

Maintaining Balance in the US-Venezuelan Relationship after Chávez
The Role of Venezuela's Human Rights Situation in Shaping the US-Venezuelan Relationship
Under Nicolás Maduro

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Introduction

Following the death of former leader Hugo Chávez, protests in Venezuela have emerged against new leader Nicolás Maduro. Demonstrators have been generally polarized in their reasons for opposing Venezuela's new president. On one hand, supporters of the late Hugo Chávez have urged Maduro to follow the example of Chávez by being more "chavista" ("Human Rights in Venezuela: Not so pretty" 05 May 2014). While chavismo seems to be an answer for some protestors, those on the other side of the opposition see Chávez's rejection of economic development through free trade and neoliberal policies as a cause for the country's failures, with domestic issues continuing under Maduro's leadership. Taking lead of a county with a declining economy and rising inflation rate, Maduro must learn how to appease both sides of the divided opposition.

Protests in Venezuela have been lead largely by students, who have spoken out against the failures of Maduro's regime, namely inflation and food shortages (BBC News 15 March 2014). Although many demonstrations have been peaceful, protestors have been brutally repressed by the Maduro government leading to a wave of arrests, injury, and murder at the hands of Venezuelan authorities. The government defends their use of force against Venezuelan citizens, claiming that protestors have attempted to overthrow the government. What makes this accusation more controversial is that Venezuela has suggested that protestors are attempting to dismantle the current government system using support from the United States (BBC News 15 March 2014).

Since the leadership of Hugo Chávez, repression of opposition in Venezuela has not been uncommon. What is more significant is that with the death of Hugo Chávez and the end of his controversial leadership, the future of Venezuela's foreign relations has been placed in the hands

of Maduro, who has been given the option to either take a strong-armed Chávez approach, or to introduce an open attitude towards strengthening and rekindling international ties. For the purposes of this paper, human rights issues in Venezuela are significant not because of the violations themselves, but for US and international concern for the human rights issues under new president Maduro. Venezuela's protests and Maduro's repressive response will shape Venezuela's domestic affairs as well as how Maduro will be perceived on the international stage.

As Maduro presents his diplomatic leanings, the initial accusation that protestors were backed by the US in alleged coup attempts seemed to be following an anti-US trend left from the Chávez regime. Interestingly, in a more recent claim, Maduro has requested the US join a "peace commission" with Venezuela. This contradictory peace offering seems to demonstrate an attempt by Maduro to revive US-Venezuelan relations in the interest of "peace and sovereignty" (BBC News 15 March 2014). The Venezuelan attitude towards the US and the US response to Venezuela's foreign policy will affect the future of Venezuela, particularly its positioning on the international stage under President Maduro and the success of the anti-government protests.

This paper seeks to answer the following question: Why has Venezuela's President Maduro made shifts towards improved relations with the United States this past year while maintaining anti-US policies remnant of the Chávez regime? This analytical research paper will argue that President Maduro is making shifts towards improved relations with the United States this past year, while maintaining aspects of Chávez's resistant US approach because 1) the US-Venezuelan relationship under Hugo Chávez involved a balancing act that President Maduro must now learn to maintain; 2) the US-Venezuelan relationship affects where Maduro will stand among the states of the UN General Assembly with the end of the Chávez regime; and 3) recognizing the United States has a history of intervening in Latin America and Venezuela

specifically, President Maduro wishes to prevent the US from intervening in favor of the recent anti-Maduro protests.

In answering this research question it is important to understand the concept of “Chávismo” or “Chavista rule”, terms used to describe Hugo Chávez’s form of leadership. As an influential leader in Venezuela and the greater Latin American region, the leadership of Chávez is significant in analyzing where Venezuela lies today. Beginning in 1998, Hugo Chávez claimed to be implementing a system to combat poverty by eliminating corruption in Venezuelan politics (Skidmore, Smith, Green 2010, 237). Chávista rule set out to accomplish this feat by developing a new constitution, dissolving the Supreme Court and elected legislature, and eliminating checks and balances against “president” Hugo Chávez (Skidmore, Smith, Green 2010, 237-238).

Although Chávez maintained domestic support and controlled opposition in the Chávista system, the Chávez government was met with public unrest beginning most notably in 2002 due to economic decline. In response to the resistance, Chávez further oppressed Venezuelan citizens by arresting and firing on demonstrators in the attempt to restore order. The actions of Chávez’s regime were met with opposition from the United States. The US chose to address Chávez’s crackdown on his citizens not necessarily because of the repression but instead because of Chávez’s foreign policy approach, which was aimed to oppose the United States (Skidmore, Smith, Green 2010, 238-239).

Like Chávez, Maduro has recently used force to repress those demonstrating against the Venezuelan government. Maduro’s violent suppression of Venezuelan protestors is significant as representative of excessive use of force against citizens. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recognizes freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, as well as freedom of opinion and expression to be universal and inalienable human rights (Office

of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014). In the international community, the use of force against protestors and opposition groups, especially those demonstrating peacefully, is considered a human rights dilemma.

Theoretical Perspective

Neoliberalism will be the dominant theory used throughout this paper. Neoliberalism looks at states as rational actors that are constrained by the international system, rather than independent of it (Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 9). Neoliberalism also focuses on the importance of institutions (Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 66). The important international institutions in the case of the US-Venezuelan relationship are international organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and OAS, a body that will be introduced later in the paper. States are important actors in the international system that work along side and in the confines of international institutions in the international system.

A “system” is characterized by interrelated and often interdependent parts. The international system can therefore be defined as a political system that contains interrelated states and institutions (Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 48). As rational actors, states will act in their own national interests, which in the liberal view, is defined by the state’s position in the international system in addition to the state’s domestic culture and society (Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 51). Differences in national interests between the United States and Venezuela is significant as the United States represents one of the world’s largest powers and has traditionally played the role of an international protectorate. At the same time, the United States is interested in a free-market international economy for economic growth. On the other hand, Venezuela under Chávez as will be discussed further, rejected the US approach to free-market economy and focused instead on maintaining national control of state resources.

