Different Era, Same Errors: A Historical and Political Comparison of U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Cuba, 1959 and Venezuela, 2019

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Abstract of Thesis

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One of the most pressing policy challenges for the new Biden administration is how to address Venezuela. Between the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the complexities surrounding the Maduro regime, immediate action is required. However, President Biden must be cautious as to not repeat past U.S. policy errors in Latin America. Much of the current situation can be traced back to the actions undertaken by the previous Trump administration. In 2019, President Trump was faced with the prospect of an increasingly authoritarian, Marxist-inspired, anti-United States dictator cementing power in a formerly allied Latin American country. This situation paralleled what occurred under President Eisenhower sixty years prior, with the rise of Fidel Castro in Cuba. In both situations, U.S. policy makers decided that forcing a regime change was in their best interests. However, in both instances, domestic and international factors limited the available policy options. Ultimately, in the cases of both Cuba, 1959 and Venezuela, 2019, U.S. policy makers attempted to force through a regime change with a series of relative half-measures, based on mostly unilateral economic sanctions. In both instances, the policies failed to achieve their stated purpose and additionally damaged the United States' standing in the region. However, unlike with Cuba, the United States does not have to continue down the same fraught path with its Venezuela policy. By examining past policy mistakes, and understanding how the United States repeated many of these mistakes, U.S. policy makers can work to create better policy, engaging with Venezuela to create a better future for all.

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Introduction

Newly-elected President Joe Biden faces a number of pressing foreign policy challenges in his first year in office. One of the most critical for his new administration is the question of U.S. policy towards Venezuela: handling the Maduro Regime as well as the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The current situation is precarious and can be directly traced to the decision-making process of the Trump Administration. Faced with an increasingly belligerent Maduro Regime, amidst a deteriorating political and economic situation in Venezuela, the Trump Administration decided that U.S. action was required. This policy process mirrored U.S. actions sixty years earlier in Cuba. Then, the United States was faced with a similar predicament: the rise of a left-wing dictator hostile to U.S. interests in Latin America. In both situations, assuming the United States would take actions in order to protect their regional interests and status, there were two possible, distinct courses of action. First, the United States could have elected to aggressively remove Fidel Castro and Nicolás Maduro, through an orchestrated coup or large-scale invasion. Alternatively, the United States could have worked to slowly build the local infrastructure that works to support democracy in the long-run, such as targeted investments and support for NGOs. However, rather that strictly pursue either of these routes, in both instances, the U.S. opted for a compromised approach. In both countries, the U.S. actively worked towards regime change, however in relative half-measures. Ultimately, the U.S. refusal to fully commit to a regime change—via these compromised maneuvers—led to longer-term problems, including a weakened U.S. position in the hemisphere, at the expense of gains by international rivals.

To support this assertion, this paper is organized into four distinct sections. First, an examination of the current situation in Venezuela and why the U.S. should look to take action. There are a number of possible explanations, and this paper analyzes three of the most persuasive arguments. Second, a brief recounting of the historical events that immediately preceded and influenced the crucial policy choices by the U.S. around 1959 and in 2019. Modern policy decisions cannot be properly understood without the accompanying historical context. This is especially true for the U.S. with respect to Latin America; a complicated history of previous U.S. interventions and the remnants of a colonial legacy greatly impact the possible policy options for the U.S., and must be taken into account when examining complicated policy decisions. Third, given the U.S.' decision to pursue incomplete measures to ensure a regime change, this section will look to answer the question of why—with two domestic and two international explanations. Lastly, the conclusion will return to the present predicament for the U.S. and address key lessons that should inform future policy in Venezuela.

Cuba as the Point of Comparison

One of the fundamental questions to the thesis of this project, was why examine the Venezuela question in conjunction with past U.S. policy towards Cuba. There are numerous examples of the U.S. instigating regime changes and implementing economic sanctions throughout its history. However, Cuba is particularly pertinent for the international and domestic parallels to Venezuela. First, there are a number of direct similarities between the principal leaders of both Cuba and Venezuela during the most relevant time periods for U.S. policy. This is not a matter of historical revisionism either; rather, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez developed a close relationship predicated on the

parallels they saw in one another, from their personal ideologies to their countries' shared struggle against the United States. Both of these leaders had an inexorable link to the development of U.S. foreign policy towards each country, and viewing them in tandem elucidates why the United States took the specific actions that it did. Second, one of the most visible factors in the development of U.S. foreign policy has been the domestic pressure applied by key electoral voting blocs. While this is not necessarily unique, in and of itself, the cases of Cuba and Venezuela both feature highly motivated ex-pat communities in a crucial electoral state. This combination of factors contributes to a bi-partisan consensus, even in an increasingly polarized political climate in the United States, and makes for an additionally interesting topic to explore.

The third and final reason for utilizing Cuba in this paper is the significant time difference between the development of U.S. Cuba policy in 1959 and Venezuela policy in 2019. While initially it would seem that the sixty-year gap hurts any comparative analysis, in reality it highlights the larger issue. Much of the current analysis of U.S. policy towards Venezuela seeks to address specific facets of the humanitarian crisis—the status of Venezuelan refugees, the continued recognition of Juan Guaidó, or the efficacy of individual versus sectoral sanctions. By incorporating an analysis of U.S. policy in Cuba, and how that has unfolded over the last sixty years, one can examine Venezuela from a more meta perspective. Rather than examine each individual U.S. policy in a vacuum, one can look at the general belief that is informing all subsequent policies. The belief that an amalgam of various sanctions will be sufficient to produce the desired regime change in Venezuela was the same policy belief that informed U.S. Cuba policy sixty years prior. Thus, through this lens, one can examine the real issue at hand: why the

U.S., in a comparable situation, is repeating the same policy mistakes that it made sixty years prior. Further, this lens can provide actionable steps to help the U.S. avoid embedding itself in the same policy quagmire in Venezuela that it did in Cuba—failing to achieve their primary goal while significantly damaging its standing and regional relationships along the way.

Arguments in favor of U.S. involvement in Venezuela

The decision of the Trump Administration to intervene, in some capacity, in Venezuela, was well founded. There are a number of valid arguments as to why intervention was the correct policy direction for the U.S., drawing from the more grounded moral and economic arguments to political theory.

Moral Argument

From a moral perspective, the U.S. has a vested interest in securing a peaceful and successful regime change in Venezuela. Under the Maduro Regime, Venezuela has suffered a complex humanitarian crisis, directly exacerbated by specific actions undertaken by the regime. Since 2014, over 4.5 million Venezuelans have fled the country, most seeking refuge in neighboring Latin American nations, but some further to places like the U.S. and Spain.[1] This is the second largest refugee crisis in history, behind only Syria. In and of itself, this has significant implications for the larger region, taxing nearby countries while those refugees desperately seek assistance, yet this figure does not encapsulate the scale of the crisis within Venezuela. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Venezuelan economy was in shambles: a minimum wage that amounted to

[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Venezuela Situation," UNHCR, accessed March 15, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html.

about $4 USD a month, an annual inflation rate estimated to be 15,000 percent and an expected economic contraction in 2020 of 26 percent, continuing a years-long trend.[2]

Additionally, a recent United Nations report found that the Maduro Regime pursued policies that amounted to crimes against humanity against its own citizens.[3] From a moral perspective, the U.S. has a duty to intervene on behalf of the Venezuelan people—acting to remove the regime and ensure a successful transition of power to a democratic government, that will act to defend the rights of its citizens and end the conditions causing the humanitarian crisis.

Economic Argument

The second persuasive argument for regime change comes from the vast economic benefits that a different Venezuelan regime would have for the U.S. Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, but still lags behind in production of other industrial and agricultural products.[4] Prior to the Maduro regime taking power, trade between the two countries was highly beneficial for the U.S. This relationship peaked in 2012, with more than $55 billion in total imports and exports between the U.S. and Venezuela.[5] Since, trade has steadily declined. Total trade in 2020 reached its lowest

[2] Moises Rendon and Lucan Sanchez, "Covid-19 in Venezuela: How the Pandemic Deepened a Humanitarian Crisis", Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 13, 2021, https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-venezuela-how-pandemic-deepened-humanitarian-crisis.
[3] United Nations Human Rights Council, "Detailed findings of the independent international factfinding mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela", UNHRC, accessed March 17 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFMV/A_HRC_45_CRP.11.pdf.
[4] "U.S. Energy Information Administration - EIA - Independent Statistics and Analysis," International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), accessed March 20, 2021, https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/VEN.
[5] Foreign Trade Data Dissemination Branch, "Foreign Trade: Data," U.S. Trade with Venezuela, April 21, 2009, https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c3070.html.

point, with little over $1 billion in goods and services exchanged between the two countries—and the early 2021 numbers show more of the same.[6]

Additionally, beyond the material benefits of positive trade relations, the reassertion of the U.S. as the preeminent economic power in Venezuela has the additional benefit of marginalizing key international adversaries of the U.S.—China and Russia. Both have capitalized on the recent withdrawal of the U.S. in the region to extend various loans and embark on key joint ventures, expanding their influence in Venezuela and in the region as a whole.[7] By securing a transition of power away from the Maduro regime, the U.S. would benefit their own economic interests, as well as reasserting its regional power.

Realist Argument

Lastly, from a Realist Perspective, the international system is characterized by anarchy, under which great powers often come into conflict in pursuit of their own security and hard power interests. Specifically, under the Offensive Realist theory popularized by John Mearsheimer, the ultimate goal for a great power is to secure their status as a regional hegemon.[8] Under this theory, this is the most defining aspect of the Venezuela situation for the U.S. First, in order to stay in power, Maduro is supported by five key international allies.[9] For two in particular, China and Russia, their involvement

[6] Ibid.
[7] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.

[8] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2014).
[9] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.

in Venezuela has provided them with an opportunity to actively counter the influence and foreign policy objectives of the U.S. These efforts threaten the status of the U.S. as a regional hegemon, a status that the U.S. has arguably enjoyed dating as far back as the early nineteenth century.[10] This type of proxy-conflict is deeply problematic for the U.S., which has a vested interest in maintaining its regional dominance in Latin America, and not allowing both China and Russia to gain significant presences in the hemisphere.

Additionally, from the Realist perspective, nations leverage economic power into tangible hard power advantages. Venezuela—beginning under Hugo Chavez and continuing under Nicolas Maduro—has used its oil production to essentially purchase key political allies in the region. Venezuelan oil was sold at significant discounts to smaller regional players, and in exchange, Venezuela cemented a bloc of nations that would support their foreign policy objectives. While the composition of these "ALBA" nations does not represent a tangible threat to the U.S., this conglomerate has succeeded in frustrating a number of U.S. initiatives in the Organization of American States, owing to its one nation, one vote structure. With continued disagreement within the organization on how to best proceed with regard to Maduro, the specific mechanisms available to the U.S. through the OAS will continue to be of little use while the Maduro Regime is able to maintain their alliances.[11]

[10] J.D. Richardson, ed., *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. 2 (1907), 287.
[11] Luis Jaime Acosta, "OAS Meeting Ends in Disagreement over Venezuela Opposition Delegation," Reuters, June 29, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-oas-vote/oas-meeting-ends-in-disagreement-over-venezuela-opposition-delegation-idUSKCN1TU023.

