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Consequences of U.S. Intervention in Socialist Latin America

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Consequences of U.S. Intervention in Socialist Latin America

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Table of Contents

- I. Abstract
- II. Introduction
- III. Literature Review
 - A. Methodology
 - B. Historical and Contemporary Sources on Cuba
 - C. Historical and Contemporary Sources on Venezuela
- IV. Theoretical Framework
- V. Historical Overview
 - A. Overview of Cuba
 - 1. From Colony to Protectorate
 - 2. Life under Batista
 - 3. Revolution and Embargo
 - B. Overview of Venezuela
 - 1. Dictatorship's Alliance with the U.S.
 - 2. The Chavez Era
 - 3. Destabilization of Maduro's Government
- VI. Case Studies
 - A. Cuba during Covid
 - 1. Repercussions of Economic Blockade
 - 2. Economic and Social struggles as a result of Covid-19
 - 3. Responses to the Protests
 - B. Destabilization of Venezuela
 - 1. Aftermath of 2018 Presidential Elections
 - 2. The Rise of Juan Guaido
 - 3. Coup D'etat Attempts
 - 4. Fall of Juan Guaido
- VII. Analysis
 - A. Cuban relations with the United States
 - 1. Impact of the Embargo on Cubans
 - 2. Embargo Effects Worsened by Covid-19
 - 3. Needless Intervention into Cuba
 - B. Venezuela's Political and Economic Uncertainty
 - 1. Economic Instability Created by Sanctions
 - 2. Harmful Effects of Multiple Coup Attempts
- VIII. Conclusions

Abstract:

This thesis seeks to show the harmful effects of contemporary interventionist attempts by the United States on socialist Latin American countries such as Cuba and Venezuela. The United States continues to meddle with the politics and economies of various countries with the goal of establishing a new government that is favorable to the capitalist practices of the United States. By looking at two key moments: the Covid-19 outbreak in Cuba and the aftermath of the 2018 Venezuelan presidential elections, it becomes clear to see the damage done by harsh embargoes and U.S. support of use for military violence against the socialist governments.

II. Introduction

The year is 1962, Cuban president and communist revolutionary Fidel Castro, stands before one million Cubans at the main square in the capital Havana, to address the future of the nation in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion and economic blockade from the United States. He defiantly states: “No nation in Latin America is weak because each forms part of a family of 200 million brothers, who suffer the same miseries, who harbor the same sentiments, who have the same enemy, who dream about the same better future.”¹ His speech encapsulates the sentiments of every Latin American nation that has been exploited by the interventionism of the United States.

Almost sixty years later, many Latin American nations are still fighting against the imperialist tactics of the United States government, with Cuba and Venezuela being the most vocal about their anti-imperialist stance. As a result, both nations have been labeled terrorist states and subject to harsh sanctions and US backed insurrections. The constant political and social instability fueled by the United States has greatly affected the lives of citizens as it fuels the scarcity of essential resources such as food, medicine, and a steady source of income. It also forces the socialist governments of Cuba and Venezuela to focus on stabilizing their nations instead of building upon their well renowned social programs.

Currently, US interventionist tactics have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in both Cuba and Venezuela. Demonstrations in Cuba have emerged because the embargo has limited access to supplies needed to combat and treat covid-19. In Venezuela, the United States continues to dispute the results of the last presidential election while refusing to acknowledge the socialist president, Nicolas Maduro. Additionally, the US has backed coup attempts from

¹ Castro, Fidel. 1962. “Second Declaration of Havana”

opposition leaders in Venezuela such as Juan Guaido to weaken the rule of the socialist party, only causing more unrest in the area. This thesis seeks to showcase the disastrous consequences of contemporary imperialist tactics of intervention from the United States such as sanctions and backing coups. These tactics harm the potential prosperity of Latin America.

Specifically, this thesis demonstrates how new manifestations of American interventionism in Cuba and Venezuela contribute to the current economic and social destabilization of their region. Both nations have been vilified by the United States government because of their left-wing governments and open hostility towards the U.S. My interest in this topic was fueled by the rampant amount of misinformation being spread by major news organizations during the Cuban protests in June 2021. Almost all the major western news outlets blamed the economic and political instability on the communist party and pointed to the protests as a reason for why socialist ideology does not work. As someone who has Cuban family and descent, I wanted to learn more about Latin American socialism and whether this political ideology is the main catalyst for the conditions that citizens in Cuba and Venezuela are living through currently.

III. Literature Review and Methodology

A. Methodology

One important point that needs to be established is how to classify the governments of Cuba and Venezuela. The terms socialist and communist are often interchanged in US politics and discourse despite some key differences between both ideologies. Socialism is an umbrella term for an economic system that prioritizes a more equal distribution of resources to the general population. Reforms made under socialism can include mass nationalization of certain industries,

large social safety nets, and funding of social services. Even this basic definition can change depending on the country as some may have capitalist economies with hints of socialist reforms such as the Nordic countries. On the other hand, there are more expansive socialist economies that seek to limit or abolish any form of capitalist practices like in the former USSR and Cuba. Communism then is the final stage of socialism, where the state withers away, and people live in collectives that can provide for all. Communist parties are trying to reach that end by enacting mass socialist reforms, some more rapidly than others. The implementation of such reforms will often meet backlash, leading some countries to take a more authoritative approach to the transition to communism. This leads to a key difference between both nations I will be looking into as Venezuela allows elections, opposition parties, and even foreign capital into their economy to fund their reforms. Meanwhile, Cuba is a single party dictatorship that outlaws any form of dissent under the preface that they are combating foreign intervention. Therefore, when I speak of Venezuela, I will exclusively refer to it as a socialist country that is run by a socialist party since that is how the party defines itself. Cuba on the other hand has a communist party in control but has a socialist economy.

Since the Covid induced economic and social unrest in Cuba is still an ongoing issue that still affects the livelihood of many citizens, complete and extensive research into the problem is not currently available. Instead, a combination of research into past US intervention in Cuba, left wing news, Western news coverage of the situation to showcase what the two main actors, the United States and Cuba, think is the best way to control the spread of Covid. Western news outlets such as CNN, Fox News, and the Guardian continue to advocate for the long standing belief in many capitalist representative democracies, that economic or military intervention is the best way to circumnavigate the communist government and give humanitarian aid to the Cuban

people.² On the other side, state-controlled news networks and left leaning outlets such as Telesur have continued to call out the United States for being an imperialist power seeking to destabilize Cuba in order to overthrow the communist government in favor of a US backed capitalist government.³ Social media is another source of information that shows the sentiments of domestic and diasporic Cubans. Both the Cuban and United States government accuse each other of spreading misinformation through social media platforms such as Twitter, but it is still a useful tool used by both pro and anti-government activists to capture the sentiments of the Cuban people.

The political unrest in Venezuela in the aftermath of the 2018 presidential election has also still yet to be resolved. Similarly to the Cuba case study, the sources I will use are a combination of academic research into the history of US intervention in Venezuela as well as various news channels coverage of the situation. Reuters, BBC, and the Guardian are a few of the Western/US news channels that show the perspective of western powers in North America and Europe on the presidency of Nicolas Maduro. For the most part, these networks condone the harsh embargos set by the United States as well as support opposition movements in the nation. Leftwing independent news networks along with the Venezuelan owned teleSUR will provide the perspective of the socialist government on attempts to overthrow the Maduro administration. They argue that the backing of opposition movements actively hurts the socialist party rule by delegitimizing Venezuela's elections, system of government, and provide a reason to enact harsh embargoes that only hurt the country's struggling economy.

² Haltiwanger, "Miami's mayor."

³ teleSUR, "US Places More Sanctions"

B. Historical and Contemporary Sources on Cuba

The United States has a long history of intervening in the affairs of various Latin American countries, especially in Cuba. To provide context on the multitude of US intervention attempts, the book *A Short History of U.S. Interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean*, by U.S. historian Alan McPherson, highlights the exploitative nature of U.S. and Latin American partnerships. In particular, McPherson demonstrates how the United States came to take over Cuba after the Spanish American War leading to nationalist and independence sentiments in the late 20th century.

The effects of the U.S. embargo on the Cuban economy have been thoroughly researched by academics to see whether a socialist/communist economic system or United States intervention is the biggest contributor to the decrease of the standard of life for the average Cuban citizen. Aviva Chomsky has investigated the living conditions of Cubans since the fall of the Soviet Bloc in the 1990's in her book, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*. As the eldest daughter of famed linguist and left-wing activist Noam Chomsky, she dedicates her academic research to studying the history of Latin American and Caribbean politics. Her time and research in Cuba provide background information for how economic reforms, the fall of the Soviet Bloc, and the harsh U.S. embargo has only made the Cuban government's responsibility to fight Covid that much more difficult.

