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# Imperialism: a Case Study of America's Neorealist Domination of Power

Hannah Daniels  
*Portland State University*

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Imperialism: A Case Study of America's Neorealist Domination of Power

by

Hannah Daniels

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Thesis Adviser

Lindsay Benstead

Portland State University

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### **Abstract**

The international policy of the United States has been historically characterized by the promotion of democracy and freedom. However, historical analyses of U.S. policies and intervention in countries such as Iran, Chile, Guatemala, Syria, Brazil, and Nicaragua demonstrate that American aid more often than not ends in a military dictatorship replacing a democracy. This paper investigates the discrepancies between these values that the United States claims to uphold and the actual operation efforts carried out, proposing that U.S. international politics are defined by a neorealist framework rather than the liberal structure that is commonly thought of as the basis for American politics as well as reflecting upon the place of imperialism within the modern enactment of intervention. Using declassified CIA documents regarding Operation AJAX, the coup staged in Iran by the U.S. government in 1953, a recurring pattern can be observed in which the United States takes advantage of the perceptions of democracy and freedom in order to accumulate mass amounts of power for personal interests and gain. This model is herein applied to present-day Venezuela in order to describe current U.S. policy toward the Latin American nation and predict what these practices will generate in the future.

*"It is the policy of the United States not to intervene in the internal affairs of other nations."*

- Former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, five months after staging Operation Ajax

## **I. Introduction**

In 1992, *The Baltimore Sun* published a story entitled "The World's Protector" by Georgie Anne Geyer. The article detailed American military action in Somalia, praising the United States for being the only force to send troops to the nation to "save" the country from itself while at the same time answering the self-proposed question of why only the U.S. participated in this manner. Geyer's answer is as follows: "The United States is the only nation that can do it!" She argues that the Russians of course have evil intentions of propagating communism, and that other European countries such as Britain and France have militaries too weak to make a difference. The most notable reason Geyer notes for the U.S. being alone in the world with its ability to save others is a supposedly unique "moral makeup" that collectively defines Americans (Geyer). But why exactly does the United States hold some kind of moral high ground in comparison to the rest of the world? What power licenses the U.S. to be the judge and jury of the international field, deciding what is best for others and ostensibly being the only possible option?

The United States has historically perpetuated a premise in its international policy of spreading democracy to all. American policymakers drive the point that the United States is a defender of the free world, liberating helpless nations from oppressive regimes. However, the international record of U.S. policy tells a different story. The United States has been responsible for over eleven military coups to overthrow democratically elected governments in Latin America alone over the past century (Kahn). How can the actions of the U.S. be reconciled with its claims in the international community? The official White House website asserts that "The

premise of a better future will come in part from reasserting American sovereignty and the right of all nations to determine their own futures” (“Foreign Policy”). This proclamation sits in contrast with the hypothetical objective duty of the United States to protect the countries across the globe that purportedly lack the ability or understanding to create their own policy or democratic institutions. The democratic question appears at the core of American international policy, with tireless demands for countries to introduce democracy that is friendly to U.S. foreign interests clashing with the value of self-determination.

I contend that to find an explanation for these questions and contradictions, it is necessary to look at theoretical explanations of international relations theory. Investigating international relations theory is important both for deciphering past actions and predicting future behavior of nations. By understanding how the United States views its place in the international field, we can build an interpretation of why it executes certain policies. First, I will build a theoretical structure through which to understand actual case studies. I focus specifically on liberalism and realism as the two major defining approaches relevant to the analysis of the United States. Next, I link the conclusions drawn from the conceptual portion to an understanding of how intervention ties to classical ideas of imperialism and the adaption of colonialism to the modern era. After these steps I will proceed into the case studies. My research focuses on the parallels between the CIA coup staged in Iran in 1953 and how it compares to the political discord in Venezuela today, observing the specific methods of U.S. interventionism in both countries and patterns that arise. I extend the argument that through analysis of particular cases and historical examples, it can be concluded that the United States disguises neo-imperialism and subsequent colonialism in its international policy through portraying the government’s practices as an extension of liberalist theory, when in fact the U.S. government functions under a neorealist framework.

## II. Theoretical Framework

To begin, it is necessary to elucidate the theories of international relations that guide U.S. behavior. Liberalism as a theory differs from the traditional understanding of liberalism and conservatism within the United States. While not defined by any one philosopher, liberalism arose from Enlightenment-era thinkers such as John Locke and Immanuel Kant. A newly formed America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century embraced Locke's ideals of rights to life, liberty, and property, and many politicians began to translate his teachings to reflect principles of liberalism as well. According to Locke, the formation of civil government instills certain guarantees to people that liberate them from a life of anarchy; government, in a sense, binds a population through defined rules and structures that help dictate social behavior and actions (Tuckness). Immanuel Kant continued this tradition with a further emphasis on the ideals of liberalism. Kant offered an even bolder claim: democracies never fight one another. In *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, the conditions for creating international peace are described as such. Firstly, all nations ought to adopt a republican government. Secondly, nations will formulate partnerships amongst one another to create laws of action. Finally, the laws created by such organizations will be dictated solely through the concept of "universal hospitality" (Kant). These articles intended to create a structure upon which peace could be founded internationally, defined further by six clauses that illustrated necessary actions leading to these conditions. Important amongst these provisions are a denial of treaties or debt that would lead to further conflict, eventual dismantling of standing armies, the first condemnation of war crimes, and, significantly, the doctrine that states should not exercise force to control the government of another state (Kant). Liberalism is often referred to as an idealist theory, in that it envisions the creation of a better world. Ascribers to liberal

philosophy argue, in the context of the United States, that America was founded on the tradition of non-intervention and individual liberty over domination.

However, this view of American history is conducted through a revisionist consideration of the nation's founding. Researchers Robert Higgs and Carl Close authored a book entitled *Opposing the Crusader State: Alternatives to Global Interventionism* in which they claim the need to a "return" to the ideals of the founding fathers. These concepts are presented as a rejection of interference in other nations and a staunch valuing of independence. Higgs and Close argue that this only began to change near the end of the 1800s with the Spanish-American war (vi). This analysis does not capture the true nature of American beliefs at the time of its founding, and this argument for a return to liberal ethics does not hold up because the United States never held these values to begin with. Notably, Higgs and Close utilize a quote from Thomas Jefferson in which the at-the-time president stated that, "[The United States] goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own" (vi). This statement was only true in one regard; the United States did not have to go abroad to fight others. The United States was determined to claim the land of Native Americans through force, in definitive contrast to the concept of freedom and independence of all. George Washington himself believed in the idea of Western expansion as the future for both himself and the United States. Treaties negotiated with Native American groups were thought of as only temporary until a better way of conquering was devised ("Washington and the West"). Manifest destiny was the definitive policy plan of the 1840s, invoking the sense of divine right as an excuse to conquer occupied territories. The United States was founded upon the self-indulgent belief that what had been created was so new and unique from any other nation that they not only had the right but compulsion to expand and

conquer (Stephanson 6). Though this form of intervention may be different than the one typically conceptualized today, it still involved the manipulation and degradation of other nations.

