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"Cold Warriors & Coups D'Etat"

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*Chronological
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"Cold Warriors & Coups D'Etat **IWU Prof Writes Book Tracing U.S.-Brazil Relations, 1945-64**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Brazil and the United States were allies in World War II. Twenty years later, Washington supported a coup d'etat that toppled Brazil's president from power, opening the way for two decades of military dictatorship.

What went wrong? How did two allies become adversaries--and in this tale of a diplomatic love-hate relationship are there any lessons for the 1990s?

These are some of the tough questions explored in "Cold Warriors & Coups D'Etat--Brazilian-American Relations, 1945-1964," written by W. Michael Weis, an IWU associate professor of history who specializes in U.S. diplomacy and Latin American affairs.

The 262-page book was published this month by the University of New Mexico Press.

"Americans tend to take Latin America for granted," Weis said. "They don't see it as an important region. It's not seen as a region with any inherent greatness. Yet it is probably the most vitally important region to the United States in terms of U.S. security interests, raw materials, agricultural and mineral products, and investment.

"Latin America is a very important region," Weis added, "and Brazil is the most important country in the region for the United States--with the exception of Mexico. Brazil is larger than the 48 contiguous states. It's a big country and its size alone makes it important to the United States from the security and economic standpoints."

Weis' interest in Brazil was sparked by a Brazilian professor he had as an undergraduate in an educational psychology course at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. Weis, a history major who was eyeing a career as a teacher and football coach, was fascinated by the professor and took his advice to apply to a Brazilian school to do his student teaching work. He taught at a school for children of American businessmen in Brazil, teaching eighth, tenth, and eleventh graders.

"I spent three months in Campinas--a town now of two million, which is located 50 miles from São Paulo--during the Ford-Carter election of 1976. The Brazilians were really interested in the election--the government was pro-Ford and the people were pro-Carter.

"But after the election," Weis explained, "Carter criticized Brazil's human rights policy, he sent his wife to Brazil rather than Vice President Mondale, and he attempted to block the sale of nuclear generators to Brazil from West Germany--not so much to stop nuclear proliferation but to have an American firm get the sale, according to many Brazilians. After all of these things, the Brazilians got very angry and tore up a military assistance treaty with the United States that went back to 1950s.

"I thought when all of this happened that I love Brazil and America and I wanted to see them work together--it may have been naive but I decided then and there to go to graduate school and study U.S.-Brazilian relations."

Weis began graduate school at Ohio State University in 1980, digging deeply into Brazilian history and U.S.-Brazilian relations. "It puzzled me," he said, "why the United States helped the Brazilian military overthrow a civilian democracy. I wanted to understand why this happened."

What Weis found was that the 1964 coup d'etat that toppled the government of João Goulart was a long simmering affair, the result of increasingly divergent interests and bad faith generated over many years. Two pivotal issues that pushed the former allies apart were Brazil's economic development and the politics of the Cold War.

"Brazil's quest for rapid economic development became the dominant issue in postwar Brazilian-American relations," Weis writes in the book. "United States policy makers constantly stressed free trade and private investment as the best way to achieve development, and they opposed restrictions to access to Brazil's markets and raw materials. Brazilian-American differences over economic development were conceptual and the result of their respective national experiences rather than a product of calculatedly antagonistic goals. Anti-communism and America's rapid development in the late nineteenth century through private investment led U.S. policy makers to distrust state intervention in the economy, unless that intervention aided private enterprise. . . By the end of the 1950s . . . a significant number of Brazilians viewed U.S. policies as inimical to development.

"By the 1960s, the United States was embroiled in Brazilian politics, and U.S. relations became a partisan political issue within Brazil, perhaps the inevitable consequence of the dogmatism of Washington, the emergence of the cold war in Latin America (exemplified by the Cuban Revolution), the importance U.S. policy makers placed on Brazil's economic orientation, and the importance of economic development issues within Brazilian politics . . . By 1962 the U.S. was funding groups opposed to the Goulart regime and had begun the process of 'destabilizing' Goulart. The military coup of March 31, 1964, was merely the logical culmination of U.S. policy."

Initially, the economic blueprint for Brazil devised by the military resulted in years of double-digit economic growth--an economic miracle that was torpedoed by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and a tripling of the price of oil. Brazil imported 90 percent of its oil. By 1982, Brazil had run up \$100 billion in debts, making it the largest debtor nation in the developing world (now its debt is around \$130 billion) and its economy was racked by a 1,000 percent inflation rate. These and other factors conspired to return civilian government to Brazil in 1985. However, earlier this year, Brazil's third civilian president since the military stepped down--Fernando Collor--was ousted from power on charges that he stole \$300 million over two years.

Much of the research for the book was done by Weis in Brazil, where he was able to travel to in 1985-86 and in 1989 through a Fulbright grant, a congressionally funded program to spur the international exchange of scholars, and grants from the American Historical Association, National Endowment for the Humanities, and IWU. Additional financial support for the project permitted archival research in the United States.

Weis is contemplating a second book on environmental diplomacy, an outgrowth of last year's Rio summit conference. The book would deal with the development and destruction of the Amazon region through farming and the role of the United States in this process stretching back to Richard Nixon's administration and U.S. funding of the Trans-Amazon highway.

The last month has been exciting for Weis: he was granted tenure and promoted to the rank of associate professor by action of the IWU Board of Trustees in February and his book was published in March.

Editor's Note: "Cold Warriors & Coups D'Etat--Brazilian-American Relations, 1945-64" is written by W. Michael Weis, an associate professor of history at Illinois Wesleyan University. The 262-page book, published in March 1993 by the University of New Mexico Press (Albuquerque), costs \$37.50. For interviews with Weis about the book or other issues involving Latin America, call IWU Public Relations-News Services, 309/556-3203.