History of the United States and Cuba

U.S. involvement in Cuba dates back to the late nineteenth century. While Cuba had made several prior attempts to gain their independence, the U.S. did not become involved until 1898. Public opinion had warmed towards the Cuban cause throughout the 1890s; however, the defining moment would be the explosion of the U.S.S. "Maine" in the Havana Harbor in February of 1898.[12] Calls to intervene could no longer be pushed aside, and by the end of April, the U.S. had formally declared war on Spain.[13] The war effort was quick, and the U.S. won decisively.[14] In the aftermath, the United States took control of many of Spain's former colonies, with a particular interest in Cuba. Cuba had long been a focal point for U.S. policy makers, owing to its lucrative production of sugar cane, strategic positioning on key shipping lanes, and increasing connectedness with U.S. enterprises.[15]

The initial U.S. position upon entrance into the war, as outlined by the 1898 Teller Amendment to Congress' War Declaration, was that the United States had no intention of assuming control over Cuba.[16] However, the post-war reality was quite different. A 1901 amendment proposed by U.S. Senator Thomas Platt outlined a series of eight conditions that Cuba would have to accept before the U.S. agreed to withdraw the military from Cuba.[17] Among these, the United States would: be granted control over the

[12] Louis A Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Edward P Crapol, James G. Blaine: *Architect of Empire. Biographies in American Foreign Policy*. 4. Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources.
[16] "Teller Amendment, 1898," Teller Amendment, accessed April 20, 2021, https://faculty.chass.ncsu.edu/slatta/hi453/PS/deteller.htm.
[17] "Platt Amendment, 1903," Platt Amendment, accessed April 20, 2021 https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=55

land that would become Guantanamo Naval Base, prevent Cuba from signing treaties with any other nations, and maintain the right to intervene militarily at any point "For the preservation of Cuban independence."[18] For many in Cuba, these conditions led them to believe that they had simply exchanged one imperial power for another. Among the most prominent critics of the U.S., was Cuban poet and revolutionary hero José Martí. His words, helping form a national Cuban identity while warning of the future danger posed by the U.S. in Cuba, would be hugely influential in the thinking and governance of future Cuban leaders.[19] Notably for future U.S.-Cuba relations, these warnings about a new encroaching imperial power would become prophetic. Using the terms outlined in the Platt Amendment, the U.S. would intervene in Cuba three distinct times by 1922, while simultaneously exercising greater control over the Cuban economy—including its primary crop, sugar, and their national debt.[20]

Throughout the 1950s, the United States enjoyed mostly positive relations with Cuba. Under General Fulgencio Batista, Cuba traded extensively with the United States. Cuba became a preeminent destination for American tourists, with U.S. dollars and culture fueling a bourgeoning middle class.[21] The Cuban people became accustomed to U.S. luxury goods, and increasingly adopted aspects of U.S. culture—such as Hollywood movies, baseball, and rock and roll.[22] However, this trend was not without drawbacks. While wealth increased in Cuba, U.S. corporations grew increasingly powerful, with

[18] Ibid.
[19] John M Kirk, "Jose Marti and the United States: A Further Interpretation." Journal of Latin American Studies 9, no. 2 (1977): 275-90. Accessed February 16, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/156129.
[20] Louis A Pérez, *The War of 1898: the United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[21] Natasha Geiling, "Before the Revolution," Smithsonian.com (Smithsonian Institution, July 31, 2007), https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/before-the-revolution-159682020/.
[22] Ibid.

estimated financial interests totaling $1 billion.[23] This was emblematic of the overall economic situation in Cuba. While general statistics pointed to growing economic success, the results of this newfound prosperity were not shared proportionately throughout the country.

Batista was installed following a successful military coup in 1952.[24] Batista had previously retired from politics and moved to Florida. He returned to Cuba to run in the 1952 presidential election. However, when polling data showed him in a distant third, Batista conspired with a group of loyal military officers to overthrow the acting President Carlos Prío Soccarás.[25] According to a memorandum prepared by Secretary of State Acheson for President Truman, the coup was a complete surprise to both the Cuban government, as well as the U.S. government.[26] Despite the surprise, the Truman administration believed this would be a positive development for U.S.-Cuba relations, and quickly recognized the new Batista government, supplying it with needed economic aid.[27] Initially, Batista promised that his presidency would establish a framework for free and fair democratic elections to follow. However, once in power, he quickly resorted to violence and suppression in order to stay in power. The growing economic inequality reinforced by a violent dictator with U.S. support would inform the next and most definitive point in U.S.-Cuba relations.

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997).
[25] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 327. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v04/d327
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.

The definitive inflection point centered around one man, Fidel Castro. Castro's prevalence in Cuban politics began in 1952, with an ill-fated congressional campaign. Castro's early political career was cut short when Batista took power through his coup, and cancelled the subsequent election.[28] However, this also inspired the next phase of Castro's political involvement. In response to the Batista's 1952 coup, Castro organized a group of younger, like-minded individuals to try and force through a regime change of their own. The movement decided their first step would be to attack the Moncada Barracks.[29]

Though the attack failed, and thus brought about a quick end to Castro's initial revolutionary movement, the long-term repercussions of this moment were immense. First, between the attack itself and his subsequent trial, Fidel Castro became a national figure. While on trial, he delivered his now famous, "History Will Absolve Me" speech, which was later widely distributed throughout the country.[30] Though Castro and other leaders of the uprising were sentenced to anywhere from ten to fifteen years in prison, they were released less than two years into their sentence when the Cuban Congress passed legislation freeing all political prisoners.[31] Fidel and his brother Raúl then traveled to Mexico, where they would meet Communist author and revolutionary, Che Guevara.[32]

[28] Ibid.
[29] Leo Huberman and Paul Seweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York 4bMonthly Review Press, 1969).
[30] Fidel Castro, "History Will Absolve Me," History Will Absolve Me, accessed April 1, 2021, https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm.
[31] Leo Huberman and Paul Seweezy, *Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution* (New York 4bMonthly Review Press, 1969).
[32] Ibid.

Within a year, the three men—alongside some eighty fellow revolutionaries—would land back in Cuba to continue what they had begun three years prior.[33]

In this second phase of the revolution, the United States and Batista were seemingly natural allies. In accordance with broader U.S. Cold War strategy, especially in Latin America, the United States supported right-wing military dictators, given that the United States viewed them as the strongest check on the growing influence of communism in the region. In the early days of the revolution, the United States did continue to support Batista. However, despite the massive numerical superiority of Batista's forces, the Cuban army was unable to quickly defeat Castro's movement. Over the course of 1957, Castro and his other generals scored a series of notable victories—winning them much needed supplies and popular support.[34]

With his position looking increasingly tenuous, Batista doubled down on his repressive tendencies. This was a losing strategy. First, it increasingly alienated the Cuban populace, who saw Castro's revolution as liberation. Second, it served to drive a wedge between the Batista regime and the United States, whose support was essential to Batista maintaining the war effort. In fact, by 1958, the Eisenhower Administration was tying its continued military support for Batista on the belief, and condition, that it would speed up the process of implementing free and fair elections.[35] Thus, on March 12, when Batista announced that he was suspending constitutional guarantees "in view of the

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 3. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d3

continuing unrest," the United States was prompted to take action.[36] Two days later, the U.S. State Department suspended the exportation of a shipment of rifles that were intended for Batista, citing the failure to create conditions for fair elections and what they believed to be the long-range U.S. interests in the country.[37] This position continued throughout the year, with the Eisenhower Administration knowing full well that their withholding military aid greatly aided Castro's 26th of July Movement, and increased the likelihood that they would ultimately be successful in overthrowing Batista.[38] This dynamic reached its endpoint in December, 1958. In a conversation between Ambassador E.T. Smith and the top officials in the Batista government, Smith informed them that the official position of the United States was that it could no longer support the present government of Cuba.[39] On January 1, 1959 Batista's government officially fell. The next day, Fidel Castro announced that Dr. Manuel Urrutia Lleo would serve as the Provisional President; however, it was apparent that true authority in the country lay with Fidel Castro.[40] That week, Secretary of State Dulles recommended that the Eisenhower Administration recognize and attempt to work with the new Cuban government, officially beginning the new and more deterministic chapter in U.S.-Cuba relations.[41]

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[36] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 32. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d32
[37] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 36. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d36
[38] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 43. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d43
[39] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 185. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d185
[40] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 217. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d217
[41] Ibid.

Initially, the Eisenhower Administration was optimistic about the prospects of the new Cuban government. The appointment of President Urrutia was seen as an important first step in a positive direction for bilateral relations, as Urrutia was well-regarded as a moderate among the leaders of the 26th of July Movement. This assuaged a concern held by some within the United States that the more radical—specifically communist—elements within the revolution would dictate the direction of the country.[42] However, as the year progressed, it became increasingly clear that the initial honeymoon phase was just that, and relations began to sour thereafter. Castro's April visit to the United States, the first for a Cuban leader representing a fully independent nation, had mixed results. U.S. officials, namely Vice President Nixon, were not assured that Castro would fully impede the communist elements within his revolution, nor about his future vision for Cuba. However, Nixon himself remarked that he did not believe Castro to be a communist himself, and that Castro was no doubt a born leader, not to be underestimated by the U.S.[43] Within weeks of returning from the U.S., Castro introduced the text for his agrarian reform bill and effectively forced President Urrutia out of office, replacing him with Osvaldo Dorticós.[44][45] Dorticós was perceived to be far more radical than his predecessor, and from the U.S. perspective, this shift was emblematic of Cuba's larger transition to a government the U.S. could not work with.

[42] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 254. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d254
[43] Richard M. Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 201–203.
[44] James O'Connor, "Agrarian Reforms in Cuba, 1959-1963." Science & Society 32, no. 2 (1968): 169-217. Accessed December 21, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40401340
[45] "Cuba: The Strongman Speaks." *Time*. Time Magazine, July 27, 1959. http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,864750,00.html

Though the relationship between the United States and Castro's Cuba was slowly deteriorating, October 1959 became the definitive breaking point. In this month, there were three distinct events that resulted in key U.S. foreign policy officials concluding that they would not be able to work with the Castro regime, and those same officials began planning contingencies to instigate a regime change. First, on the night of October 16, Castro's cabinet dissolved a number of existing institutions: the army, navy, the national police, and the labor minister and reconstituted them into new "revolutionary" units, headed by more radical revolutionary leaders, such as Raúl Castro.[46] Second, on October 19 moderate revolutionary hero Huber Matos, concerned with the direction of the new government, attempted to resign his post. In response, Castro publicly denounced Matos, and had him arrested-on charges of treason and sedition—eventually leading to a twenty-year prison sentence.[47] The last event was a government rally held on October 26. In this rally, a string of speakers gave increasingly inflammatory speeches, ending with Fidel Castro himself. Castro's speech was described by U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Philip Bonsal:

> Speech was highly inflammatory and pro-revolutionary. By same token as strongly anti-American as anything he has ever done. He listed virtually all local American interests as items which were not in the interests of Cuba. He talked of controlling utilities and of new mining and petroleum laws. He got approval from audience for re-establishment of revolutionary tribunals. He got approval of execution of Matos and others. He repeatedly mentioned Cuban people fighting to last man in caves and tunnels if necessary to repel foreign invasion. He worked on

[46] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 370. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d370
[47] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 410. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d410

theme of unreasoning fear of United States Government and people of communism.[48]

All the events of this month contribute to a common theme, what the United States perceived as increasing belligerence from Cuba, specifically Fidel Castro. And, while in the past there had been hopes that the more moderate elements of the 26th of July Movement would win the internal struggle, it was increasingly obvious that this was not true. From the end of October 1959 forward, U.S. officials were no longer concerned with how they could work with Castro and Cuba.

Thus, it was in October when the Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, initially began formulating the policy plan to remove Fidel Castro from power and install a more pro-U.S. leader.[49] This plan was eventually presented to the National Security Council on March 16, 1960. The CIA's plan consisted of four distinct components, coordinating elements within Cuba with the development of a paramilitary force that would be responsible for invading the island.[50] One of the most notable aspects of this plan was that it was designed, "In such a manner as to avoid any appearance of U.S. intervention."[51] This was critical for the United States, as the policy makers did not want to make it appear that the United States was overthrowing yet another ruler, especially in Latin America. This requirement was also evident across all of the layers of Dulles' plan. The first three all call for developments within Cuba itself, from a unified opposition, to

[48] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 379. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d379
[49] Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).
[50] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 481. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d481
[51] Ibid.

an effective propaganda network, and the creation of covert intelligence on the island.[52] The final component of the plan—the paramilitary force—was to be comprised of non-Americans, and trained outside of the continental United States, for the purposes of plausible deniability. Given the time required to develop the various components, this plan was approved and ultimately implemented by Eisenhower's successor, President John F. Kennedy.

The final plan appeared to be perfect: achieve the policy goal the United States desired without the penalties often incurred for invading a sovereign country. The reality was an unmitigated disaster. Cuban forces had known about the planned Bay of Pigs invasion for some time, and were able to prepare and quickly counter the ground forces. And, fearing the perception of a U.S. presence invading Cuba, President Kennedy did not order the requisite air support required by the initial plan.[53] In the end, the entire invading force was either killed or captured and the U.S.' role in planning and executing the invasion was promptly publicized.[54]

This double failure is largely emblematic of the overall U.S. approach towards Castro's Cuba. The United States was hoping to remove Castro from power but refused to fully commit and guarantee the regime change. The end result was the worst-case scenario for the Kennedy administration—Castro was not only still in power but now even more antagonistic towards the United States, while the U.S. was forced to deal with the humiliation of a public failure in the midst of a great power struggle with the Soviet Union. And this theme of half-commitments to a regime change would define the U.S.

[52] Ibid.
[53] Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).
[54] Ibid.

position on Cuba for most of the following sixty years. Some of these complications can be traced back to the agreement between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev that ended the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.[55] One of the key stipulations in the final agreement was that Kennedy, and future administrations, committed to not invading Cuba at any point in the future.[56] This precluded the United States from invading Cuba and ensuring a successful regime change where the Bay of Pigs invasion failed. Rather than relying on a small paramilitary force and no air support, the U.S. theoretically could have used their vast military superiority to overwhelm Castro's army, and install a new regime. As highlighted above, this would not have been the first time the United States invaded Cuba for such purpose. The agreement with Khrushchev essentially handicapped U.S. policy makers, removing arguably the most effective manner of guaranteeing regime change from the available options.