Certainly the U.S. did not recognize indigenous communities and tribes as sovereign nations, but this differentiation hardly mattered. The Spanish-American war proved that borders were of no concern to American conquest. Higgs and Close claimed that the United States folded to the pressure of European states due to the tension of Spain's domination of Central and South America, that the honest American liberals were silenced in favor of participating on the international level (vi). This claim is incongruous with the imperialist actions of the United States since its conception. The protecting "only of her own" described by Thomas Jefferson was amongst the first examples of America framing its proactive domination policy as self-defense.

If the United States was not founded on liberal principles, what philosophical explanation would interpret its behavior? John Mearsheimer proposes in his novel *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* a theory called offensive neorealism, a subsection of realist thought that focuses on power struggle as a defining trait of international politics. Mearsheimer proposes, in contrast to liberal thought, that rather than cooperating together in a peaceful way, nations are actually committed to creating hegemonic domination of their region. A hegemon, being the most dominant power in a certain area of the world, would do its best to prevent other nations from gaining power that may threaten its control (Mearsheimer). Realist theory does not reject the notion of peace nor consider it a negative outcome, but rather adopts the position that power struggle within international structure makes peace an incredibly unlikely prospect. Defensive realists claim that nations struggle for power only in the context of achieving security (Mearsheimer). The offensive neorealism of Mearsheimer diverges with this theory by arguing further that there is no cap to the amount of power that states seek. The theory assumes that

because of the possession by powerful nations of military capability and the manner in which international politics is structured, without a singular authority in charge, that nations are unsure how other states will behave and thus act in their own self-interest. In addition, most nations are not necessarily senseless in their acquisition of power; states are rational and capable of weighing costs and benefits (Mearsheimer). Mearsheimer also points out that nations can be limited in their power building by oceanic borders, thus making it easier to establish regional hegemonies; he argues that while the United States may not exemplify a global hegemon, it most certainly has concentrated the most amount of power within the Americas. To counteract this inability to conquer far away nations, power-hungry states will attempt to stop other nations from accumulating power through a variety of means (Mearsheimer). These strategies can include the use of international diplomatic institutions, waging war, and employment of coups.

This theory is acknowledged as unpopular to identify with; the concept of ripping power away from others is much less appealing than the ideological allure of liberalism. This disesteem is the exact reason why political motivations have been so easy to disguise. From a standpoint of simply moral interpretation, acknowledging international action as self-interested and power-accumulating is much more difficult to swallow than a valiant crusade for freedom, justice, and democracy. The United States over the past decade has spent over two billion dollars every year on “promoting democracy” in other countries (Lawson and Epstein 1). What does this number imply? Why does the U.S. have the right to determine what democracy looks like? Democracy is a weaponized word taken from the concepts of liberal philosophy in order to justify interventionism. The framework of offensive neorealism allows an interpretation of international relations that dissects these outward claims to reveal driving factors behind political ploys. It is important to note that offensive neorealism is not a description of how the world should be. The

theory makes no claim as to realism being the most logical way to act nor the process with which to better society. Offensive neorealism simply observes the manner in which states act and illustrates the power struggle found in international relations. In this paper, I will detail how the United States uses the facade of liberalism in order to hide its less morally justifiable neorealist policies and actions.

### **III. U.S. Intervention as Neo-imperialism**

The United States participates in the international field in a variety of complicated ways. The relationship America holds with the European Union vastly differs from that with China or Russia. However, international politics have been structured around a series of supposed universal values allowed to be imposed upon all nations. The United States defines its international goals as: “To advance freedom and dignity by assisting governments and citizens to establish, consolidate and protect democratic institutions, processes, and values, including participatory and accountable governance, rule of law, authentic political competition, civil society, human rights, and the free flow of information” (Lawson and Epstein 1). These objectives are implemented through the introduction of reforms, training, and U.S. approved techniques throughout other nations. In less cooperative countries, sanctions may be implemented in attempts to forcefully prompt certain behavior (2). What basis exists that allows for these strategies to be employed? Emmanuelle Jouannet writes of a paradox existing in international politics that describes the struggle of reconciling the alleged universality of international goals with their inherently European design. European philosophy between the 1500s and 1700s formed the basis of international law, claiming precedence over the cultural identities and existences of more “barbaric” countries (Jouannet 380). This precedence easily adapted to American and European attitudes of the modern era, allowing for disproportionate

distribution of international power. International law has been employed as an extension of imperialist control, being defined by Jouannet as “domination and the imposition on others of one’s own legal and economic systems” (382). Through forcing other nations to behave in accordance with European-based standards, major Western powers are able to continue colonialist practices by reframing imperialism as a benevolent and universal act. This guise passes as a form of liberalism that claims to wish to establish a peaceful and cooperative world while simultaneously relying on the subjugation of countries that stray away from the European, typically Christian standard (381). International relations are plagued by the contradiction of outwardly presented motivations and underlying strategies that permit age-old colonial norms to continue being perpetuated.

Intervention can be a difficult term to define because of the nebulous forms it takes. The general basis of intervention is shaped around a nation utilizing military, economic, and/or political force to influence the governing body of another nation (Turner and Kühn 3). The military has been the greatest agent of intervention administered by the United States. The U.S. defense budget alone costs hundreds of billions of dollars, and this modest amount does not account for expenses that go unreported or unattributed in the total costs (Flounders 143). Intervention is often associated with humanitarianism, a linkage established as a justification of international involvement. The concept of intervening as a manner of protecting human rights is both an essential component of U.S. foreign policy and a myth of deeply-rooted racist origin that relies on the presumption of non-Western nations being ignorant and incapable of taking care of themselves. Richard Seymour writes that “If it were not for certain widely held assumptions about the remedial power of conquest, originating in the age of European empires, their [pro-war liberals] arguments would make no sense to anyone” (2). This European-minded state of politics

wields force as a deterrent to acting out against the hegemonic powers. Kant's dreams of universal hospitality are rejected by intervention; the so-called moral imperative of "civilized" countries such as the United States to impose universal will upon other nations has surpassed any hope of respectful deliberation. War is labeled as a just conquest—but only if waged by the United States (10). It is here that the liberal rationale begins to fall apart. The United States intervenes to overpower other nations; war is used as a method of control. The lines between good-natured humanitarian intervention and imperialism begin to blur, though the division between the two may have been non-existent in the first place.