Neoliberalism as a theory is also used in reference to free and open trade in the global economy. Liberalism places emphasis on factors such as military power, trade, investment, negotiation, and persuasion as dominant instruments for actors in the international system. Within the system actors use these tools to maximize welfare, justice and security (Nye Jr. and Welch 2013, 63). Because international trade seeks to “maximize welfare” through economic growth, free and open international trade has often been understood in terms of a neoliberal approach to the international economy. Referring to neoliberal policies as including free and open international trade is significant because Hugo Chávez, who emphasized the importance of maintaining state control over resources for the benefit of the people, has been known for rejecting US and neoliberal ideologies.

The level of analysis to be used in this paper will focus heavily on the role of the individual. Individual level of analysis is used when the role of the individual decision makers is significant (Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 54). In this case, an individual level of analysis is important in understanding the behavior of new President Nicolás Maduro, who has been heavily influenced by former leader Hugo Chávez. Because Hugo Chávez acted as a distinct leader in Venezuela and in the international system at large, understanding his method of ruling and personality is important in understanding how President Maduro’s actions will be shaped when carrying on the “Chavista” government of his predecessor.

Due to the rise of human rights abuses under Maduro and potential US interest in intervening based on this situation, human rights in consideration of international relations theory must be addressed, particularly as a moral interest. Human rights concerns are included in the liberalist perspective, which suggests that it is unacceptable for a state to act in criminal or morally unacceptable behavior (Eds. Burchill and Linklater 2013, 69). Human rights in the case of

Venezuela are significant because, as an issue of international concern, Maduro's action to repress his citizens runs the threat of being restrained by the international system, as states are restricted by the international system in the neoliberal view.

Methodology

Qualitative data will be used in this paper to analyze the situation in Venezuela today. Historical background and description will be provided to create an understanding of the political situation in Venezuela and the US-Venezuelan relationship leading up to the current leadership of President Maduro. President Maduro's policy shifts will then be analyzed in comparison to US-Venezuelan relations under Chávez. It is important to use the historical description regarding Hugo Chávez to compare to President Maduro's regime to determine where differences exist in the effectiveness of anti-US policies in Venezuela between Chávez and Maduro, and understand how these policies are related to domestic affairs. After presenting a historical perspective, the influences on Maduro's foreign policy towards the United States as detailed in the thesis will be analyzed. Addressing where Venezuela's human rights issues come into play in relation to the US and the international system will be an important factor in the analysis of Maduro's policy.

As a recent issue, there is limited, if any printed work on the current situation in Venezuela that analyzes the US-Venezuelan relationship under President Maduro in detail. For this reason, databases *Academic Search Complete*, *JSTOR*, *Lexis-Nexis*, and *CQ Researcher* have been useful in reviewing and gathering relevant historical and background information regarding the leadership of Hugo Chávez and details regarding the US-Venezuelan relationship, up until President Maduro has taken lead of Venezuela. Announcements and speeches from international officials as published on the United Nations and OAS website, in addition to sources such as *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* have been key resources used to supplement this background

information and provide additional insight to the current situation under President Nicolás Maduro in 2014.

Overview: Following Chávista Policy

As an influential, popular, and undoubtedly controversial leader, Hugo Chávez led Venezuela for over fourteen years. Before his death in 2013, Chávez was reelected as Venezuela's president for the third time in October 2012 and named Nicolás Maduro as his successor (Corrales 2013). Chávez's success has been attributed to his social spending, with Javier Corrales noting "Chávez believed in throwing money at every problem" (Corrales 2013). As evident by his long-term leadership, Chávez's method seems to have worked. Through large social spending projects, which Chávez claimed to be developing to benefit the poor, Chávez maintained popularity and support in Venezuela and abroad.

Hugo Chávez is possibly best known in the United States for his statements and actions against the US and neoliberalism in the form of open international trade and a free economy. Chávez's policy against the United States for his action was not unwarranted – the United States was involved in supporting the April 2002 coup attempt aimed at overthrowing the Chávez government. Chávez's government was even named part of a Latin American "Axis of Evil", along states such as Cuba and Brazil (Nielson 2009, 95). The US opposition to the Chávez leadership seemed to be due to his leftism and most obviously for Chávez's overtly anti-US leanings. Adding to this, Chávez spurred US hostility by openly supporting Iran, a known enemy of the US, in its nuclear proliferation programs (Nielson 2009, 97).

Interestingly, although Chávez took a heavy anti-US stance, much of the money used for Chávez's massive spending policy was generated from exports, including exports to the United States, numbering \$341 billion between 1999 and 2011 (Corrales 2013). Chávez's anti-American policy, as characteristic of his foreign policy towards other states such as Iraq and Colombia seems to have been a well-played tactic for Chávez: Chávez never took major action against the

US, even though it had the means to do so by the threat of cutting off the Venezuelan flow of oil to the United States (Corrales 2013). By voicing anti-Americanism with hesitation to turn away the US market, Chávez successfully gained the support of followers, while maintaining profit from US oil consumption.

Neoliberal theory can be applied to the strategic policies developed by Chávez in the sense that Chávez understood that he could oppose the United States only so far as he was limited by the international system. In the case of Venezuela, Chávez was restricted by the rise of globalism and the need to trade in order to maintain economic growth. As a rational actor, Venezuela therefore expressed anti-US sentiments while maintaining an economic relationship with the US in order to utilize its oil resources to the economic benefit of the state.

Support for the Maduro government within Venezuela rests heavily on to the extent to which Maduro is able to address the needs of the people while either satisfying or suppressing opposition groups. As explained in one article, “Venezuelans have been hitting the streets en masse since early February, protesting against the government’s inability to tackle the nation’s soaring inflation and crime” (Nagel 14 May 2014). With uprisings fuming since the end of the Chávez regime, Maduro has been pressured to address the economic and social concerns now faced by Venezuelans. As protests rise and human rights abuses come to international attention, utilizing force against opposition in Venezuela has not been fruitful in solving Maduro’s domestic challenges. Maduro’s strong-armed approach has also been detrimental to the leader’s image in the international community due to the violation of human rights as a result of his actions.

