systems of relations among states show variation, across space and time, in the extent to which

17. Donnelly 2006.

18. Wendt and Friedheim 1995, 690.

19. Lake 2007, 54–56.

20. *Ibid.*, 54.

21. See Wendt and Friedheim 1995, 698; and Lake 2009.

22. On the willingness of leaders to cede their state’s sovereignty, see Krasner 1999.

23. See Clark 2009; Hall 1997; and Hobson and Sharman 2005.

24. Clark 2009 has a particularly well-written account of this point.

25. On geographical variation as it relates to anarchy and hierarchy, see Buzan and Little 2000; Hobson and Sharman 2005; Kang 2003/04; and Wendt and Friedheim 1995.

they adhere to the anarchy assumption. At a conceptual level, this existence proof of hierarchy is a crucial development because it forces IR to grapple with anarchy seriously, rather than the casual manner with which it is generally treated.

Justice as a Public Good, and a Means to Peace

When discussing the provision of public goods, extant theories of hierarchy focus either on political economic public goods such as an open or free trading system, or security. Lake theorizes the provision of both security and freer economic relations in a hierarchic setting.²⁶ Lake describes how the United States, especially but not exclusively in the Western Hemisphere, promotes peace using both economic and military tools. On the economic front, states under US hierarchy practice more open trade and generally adopt more liberal economic policies because US hierarchy aids subordinate states in “minimizing insecurities about economic exchange” and “inducing compliance” with liberal policies.²⁷ In turn, open economic relations between subordinate states make them less likely to fight.²⁸ The United States is also more likely to militarily intervene in a conflict that involves a subordinate state, thus acting as a security guarantor.²⁹

Such a guarantee is akin to a state protecting its domestic citizens against foreign aggressors, since the actor that purportedly threatens the status-quo lies outside the bounds of the relationship between super- and subordinate actors. Imagine, for instance, the United States guaranteeing West German security against the Soviet Union. But what about security among actors within the circle of relationships? How does a state contain violence between fellow citizens? The equivalent question in international politics would be: when concerned with peace among the states under hierarchy, how does the hegemon maintain peace?

Lake would answer by pointing to more open economic relations between the states in question. Joffe, author of the well-known “pacifier” argument, would posit that by guaranteeing subordinate states’ security, a hegemon such as the United States ensures that subordinate states do not have to arm themselves, and in so doing, tempers the effects of the security dilemma.³⁰

I identify a distinct mechanism here: an adjudicating court, which operates once a crisis has already broken out. Unlike the Lake and Joffe models, where the primary mechanism for peace is a subordinate actor reaching out to a superordinate

26. Lake 2009.

27. *Ibid.*, 161.

28. On increasing trade affecting conflict, see Hegre, Oneal, and Russett 2010.

29. Lake 2009, 104–12.

30. Joffe 1984. As he put it, “by sparing the West Europeans the necessity of autonomous choice in matters of defense, the United States removed the systemic cause of conflict that had underlain so many of Europe’s past wars” (Joffe 1984, 68). See also Mearsheimer 2001b.

for protection, I argue for adjudication by the superordinate actor lowering the temperature of a potential conflict between two or more subordinate actors.³¹

The Containment of Conflict Under Hierarchy

The key feature distinguishing a hierarchic system from an anarchic one is that there exists a solution to Mearsheimer's "911 problem": insecure or aggrieved parties have somewhere to turn. Consider an unexpected punch I deliver to a coworker. In anarchy, the coworker will probably escalate the conflict by punching me back, or even striking me with a baseball bat. In hierarchy, however, he can report me to our supervisor, or worse, the police, which would contain our conflict. The hierarchic structure under which we operate has mitigated the possibility of escalation, nipping the conflict in the bud.

This understanding of a state's role in domestic politics—that it beneficially restricts the unbridled freedom of citizens to harm one another—enjoys prominence for several classical political theorists.³² Rousseau, for instance, noted that "what a man loses as a result of the Social Contract is his natural liberty and his unqualified right to lay hands on all that tempts him, provided only that he can compass its possession. What he gains is civil liberty and the ownership of what belongs to him."³³ On the functional purpose of punishing criminals, Nietzsche writes:

Compromise with the fury of the man immediately affected by the misdeed; *an effort to localize the case and to obviate further or even general participation and unrest*; attempts to find equivalents and to settle the whole business; above all, the increasingly definite emergence of the will to accept every crime as in some sense capable of being paid off, and so, at least to a certain extent, to isolate the criminal from the deed—these are the characteristics which become more and more clearly stamped on the later development of the penal code.³⁴

It is Locke, though, who provides the clearest synopsis of the argument I seek to transfer to the international sphere. He writes that

in the state of nature every one has the executive power of the law of nature, I doubt not but it will be objected, that it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends: and on the other side, *ill-nature, passion and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others; and hence nothing but confusion and disor-*

31. The formal and deep security cooperation in Western Europe in the aftermath of war was absent in the Americas; the apparatus of transnational military ties and organizations never developed. See Dominguez 1980; and Hayes 1980.

32. The most well-known exposition of this point is Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1934).

33. Rousseau 1960, 185.

34. Nietzsche 2008, 53 (emphasis added).

*der will follow; and that therefore God hath certainly appointed governments to restrain the partiality and violence of men.*³⁵

Locke's argument is that one of government's central roles is to contain conflict among citizens by resolving their disputes for them, or at least providing a venue for attempting to do so. If government did not fulfill this role, it would be left to the participants themselves in a Hobbesian state of nature, which would almost always result in more violence.³⁶

When this idea is transported to the international realm, one no longer has to think that states have nowhere to turn in a crisis. Subservient powers can turn to the hegemonic state when confronted with a security threat, and the latter can mediate conflicts between states under its umbrella, thus serving as a break to war. In anarchy, escalation is slippery—disputes can easily develop into outright wars. In hierarchy, escalation is more challenging.

For hierarchy to obtain in both domestic and international settings, we need severe power differentials as well as certain modes of interaction. Interaction and practice are crucial in determining the structure of the system. Theorists in the Waltzian tradition would claim that structural change is produced only by changes in system-wide phenomena such as material capabilities. This position ignores that interaction capacity itself is a “distinct source of shoving and shaping forces playing on the units alongside those from the structural level.”³⁷ Stated differently, how actors interact is itself a system-wide concept, and thus influences structure. This is especially true when it comes to subsystems, or geographically or culturally distinct areas of the globe, where transformations in structure can be more likely because of powerful actors' actions.³⁸

Two conditions must be met for a hegemonic state to be hierarchic and aid the cause of peace among states under its umbrella. First, the hegemonic power must be engaged meaningfully with the region as a superior power. Second, the hegemonic power must be impartial and disinterested in its dealings with lesser powers on the issue at hand, and perceived as such. These conditions are required for the domestic dispensation of justice to reliably measure up to its international counterpart, which is what we are truly interested in.