Perhaps no country has embraced this imperialist narrative as resolutely as the United States. For the U.S., intervention is a way to protect assets and consolidate power. Mandy Turner and Florian Kühn explain that capitalist systems benefit from supporting capitalism in other political and social spheres. Therefore, the United States has a vested interest in introducing neoliberal reforms to other countries in order to benefit the economy and political standing of its own institutions (Turner and Kühn 6). It is no secret that the United States has vehemently opposed communism and socialism at any turn; if capitalist rule fails, then the U.S. stands a chance of losing hegemonic control. The concept of Kant's democratic peace has been warped from a mutual effort to the guise of democracy so long as it satisfies a more powerful nation elsewhere. This interpretation is very distinctly neorealist, valuing accruing influence above all else. Putting war to the side, other allegedly diplomatic missions usually take on imperialist tones as well. A term has even been coined for such endeavors: liberal imperialism (Jouannet 390). Liberal imperialism assumes the right of the United States to play the peacemaker and ultimate authority over other nations' internal conflicts—and what is this concept but neorealism at its bottom line? The declaration of a moral imperative does not distract from the goal of holding

authority. Philip Cunliffe explains, “transformative peacebuilding represents the dissemination of a distinctive, Western-inspired model of liberal political and economic relations from the core to the periphery” (Turner and Kühn 61). Still, most would prefer to avoid the inevitable unsavory response to an open acknowledgement of imperialism, choosing to disguise more nefarious intentions behind propositions of benevolence.

Imperialism in its new form does differ from past attempts. Though military force and invasion is still commonplace, more covert operations have become increasingly familiar. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has allowed for the United States to engage in political manipulation without requiring American troops to openly invade. The invasion of Iraq post-9/11 was one of the most overt acts of neorealist America. The United States declared a moral imperative to overthrow Saddam Hussein without the support of the United Nations, an institution that one would expect to be respected by liberals (Fouskas and Gökay 3). A unique condition that has allowed the U.S. to continue with this pattern of neorealist power struggle is the control of the world economy. The U.S. has hegemonized currency internationally by implementing the world reserve currency, or standard for all international purchases, as the U.S. dollar (13). Though this move was originally defined by the gold standard, it shifted to a much more profitable resource—oil. In the 1970s, former secretary of state Henry Kissinger helped negotiate the creation of petrodollars, a U.S. based transactional system that traded U.S. dollars for oil (18). The U.S. was then able to privatize the economy and begin distributing loans to poorer nations, which would then in turn buckle under the high interest rates. Under threat of repayment, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the behest of the United States and Great Britain was able to enter these borrower nations and enforce neoliberal policies that would cut public services in order to pay their bills (19). The combination of economic domination as well

as the previously-discussed intervention efforts formulate the units of neo-imperialism, an appellation describing the second wave of the colonialist front that takes place with the help of liberal institutions. By establishing an us-versus-them mentality, the United States is able to manipulate perceptions of democracy and peace to position the U.S. as a charitable savior and any opposition as violent threats to society. The Cold War provided an easy target of communism as the great evil for the U.S. to fight back against (115). So long as another group can be blamed for the evils of the world, the United States persists in aggressively pursuing its own political and economic interests. As will be explored with the example of Iran, U.S. intervention is deployed as an act of imperialism, which abides by what would be expected of a neorealist framework. Utilizing these pattern observations and framework analysis can help to interpret the ongoing crisis in Venezuela today.

#### **IV. Operation Ajax: Establishing a Pattern**

Times were changing for Iran in the 1950s. A new prime minister had just been elected, and his presence promised a transformation of Iran. Mohammad Mossadegh was a former member of Parliament who was among the few that resisted the old Shah's claim to power. To the Iranian people, Mossadegh represented democracy and independence from foreign influence (Kinzer 92). In 1951, Mossadegh was elected in a sweeping victory to the position of prime minister by the parliament of Iran. This victory was an upset to British control, because Mossadegh's first act as prime minister was to pass a unanimously supported resolution to nationalize oil. This move shocked the British system; England had a long-standing history of power in the region, and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company operated under control of the British government (93). Having profited from these oil reserves for years, nationalization threatened to transfer these profits to Iranian hands. Terrified by this prospect, Winston Churchill took a series

of measures to stop this outcome, including asking allies not to buy Iranian oil, blocking waterway transport, and freezing Iranian assets (94). Despite these attempts, Mossadegh did not waver. Determined to secure Iranian independence, Mossadegh pushed forward with his plans of nationalizing oil, stabilizing the economy, and a democratic understanding of Iranian government that stepped away from the traditional rule of the shah (92). He even welcomed British employees and was open to the idea of a reasonable repayment system for lost profits (Abrahamian 186). Fearing the disposal of colonial control and feeling unanswered by the international community, Churchill reached out to his friends in the United States. He first asked the administration of Harry Truman to employ the CIA, a still relatively new organization, to run Mossadegh out of power (Kinzer 95). Truman refused to set a coup in motion, but the president soon to follow, Dwight Eisenhower, was far more open to these plans.

Over the past several decades, the United States has finally released some of the declassified (and often sanitized) documents that linked the U.S. to Project Ajax, the coup that ultimately took down the government of Mohammad Mossadegh. For years, though, the U.S. would claim that Mossadegh had secret ties to the Soviet Union and was looking to spread communism throughout the Middle East (Balaghi 73). The outward principles of liberalism might support this protection of democracy as a positive action. However, these accusations were merely a cover-up for the oil-based motivations for American action in Iran. One of the unredacted policy proposal statements issued by the National Security Council acknowledges the key incentives, directly stating, “Iranian oil resources are of great importance to the economies of the United Kingdom and Western European countries. Loss of these resources would affect adversely those economies in peacetime” (“Draft Statement of Policy Proposed by the National Security Council”). Yet the accusations of communism were a crucial component of the coup.

Senior oil executive and government aide Max Thornburg made a fatal point in one of his declassified memorandums. As the executive said, “The question of establishing a “democratic” form of government has no place here. What is necessary is that each of these countries have a stable government dedicated to the welfare of its people and capable of responsible behavior in relation to other governments of the world” (Thornburg). Mossadegh’s relation to democracy had no place in defining the actions of the United States. How could a supposedly liberal nation override such a defining principle? The answer is clear: the United States is not a liberal nation. Though individuals within the U.S. may fervently believe in the ideals of liberalism, the truth is that the government has never abided by liberal doctrines. Neorealism shapes the foundation of international policy, with U.S. officials acting in overtly intrusive manners that conform with power accretion standards.

Though the coordination of a coup involved many major figures across the United States and United Kingdom, three American men helped to define the presence and strategy of the CIA in the years to come. These men were Kermit Roosevelt Jr., John Dulles, and Allen Dulles. Roosevelt Jr., a descendant of the presidential family, worked in the CIA as a direct Middle Eastern correspondent. John and Allen Dulles respectively worked as the Secretary of State and Director of the CIA. These three perceived an opening for the United States to hide behind the facade of liberalism in order to infiltrate nations and persuade the international community to watch obediently (Kinzer 96). In Iran, the hope was to frame the coup as the idea of the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and eliminate evidence of U.S. involvement. However, leaked CIA documents as well as accounts directly from those involved have completely discredited the concept of U.S. separation. Roosevelt Jr. published a book twenty years after the coup that was pulled from shelves not three months later for “defective production” (Balaghi 80). In truth, oil

companies, particularly British Petroleum (BP) which took control of Iranian oil following the coup, had the book removed for recounting the story of the 1953 coup in a way that implicated not only BP but the American and British governments. According to Roosevelt's memoir, "What AJAX was intended to be was a cooperative venture. It allied the Shah of Iran, Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and other British representatives with President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The alliance was to be formed for the purpose of replacing an Iranian Prime Minister, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh" (82). Regardless of the effectiveness of the cover-up, the CIA was fundamentally able to take down the government of another nation through strategies of intervention and invocation of liberal institutions. I have divided the techniques of Roosevelt Jr. and the Dulles brothers into five steps that illuminate the basic blueprint of American intervention. These steps often overlap but still provide an unmistakable look at how the imperial establishments maneuver in modern times.