On the other end of the spectrum, the United States could have maintained full relations with Cuba, working to bring Cuba towards the western, international consensus, where the U.S.' soft power and economic influence could have helped build the type of long-term infrastructure that promotes democratic practices. However, the United States

[55] While the Cuban Missile Crisis is a significant historical event in and of itself, this paper will not delve too deeply into the specifics surrounding it. Rather as a significant moment in the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba, the author views it more significant for U.S.-Soviet relations, while Cuba was just the theatre. There are significant developments that came from this event however, and the paper will focus on those. For additional resources regarding the event itself, see the following:
Jane Franklin, *Cuba and the United States: A Chronological History* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1997).
L. V. Scott and R. Gerald Hughes, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Critical Reappraisal* (London: Routledge, 2016).
Kenneth M Absher, Mind-Sets and Missiles: A First Hand Account of the Cuban Missile Crisis (U.S. Army War College, August 2009), https://web.archive.org/web/20100420055113/http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=935.

[56] "Timeline: U.S.-Cuba Relations," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations), accessed April 2, 2021, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-cuba-relations.

did not pursue that policy track either. Rather, the United States indefinitely extended the full embargo imposed by President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis.[57] Ostensibly, this move was done to exert economic pressure on Cuba, with the hopes that the Cuban economy would collapse, and popular demand would force Castro from power. This never occurred.

Thus, this state of antagonistic relations defined by a misused economic embargo would continue from 1962 onward, with only a brief intermission in 2015 when then-President Obama attempted to thaw relations through various executive orders.[58] President Obama's decision to pursue a new route for Cuban relations was sound. First, the previous 50+ years of U.S. policy had not been successful in forcing a regime change. Second, Fidel Castro had recently ceded official office in favor of his brother Raúl, which potentially signaled a new direction in Cuba.[59] Lastly, President Obama cited polling data that he believed showed he had a mandate to take such action.[60]

While the process was sound, the execution of the policy was not. President Obama granted Cuba a number of concessions—restoring diplomatic relations, removing Cuba from the terror watch list, and a limited re-opening of economic relations. However, Cuba offered little in return.[61] The island was still ruled under a dictatorship, the regime continued to control much of the economy through a joint government-military

[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ginger Thompson, "Cuba Stays Calm With Castro on Sidelines," The New York Times, August 14, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/14/world/americas/14cuba.html?_r=0.
[60] Guillermo Grenier and Hugh Gladwin, 2014 FIU Cuba Poll: How Cuban Americans in Miami View U.S. Policies Towards Cuba, May 2014, distributed by Florida International University, cri.fiu.edu/research/ cuba-poll/
[61] Ibid.

monopoly, and the government afforded very few freedoms to its population.[62] The only significant concession President Obama was able to secure was that Cuba release 53 political prisoners; however, independent groups were not able to verify that this represented all of the political prisoners in custody, nor did the detentions of protesters stop.[63] Ultimately, because President Obama's policies were all undertaken as executive orders, they were swiftly reversed when President Trump took office.[64]

One important counter-argument is that this route was always intended to be a long-term effort, and therefore expecting substantive change in fewer than two years was unrealistic. However, it ignores an important distinction between what should be the long-term and short-term goals of engagement. The long-term goals of U.S. engagement would be for Cuba to adopt good democratic practices and become a reliable partner and ally in the international realm. And, expecting Cuba to, for example, conduct free and fair elections within two years is unrealistic. However, the key missed opportunity here was that the Cuban government wants the U.S. to remove its sanctions. This gives the United States a point of significant leverage. While economic sanctions are insufficient to force regime change, and are misused in this capacity, they are still an important tool in the proverbial foreign policy arsenal. Thus, in the short-term, they should not be repealed without some significant concession on the Cuban side. This did not occur under President Obama. Without a definitive commitment to, for example, breaking the government-military monopoly that controls most of the tourism-facing industry on the island, moving to legalize a second political party, or permitting political demonstrations,

[62] "World Report 2016: Rights Trends in Cuba," Human Rights Watch, February 2, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/cuba.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

it becomes highly unlikely that any real democratic change would occur in the future. The United States should not settle without receiving adequate recompense for removing the sanctions, and that should inform U.S. policy decisions moving forward.

U.S. – Cuba Relations Today

U.S.-Cuba relations today are very similar to where they were around 1970. Much of the blame can be placed on U.S. policy makers insisting on following a faulty policy track, pushing for a regime change with half measures and refusing to adapt when it became clear that their chosen policy was not working. Economic sanctions, the primary policy vehicle utilized by the U.S. against Cuba, have proven to be—at best—very infrequent precursors to regime change.[65] This is especially poignant in the case of Cuba because the United States has largely opted to pursue this hardline policy unilaterally. There is nearly no international support for the U.S. position, thus severely blunting the intended impact of the sanctions.

As for the near-term future, while there was some initial optimism about Cuba moving in a new direction after Raúl Castro ceded office, new Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel appears determined to uphold the legacy of the Castro brothers. He has frequently equated opposing the United States with Cuban sovereignty, and has largely upheld the policies first implemented by his predecessors.[66] Without any real impetus for Cuba to change course, the United States is largely left without a clear path forward to

[65] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "Domestic Explanations of International Relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (2012): pp. 161-181, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-070209-174835.
[66] Azam Ahmed and Frances Robles, "Who Is Miguel Díaz-Canel, Cuba's New President?," The New York Times (The New York Times, April 19, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/19/world/americas/miguel-diaz-canel-bermudez-cuba.html.

settle the Cuba question. Further still, it appears the United States is on track to make similar mistakes with respect to an analogous situation in Venezuela, which will be explored in the next section of the paper.

History of the United States and Venezuela

Similar to Cuba, U.S. involvement in Venezuela dates back to the late nineteenth century. However, contrary to Cuba, U.S. relations with Venezuela were generally stable, with only brief moments where significant events would cause the United States to become involved. The first of these occurred following an 1876 territorial dispute between Venezuela and Great Britain.[67] The Venezuelan government repeatedly appealed to the United States to resolve the issue, and after nearly twenty years, President Grover Cleveland appointed a boundary commission to handle the matter. The commission ruled in favor of Great Britain, and while disappointing to Venezuela, its government ratified the commission's finding—asserting the United States' preeminence in Latin America, and giving weight to documents such as the Monroe Doctrine.[68] The next notable event occurred from 1902-1903, when Great Britain, Germany, and Italy blockaded Venezuela for its failures to pay foreign debts.[69] With the situation deteriorating, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt sent in a naval fleet to force the European powers to back down and negotiate a compromise. An agreement was reached on February 13, 1903.[70] This sequence of events directly contributed to the development of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, asserting the right of the United States to intervene to stabilize the

[67] "Venezuela Boundary Dispute, 1895–1899," U.S. Department of State (U.S. Department of State), accessed April 20, 2021, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/venezuela.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Embert J Hendrickson, "Roosevelt's Second Venezuelan Controversy", *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 50, no. 3 (1970): 482-98. Accessed April 26, 2021. doi:10.2307/2512193.
[70] Ibid.

economic affairs of Latin American nations, as to prevent the future need for European intervention.[71]

For the next forty years, U.S.-Venezuela relations were positive, and relatively stable. However, this again changed in 1948. The year prior, Venezuela had just held its first national election with universal suffrage—a notable milestone for the nascent democracy. However, the recently elected Accion Democratica party was removed only one year later, in a military coup.[72] There is some debate as to the role of the United States in organizing and supporting this coup.[73] While U.S. officials, at the time, denied any involvement, the overthrown Venezuelan President, Rómulo Gallegos, charged that certain U.S. military officials cooperated with and counseled the military officers responsible for the coup.[74] Even if the United States did not formally support the coup, it benefited, as the new Venezuelan government was staunchly anti-communist and fostered a better and more profitable relationship with U.S.-based oil companies.[75] For the next fifty years, the United States continued to enjoy a positive and stable relationship with Venezuela, benefiting immensely from Venezuela's burgeoning oil trade.

However, beginning with the election of Hugo Chavez in 1998, relations between the U.S. and Venezuela can be characterized as consistently deteriorating. The philosophy of "Chavismo"—equal parts Bolivarianism and Marxism—was the driving force behind many of Chavez's principal policies, putting him into direct conflict with the

[71] Ibid.
[72] Bethany Aram, "Exporting Rhetoric, Importing Oil: United States Relations with Venezuela, 1945-1948", *World Affairs* 154, no. 3 (1992): 94-106, Accessed April 20, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20672311.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

aims of the U.S. Additionally, his proclivity to seize additional power and systematically work to undermine the democratic processes that led to his initial election would eventually set the stage for his successor, Nicolás Maduro to come to power, and complete Venezuela's backslide into a repressive, authoritarian state.

Throughout all of this time, U.S. action towards Venezuela consistently escalated. Chavez's early years were only marked by the occasional diplomatic response. President Obama established the early framework for implementing targeted sanctions against members of the government. President Trump then aggressively expanded the scope of U.S. sanctions, and made the first formal efforts to initiate a transition of power. Looking at the rise of Hugo Chavez, and how his actions established the framework for 2019, is essential to understanding the development of U.S. policy over time, and how to best avoid repeating past mistakes.

Prior to Chavez's victory in the 1998 Presidential election, the U.S. enjoyed a positive relationship with Venezuela, with mutually beneficial trade as the cornerstone. Venezuela had, for years, enormously benefited from the export of its oil, with the world's largest proven reserves.[76] This consistent income supported an array of government-sponsored public programs, and for a time, Venezuelan workers enjoyed the highest wages in Latin America.[77] However, their overreliance on oil would soon backfire. A collapse in the price of oil in the early 1980s devastated the Venezuelan economy, leading to high unemployment, high inflation, and low wages throughout the country. Public trust in their established two-party democratic system cratered. This trend

[76] Michael McCaughan, *The Battle of Venezuela* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2004).
[77] Ibid.

continued throughout the 1990s, leading to the rise of the former military officer, political outsider, and left-wing activist Hugo Chavez.[78] Chavez blamed the current state of the country on their two-party system, and the corruption he believed to be inherent within it.[79] In 1998, Chavez ran on this platform, promising to eradicate corruption and overhaul the economic system that had grown increasingly unequal. He won easily, with 56.2% of the vote, and quickly set about implementing his sweeping changes.[80]

The first major conflict with the U.S. arose from his Chavismo philosophy. The first component of the philosophy, Bolivarianism, was derived from the historical legacy of Venezuelan hero Simón Bolívar—who fought to free his country from an imperialist power. As President, Chavez explicitly worked to counter the influence of the United States. The most important example was the creation of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA).[81] Initially founded as a trade agreement between Venezuela and Cuba, this new alliance worked to subvert U.S. interests in two key areas. First, it strategically undermined the U.S. strategy of isolating the Castro regime in Cuba. Second, ALBA quickly expanded beyond its initial mandate. Through oil-based trade agreements such as PetroCaribe and PetroSur, ALBA would expand to ten full-member states with as many five others as at least observer members.[82] ALBA would quickly become an alternative to what was perceived as an overt U.S. influence in specific

[78] Richard Lapper, "Venezuela and the Rise of Chavez: A Background Discussion Paper," (Council on Foreign Relations, November 22, 2005), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-and-rise-chavez-background-discussion-paper.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] "Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed April 3, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bolivarian-Alliance-for-the-Peoples-of-Our-America.
[82] Ibid.

international institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank.[83] Further still, the one country, one vote policy within the Organization of American States (OAS) has allowed the Venezuela-backed coalition to consistently frustrate U.S. efforts to push their policy through the preeminent regional organization.[84]

The second core tenet of Chavismo, Marxism, worked in conjunction with Bolivarianism to contribute to the various friction points with the United States. First, it contributed to the creation of a strong alliance between Venezuela and Cuba. Chavez saw a great many parallels between his own personal rise to power, and that of Fidel Castro about forty years prior. One of these parallels was their common ideological background, and many of the actions taken by Chavez once in power drew from the same ideology. Following a 2003 general strike among workers at the country's main oil company Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA), Chavez nationalized the company, placing Venezuela's single largest income generator under the direct control of his government.[85] Higher oil prices inundated the government with new funds which simultaneously funded ambitious social programs such as "Barrio Adentro" as well as the cementing the newly-minted international ALBA alliance.[86] This mirrored a number of other domestic changes made in the first years under Chavez, such as the creation of agricultural communes.[87] As

[83] Ted Piccone, "The Geopolitics of China's Rise in Latin America", Geoeconomics and Global Issues | Brookings Institute, November 2016 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/the-geopolitics-of-chinas-rise-in-latin-america_ted-piccone.pdf
[84] Michael Shifter, "The Diplomatic War to Topple Venezuela's Strongman," Foreign Policy, June 17, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/17/venezuela-maduro-almagro-oas-chavez/.
[85] Richard Lapper, "Venezuela and the Rise of Chavez: A Background Discussion Paper," (Council on Foreign Relations, November 22, 2005), https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-and-rise-chavez-background-discussion-paper.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

Chavez took greater control over the various facets of economic and political power in Venezuela, relations with the United States continued to worsen.