Chávez’s death has left succeeding President Nicolás Maduro with several issues to balance during his leadership. Chávez successfully maintained domestic and international

support through social spending projects and strong-armed leadership while balancing Venezuela's relationship with the US with a strategic balancing foreign policy approach. Continuing Venezuela's Chavista-style government, Maduro must make critical decisions on how to approach the United States in Venezuela's foreign policy. At the same time, Maduro must maintain both domestic and international support. Returning to the individual level of analysis, due to the lack of popular support, economic decline, inflation, and rise in violence, garnishing domestic support will pose one of the greatest challenges to Maduro's success.

Due to the power of Hugo Chávez during his regime as an influential leader, Chávez was able to secure both domestic and international support while maintaining control over domestic, economic, and social concerns within Venezuela. With international support, Chávez faced limited the international system from restricting his expression of anti-American policies. Due to this political and diplomatic strength, Chávez was not pressured to embrace neoliberalism or pro-US policies, even in the advent of a US-supported coup attempt in 2002.

With both domestic and international support as a major leader in Latin America, Chávez was able to maintain anti-US and anti-neoliberal economic policies and declarations. At the same time, Chávez successfully balanced his anti-US approach by maintaining economic relations with the United States to bring money into Venezuela, which was then used to support Chávez's social spending. Chávez's strength and tactful diplomacy allowed Chávez to act as a balancing power as an anti-US leader, without becoming an economic enemy to the US.

Neoliberal theory is significant in understanding President Maduro's policy towards the United States due to the proliferation of domestic issues in Venezuela. The difference between Chávez and Maduro exists because Maduro has not established his strength as an international leader and has not made sure to secure domestic support. Although Chávez was outright in his

statements against the United States, as a significant international leader, with notable leadership in OPEC, along with domestic support, Chávez was able to remain successful on the international stage and within Venezuela. Maduro on the other hand, in the attempt to maintain the anti-neoliberal and anti-US policies of Chávez, has failed to make the domestic issues within Venezuela a priority, thereby fueling opposition to the Maduro regime.

Maintaining Balance under President Maduro

Maduro began his presidency carrying on the anti-US trend of his predecessor. With rises in demonstrations from domestic opposition groups in 2013, Maduro made various allegations against the United States. These accusations included the claim the US was developing plots against Maduro's presidency, that an "economic war" had been created by the US using support from Venezuelan opposition, and even the claimed the US and opposition groups were responsible for a refinery explosion that occurred in 2012 (Hudson 2013). In the midst of protests Maduro ordered the expulsion of three US diplomats from Venezuela in February 2014, claiming the US diplomats were supporting the overthrow of his government (Quiñones 2014).

Currently, Venezuela is one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America (Muñoz 2014). Some of the violence in Venezuela can be attributed to the tension between the Venezuelan government and opposition groups. Other causes include violence related to the economic decline and ineffective law enforcement. Venezuelan citizens concerned with the rise of violence in their country have considered the violence to be another cause for opposition against Maduro's leadership. The failure of Maduro to respond effectively to the issues of Venezuela is reflective of his weakness as a leader in comparison to strong-armed Hugo Chávez.

Maduro has made numerous statements against the US but has not yet established himself as a significant power on the international stage. Because Maduro has not developed enough influence internationally, he has not yet developed the power to balance the United States through his policies. With neither substantial international support nor backing from Venezuelan citizens, Maduro has been left with high opposition groups in Venezuela and few incentives to convince the US not to intervene in overthrowing his government.

As evident by mounting protests and violence, President Maduro has struggled to maintain control over domestic affairs through the Chavista government. Because blaming the United States and capitalism has proved unsuccessful under Maduro, the new leader must look to an alternative approach to Venezuela's domestic and foreign policies. It appears that Maduro has chosen to heed to the requests of protestors fighting for reform by encouraging an economic and diplomatic partnership with the United States. Maduro has made the first efforts towards developing a market economy through the "Foreign Exchange Agreement No. 27" statute, which is predicted to possibly improve economic conditions in Venezuela (Nagel 2014).

At the same time, Maduro has stuck by his reasoning for the removal of the US officials from Venezuela. Despite Maduro's support for smoother relations with the United States, he does not seem to be suggesting a friendship with the United States – Maduro made it clear in the interview with Amanpour that his wish is that the United States "respect" Venezuela. Presumably the claim made by Maduro suggests that Maduro will be civil with the US, just so long as the US does not support the opposition in overthrowing the Venezuelan government.

In an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour, Maduro remained unapologetic for this action, with Maduro mentioning the history of US action in conspiring to overthrow the Chavista government. Maduro's claims were not overreactions to potential US involvement in his overthrow. As mentioned previously, the US supported the April 2002 coup against Chávez, it is not unlikely to assume the US may take similar action against the Venezuelan government in favor of current opposition groups, should the intervention be of US interest due to pressure or further decline in Venezuela. As a result of unresolved economic issues that have resulted in unemployment, high inflation, and consistently low wages, opposition has proliferated and has been met with violent suppression by the Venezuelan government.

President Maduro has begun leaning towards a pro-US policy due as domestic changes, including security and economic concerns, have only worsened under the continued Chavista government. Opposition groups against the Maduro government have involved diplomacy in the attempt to draw attention, placing pressure on the Maduro government to either heed to the interests of the opposition groups or be subject to criticism from the international community. The use of this tactic by the opposition group is significant because it involves other countries, including the United States, requesting states in the international community to pick a side in the conflict (Nagel 2013).