There are three components to the condition of being meaningfully engaged as a superior power. To be “engaged” means the hegemonic state takes a substantive interest in the dispute, and that there is therefore a greater likelihood of viable solutions to crises offered from above. An engagement is “meaningful” if the hegemonic state is prepared to be firm and risk unpopularity in a crisis. Firmness

35. Locke 1960, 9 (emphasis added).

36. Criminals themselves are often aware of this dynamic. In January 2011, a group of burglars was trapped inside an apartment they were robbing in New Delhi. Outside, a crowd of 250 awaited the robbers, baying for revenge. To preclude their getting lynched, the robbers called the police. “Caught in Act, Thieves Call the Cops,” *Times of India*, 9 February 2011, 1.

37. Buzan, Jones, and Little 1993, 72, 66–80.

38. *Ibid.*, 155–68.

ensures that spoilers' arguments against proposed solutions to disputes are more likely to be rejected. Finally, it is important that there is little confusion regarding the hegemonic state's standing with the disputants. If it is the "superior power" in crisis mediation, and other states do not interfere without the blessing of the hegemonic state, then there is a decreased likelihood of disputants playing off various actors and their proposals against each other.

The second condition for hierarchy to work is that the hegemonic power must be disinterested and be perceived as such. Perceptions of impartiality do not imply popularity. They connote only that the two disputants believe that the hegemonic power behaves in an even-handed way with each of them on the contested issue. If a hegemonic power is perceived as partial, its solutions to crises will be less likely to be accepted by the disputants and, in turn, at least one of the disputants is more likely to take matters into its own hands and escalate. If a hegemonic power either came to the material aid of, or conversely acted against the interests of, a particular disputant, then its adjudicatory role will either be uncalled for or unsuccessful.³⁹

Importantly, hierarchy holding does not imply its endless life. It can be disturbed and replaced, just as anarchy can. Generally, hierarchy breaks down from three sources. First, the hierarchic power itself can retrench and withdraw from a particular region. This can happen due to rising costs associated with maintaining hierarchy.⁴⁰ These include both incurred costs as well as opportunity costs; dollars spent in practicing hierarchy in one region necessarily means that other areas, including the homeland, are neglected.

Second, one or more subordinate states can launch challenges against the superordinate state if the benefits accruing to them from the order the hegemon provides are not worth the loss of sovereignty. Larger forces can also change the equation: transnational phenomena such as nationalism or socialism can change the extent of the perceived benefits local elites in charge of subordinate states enjoy from externally imposed orders, and push them to evict their erstwhile principals.⁴¹ And third, a rising, external power can threaten the existing structure of relations in a region as part of its growing appetite for territorial control, and seek to become the new regional hegemon.⁴²

These possibilities—retrenchment, revolt, and replacement—can spell doom for a hierarchic order. Though analytically distinct, these processes often operate syn-

39. This is why adjudication by the United States did not work as well in Central America as it did in South America. The United States militarily intervened directly in Central American states significantly more often than in South American states. This disjuncture was mainly a consequence of geography (see Kelly and Child 1988, 2; and Kelly 1997, 152). The lower level of interference in South America meant that the United States was more often perceived as a disinterested arbiter there than in Central America, where it was often itself a disputant.

40. On the dynamic nature of costs and benefits of hierarchy, see Lake 2009, 132–37. On the question of potential costs of hegemony, see Snyder 1991.

41. See Anderson 1983; and Hechter 2000.

42. Mearsheimer 2001a, 143–45.

chronistically, such as at the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union lost its hierarchy in Eastern Europe.

Anarchy and Hierarchy in South America

South American states have fought remarkably few wars against each other since 1884. In more than 125 years since, there have been only four interstate wars in the region.⁴³ Peru and Colombia fought the Leticia war in 1932, Paraguay and Bolivia waged the long and bloody Chaco war from 1932 to 1935, and Peru and Ecuador fought the Zarumilla and the Cenepa wars in 1941 and 1995 respectively.⁴⁴ The temporal aspect of these wars is striking. South American states fought no wars against each other for the forty-eight years between 1884 and 1932. They have fought only one war against each other in the seventy-two years since 1941.⁴⁵ Yet there were three wars in the intervening period that lasted less than a decade. What explains the relative preponderance of wars between 1932 and 1941 when the region was so peaceful both before and after this period?

The variation in structure drove the variation in war proneness. International politics in South America were generally hierarchic from the late nineteenth century onward, with the United States playing the role of regional hegemon. It was certainly powerful enough to do so: at the turn of the century, U.S. military spending was more than five times the combined total of South American states. During the twentieth century, the median ratio of U.S. material capabilities to Brazil's—considered the most powerful South American country—was 19:1. Until the mid-1970s, the ratio of U.S. material capabilities to those of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile combined did not drop below 5:1.⁴⁶

The United States combined power with hegemonic purpose. Within IR, hegemony is essentially geopolitical domination, whether globally or regionally.⁴⁷ This is precisely what the United States sought, beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In particular, the Monroe Doctrine—asserting “America for the Americans” and “Hands off, Europeans”—and its various extensions under

43. This number is itself inflated if one strictly observes the ubiquitous definition that requires 1,000 battlefield deaths for “war.”

44. Mares 2001, 33.

45. I only examine intraregional wars, and exclude those that took place between a South American state and an extra-regional state, such as the Falklands/Malvinas War between Argentina and Britain.

46. Data from the Correlates of War data set version 4.0 (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972, 19–48). Some scholars, such as Kacowicz 1998, 90–91, claim that Brazil, not the United States, was the actual regional hegemon in South America. However, Brazil's power and influence, even restricted to the region, was significantly less than that of the United States for much of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Brazil often acted in consort with the United States, rather than as a separate actor. Finally, as a participant in a number of potential conflicts, Brazil often aroused suspicion amongst the Spanish-speaking countries of South America and was not far enough removed from potential conflicts to play the hierarchic role the United States did (Kelly 1997, 165, 178, 198–201).

47. Mearsheimer 2001a.

Presidents Ulysses Grant, Grover Cleveland, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson, was used to carve out the region as an American sphere of influence. It is true that Central America, rather than South America, bore more of the brunt of US direct interventionism. But the United States signaled its intent of hegemony in South America with its strong-armed approach during a boundary dispute between Venezuela and Britain in the late 1890s; its watchful role in the blockade of Venezuela by Germany, Britain, and Italy in 1902–3; and its intimidation of British oil companies in Colombia early in the Wilson era.⁴⁸ The building of the Panama Canal also led to greater economic and commercial ties with South American countries, especially those on the west coast.⁴⁹ To put it simply, because it was by far the leading power in a region that it deemed off-limits to other great powers, the United States was a regional hegemon.

South American states would defer to this hegemonic power on a variety of interstate issues, not least intraregional conflicts. Such conflicts, in an anarchic world, could be reasonably expected to escalate to outright war. Under hierarchy, however, the hegemon's involvement as a mediator served as a break from militarized conflict to outright war.

But in the war-prone decade of the 1930s, South America resembled a traditional anarchic structure rather than a hierarchic one. This shift took place not because the United States became less powerful, but because hierarchy rests on both capabilities and practice. To use the schema here, the war-prone decade saw a period of retrenchment from the United States.⁵⁰ Three factors played a key role: the Great Depression, the onset of World War II, and the Good Neighbor policy.