*Step One: Declaration of Communist Agenda*

The Cold War opened up the possibility for a very easy political scapegoat. McCarthyism—a political crusade driven by Senator Joseph McCarthy that demanded the rooting out of alleged communists within the U.S.—was at its height in the 1950s. This wave of the Red Scare made Americans paranoid of any possible link to communism. This movement was rooted in fear and mistrust. Suspected communists could be fired from their jobs or forcibly silenced, especially on college campuses (Storrs 1-2). For politicians savvier and less suspicious than McCarthy, the Red Scare was an opportunity. Communism was easily associated with the Soviet Union and therefore was the enemy. The American people, fearful of retribution and indoctrinated with a hatred of any and all things communist, were more than happy to accept policies that would supposedly stop communism in its tracks (5). The Dulles brothers saw that

Churchill's demands to save British control of oil were not working, so they changed tactics. Instead of oil being at the center of the debate, the Dulles decided to frame Mossadegh as being a Soviet stooge who would invite the evils of communism into Iran, from whence they would spread to the rest of the Middle East (Kinzer 96). Never mind the reality of the Soviet Union also being displeased by nationalization of Iranian oil. The Soviet Union had also retained control of Northern Iran and its oil supplies, so the Mossadegh government was viewed unfavorably by them as well (Abrahamian). Mossadegh actually disagreed with communism and socialism as concepts. U.S. ambassador to Iran, Loy Henderson, admitted in his own words, "Mossadegh was not a Communist, and I was convinced that he was opposed to communism as an ideology. Nevertheless, he was willing to accept Communists and their fellow-travellers as allies" (Etges 504). It was the willingness of Mossadegh to work with the communist-aligned parties within Iran that ultimately made it possible for the United States to create the perception of his personal connection to communism.

Mossadegh himself was a member and founder of the National Front party, which was actually a combination of various parties allied in favor of oil nationalization. The National Front suffered from internal weakness due to the lack of coherence between the ideals of the representative groups. Due to a lack of strong party unity, Mossadegh would occasionally work, albeit reluctantly, with the Tudeh party, a left-wing group sometimes considered to be communist (Etges 501). Washington insiders hastily seized upon this connection. An operations report from Kermit Roosevelt helps elucidate the targeting of the Tudeh party, even before the official coup began. In the report, Roosevelt details the observation of the Tudeh party by CIA agents in order to gain access to information about the internal workings of the party. One particular detail displays the integration of the CIA into the Iranian public:

These officials are cooperating with our agents who, in turn, through penetration of the Tudeh, inform the police of Tudeh plans. We have succeeded in discrediting the Communist among the labor elements at the important Tehran tobacco factory, and have broken Tudeh's hold on Isfahan labor. As was demonstrated by our operations during Ramadan, the Iranian clergy is a major anti-Communist instrument. Accordingly, religious leaders have been mobilized to direct feeling against the Tudeh during the holy month of Muharram (October). Moreover, a "black" propaganda book (purporting to be a Soviet attack against Islam) has been written, published, and is being disseminated. Steps were also taken to meet expected Tudeh demonstrations in October by counter-demonstrations. (Roosevelt)

The United States directly participated in bolstering the Red Scare throughout Iran, circulating the same fear that ran through the American people. By convincing both the international community and the Iranian populace that communism was a direct threat to their existence, the U.S. could weaken Mossadegh's legitimacy. Roosevelt even admits candidly in the document that evidence was falsified and lies supporting the American regime were disseminated. The Tudeh party was no threat to the democracy of Iran. Its numbers were a modest fraction of the political spectrum. The intelligence gathered by the Americans and the British in their data-collecting and surveillance missions disclosed that Tudeh had no intentions of attempting an uprising (Abrahamian 204). Yet, the goals or intentions of a communist-aligned party have never mattered. The existence of the Tudeh was enough for the United States to initiate a mass panic.

#### *Step Two: Media Smear Campaign*

This second step is crucial in manipulating public view. The United States is very interested in maintaining an international perception of innocence and liberalism. Gaining

control of media allows for a narrative to be constructed by the United States rather than around it. Two prongs of this campaign exist; the first is convincing the people at home of the moral authority to intervene, and the second is exploiting the media of the selected nation in order to cause panic and delegitimize the ruling government. Internally, the U.S. leaned heavily into the communist narrative (Etges 504). The British performed a major role in this characterization, publishing usually racist and fear-mongering descriptions of the Iranian leader. Mossadegh was targeted with personal attacks on his appearance and mental health, with American and British news sources establishing him in the mind of the nations as a crazed fanatic who yearned for the death of the West. *Time* magazine labeled him as a cowardly man with a “martyrdom complex” (Abrahamian 193). Politicians played into this public disparagement as well, with President Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill making clear their hatred of Mossadegh. At the time, some U.S. senators were telling citizens that communists had infiltrated the U.S. government (Kinzer 96). Assuring the American and British populace that Iran was a threat to their freedom was not a difficult narrative to enforce.

Several released CIA memoranda extensively detail the propaganda movement within Iran. The CIA established a network of associates that had infiltrated the press, clergy, and political spectrum. These units were able to circulate an anti-Tudeh message that would help to split Mossadegh from the party. While not directly able to slander Mossadegh as a leader, the media could instead imply weaknesses in the government that indirectly pointed to the prime minister as incompetent (“170. Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency”). Kermit Roosevelt paid off reporters and Iranian officials to vilify Mossadegh in a more conspiracy-riddled way, accusing him of being “an atheist, a Jew, a homosexual, and even a British Agent” (Kinzer 97). These attacks were aimed to weaken

confidence in the government and make the Iranian people more agreeable to a CIA-selected leader. The CIA wanted to reinstate the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as he was very agreeable to de-nationalizing oil and cooperating with the American and British governments in any capacity. One of the primary goals of the U.S. was to promote a ruler who would fall in line. Part of the propaganda effort included support of the Shah and his return to more direct, dominating control of Iran (“170. Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency”). This in part accompanied attacks on Mossadegh; the Prime Minister was allegedly too weak to protect Iran against the Soviets, and a strong leader like Mohammad Reza was needed in order to push back against the communists.