In the same March 2014 interview in which Maduro supported his decision to expel US diplomatic officials from Venezuela, Maduro has hoped for a “warmer” relationship with the United States. Maduro has also appointed a new US ambassador Maximilian Arveleaz in order to “establish new levels of relations” with the United States (Maduro 2014). While expelling the US officials from Venezuela appeared to be an act to prevent the United States from “conspiring” against the Maduro government, the appointment of Arveleaz seems to be an action taken by Maduro to develop relations with the United States at a time in which US intervention is still a possibility and Venezuela’s domestic opposition remains a heated issue.

President Maduro has acted aggressively in his initial claims towards the United States to establish his presence as a leader that will not be intimidated by the United States – a sentiment adamantly expressed by former leader Hugo Chávez. Because Maduro lacks the international clout or domestic support of his predecessor, he does not have the ability to continue challenge the United States in the same way as Chávez. Maduro is therefore restricted by the international system based on his acceptance by the UN General Assembly. For this reason, Maduro has shifted towards warmer relations with the United States to prevent the rise of hostility between

the two states. This shift between seemingly hostile views and positive relations with the United States is reflective of the balancing act that Venezuela has maintained since Chávez.

Venezuela's constant switch in attitudes towards the United States is reflective of the US-Venezuelan relationship under former leader Hugo Chávez. In applying neoliberal theory, fluctuations in diplomacy reflect the interests of states as restricted by the international community through their relations with other states. If state's positive relationship with another state will help the state to advance its own interests, the state will take action to maintain positive relations with the other.

The US and Venezuela share a "love-hate" relationship as ideological rivals and economic partners. Because Venezuela and the United States do not share the same national interest due to the differences in cultural and social values as imposed by Chavismo, the two nations have consistently come into conflict. Despite this conflict, constrained by an international system in which interdependence is required, the United States and Venezuela have managed to balance their ideological rivalry with the economic and diplomatic need to cooperate.

The United States has expressed interest in eliminating tensions between the two states, despite Maduro's claims against the US. US Secretary of State John Kerry voiced hope for improved relations with Venezuela in the statement: "Regrettably, President Maduro keeps choosing to blame the United States for things we are not doing or for things that they are unhappy about in their own economy and own society [...] We are prepared to have a change in this relationship. This tension between our countries has gone on too long in our view" (Kelemen 26 February 2014).

In the case of the United States and Venezuela, as will be discussed later, the US would benefit from maintaining positive relations with Venezuela rather than intervene against

President Maduro because Venezuela is one of the major oil suppliers to the US. Similarly, as “Venezuela’s most important trading partner”, President Maduro would benefit from maintaining this economic relationship through friendly relations with the United States, especially at a time in which Venezuela is facing economic turmoil (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs 02 December 2013). However, as suggested by neoliberalism, other factors, in this case, human rights abuses and the effects of Venezuela’s instability on the international system are to be considered in whether or not the US will support or at least tolerate Maduro’s leadership.

US-Venezuelan Relations in the International System

As one of the 193 member states in the United Nations, it is important to consider the US positioning towards Venezuela in the UN General Assembly. The U.S. Department of State describes the significance of the UN General Assembly as the only forum in which “the United States President has the opportunity to raise US foreign policy priorities and global issues of concern to heads of state and national leaders that represent all 193 member states at the same time” (“Presidential Remarks to the United Nations General Assembly” 2014). To date, the US President specifically has not made remarks to the United Nations General Assembly regarding Venezuela. The lack of a Presidential remark to the United Nations suggests that Venezuela and US tensions with former Hugo Chávez and current president Maduro have not reached the level of top priority of the United States.

Hugo Chávez’s leadership ended on a positive note in the international community. In March 2013, the UN General Assembly recognized President Hugo Chávez, with Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly noting Chávez’s involvement in reducing poverty in Venezuela through his leadership. Jeremić was quoted as praising Chávez as a powerful leader in the statement, “Throughout his term in office he remained committed to the cause of social justice, working hard to improve the lives of Venezuelans, especially the most underprivileged among them. Under his strong leadership, Venezuela made great strides toward fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals to the lasting benefit of a great and proud nation.” (“General Assembly pays tribute to late President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela”).

Praise to Hugo Chávez was mirrored by UN Secretary General Ban, who voiced the importance of Chávez as a regional leader: “President Chávez ensured that Venezuela provided crucial assistance to Haiti following the devastating earthquake of 2010. He always reminded the

region of the historic debt that it owed to Haiti, the first republic to gain independence in Latin America and the Caribbean” (“General Assembly pays tribute to late President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela”). The significance of the admiration of Hugo Chávez by important members of the international system cannot be overlooked. Neoliberalism emphasizes the importance of the international system as restricting the actions of states. Chávez maintained support of the international system by engaging in ways that reflected his recognition of principles such as equality, morality, and social justice, which are valued by the international community. Just as Maduro has been expected to maintain order in Venezuela, the new president will be compared to former Hugo Chávez in carrying on the social initiatives of his predecessor as an actor in the international system.

The UN General Assembly is significant as the world’s platform for international negotiation and discussion, allowing international discussion on a number of international issues (“General Assembly of the United Nations” 2014). Apply neoliberalism the UN General Assembly is important as an entity that is reflective of the international system as a whole. Declarations made at the UN General Assembly are expressed to other actors in the international system and are therefore significant in shaping the action of other actor, including sovereign states such as the United States and Venezuela.

As evident from statements from the United States Mission to the United Nations, in the year 2014 among the crisis in Ukraine, Libya, and Sudan, the United States has not yet made Venezuela a priority concern (“Statements – 2014” 2014). In fact, the last time in which the United States directly mentioned Venezuela as a specific interest in the United Nations was during Chávez’s leadership in the 2011, following US support for the April 2010 coup. In a 2011 fact sheet release, the United States mentioned its focus on utilizing its membership in the United

Nations to reform the UN Human Rights Council specifically in 2009-2011 to bring attention to human rights violations in Venezuela, among other states. The fact sheet was released to introduce US strategies to advance US interests in the United Nations (“FACT SHEET: Advancing U.S. Interests at the United Nations” 06 April 2011).