Another expert providing perspective on the Cuban embargo is McClain Napier, a financial advisor for Goldman Sachs who graduated Brigham Young University with a degree in Latin American studies and Political Science, as well as a master's degree in Financial Law. His educational background helped him write a journal article titled, *The Cuban Embargo: Detrimental to Cuba, the United States, and Democracy*. In this piece, Napier details the

diplomatic and political benefits for the United States for lifting the embargo. He also covers the detrimental effects the embargo has on the image of the United States around the world as well as on the Cuban people. He argues that, “The primary reason the current policy against Cuba is ineffective is because it misses its intended target, Cuba's party leaders; instead, it punishes citizens with impoverishment.”⁴ He argues that the best way to democratize Cuba is to have open trade negotiations with the communist government which will push citizens to demand for a free market economy, like the collapse of the Soviet economy.

The last source I will use that provides background information on the embargo is writings from José Luis Rodríguez García, the former Minister of Finance (from 1994-1995) and Minister of Economy and Planning (from 1998-2009) of Cuba. In his essay titled, *The Cuban economy: experiences and perspectives (1989-2010)*, he goes over the various economic reforms the Castro regime underwent after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc from the 1990's to the early 2000's. He goes over the successes and failures of the various policy reforms during this time which the communist party calls, “The Special Period”.⁵

C. Historical and Contemporary Sources on Venezuela

The 2018 Venezuelan presidential crisis is also an ongoing social and economic crisis, which again makes it very difficult to find sources that cover every aspect of the conflict. Before I present the academic analysis to the dispute for power between Nicolas Maduro and Juan Guaido, some historical context is needed to highlight the history of United States intervention in Venezuelan politics. I will start by using Steve Ellner's article titled *The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments* as the

⁴ Napier, “The Cuban Embargo,” 60

⁵ Garcia, “The Cuban economy,” 39

groundwork for how the PSUV (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela) came to power. Steve Ellner has an academic background in Latin American history and currently teaches political science and economics at the Universidad de Oriente in Venezuela. In his article, Ellner showcases how socialist parties in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia were able to take power by comparing and contrasting political strategies that are relevant to each specific nation but that may also overlap with one another.⁶

Another source I will be using for my research is a book by Joe Emersburg and Justin Podur titled, *Extraordinary Threat: The U.S. Empire, the Media, and Twenty Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela*. This book covers the various attempts by the U.S. government to depose left-wing leader Hugo Chavez during his time in power. Both authors cover the intentions of the U.S. government to extract the most of Venezuela's most valuable resource, oil, and the various mediums taken to delegitimize and eventually overthrow Chavez, Maduro, and the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), "For two decades, despite winning elections, Venezuela's "Chavista" governments (under the presidencies of the late Hugo Chávez, who died in 2013, and then his protégé and elected successor, Nicolás Maduro) have been smeared as dictatorships. No one in the Western media is ever held accountable for telling outright lies about the country. And these lies have deadly consequences: as a result, the Western public has accepted sanctions that have killed tens of thousands of Venezuelans since 2017."⁷ The attempts from the United States to discredit the socialist party provides a good segway into the coverage and analysis of how Juan Guaido was able to rise as a major resistance figure to the Maduro government.

⁶ Ellner, "The Distinguishing Features," 111

⁷ Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 9-10

Similar to the ongoing Covid related uprisings in Cuba, I will be using a variety of news sources to showcase the development of the power struggle for presidency from 2018 to today. The western news outlets I will be citing will be defending the stance of the United States government which claims that the economic and social unrest is strictly caused by the authoritarianism of Maduro and the socialist party.⁸ They all advocate for intervention but using different tactics depending on the organization's political bias. To contrast western media, I will also be looking at left-wing news sources that have shifted the blame onto the United States for continued economic and political intervention in Venezuela. They highlight the imperialism of the United States as the main contributor to the instability in the region. I also plan to use state run media as the mouthpiece for Maduro and the PSUV party to hear their response to the conflict, political opponents, and to the United States government.

Lastly, election polls conducted by various domestic and international organizations provide an excellent insight into the Venezuelan election process. Many of them show the legitimacy of Venezuelan voting machines, but yet their findings can be twisted to show the bias of western news coverage of the socialist party.⁹

IV. Theoretical Framework

The lens through which I analyze the complex nature of U.S. involvement in Latin America is through what McPherson calls the “five C’s”: causes, consequences, contestation, collaboration, and context.¹⁰ Each one of these points highlights an important factor in understanding the hostile reactions towards U.S. involvement in both Cuba and Venezuela. The first point, cause, examines the reasons for why the United States intervened in a particular

⁸ Washington, “Maduro approach”

⁹ Global News, “Venezuela's Maduro shows off”

¹⁰ McPherson, A Short History of U.S. Interventions, 4

country. McPherson notes that there are a variety of reasons for U.S. intervention, but the two most common are either to establish political stability/create political change or to protect the business interests of U.S. corporations. While the two main causes often overlap, there are instances where it is purely one or the other. McPherson recalls the purely political motives behind some of the U.S. interventions, “President Woodrow Wilson’s desire to see only constitutional changes of power in Mexico, to fighting fascists in World War II, to keeping communism contained to Cuba in the Cold War, to restoring democracy in the 1990s, U.S. interventions in the region harbored above all political motives.”¹¹ While the political motive at the time of Wilson’s presidency was to contain the spread of fascism and communism, here McPherson notes how the political motive is ever changing in order to justify intervention in a given Latin American country. While the US currently claims that they are trying to liberate the citizens of Cuba and Venezuela from a tyrannical system, past intervention motives in both countries show a different story.

The consequences of U.S. interventions are another important aspect to study when looking at Cuba and Venezuela. The actions of the United States often have repercussions that will forever alter the history of a given country in Latin America, “They sometimes ended periods of economic reform or hardened repression, or ushered in a democratic spring. Some saved lives by separating warring factions or otherwise restoring order; almost all killed Latin Americans, sometimes in the thousands. Most reinforced U.S. economic interests and pulled the region closer to the U.S. orbit, or else they opened up new possibilities for U.S. investment in land and exports.”¹² The rapid changes caused by US intervention noted show the volatility of political and economic change forced upon Latin America by the United States. As a result,

¹¹ McPherson, 4

¹² McPherson, 6

many authoritative governments have risen in order to try and mitigate these rapid changes. While I personally don't agree with some of the authoritarian actions done by the Venezuelan and Cuban governments, this lens helps us understand the reasoning behind consolidating power to prevent the consequences of U.S. intervention within their borders.

Contestation is another factor to look at as it explains the strong resistance from Latin American populations against U.S. occupation. McPherson notes that there are a variety of parties fighting U.S. imperialism for different reasons, "As with causes, resistance occurred for a host of reasons. Some reasons were selfless, others petty. Some reflected grand ideologies, others desire for local autonomy."¹³ These ideals are reflected in the present as many citizens and political actors in Cuban and Venezuelan have a different vision of how to run an autonomous nation without foreign influence.

The principle of collaboration is something that currently affects resistance movements in both Cuba and Venezuela. McPherson notes that a strategy taken by some Latin American governments is to collaborate with the American invaders motivated by a variety of reasons,

"In some cases, local governments invited U.S. forces to intervene, usually to prop them up against a political enemy. Others did not invite intervention but welcomed it, sometimes in the hopes that they and their friends could benefit personally, for instance by moving up the political ranks or securing a job. Other Latin Americans were sincere and eager students of U.S. ways of life and government. A final group accommodated rather than collaborated, meaning that they played along with U.S. invaders so as to avoid the consequences of not playing along."¹⁴

¹³ McPherson, 6-7

¹⁴ McPherson, 8

However, the stigma of being associated with the United States can often derail a resistance movement because of fear of losing their autonomy.

Lastly, context is a vital component of studying U.S. interventions in Latin America. The context gives a background to why the United States felt it necessary to intervene in another country's politics, "Sometimes it references global events that drove U.S. or Latin American interests, such as an economic crisis or a larger war. Other times, it explains ideologies or concepts that justified or restrained interventions."¹⁵ For this paper, the Covid crisis in Cuba and contested Venezuelan presidential elections are the major catalysts that the United States and western powers deem it necessary for the U.S. to step in.