Worsening relations between the United States and Venezuela, as Hugo Chavez increasingly centralized power within the country, was a consistent trend from his nearly fifteen years in power. In 2002, merely two years after he was elected, Chavez faced growing discontent from a number of different sectors within Venezuela. A public demonstration quickly unraveled into a march on the palace at Miraflores, leading to the military to depose Chavez and install Pedro Carmona as the new President.[88] After just two days, Carmona's policies caused the public and the military to turn on him, and re-install Chavez in office. While the coup was short-lived and fairly straightforward, the issue of potential U.S. involvement was more complicated. Unlike many Latin American nations, the United States did not initially condemn the coup.[89]

The U.S. government also knew that elements within Venezuela were planning a coup before it was executed.[90] However, the U.S. embassy in Caracas communicated this to Chavez, and both top officials within the U.S. government, as well as Chavez's government, publicly stated that the United States had no role in the coup.[91] Despite Chavez's initial stance, in the subsequent months, his tone and stance would shift. Faced with growing domestic difficulties, Chavez spun the events of the coup in an attempt to consolidate support against an external foe—linking the coup to past U.S. regime change

[88] Daniel Lansberg-Rodríguez, "Coup Fatigue in Caracas," Foreign Policy, March 15, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/15/coup-fatigue-in-caracas-venezuela-maduro/.
[89] Michael McCaughan, *The Battle of Venezuela* (London: Latin America Bureau, 2004).
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.

efforts in the region, such as the Bay of Pigs.[92] Despite the fact that the United States vociferously refuted this claim, Chavez continued to allege that he had proof of U.S. involvement.[93] Later, the reality around U.S. involvement would again become muddled following official investigations into the actions of both the U.S. government and NGOs in Venezuela at the time. The eventual report by the U.S. Inspector General found that neither U.S. officials nor the embassy committed any "wrongdoing."[94] However, the same report also concluded that organizations such as the Department of Defense (DOD) and National Endowment for Democracy (NED) had provided training and other material support to actors involved in the coup.[95] In this respect, the events of the 2002 coup in Venezuela mirror those of the Bay of Pigs invasion sixty years prior. And, in both instances, the effort was ultimately unsuccessful in forcing a regime change, while damaging the standing of the United States in the target country and region as a whole.

This trend did not end following the coup, but reoccurred time and again throughout Chavez's tenure in power. He additionally accused the United States of supporting further efforts to overthrow him later in the year, and occasionally claimed that the United States had various plans to either assassinate him personally, or invade Venezuela.[96] In 2008, Chavez expelled U.S. Ambassador Patrick Duddy, the latest in a series of diplomatic escalations resulting from various foreign policy disagreements.

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[92] Daniel Lansberg-Rodríguez, "Coup Fatigue in Caracas," Foreign Policy, March 15, 2015, https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/15/coup-fatigue-in-caracas-venezuela-maduro/.
[93] "A review of U.S. Policy Towards Venezuela November 2001 – April 2002", Office of the Inspector General, July 2002 https://web.archive.org/web/20030423012407/http://oig.state.gov/documents/organization/13682.pdf
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] "Transcript: Hugo Chavez Interview," ABC News (ABC News Network, October 31, 2005), https://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/International/Story?id=1134098&page=3.

Even the relative "thaw" that began in President Obama's first years in office would not last, with Chavez continuing to oppose U.S. objectives, and even personally insulting the President for his policy actions.[97]

Upon his death in 2013, Chavez was succeeded by his hand-selected choice, Nicolás Maduro. Maduro narrowly won the subsequent Presidential election in 2013, and then used his new position to continue in the footsteps of his predecessor. Maduro set out to maintain continuity in Venezuela's foreign and domestic policy, as well as continuing to centralize power and further Venezuela's backslide from democracy. However, whereas the United States responded to past Venezuelan actions by either ignoring them or with only minor diplomatic actions, the latter years under President Obama marked a distinct turning point. In response to the Venezuelan government's crackdown on protests in 2014, the U.S. Congress passed the Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014.[98] This bill established a new framework, under which the United States would impose individual sanctions on anyone deemed responsible for arresting or prosecuting citizens exercising their right to protest.[99] This established a consistent pattern for the next years. The Maduro Regime would increase its central authority and work to undermine the policy goals of the United States, and in turn, the United States would pass a new round of targeted sanctions. In both 2014 and 2015, in response to allegations of corruption and human rights abuses, the Obama administration issued new

[97] Mackenzie Weinger, "Chavez: Obama's a 'Clown' President," POLITICO, December 20, 2011, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1211/70694.html#ixzz1pBQ11D9Z/.
[98] "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions", Congressional Research Service, updated January 22, 2021. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf
[99] Robert Menendez, "Titles - S.2142 - 113th Congress (2013-2014): Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act of 2014," Congress.gov, December 18, 2014, https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/2142/titles.

sanctions, blocking assets and restricting the visas of a number of top government officials, as well as those of their family members.[100]

Prior to the election of President Trump in 2016, U.S. policy towards Venezuela could be characterized by limitations. While the previous administrations had often been at odds with both Chavez and Maduro, they limited retaliatory policies to smaller-scale diplomatic actions, and eventually limited individual sanctions. However, early actions by Nicolás Maduro were met with more dramatic responses from President Trump, eventually culminating in a series of policies aimed at forcing through a regime change. First, in 2017 following a midterm defeat for his socialist party in Venezuela's legislative body, Maduro responded by stripping the National Assembly of its constitutionally-ordained power and creating a new institution.[101] The new "National Constituent Assembly" was staffed entirely by party loyalists, and would rubber stamp any executive actions Maduro sought to carry out.[102] This move would be a hallmark of even further undemocratic actions to come. The definitive turning point in the relationship was the fraudulent 2018 Presidential elections, in which Nicolás Maduro illegitimately won another term.[103] Following the failure to conduct a free and fair election, according to the

[100] "United States Expands Venezuela Visa Bans," BBC News (BBC, February 3, 2015), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-31104879.
[101] Jennifer L. McCoy, "Analysis | Venezuela's Controversial New Constituent Assembly, Explained," The Washington Post (WP Company, February 14, 2018), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/01/venezuelas-dubious-new-constituent-assembly-explained/.
[102] Ibid.
[103] While previous Venezuelan elections fell short of the criteria that most world democracies adhere too, they were still generally regarded as mostly fair. Both Chavez and Maduro, in 2013, used their position in government to grant themselves significant advantages in their campaigns, such as unequal access to resources, media, and utilizing state resources to influence voters. However, the actions undertaken by Maduro in the lead up to the 2018 election far outstripped those done prior. In response, much of the international community refused to certify the election, or recognize Maduro as the legitimate victor. The specifics of all of these allegations fall outside the purview of this paper, but nonetheless are important, and discussed in greater detail in the following:

Venezuelan constitution, the President of the National Assembly then assumes power, until such a date that legitimate elections can be held.[104] When Juan Guaidó, following this mandate, was declared the Interim President of Venezuela, the United States became the first country to officially recognize him, and not Nicolás Maduro, as the legitimate leader of Venezuela.[105] This marked a clear departure from past U.S. policy. For the first time, the U.S.' official stance called for regime change, and all subsequent U.S. policy can be seen as attempting to work towards this end.

Beyond the recognition of Guaidó, and coalescing international support behind him, President Trump's most significant actions towards Venezuela revolved around expanding the sanctions framework initially outlined by President Obama. Using the authority of the same executive order, as of January 19, 2021, President Trump sanctioned 113 Venezuelan individuals.[106] The vast majority of these were high-ranking officials within the Venezuelan government, such as Maduro's family, the leaders of the armed forces, and the Socialist Party President, Diosdado Cabello.[107] The most dramatic escalation of this tactic came in March 2020, when the Trump administration charged Maduro and fourteen other top government officials with narco-terrorism, corruption,

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2020 | Topics: News U.S. Mission OAS | 9 December, "OAS Resolution Condemns the Fraudulent Elections in Venezuela," U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, December 9, 2020, https://usoas.usmission.gov/oas-resolution-condemns-the-fraudulent-elections-in-venezuela/.
"Texts Adopted - Presidential Elections in Venezuela - Thursday, 3 May 2018," europarl.europa.eu, May 3, 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0199_EN.html.
Clare Ribando Seelke, "Venezeuela's 2018 Presidential Elections", Congressional Research Service, May 24, 2018,
https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IN10902.pdf

[104] https://law.stanford.edu/2019/02/01/guaido-not-maduro-is-the-de-jure-president-of-venezuela/

[105] https://cu.usembassy.gov/statement-from-president-donald-j-trump-recognizing-venezuelan-national-assembly-president-juan-guaido-as-the-interim-president-of-venezuela/

[106] "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions", Congressional Research Service, updated January 22, 2021. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf

[107] Ibid.

drug trafficking, and other criminal offenses.[108] The State Department offered anywhere from $5 million to $15 million for information leading to the arrests of these individuals, in one of most aggressive sanctions ever imposed against an ostensible head of state.[109]

However, unlike his predecessor, President Trump also imposed broader sanctions, on entire entities and eventually even entire economic sectors. These general sanctions began in August 2017, when President Trump signed an executive order prohibiting the Venezuelan government from accessing U.S. financial markets.[110] Significant escalation with these sanctions came in 2019. In January, President Trump designated PDVSA as subject to sanctions, and barred any U.S. citizens from engaging in business with them.[111] In March, the same sanction was then applied to Minerven, Venezuela's state-owned gold mining company.[112] In April, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Venezuela's central bank, cutting off its access to U.S. currency and limited its ability to conduct financial transactions abroad.[113] From there, the Trump administration expanded its sanctions to target the businesses of other nations that continued to support the Maduro Regime, such as financial institutions in Russia, oil importing businesses in Cuba, and fuel transports from Iran.[114]

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[108] "Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 Current and Former Venezuelan Officials Charged with Narco-Terrorism, Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Criminal Charges," The United States Department of Justice, March 27, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nicol-s-maduro-moros-and-14-current-and-former-venezuelan-officials-charged-narco-terrorism.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Moises Rendon and Max Price, "Are Sanctions Working in Venezuela?," | Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 3, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/are-sanctions-working-venezuela.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

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Despite the enormous pressure placed on the Maduro regime by the Trump administration, Maduro remains in power. Therefore, if the goal of the administration's actions was to force through a regime change, one must examine why this failed, what the alternative policy options could have been, and where does this leave the U.S. going forward. First, it is imperative to understand that history demonstrates that economic sanctions, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to force a regime change.[115] This is especially true in the case of Venezuela because, similar to Cuba, the U.S. undertook many of its policy decisions unilaterally. While there was a good degree of international consensus among the U.S.' allies for recognizing Guaidó's government and holding the Maduro regime responsible for its crimes, there was far less consensus with respect to the size and scope of the economic sanctions that Trump administration enacted.[116] Further, the international community is not united in its support for the U.S. and its policies. Maduro himself was able to rely upon five key international allies to support his regime, both economically and materially.[117] While each of these five—Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, and Turkey—have different vested interests in Venezuela, they are united in their desire to keep the Maduro regime in power.[118] While the U.S. made efforts to sanction

[115] David S. Cohen and Zoe A.Y. Weinberg, "Sanctions Can't Spark Regime Change," Foreign Affairs, May 14, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2019-04-29/sanctions-cant-spark-regime-change.
[116] Moises Rendon and Max Price, "Are Sanctions Working in Venezuela?," | Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 3, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/are-sanctions-working-venezuela.
[117] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.
[118] Ibid.

these nations as well, the relative cost never persuaded those five nations to abandon their support for Maduro.