The civil unrest in Venezuela, as a “civil society” concern to be addressed by the international system, particularly the United Nations has been noted by Ambassador Samantha Power in the declaration, “we are striving to mobilize the UN as a vehicle for the promotion of human dignity and human rights, and a forum in which the United States can continue to stand up to repressive regimes. [...] We have [...] provided a platform for the victims of repression in North Korea, Cuba, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, and elsewhere” (Power 02 April 2014). The statement by Samantha Power is significant in the sense that Venezuela has been aligned with known US enemies such as North Korea, Cuba, Iran, and Syria, rather than with other nations experiencing general human rights violations. Declaring the human rights situation in Venezuela a civil society concern ultimately places pressure on Venezuela to resolve their human rights dilemma by first discontinuing the use of force to repress protestors.

While the United States has not drawn direct attention to Venezuela in the UN Assembly since 2011, the United States has mentioned the human rights situation in Venezuela in other international organizations in recent months. On March 6th 2014, U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States and Ambassador Carmen Lomellin presented the human rights situation in Venezuela as a concern in the Organization of American States (OAS) meeting of the OAS Permanent Council. Carmen Lomellin expressed that the Organization of American States must not remain silent on Venezuela’s human rights issue and must instead “call for an immediate end to violence, respect for peaceful dissent and an initiation of a meaningful

dialogue” (06 March 2014). While this statement addresses the use of violence against Venezuelan citizens, it is important to note that it does not call for active intervention in Venezuela against President Maduro.

Unlike the United States, Venezuela has used the UN General Assembly as a forum to express US-Venezuelan tensions to the international community under Maduro. On 27 September 2013, preceding Maduro’s pro-US shift in diplomacy, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Venezuela, Elias Jaua Milano, explained the reason for President Maduro’s absence from the meeting was the fault of the United States. Elias Jaua Milano then proposed that the Security Council and United Nations as a whole had fallen victim to imperialism (Jaua Milano 27 September 2013). By making these statements, Elias Jaua Milano suggested inequality in the international system due to US domination or “imperialism” of the United Nations. To play against the negative attention for the human rights situation in Venezuela opposition groups the victims of human rights abuses have been labeled “violent groups”, rather than citizens or victims of repression at the hands of the Venezuelan government (Jaua Milano 27 September 2013).

By drawing attention away from the domestic human rights situation in Venezuela and towards issues in the international system, Elias Jaua Milano attempted to bring into question the values and structure of the international system, namely the United Nations, via the UN General Assembly. By suggesting, “the United Nations and the diplomatic processes had been kidnapped by imperialism”, in which imperialism is characterized by dominance of one state Elias Jaua Milano has claimed that inequality exists in the United Nations (; Nye, Jr. and Welch 2013, 3-4).

Using the UN General Assembly to suggest alleged inequality in the international system while referring to protestors as enemies rather than victims in the Venezuelan human rights

issue, Elias Jaua Milano has sought to change the interpretation of the human rights situation in Venezuela as understood by members of the United Nations. Because value is placed on human rights in the international community and among UN member states, these statements have attempted to counter the claim that Venezuela has committed human rights abuses against innocent citizens.

On the other side, the United States has chosen not to bring international attention to the human rights situation in Venezuela through the UN General Assembly and has instead let knowledge about the issue reach the international community through organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the Organization of American States, both important institutions in the international system. Although this appears to be a passive role taken by the United States, the United States has previously made it known that human rights issues in Venezuela are a concern and that it is willing to become involved in mitigating the situation. The international community, through statements made by the United States in multiple international organizations, has been made aware of the human rights situation in Venezuela. Recognizing the US as a powerful figure in the United Nations with the ability to call attention and request action in response to the human rights situation, Maduro's government has shifted from addressed US power in the UN as "imperialism" in 2013, to developing more open relations with the US.

Anti-Maduro Protests and Prospects for US Intervention in Venezuela

Unlike Hugo Chávez, President Nicolás Maduro lacks the personality of his predecessor and has failed to gain public support for his leadership. Although in many cases known as a repressive leader, Hugo Chávez described his regime as “the pretty revolution”, in favor of the democratic transition demanded by the Venezuelan public. In light of increased violence and food shortages, demonstrators have spoken out against Maduro’s leadership. Amidst the unrest, income from oil has slowed, creating even greater economic issues for the new leader. Rather than addressing the interests of protestors, Maduro has launched a violent crackdown against Venezuelan citizens (P.G. 05 May 2014).

The actions of Nicolás Maduro against generally peaceful protestors has gradually reached international attention through groups as Human Rights Watch, which has spoken out against the human rights situation as hundreds have been detained and attacked by Venezuelan law enforcement officials (P.G. 05 March 2014). The United States has taken a particular interest in Venezuela when it involves the human rights situation in the country. In early May 2014, the US Senate discussed imposing sanctions against the Maduro government for human rights abuses in response to the Human Rights Watch report on the human rights situation in Venezuela (Nagel 14 May 2014).

Considering recent actions by the United States expressing concern for human rights issues in Venezuela, it is important that Maduro maintain favorable relations with the United States. As anti-Maduro protests intensify, it has become more evident that Maduro’s brutal crackdown could work in favor of the anti-Maduro protestors as they gain support from the United States against the Maduro government’s human rights abuses. Recognizing the US has already brought Maduro’s actions against his citizens to the attention of the international

community, opposition groups in Venezuela can utilize the Maduro's human rights abuses as leverage in developing a diplomatic relationship with the US against President Maduro.

With Maduro's government crackdown in full effect, anti-Maduro opposition groups in Venezuela benefit from claiming the status of human rights victims suffering at the hands of their president. Maduro must now act strategically to preserve his image in the international community and with the US specifically in the midst of human rights issues in Venezuela. Although the United States has declared in early statements that it will not become involved in Venezuela's domestic affairs, it has become increasingly evident that the US will take the side of Venezuela's anti-government protestors as US-Venezuelan relations sour. When President Maduro made the decision on 17 February 2014 to remove three US consular officials from Venezuela, the US promptly responded by expelling three Venezuelan diplomats from the United States.