The Depression and the 1930s saw an isolationist spirit pervasive in the upper echelons of the US government as well as the public, both of which displayed "limited interest in Latin America or foreign affairs more generally."⁵¹ Isolationism made it more likely that the United States would either refuse to be engaged as a hegemonic power in disputes that did not concern it directly, or that it would adopt a cautious disposition and be wary of upsetting diplomatic apple carts.⁵² The coming of World War II, meanwhile, meant that the United States was either distracted by the crisis in Europe or was immediately concerned with its military prospects in the Pacific Ocean, the latter causing it to shed its impartial role in at least one dispute. Finally, Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy—which had its antecedents in the late 1920s—was put in place by 1933, the salient features of which were the principles of nonintervention and noninterference in other actors' affairs.⁵³

48. Mecham 1965, 54–74.

49. Whitaker 1948, 163–64.

50. As Art notes, "isolationism's grip on the United States was especially strong in the first half of the twentieth century, and especially in the era between the two world wars" (Art 2003, 173). The 1930s were the apogee of US isolationism.

51. Berger 1993, 20.

52. Wood 1966, 379.

53. Smith 2000, 68–69.

Noninterventionism had its roots in the rising political, diplomatic, and reputational costs associated with US interventions in Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua in the 1920s. Aware of Central American states chafing under its heavy-handedness, the United States, starting around 1927, made a concerted effort to put away its “big stick” and be more respectful of other Western states. Generally, “there was a trend toward the abandonment of American imperialism in Latin America.”⁵⁴ This trend was formalized at the seventh Pan-American Conference held in Montevideo in 1933, where US Secretary of State Cordell Hull “went to great lengths to be cooperative” and “a nonintervention proposal was adopted by the body for the first time. ‘No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another.’”⁵⁵

A number of signposts marked the shift in US policy. Conflicts between the United States and Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti dampened by 1930. The United States conceded that the League of Nations had jurisdiction over disputes in the hemisphere—contrary to the implications of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine—and signed various conventions that chipped away at its politico-legal power in the hemisphere. In November 1928, President-elect Hoover said in an interview in Buenos Aires that “there are no young, independent, sovereign nations; there are no older and younger brothers on the American continent. These are all friendly and equal states . . . the fear of some persons concerning supposed intervention ideas of the United States is unfounded.”⁵⁶ In 1930 the State Department published a 200-page memo by former Under Secretary of State J. Reuben Clark. The memo noted that “the Monroe Doctrine does not apply to purely inter-American relations” and, according to a *New York Times* report, “frankly throws overboard the Roosevelt dictum that the Monroe Doctrine commands the United States to intervene in countries of the Western hemisphere to prevent chronic disorder. According to Mr. Clark, the doctrine states a case of the United States vs. Europe and not of the United States vs. Latin America.”⁵⁷

These policies, enacted during the Herbert Hoover administration, “were considerably accelerated and broadened” after 1933.⁵⁸ In his inaugural address, Franklin D. Roosevelt set the terms of his foreign policy thusly: “I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself, and, because he does so, respects the rights of others.”⁵⁹ On 28 December 1933, he claimed that “the maintenance of constitutional government in other nations is not, after all, a sacred obligation devolving upon the United States alone. *The maintenance of law and orderly processes of government in this hemisphere is the concern of each individual nation within its borders first of*

54. Mecham 1965, 110–12.

55. See Walton 1972, 100; and Barclay 1971, 48–50.

56. “Our Changing Policy Toward Latin America,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1930, 3.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Mecham 1961, 114.

59. *Ibid.*

all.”⁶⁰ Ironically, these “good neighborly” intentions, drawn from harsh lessons in Central America, resulted in anarchy in South America, and made war in South America more likely.

Mechanisms of US Power in the Region

An important question to consider at this point is the basis of US influence in the region. The United States never seriously threatened military action to enforce agreements proposed and/or reached during mediation. Even the use of more mild coercive techniques was rare. What, then, can explain the baseline of credibility of commitment afforded to U.S. mediatory pressures?⁶¹

As a broad framework, one can think of power being manifested at three different levels.⁶² The first is direct control, whereby the hegemon explicitly uses both carrots and sticks to shape and influence outcomes. Subordinate states fall in line because the net benefits of cooperation outweigh those of defection. The second is indirect control, where the hegemon structures the context of relations to incentivize cooperation. Subordinate states understand that their goals are most likely to be realized if they conform to the hegemon's institutionalized expectations. The third is subtle control, whereby the hegemon consciously and unconsciously influences the ideas, ideologies, and identities of other states. Subordinate states internalize the hegemon's standards of legitimacy, and take these standards as norms within which action should be limited.⁶³

United States policy in South America, at least before the Cold War, broadly fell in the latter two categories. It structured interstate politics such that two inter-related norms were privileged: interstate peace—that is, the avoidance of war—and Pan-Americanism. The United States guaranteed its words and actions a baseline of credibility by imposing a structure of relations within which all actors shared assumptions of context and interaction, precluding the need for threats.

Since their independence, South American states prided themselves on being unique and, particularly, dissimilar to European states, where brute force was a more regular instrument of policy. This “diplomatic culture” embedded within the rhetoric, if not practices, of South American states emphasized coexistence, recourse to arbitration, and other juridical mechanisms during crises.⁶⁴ Of course, as most states are wont to do, South American states behaved belligerently when core inter-

60. Mecham 1961, 116 (emphasis added).

61. Coercion is the conceptual antonym to legitimate authority. Legitimacy rests on actors following instructions without being threatened. See Simmons 2002, 17; and Wendt and Friedheim 1995, 701.

62. See James and Lake 1989, 3–9; and Mares 2001, 58.

63. This tripartite breakdown mirrors Wendt's conception of the three different degrees to which norms can be internalized (Wendt 1999, 250).

64. Kacowicz 1998, 102–5.

ests were threatened, particularly during the first sixty years after independence.⁶⁵ The point is that, despite its frequent violation in the nineteenth century, the norm of peaceful conflict resolution was a constitutive feature of South American states' identities.⁶⁶

The norm of peaceful resolution of interstate disputes dovetailed with the US desire to impose a Pan-American order on the continent.⁶⁷ Pan-Americanism became a feature of regional politics toward the end of the nineteenth century, with three distinguishing characteristics. First, US leadership on international issues was unquestioned, though not always popular. Second, efforts were made to institutionalize and formalize norms of peaceful dispute resolution with various bilateral and multilateral treaties. Third, an "American" identity was solidified—drawing starker contrasts between American states in the Western Hemisphere, and those in Europe or the "Third World." Pan-Americanism, then, placed the United States atop a norm-based American order that privileged intraregional peace, unity, and cooperation in the face of extra-regional threats. Its importance can be gleaned from US Secretary of State Frank Kellogg, who stated in 1928 that "it is an established principle of our international policy that among the foreign relations of the United States as they fall into categories, the Pan-American policy takes first place in our diplomacy."⁶⁸

This regional order guaranteed a baseline of credibility to US policy. As Watson notes, "the principal effect of hegemonic influence is to induce other states and communities in the system to conform more closely to the purposes and practices of the hegemonic power, or . . . to accept the compromises worked out by" it.⁶⁹ Looming in the background of interaction among South American states was the norm of interstate peace, and the expectation that states which violated Pan-Americanism as constituted by the United States would earn the hegemon's ire.

