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***Latin America in the Post-Chavez Era: The Security Threat to the United States.* By Luis Fleischman. Washington: Potomac Books, 2013. ISBN 978-1-61234-601-4. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xvi, 276. \$29.95.**

When Fidel Castro relinquished his leadership of the Cuban Communist Party due to illness in 2011, there were a number of Latin Americanists who offered their views of what Cuba would become in a post-Castro era. Few considered Cuba a security threat to the United States, much less Fidelismo and its influence on Latin American revolutionary movements.

Luis Fleischman has taken a much different approach toward Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and his legacy in Latin America. The author argues that Chavezismo and the Bolivarian Revolution will long outlive the Venezuelan strongman, posing a long-term security threat to the United States, due to the influence Chavez has had in spreading his ideology and movement throughout Latin America. The book was written during Chavez's on-ongoing battle with cancer and completed before he passed away on March 5, 2013; however, Fleischman was able to include a brief epilogue addressing Chavez's death before publication.

The argument that Fleischman offers in his book is that Chavez's influence in Latin America has been much deeper and sustainable than political leaders in the United States have given it credit. He criticizes both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations for not taking Chavez more seriously, rather following a policy of neglect, treating him as a blowhard – just another bellicose leftist Latin American leader, bent on blaming the United States for all of the region's woes. Not that the region has been lacking precedents, of course, since dependency theory and anti-neoliberalism rhetoric have been a rallying cry for many populist leaders.

Fleischman makes the case that Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution is different from previous ideological movements in Latin America, since it reflects an alternative to both the neoliberal economic model and democratic political model that were the mainstays of U.S. foreign policy in the region in the 1990s and 2000s. In the post-Cold War era, there was an assumption that Castro-style communist inspired revolutionary movements were dead, that democracy had triumphed, and capitalism was the only solution to the region's economic woes. Since Cuba was not a threat, then no other threats existed in the region (except drugs) and the "day of the dictator" was over. The signing of the Inter-American Democratic Charter at an Organization of American States meeting in Lima, Peru on September 11, 2001 confirmed the belief that Latin America, as a region, had embraced political and economic changes commensurate with U.S. interests.

Yet, September 11<sup>th</sup> brought a shift in U.S. policy (and interests) away from Latin America, as the focus on the threat of terrorism took center stage in U.S. security policies. The only country in Latin America that saw a renewed interest on the part of the United States was Colombia, where the communist-inspired revolutionary movements that arose in the 1960s and 1970s lingered. Rebranding these groups as "narcoterrorists" allowed a change in U.S. policy along with the partnership of a new pro-U.S. regime in Colombia under Alvaro Uribe.

Fleischman argues that U.S. support for the war on terror globally, and its focus on Colombia in Latin America, led to neglect of the rest of the region, creating a void that was filled with the

new Bolivarian ideology of Chavez. Combined with oil money, Chavez spread his influence throughout the region, supporting Bolivarian candidates to win elections in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Honduras, while currying favor with leftist leaders in Argentina, and Brazil, and most importantly for Chavez's revolutionary image, Cuba. In addition, Chavez agitated the United States even further by expanding relations with Iran, Russia, and China, fostering increased trade and investment in the region. Chavez also supported radical Islamic movements in Latin America, as well as funded the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in Colombia – the result being a Latin America that Fleischman believes does pose a security threat to the United States, even after Chavez's death.

While Fleischman's book comes with the endorsement of many advocates of his argument on the political right, it fails to make a dent in the scholarly literature on Latin America and social movement theory in particular. Many of his aphorisms include words like: might, may, could, can assume, etc. He also makes some rash generalizations such as suggesting that China's protection of Venezuela approximates the U.S.-Taiwan Relations Act with regard to mutual defense, or, like Iran, Venezuela could obtain a nuclear weapon. In his epilogue, he admits that Chavezismo may be waning and that Chavez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, does not have the same charisma or popularity (not to mention being linguistically challenged; e.g. his speech on "bread and fishes"). Yet, Fleischman still holds to his thesis that what Hugo hath wrought in the region will have staying power, to the point of posing a significant threat to U.S. security interests.

I find the empirical evidence for many of Fleischman's argument lacking. If anything, the results of Chavez's policies in Venezuela alone have increased the misery index due to failed socialist models and populist tactics that gain supporters in the short-run, but contribute to long-term socio-economic problems. The fact that Maduro won election with less than a 2% margin of victory over the opposition candidate, Henrique Capriles, portends a change in the region in a post-Chavez era.

What I do appreciate about Fleischman's book is his ability to highlight many of the policy failures of the United States toward Latin America during the last decade and the continuation of questionable policies today. An example would be the recent overtures of the Obama administration to Maduro, seeking to "reset" U.S.-Venezuelan relations post-Chavez. Rather than seeking to delegitimize the regime, due to its anti-democratic and anti-capitalist policies, the United States unwisely suborns the pro-democratic and pro-capitalist opposition, sending the wrong message to other opposition movements throughout the region, which have attempted to stand up to Chavez's anointed Bolivarian candidates. Fleischman offers some concrete policy proposals that would support more representative governments and attempt to push back on the successes of undemocratic leaders following Chavez's model; e.g., win elections democratically, then change the constitution to be able to remain in power indefinitely – a return to Latin America's authoritarian past. Fleischman also offers suggestions on countering Chinese, Iranian, and Russian influence in the region, which requires the United States to take geopolitics seriously and reengage with Latin America.

While I don't see Latin America posing the type of regional security threat that Fleischman envisions in his text, I do see continuing security threats in the region, to include powerful

transnational criminal organizations in Mexico and Central America, in particular. The United States ignores Latin America as its own peril and Luis Fleischman does provide a view toward what fills the void when it does.

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