Despite the US decision to remove Venezuelan diplomats, the US State Department maintained that it would remain "open to a diplomatic relationship with Maduro", with White House spokesman Jay Carney claiming the US would allow the future of Venezuela to remain with the Venezuelan people (The Associated Press 25 February 2014). Interestingly, the Venezuelan political opposition group Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) in response to the US hearings for sanctions on Venezuela's human rights abusers has asked the US specifically not to impose sanctions against Venezuela. The request from MUD to prevent US involvement appears to be in the interest of promoting dialogue with the Maduro government in order to fix the dwelling issues in Venezuela, rather than fueling tension between Maduro and the opposition groups (Nagel 14 May 2014).

Despite whether or not Venezuelan opposition groups request US assistance, the US decision regarding whether or not to intervene in Venezuela's domestic affairs will ultimately depend on whether or not such involvement will promote US interests. In the neoliberal view, states are rational actors constrained by the international system and will therefore utilize diplomacy in their own rational self-interest. Therefore, a state will intervene in the domestic affairs of another sovereign state only when such intervention will help to advance the interests of the intervening state. When looking at Venezuela as a major oil-producing nation – among the top five largest oil suppliers to the United States – the US will make the decision to intervene if the current situation threatens the ability of Venezuela to fuel the US demand for oil (“Global Conflict Tracker” January 2014).

In the case of the current unrest in Venezuela, citizens are speaking out against the economic turmoil that has resulted in high inflation and unemployment under new President Maduro. If the Venezuelan leader fails to address the state's crime and economic issues, the country faces the threat of political instability and continued economic decline. The concern of the opposition groups who “[carry] a message that the country is crumbling and there is no time to wait for change” is the same concern of the United States in maintaining its oil interests in Venezuela (Ghitis 20 February 2014). At this point in time, the opposition in Venezuela is fighting for stability, not necessarily to overthrow their new president.

The US interest in Venezuela is that the state maintains stability so the US can continue to secure access to oil from Venezuela. Support of the opposition in Venezuela to overthrow Maduro does not guarantee Venezuela's stability. While the United States does have an interest in the human rights situation in Venezuela because the international community considers human rights abuse unacceptable, the US will not risk overthrowing the Chavista leader if it threatens to

bring further instability to the state. At the same time, although the United States would not want to risk potential instability of Venezuela through intervention, the US is enticed to act in accordance with international pressure to intervene in instances of human rights violations. For these reasons, US intervention in Venezuela will be likely in two instances: 1) if President Maduro chooses to cut off US access to Venezuelan oil and 2) if the US faces pressure either domestically or internationally to address the human rights abuses in Venezuela.

Conclusion

In the midst of uprisings from opposition groups at the end of the Chávez regime, in the last year new President Nicolás Maduro has made shifts towards a more openly friendly relationship with the United States than his predecessor. This analytical research paper has sought to answer the question - Why has President Maduro made shifts towards warm relations with the US this past year while maintaining anti-US policies remnant of the Chávez regime?

We have explored President Maduro's diplomatic policies towards the United States as well as the prevailing domestic concerns in Venezuela in order to understand that President Maduro is making shifts towards positive relations with the United States this past year, while maintaining aspects of Chávez's resistant US approach because 1) the US-Venezuelan relationship under Hugo Chávez involved a balancing act that President Maduro must now learn to maintain; 2) the US-Venezuelan relationship affects where Maduro will stand among the states of the UN General Assembly with the end of the Chávez regime; and 3) recognizing the United States has a history of intervening in Latin America and Venezuela specifically, President Maduro wishes to prevent the US from intervening in favor of the recent anti-Maduro protests.

Due to the differences in the type of leadership of Hugo Chávez and Nicolás Maduro in addition to the different type of opposition pressures and domestic concerns within Venezuela, each leader was left with different approaches to their foreign policy. Looking at the individual level analysis, the difference in charisma and leadership between Chávez and Maduro has played a meaningful role in the acceptance of each leader both domestically and internationally. In the case of Nicolás Maduro, a new leader faced with lack of domestic and international support, the president must recognize the restrictions in the international system and develop his diplomatic policies towards the US accordingly.

While maintaining the Chavista government, Maduro has faced challenges in his leadership that have forced him to rethink Venezuela's use of an anti-US and anti-neoliberal economic policy. Because the policies of Chávez's leadership have arguably resulted in Venezuela's domestic chaos and dissatisfaction with the current economic situation, Maduro must learn to first address the domestic issues he faces at home. Utilizing violence against citizens will not solve Venezuela's domestic issues with crime, inflation, and food shortages. Human rights abuses to repress state citizens are also not seen as acceptable in the international community.

The international community through the UN General Assembly and organizations such as Human Rights Watch and OAS have been made aware of Maduro's actions against his citizens, placing the new leader in an unfavorable light. Such abuses, along with Maduro's negative statements against the US places Maduro in a disadvantage in terms of developing a warmer US-Venezuelan relationship, which places the US at risk for being associated with a nation that represses its citizens. Maduro has recognized, as evident from his call for an alliance with the US, that maintaining favorable relations with the US will be important in maintaining the balancing of US-Venezuelan relations. US influence in Venezuela is significant because in applying neoliberal theory, Venezuela as a state is confined by the international system.

The international system through the linkage of states and international organizations looks down upon leaders that repress their citizens and in most cases, allows actors, such as the US to intervene in favor of citizens in states in which human rights abuses are present. Through involvement in the attempted 2002 coup against Hugo Chávez, the US has developed a history of intervention in Venezuela. With an interest in the human rights situation in Venezuela, there is potential for the United States to become involved in Venezuela to address the human rights violations that have occurred at the hands of President Maduro. Because the United States has

interest in intervening in Venezuela and may do so with international support in the international interest of human rights, Maduro must be careful in addressing the US: too much aggression towards the United States could sour relations and make the US more likely to intervene against the Venezuelan president.