*Step Three: Infiltration of the Military, Political Structures and Social Groups*

Media smears would mean nothing if the CIA had no way to make sure these messages were being shared throughout Iran. The military was amongst the most important targets. With military aid, the CIA could enact forceful change within the country. Strong armed forces could ensure the definitive maintenance of an obedient government and populace. The CIA began its military infiltration through bribing key figures like General Fazlollah Zahedi, who would ultimately replace Mossadegh as prime minister of Iran after the coup. Zahedi was paid an amount of \$60,000 to incite violence that could be attributed to the Tudeh party (Balaghi 77). The government of the United States knew Zahedi to be an inexperienced and ineffective commander, as acknowledged in a memorandum from the CIA Chief of the Iran Branch to the Deputy Director (Waller). These faults were of little consequence though; the most important matter was deposing Mossadegh in favor of a leader with military control who would obey orders. The United States provided payments to the Iranian military in order to aid in the imagined battle against communism (Etges 500). This, of course, was the link between the coup

and the war on communism. If the United States could ‘prove’ that communism was a great enough threat in Iran, then the military would be justified in invading and overthrowing the ruling government. In addition to Iran, the U.S. also provided arms to surrounding Middle Eastern countries to prepare for this vaguely-defined foreign threat. American air force and naval troops closed in around Iran as support, ready to move in if needed (Smith). With assurance that the military would be behind a coup, support for such an undertaking was emboldened.

Having secured military power, political accordance becomes the next target. When a leader like Mossadegh cannot be directly bribed into submission, politicians and figures who are interested in gaining power become a viable option. The Shah was a man looking to regain the power he felt was lost with Mossadegh’s election. For years, the Shah had ruled with a definitive authority, but the development of democratic structures meant that his control had waned. As Kermit Roosevelt acknowledged in his autobiography, the CIA cooperated with the Shah in order to overturn the democracy. One important order for the Shah was for him to sign a firman, or royal decree, that would instate General Zahedi as the new prime minister and oust Mossadegh (Etges 501). The U.S. thought that the Iranian people would unite behind such a prominent figure and recruited loyalists within the parliament to sponsor pro-Shah sentiment as well (Smith). The American embassy in Iran was a base for operatives to manipulate political figures while receiving the general hospitality and influence that a foreign ministry possesses. The CIA used the positive reputation of Ambassador Loy Henderson as a pressuring force on Iranian politics to encourage submission to U.S. demands (Dulles). Control of political structures affected not only the institutions within Iran, but the United Nations as well. The United States publicly condemned the “communist” government of Iran and even further claimed that any defense of Iran would be an endorsement of the Soviet Union. Inside the United Nations, the

U.S. convinced allied nations that Iranian requests for aid were a reflection of communist influence (Smith). These political movements strategically isolated Mossadegh's government both internally and from any external foreign help. Regional allies faced the potential for accusations of communist sympathizing or a similar CIA invasion if they offered to provide assistance, and Mossadegh would be doomed if he reached out to any nation with ties to the Soviet Union.

The social sector was in part influenced by the media campaign being waged by the CIA, but the United States was able to further access influential power by having assets infiltrate important communal groups. The tribes seemed to be a potential point of access, but most seemed to be in favor of Mossadegh's reign and against the return of the Shah ("170. Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency"). Allen Dulles worked around this apparent ideological differentiation by arming the Qashqai tribes to fight against communism, intending to create resistance movements that would reflect poorly upon Mossadegh's ability to curb dissent. At the same time, the British were working with tribes in the south to provoke insurrection (Dulles). The CIA was also able to create social strife through staging riots. Though not able to produce convincing anti-Tudeh uprisings, the United States framed their paid insurgents as being in support of Mossadegh's government, encouraging violence that would seemingly be produced by the Tudeh party ("170. Memorandum Prepared in the Directorate of Plans, Central Intelligence Agency"). Kermit Roosevelt's mobs were armed and caused significant property damage, all the while making sure to loudly declare how much they exalted communism (Kinzer 97). Immobilizing the ability of the Tudeh party to respond was crucial in preventing one of the strongest opposition groups from being able to counter a military takeover. The CIA used their Tudeh impersonations to assault the Pan-Iranist party

home as well as brawl with other parties in the streets (Balaghi 77). By generating confusion and mistrust, the CIA could distract citizens from foreign interference and direct anger toward the government being overthrown.

*Step Four: Weakening of Government through International Policies*

Another way for the United States to make a government more susceptible to a coup is to undermine it economically. Winston Churchill's commercial attacks had failed in convincing the Mossadegh to change his mind, but already a much more important target had been suffering. The people of Iran faced a sharp increase in poverty, with many necessary goods becoming scarce and jobs waning as the British obstructed Iranian exports and utilized allies to pile on the pressure (Kinser 94). The U.S. was quick to take on this strategy, realizing the potential for creating a chokehold on the citizens. Of course, admitting that the actual objective was to hurt citizens would be a deeply anti-liberal sentiment, so the official goal was stated as renegotiating oil agreements. This scheme created a deeply unsatisfactory crisis for Mossadegh. To agree to negotiations that would cede some control of oil to the British would be a betrayal of the principles Mossadegh was elected upon; to continue rejecting would mean a prolonged suffering of the people. Either way, Mossadegh was trapped in an unwinnable situation. The United States and Britain never expected a renegotiation in the first place, though. The point of international intervention was to turn the people against their leader. As Max Thornburg stated many times, "the oil question could not be settled until there were a government in Persia that wanted to settle it" (Thornburg). Nothing Mossadegh could do would satisfy the West, which was already intent on forcing him out.

The World Bank and United Nations were both influential institutions through which to delegitimize Iran. On one hand, the World Bank took a stance of biased neutrality. Iran's

requests for nationalization support met with a staunch denial of aid; the Bank wanted to play both sides in representing Iran and the UK. In doing so, the Bank backed British claims to the oil (Leavitt). This carefully orchestrated appearance of impartiality served to support the imperialist connection that the British had to Iranian oil. By claiming that both Iran and Great Britain had legitimate stakes in the possession of oil, the Bank was able to give standing to the British in the international community, making a Western takeover of the oil less morally reprehensible. Allen Dulles also gave an impassioned speech in front of the National Security Council claiming that Mossadegh was planning to install a communist dictatorship that would spread across the Middle East, and that the free world must strike against his power or risk losing the majority of the world's oil to the Soviets forever (Gleason). Mossadegh brought his concerns to the United Nations, where he was asked to enter in renegotiations. The British and Americans pushed for neoliberal reforms that would privatize oil and allow for foreign investments, but Mossadegh expressed concern that these changes would necessitate concessions to Soviet interests. The American delegation acknowledged these concerns and agreed to work through a satisfactory conclusion for all (Walters). The Americans returned home and very shortly thereafter began planning the execution of Operation Ajax. The United Nations was a place for America and Britain to outwardly express interest in peaceful negotiations while secretly plotting against Iran, setting Mossadegh up to appear paranoid and ungrateful if he questioned the process.