V. Historical Overview

A. Historical Overview of Cuba

1. From Colony to Protectorate

The island of Cuba was an important colony in the Spanish Empire for its production of sugar and its slave-based economy. As Spain was losing influence over its colonies, Cuba became extremely valuable for the revenue that it generated. The United States government interests in Cuba spanned as early as 1850 during their quest to expand U.S. influence on the American continents and diminish the power of European empires.¹⁶ In 1898, the United States saw an opportunity to take control of Cuba by supporting the independence movement from Spain brewing on the island. Increased economic investment and promise of military support

¹⁵ McPherson, 8

¹⁶ McPherson, 25

from the United States brought hope but also some skepticism from Cuban revolutionaries and independence figures.¹⁷ While many members of Congress were in favor of sending troops to intervene on the island of Cuba, U.S. public opinion was mixed. The biggest concerns of the public were the amount of soldiers and money it would cost and the fear of employment opportunities leaving the United States to Cuba.¹⁸ Despite initially facing resistance, President McKinley declared war on Spain in 1898 after public outcry from citizens and media outlets accused the Spanish of the sinking of the U.S.S Maine, a United States warship that was harbored in Havana.¹⁹

The United States was victorious in the Spanish-American War in 1898 crushing the Spanish Navy, leading Spain to hand over the territories of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Cuba. While U.S. intervention was presented as the rightful duty of the United States to protect the sovereignty of Latin American territories, many Cubans were not expecting one colonial power to replace the former. Cuban revolutionary Maximo Gomez famously expressed the sentiment felt amongst many Cubans after the Spanish-American War stating, “None of us thought that [the U.S. war against Spain] would be followed by a military occupation of the country by our allies, who treat us as a people incapable of acting for ourselves.”²⁰ The promise of independence was not realized for any of the territories the United States “liberated” and instead just became economic protectorates. With enough pressure from Cuban citizens, the United States granted full sovereignty to the nation of Cuba, however with some exceptions. As part of the agreement to withdraw U.S. soldiers from Cuba, General Leonard Wood (U.S. Military Governor of Cuba) included the Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution in late 1900

¹⁷ McPherson, 35-36

¹⁸ McPherson, 39

¹⁹ McPherson, 40

²⁰ McPherson, 34

which allowed continued U.S. presence on the island for Cuba's own protection. The United States claimed that it would only intervene in Cuban politics to ensure "a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty." In other words, the United States would be the ultimate judge in deciding what is an "adequate government" for Cuba.²¹ This would prevent any pro-Cuban president from being elected as the United States could replace them with anyone the US government deemed as "adequate". The Platt Amendment also allowed the U.S. government to buy or lease land on the island for coaling and naval purposes. This specific part of the amendment is still relevant today as it is the reason for why the United States retains control of Guantanamo Bay. From 1902 onwards, the island of Cuba was no longer a territory of the United States but rather a protectorate of economic and political factors.

2. Life under Batista

The influence of the United States on Cuban politics could be seen most clearly during the rule of Fulgencio Batista. As a powerful military general, he was able to seek assistance from the United States to stage a coup against center-left president Ramón Grau known as the Sergeants' Revolt in 1934.²² This was the beginning of his rise to power leading to his first presidential run in 1940. His first term in office was one remembered for addressing the needs of the Cuban people and inspiring hope in the aftermath of the global recession. He allowed trade unions to form, more political parties and alliances to arise, and helped the Cuban economy grow during World War II by expanding the sugar industry.²³ After his first term, he spent a considerable amount of time in the United States while still having a major influence over Cuban politics. The rise of leftist movements prompted his return to Cuba, leading to a second

²¹ U.S. Department of State, "The United States, Cuba, and the Platt Amendment, 1901"

²² Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 32

²³ Thomas, "Cuba: The United States and Batista," 170

presidential run in 1952. After polling third overall, Batista knew his defeat was inevitable. He led a coup d'etat to prevent the election favorite Roberto Agramonte, a popular left-wing candidate from winning.²⁴ Batista would be sworn in as president of Cuba in 1954. What followed was an era of extreme political suppression, corruption, and brutality as Batista did anything he could to stay in power. He outlawed the Communist Party of Cuba who previously helped him win his first presidential election, repressed the social mobility of the Afro-Cuban community, and left 3.5 million Cubans living on the edge of poverty while Havana and foreign capital boomed.²⁵ The blatant corruption and exploitation of the island helped spur the growing anti-Batista sentiments, propelling a new wave of left-wing revolutionary movements.

3. Revolution and Embargo

The growing economic disparity between Cuba's upper class and the rest of the population inspired a young Fidel Castro to take up arms against the dictatorship. After leading a failed revolt on July 26th, 1953 which led to a brief prison stint, he was exiled to Mexico along with his brother Raul. It was here that he met revolutionary leader, Che Guevara and started planning a guerilla warfare against the Batista regime.²⁶ The popularity of Fidel combined with harsh suppression of anti-government voices led the United States to stop funding and dealing arms to the Batista government in 1958. This allowed the communist revolutionaries to capture all of Cuba by 1959.²⁷ While Fidel did not call himself a communist, his government implemented socialist reforms such as massive land redistribution policies, abolished U.S. owned casinos, and slashed rent for housing. The United States now saw Cuba as a threat in their fight to stop the spread of communism, leading to the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. After

²⁴ Thomas, 170

²⁵ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 33-34

²⁶ Chomsky, 37-38

²⁷ Thomas, "Cuba: The United States and Batista," 171-172

quickly defeating the ragtag group of U.S. backed Cuban exiles, Castro suppressed democratic liberties such as freedom of speech, press, and elections, in fear of further attempts from the CIA to overthrow his government.²⁸ Most importantly, Castro aligned himself with the USSR politically and economically to the ire of the US. This would lead President Eisenhower to place a decades-long economic embargo on Cuba in 1960, hoping that it would weaken Castro's rule over the island. In the 60 years that the embargo has been enforced, the communist government still holds power in Cuba. Despite condemnation from the international community for violating the human rights of the Cuban people, the United States continues to uphold the strict embargo that prevents any growth in the Cuban economy.²⁹

B. Historical Overview of Venezuela

1. Dictatorship's Alliance with the U.S.

Venezuela is a country rich in oil that has captured the attention of U.S. politicians and corporations since the early 20th century. This South American country had a history of being ruled by dictators for decades going all the way back to fabled national hero, Simon Bolivar.³⁰ The discovery of oil in 1914 completely changed Venezuela's economy and gave financial leverage to the brutal dictators. The United States supported the rule of one such dictator, Juan Vicente Gomez, who allowed US oil companies to write Venezuela's petroleum legislation in 1921. Various state officials in the United States invested in or were employed by oil corporations, creating a need to expand the US sphere of influence to protect their capital.³¹ Companies like Exxon, Standard Oil, and Gulf dominated Venezuelan politics by advocating for

²⁸ McPherson, *A Short History of U.S.*, 149,152

²⁹ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 89

³⁰ Bushnell, *The Last Dictatorship*, 65

³¹ Garry, *Crude Interventions*, 168

politicians who were friendly to U.S. corporate interests. U.S. corporations also derailed any efforts to redistribute profits from the oil industry back into Venezuela. They also took measures to prevent oil from being nationalized and limit the power of OPEC; a coalition of oil-rich countries who would determine the price for their oil instead of western capitalists.³² The fluctuating price of oil from the 1970-1980s left the Venezuelan economy in ruins as the nation kept accruing more debt. Loans from the IMF and World Bank were spent on improving oil refineries while 43.9% of the population was living under the poverty line by the end of the 1980s.³³ The neoliberal economic reforms along with a decrease in the standard of living angered thousands of Venezuelan citizens who would take to the streets of the capital, Caracas in a protest known as the Caracazo in 1989. This movement spread throughout Venezuela before the government stepped in and put down protestors, with a reported 287 deaths.³⁴ While the uprising was unsuccessful, it gave way for a popular military major to bring social and economic change to the struggling nation.

2. The Chavez Era

After years of economic stagnation, Hugo Chavez rose to popularity with a strong anti-imperialist stance and leftist policies such as wealth redistribution to the poor. After leading an unsuccessful coup against the Venezuelan government in 1992, he was imprisoned which garnered him nationwide popularity and recognition. His left-wing policies and educational background in public universities helped him gain support from the lower to middle class citizens, eventually leading to his election as president in 1998.³⁵ The Chavez administration implemented a multitude of economic and government reforms to address the needs of the

³² Garry, 171-172

³³ Garry, 174

³⁴ Garry, 175

³⁵ Garry, 176-177

Venezuelan people. These new reforms would reduce poverty in half and raise the country's GDP after years of economic stagnation.³⁶ The implementation of left-wing policies did not excite everyone, especially the upper classes in Venezuela who profited from the privatization of Venezuelan oil. Powerful politicians and businessmen like Pedro Carmona (CEO of Fedecamaras) and Nestor Gonzalez (Army General) pressured the socialist party to reverse their policies while they secretly supported right-wing parties. Opposition groups also used private Venezuelan and U.S. news corporations to portray Chavez as a tyrant looking to consolidate more power.³⁷

These tactics rallied protestors to force Chavez to resign and on April 11, 2002, began marching towards the presidential palace. Opposition groups would be met by Chavez supporters who had learned of their plans to attempt a coup. Fearing another deadly catastrophe such as the Caracazo in the 90's, Chavez sent military guards to calm the situation. The protestors ignored the military's demands to turn away and instead kept pushing towards the palace, ultimately leading to 10 deaths and dozens injured.³⁸ The pushback from US media and opposition politicians provided the perfect opportunity to oust Chavez as president. One day later, on April 12, an armed group composed of sects of the Venezuelan military led by Pedro Carmona stormed the presidential palace and held Chavez captive. Carmona's forces allegedly found a resignation letter signed by Chavez, which allowed him and his men to assume power.³⁹ The way Carmona took power made many Venezuelans citizens and politicians skeptical as he forbade any pro-Chavez message from being published and dismissed members of parliament with members

³⁶ Emersberger, *Extraordinary Threat: The US Empire, the Media and 20 Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela*, 60-61

³⁷ Emersberger, 82.