While sanctions are an aggressive policy, and were ostensibly carried out with the intent of forcing Maduro out of power in Venezuela, they were not the only possible policy option for the United States. On one hand, the United States could have acted much more definitively to force an undesirable leader out of power. Time and again in Latin America, the United States has done just that.[119] With respect to Venezuela, the United States never explicitly ruled out a military intervention.[120] In one press conference, then-National Security Adviser John Bolton wrote "5,000 troops to Colombia" on his notepad, again sparking a conversation about the possibility that the United States would take more forceful military action to see their policy aims through.[121] However, this never came to pass. On the other side of the spectrum, the United States also notably did not pursue the long-term angle to democratization in Venezuela. Under President Trump, the United States was not only conspicuously absent from the

[119] U.S. interventions in Latin America span several centuries, and took place for a wide variety of reasons. This is an important topic but too vast to explore fully within the context of this paper. For additional resources regarding the specific interventions, and the various reasons for why they were conducted, see the following:
Langley, Lester D. America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere. University of Georgia Press, 2010. Accessed February 9, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nk3h.
Thomas F. O'Brien, *Making the Americas: The United States and Latin America from the Age of Revolutions to the Era of Globalization* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007).
Alan L. McPherson, A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1st ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016)

[120] Lara Seligman, "U.S. Mulls Military Options in Venezuela," Foreign Policy (Foreign Policy, May 3, 2019), https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/us-mulls-military-options-in-venezuela-trump-maduro-guaido/.

[121] Dan Lamothe, Eli Rosenberg, "'5,000 Troops': Photo of John Bolton's Notes Raises Questions about U.S. Military Role in Venezuela Crisis," The Washington Post (WP Company, January 29, 2019), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/01/29/troops-photo-john-boltons-notes-raise-questions-about-military-role-venezuela-crisis/.

negotiation efforts with the Maduro regime, but also undermined them.[122] Additionally, rather than funding and working with the local NGOs that could work to roll back the democratic backsliding that has defined Venezuela for twenty years, the sectoral sanctions imposed by President Trump unduly harms them in their day-to-day operations.[123]

Cuba – Venezuela Policy Pattern

Overall, the pattern that emerged under the Obama and Trump administrations mirrors that which occurred in Cuba sixty years prior. Faced with a key Latin American nation backsliding and becoming increasingly hostile to U.S. interests, the United States eventually decided to take action to try and force through a regime change. However, in both instances, the United States did not opt for a direct military intervention, despite it possessing the ability to do so. Further, the United States did not choose to invest in the grassroots infrastructure that would create support for democracy in the future, while working to keep either Cuba or Venezuela within its sphere of influence. Rather, in both instances, the United States adopted a series of half measures—unaffiliated military actions and mostly unilateral sanctions to try and force the regime change. In both instances, this policy failed. Thus, the next section of this paper will attempt to address various explanations as to why the United States repeated its policy failures, and what

[122] "Venezuela's Maduro Halts Talks with Opposition after US Sanctions," Nicolas Maduro News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, August 8, 2019), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/8/8/venezuelas-maduro-halts-talks-with-opposition-after-us-sanctions.
[123] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved?" Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved? | Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 22, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-sanctions-venezuela-be-improved.

avenues remain open for the United States so that Venezuela does not become a policy albatross, much in the way that Cuba has since 1959.

Importantly, these two situations paralleling one another is not incidental. Rather, one of the significant contributing factors are the deliberate choices Venezuela has made in its national development—first under Chavez and then continuing under Maduro. When Chavez first came to power, he developed a very close relationship with Cuba. As mentioned above, Chavez and Castro saw great similarities in each other, and worked to bring their countries closer together. Part of the relationship was built on mutual economic aid. Cuba had limited access to oil to fuel the country, and Venezuela had oil in excess. In exchange, Cuba would provide Venezuela with what it lacked: technical experts in a variety of fields but most notably, medical doctors.[124] However, as Venezuela slowly backslid into the authoritarian government of today, Cuba became increasingly important. Primarily through the Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar (DGCIM), Cuba has sent thousands of intelligence operatives, in addition to training Venezuelan officials, to create and then maintain the system of social repression Maduro relies upon to stay in power.[125] Further, these operatives have helped the Maduro regime monitor and purge the military of any individuals who may oppose the regime, develop widespread disinformation campaigns, and provide a blueprint on how to resist targeted U.S. action against the country.[126] Many of the regimes actions, such as the widespread

[124] John M Kirk, "Cuban Medical Cooperation Within ALBA: The Case of Venezuela", *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 3, no. 2/3 (2011): 221-34, Accessed April 5, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41945946.
[125] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.
[126] Ibid.

torture of dissidents and recent arrests of many of Guaidó top campaign officials — effectively working to isolate the Interim President — can also be traced to the influence of Cuban operatives.[127] Cuba has more than sixty years of experience in maintaining a repressive government in the face of withering U.S. sanctions, and its assistance to Venezuela is vital for the continuation of the Maduro regime.

Cuba and Venezuela have followed similar paths to development, at least in part, due to the intentional decisions made by the leaders of each of the respective countries. However, given the U.S.' seemingly similar approach to Cuba around 1959 and again with Venezuela in 2019, one must explore why the U.S. could have made the same policy errors in both instances. There are a number of possibilities; this paper will explore two domestic and two international explanations for the U.S.' policy approaches.

Domestic Explanations

U.S. Electoral Politics

While elections on all levels matter, for the purposes of U.S. foreign policy, the most consequential elections are for president. The president wields the most influence in this theatre, owing to the power of executive orders, the appointment of nearly all the top government positions relating to foreign policy, and the dual role of Commander in Chief of the military. Thus, this section will focus specifically on the nature of presidential elections in the United States. Given the structure of the electoral college, certain states are more valuable for U.S. presidential candidates to win. Florida possesses 29 electoral votes, tied with New York for the third most in the country.[128] This, in and of itself,

[127] "Venezuela: Suspected Plotters Tortured," Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2020, https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/09/venezuela-suspected-plotters-tortured.
[128] "Florida Presidential Election Voting History," 270toWin.com, accessed April 5, 2021, https://www.270towin.com/states/Florida.

grants Florida huge significance when it comes to the presidential races. However, even beyond the raw number of votes, is the nature of Florida's voting history. Florida is one of the true "swing states" for nation-wide elections. Since 2000, the Republican candidate for president has won Florida four times, and the Democratic candidate has only won twice.[129] This becomes additionally important when juxtaposing Florida's voting history with the other three biggest states in the country. In the same time frame, the Democratic candidate has won both California and New York all six times, while the Republican candidate has won Texas every time as well.[130] The combination of both of these factors grants Florida an outsized importance in presidential elections—an importance that is reflected in the results. Since 1980, the U.S. has conducted eleven presidential elections, and the winner of Florida has ultimately won nine of them, including five of the last six.[131] The only exception was the 2020 election. However, despite President Trump losing his re-election bid, he actually expanded his margin of victory in Florida from 2016, as the candidate with the more hardline stance on both Cuba and Venezuela.[132]

Given the importance of winning Florida to win a presidential election, politicians from both parties are forced to cater specific messages that resonate with Florida's electorate. One of the most important voting blocs in Florida, since 1959, has been Cuban-Americans. Ever since Castro's revolution, Cubans have fled for the U.S. in large numbers. Today, there are more than 1.3 million Cubans living in the United States, with

[129] Ibid.
[130] David Leip, "Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections," Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, accessed April 5, 2021, http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

about 77% located in Florida.[133] In a state where national elections are often decided by fine margins, this voting bloc has been seen as crucial towards building a winning statewide coalition. Recently, it appears that this trend is beginning to repeat. Since 2000, the Venezuelan population in the U.S. has more than tripled.[134] Similar to Cubans sixty years prior, these Venezuelans arrived in the U.S., fleeing deteriorating conditions in their home country as a direct result of the policies implemented by a Marxist-inspired dictator.[135] It is estimated that over 50% of the Venezuelan nationals living in the U.S. are living in Florida, adding another significant voting bloc to the state that has a direct interest in the development of U.S. foreign policy.

Understanding these demographic shifts is essential to understanding the development of U.S. foreign policy towards both Cuba and Venezuela. For the Cuban-Americans, many of them, especially in the earlier years, were directly fleeing Castro's regime. Combined with the existing Cold War and a deep-seated fear of communism, presidential candidates adopted strong foreign policy stances against Cuba—pushing for regime change and rejecting any semblance of compromise or cooperation. This was a consensus that was held by both Democratic and Republican candidates. To this point, in the 1960 presidential debates, then-Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kennedy attacked the Republican, former VP Richard Nixon, for the perceived policy failure of

[133] Brittany Blizzard and Jeanne Batalova, "Cuban Immigrants in the United States," migrationpolicy.org, June 11, 2020, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-immigrants-united-states-2018.
[134] Luis Hassan Gallardo and Jeanne Batalova, "Venezuelan Immigrants in the United States," migrationpolicy.org, April 10, 2020, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/venezuelan-immigrants-united-states-2018.
[135] Sonia Osorio, "Venezuelan Americans make their way into U.S. political arena," Miami Herald, August 15, 2020,
https://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/article244934282.html

allowing Castro to successfully overthrow Batista.[136] Then Senator-Kennedy claimed that Cuba was lost to the United States, Castro was clearly a communist, and that the United States needed a more aggressive policy stance against Cuba.[137]

This thinking was largely maintained by both Democratic and Republican administrations for the next fifty years, as the electoral importance of Florida, and thus by proxy, Cuban-Americans, never waned. Although the events are still fairly recent, a similar pattern can be seen with respect to Venezuela. The initial sanctions placed on Venezuela were done by Democrat, President Obama. U.S. policy became more aggressive against the Maduro regime under Republican, President Trump, and at least in the beginning months of his presidency, it appears that Democrat, President Biden, is going to continue in a similar mold. Both President Biden and his Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, have confirmed that they view Interim President Juan Guaidó as the legitimate leader of Venezuela, desire a peaceful transfer of power, and plan to maintain the existing sanctions.[138] In both cases, while the sanctions are not achieving their stated purpose, they do achieve their electoral purpose—they give the impression that the president cares about the situation in both countries, and is willing to stand-up and take a hardline stance against both.[139]

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[136] "Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon Second Joint Radio-Television Broadcast, October 7, 1960," October 7, 1960 | JFK Library, accessed April 5, 2021, https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/2nd-nixon-kennedy-debate-19601007.
[137] Ibid.
[138] "Venezuela's Guaido, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken Discuss 'Return to Democracy'," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 2, 2021), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-usa/venezuelas-guaido-u-s-secretary-of-state-blinken-discuss-return-to-democracy-idUSKCN2AU2QO.
[139] Doug Bandow, "America Shouldn't Invade Venezuela," Cato Institute, January 22, 2021, https://www.cato.org/commentary/america-shouldnt-invade-venezuela.

The final pertinent domestic political development is what occurred when President Obama attempted to reverse course with his Cuba policy. In 2015, President Obama sought to walk back roughly 55 years of policy and normalize relations between the two countries. Part of President Obama's justification came from polling data of Cuban-Americans, which highlighted that the younger generations were opposed to the ongoing restrictive policies.[140] On the surface, this decision made sense. The U.S.' pressure campaign had not forced a regime change over the entire duration of the policy, the polling data was interpreted as a mandate from the next generation of Cuban-Americans, and President Obama was able to implement many of these changes through executive orders. Now, six years later, one can evaluate the electoral repercussions of this decision. Since 2015, Florida has conducted five statewide elections: two presidential, two senatorial, and one gubernatorial. Republicans have won all five.[141] While all of the results were within a few percentage points, in a state that is renowned for its reputation as a swing state, this string of results is notable. This becomes even more pronounced when one considers that one of the senatorial races featured a democratic incumbent, and President Obama had previously won Florida in both of presidential campaigns. When the state that has the highest concentration of Cuban-Americans immediately reacts to a change in Cuba policy by voting five consecutive times for the opposite party, it greatly disincentivizes any similar moves in the future. This, in a way, could be responsible for cementing U.S. policy towards Venezuela for the future. The situations bear an incredible

[140] Guillermo Grenier and Hugh Gladwin, 2014 FIU Cuba Poll: How Cuban Americans in Miami View U.S. Policies Towards Cuba, May 2014, distributed by Florida International University, cri.fiu.edu/research/ cuba-poll/

[141] David Leip, "Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections," Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, accessed April 5, 2021, http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/.

resemblance—both in the driving factors behind the refugee population coming to the U.S. but also with how U.S. policy reacted to these moves. In 1959, the influx of Cuban refugees coupled with an existing fear pertaining to the ideology of communism. In 2019, the influx of Venezuelan refugees coupled with a significant rise in political rhetoric on the dangers of socialism. In both cases, the U.S. adopted hardline policy stances, in what can be seen as overt attempt to win over an electorally significant population, in one of the most electorally significant states in the country.

