

# **Relaciones Internacionales: los Nuevos Horizontes**

Grace Jaramillo, compiladora

# Relaciones Internacionales: los Nuevos Horizontes



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# Domestic Influences on Ecuador – U.S. Relations: Towards the incorporation of a balanced theoretical analysis\*

Kenneth P. Ray\*

The Latin American transitions to democracy and the end of the Cold War set the stage for a new phase in Latin America - U.S. relations. Whereas pro-Soviet or pro-U.S. alignment defined Latin America - U.S. relations in the Cold War, bilateral foreign policy agendas emerged in the post-Cold War period encompassing an array of political, economic, and even social issues. In light of this development, a growing number of scholars shifted their research foci from macro or structural levels of analysis to micro or sub-state analytical levels<sup>1</sup> in order to systematically examine the construction of these multi-faceted and often complex foreign policy agendas.

The Republic of Ecuador experienced one of the earliest transitions to democracy in the region. After nearly twenty years of relative stability, Ecuador entered a period of political turbulence characterized by interrupted presidential terms and intermittent social unrest, which received considerable attention from the U.S. and the international community. Ecuadorian decision-makers inevitably crafted foreign policy agendas in

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\* Sections of this paper are part of a theoretical framework chapter in a forthcoming Master's Thesis.

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1 Hudson (2007) distinguishes between structural or macro levels of analysis (National Attributes and International System) and micro or sub-state levels of analysis (Individual Decisionmaker, Group Decisionmaking, Culture and National Identity, and Domestic Politics and Opposition).

this tumultuous context. While not ignoring the impact of structural factors, several Ecuadorian scholars and a few American counterparts began to analyze components of Ecuador's domestic situation and their impact on foreign policy agenda formulation.

Despite this growing interest, scholarly study of Ecuador - U.S. relations remains in an incipient stage (Ponce, 2005: 10).<sup>2</sup> Several Ecuadorian and American scholars have analyzed the bilateral policy agenda, but Ecuadorian scholars dominate the debate regarding sub-state influences on the bilateral relationship. Most Ecuadorian scholars employ a systematic, multi-disciplinary approach to understand domestic influences on Ecuadorian foreign policy, but do not treat U.S. domestic influences in a similar manner.

This paper addresses how to develop a more evenhanded analysis of both Ecuadorian and American domestic influences on foreign policy agenda formulation; the focus is the Ecuador – U.S. bilateral agenda particularly in the political-diplomatic realm. The discussion is both retrospective and briefly prospective. The author critically assesses relevant literature from 1996 until 2006 reflecting a variety of theoretical perspectives. Following the examination of the scholarly debate, the author proposes a skeletal FPA (Foreign Policy Analysis) framework to analyze institutional and cultural sub-state levels<sup>3</sup> framing Ecuador - U.S. relations. Lastly, the author concludes with a concise discussion on the implications and limitations of this approach.

### Understanding the scholarly debate on contemporary Ecuador – U.S. relations

The theoretical treatment of Ecuador - U.S. relations increased considerably since the mid-1990s, particularly in Ecuadorian academic circles. Ecuadorian and American scholars analyzed the bilateral relationship

2 *Las relaciones Ecuador-Estados Unidos en 25 años de democracia (1979-2004)* was the first book published on Ecuador – U.S. relations, in 2005.

3 The analytical focus of this paper is on the Culture and Domestic Politics sub-state levels (Hudson, 2007).

from an array of realist, dependency<sup>4</sup>, and liberal<sup>5</sup> perspectives. In turn, these theoretical perspectives directed attention toward one or more levels of analysis. Due to the overlap of theoretical perspectives within several works, this section chronologically<sup>6</sup> reviews the literature.

John D. Martz (1996) views Ecuador's role in international relations as predominantly conditioned by weak state-level capabilities *vis-à-vis* its neighbors and the U.S. Due to its weak status, Ecuador remains susceptible to political and economic pressures; this vulnerability foments a status of traditional dependence for Ecuador (1996: 129-130). Martz recognizes the personal influence of various Ecuadorian presidents on foreign relations, but ultimately the individual level of analysis remains secondary to the state and system-level determinants of Ecuador's relationship with its neighbors and the U.S.