#### *Step Five: The Coup*

After setting the stage for the most accommodating takeover, the CIA was able to move into the substantive physical motions of a coup. The first attempt of 1953 was actually a failure. The Shah officially authorized the papers to remove Mossadegh from office and replace him with Zahedi on August 15th, but Mossadegh caught wind of the first round of plans. Fearing

retaliation, the Shah left Iran, leaving the CIA to regroup its efforts (Etges 501). Roosevelt refused to pull back, and four days later his revised plan was a success. The plot included having military crews arrest several important political figures, including the chief of staff, and then cut off resistance by taking control of communications centers (Abrahamian 205). Ambassador Henderson managed to convince Mossadegh to call the guards to suppress uprisings and send citizens to their homes, alleging that the Americans would be more likely to support Iran if fewer protestors were decrying the United States. As Mossadegh had armed forces filter throughout the central city of Tehran, the U.S. pounced upon this misstep and loudly proclaimed that the prime minister was unleashing an army upon his people (209). Kermit Roosevelt's riot groups flooded the streets accompanied by many of Zahedi's troops, rushing Mossadegh's residence as well as police stations and the parliament building. Three hundred people died in the ensuing conflict as dissidents matched up against armed bodyguards and militia (Balaghi 78). Mossadegh was dragged from his home and arrested, ultimately being convicted in court of treason. He spent the rest of his days under house arrest, and the Shah returned to oversee the court proceedings. Mohammad Reza Shah spent the good part of the next twenty-five years establishing a dictatorial control of Iran and tearing down the nascent democracy (Kinzer 98).

The question of oil was solved in a way that promised to satisfy all Western powers. Iran was allowed to keep its title for the national oil company, but shares were split between British Petroleum (BP) at 40%, a collection of American companies with another 40%, and the rest divided between French assets and British-controlled Iranian shell companies (Abrahamian 211). The coup had accomplished exactly what the Americans wanted, and despite not claiming a complete ownership of Iranian oil, the British were generally satisfied with the outcome. The leader of Iran was a pro-Western dictator with the ability to control the economy to best benefit

Britain and the United States. The coup also provided another distinct benefit for the U.S.; despite the fact that the United States maintained its denial of involvement in the coup for years, most Iranians understood the change in government to have occurred due to American influence (Kinzer 99). The United States had asserted itself as being powerful and capable of control. The nation's place in international politics had been altered irrevocably. The president and CIA understood new possibilities of securing authority and would not hesitate to utilize its intervention capacities in the years to come. Outwardly, the U.S. could preach ideals of democracy and freedom while covertly organizing plots to topple governments for personal gain.

## **V. Modern Venezuela**

After Operation Ajax's shocking success, the United States was faced with an endless expanse of potential and one pressing question: where to next? The answer, quite simply, was everywhere. In Latin America alone, the U.S. was involved in over forty regime changes throughout a century, not even counting the failed and aborted attempts (Kahn). In Guatemala, one year after Operation Ajax, the CIA organized Operation Success to overthrow the democratic government of Jacobo Árbenz because of his agrarian reforms that would have made it more difficult for the United Fruit Company, an American business, to profit off of cheap labor and land prices (Schlesinger and Kinzer 77). Three separate times in the 1950s, the U.S. attempted to topple the government of Syria due to differences in international policy regarding Israel and its unwillingness to play along with the West's crusade against communism (Saunders viii). In 1964, the U.S. targeted the democratic leadership of João Goulart in Brazil, using combatant power to exile the president and establish a military dictatorship. Goulart was accused of being a secret communist for his progressive de-privatization and social reform programs that would potentially harm U.S. economic interests (Gordon). The 1970s saw another coup

formulated in Chile under the name Project Fubelt. A brutal and powerful military strike moved in on September 11, 1973, in order to overturn President Salvador Allende. Much to the horror of the United States government, Allende was a democratically-elected socialist who threatened to show the world an American's worst fears: communism was not in fact a great evil, and socialism might just work (Kornbluh xvii). For this reason, Allende had to go. As part of another Latin American coup plan, the Reagan Administration trained right-wing death squads in Nicaragua to carry out assassinations on the behalf of the United States with the intent of toppling the Sandinista government. The U.S. poured money into arming and training these troops to commit terrorist acts throughout Nicaragua, with the CIA actively participating and helping out where it could (Walker 1). The conclusion that all these coups would lead to was subjugation of the razed countries to years of military dictatorships and human rights abuses, acceptable to the international community as a whole so long as the new leaders would bow to the wishes of the United States. Even the examples mentioned are but a very small fraction of the global intervention by the U.S. over the past century.

So why Venezuela? What makes Venezuela stand out as a significant comparison to the steps of intervention observed in Iran? First, Venezuela is currently a situation that is still unfolding with recognizable, changing impacts. The interactions between the United States and the government of Nicolás Maduro are still being witnessed and reported upon, with no definitive end to the crisis. If the conclusions drawn from analyzing Iran as an example of neorealist behavior are correct, then similar procedures should be expected to be seen in Venezuela now and can be utilized in order to predict U.S. behavior in and around Venezuela in the years to come. Secondly, Iran and Venezuela shared a curious product that remains at the heart of intervention efforts: oil. U.S. motivations for the past seventy or so years have remained

essentially the same. Maduro's government and promise of nationalization of oil mirror very similarly the attempted reforms of Mohammad Mossadegh in the 1950s that led up to intervention. In this section, I will revisit these five steps and see how U.S. interactions in and with Venezuela match up with the predicted observations.

*Step 1: Declaration of a Communist Agenda*

President Nicolás Maduro is a member of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, and he was preceded by the politically popular Hugo Chávez who directly aligned himself with socialism and communism, fighting against the neoliberalism of the United States (Ellner 89). What was the U.S. to do in the face of such open acceptance of socialist ideas? Venezuela threatens the regional hegemon because of its close proximity. Guatemala, Chile, and Brazil all faced the same territorial-based attacks because of their challenge to U.S. authority. Utilizing communism as a weapon of rallying has become a bit more difficult in the 21st century. Imperialists have often relied on a narrative of equivocating socialism and communism as being the same ideology, or at least the former being a slippery slope leading to the latter. The fact of the matter is that socialism has become more and more acceptable to the American public. In the 1950s, the prospect of a democratic socialist presidential candidate would have been unthinkable, but in 2020, Bernie Sanders has been able to quite successfully build a mainstream presidential run on such a platform. The Democratic Socialists of America organization has several members in the House of Representatives. Of course, pushback on socialism is still strong from many centrist and republican groups. *The New York Times* has published articles such as “Democrats’ frightening embrace of socialism” and “The CIA funded a culture war against communism. It should do so again.” Socialism (and, by extension, communism) is positioned as existing in

direct opposition to democracy, and it is through this manner that the U.S. has begun portraying Venezuela as a dictatorial communist state.