Domestic Nature of the United States

Organizational theory is one of the many frames through which one can examine the domestic nature of the United States, and how it impacts foreign policy. In essence, this theory argues that states do not make foreign policy decisions.[142] Rather, foreign policy is the aggregate of all the various organizations within a country that have a stake, and thus influence, in the decision-making process.[143] This includes actors both within and outside of government, from the President and Congress to business interests. U.S. foreign policy is the sum of a number of different domestic actors all weighing in with their distinct interests. Ultimately, for the United States to create foreign policy, it is forced to find a compromise between all of the competing interests to create an action plan that best suits the global interests of the country.

This type of analysis is also uniquely situated for the United States given the structure and power distribution within the U.S. Government. One of the federal government's defining characteristics is the separation of power and series of checks and

[142] Bill Newmann, "A Brief Introduction to Theories on International Relations and Foreign Policy," accessed April 5, 2021, http://www.people.vcu.edu/~wnewmann/468theory.htm.
[143] Ibid.

balances that the Founding Fathers put into place to ensure that the Republic functioned as intended. In other words, compromise was always meant to be a feature of the U.S. government. Thus, it naturally follows that this model would then influence the way foreign policy is made. The various responsibilities that would fall under the purview of foreign policy are distributed between both the President and Congress, as well as a number of different bureaucratic organizations throughout the rest of government.[144] The combination of all of the various organizations, along with the natural proclivity of the United States to work towards compromise, establishes a system in which U.S. foreign policy is then often a result of compromise between various actors with distinct interests.

Using this lens, one can then examine how U.S. policy towards Cuba, beginning in 1959, developed. On one side of the equation, there were a number of actors within the United States that were pushing for a drastic response to Castro seizing power. U.S. business was concerned about the radical elements within the revolution, and what they would have planned for U.S. holdings on the island.[145] Also pushing in this direction were the Cubans that fled the island for the United States, and the Cold War/communism hawks throughout all levels of the U.S. government. All of these actors believed that the United States was best suited by replacing Castro with a more pro-U.S. leader in Cuba.

These were not the only actors with interests in the situation. On the other side, many actors within the U.S. government did not want the United States to be seen as

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[144] Zaara Zain Hussain, "The Effect of Domestic Politics on Foreign Policy Decision Making" (E-International Affairs, March 28, 2021), https://www.e-ir.info/2011/02/07/the-effect-of-domestic-politics-on-foreign-policy-decision-making/.

[145] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Volume VI, eds. John P. Glennon and Ronald D. Landa (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1991), Document 169. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v06/d169

overtly overthrowing another government in Latin America. Others, including at the highest levels, were far more optimistic about the prospects of Castro in Cuba. At first, this balance skewed in favor of the more hawkish side, and U.S. policy reflected that, culminating with the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, this desire to force a regime change in Cuba was overruled by other U.S. foreign policy interests—namely, no nuclear war with USSR. Thus, in an attempt to satisfy all parties, the United States compromised. President Kennedy stated that the United States would not invade Cuba, as he had promised Khrushchev. But, the United States still desired a friendlier government in Cuba, and would continue to pursue policies ostensibly with the intention to force through a regime change. Examining Cuba policy through this lens also explains the continuation of the economic sanctions and embargo throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Many of the same organizations that initially pushed for a hardline Cuba policy were still in place, looking to replace the Castro regime. However, as time wore on, they were countered by a new generation of Cuban-Americans, not as opposed to the regime, as well as growing war-weariness among the population. Overall, this likely would have been enough to keep the existing policy compromise in place.

This same dynamic can now be seen repeating itself with respect to Venezuela. There are two main groups within the United States pushing for more severe action against the Maduro regime. First, similar to the situation that occurred with Cuba sixty years prior, are the Venezuelan refugees within the United States. Having fled the disastrous conditions in their home country, and most having a direct connection to the human rights abuses by the Maduro regime, this population is naturally hawkish when it comes to advocating for U.S. policy towards Venezuela. Also similar to the dynamic that

defined the Cuba situation, is the existence of a group of policy hawks against the communist dictatorship ruling the country. Relatedly, many of these prominent law makers, as well as extra-governmental organizations such as think tanks, are similarly concerned with the growing influence of foreign powers—looking to subvert the role and influence of the U.S.—within Latin America.[146] Specifically, countries like China and Russia are supporting the Maduro regime, not only for their own financial stakes in the country, but also because its acts as a check on the larger geo-political aims of the U.S.[147]

These are not, however, the only actors with policy designs related to Venezuela. One factor pushing against definitive action is the growing unpopularity of war and continuing U.S. military deployments to foreign countries.[148] Further, there are U.S. businesses that still maintain significant interest in Venezuela, and want to be able to continue their operations in the country. As a result of the influence from all of these organizations, U.S. foreign policy again ends as a compromise between the various viewpoints. With the most dramatic action against Venezuela off the table, the U.S. satisfies the hawkish organizations by increasing the size and scope of the sanctions. However, compromise can be seen with the one notable exception to the otherwise comprehensive sanction program. Citgo is a United States-based oil and gasoline giant, but is majority owned by the Venezuelan state-owned oil company, PDVSA.[149] Citgo

[146] Ted Piccone, "The Geopolitics of China's Rise in Latin America", Geoeconomics and Global Issues | Brookings Institute, November 2016 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/the-geopolitics-of-chinas-rise-in-latin-america_ted-piccone.pdf
[147] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.
[148] "Rejecting Retreat," Chicago Council on Global Affairs, September 16, 2019, https://digital.thechicagocouncil.org/lcc/rejecting-retreat.
[149] "Citgo Petroleum Corporation Company Profile: Houston, TX: Competitors, Financials & Contacts - Dun & Bradstreet," Company Profile | Houston, TX | Competitors, Financials & Contacts - Dun &

totaled more than $24 billion in revenue last year and, despite the severe sanctions on nearly all major Venezuelan companies, has continuously been granted waivers to continue their operations in Venezuela, a significant concession that works to satisfy all of the relevant organizations and their interests.[150]

The future implications for U.S. policy, towards both Cuba and Venezuela, using this organizational lens are dire, at least in the short-term. In order for U.S. policy to be altered in either case, there would need to be some underlying shift in the stances of the various organizations that are influencing the policy direction. At least in the short-term, this appears unlikely. When this lens is combined with the domestic electoral explanation, it becomes even more difficult to forecast near-term policy shifts. The electoral importance of Florida pushes politicians towards adopting hardline stances against both Cuba and Venezuela as a means to win over the crucial Hispanic vote within the state. From there, the other influential organizations and compromising nature of U.S. politics forces a slight hedge down from the most extreme options. However, the recent trend of Democratic losses in Florida—following the only significant policy shift since 1959—reinforces the need for the hardline policy stance. All of this combines to create the present-day situation. The United States is forced to adopt a tough policy stance, ostensibly pushing for regime change, despite knowing it will never work, but the

Bradstreet, accessed April 15, 2021, https://www.dnb.com/business-directory/company-profiles.citgo_petroleum_corporation.34d01fc01580dde5f04256738c9e26ad.html.

[150] "US Treasury Extends Venezuela Order Blocking Potential Citgo Seizure through October," S&P Global Platts, July 15, 2020, https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/oil/071520-us-treasury-extends-venezuela-order-blocking-potential-citgo-seizure-through-october.

electoral implications ensure that it is more politically viable to keep losing strategies in place than it is to actually alter course.

International Explanations

Realist Perspective

From the perspective of an offensive realist, both Cuba and Venezuela represented similar challenges for the United States.[151] In both cases, the countries presented a threat to the United States in and of themselves, as well as serving as proxies for a larger conflict. First, largely ever since the Monroe Doctrine, the United States has acted as the regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere.[152] While general U.S. policy towards Latin America often vacillated between exercising its power to shape events in its favor, and attempts to act as more of a "good neighbor", the United States has always held overwhelming economic and political interests and influence in the region. Simultaneously, the United States has worked diligently to shut out foreign competition. Thus, when an event such as Castro's takeover and subsequent directional shift in Cuba occurs, the United States perceives it as a direct challenge to its unquestioned status as the preeminent power in the region. A similar phenomenon occurred with Venezuela, beginning with Chavez and then increasingly so under Maduro. In both cases, the threat to the U.S.' status as hegemon not only occurred because each of the countries had expressed anti-U.S. sentiment, but also because both countries actively pursued policies that worked to subvert U.S. goals and interests. Domestically, Castro quickly moved to

[151] A brief outline of the core tenets of John Mearsheimer's theory are explained earlier in the paper, and will not be re-stated here.
[152] Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 12/02/1823; Presidential Messages of the 18th Congress, ca. 12/02/1823-ca. 03/03/1825; Record Group 46; Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990; National Archives.

redistribute land holdings and nationalize U.S. business interests on the island. Internationally, Castro tried to spread similarly-styled revolutions throughout the region; most famously, he launched an invasion of Trujillo's Dominican Republic not long after coming to power.[153] In Venezuela, Chavez effectively weaponized his oil surplus to subvert U.S. policy aims in the region. He pursued closer relations with Cuba, helping Cuba circumvent U.S. sanctions, and also struck deals with a number of smaller nations, trading cheaper oil for diplomatic allegiances against U.S. policy.[154] In both instances, the threats to U.S.' status as the unquestioned regional hegemon necessitated a response.

However, this was not the only factor that realists address when looking to evaluate U.S. policy actions against both Cuba and Venezuela. Neither of these conflicts occurred in a vacuum. Rather, both Cuba and Venezuela serve as flashpoints, or proxies, for larger global conflicts that involved the United States. This is especially relevant because U.S. policy was not simply responding to the events in each country, but was then constrained by the larger international conflicts. First, the events in Cuba cannot be divorced from the larger context of the Cold War. From a realist perspective, the Cold War was a great power conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Cuba became an embodiment of that larger conflict even before Castro officially declared himself a "Marxist-Leninist" and signed various treaties with the Soviet Union.[155] From the earliest days of Castro's revolution, U.S. law-makers were preoccupied with Castro's

[153] Robert L. Scheina, *Latin America's Wars Volume II The Age of the Professional Soldier, 1900-2001* (Dulles: Potomac Books Inc, 2014).
[154] Martin Varese, "ALBA Denounces The Return of US Imperialist Monroe Doctrine," teleSUR English (teleSUR, November 9, 2018), https://www.telesurenglish.net/analysis/ALBA-Denounces-The-Return-of-US-Imperialist-Monroe-Doctrine-20181109-0020.html.
[155] "Fidel Castro Declares Himself a Marxist-Leninist," History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 13, 2009), https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/castro-declares-himself-a-marxist-leninist.

ideological stance. For them, the question of Castro's ideology was essentially a proxy for the U.S.' ability to work with him, if he were to assume power. It was only after his government began implementing increasingly communist-like reforms that the United States began exploring options for a regime change. However, this is where U.S. policy makers were constrained by the larger great power conflict. With the Soviet Union increasingly supporting Castro's government, it was simply not within the U.S.' best interests to risk all out conflict with the Soviet Union, over Cuba. Thus, while the United States continued to pursue regime change, they did so with relative half-measures—such as the paramilitary-led Bay of Pigs invasion, while refusing to provide additional air support. When the conflict over Cuba reached its hottest point, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States again compromised with the Soviet Union. The United States avoided a potentially catastrophic conflict in exchange for removing the most drastic, but arguably effective, methods of removing Castro from power—a full-scale invasion. The Cold War would continue on until 1990, and this dynamic between the three countries would largely remain the same. The United States, while ostensibly looking to remove Castro from power, could not escalate beyond economic sanctions, while the Soviet Union continued to support the communist country on the U.S.' doorstep.

The later example of Venezuela highlights a different component of realist theory. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States was left as the world's lone superpower. Thus, when Venezuela shifted its policy direction and looked to coalesce regional support away from the United States, there was no equally powerful country to support Venezuela in its struggle. However, especially over the last five years or so, two rising world powers have increasingly thrown their support behind Venezuela, using the

Maduro Regime as a proxy to undermine the U.S.' geopolitical interests as the world hegemon. These two countries are China and Russia.[156] While both countries have made somewhat significant financial investments to support the Maduro regime, economics are not the primary driver of their attention in Venezuela.[157] Rather, both China and Russia have used various economic pursuits as a means to advance their geopolitical interests.