The United States, a state influenced by international institutions such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations will be constrained by the organizations in deciding whether or not to address Venezuela's human rights issue. Ultimately, preventing the possibility for US intervention and developing a positive rapport in the international community will depend heavily on Maduro's ability to discontinue human rights abuses and maintain the balancing act in US-Venezuelan relations.

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Appendix: Literature Review

The following review of works pertaining to the US-Venezuelan relationship will assist us in answering the following question – Why has Venezuela’s President Maduro made shifts towards improved relations with the United States this past year while maintaining anti-US policies remnant of the Chávez regime? This analytical research paper will argue that President Maduro is making shifts towards improved relations with the United States this past year, while maintaining aspects of Chávez’s resistant US approach because 1) the US-Venezuelan relationship under Hugo Chávez involved a balancing act that President Maduro must now learn to maintain; 2) the US-Venezuelan relationship affects where Maduro will stand among the states of the UN General Assembly with the end of the Chávez regime; and 3) recognizing the United States has a history of intervening in Latin America and Venezuela specifically, President Maduro wishes to prevent the US from intervening in favor of the recent anti-Maduro protests. The death of Hugo Chávez occurred hardly a year ago, leaving little literature regarding the leadership under new President Nicolas Maduro. Much of the literature regarding Venezuela’s policy and relationship with the United States therefore focuses on the Chávez regime and the general tension between the US and Venezuela.

As evidenced in “Venezuela’s Oil Reform and Chavismo” by Luis Lander and Margarita López-Maya, the significance of the US-Venezuelan relationship lies with Venezuela’s role as a major oil producer. As one of the founding members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Venezuela has conflicted with US oil policies (21). Lander and López-Maya focus on Chávez’s oil reform policies through the “Oil Opening” beginning with the nationalization of Venezuela’s oil resources. Because Venezuela has strengthened control of over oil resources by taxing and regulating transnational investment in oil resources, and strengthened

OPEC as a whole, US concern with Venezuela exists primarily in the country's role in OPEC. However, Lander and López-Maya point out that while the US may not favor the oil policies of OPEC and Venezuela specifically, the United States must maintain at least cordial relations with Venezuela due to US reliance on Venezuelan oil (23).

The United States is understandably not be fond of the role of Venezuela in strengthening OPEC and raising oil prices. However, the United States relies on Venezuelan oil and must not allow the threat of a strengthened OPEC and higher oil prices to get in the way of satisfying the domestic need for foreign oil, which, as Lander and López-Maya mention, is cheaper than producing oil domestically. Lander and López-Maya therefore describe the US's position on Venezuela's oil reform as "contradictory" due to the continued US-Venezuelan mutual relationship for oil and US backing of higher oil prices in the interest of pricing for US reserves, despite US disapproval of a strengthened OPEC that includes US "enemies" such as Iraq, Libya, and Iran (23). Rather than focusing on the US-Venezuelan relationship specifically, Lander and López-Maya make an important point regarding the role of oil in shaping US-Venezuelan relations.

Steve Ellner's "Venezuela: Defying Globalization's Logic" suggest that Chávez played an important role in his ability to implement reform despite US opposition. In Ellner's view, the Chávez goal to enhance state power represents an "alternative" to free-market policy (20). Ellner even makes the statement that Chávez has implemented reform specifically to bring about radical change. Chávez's mission for radical change was met with US opposition most notably following the 9/11 attacks due to harsher foreign policy. In 2002, the United States encouraged opposition groups against Chávez through their support for the April 2002 coup (Ellner 21).

Ellner explains that US opposition to the Chávez regime exists in the “demonstration effect” (21).

Representative of an alternative to the neoliberal system, Chávez has been influential throughout Latin America, particularly by those inspired by his ability to defy the system. At the same time, the Chávez regime has remained successful by protecting and strengthening diplomatic relationships. Continued strength and success of the Chávez regime, which openly spoke out against the US as an “imperialist” was feared by United States not only because of its ability to succeed with radical initiatives, but also because of Venezuela’s push to “de-dollarize” oil (Ellner 22). In Ellner’s view, the strength of the Chávez regime as a model for change through nationalism, in opposition to US hegemony, appears to be the cause of US hostility towards Venezuela.

Javier Corrales presents an interesting view of Venezuela’s foreign policy towards the United States in the article “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy”. Presenting the concept of “social power diplomacy”, Corrales explains that Venezuela has used social power diplomacy to gain allies through soft power by spending large amounts on social projects in other countries. Social power is therefore a soft-balancing tool used by Venezuela through regional drug eradication efforts, trade agreements, enhanced diplomatic ties, and investment in projects both domestically, and in other countries (Corrales 97-98). By investing in social and development projects, Venezuela has developed social power to be used to balance the US as a foreign policy tool (101). Corrales makes note that despite the fact that Chávez’s regime is undemocratic, Venezuela has remained powerful due to its social power and ability to support this soft power by creating “oil ties” with OPEC states.

Despite Venezuela's power abroad, the Chávez regime was faced with setbacks due to domestic crisis from declines in the oil sector. Because Venezuela relies heavily on its role in the oil industry, declines in the price of oil forced Chávez to fire approximately 29 percent of the employees working for the Venezuelan national petroleum company, *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA)*(Corrales 106). Due to Chávez's emphasis on maintaining national control over oil resources, foreign direct investment remains limited, hindering the possibilities for growth for the Venezuelan oil industry (Corrales 107). Chávez also fell short diplomatically by making his bias towards politicians visible, thereby making Chávez unpopular among political leaders even within the region (Corrales 107). Corrales concludes that despite Venezuela's strength through social power, the United States should not be alarmed because with decreases in the price of oil, Venezuela can no longer afford to spend the money abroad required to develop social power (109). Corrales suggests that while social power diplomacy will continue, it is in the best interest of the US to continue to promote strong democracies to promote opposition actors to balance the Chávez regime (111).