Martz's analytical approach is slightly problematic. The author argues there is no need for "conceptual systematization" in understanding Ecuadorian foreign policy due to Ecuador's relative weakness and small population (1996: 129). This inaccurately suggests small states lack the appropriate complexity for scholars to employ a more penetrating theoretical analysis. Indeed, as Ecuadorian scholars later demonstrated, the systematic application of theoretical decision-making models is possible to study Ecuadorian foreign policy.

Fernando Yépez (2001) addresses the Ecuador - U.S. bilateral relationship primarily from an international legal perspective. The author argues the U.S. foreign policy agenda is set by the projection of hegemonic power interests which may or may not abide by international legal norms; in turn, Ecuador's small, underdeveloped status compels Ecuador to use international law as the only mechanism to preserve its foreign policy

4 "Dependency" refers to this alternate conceptualization: "*Dependencia...supone diferencia de posibilidades entre Estados y relaciones de subordinación en política exterior en las cuales el Estado más débil se ve obligado a cumplir con los puntos de la agenda del Estado más fuerte*" (Bonilla, 1998: 82)

5 "Liberal" refers to liberalism as a theory of international relations, in which domestic institutions and society shape (to varying degrees) state behavior in international politics (Moravcsik, 1997).

6 The author groups Adrian Bonilla's selected works at the end of this section due to his numerous contributions to the scholarly debate on Ecuador – U.S. relations from 1996 until 2006.

agenda (2001: 34, 37). Yépez includes an analytical framework that combines international system, state, and sub-state level factors to understand the construction of foreign policy agendas. This framework pinpoints sub-state influences, such as socioeconomic interests, government ideology, public opinion, institutions, and national beliefs/values, among others (2001: 45). However, further operationalization of these sub-state elements would be needed in order to measure the degree of each element's influence on Ecuadorian and American bilateral foreign policy agendas.

Katalina Barreiro (2002) presents a thorough, multi-issue examination of the Ecuador – U.S. foreign policy agenda. The author analyzes Ecuadorian and American views regarding political and economic issues on their bilateral agenda from a combination of theoretical perspectives. A central tenet of the analysis is Ecuador's reactive foreign policy stance *vis-à-vis* the imposition of U.S. interests. For instance, the 1999 Manta Air Base deal exemplifies this Ecuadorian dependency, in which Ecuador acquiesced to U.S. anti-narcotics and anti-terrorism policies to maintain its bilateral trade agenda (2002: 256).

Aside from the importance of state-level factors, Barreiro highlights the significance of domestic political and societal influences in the formulation of Ecuador's foreign policy. The author thoughtfully addresses Ecuador's institutional foreign policy decision-making structure, party system dynamics, specialized interest group pressure, and political culture. This methodical, multi-disciplinary treatment of Ecuadorian sub-state levels is also accompanied by a thoughtful consideration of U.S. sub-state level influences. Nevertheless, analysis of U.S. sub-state levels could be strengthened by exploring the cultural values and beliefs of U.S. foreign policy decision-makers involved in constructing the Ecuador foreign policy agenda.

Jeanne Hey's (2003) assessment of Ecuadorian foreign policy tackles Ecuador – U.S. relations in the context of international economic policy and the development of Plan Colombia in the 1990s. The author analyzes Ecuadorian foreign policy incorporating individual, state, and system levels. Hey ultimately concludes that external vulnerability is the principal influence limiting Ecuadorian foreign policy, especially in the economic realm (2003: 202-203). However, unlike Martz, Hey seriously recognizes the importance of domestic institutional and societal influ-

ences. Interest group pressure, executive-legislative deadlock, and political instability are key components that constitute a “strong determinant of Ecuadorian foreign policy in the 1990s” (2003: 201).