Literature on South American Security

It bears noting that the variation I explain with changes in regional structure—peace for half a century, three wars in a decade, and then peace for another half-century—is often missed by studies of South American security. For instance, McIntyre seeks to explain what he calls "the longest peace" in South America with one primary variable: geography.⁷⁰ McIntyre distinguishes between wars and "lim-

65. Brazil's conduct between 1850 and 1910 is a vivid illustration of the frequent mismatch between rhetoric and reality (Parodi 2002, 8–16).

66. Kacowicz 1998, 102–5. See also Holsti 1996, 166–67; and Centeno 2002, 76.

67. The discussion on Pan-Americanism is drawn from Martín 2006, 84–87; Mecham 1961, 28–111; Smith 2000, 29–32; and Wood 1966, 5–15.

68. Quoted in Matthews 1961, 14.

69. Watson 2007, 104.

70. McIntyre 1995.

ited aims attacks,” and codes conflicts that result in fewer than 1,000 battlefield deaths as nonwars. Given that neither the Leticia nor Zarumilla wars reached this wholly arbitrary figure,⁷¹ McIntyre misses an interesting and hitherto unexplained trend in warfare on the continent.

Martín too misses this trend when he makes the object of his investigation the absence of a “major war” in South America since 1935.⁷² Martín argues that militaries in the region came to identify with each other, and came to see their domestic populations as the enemy, through a transnationalization of identity in the early twentieth century. His argument thus addresses the “external peace and internal violence” paradox in the region. Though it is innovative and valuable, Martín’s argument is blinkered by his puzzle, which by virtue of starting the clock only after the Chaco War fails to account for the variation over time in war-proneness in South America.

Kacowicz codes the Zarumilla conflict as a war but not the Leticia dispute—even though Leticia saw higher casualties.⁷³ He, like McIntyre and Martín, misses the cross-time variation in South America’s record of peace. For Kacowicz, it is not the extent of peace that has changed in South America over time but the nature of it. Kacowicz uses the phrase “negative peace” to describe the state of affairs from 1884 to the 1980s and “stable peace” for the period since then. Though I do not take issue with the qualitative distinction in relations among South American states, Kacowicz’s study suffers from its use of a multitude of variables, some of which are contradictory or symptoms rather than causes of peace. For instance, Kacowicz cites both interdependence and its lack as causal factors in South America’s peace. Additionally, his assertion that a satisfaction with the territorial status quo was a cause of peace veers close to a tautology.⁷⁴

Other arguments could potentially explain aspects of the empirical puzzle addressed in this article. For instance, one could claim that South America has exhibited a classic balance-of-power configuration, particularly with Argentina’s rise in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁷⁵ This configuration—with Peru and Argentina on one side, Brazil and Chile on the other, and the smaller states vacillating between the two camps—could conceivably have led to the long period of peace in South America.⁷⁶ The problem with this explanation is that the relationship between the balance of power and levels of interstate war are often poorly understood. IR and Security Studies, as fields of inquiry, have no consensus on whether a balance or a preponderance of power leads to peace. This is especially true in a multi-actor world, such as South America, and varying levels of dissatis-

71. The Leticia war saw 868 battlefield deaths, while the Zarumilla war saw more than 500. See Mares 2001, 34.

72. Martín 2006.

73. Kacowicz 1998.

74. *Ibid.*, 67–124.

75. Burr 1965, especially 107–14, 142–43, 204–11.

76. Kelly 1997, 36–40.

faction among the actors with the status quo.⁷⁷ Moreover, the balance-of-power argument cannot account for the war-prone decade, because while the balance did not change appreciably in the 1930s, levels of warfare did.

A domestic politics argument would consider the coups that took place in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru in the early 1930s. One could argue that military governments are more nationalistic and aggressive in their foreign policy, and that the transition in regime types led to the war-prone decade. However, South America is no stranger to military coups and nationalistic governments. In Argentina, for example, every elected government from 1930 to the early 1980s lost power in a coup.⁷⁸ More generally, “excluding Guyana up until 1999 and Surinam from 1990 to 1991, at no other time during the duration of the long peace have all South American states been democracies. On the contrary, for large blocks of time since 1935, the majority of South American nation-states have been dictatorships.”⁷⁹ Though one could plausibly claim that the relatively liberal nature of these states accounted for the peace before the 1930s, the long-term trend investigated here cannot be explained by regime-type arguments, for two reasons. First, periods of relative liberalism as well as relative militarism both witnessed peace. Second, coups and relative militarism correlated with both the war-prone decade as well as the later peace.

War and Peace in South America

Quantitative Data on Militarized Disputes in South America

By standard definitions of war in IR, there has been only one intraregional war in South America during the last 120 years. This record is highly impressive and places South America behind only North America in terms of peaceful regions.⁸⁰ Yet relations among South American states have been far from cordial. The nomenclature employed by scholars of interstate relations in South America suggests so; phrases such as “violent peace”⁸¹ or “negative peace”⁸² are used to describe intraregional politics. As the data show, South American states frequently threaten or employ low levels of force, and yet largely refrain from going to war.

To substantiate these claims, I used the dyadic Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) data set.⁸³ The MID data set records wars as well as those disputes that fell short of wars, and codes each of these conflicts by the highest level of hos-

77. See Wagner 1994; and Powell 1996.

78. Levitsky 2005, 66.

79. Martín 2006, 119.

80. For reasons of space, I do not present the cross-regional war data here. See Centeno 2002, 37–44.

81. Mares 2001.

82. Kacowicz 1998.

83. Maoz 2005.

tility reached. To make a regional comparison, I employ two controls—one for the number of states in a region and the other for the length of time those states were independent. Interstate disputes in the MID data set get coded as such only if the conflicting entities are recognized, independent states. Regions with either new states or few states would, *ceteris paribus*, see less warfare. I combined my two controls into one statistical measure: *dyad-years*, in the time period 1885 to 2000.

I then collated the number of years in which a dyad within a particular region engaged in an MID between 1885 and 2000, and then summed across all possible dyads in the region to get the region's MID-years value. Finding the proportion of MID-years to dyad-years can provide a fairly accurate, if blunt, representation of the level of hostility in interstate relations within and across regions.

Table 1 lists the MID score ($MID\text{-years} * 1000/dyad\text{-years}$) for five regions. The list is not meant to be exhaustive but is presented to illustrate that South American is no special case when it comes to intraregional relations. Table 1 shows that South American states are not shy about engaging in hostile or militaristic actions. The region's hostility levels may well be about half of those of South Asia and significantly lower than those in the Middle East, but they are considerably higher than those of either sub-Saharan Africa or Western Europe.⁸⁴

TABLE 1. Comparing levels of intraregional hostility across regions, 1885–2000

Region	Dyad-years	MID-years	MID score
South Asia	1,096	59	53.832
Middle East	8,360	389	46.531
South America	5,856	158	26.981
Western Europe	16,697	274	16.410
Sub-Saharan Africa	36,201	245	6.768

So we are left with a paradox. South American states have moderately high levels of militarized disputes, but abnormally low levels of war. There exists, then, a phenomenon in South America that functions as a break between conflictual relations and the outbreak of war. Crucially, this phenomenon was absent in the 1930s, because the region was highly war prone then. To understand this phenomenon, I process trace five crises, three of which erupted in war, and two, outside the war-prone decade that did not.