In a time when access to declassified CIA documents that expose clandestine operations has expanded, American politicians have characterized any objection to intervention as a secret defense of communist policy. In 2019, Minnesota Representative Ilhan Omar criticized U.S. policies that denied necessary medical supplies and food imports to Venezuela in an interview with *Democracy Now*. Vice President Mike Pence tweeted in response:

As Venezuelans take to the streets to stand for their freedom against an oppressive dictator, Democrat Congresswoman [@IlhanMN](#) chooses socialism over freedom. The Trump Administration stands with the freedom-loving people of Venezuela. (@VP)

The argument from the reigning U.S. administration is that the people of Venezuela actually hate all socialist reforms, and that they have brought nothing but evil to the country. It is a presumption on behalf of the United States that socialism is what created political and economic strife in Venezuela, but this assertion is directly in line with what would be expected in the build-up to a U.S. sponsored coup. By positioning the United States as supporting a “democratic” government in contrast to a “socialist” one, U.S. interference can be explained as a liberal attempt to usher Venezuelans to freedom. Secretary of State and former CIA Director Mike Pompeo uses his own quote in a description of U.S. policy toward Venezuela on the U.S. Department of state website, declaring that “The United State stands with the brave people of Venezuela as they strive for a return to dignity and democracy” (Pompeo). This narrative also relies on a return to the imperialist line of reasoning that colonies were unable to take care of themselves, requiring a more developed and civilized nation such as the United to guide them into a better age.

### *Step 2: Media Smear Campaign*

The most obvious movement of U.S. intervention against Venezuela has been the treatment of the Latin American nation in the media. At the core of the media campaign has been accusations that Maduro falsified presidential elections in his favor. This assertion is central to the fiction of Venezuela being an evil communist dictatorship. Of course, the people of Venezuela would never willingly choose a socialist government, so there must have been election fraud. Mike Pompeo's webpage loudly proclaims in the first sentence that Maduro is an "illegal" president who tampered with the vote (Pompeo). Nearly every single major media outlet within the United States, including *CNN*, *Fox News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times* amongst many others, decried the 2018 presidential elections in Venezuela as rigged and an enforcement of authoritarianism (Macleod 143). Opponents both inside and outside Venezuela claimed that the voter turnout of only 46% was much too low, neglecting to mention that the major opposition parties called for voters to boycott the elections (142). Characterizing Maduro as anti-democratic establishes an easy way to criticize the regime as being corrupt.

Fighting for democracy would certainly align with liberal principles, but despite claims of corruption, there is no actual evidence that would suggest any fraud in the 2018 Venezuelan election. The United States as well as the opposition pushed back against foreign observation groups monitoring the ballot, but the Maduro government openly welcomed impartial spectators. Four separate reputable groups watched over the elections, all coming to a very similar conclusion. One of these organizations, the Latin American Council of Electoral Experts (CEELA), said that the elections securely and freely represented the "will of the people" (Macleod 142). Even if CEELA's word is not trusted, there are plenty of other similar endorsements. The United Nations refused to send a commission, but the National Electoral

Council (CNE) gathered a group of delegates spanning across Europe, Latin America, Russia, China, and even the United States who all confirmed the legitimacy of the vote, specifically praising the secrecy, efficiency, and auditing process (“International Electoral Accompaniment Missions Declare May 20 Elections Free and Fair”). The observation group sent by a coalition of African states as well as the African Union noted the “high-tech” capacity of the Venezuelan elections, again listing the procedure as free and fair (Macleod 143). The report from the Caribbean faction conveyed their belief that the procedure and outcomes were an accurate representation of Venezuelan voter consent (143). Alan Macleod interviewed twenty-seven journalists who had covered elections in Bolivia and Venezuela in order to understand why biased news reports were being published inside the United States. One common comment was that opposition leaders were simply easier to gain access to. The culture of media companies encourages journalists to take the side of the opposition and criticize Chávez and Maduro. Writer Dan Beeton pointed out the adverse responses that could be targeted at reporters, saying:

That is the framework. If you are a reporter and you write something that is not considered negative enough against the Venezuelan government then you will get flak. There is push back, maybe from the US government, but there are any number of right-wing think tanks, Venezuelan exiles have their own organizations and lobbies and their champions in the US Congress...We have been challenged repeatedly and questioned any time we say something about it—whether we get funding from the Venezuelan government. There is this assumption that if anyone is saying anything that goes against the conventional wisdom that they must be in the pockets of the Venezuelan government. (Macleod 149).

This admission is a clear reflection of the Red Scare tactics of the 1950s; reporters who do not depict the occurrences in Venezuela as a condemning analysis of Chávez and Maduro face backlash from the government and other media sources that in turn accuse the journalists of being communist sympathizers. Even with higher voter registration numbers than in the U.S. and a unique auditing system that takes place in front of a variety of multi-party representatives, Venezuela is maligned in the media. This move falls in line with anticipated U.S. strategy in building opposition support.

*Step 3: Infiltration of the Military, Political Structures and Social Groups*

The full extent of U.S. interference in Venezuelan society and politics is not entirely clear yet, but there is one obvious figure who represents U.S. interests. Juan Guaidó was practically unknown to most Venezuelans before the 23rd of January, 2019, when he declared himself as the legitimate interim president of the country. A survey conducted by Hinterlaces polling suggested that as many as 81% of Venezuelans did not know who Guaidó was in the days leading up to his announcement (Ciccariello-Maher). Guaidó had just been sworn in as the head of the opposition-led National Assembly, and his announcement was supported by the same political parties that accused Maduro of rigging the elections. The presidential hopeful invoked the following constitutional article as a supposedly democratic justification for his movement:

The President of the Republic shall become permanently unavailable to serve by reason of any of the following events: death; resignation; removal from office by decision of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice; permanent physical or mental disability certified by a medical board designated by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice with the approval of the National Assembly; abandonment of his position, duly declared by the National Assembly; and recall by popular vote...When the President of the Republic becomes

permanently unavailable to serve during the first four years of this constitutional term of office, a new election by universal suffrage and direct ballot shall be held within 30 consecutive days. Pending election and inauguration of the new President, the Executive Vice-President shall take charge of the Presidency of the Republic. (“Constitution - Title V: Organization of national public authority (Art. 186-298)”)

Guaidó’s claim is that Maduro has “abandoned” his position as president in favor of dictatorship, which is a fairly generous interpretation of the constitutional law. Maduro has not at any point stepped back from his role of president, and the phrasing implies that the Supreme Court would be in charge of the decision of impeachment rather than the National Assembly (Ciccariello-Maher). Regardless of the actual democratic qualifications of such a take-over, the United States was quick to back Guaidó’s claims to authority. The night before Guaidó’s statement, Vice President Mike Pence called the politician to assure him that if Guaidó decided to take charge of the presidency through this specific provision, it would be with the full backing of the United States (Donati and Salama). The U.S. government knew in advance of the plans, but neither did nor said anything publicly, choosing to allow Guaidó to attempt to seize power.

Why the U.S. would do this has a quite simple answer. Guaidó’s platform is based upon adopting neo-liberal policies that would reverse the nationalization that Hugo Chávez fought to establish. Private investment is a key feature of Guaidó’s plan; assets of the *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA), the state-owned oil company, are to be auctioned off and rights transferred to independent companies (Parraga). Not dissimilar to Mossadegh’s nationalization plan countered by the Shah’s willingness to let American and British investors seize means of production from the people, Guaidó would open up the economy for seemingly no benefit to the Venezuelan people other than the potential of the United States backing off on its repressive

sanction policies. The self-declared interim president denies any possibility that the sanctions were the cause of harm to the people, saying ““It is not true that this happened because of the economic sanctions. Nicolas Maduro is entirely responsible for the crisis, no doubt about it” (“Juan Guaido interview: 'All Venezuelans want change’”). Guaidó is the perfect representative of American wishes for Latin America: a return to the colonial practices and coups of the 1950s that secured American control of oil. Though he lacks the full support of the military, Guaidó receives the backing of several groups of armed forces that took to the streets with him to urge soldiers to turn against Maduro (“Venezuela’s Guaido takes to streets in military uprising”). The United States is urging international allies to condemn Maduro’s government in Venezuela and throw support behind Guaidó, and many already have. Guaidó never ran for president and his claim is tentative at best, but the democratic measure of his situation does not seem to be of major concern to U.S. observers.