Denys Toscano (2005) studies the Ecuador - U.S. bilateral relationship during the short-lived presidencies of Abdalá Bucaram and Fabián Alarcón. Toscano focuses the analysis on sub-state levels with a particular emphasis on influential individuals that played a role in the Ecuador - U.S. bilateral relationship. The author identifies an overarching trend of dependency in Ecuador - U.S. relations concerning the Ecuador - Peru conflict, democracy, trade, technical cooperation, and intellectual property issues. However, Ecuador's reactive stance is not necessarily the result of state and system-level influences, but of pervasive domestic institutional instability (2005: 131). While the author is explicit about Ecuadorian policymakers' inability to articulate a clear foreign policy agenda amidst institutional instability, there is no serious consideration of the cultural beliefs and attitudes of the foreign policymakers themselves.

Carlos Larrea (2005) examines Ecuador - U.S. relations in the context of the International Criminal Court's 1998 Rome Statute and subsequent U.S. pressure for Ecuador to ratify an Article 98 bilateral agreement. The author indicates that Ecuador and the U.S. have fundamental philosophical differences on this issue: Ecuador emphatically upholds international legal norms and institutions while the U.S. disrupts the functioning of international legal system (2005: 170, 177). Larrea analyzes the U.S. position mainly from state and system-level perspectives while sub-state, state, and system-level perspectives are considered to address the Ecuadorian position.

Despite the asymmetric nature of the Ecuador - U.S. bilateral relationship, Larrea stresses the idea that Ecuador's foreign policy characteristics are secondary to its domestic political realm (Bonilla in Larrea, 2005: 184). In the case of the Article 98 issue, the Lucio Gutiérrez administration faced considerable institutional and civil society pressures to not ratify a bilateral agreement with the U.S. (Larrea, 2005: 195). A multi-level FPA approach incorporating these sub-state level factors could provide a more systematic analysis of Ecuador - U.S. relations in this particular instance of international law.

John Sanbrailo (2006) explores the opportunities and challenges of the Ecuador - U.S. relationship at both macro and micro levels. Ecuador's geographic location is a strategic asset for U.S. anti-narcotics and anti-terrorism strategies, but sub-state political and social participation, democracy strengthening and economic growth and trade issues also matter to U.S. interests (2006: 2-4). In terms of challenges in Ecuador - U.S. relations, Sanbrailo emphasizes obstacles presented by Ecuadorian political culture; suspicion and mistrust permeate most levels of society and limit action in dealing with the highly pluralistic, fragmented, decentralized U.S. system that requires aggressively lobbying the U.S. Congress and major interest groups as other countries have done more effectively (2006: 9). This incisive observation about Ecuadorian political culture and its historic inability to understand and deal with American democracy is critical, but the influence of U.S. cultural values should also figure in the analysis. Furthermore, systematic study of "Washington's pluralistic fragmented policy-making process" (2006: 10) concerning U.S. Ecuador policy is a sub-state level worth exploring within a FPA theoretical framework.

Adrian Bonilla is perhaps the foremost contributor to the study of Ecuador – U.S. relations, particularly in terms of security. Bonilla combines dependency and realist<sup>7</sup> approaches to explain Ecuador's asymmetric and vulnerable relationship with the U.S. Bonilla highlights the importance of Ecuadorian sub-state levels of analysis in order to explain the bilateral relationship with particular emphasis on the Ecuadorian foreign policy decision-making process.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Ecuadorian foreign policy-makers must unavoidably contend with an array of contextual phenomena when making decisions: political instability, clientelistic and patrimonial cultural norms, societal fragmentation, and high degrees of institutional turnover in the foreign policy decision-making establishment; these sub-state level phenomena contribute to the understanding of Ecuador's reactive foreign policy agenda (Bonilla, 2002: 20, 23-24).

7 Realist refers to *subaltern* realism: a Third World paradigm which understands international system-level conflict to be intimately intertwined with state and societal formation; subaltern realism acknowledges the pivotal impact of system-level variables on the domestic arena (Ayoub, 1998: 44-45).

8 See Bonilla 2004 for an in-depth theoretical and empirical analysis of Ecuadorian foreign policy decision-making as related to national security and drug trafficking.