84. Despite two world wars taking place in Western Europe during this period.

The Leticia War

The short war between Peru and Colombia over the upper Amazon region of Leticia arose from Peruvian dissatisfaction with the Salomón-Lozano treaty, which ceded territory to Colombia. Peru wanted to repudiate the agreement and when it failed, endeavored to break out of it by conquering the region and presenting a *fait accompli*.⁸⁵ Colombia did not respond immediately—it, in fact, waited for months—and it was in this intervening period that the United States and other mediators attempted to bring about a peaceful solution to the dispute. They did not succeed.

On the night of 31 August 1932, a private group of armed Peruvians forcibly took over the Leticia village.⁸⁶ The Peruvian government pleaded ignorance and claimed that the attack took it by surprise.⁸⁷ Though no Peruvian soldier took active part in the raid, forces stationed in Loreto wasted little time in supporting the occupation. The Peruvian government, faced with nationalist pressures domestically, refused to condemn or even disavow the attack, instead holding out for the possibility that Colombia would renegotiate the Salomón-Lozano treaty.⁸⁸ Although the United States opposed the occupation, its reaction was tepid. US Ambassador Fred Dearing said to Peruvian Foreign Minister Carlos Zavala Loaiza, “I would be happy to know precisely how Peru felt about the situation . . . but . . . I did not wish to appear unduly curious about Peru’s internal affairs and merely desired to promote peaceful solutions and good relations.”⁸⁹

Colombian President Enrique Alfredo Olaya Herrera made it clear that Colombia could not be the one to unilaterally concede in the dispute because it was the aggrieved state and Peru the belligerent, and he urged the United States to act to preserve peace. “Anything else,” he said, “means that every Latin American country must stay armed to the teeth in order to guard its legitimate rights.”⁹⁰ Here, then, was a plea by Colombia to the United States to act as the region’s policeman and assert its dominance to avoid war.

These pleas went unmet. The United States acted too cautiously in emphasizing the justness of Colombia’s position and did not strongly assert itself during the mediation process. At bottom, the United States was reluctant to go beyond polite requests to Peru for fear of unpopularity. “We are not the sole guardian of peace in South America,” US Assistant Secretary of State Francis White told the Pan American Union, “and there is no reason why we should always jump in and assume

85. Wood 1966, 169.

86. League of Nations 1933, 18.

87. Wood 1966, 175. The president was at least aware of the attack and probably countenanced it.

88. St. John 1992, 173–74. The irony of Peru and Colombia declaring in the treaty, signed less than a decade before the Leticia episode, that “all disputes which have arisen in the past with reference to the boundaries between Colombia and Peru are hereby finally and irrevocably settled” will not be lost on the reader. See League of Nations 1933, 2.

89. Wood 1966, 176.

90. *Ibid.*, 177–78.

such a role. Such action on our part might well be resented in other parts of South America.”⁹¹ United States Secretary of State Henry Stimson echoed this view, in a telegram to the US ambassador in Peru: “We have no responsibility to act as sole guardian of the peace of Latin America nor do we desire to assume such responsibility.”⁹² A memo by White, relaying a conversation he had with the Brazilian ambassador, further backed the noninterventionist position: “I told him that I thought it better for the interests of the American nations that one country should not always be carrying the burden and taking the initiative.”⁹³ Later, White touched on similar themes in his conversation with the Ecuadorian foreign minister: “We had not wanted to seem to play the preponderant role and have it appear that no settlements in these disputes could be made except in Washington.”⁹⁴ The United States was evidently very keen to maintain a distance between it and South America, and play up its noninterventionist credentials.

This was despite various actors urging the United States to play a more preponderant role. Ecuador and the Pan American Union said that only the United States could prevent “a bad situation” and take “steps to bring the two countries together.”⁹⁵ The Colombian president went further, saying that the United States “could settle the Leticia controversy, if it so desired, in forty-eight hours.”⁹⁶

While the United States refused calls for more forthright diplomacy, the outbreak of war got closer. A month after the initial raid, Peru and Colombia made preparations for war. Peru sent an envoy to Japan to purchase arms, and both states floated loans for war supplies. Colombia dispatched a military expedition to forcibly remove the Peruvian presence in Leticia and reoccupy it.⁹⁷ The United States continued to make cautious suggestions and forwarded the view that some other state, perhaps Argentina or Brazil, or international organizations, such as the League of Nations, should play the lead mediating role. Chilean and Brazilian efforts to mediate, however, were unsuccessful. A final set of diplomatic efforts by Brazil were in vain, as Colombia forcibly eviscerated the Peruvian presence from Leticia through a short campaign of aerial and naval bombardment.⁹⁸

It is unclear if a stronger position adopted by the United States could have ended the dispute in forty-eight hours, as the Colombia president noted, but it certainly could have placed greater pressure on Peru.⁹⁹ Throughout the dispute, the United States never publicly reprimanded Peru nor held it responsible for the confrontation. It never openly called on Peru's leadership to disavow the raid on Colombia's territory and never exerted substantive diplomatic pressure on Peru. By issuing

91. *Ibid.*, 186.

92. United States Department of State 1932b.

93. United States Department of State 1932c.

94. United States Department of State 1932d.

95. Wood 1966, 190, 191.

96. *Ibid.*, 193.

97. *Ibid.*, 185–88.

98. See *ibid.*, 194–96; and St. John 1992, 175.

99. St. John 1992, 174–75.

soft requests for reconsiderations of positions, passing the diplomatic and mediatory buck to others, and privileging resentment costs to its reputation over strong words and action, the United States appeared to be not just a disinterested actor in the dispute but an uninterested one.

With regard to the two necessary behavioral conditions for hierarchy to obtain, the United States violated the first condition. It refused to be firm when forthright diplomacy was called for, and at various times passed the diplomatic buck to other states in South America. In other words, its engagement was not “meaningful” and it was not unequivocally the “superior power” during the mediation process. The path to war, then, was facilitated by the breakdown of hierarchy and the Colombian lapse into self-help.