³⁸ Garry, *Crude Interventions*, 183-184

³⁹ Garry, 184

of his conservative party.⁴⁰ In addition, many of Chavez' supporters could not believe he stepped down that easily and had a feeling that his "letter of resignation" was forged. In response, supporters and military officials loyal to Chavez organized around the presidential palace and forced his release, allowing him to be reinstated as president on April 14. The aftermath of the two-day long coup saw Chavez asking questions about US involvement in trying to overthrow him. He saw that the two main proponents of fueling opposition groups was the involvement of private/foreign media as well as the United States meeting with resistance leaders such as Carmona before the attempted coup.⁴¹ In YEAR, the US State Department denounced any involvement in the coup but acknowledged they had met with opposition leaders and supported their cause.⁴²

3. Destabilizing the Maduro Regime

After serving his country for 14 years, Hugo Chavez passed away on March 5, 2013. Before his passing, he had selected Nicolas Maduro as his successor to become party leader in the upcoming 2013 presidential election. This endorsement helped propel him into the presidency as he narrowly defeated Henrique Capriles by 1.8% of the votes.⁴³ Capriles and US media would contest the legitimacy of the elections despite the head of the National Electoral Council in Venezuela coming out to show the transparency in the electoral process with no substantial evidence of election interference.⁴⁴ The United States also hoped to pressure other nations to not recognize the 2013 elections, but the wave of left-wing governments arising in South America at that time such as Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador backed

⁴⁰ Emersburg, 77

⁴¹ Garry, 186

⁴² Emersburg, 86

⁴³ Emersburg, 111

⁴⁴ Emersburg, 111-112

Maduro as president. Despite the failed attempts from the United States and Capriles to overthrow the socialist party, the influence of the United States in international politics and media pressured NGOs and other international organizations to portray Venezuela as a nation becoming increasingly authoritarian.⁴⁵ This false notion propagated by western NGOs and nonprofits allowed the US to place economic sanctions on Venezuela without significant backlash from the international community. In turn, it crippled the Venezuelan economy which was already facing economic instability in the wake of oil prices collapsing. Over the years leading up to the still contested 2018 presidential elections, the United States tightened these sanctions to stir up social unrest to remove Maduro through nationwide protests or in the upcoming election cycle.⁴⁶

Case Studies

A. Cuba during the Covid Era

1. Repercussions of the Economic Blockade

Since the signing of the US economic embargo on Cuba by President Eisenhower in 1960, the ruling Cuban communist government has emphasized the importance of economic self-reliance, especially in the wake of the collapse of their former biggest trading partner, the USSR.⁴⁷ Maintaining a self-reliant economy and mode of production is quite the lofty goal for a small island country that is barred from trading with the United States and any country that has economic or political relations with the US. This left the Soviet Union as the only nation that openly trades with the Cuban government. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and

⁴⁵ Emersburg, 123

⁴⁶ Emersburg, 143

⁴⁷ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 157.

its communist satellites in Eastern Europe, Cuba was left with no economic trading partners which created a shortage of resources. Columbia University researchers found that in 1997 access to food, medicine, and other essential commodities became hard to come by for the average to lower income Cuban citizen.⁴⁸ Lack of economic trading partners and high social spending exhausted the Cuban economy and forced the communist party to find new ways to diversify their financial income. Some of the ways the Cuban government managed to accomplish this is by introducing small amounts of private property ownership, implementation of the US dollar, private businesses, foreign investment, and by refocusing their strategy to promote the resources Cuba has to offer.⁴⁹ Tourism would soon become the crux of the economy as the government promoted the island's natural beauty, low cost of medical supplies, and eased travel restrictions of U.S. citizens.

Although the economic reforms brought upon by the Cuban government eased some of the economic troubles the nation was experiencing, it also came along with its fair amount of problems. The introduction of private property and private businesses exacerbated the economic and racial inequalities that Afro-Cubans faced. The Cuban revolution sought to overthrow racial biases and discrimination that were seen in past dictatorships such as under Bautista in the late 1950's, however, these biases were reinstated through the hiring processes of foreign companies investing in Cuba. The influence of these practices has even affected the way the communist government views racial discrimination. Despite the original goal of the revolution, the Cuban government has given positions to white Cubans to appease investors and tourists.⁵⁰ Racial discrimination is only one area in which foreign investments began affecting the day-to-day

⁴⁸ Napier, "The Cuban Embargo", 61.

⁴⁹ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 155-157.

⁵⁰ Chomsky, 165.

behaviors of the Cuban people as well as Cuban society. Introducing capitalist practices would lead to an unequal distribution of wealth, something that the revolution criticized under the Bautista regime. A survey taken in 2000 found that in the private sector in Cuba, light-skinned/white Cubans were more likely to be paid in American dollars compared to Afro-Cubans.⁵¹ One consequence of this is the commodification of Afro-Cuban culture within the tourism industry. For example, many cultural aspects of Afro-Cuban culture such as music and dance attracted audiences during the 1990's when Cuba's borders were opened to tourists, but never raised the attention of the Cuban government to the increasingly growing racial disparities within the country. Many Afro-Cubans are still relegated to self-employment service jobs such as performance or sex work instead of jobs in the private or government sector.⁵² They are forced to commodify their images, bodies, and culture for a foreign clientele that view the Afro-Cuban population as nothing more than a product.

The adoption of small amounts of capitalist practices has also hurt the livelihood of many Cubans. For one, it undermined many of the social programs and opportunities laid out by the communist party. Initiatives like the Literacy Campaign and access to state education up to the university level were implemented to ensure that Cuba would be one of the most educated nations in Latin America. Yet, the privatization of certain sectors of the economy such as transportation and hospitality has encouraged citizens to seek jobs in these fields rather than pursue an education to receive a higher salary.⁵³ Chomsky notes that many Cubans find it more economically viable to become a taxi driver than to become a brain surgeon as they would be paid directly in US dollars from tourists instead of the national currency.⁵⁴ The growing tourism

⁵¹ Chomsky, 165.

⁵² Minority Rights, "Afro-Cubans".

⁵³ Garcia, *The Cuban Economy*, 33.

⁵⁴ Chomsky, 158-159.

industry also shifted the attention of the government to provide the best experience for visitors over Cuban citizens. Soon enough, Cubans were being treated like second class citizens by the communist government in their own country. The various fields of tourism such as health and medical tourism meant that resources were allocated with foreigners in mind, restricting access to essential treatments from citizens. This divide was most prevalent in laws created by the government concerning relations between Cubans and foreigners. Citizens were banned from entering new hotels and could be punished for being seen interacting with Americans and other tourists.⁵⁵

2. Economic and Social struggles as a result of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has only made these issues of unequal distribution of goods and services harder on the Cuban people. Tourism was halted as a result of the pandemic, greatly affecting the country's main source of revenue. Despite the lack of resources and income, Cuba was seen as a leader in the fight against the coronavirus, sending hundreds of their own doctors to work on research as well as developing their own vaccine to prevent the virus from spreading.⁵⁶ However, the country's self-reliance has its limits, especially in a matter of international concern. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a worldwide shortage of supplies needed to protect individuals from spreading the virus and treating people who caught Covid-19. International demand for supplies such as ventilators, masks, and sanitation supplies led nations to compete with one another to attain these goods, sometimes at the expense of one another.⁵⁷ To make matters worse, the Trump administration reversed Obama's rapprochement strategy with Cuba of rolling back certain trade and travel restrictions. Additionally, the Trump

⁵⁵ Chomsky, 166.

⁵⁶ Marsh, "Coronavirus surge pushes Cuba's healthcare system to the brink."

⁵⁷ WHO, "Shortage of personal protective equipment endangering health workers worldwide."

administration imposed further trade restrictions which allow corporations in the US to sue foreign citizens or companies from investing in Cuban industries.⁵⁸ The Biden administration has yet to reverse these Trump era policies.