Bonilla's numerous studies effectively incorporate Ecuadorian institutional and cultural sub-state levels and their impacts on the formulation of the Ecuadorian foreign policy agenda (Bonilla, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006). However, Bonilla's works minimally address U.S. political culture and its influence on the bilateral relationship. Indeed, as previously mentioned, American cultural values and attitudes influence U.S. foreign policy decision-makers; a balanced FPA approach would be useful in incorporating the neglected U.S. cultural element to examine Ecuador - U.S. relations.

The review of academic literature reveals that the analysis of sub-state level influence on Ecuador - U.S. relations is a valuable research endeavor undertaken by both Ecuadorian and American scholars from different theoretical perspectives. In spite of this, a balanced, pluralistic assessment of Ecuadorian and American sub-state influences on their bilateral relationship is sorely needed. This author proposes a skeletal FPA theoretical framework to analyze institutional and cultural sub-state levels of analysis and incorporate both Ecuadorian and American perspectives.

#### **Examining domestic influences on Ecuador – U.S. relations: A proposal for a balanced theoretical approach**

The examination of sub-state level influences on foreign policy is at the heart of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) theory. FPA's agency-oriented and multi-disciplinary perspective seeks to understand the formulation of foreign policy from political, sociological, and even psychological angles. Although scholars historically applied this theoretical approach to the developed world, some argue analysis of the domestic context in the developing world is central to comprehend foreign policy dynamics (Braveboy-Wagner, 2003: 7).

As reviewed in the literature, both Ecuadorian and American scholars generally agreed in the case of Ecuador since the mid-1990s; discussions of executive-legislative gridlock, social unrest, and clientelistic and patrimonial cultural norms all contributed to confirm the importance of domestic institutional and cultural influences on Ecuadorian foreign policy. Ecuadorian policymakers incorporated such observations into the



2006 – 2020 Ecuadorian National Foreign Policy Plan. The Plan explicitly states the relevance of Ecuador's recent domestic institutional stability and "pluricultural and multiethnic" culture (Ecuadorian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006: 19, 41).

According to the U.S. Embassy in Quito, the most salient issues on the political-diplomatic front are the promotion of democracy, humanitarian assistance, and protection of the environment (United States Embassy in Ecuador, Online). Application of the FPA institutional and cultural levels of analysis may prove useful to understand the formulation of a particular U.S. position on Ecuador.

The Domestic Politics and Opposition level of analysis identifies key domestic political players, including the executive and legislative branches of government, political parties, specialized interest groups, and labor unions (Hudson, 2007: 127). Region-specific and party-affiliated think-tanks and lobbying organizations also participate to a considerable extent in the policy-making process. After identifying the central players involved, it is necessary to consider each actor's primary attributes (power position, degree of unity, and size) and strategy (2007: 131). In the case of U.S. Ecuador policy, the State Department via the U.S. embassy in Quito is the principal institution responsible for articulating items on the policy agenda, but the U.S. Congress and key interest groups are also highly influential in the policy-making process (Sanbrailo, 2006: 10).

The Culture and Identity level of analysis concerns several fundamental questions in relation to foreign policy: "Who are we?," "What do 'we' do?," and "Who are they?" (Hudson, 2007: 104). Although there are no clear-cut answers to these complex questions, this author coincides with Hudson's multi-prong approach to culture and foreign policy. The foundation of this approach views culture in terms of "how power is conceived of and employed" by various groups (2007: 121-122). In the case of political-diplomatic Ecuador – U.S. policy, such an approach would involve examining how the principal American institutional players manipulate, refer to, and interpret culture when treating foreign policy agenda issues. This approach breaks away from simplistic characterizations of national values and attitudes by introducing differing group-level conceptualizations of culture.

### Conclusion: FPA and explaining domestic influences on Ecuador – U.S. relations

This paper argued for a more evenhanded analysis of sub-state institutional and cultural influences framing contemporary Ecuador - U.S. relations, especially in the political-diplomatic realm. It is imperative to note that analytical attention to sub-state levels should not occur at the expense of state or system-level influences especially in the security and economic realms. Ultimately, future research should strive to integrate sub-state, state, and system-levels of analysis to provide a balanced and complete picture of both Ecuadorian and U.S. influences on their bilateral political-diplomatic, economic, and security relationships.

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