The Chaco War

The Chaco War was the bloodiest of all the South American wars in the twentieth century. Bolivia and Paraguay fought from 1932 to 1935 and suffered more than 100,000 casualties.¹⁰⁰ The roots of the conflict lay in imprecise frontier demarcations on their border. In addition, each harbored bitterness from the wars lost in the previous century—Paraguay was almost wiped off the map by Brazil and Argentina in the War of the Triple Alliance, while Bolivia lost valuable land and access to the sea in the War of the Pacific against Chile.¹⁰¹ Both were frustrated, revisionist states, landlocked and dependent on others for trade routes to the rest of the world.¹⁰² Control of the Chaco region would entail access to the Paraguay River as well as rumored natural resources.¹⁰³

As Bolivia encroached upon the disputed area, a series of small border skirmishes took place in the late 1920s. Tensions flared and the United States formed a Commission of Inquiry and Conciliation, referred to as the Neutrals Commission, to mediate between Paraguay and Bolivia.¹⁰⁴ Four other states were represented in the Neutrals Commission: Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Uruguay.¹⁰⁵ Over a period of eighteen months, the Neutrals attempted to find a solution to the conflict. They did not succeed because of a number of factors.

First, despite Brazil suggesting that the United States could bring peace to the region “more expeditiously alone,”¹⁰⁶ the United States refused to be drawn in. Almost as soon as the crisis broke out, then-Secretary of State Kellogg expressed in the clearest possible terms the U.S. lack of interest in getting deeply involved

100. Dominguez et al. 2004, 20.

101. Child 1985, 107.

102. Kacowicz 1998, 76.

103. The utility of access to an ocean through control of the Chaco region was questionable for Bolivia. See de Ronde 1935, 19.

104. Farcau 1996, 14.

105. Wood 1966, 19–23.

106. United States Department of State 1931.

in the Chaco conflict, writing that while the United States “is of course always willing to lend its good offices in the cause of international harmony, it does not wish at the present time . . . to be placed in the position of undertaking to settle the boundary dispute between Bolivia and Paraguay, either by arbitration or other procedure.”¹⁰⁷

One of the central factors driving Paraguay and Bolivia to war were their differing estimates of what war would entail. Bolivia believed that its geography and military precluded significant damage to it, while Paraguay was “anxious” and expressed “the dread of the people of a war.”¹⁰⁸ These estimates meant that Bolivia was more willing to fight than Paraguay was,¹⁰⁹ and consequently that Paraguay was less trustworthy of any efforts by the Neutrals that did not strictly restrict Bolivian actions. Throughout the period of negotiations, Paraguay’s condition for accepting any proposed solutions was a “sufficient and effective international guarantee.”¹¹⁰

Paraguay favored a proposal where both Bolivian and Paraguayan troops would be withdrawn before arbitration of the dispute. The United States chose not to provide the guarantee primarily because of its reluctance to be South America’s “policeman.”¹¹¹ Instead, it delegated to various powers in Latin America as well as to the League of Nations. As a report in the *New York Times* put it, “it would have been possible for the United States to warn the League [of Nations] to keep its hands off this dispute, but it is significant that it did not do so. It is also significant that the United States refused to accept the proposal that it alone mediate in the Chaco dispute.”¹¹² This refusal meant that Paraguay was more likely to take matters into its own hands, rather than trust a negotiated settlement with Bolivia, for whom, Paraguay alleged, pacts were “chiffons de papier.”¹¹³

Second, the Neutrals’ efforts were complicated by Argentine and Chilean interference.¹¹⁴ Both were hungry for the credit that would accrue to any state that would find a peaceful solution. This was especially true of the Argentine Foreign Minister Saavedra Lamas, who wished to exercise his diplomatic skill in the dispute to earn the Nobel Peace Prize, a longtime ambition.¹¹⁵ Argentina’s interference was seen as particularly problematic because Argentina and Paraguay

107. United States Department of State 1928a.

108. Wood 1966, 24–25.

109. Zook 1960, 55–58.

110. Wood 1966, 26.

111. Indeed, because both protagonists were weak, landlocked states, their ability to withstand even a limited arms embargo was minimal. See Farcau 1996, 94.

112. “Our Policy in Latin America as Nicaragua Events Show It,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1931, 114.

113. Wood 1966, 26–27. For a formal outline of the mechanism by which a weaker actor is more trigger happy, see Fearon 1994.

114. Argentina, especially, played an increasingly assertive role. See Garner 1966, chap. 5.

115. Wood 1966, 31.

were allies, resulting in Bolivia becoming suspicious of any settlement that had Argentina's fingerprints on it—and even some that did not.¹¹⁶

Interference from other powers in South America had important effects. The United States became more circumspect in its dealings with Paraguay and Bolivia.¹¹⁷ During the conflict's nascent stage in the late 1920s, Secretary of State Kellogg wrote to an American official in Bolivia of his reluctance to interfere. Argentina, he wrote, had been mediating the dispute “for many months and any suggestions from the Government of the United States might be misunderstood.”¹¹⁸ In a later telegram, Kellogg reiterated the US stance: the United States did not “intend to take any independent action. [We] certainly would not take any action which would conflict in any way with the commendable efforts” of Argentina.¹¹⁹

Other powers' interference also allowed the disputants to play off various coalitions against the other. There was a lack of communication between the Neutrals and the Neighbors—the coalition headed by Argentina and Chile—and consequently a lack of cooperation.¹²⁰ A *Washington Post* article in 1933 summed up the chaotic mediation process: “From Buenos Aires to Washington, to Mendoza, to Geneva, the seat of conciliation of the Gran Chaco boundary war has moved in the last five years, and Rio de Janeiro is the next stop.”¹²¹ Secretary of State Stimson could not hide his displeasure when he said “the only way for the negotiations to succeed is to have them centered in one place only and if suggestions [from other states] would be sent to the Neutrals before being discussed with Bolivia and Paraguay it would greatly help the task of the Neutrals and prevent any crossing of wires.”¹²² The overabundance of cooks in the arbitration kitchen meant that Bolivia and Paraguay could reject a suggestion by one side if it favored a proposal by another, reducing the likelihood of a peaceful solution acceptable to both parties. As Assistant Secretary of State White wrote, “independent negotiations at two or three different focal points can only complicate matters as we have already seen.”¹²³

To employ the schema outlined earlier, the United States failed to fulfill the first necessary condition for hierarchy to obtain. It was not engaged in South America as the superior power, as the lesser powers' interference attests. Moreover, its trepidation vis-à-vis causing resentment meant that it was less than firm in its dealings with the two disputants. The resulting anarchy made it more likely that war would occur.

116. Rout 1970, 58–60.

117. Wood 1966, 36.

118. Garner 1966, 57.

119. United States Department of State 1928b.

120. Farcau 1996, 94.

121. “Another Move Made for Peace in Gran Chaco,” *Washington Post*, 20 August 1933, 7.