For example, beginning as far back as 2006, China had worked to strengthen the relationship with Venezuela. At the time, China was desperate to meet the growing energy requirements of their rapidly growing economy, while Venezuela was seeking an international alternative to the hegemony of the United States.[158] China provided a number of significant loans to assist Venezuela with infrastructure projects. However, unlike Russia, China ensured that Venezuelan oil was held as collateral in the event that the Venezuelan government was unable to repay them. This is exactly what transpired. As of 2020, Venezuela still owes the Chinese government about $20 billion of the initial $64 billion China loaned.[159] While a significant amount of money, China continues to support the Maduro regime, for two main reasons. First, pursuant to the terms of the loan agreement, in exchange for the outstanding money, Venezuela continues to send China vast quantities of oil, evading ongoing U.S. sanctions. And second, while $20 billion is a significant sum, it pales in comparison to China's total sovereign wealth fund. This

[156] William Courtney and Howard J. Shatz, "Why Russia Struggles to Feed Its Great-Power Addiction," RAND Corporation, May 11, 2020, https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/05/why-russia-struggles-to-feed-its-great-power-addiction.html.
Bruce Jones, "China and the Return of Great Power Strategic Competition", Brookings Institute, February 2020,
https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/FP_202002_china_power_competition_jones.pdf
[157] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 19, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/fabulous-five-how-foreign-actors-prop-maduro-regime-venezuela.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

money, for them, is worth their continued support, as Maduro continues to thwart the geopolitical interests of the United States, at a time when the relationship between the United States and China has deteriorated completely.[160]

Russia has operated in a similar manner. Russia has little need for Venezuela's oil. However, Russian president Vladimir Putin recognized years ago that Venezuela represented an opportunity for his country to actively subvert the geopolitical interests of the United States.[161] In this pursuit, Russia has used both its state-owned oil enterprises, and its banks, to support Venezuela's regimes through strategic partnerships and loans of last resort—stepping in when other international institutions would refuse to loan to the country.[162] This economic aid is in addition to the military equipment and intelligence assistance Putin's government provides.[163] All is done with the intent of continuing to prop up the Maduro regime, as a proxy to continuously frustrate U.S. geopolitical aims in Latin America.

Thus, in the end, examining the question of Cuba and Venezuela through a realist lens grants an understanding of why the United States would be moved to pursue a regime change in both cases. However, it also highlights the various international factors that also work to constrain any U.S. action. Because both countries became emblematic of larger international conflicts, U.S. policy goals had to be evaluated relative to costs in a larger conflict. While regime change was in the U.S.' best interests, it was not worth risking even larger conflict with a rival superpower, nor two rising powers. Thus, the

[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

United States hedged from the most drastic forms of ensuring a regime change, and utilized relative half-measures, such as economic sanctions, to try and pursue their policy aim. Going forward, this has significant implications for both countries. First, with respect to Cuba, the realist framework constraining U.S. action is no longer present. Cuba does not have an international superpower backing its struggle against the hegemony of the United States. Essentially, this would mean that the United States would be able to more freely pursue its stated goal of forcing a regime change in Cuba, without significant international repercussions. Any reason not to pursue this policy aim would need outside justification, such as an unwillingness to commit to such drastic action.

As for Venezuela, in order for the United States to change this dynamic, the United States must look to undermine the international support for Maduro's Venezuela. However, the international dynamic of the two rising powers backing the Maduro regime is unlikely to change. It is the interests of both China and Russia to continue to subvert the geopolitical aims of the United States, as both countries look to upset the unipolar international order in favor of one more beneficial to themselves. One method of moving forward would be to look for other policy interests of China and Russia that the United States could effectively leverage in exchange for reducing their support for Maduro. For China, this could revolve around the ongoing trade war, or threatening stiffer sanctions related to China's continuous action undermining existing U.S. sanctions, or the ongoing human rights crisis against the Chinese Uighur population.[164] For Russia, the actions would be similar. The United States could implement increasingly stringent sanctions on

[164] David Campanale and Joel Gunter Matthew Hill, "'Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone': Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape," BBC News (BBC, February 2, 2021), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071.

the companies and officials that continue to operate in Venezuela, raising the financial cost of continuing business until such a point that it is no longer viable for them to back Maduro.

Liberal Explanation

Building on some of the core tenets of realism but adapting them to better account for the international order, institutional liberalism provides alternative explanations for U.S. action with respect to both Cuba and Venezuela. Institutionalism begins at largely the same point as realism: an anarchic world order, state-level analysis, and that states primarily pursue security.[165] However, where realists assume that states have limited access to information, thus driving them further towards actions aimed at security and hostilities with foreign powers, institutional liberals take into account the role of international organizations.[166] These organizations have a number of roles under this system. The institutions can function as information vectors, provide common rules for international actors, and monitor states to hold them to their commitments.[167] Institutionalists argue that these organizations can even go so far as to fundamentally transform the interests and identities of the states in question.[168] Thus, this section will focus on the role of various international institutions, and the role they played in shaping the policy debates, and potentially constraining U.S. action on both Cuba and Venezuela.

The first relevant international institution pertaining to the U.S. policy action towards both Cuba and Venezuela is the United Nations (UN), and more specifically, the

[165] Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, "Institutional Theory as a Research Program," *Progress in International Relations Theory*, 2003, https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5627.003.0006.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

UN Security Council. First, beginning with Cuba, the established U.S. policy aim was to remove Fidel Castro from power and replace him with a pro-U.S. government. Many of the most effective methods for guaranteeing such a regime change involve broad international coalitions, that then in-turn can apply multi-lateral pressure on states. However, there were significant impediments to the United States pursuing that type of action.

One of the critical backdrops of the Cold War that the realist lens overlooks is the dynamic of the UN Security Council. The five members were split essentially between two camps—the three western democracies of the U.S., Great Britain, and France, and the two eastern communist countries of the Soviet Union and China. Any type of international sanction, or coalition-style sanction on Cuba, needed to pass through the UN Security Council. With the Soviet Union as an ardent supporter of Cuba, and the one nation veto power of the Security Council, there was little chance for any U.S.-backed policy initiatives against Cuba to pass. This was not the original intention of the UN, nor the Security Council. Both were initially founded—with the intent of all signatory countries—to come together in an effort to maintain international peace and security.[169] The veto was intended as a measure of last resort. However, during the Cold War, all of the members of the Council began to wield their veto power with increasing impunity. For example, the first Soviet Ambassador to the UN, Andrei Gromyko, became known as "Mr. Nyet" for his frequent use of the veto power in the Security Council.[170] During the

[169] "UN Charter," United Nations (United Nations, June 26, 1945), https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter.
[170] Tarik Kafala, "The Veto and How to Use It," BBC News (BBC, September 17, 2003), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2828985.stm.

first ten years of the UN, the Soviet Union used the veto 79 times, an astounding rate relative to their peers.[171]

Though the Cold War was over, that did not prevent a similar repetition of this same gridlocked dynamic when it came to the issue of Venezuela some sixty years later. As Venezuela backslid into the authoritarian government of today, the international community largely found itself taking sides, yet again. One on, the United States, European Union, and a number of other nations backed Interim President Juan Guaidó.[172] On the other side, China and Russia led the countries who continued to recognize Nicolás Maduro as the rightful leader of the country.[173] This divide again split the Security Council. For example, early in 2019, with the situation in Venezuela quickly devolving, both the U.S. and Russia tried to pass competing resolutions through the Security Council.[174] Both countries vetoed the others' proposal. However, when the U.S. proposal garnered enough votes to override the initial Russian veto, China also voted to veto the proposal, officially sinking the motion while effectively re-drawing the old ideological boundaries that divided the Security Council.[175]

While the UN did take some limited action, such as officially declaring that Maduro had committed crimes against humanity with his actions in Venezuela, there was no subsequent action taken by the institution.[176] In fact, outside of limited humanitarian

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[171] Ibid.
[172] "More than 50 Countries Support Venezuela's Juan Guaidó," ShareAmerica, November 15, 2019, https://share.america.gov/support-for-venezuelas-juan-guaido-grows-infographic/.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Michelle Nichols, "U.S., Russia Fail in Rival Bids for U.N. Action on Venezuela," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, February 28, 2019), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-un/u-s-russia-fail-in-rival-bids-for-u-n-action-on-venezuela-idUSKCN1QH2SL.
[175] Ibid.
[176] "Venezuela Abuses Amounted to Crimes against Humanity: UN-Appointed Panel | | UN News," United Nations (United Nations, September 16, 2020), https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1072512.

assistance for the ongoing crisis, the UN has done little else to intervene in the country, gridlocked by the competing interests in its highest body. In both Cuba and Venezuela, it is clear how U.S. policy was impacted by relevant international institutions. While the policy aim of the United States was to force a regime change in both countries, the nature of the UN constrained the United States from pursuing many of the hypothetical policy routes. Thus, eventually, the United States was forced to turn to its ultimate policy of unilateral sanctions, despite the small likelihood that they would succeed.

In the case of Venezuela, the UN is not the only international institution that has had implications for U.S. policy. The Organization of American States (OAS) has also prominently featured in the policy debate surrounding Venezuela. Part of the broader U.S. policy approach to Venezuela has been to work through the OAS, building a secondary international coalition to assist the Venezuelan people and sanction the Maduro regime. However, the OAS features a "one nation, one vote" policy, with no veto power such as the one seen in the UN Security Council. In effect, this greatly levels the influence of any one country. Venezuela, long ago recognizing the implications of this policy, worked to build their own coalition of allied nations in the body. Utilizing its excess oil as a trade chip, Venezuela finalized contingent trade deals with a number of smaller Latin American and Caribbean nations, offering discounted rates in exchange for voting in conjunction with one another.[177] This move secured Venezuela enough loyal votes to frustrate many intended policies against them.[178] The best example of this dynamic was in the 2018 resolution, proposed by the United States, to remove Venezuela

[177] Stephen Johnson, "Neorealism and the Organization of American States (OAS): An Examination of CARICOM Rationality Toward Venezuela and the United States," *SAGE Open* 9, no. 4 (November 8, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019887950.
[178] Ibid.

from the OAS. Despite support from all of the biggest countries in the region, the motion fell five votes short of succeeding, as a number of smaller Caribbean islands either voted to abstain, or voted against the motion.[179] Again an international institution constrained U.S. policy options. When the most drastic U.S. actions have failed, the United States has been forced to compromise down—with the hopes of still achieving its policy aim. In this case, the United States has had more success passing resolutions to condemn the fraudulent elections Maduro has conducted, administer aid to Venezuela, and recognize a delegation sent by Interim President Guaidó.[180] However, Maduro remains in power. Further, the dynamic that prevents the OAS from taking more dramatic action is still in place, and unlikely to change in at least the near-term future. Once again, this leaves the United States in a holding pattern of pushing for regime change without the most effective policies in place to guarantee one.

Both Cuba and Venezuela represent examples of institutions failing in their intended purpose, and the subsequent consequences it had for U.S. policy. Rather than helping distinct actors find common ground in a united purpose with better information, and even shaping their national interests, the institutions became a vector for each country to wield its power and influence. The UN Security Council turned both Cuba and

[179] "Venezuela Scores Victory as US Fails to Secure Votes for OAS Suspension," News | teleSUR English, June 6, 2018), https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Venezuela-Celebrates-Pences-Defeat-in-OAS-20180606-0005.html.
[180] Elizabeth Melimopoulos, "OAS Recognises Guaido's Envoy until New Venezuela Elections Held," Juan Guaido News | Al Jazeera, April 10, 2019), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/10/oas-recognises-guaidos-envoy-until-new-venezuela-elections-held.
"OAS Permanent Council Adopts Resolution on Humanitarian Assistance in Venezuela," OAS, March 27, 2019, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-017%2F19.
Bradley Freden, "OAS Resolution Condemns the Fraudulent Elections in Venezuela," U.S. Mission to the Organization of American States, December 9, 2020, https://usoas.usmission.gov/oas-resolution-condemns-the-fraudulent-elections-in-venezuela/.

Venezuela policy into a continuation of the existing Cold War ideological divide. Because of Venezuelan foreign policy pursuits, they have effectively insulated themselves from many of the possible actions the OAS could take. Because of this, U.S. policy was constrained by both institutions. The international allies of both Cuba and Venezuela were effective in blocking the United States from fully pursuing their policy interests through either the UN or the OAS. This, in turn, prompted the United States to pursue alternative policies in order to continue their pursuit of pushing through a regime change in both countries—resulting in the extended unilateral sanctions that have come to define U.S. policy in both Cuba and Venezuela.

Conclusion

International relations are complex, and no single theoretical framework or consideration will be sufficient to capture the full scope of policy decisions. However, the benefit of examining an issue such as U.S. policy towards Cuba is that one can attempt to glean lessons that can then be applied in the future. With Cuba in 1959, the United States responded to the rise of anti-U.S. authoritarian through an attempted regime change. However, a combination of domestic and international factors constrained U.S. policy makers, ultimately leading to various compromised policy efforts. In the end, the U.S.' compromise only beget longer-term problems, with a relatively weaker U.S. position in the hemisphere and a policy quagmire without any clear direction to move forward.