This race for medical treatment supplies along with the United States' decades-long embargo prevented supplies from getting into the hands of the Cuban people. In one instance, a Chinese billionaire, Jack Ma had planned to send shipments of masks and ventilators to Cuba with the help of a Colombian shipping company. However, because the shipping company was partially funded by an American shareholder, the United States government blocked the transport of Covid supplies.⁵⁹ In another case, the Cuban government tried to get medical supplies from a Swiss ventilator company to treat its hospitalized citizens but was once again prevented by the United States since the Swiss vendor had recently been bought out by an American owner.⁶⁰ In response to growing unrest in Cuba, Cuban president Miguel Diaz-Canel has continued to call out the United States for upholding the embargo that has halted the nation from developing its vaccine called Abdala.⁶¹ In the same speech, he also called on the international community to pressure the United States to lift the embargo. His denouncement of the United States has not been unwarranted as Global Health Partners, an NGO that studies international health crises, found that when Diaz-Canel gave his national address, Cuban scientists were 20 million syringes short of their 30 million goal to begin the vaccine rollout process.⁶² Despite the economic embargo and shortage of resources, the Cuban government has been able to successfully

⁵⁸ Carrero, "U.S. economic embargo harms Cuban daily life amid pandemic."

⁵⁹ Stangler, "U.S. Sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela hamper the global fight against COVID-19."

⁶⁰ Stangler, "U.S. Sanction on Cuba."

⁶¹ Telesur, "Díaz-Canel: La pandemia nos llegó como un reto en medio de toda esta situación."

⁶² Global Health Partners, "Vaccination Syringes."

vaccinate around 70% of the population with at least 1 dose of the Abdala vaccine. Cuban scientists have also worked on two Cuban produced vaccines that have an efficacy rate of 90%.⁶³

The scarcity of resources and slow vaccination rollout has only exacerbated the repercussions of Covid-19 to the Cuban population. The difficulty in containing the spread of Covid has turned Cuba from the nation providing scientists to help contain the spread internationally into a hotbed of the virus as the Delta variant continues to spread at a more rapid rate. Social unrest emerged as a result of the slow response and on July 11, 2021, people started protesting the government's handling of the pandemic.⁶⁴ What started as a general peaceful protest devolved into a variety of groups each blaming a different actor for the handling of the pandemic. Peaceful anti-government protests were met with a swift response from Cuban authorities who detained and questioned those who attended. The government also cracked down on any group organization and social media campaigns by cutting off access to the internet nationwide claiming the spread of misinformation coming from the United States.⁶⁵ On the other hand, there were various counter protests calling out the United States government for upholding the embargo.⁶⁶ These pro-government protests arose after a call from President Díaz-Canel to uphold the values of the revolution and instead fight the imperialism of the United States.⁶⁷ In the same address, he also stated that many of the protests are from confused and concerned citizens who only want to protect themselves and their loved ones; and dismissed the claims of anti-government protests that the communist party is suppressing the voices of these protestors.

⁶³ Tempo, "Cuba to Finish Covid-19 Vaccination Rollout with Homegrown Vaccines."

⁶⁴ Londoño, "The Spark Has Been Lit: Cuban Dissidents Feel Emboldened Despite Crackdown."

⁶⁵ Marsh, "Fake news muddies online waters during Cuba protests."

⁶⁶ BreakThrough News, "Pro-socialist demonstrations are underway in Cuba."

⁶⁷ Euronews (Español), "Díaz-Canel llama a combatir las protestas contra el gobierno."

3. Responses to the Protests

In the aftermath of the nationwide protests, an influx of Western news outlets such as the Guardian, *New York Times*, and Fox News were quick to cover the story with claims that this would be the final straw to end the decades long rule of the communist party. A consequence of this reporting was the spread of misinformation with the purpose of trying to portray Cuba as a nation ready for a change in government that needs the help of external forces. The Cuban government responded directly to fake stories about Raul Castro fleeing the country as well as Venezuela sending in troops stating, “What calumnies, what lies...The way they [United States] are using social media is poisonous and alienating.”⁶⁸ The claims of the communist party that the United States is using propaganda to weaken the nation is further proven by how American media outlets have completely misrepresented the protests. News corporations like Fox News, *The Washington Times*, and *The New York Times* misused photos of past pro-Castro demonstrations in their coverage of the protests, while CNN used a picture from a rally in Miami and wrongfully reported that it was Cuban protests in Havana.⁶⁹ The western media’s coverage of the protests prompted several responses from politicians in the United States. The mayor of Miami, Francis Suarez, has proposed that the U.S. military should consider air strikes and a military intervention like past U.S. led interventions in Panama and Kosovo.⁷⁰ Mayor Suarez along with other high ranking Republican officials such as Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio have called on President Biden to take a more aggressive stance on the communist regime.⁷¹ The Biden administration promptly responded by imposing more economic sanctions on Cuba and will continue to do so until the regime steps down or acknowledges the demands of the

⁶⁸ Marsh, “Fake news muddies online waters during Cuba protests.”

⁶⁹ The Express Tribune, “Western media use images of pro-govt rally, protests in Miami to illustrate Cuban unrest.”

⁷⁰ Haltiwanger, “Miami’s mayor says the US should consider air strikes against Cuba.”

⁷¹ Blitzer, “Republicans spotlight Cuba as socialism failure as protests erupt amid historic economic crisis.”

anti-government protests.⁷² President Biden's stance contradicts what he promised on the campaign trail where he stated his administration would look to reestablish diplomatic and economic negotiations with Cuba, a strategy he approved of under the Obama administration.⁷³

B. American Destabilization of Venezuela

1. Aftermath of 2018 Presidential Elections

The 2018 presidential elections in Venezuela are still currently being contested between sitting president Nicolas Maduro and the head of the legislative body, Juan Guaido. Nicolas Maduro has been acting president of Venezuela since Hugo Chavez's passing in 2013. His administration faced the nation's biggest challenge as an economic depression hit in 2014 after the price of oil plummeted. Since oil is the state's biggest export, the national currency, the Bolivar collapsed, making access to basic necessities like food and medicine extremely difficult for Venezuelans to come across. In response to protests from angry citizens demanding food and medicine, Maduro aggressively put down uprisings by deploying state police and the military to major cities like Caracas. His response prompted sanctions from the international community led by the United States beginning in 2015 under the Obama administration, further hurting the Venezuelan economy.⁷⁴ He was extremely unpopular among certain sectors of the population who felt that his administration had not done enough to provide basic needs to the Venezuelan people, unlike his predecessor, Hugo Chavez. With approval ratings at an all-time low entering election season, many citizens hoped for a change in leadership.⁷⁵ However, Maduro was reelected president of Venezuela with over 60% of the votes. The outcome of the election led

⁷² The White House, "Statement by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on Continuing Crackdown in Cuba."

⁷³ BBC, "US slaps sanctions on Cuban officials after protest crackdown."

⁷⁴ Washington, "'Maduro approach' to Venezuelan crisis is not fixing the problem."

⁷⁵ Statista, "Approval rates of presidents in office in Venezuela from 2002 to 2018."

citizens and nations around the world to believe that the voting process was rigged by the socialist party and heavily favored for Maduro reelection.

However, there were many factors that independent polling stations and western media overlooked in the buildup to the election. Joe Emersberger, a Canadian writer who spent time in Venezuela, covers election misinformation in his book, *Extraordinary Threat: The US Empire, the Media and 20 Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela*. He first points to the polling data gathered by an anti-Maduro corporation, Datanalisis. They are the most trusted source of election-fraud reporting by western news corporations as they were included in over 1,000 news stories from 2009-2019; whereas the next closest election polling company, Consultores 21, was only mentioned 149 times.⁷⁶ In every polling reporting, no data analysis company was able to find substantial evidence of electoral fraud from 2009-2019.⁷⁷ Yet, Datanalisis and Maduro's political rivals domestically and abroad consistently fed the narrative to audiences that the Venezuelan elections were rigged even if opposition parties gained seats in the government's legislative branch, the National Assembly, increasing opposition to the ruling party. Anti-Maduro misinformation sowed plenty of doubt and skepticism about the democratic process among anti-Maduro supporters, leading sects of the population to believe that their vote would not amount to anything. Maduro's party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), took advantage of this moment and mobilized their supporters and undecided citizens to vote for Maduro. The PSUV led initiatives like food drives and distribution of essential needs to impoverished Venezuelans to help change public opinion on the Maduro administration before the election season.⁷⁸ The PSUV also emphasized the importance of voting for a leader who

⁷⁶ Emersberger, *Extraordinary Threat: The US Empire, the Media and 20 Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela*, 27.