In "Is Venezuela the New Cuba?", Teo Ballvé answers his title by suggesting that Venezuela has become the new preoccupation for the United States, replacing Cuba in the new world order. Opposing the neoliberalism system, Venezuela challenges the world order, in direct resistance to the US, just as Cuba did in the Cold War era (Ballvé 3). Ballvé explains that despite US claims, the United States is not antagonistic to Venezuela in the interest of democracy, but rather because of the influence Venezuela has throughout the hemisphere. Venezuela has now replaced Cuba as the region's anti-US power, while remaining strong in the region due to Chávez's ability to appeal and empower the impoverished Latin American majority (Ballvé 3).

Francisco Dominguez bluntly states that since the election of Hugo Chávez, the United States openly resisted his leadership, “as if it was up to the US government to have the ultimate say in who should run this South American nation; that it was somehow endowed with the right to oust any administration that was not to its liking” (101). Dominguez attributes the US sense of “endowment” to the Monroe Doctrine and concept of Manifest Destiny, which has caused the US to develop a sense of entitlement to control Latin America in favor of its own interests. Dominguez even goes as far to say the US sense of control over political affairs in the Southern Hemisphere are reflective of imperial interests.

The United States has consistently intervened throughout Latin America, in the interest of maintaining its hegemony, crushing even democratic initiatives such as in the overthrow of democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954 (Dominguez 102). Meanwhile, neoliberalism, heavily promoted by the United States, has led to growth for investors but has led to widespread inequality, poverty, unemployment, and disease among a larger percentage of the Latin American population (Dominguez 103). In response to these conditions, Latin American citizens rebel. Venezuela, prior to the Chávez regime mirrored other Latin American countries in that oil resources benefited the minority elite, while poverty and domestic issues remained (Dominguez 105-106). Throughout his leadership, Chávez addressed these issues by regaining national control of oil resources, to the disapproval of the United States. In response, the United States, following its pattern of intervention in Latin America, sponsored a coup in 2002, which ultimately failed to bring an end to the Chávez regime (Dominguez 106).

Despite US hostility, Hugo Chávez continued to oppose US hegemony by eliminating its relationship with the World Bank and the IMF in 2007. In 2012, Chávez announced his domestic successes, including the fact that the number of households in poverty was reduced by more than

17 percentage points between 1998 and the end of 2011, and that Venezuela had maintained the highest minimum wage in Latin America, while creating almost 3.5 million jobs, eliminating illiteracy, and reducing infant mortality (Dominguez 106). Although Chávez has brought many domestic benefits, his anti-US and anti-neoliberalist regime was not favored by the United States. Dominguez explains the US has developed systems to destabilize regimes they do not find favorable, especially in Latin America and that countries in the region, particularly Venezuela, should remain mindful of the US tendency to intervene (112). The point to be made, as reflected in Chávez's leadership is that US intervention, whether direct or indirect is not always successful and that "radical", non-neoliberalist policies can bring about positive domestic change (Dominguez 112).

In "Inconvenient Thorn or International Security Threat?", Jenny Nielsen takes a view that opposes that of Dominguez. Rather than emphasizing the consistent intervention of the United States in Latin American affairs, Nielsen focuses on the actions of Hugo Chávez as actively resisting the United States (95). Nielsen explains that the US, justifiably supported the April 2002 coup against Chávez due to his support and alliance with US enemies such as Fidel Castro and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Nielsen consistently describes Hugo Chávez as defiant and views his leftist leadership as a threat.

Interestingly, although not expressly stated by Nielsen, Venezuela's "threat" to the United States once again seems to exist due to its influence in Latin America. Nielsen describes the elected leftist leaders in Latin America, including Venezuela, Cuba, and Brazil as the Latin American "Axis of Evil" (95). Nielsen suggests that although Venezuela holds relationships with states that are seen as a threat to US national security, Venezuela should be seen as a threat to

national security, but instead a “nuisance” to Washington that should be left alone because it has been able to provide better living conditions for the poor under Chávez’s leadership (98).

Questions	Answers in the Literature	
	Yes	No
1. Is Venezuela really an influential/significant power?	Dominguez Lander and López-Maya Ellner Corrales Ballvé	Nielsen
2. Is the United States interested in Venezuela’s political affairs?	Dominguez Lander and López-Maya Ellner	
3. Is Venezuela a threat to US national security?	Ballvé	Dominguez Nielsen Corrales
4. Is Venezuela a threat to US interests?	Dominguez Nielsen Lander and López-Maya Ellner Ballvé	
5. Will/Should the US intervene in Venezuela’s political/domestic affairs?	Dominguez Ellner Ballvé	Nielsen Corrales
6. Can Venezuela survive without US support?	Dominguez Lander and López-Maya	

As made evident by the works of each author, without contest, Venezuela has been an influential power in Latin America due to its ability to stand up against neoliberalism and US hegemony under the leadership of Hugo Chávez. While Venezuela does not pose an immediate threat to the United States in terms of national security, Chávez was faced with US hostility due to his opposition to the United States, which threatened US interests, particularly in the case of the oil sector. Chávez’s anti-neoliberal policies, interest in regaining sovereignty of Venezuela’s oil resources, and “social power diplomacy” has allowed Venezuela to remain a powerful nation, even in the face of US-supported coups. At the same time, Chávez improved conditions for its citizens, creating an inspiring social model for neighboring countries battling the issue of

poverty. US disapproval of Venezuela exists not in its non-democratic policies, but in Chávez's refusal to submit to US control and neoliberal model. With the death of Hugo Chávez, new President Nicolas Maduro is now faced with the decision as to whether to continue Chávez's strong and influential policies for the benefit of his citizens, or to submit to the US in the interest of preventing US support for opposition groups that threaten the regime.

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