122. Wood 1966, 43–44.

123. United States Department of State 1932a.

The Zarumilla War

The ill-defined boundary between Peru and Ecuador had been a bone of contention since independence. Ecuador made claims to the territory that was the source of war between Peru and Gran Colombia in 1828–29, before the latter's dissolution.¹²⁴ The dispute assumed greater importance at the end of the nineteenth century when colonists from both states tried to annex the territory. At stake for Ecuador was the fact that holding the Zarumilla-Marañón region would give it access to the Amazon River. Peru too attached significance to the region, primarily because of the belief that the area was resource-rich in oil and rubber.¹²⁵

Tensions rose throughout the 1930s, as a diplomatic solution to the conflict seemed increasingly unlikely. At the end of the 1930s, Peru assumed a posture of increased intransigence on the question, and found an unlikely ally in Chile, whose interference with the U.S. mediation efforts, and to a lesser extent, Argentina's and Brazil's, allowed Peru to play divide-and-conquer with the mediators.¹²⁶ Ecuador, on the other hand, was keener on intervention by the United States, with a delegation in Washington arguing "to submit the whole controversy to judicial arbitration by the President of the United States."¹²⁷

By the beginning of 1941, rumors in both countries described the movement of Peruvian troops toward Ecuadorian positions in Zarumilla and to the east of the Andes. Ecuador in turn commenced the construction of a road from Cuenca to Loja that would facilitate the quicker transport of war materials to the front. Ecuador also established military posts in the civilian-only parts of the region.¹²⁸

The path to war in 1941 was strongly affected by World War II. First, Peru's evasions of responsibility in the early 1940s met little rebuke from a distracted United States—which was focused on Europe—and allowed Peru to engage in brinksmanship that made war more likely.¹²⁹ It was simply a matter of cost-benefit analysis: "given the stakes at hand and in the context of the threat of global war, the incentives [for Peru] increased to use force in a localized and swift operation."¹³⁰

Second, Peru believed that the United States was a biased actor during the 1941 crisis. An *Associated Press* article reported that the United States had made an arrangement with Ecuador, motivated by the exigencies of the American war effort, under which the United States would support it in return for the right to establish naval and air bases on the Galápagos Islands in the Pacific. Peruvian suspicions were further aroused when the United States provided two coastal patrol vessels and military supplies to Ecuador, which Secretary of State Hull disingenu-

124. Goldstein 1992, 200.

125. De La Pedraja 2006, 72.

126. Wood 1966, 255–65.

127. Government of Ecuador 1938, 4.

128. Wood 1966, 267.

129. *Ibid.*, 265–66.

130. Herz and Nogueira 2002, 32.

ously ascribed to “the purpose of strengthening the defense of the Western Hemisphere.”¹³¹ Peru, then, was fearful that the United States would impose an inequitable solution, and consequently was more eager for a war that would almost certainly result in Peruvian victory.

Third, the United States was unwilling to pressure either disputant. This was partly a result of US distraction with events in Europe and the Far East and partly a result of greater assertiveness from Peru. At the beginning of the crisis, the United States distanced itself from playing too strong a role; Secretary of State Hull wrote that he had “felt for a long time that the Government of Brazil is the best qualified of all the American governments to undertake the task of mediation.”¹³² Furthermore, Peru discovered “that diplomatic ferocity, artificial or real, was a rewarding technique.”¹³³ President Manuel Prado was said to feel “resentment against the United States for its part in insisting upon what Peru considers an impossible course . . . he believes that some strong influence unfriendly to Peru is at work in Washington.”¹³⁴ Peru’s more forward posture met little resistance from the United States, which was reluctant to exert pressure.¹³⁵ The fallout was a short war between Peru and Ecuador in the summer of 1941, the result of which was a heavy defeat for Ecuador.

In terms of the anarchy-hierarchy framework, the United States failed to fulfill both of the necessary conditions for hierarchy to obtain. First, it did not engage as the superior power, as lesser powers interfered in the mediating process to the detriment of the final outcome, and it was not prepared to be firm in its dealings with the disputants, particularly Peru. Second, the United States was not perceived as an impartial and disinterested actor owing to its *quid pro quo* with Ecuador. The failure of hierarchy to obtain, then, made war more likely.

Controlled Comparison: Peru and Ecuador in 1910

The underlying causes for the conflict between Peru and Ecuador were the same as those I outlined for the Zarumilla war: the territorial dispute over the Zarumilla-Marañón region. After a short armed battle in 1903, Peru and Ecuador agreed to submit the matter for arbitration to the King of Spain.¹³⁶ After intense and long negotiations, the Spanish counselors prepared to announce their verdict in 1910, largely upholding Peru’s case. Before the judgment was officially handed down, however, Ecuador’s representatives, discontent with the proposed solution, published a pamphlet with information of the award contained in it and released the

131. Wood 1966, 273, 268–74.

132. United States Department of State 1941a.

133. Wood 1966, 276. As examples of this diplomatic aggression, see United States Department of State 1941b, 1941c, and 1941d.

134. Wood 1978, 85.

135. See Wood 1966, 273–76; and Herz and Nogueira 2002, 28–32.

136. Wood 1966, 72–74.

pamphlet in both Spain and Ecuador. The reaction in Ecuador included incidents of violence, and an informal consensus that the Spanish decision would not be accepted.¹³⁷

It was at this point that the United States stepped in. On 24 March 1910 US Secretary of State Philander Knox told representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru that the disputants had requested US aid in calming the damaged relations between them. The United States suggested a settlement prior to the official release of the Spanish award, and Ecuador quickly agreed to the proposal. Peru denied the American claim that they had sought help, said that a direct settlement was impossible, and declined US stewardship.¹³⁸

Tensions soon escalated. Attacks were directed against Peruvian citizens in the Ecuadorian port city of Guayaquil, as well as against the diplomatic staff in the capital Quito. The police failed to quell the violence. Large demonstrations followed, and the danger of war became apparent. Tens of thousands of military reserves were mobilized and war preparations began in both countries, including shipments of arms from allies.¹³⁹

At this time, peacefully resolving this territorial dispute was a lower priority than the simple avoidance of war. Secretary Knox urged tripartite mediation. He proposed that if Ecuador and Peru withdrew their militaries from the frontier and stalled their arms buildups, the United States, Brazil, and Argentina would attempt to impose a just settlement. While Ecuador was keen about the proposal, Peru was decidedly cool. Peru stated that although it was prepared to accept outside mediation, it could not do so on Ecuador's terms. Secretary Knox replied that the question of border settlement did not have "immediate necessity" and that the first order of business was to avoid a costly war. He urged Chile to use its heavy influence on its ally Ecuador to temper Ecuador's demands and claims. Three days later, Peru and Ecuador agreed upon the US call for withdrawals of mobilized forces from the border areas.¹⁴⁰

During the de-escalation period, the United States was not afraid to offend a particular disputant or act aggressively. It was unafraid of public suasion, as seen in Secretary Knox's instructions to Williams Fox, a US representative in Ecuador: "You will realize that publicity is very important to the moral effect."¹⁴¹ When Ecuador attached too many conditions to talks, Secretary Knox flatly rejected its proposals. In fact, the United States itself attached conditions to talks, including the withdrawal of forces from advanced positions, before it would mediate. At one point, the United States sternly told Ecuador that its eagerness to discuss the demarcation of the border before troop withdrawals was "entirely premature and

137. Zook 1964, 97–100.

138. *Ibid.*, 100.

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*, 101–2.