⁷⁷ FAIR, "US Media Require No Evidence for Claims of Electoral Fraud—in Venezuela."

⁷⁸ Emersberger, *Extraordinary Threat: The US Empire, the Media and 20 Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela*, 29.

would stand up to the imperialism of the United States knowing that sovereignty from U.S. influence is an issue that is important to all Venezuelans no matter their political affiliation. On the other hand, opposition candidates such as Henri Falcon openly expressed desire to work with the United States government by employing the help of Wall Street executive, Francisco Rodriguez during his campaign.⁷⁹ Despite the results of the election, opposition abroad from nations like the United States refused to accept Maduro's reelection.

2. The Rise of Juan Guaidó

In response to Maduro's election, the opposition-led National Assembly invoked a clause in the Venezuelan Constitution that allowed them to vote in the president of the assembly, Juan Guaidó, as the head of state. On January 21, 2019, one week after the election of Maduro, the Supreme Court of Venezuela declared Guaidó's claim to the presidency as illegitimate and an attempt to usurp power from a democratically elected candidate.⁸⁰ It should be noted that Guaidó was not on the election ballot of 2018, further giving substance to claims made by the PSUV that he attempted an undemocratic coup d'etat. Yet, Guaidó swore himself as President of Venezuela on January 23, 2019 and inadvertently kickstarted a series of responses from the international community who were undecided on who to recognize as the legitimate leader.

The United States was the first country to acknowledge the presidency of Juan Guaidó. President Trump promised to support Guaidó's transition to power using diplomatic and economic measures at first. Trump also pressured other nations and allies to follow suit to defend "Venezuelan democracy."⁸¹ The Organization of American States (OAS) followed suit as well as

⁷⁹ Reuters, "Venezuela presidential hopeful wants Wall Street economist on team."

⁸⁰ CNN, "The Supreme Court of Justice of Venezuela declares the National Assembly 'unconstitutional' and annuls the appointment of Juan Guaidó as its president."

⁸¹ CNN, "Violent protests in Venezuela."

the European Union and other American allies. This led to a split in the international community over whom to recognize as the legitimate leader of Venezuela. The United States and its western allies recognized Guaido as president, while nations like China, Russia, South Africa, Cuba, and Bolivia acknowledged Maduro's victory. In response, Nicolas Maduro expelled all United States diplomats because of fears that they would attempt to install a puppet government that favors the United States. A senior Trump administrative official responded to Maduro's order by saying that the United States government will take any measures necessary to restore democracy, "When we say all options are on the table, it means all options are on the table." Similarly, the Trump administration declared, "The message to Maduro and his cronies will be that — if that is the route they choose — it will be very clear to them ... they will have no immediate future. They will have no immediate livelihood. And therefore, one way or another, have their days counted."⁸² The overt threat of a violent intervention from the United States horrified Venezuelans who had lived through past attempts to overthrow the socialist government such as the coup against Chavez in 2002.⁸³ This would kickstart multiple coup d'état attempts led by Juan Guaido and his allies to depose Maduro as acting head of state.

3. Coup D'etat Attempts

On April 30, 2019, Juan Guaido launched what he called "Operation Freedom," an attempt to rally support from the Venezuelan military and government defectors to take control of the presidency. He spent the first half of 2019 rallying his legion of supporters through social media to pressure Nicolas Maduro to step down with the help of disgruntled members of the opposition in the military and parliament.⁸⁴ He was convinced that it was the right time to start an

⁸² CNN, "Violent protests in Venezuela."

⁸³ Smilde, "Most Venezuelans Want Maduro Out, but Oppose Military Intervention."

⁸⁴ Meredith, "'There's no turning back': Venezuela's Guaido remains defiant after failed attempt to recruit military."

uprising as American secret intelligence informed Guaido that Maduro had plans to flee the nation and that there were key officials in Maduro's camp who were ready to switch to the opposition's side.⁸⁵ On April 30, 2019, Guaido, surrounded by a handful of armed men at an airfield in eastern Caracas, called for all Venezuelans to join his cause: "Today, brave soldiers, brave patriots, brave men loyal to the constitution have heard our call. We have finally met on the streets of Venezuela."⁸⁶ At first, his movement seemed to be gaining momentum as hundreds of his supporters were able to free Leopoldo Lopez, a former government official who had been under house arrest since 2017 under charges of conspiring against the government. What ensued was a clash between Guaido's forces and the Bolivarian National Guard who backed Maduro. The uprising lost momentum after clashes with the national guard, leading Guaido to tell his forces to retreat. Several factors contributed to this failed uprising. One is that the uprising took place earlier than originally planned which cut down time for Guaido's forces to rally support from the military as they were pressed for time. Guaido and his forces underestimated the response of the Venezuelan government thinking that they could take power in a day. Second, the American information fed to Guaido and opposition groups also turned out to be incorrect as both the military and government officials were strictly loyal to the PSUV and committed to preventing any foreign intervention in Venezuela as seen in past coup attempts against Chavez. Rumors from the United States that Maduro had plans of leaving the country were untrue and he was prepared to handle opposition forces looking to oust him. While Guaido plans failed, the uprising became a moment of national pride for Maduro and his party who were happy to boast about preventing a violent overthrow in the nation: After the failure of the overthrow, Maduro stated, "Today the goal was a big show...Their plan failed, their call failed, because Venezuela

⁸⁵ Reuters, "Venezuela's Guaido calls for uprising but military loyal to Maduro for now."

⁸⁶ The Guardian, "The plot that failed."

wants peace.”⁸⁷ Days after Guaido’s Operation Freedom, Maduro, who was surrounded by high-ranking members of the government and military, spoke to all members of the military celebrating their loyalty to defending Venezuelan liberty and called on them to oust any traitors to the nation, with the hopes of preventing another uprising from taking place.⁸⁸ The western international coalition led by the United States responded by placing further sanctions on goods entering the country and Venezuelan exports such as oil. The United States also denied any involvement in the uprising, but top officials such as John Bolton encouraged Venezuelan detractors to keep fighting what he called, an oppressive regime.⁸⁹

A second failed attempt at overthrowing the Maduro administration occurred in 2020 called Operation Gideon. It was a joint effort by Venezuelan defectors and a private defense firm from the United States called Silvercorp USA to kidnap and extradite Maduro to the United States. According to several officials in Guaido’s camp, they reached out to the founder of Silvercorp and former U.S. Special Armed Force member, Jordan Goudreau and former Venezuelan General, Clíver Alcalá, a staunch anti-Maduro affiliate.⁹⁰ Goudreau was inspired by the Trump administration's efforts to depose Maduro especially after the Department of Justice put a \$15 million dollar bounty for his capture. Guaido specified that all means of taking power were on the table, including foreign military intervention.⁹¹ Guaido also enlisted the help of J.J Rendon, a right-wing Venezuelan political advisor based in Miami, Florida to continue negotiations with Silvercorp. Rendon trusted the reputation of Silvercorp as the founder had previous experience in leading a group of US armed forces in the Middle East as well as being hired as Trump’s security team during a few of his rallies. Rendon expressed both he and

⁸⁷ Reuters, “Venezuela's Guaido calls for uprising but military loyal to Maduro for now.”

⁸⁸ Global News, “Venezuela's Maduro shows off military loyalty days after Guaido's attempted uprising.”

⁸⁹ The Guardian, “The plot that failed: how Venezuela's 'uprising' fizzled.”

⁹⁰ Vox, “The “ridiculous” failed coup attempt in Venezuela, explained.”

⁹¹ PBS, “Inside the botched Venezuela raid”, 2:45.

Guaido's desire to use any means necessary to depose the PSUV, including violence: "We researched around 22 scenarios... maybe a third of them involved the use of force."⁹² What seemed originally as a thoroughly planned operation quickly went off the rails as Clíver Alcalá was arrested by Colombian authorities for charges of drug trafficking and weapons dealing, leading to his extradition to the United States. He claimed the weapons were for the Venezuelan freedom fighters and blamed Guaido for "abandoning the cause." The cause Alcalá referred to was Operation Gideon that Guaido denied having previous knowledge of.⁹³ Goudreau also promised a well-trained legion of around 800 armed soldiers made up of Venezuelan detractors, but many of them abandoned the mission after witnessing how unprepared Silvercorp was in the days leading up to the mission.⁹⁴ With an army of around 60 men, the ill-conceived plan went underway as the opposition group arrived at Venezuelan coasts using fishermen boats and were poorly armed. Local Venezuelan fishermen spotted them and the Bolivarian National Guard quickly captured and arrested them for an attempted coup against the Venezuelan government. Among those detained were two former American soldiers, Luke Denman and Airan Berry. During a national press conference, Nicolas Maduro exposed details of the failed operation as well as showed the passports, driver's license, and Silvercorp tags of Denman and Berry.⁹⁵ He blamed the United States for orchestrating this effort in trying to destabilize Venezuela with the purpose of gaining access to the nation's various oil reserves. Yet, the United States denied any involvement in the matter with President Trump stating that his plan would have gone differently: "If I wanted to go into Venezuela I wouldn't make a secret about it...It would be called an army. It would be called an invasion."⁹⁶ However, Goudreau repeatedly assured that

⁹² BBC, "Bay of Piglets': A 'bizarre' plot to capture a president."