However, the true failure of U.S. policy makers was not that these initial attempts failed to produce the desired result. The true failure was the inability to properly adapt over time, electing instead to continuously pursue ineffective policy for the better part of the next sixty years. This failure has continued to plague the United States. Now, this

undesirable situation appears to be repeating itself again with respect to Venezuela. Sixty years later, with the rise of another anti-U.S. authoritarian government in Latin America, U.S. policy makers again decided it was best to instigate a regime change. And, yet again, U.S. policy reflected a compromised stance due to various domestic and international constraints. However, unlike the situation with Cuba, the United States is not forced to remain in a policy limbo for the extended future. Rather, the United States has the chance to learn valuable lessons from past mistakes, and correct course.

The first lesson to be taken from the four years of President Trump's policy towards Venezuela was that the belief that the Maduro regime was weaking was largely a myth. Despite the international pressure and targeted U.S. actions, Maduro's position in Miraflores is arguably stronger today than it was four years ago. While the recent December election was fraudulent and not recognized by most of the international community, Maduro's party did regain control of the National Assembly.[181] This grants him increased authority to rubberstamp most of his domestic policy goals, control the judiciary, and further repress his political opposition.[182]

Also working to strengthen Maduro's position have been the internal problems with the opposition movement in Venezuela. Political opposition has always been fractured in Venezuela. However, for a brief moment beginning in 2019, the movement

[181] "U.S., EU Say They Do Not Recognize Venezuela Parliamentary Vote," U.S. News & World Report (U.S. News & World Report, December 7, 2020), https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-12-07/pro-maduro-candidates-win-control-of-venezuelan-congress-after-disputed-vote.
[182] "Venezuela pro-Government Assembly Approves Law Expanding Maduro's Powers," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, October 9, 2020), https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N2H000O.
Will Freeman, "Why Maduro Is Relying on Courts to Silence Dissent More than Ever Before," Global Americans, July 23, 2020, https://theglobalamericans.org/2020/07/under-maduro-venezuelas-courts-enable-repression/.
"Venezuela's High Court Replaces Opposition Party Leadership," Voice of America, June 17, 2020, https://www.voanews.com/americas/venezuelas-high-court-replaces-opposition-party-leadership.

did unite behind the Interim Presidency of Juan Guaidó. However, Guaidó was only ever meant to guide a swift transition towards a free and fair election. The interim presidency has now dragged on for about two years, and resultantly, Guaidó popularity and ability to keep the movement united have disintegrated.[183] Going forward, President Biden will have to learn from previous mistakes and understand that he is dealing with an entrenched Maduro, not one on the brink of losing power.

The second lesson to be taken from the last four years pertains to the U.S. sanctions program. The sanctions will not be successful in forcing through a regime change. There is ample evidence of this specific failure of international sanctions; the U.S.' ongoing policy challenges with Cuba are an apt representation of this policy failure.[184] However, solely because the sanctions did not work to force a regime change, does not mean that they are not a useful policy tool, when implemented correctly. President Obama erred in his Cuba policy by unilaterally repealing numerous sanctions on the Castro regime, but receiving little in return. The United States should not repeat this mistake. Moving forward, the United States should work to expand the areas in which the sanctions are highly effective, while simultaneously working to improve them in other areas. For example, the existing sanctions have yielded some positive results. The sanctions have allowed the United States, and the broader international community,

[183] Jim Wyss, "Poll shows Venezuela's Guaidó is losing popularity and has sunk to Maduro level", Miami Herald, December 4, 2019, https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/article238040219.html
"No Good Options for Venezuela's Divided Opposition," The Economist (The Economist Newspaper, September 10, 2020), https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2020/09/10/no-good-options-for-venezuelas-divided-opposition.
[184] David S. Cohen and Zoe A.Y. Weinberg, "Sanctions Can't Spark Regime Change," Foreign Affairs, May 14, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2019-04-29/sanctions-cant-spark-regime-change.

to hold top officials in the Maduro regime accountable for repressing political freedoms, human rights violations, and narcotrafficking.[185] They also have greatly restricted the legal economic methods available to the Maduro regime, forcing them to resort to more illicit, and thus unreliable, forms of sustaining itself.[186] Lastly, sanctions have helped dissuade international actors from assisting the regime, such as Russian oil giant Rosneft, again restricting the Maduro's regime financial options.[187]

However, there are also significant detractions. The Trump administration's shift to sweeping sectoral sanctions have worsened conditions in Venezuela, deepening the pre-existing humanitarian crisis. For example, U.S. sanctions have made it more difficult for the regime to swap its crude oil for gasoline, worsening fuel shortages that predated the sanctions.[188] Sanctions have also had a devastating impact on the economy more broadly. Exact numbers vary, though some economists estimate that U.S. oil sanctions cost the country around $16.9 billion USD annually.[189] These general sanctions have also had unintended consequences for NGOs; the financial restrictions imposed by the sanctions slow down, and in some cases, completely halt, the ability of NGOs to process

[185] "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions", Congressional Research Service, updated January 22, 2021. https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf
[186] "Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 Current and Former Venezuelan Officials Charged with Narco-Terrorism, Corruption, Drug Trafficking and Other Criminal Charges," The United States Department of Justice, March 27, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nicol-s-maduro-moros-and-14-current-and-former-venezuelan-officials-charged-narco-terrorism.
https://www.csis.org/analysis/illegal-mining-venezuela-death-and-devastation-amazonas-and-orinoco-regions
[187] Ben Bartenstein, Jack Farchy, and Josh Wingrove, "U.S. Sanctions Rosneft Unit for Ties to Venezuelan Oil Trade," Bloomberg, February 18, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-02-18/u-s-sanctions-rosneft-unit-for-ties-to-venezuela-oil-production.
[188] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved?" Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved? | Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 22, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-sanctions-venezuela-be-improved.
[189] Francisco Rodríguez, "Sanctions and the Venezuelan Economy: What the Data Say", Torino Economics, LatAm Economics Viewpoint, June 2019, https://torinocap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Sanctions-and-Vzlan-Economy-June-2019.pdf

financial transactions, hampering their efforts to distribute humanitarian aid and conduct their daily operations.[190] Going forward, the U.S. must listen to the people and organizations on the ground in Venezuela, and work with them. The ongoing humanitarian crisis must take precedence over sanctioning the regime—with both moral and practical implications for U.S. policy in the future.

The last lesson for U.S. policy revolves around the issue of negotiations. Specifically, the general lack of U.S. participation in the process. Absent a military invasion, a negotiated solution presents the most tangible option to secure a successful transfer of power.[191] Negotiations have been broached several times between the Maduro regime and the opposition, however each has ended with little tangible progress towards a solution. Rather, the Maduro regime has often engaged in negotiations in bad faith, looking to stall for time and further entrench themselves in power.[192] Notably, the Trump administration was conspicuously absent in each of these efforts. While there is no guarantee that U.S. participation in negotiations would ensure a successful transfer of power, as outlined in the State Department's Democratic Transition Framework for Venezuela, U.S. sanctions and arrest warrants are tremendous leverage points against the regime.[193] A U.S.-backed, multilateral negotiation attempt can grant the Maduro regime

[190] Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, "Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved?" Can Sanctions on Venezuela Be Improved? | Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 22, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-sanctions-venezuela-be-improved.
[191] "A Conversation with U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 8, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/conversation-us-special-representative-venezuela-elliott-abrams.
[192] "Venezuela's Opposition Says Norway-Mediated Dialogue with Maduro 'Is Finished'," Reuters, September 16, 2019), https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics/venezuelas-opposition-says-norway-mediated-dialogue-with-maduro-is-finished-idUSKBN1W100J.
[193] "Democratic Transition Framework for Venezuela - United States Department of State," U.S. Department of State, December 1, 2020, https://2017-2021.state.gov/democratic-transition-framework-for-venezuela/index.html.

certain assurances that past efforts could not, and has the chance to make a significant impact on ending the crisis in Venezuela. Further, the United States is unquestionably seen as a leading voice in Latin America, and wields significant influence inside of Venezuela, with the European Union, and in the Organization of American States. The next administration must use this influence to bring all the actors to the table, including regime-aligned actors like China and Russia, while leveraging its position to ensure the Maduro regime engages in good faith, rather than as yet another delay tactic.

The other factor that drives the necessity of a negotiated solution are the immense complications that come from any full-scale invasion. While a full military intervention has often been utilized by the United States in the past, there are obvious doubts as to the effectiveness of this policy option with respect to either Cuba or Venezuela. First, while the Bay of Pigs invasion lacked proper support, it did highlight how quickly Castro was able to mobilize and deploy his own military. The second issue revolved around the "day after" scenario. Even in the event a U.S. invasion was successful, quickly, the United States had few tangible options to install a new government. Batista was broadly unpopular at the time and previous U.S. occupations were unpopular in their own right. The Cuban people would most likely not have welcomed either of these options. Lastly, as discussed above, Cuba maintained important international alliances. While Cuba was geographically distant from the Soviet Union, the alliance was important for the Soviets, and they almost certainly would have fought to preserve Cuba's independence.

Similarly, the United States would face a number of potential issues if they were to elect to intervene militarily in present-day Venezuela. First is the challenge of the Venezuelan military. Despite the deteriorating situation within Venezuela, Maduro has

ensured the continued loyalty of his military through pay, intimidation, and frequent purges.[194] The Venezuelan military also remains a fairly sizeable force, with capable units and special forces.[195] Second are the geographical issues. Venezuela is much further from the United States than Cuba, only further complicating the deployment of any forces. Venezuela is also a large country. For context, Venezuela is over twice as large as Iraq, a country that the U.S. military has had tremendous difficulty in maintaining control over.[196] The United States deployed hundreds of thousands of soldiers to Iraq, and Venezuela could require twice those numbers. As if the military and geographical challenges were not sufficient on their own, they also combine in one key facet. Maduro maintains nominal control of the country, but only possesses de-facto control over a relatively small portion of Venezuela's physical territory. Outside of Caracas and the major oil rigs, his government often has little to no actual control—with various armed non-state actors assuming de-facto control in the government's absence.[197] Thus, even in the event that the United States would be able to depose Maduro, the rest of Venezuela would likely not abdicate, forcing the United States to deploy their forces to try and subdue the rest of the country as well. For a war weary populace tired of prolonged engagements far from the United States, this would be unpalatable.

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[194] Doug Bandow, "America Shouldn't Invade Venezuela," Cato Institute, January 22, 2021, https://www.cato.org/commentary/america-shouldnt-invade-venezuela.
[195] Ibid.
[196] "Size of Venezuela Compared to Iraq," MyLifeElsewhere, accessed April 15, 2021, https://www.mylifeelsewhere.com/country-size-comparison/venezuela/iraq#:~:text=Iraq%20is%20approximately%20438%2C317%20sq,Venezuela%20108%25%20larger%20than%20Iraq.
[197] Anatoly Kurmanaev, "Rural Venezuela Crumbles as President Shores Up the Capital and His Power," The New York Times, January 13, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/13/world/americas/Venezuela-collapse-Maduro.html.

Lastly, perhaps the most important factor that would complicate any U.S. military intervention into Venezuela, and one that certainly impacted options for Cuba, is the long history of similar U.S. interventions in the region. As touched upon above, most of Latin America—including both Cuba and Venezuela—has directly experienced previous U.S. intervention. This has made the U.S. military, reminiscent of the colonial and imperial times, extremely unpopular throughout the region.[198] Arguably, the only entity that would be more unpopular than the dictators leading Cuba and Venezuela would be the U.S. military, and the prospects of another American occupation. All of the Castro brothers, Chavez, and Maduro have used soaring rhetoric about surviving U.S. assassination attempts and attempted coups to consolidate domestic support at times when they felt their position was threatened. While, these claims have been often exaggerated, a full-blown U.S. intervention would give real credence to these claims, with the potential to rally support behind unpopular dictators and again against the United States.

The final point on this paper as a whole is that, too often, examinations of U.S. policy only really focus on the U.S. side. That was the express intent here, in an attempt to limit the scope of the project. However, there is another element to foreign policy, and that is the desires of the other country. While it is this author's opinion that the United States needs to change the current course of its Venezuela policy, in an attempt to avoid another Cuba, the United States cannot normalize relations with countries that have no interest in doing so. Nor should the United States. There are myriad concerns in Venezuela currently. From the ongoing humanitarian crisis, to the Covid-19 pandemic, to

[198] Doug Bandow, "America Shouldn't Invade Venezuela," Cato Institute, January 22, 2021, https://www.cato.org/commentary/america-shouldnt-invade-venezuela.

the larger international power dynamics at play. Given everything, it is simply not within the best interests of the United States to acquiesce to Maduro's position. However, the current policy path is simply unsustainable, and doomed to fail. In order to pursue better policy, the United States must truly examine its past failings, recognize the similar path it is currently on, and incorporate the relevant lessons in order to create a better future, for both the United States and Venezuela.

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