*Step 4: Weakening of Government through International Policies*

The United States has carried out its most severe punishments to the Maduro government through incredibly intensive sanctioning that has had extreme consequences on the economy. First, to counter the notion that Venezuela’s economy was in a decline long before sanctions were imposed, an economist analysis by Francisco Rodriguez, otherwise a severe critic of the Maduro regime, showed that the imposition of sanctions caused the decline of oil production much more rapidly than any predictions could have foreseen. Though the oil industry was struggling prior to enforcement, sanctions caused that decline to turn into a spiraling chokehold on the Venezuelan economy (Emersberger). The U.S. has historically sanctioned Venezuela for allegedly not cooperating with anti-terrorist and drug enforcement policies, but the most recent round began in 2014 under former president Barack Obama based upon allegations of human

rights abuses and anti-democratic action. President Trump's protocols have included a much more aggressive pursuit of sanctions, to the point of freezing Venezuelan assets in its three largest industries: oil, gold, and refined petroleum ("Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions"). The supposed aim of the Trump administration is to pressure Maduro to step down by enforcing such strict sanctions that he eventually has no choice.

Though there are no declassified CIA documents yet that would expound the psychological or strategic objectives behind sanctions, the ones seen in Venezuela are remarkably similar to those in Iran. Maduro has on multiple occasions made it very clear that no amount of sanctioning could convince him to step down, so why does the U.S. continue to impose additional penalties? From a strategic standpoint, the Venezuelan people have been the real target all along. Though the U.S. and Maduro both preach that their main concern is for the helpless civilians, sanctions work only to hurt those already disenfranchised. The same Rodriguez study mentioned previously determined that sanctions had an economic cost of nearly six billion dollars (Emersberger). Over 300,000 thousand people within Venezuela are unable to obtain medical treatment and medication due to U.S. sanctions that are blocking the ability to import necessary materials into the country. About one fifth of Venezuelans do not have drinkable water within their homes, because the sanctions prevent the government from importing parts that could repair the sanitation system (Fox). The U.S. government is offering humanitarian aid, but only through Juan Guaidó and the recognition of his presidency. A fraction of this amount would go directly to funding Guaidó and his staff, and none would help refugees looking to leave Venezuela for the United States ("US to redirect Central America aid to Venezuela's Juan Guaido"). Maduro has refused to accept this aid, because it would necessitate a concession to Guaidó's claims to presidency and validate U.S. intervention in Venezuelan

affairs. Whether or not the aid is welcomed into the country, the U.S. still wins. The continuation of poverty and starvation will cause even greater dissatisfaction in the reigning government that can easily be blamed on Maduro's decision-making, and cooperation with Guaidó in negotiating relief both heroizes the opposition leader and legitimizes his control.

#### *Step 5: The Coup*

Seeing as the Maduro government currently remains intact for now, a coup obviously has not yet been successfully executed by the United States. However, there are compelling reasons to believe that such an action might be on the way. In what Maduro labeled as an attempted U.S. backed coup, Guaidó took to the streets with his armed forces on November 16, 2019, hoping to rally others to join him in storming the streets (“The March Against Fascism' To Defend Venezuela and Latin America”). Unfortunately for the opposition leader, the expected resistance was much smaller than hoped for, and a large majority of military leaders announced their support for Maduro. Counter-protestors matched up with Guaidó's group, and the protest was ultimately a failure (Macleod). This was not even the first supposed coup of the year, but it did establish the existence of significant U.S. based support that is likely to carry forward into future attempts. Vice President Pence tweeted out on the day of the event, “We urge the Venezuelan military to stand with the people of Venezuela, not a despot. The Venezuelan military should be a force of good! The power to change for the better is in your hands!” (@VP). While not a surprising endorsement considering Pence's preciously stated view on Venezuela, one might expect in a liberal international relations framework that this statement would be met with wariness—the vice president of the world's champion of democracy endorsed a military overthrow of the government. Secretary of State Pompeo also published an interesting take on the situation, saying that, “Maduro's illegitimate corrupt regime attempts to silence them, but as

the world saw in #Bolivia, the will of the people will always prevail.” (@SecPompeo). This statement came on the heels of a U.S. backed coup in Bolivia to overthrow Evo Morales which, as recent reports have shown, was based on faulty accusations of election fraud (Higgins). Despite the lack of success in this latest attempt, there is no evidence to suggest that Guaidó will back down on his intentions, and the increase in U.S. sanctions and anti-Maduro funding seems to imply that pressure is building to oust Maduro in favor of a U.S. friendly replacement.

## **VI. Conclusions**

Tools such as those provided by the CIA and American media have for many years allowed the government of the United States to undermine the sovereignty and democratic capability of countries across the globe. The strategy through which this is accomplished follows a series of often overlapping steps that make nations more susceptible to forcible institutional change. Through accusations of communism, creating media condemnation, planting and paying off anti-government agents throughout the target country, and advancing strict economic sanctions that harm the welfare of that nation’s ordinary citizens, the United States is able to build the appearance of local support for a military-lead coup that aims to topple any regime unfriendly to the neoliberal American objectives. The scare tactic of invoking communism is meant to convince the western world that a great evil power exists that intends to ultimately destroy society as we know it. In Iran, this strategy was used to replace the democratically elected leader with a dictator that dominated the country for years to come. American politicians have repeated consistently that Venezuelan citizens clearly and definitively have the same goals as the United States, presupposing an understanding of what is best for Venezuela. This autocratic interventionism is rooted in the colonialist standards enabled by international structures.

In order to recognize the patterns and objectives of U.S. foreign policy, it is necessary to reanalyze our understanding of the framework through which we interpret American action. By maintaining a strict reading of liberalism as an explanation of motivations, the United States is able to disguise imperialist activity as a good-hearted benevolence. As Georgie Anne Geyer wrote in "The World's Protector," the U.S. is the only country that can intervene on such a large scale. This is not because of some moral superiority that that U.S. has but rather due to the long-standing historical model of neorealist suppression of other nations. In order to maximize economic and sociopolitical gain, the United States has benefited from years of overturning governments that may seem to pose even the smallest threat to American political and economic hegemony. Political scientists, the media, and the American public must acknowledge that U.S. foreign policy has never been guided by or intended to follow the ideals of liberalism. Only then will Americans be able to decipher their government's behavior and legacy of neo-imperialism. We must admit the truth of intervention.

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