⁹³ AP News, "Ex-Green Beret led failed attempt to oust Venezuela's Maduro."

⁹⁴ Vox, "The "ridiculous" failed coup attempt in Venezuela, explained."

⁹⁵ The Telegraph, "Venezuela arrests two Americans in 'attempted coup invasion.'"

⁹⁶ Vox, "The "ridiculous" failed coup attempt in Venezuela, explained."

support from the United States government would come, pointing to his connections to Trump. To save face, Guaido also distanced himself from the failed operation repeating his claim that he had no prior knowledge of this operation. However, the Maduro administration released a recorded telephone conversation between Juan Guaido and his advisors with Jordan Goudreau negotiating the terms of the operation.⁹⁷

4. Fall of Juan Guaido

The resistance movement fostered the United States ended as quickly as it arose. Juan Guaido emerged as the de facto leader in the resistance movement against Nicolas Maduro, but after several failed attempts to consolidate power, his claim to the presidency has declined domestically and internationally. While the United States and its western allies have continued imposing harsh sanctions on Venezuela, some nations have retracted their support of Guaido as the rightful president of the nation. Newly elected president of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), has backtracked on the nation's original decision to follow in the footsteps of other OAS nations and recognize Guaido's presidency. Mexico has now claimed neutrality in the matter and is instead focusing on mediating negotiations between Maduro and opposition leaders to reach an agreement democratically.⁹⁸ The European Union has also formally retracted its support for Juan Guaido but continues to denounce the Maduro administration.⁹⁹ This decision comes in the aftermath of Juan Guaido losing his seat as president of the National Assembly, making his claim to the presidency less substantial. Yet, the United States continues to acknowledge Guaido as president but has proposed a transition of power that does not involve Maduro or Guaido, seeming to have lost faith in his leadership abilities.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ruptly, "Venezuela: Caracas releases recording of alleged Guaido-US veteran raid conversation"

⁹⁸ Telesur, "Why Mexico's AMLO Recognizes Maduro"

⁹⁹ Reuters, "EU states no longer recognise Guaido as Venezuela's interim president"

¹⁰⁰ Washington Post, "U.S. proposes transitional government for Venezuela, without Maduro or Guaidó"

Guaido's popularity has also fallen drastically amongst the Venezuelan population. In April of 2019 right after the presidential elections, the Venezuelan polling company, Hercon, polled 1,000 citizens asking whether they viewed Juan Guaido as the rightful head of state. Around 77% of those polled said they recognized his leadership.¹⁰¹ His goal of deposing the ruling socialist party did not go to plan as he staged multiple failed coups with help from foreign powers, upsetting Venezuelan citizens who are tired of United States intervention. Constant trips to the United States and other nations to rally support for himself while the Venezuelan people suffered under the weight of several embargo's tarnished his image as the one to change Venezuela.¹⁰² A poll taken from staunch anti-Maduro polling, Datanalisis, showed that 88% of Venezuelans no longer believe Guaido was fit to rule, essentially killing any opportunity to claim the presidency, but many still don't believe Maduro is fit to rule either. As more nations and citizens retract their support for Guaido, it opens more doors for the socialist party to address the economic and social problems by rebuilding diplomatic and trading ties with the rest of the world.

Analysis and Discussion

A. Cuban relations with the United States

I. Impact of the Embargo on Cubans

The decades-long stranglehold the United States has over Cuban trade is severely hurting any chance of economic growth along with the wellbeing of the Cuban population. Following the fall of the Soviet trading bloc, Cuba no longer had the backing of a global superpower to improve infrastructure, maintain its reputable social services, and have access to international

¹⁰¹ Hercon, "81.9% of Venezuelans recognize Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela"

¹⁰² Reuters, "Disappointed Venezuelans lose patience with Guaido as Maduro hangs on"

trade networks for essential goods. The deadly consequences of the embargo were only exacerbated by the tightening restrictions imposed by former President Bill Clinton after the Cold War.¹⁰³ While the United States viewed these restrictions as another window of opportunity for a communist government to fall, all it did was force the Cuban government to find alternative ways to work around the limitations of the embargo. Some of the economic reforms implemented by the communist party include limited amounts of private industry, creating a tourism industry, allowing foreign investment, and the legalization of the U.S. dollar. Despite the best efforts from the Cuban government to diversify the nation's economy, Cuba's economy still struggles and faces a massive drop in human life quality. Shortages for basic necessities such as food, medicine, and clean water has devastated the Cuban population as calorie intake decreased by 30%, leading to an emergence of nutritional deficiency related diseases in 1993.¹⁰⁴

Public social services were another area that was hit heavily by the U.S. embargo. The faltering economy prevented Cuba from funding their successful nationalized programs such as healthcare and education. As mentioned before, the shortage of food and medicine created more health-related problems in the nation. Cuban doctors were not ready to treat the influx of patients who were suffering from the resource scarcity brought upon by the embargo. Many Cuban doctors were also sent abroad to treat patients in other countries such as Venezuela to bring back revenue for the state, creating a shortage of doctors on the island.¹⁰⁵ Another factor leading to the shortage of doctors was the cutback on state spending on the nationalized education system. A national program that was renowned for eliminating illiteracy in Cuba as well as producing the most well-educated scholars in Latin America became a shell of its former self as funding was

¹⁰³ Garcia, *The Cuban Economy*, 29

¹⁰⁴ Garcia, 29

¹⁰⁵ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 194

reallocated to more pressing concerns and promoting tourism as an emerging industry. Enrollment in higher education dropped as citizens who pursued a university degree were no longer guaranteed employment by the government. Before the collapse of the Soviet bloc, anyone with a university degree was provided with employment opportunities, but that number dropped to 72% by 2001.¹⁰⁶ The diversification of the Cuban economy also allowed regular citizens to open private businesses to take advantage of the growing tourism industry. Consequently, many Cubans gave up pursuing a university level education to work in private industries where they could be paid in U.S. dollars, a much higher salary than any government position.

There have been many calls by the international community to lift the U.S. embargo on Cuba. Almost all member states of the United Nations are overwhelmingly against the embargo as they view it as a “breach of freedom of trade and navigation.”¹⁰⁷ The United States and Israel are the only members in favor of upholding the embargo. Both Cubans domestic and abroad also believe that the embargo should be lifted as 55% of Cubans in Miami were in support of lifting restrictions after the election of former President Barack Obama.¹⁰⁸ Despite the overwhelming consensus that the embargo does more harm than good, the United States continues to suffocate the Cuban economy at the expense of Cuban citizens.

II. Embargo Effects Worsened by Covid-19

The real harm of the embargo was clear to see in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The complete shutdown of international travel killed Cuba’s tourism industry which it heavily relies on for its economy. This in turn also affected many of the small businesses that rely on

¹⁰⁶ Chomsky, 158

¹⁰⁷ Napier, “The Cuban Embargo,” 61

¹⁰⁸ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 191

tourists as a source of income. With no money to spend and an amplified scarcity of food and medical supplies, many Cubans were left on their own to combat Covid-19 as the government looked to control the situation.¹⁰⁹ Their best efforts to seek supplies were stopped every time by the United States as a globalized economy allowed U.S. investors to have a stake in many foreign companies, which in turn would violate the conditions of the embargo. Masks and ventilators were not allowed into Cuba, as the island nation became a hotbed of the Covid-19 virus.¹¹⁰ The scarcity of supplies not only affected the general public but also the Cuban department of health that was looking to develop its own vaccine. Since the island nation sent dozens of doctors to research and combat the spread of Covid-19, they had more than enough information to develop two of their own vaccines: Abdala and Soberana 2. Yet, even this process has been difficult for Cuban scientists to overcome as a shortage of syringes prevents a fast and efficient roll out process. The inability from the government to respond to the rapid spread of Covid-19 has left Cuban citizens angry and confused, with many organizing and taking to the streets to protest. Both supporters and critics of the communist government went out demanding a solution to the worsening condition of public health on the island. President Miguel Canal-Diaz and his supporters have called on the United States to lift the embargo to receive necessary supplies to combat Covid-19, while anti-government protests have blamed the communist party for the shortages of food and long wait times at medical centers. Lifting the embargo would stop the blame game between the United States and Cuban governments and instead focus on the task of trying to treat as many Cubans as possible who are in dire need of support.