141. United States Department of State 1910a.

inappropriate.”¹⁴² At another point, the State Department wished to “make clear to the Government of Ecuador that its failure to show a conciliatory disposition and to take the steps recommended . . . can only be regarded as evidence of (1) disinclination to reach a peaceful and honorable solution of the boundary difficulty or (2) lack of confidence in the mediating powers.”¹⁴³ The United States also reiterated its request to Chile to use its influence with Ecuador to calm the status quo.¹⁴⁴ In other words, the United States was proactive and unafraid of dictating terms to the disputants.¹⁴⁵

The final step in de-escalation involved the mediators offering a framework within which the two disputants would mutually express regrets. Peru welcomed the offer. Ecuador initially assented, and then had a change in attitude, growing “more uncompromising and aggressive.”¹⁴⁶ Acting US Secretary of State Huntington Wilson pushed for greater pressure on Ecuador to support the mutual expression of regrets, and Ecuador gave in by the end of August 1910.¹⁴⁷

The events of 1910 highlight the importance of hierarchy. The United States urged restraint, applied pressure, offered solutions, and engaged in assertive diplomacy to bring Peru and Ecuador back from the brink of war. It was not afraid of deploying other states in South America for peaceful ends, as long as deployment took place on its terms. Though mediation did not result in a lasting settlement of the Zarumilla-Marañón dispute, the American assumption of a judicial role encouraged a retreat from the brink of war.¹⁴⁸ The United States was engaged as a superior power from the beginning of the crisis, prepared to be firm, and unafraid of causing resentment with strong words. Furthermore, it treated both disputants relatively even-handedly. In short, it behaved like a hierarchic power and in doing so, made the escalation to war less likely.

Controlled Comparison: Argentina and Chile in 1978

While space prevents full details of the Beagle Channel crisis of 1978 between Argentina and Chile, it is important to highlight how the two states drew back from near-certain war because this crisis constitutes a “hard case” for my argument. By its own admission, the United States enjoyed little leverage with either country at this time, owing to President Jimmy Carter’s stand on human rights that rubbed the two military dictatorships the wrong way.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the two Catholic-dominant states predominantly looked elsewhere for mediation, espe-

142. United States Department of State 1910b.

143. United States Department of State 1910d.

144. United States Department of State 1910c.

145. Zook 1964, 102–3.

146. *Ibid.*, 104.

147. *Ibid.*, 104–5.

148. *Ibid.*, 108.

149. Lindsley 1987, 441–42.

cially toward the Vatican. Demonstrating US influence in a crisis under these conditions shows the power of the overarching theoretical explanation.

In the fall of 1978, Argentina and Chile were locked in a tense crisis over three islands in the Beagle channel, on the southern tip of South America. Negotiations found little success, and October and November saw the two countries making preparations for war, including mobilizing troops, moving their navies south, calling up reservists, and conducting air and raid drills.¹⁵⁰ It was clear that Argentina and Chile were on the verge of war. What stopped them?

The United States applied pressure on Chile and especially Argentina, rightly seen as the aggressor in the crisis, to not use force to resolve the dispute. It made it “absolutely clear to Argentina that any military action would not be accepted”¹⁵¹ and expressed “its opposition to armed aggression in the strongest possible terms.”¹⁵² Owing to the preponderant US role in the hemisphere, and the potential costs of using force to their standing and relationships with the United States, Argentina and Chile sent representatives to Washington to consult with President Carter, Congress, and the State Department.¹⁵³

It is generally believed that only papal mediation stopped the two sides from war, but this belief reveals a lack of knowledge about the crisis's details. In fact, papal mediation would have occurred too late were it not for the intervention of the United States. The United States was aware on 19 December, through satellite imagery, that an Argentine invasion was imminent. Though it was understood that the Vatican would attempt to mediate, the Pope would crucially wait until after Christmas, believing that a Catholic country would not launch war during the holiday season. US ambassador to Chile George Landau urgently conveyed the information about the imminent Argentine invasion, scheduled for 21 or 22 December, and ensured that Pope John Paul II sent a personal envoy to both capitals and cooled tempers.¹⁵⁴ Were it not for Landau's intervening message, war would have broken out. In Argentina, meanwhile, US ambassador Raul Castro lobbied military commanders and traveled to Cordoba to delay military action, and thereby bought valuable time before the Vatican mediation began.¹⁵⁵

Moreover, it was US action that pushed the idea of Vatican mediation in the first place. In the fall of 1978, “US representatives in Rome began to broach the subject of possible Vatican mediation with Papal diplomats, and US ambassador to Argentina Castro discussed the matter with Archbishop Pio Laghi in

150. Princen 1992, 137–38.

151. Corbacho 2003, 13.

152. Lindsley 1987, 442.

153. *Ibid.*

154. Princen 1992, 143–44. US satellite imagery was also handy during the 1975 crisis between Chile and Peru, when Peru was dissuaded from attacking after being convinced, by the United States, of Chile's preparedness. See Holsti 1996, 158.

155. Lindsley 1987, 444.

Buenos Aires.”¹⁵⁶ Similar to the Peru-Ecuador crisis of 1910, the United States was unafraid of using other actors to achieve its ends of peace in the continent. Relatedly, throughout the mediation efforts, the U.S. surveillance and intelligence was channeled to the Vatican and was a “key source of information for the Pope.”¹⁵⁷

Despite a lack of leverage, US efforts to keep the peace between Argentina and Chile paid handsome dividends. Papal mediation was crucial in the states reaching a peaceful agreement on the Beagle Channel islands, but before a lasting agreement could be reached, war had to be avoided. By supplying valuable information, coordinating among actors across three continents, and strongly asserting demands for peace, the United States played a vital role in Argentina and Chile not going to war.

Conclusion

I have argued that anarchy should not be treated as a static concept in IR theory. Rather, scholars can conceive of international political structures as hierarchic if overwhelmingly powerful states replicate on the international sphere important elements of governments’ behavior with citizens domestically. In particular, providing recourse to aggrieved parties is a crucial role for governments to fulfill in restraining conflict among citizens. By the same token, if hegemonic states provide an avenue for redressing grievances, then they make escalation less likely and, in so doing, demonstrate that hierarchic structures are predisposed to peace. This is precisely the pattern that occurred in South America: when the hegemonic state behaved close to an ideal-type domestic government, it nipped conflict in the bud. By contrast, when hegemony was divorced from government-like actions, hierarchy did not obtain, escalation became more slippery, and war became more likely.

Thus far, the literature has tended to focus on showing the similarity between, on the one hand, the bargains struck between citizens and governments in domestic politics and, on the other, between powerful and minor states in the international system. Is there a potential conceptual blind-spot here? What other characteristics of hierarchic orders can we locate in world politics that have remained unexamined? Future research can look at how hierarchy is obtained and maintained in international politics. Future research should also focus on my argument’s external validity for peace among minor powers being affected by powerful mediators. On the surface, the structural relationship outlined here is highly generalizable—but how generalizable? The argument is set up such that it can be applied to a rich reservoir of cases across both time and space. Future scholarship should test the argu-

156. *Ibid.*, 442–43.

157. Mirow 2004, 10, fn. 42.

ment against different sets of cases, and examine where it falls short, so that it may be refined. Given the preponderant role of the United States in global politics today, and its attendant potential to serve as an arbiter in multiple disputes around the world, such research will have great significance for both theoretical and practical reasons.

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