

## [Authors' Response to ISSF Article Review 71 on "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention, 1898-1936."](#)

Discussion published by George Fujii on Monday, April 17, 2017

H-Diplo | ISSF

**Authors' Response to Article Review 71**

[issforum.org](http://issforum.org)

H-Diplo/ISSF Editors: **Thomas Maddux** and **Diane Labrosse**

H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor: **George Fujii**

**Authors' Response to H-Diplo/ISSF Article Review by Christopher Darnton of Max Paul Friedman and Tom Long. "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention, 1898-1936."** *International Security* 40:1 (Summer 2015): 120-156. [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00212](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00212).

Review URL: <https://issforum.org/articlereviews/71-soft-balancing>

Response by **Max Paul Friedman**, American University and **Tom Long**, University of Reading

Published by ISSF on 17 April 2017

[tiny.cc/ISSF-AR71-Response](http://tiny.cc/ISSF-AR71-Response)

<https://issforum.org/articlereviews/71-response>

<https://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-AR71-Response.pdf>

We thank Christopher Darnton for his thoughtful and useful critique, and we are in agreement with many of his points. However, Darnton perhaps overstates the goals of our article. Notably, Darnton faults the article for failing to test a "causal explanation of Latin American foreign policy against alternatives." Our article does not claim to test a fully specified, causal theory of soft balancing; in the prominent literature of the subject, no such theory has been enunciated (as noted on 134). That theory would need to clearly specify external conditions and causes for cross-case testing and delineate observable implications of a causal process for within-case testing. This is an important task, but ultimately not one we attempted. The literature on soft balancing, our article included, is more focused on concept formation. We extend the concept to a new case and to the context of regional unipolarity, while striving not to dilute it.

The points of Darnton's critique largely question whether Latin American behavior explains a change in U.S. foreign policy: Does Latin American soft balancing deserve primary causal credit for President Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy? The focus is partially misplaced. Roosevelt's policy is an epilogue to our historical narrative, but the primary emphasis is on the development of Latin American cooperation and oppositional strategy over a longer period. If our primary goal had been to

Citation: George Fujii. *Authors' Response to ISSF Article Review 71 on "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention, 1898-1936."* H-Diplo. 04-17-2017.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/176181/authors-response-issf-article-review-71-%E2%80%9Csoft-balancing-america>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

explain the shift in U.S. policy – instead of explaining Latin American strategies and actions – then we would fully concur with Darnton’s call for more process tracing in U.S. sources to establish whether U.S. leaders explicitly acknowledged the Latin American sources of their actions in the Good Neighbor era. Having emphasized Latin American agency and cooperation in this article, we aim in future publications to integrate the story with more of the U.S. sources that are routinely included in the existing literature, starting with Bryce Wood’s classic study.<sup>[1]</sup>

That said, it is not clear that the multiple factors Darnton emphasizes exclude a strategy of soft balancing. First, “ambitions for regional leadership,” is clearly compatible with a strategy that seeks to limit the unilateral exercise of U.S. power in a region – that is, soft balancing. Argentine claims to superiority over other Latin American states, which are indeed recurrent, do not conflict with a strategy of cooperation with other powers to achieve goals which are seen as serving Argentina’s interest. Argentine and Mexican pressures for nonintervention are compatible with both ambition for regional leadership and defending national security. In the original soft balancing debate<sup>[2]</sup> that was based on post-Cold War cases, Chinese and Russian actions to oppose and increase the costs of U.S. unilateralism were entirely compatible with those states’ strategies of greater regional influence for themselves. We see soft balancing via efforts to establish hemispheric or international norms not as altruism, which would be quite unusual state behavior, but strategies to achieve those compatible goals where more conventional approaches such as hard power are unworkable. Similarly, we did not intend to suggest that there was no bargaining among states during a period when more long-term efforts at soft balancing took place – just that the overall diplomatic strategy of the period cannot be reduced to bilateral, transactional bargains.

The third point of Darnton’s review emphasizes the role of insurgencies in forcing Washington to rethink its military interventionism. We certainly agree, and we note the importance of rising costs and greater sensitivity to those costs in Washington (148). Like Darnton, we praise Alan McPherson’s excellent and innovative study of resistance to U.S. occupation, calling the resistance McPherson highlights “another decisive element” that “contributed importantly” to the decline in interventionism. We had no intention of downplaying McPherson’s work, or that resistance, as Darnton’s critique states. One of us has praised the originality and significance of his work in a separate review.<sup>[3]</sup> Instead of reinventing the wheel by writing yet another account of factors that have been well established, we sought instead to contribute something new to the discussion by exploring the neglected element of long-term Latin American diplomatic efforts. We address stagnation and shifts in U.S. policy, and we turn directly to the Good Neighbor Policy in our conclusions. In doing so, however, our article explicitly avoids making a monocausal claim that Latin American soft balancing was the sole cause of a U.S. policy shift. It was “part of that achievement” (152), alongside several factors that we discuss. Multicausality may be the last refuge of scoundrels, but it also reflects the complexity of interstate relations.

**Max Paul Friedman** is Professor of History at American University in Washington, D.C. He is author of *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

**Tom Long** is Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Reading and Affiliated Professor

Citation: George Fujii. *Authors' Response to ISSF Article Review 71 on "Soft Balancing in the Americas: Latin American Opposition to U.S. Intervention, 1898-1936."* H-Diplo. 04-17-2017.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/176181/authors-response-issf-article-review-71-%E2%80%9Csoft-balancing-america>

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

at Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico. He is the author of *Latin America Confronts the United States: Asymmetry and Influence* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

©2017 The Authors | [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](#)

## Notes

[1] Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

[2] Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30:1 (2005), Thazha V Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," *International Security* 30:1 (2005), Stephen G Brooks and William C Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," *International Security* 30:1 (2005).

[3] Max Paul Friedman, "Occupational Hazards. *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations*, by Alan McPherson." *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Fall 2014) 106-107.