¹⁰⁹ Carrero, "U.S. economic embargo harms Cuban daily life amid pandemic."

¹¹⁰ Stangler, "U.S. Sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela hamper the global fight against COVID-19."

III. Needless Intervention into Cuba

In the wake of protests against the communist government, the members of the United States government have called for military intervention, claiming the need to promote democracy and bring back human rights to the Cuban people. President Biden has implemented further sanctions on the Cuban government at a time when resources are what the people need the most.¹¹¹ These measures alone are already hostile and not addressing the main issue hurting the Cuban people, but others in the United States government have called for more extreme measures. Many Republican leaders are not satisfied with just harsher sanctions on all imports and have called for a more interventionist approach to the situation. Senator Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee has called on President Biden to “exert leadership and American influence” in regard to his response to Cuban government crackdowns on protests.¹¹² Other politicians such as Francis Suarez, the mayor of Miami have called for direct military intervention into Cuba. On a segment on Fox News, Suarez said the embargo was not cruel at all and said military intervention including airstrikes should be considered by referencing past interventionist missions undertaken by the United States military.¹¹³ What this shows is that the United States is more interested in toppling a government because of their ideological differences rather than providing the necessary resources to foster democracy and aid that is essential to solving Cuba’s economic problems.

¹¹¹ The White House, “Statement by President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. on Continuing Crackdown in Cuba.”

¹¹² Blitzer, “Republicans spotlight Cuba as socialism failure as protests erupt amid historic economic crisis”

¹¹³ Haltiwanger, “Miami’s mayor says the US should consider air strikes against Cuba.”

B. Venezuela's Political and Economic Uncertainty

I. Economic Instability Created by Sanctions

The crash of oil prices, the passing of popular president Hugo Chavez, and countless amounts of trade restrictions placed by the international community have only made the economic situation in Venezuela worse. The approaches taken by the Maduro government to remedy the rising prices of essential goods and services have not worked out, leading to massive protests from citizens against the ruling socialist party.¹¹⁴ As the prices of food increase along with inflation and unemployment, the crisis in Venezuela has been deemed a humanitarian crisis. Rather than provide humanitarian aid and assistance to improve the lives of Venezuelans across the country, the Obama and Trump administrations imposed further restrictions in response to Maduro quelling nationwide protests and revising the Venezuelan constitution. Similar to his stance on Cuba, Joe Biden has not reserved any of the past embargoes enacted by former administrations. The decrease of imports would only make it harder for Venezuelans to have access to basic necessities such as food, medicine, and employment opportunities.¹¹⁵

The United States has spent years placing trade sanctions on Venezuela, hoping to weaken the Maduro government especially in the run up to the 2018 elections. The increasing unpopularity for Maduro and the socialist party seemed like a perfect time for a change in leadership, especially one that favors the United States. However, the U.S. was not expecting a massive election campaign effort by the socialist party to draw in voters, especially those of the middle and lower classes to vote for Maduro.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the reelection of Nicolas Maduro was

¹¹⁴ Washington, "Maduro approach' to Venezuelan crisis is not fixing the problem."

¹¹⁵ Washington, "Maduro approach"

¹¹⁶ Emersberger, Extraordinary Threat: The US Empire, the Media and 20 Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela, 29.

met with plenty of opposition from the United States who deemed the elections illegitimate, despite no concrete evidence of voter fraud, interference, and intimidation.¹¹⁷ Once again, this shows the intention of the United States to establish a government that is favorable to them economically and politically, rather than address the pressing concerns of the Venezuelan people. What would ensue is a years-long battle for recognition between Maduro and president of the National Assembly, Juan Guaido. Although Guaido did not run for office, his position in government allowed him to make a claim to the presidency along with the backing of the United States and its allies. The Supreme Court of Venezuela announced Guaido's claim as head of state violated the Venezuelan constitution and undemocratic grab for power.¹¹⁸ This did not stop the United States and many states around the world from recognizing Juan Guaido as the true president to once again try to weaken the Maduro administration. This would create confusion amongst the international community as negotiations between states and Guaido would prove to be ineffective as he had no political power to implement neo-liberal reforms. The insistence to establish Guaido as president would only create further political and economic troubles for the Venezuelan people as more direct approaches to usurp power would come.

II. Harmful Effects of Multiple Coup Attempts

Juan Guaido's first attempt at taking the presidency which he called Operation Freedom was short lived. After rallying up hundreds of supporters and political exiles, Guaido hoped to convince the Venezuelan military to switch sides and help him overthrow Nicolas Maduro as head of state. Instead, what ensued was a violent clash between the military and protestors, leading to a drop in support for Guaido's movement.¹¹⁹ From that moment onwards, it was clear

¹¹⁷ FAIR, "US Media Require No Evidence for Claims of Electoral Fraud—in Venezuela."

¹¹⁸ CNN, "The Supreme Court of Justice of Venezuela declares the National Assembly 'unconstitutional' and annuls the appointment of Juan Guaidó as its president."

¹¹⁹ Rodriguez, "We Are Going To Take Over the Premises"

that while the Venezuelan people wanted substantial change that would improve the conditions for all citizens. American intervention and the recognition of Juan Guaido as president was not the answer most people were looking for.¹²⁰ Rather than listen to what changes the Venezuelan people wanted, the United States continued to push Guaido as president. President Trump would even insinuate that, if necessary, the United States was not afraid to intervene militarily.¹²¹

The next attempt to take the presidency would leave an even worse impression of Guaido on the Venezuelan people. In conjunction with a private U.S. defense firm, Guaido and his allies attempted a kidnapping and extradition of Nicolas Maduro by sending a small militia of Venezuelan defectors to Caracas in 2020. This group was led by two former U.S. marines who had a difficult time training and communicating with the Venezuelan defectors. This ill-fated mission would be quickly stopped by the Venezuelan coast guard leading to the arrest of those involved, including the two former marines.¹²² This attempt brought questions to the United States government to see if they had any involvement in the matter and drew comparisons to other unsuccessful coup attempts like the Bay of Pigs invasion. Furthermore, it hurt Guaido's claim to the presidency as he violated the one issue all Venezuelans agree with: opposition to foreign intervention in their domestic affairs. This attempt would prove to be the nail in the coffin for Guaido's recognition as president as several nations backtracked their support for the leader of the resistance movement in Venezuela. The European Union formally retracted their support for Guaido in 2020 following the failed coup attempt.¹²³ Mexico also pulled their recognition of Guaido and president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has offered to be a mediator in negotiations between the two parties.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Smilde, "Most Venezuelans Want Maduro Out, but Oppose Military Intervention."

¹²¹ CNN, "Violent protests in Venezuela."

¹²² Vox, "The "ridiculous" failed coup attempt in Venezuela, explained."

¹²³ Reuters, "EU states no longer recognise Guaido as Venezuela's interim president"

¹²⁴ Telesur, "Why Mexico's AMLO Recognizes Maduro"

Despite the best attempts of the United States to overthrow the socialist government, it has only caused more chaos and uncertainty during a time period where the Venezuelan people need supplies to counteract the shortage of essential goods. The back and forth discussions over who is the real president of Venezuela ultimately led nowhere and left the economic problems of the nation as an afterthought. Similar to Cuba, sanctions are not going to do any good and instead exacerbate the troubles the Venezuelan people are going through. What the United States and international community should work on is providing the necessary resources for the Venezuelan people to prosper by lifting the sanctions and providing an avenue for the nation to enter the international trade market.

Conclusion

U.S. imperialism still presents itself as a major threat to the sovereignty of many Latin American nations. Both Cuba and Venezuela have successfully warded off attempts from the United States to destabilize their governments, but still feel the repercussions of interventionism. The U.S. has greatly contributed to the economic, political, and social unrest Cuba and Venezuela are facing presently with harsh economic sanctions and backing attempts to overthrow the socialist parties in both Latin American nations. This leaves the Cuban and Venezuelan people as the victims since they are caught in the crosshairs of the U.S.'s ideological battle against left wing governments. The Cuban people want better access to medical resources to fight covid-19 especially since they have developed their own vaccines, but are short on needles. They also want the long-standing US-Cuba embargo to be lifted so that the Cuban economy can be revitalized. In Venezuela, the citizens want life to go back to normal instead of having to pick a side between two extremely unpopular political figures fighting for the presidency. The more sanctions placed on the Maduro regime only limits democracy in the nation as well as cuts off

Venezuelans from essential goods needed to live. If the United States truly cared about improving the lives of Cubans and Venezuelans, interventionist tactics that only create more chaos is not the answer. Instead, the United States should look to open dialogue with Cuba and Venezuela to see how to best address the humanitarian crisis going on in both countries.

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