

Enmity over Amity: US Belligerence toward Latin American Elected Governments

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Several works focusing on the use of covert operations by one democracy against another have challenged some of the central claims of democratic peace theory (DPT). Most notably, Forsythe (1992) shed light on the United States use of covert actions against elected governments in the Third World and suggested they might present some complications for DPT. James and Mitchell (1995) also found that powerful established democracies are likely to use covert actions when disputes arise with weaker democracies attempting to overcome their structural dependencies. If DPT were to include covert actions, its claims regarding the pacific relations among democracies would be less convincing. As Barkawi (2001:107) notes, the zone of peace among democracies “may not extend to core-periphery relations” and “would be considerably reduced, largely applicable only to a Western context where many other variables may account for the lack of war.”

Forsythe (1992:393) offered two tentative explanations that transcend the Cold War. Borrowing from Michael Hunt (1988), he suggested a cultural predisposition of US leaders that consisted of “disdain for non-European politicians, fear of social revolution, and resentment that US leadership was rejected,” might have encouraged covert action. Forsythe also acknowledged that the targeted democracies may not have been considered “mature liberal states.” Thus a powerful, well-established democracy may use covert actions if it believes another democracy is “weak and poorly established” and incapable of resolving disputes at home and abroad peacefully.

Proponents of DPT have generally affirmed Forsythe’s second explanation, but they have ignored his first. Russett (1993) argued that a democracy will use or threaten force against another when the target is perceived to be an unstable democracy. The

elected governments targeted by US covert actions “could plausibly be seen as unstably democratic, with a leader either unwilling or unable to resist radical pressures for reform employing authoritarian methods (Russett, 1993: 123).” Doyle (1983) claimed US covert actions purposes were ultimately intended to secure liberalism where it was endangered. They were a product of “special circumstances” in the “nonliberal world” where a “potential liberal majority” was temporarily suppressed and could be reestablished through outside aid (Doyle, 1983:333-334). These accounts of covert actions acknowledge that perceptions about the targeted government play a critical role in determining why and when democratic leaders resort to covert actions. Are these perceptions based on accurate information and sound judgment, however? My review of three cases of US belligerence¹ against Latin American elected governments indicates they are not.

Presumptions of Amity and Enmity

According to DPT, democracies engage in peaceful relations with other democracies because national leaders assume they share similar norms. Democracies recognize other governments as democratic when their dispute settlement practices at home are compromise-oriented and non-violent. Since they are peaceful at home, other democracies trust they will be peaceful in their interactions abroad. This “presumption of peacefulness” deters war among democracies and fosters pacific methods of settlement when disputes arise (Risse-Kappen, 1995). Bruce Russett and John Oneal further assert that, “The transparency of democracies, along with shared democratic norms and procedures, makes it very hard for democratic leaders to dehumanize people living in

¹ I use the term “belligerence” to cover a wide range of actions intended to undermine or dislodge a foreign government. This includes the direct use of military force, covert operations, and overt funding of anti-government groups.

another democracy by manipulating images of the other to portray them as the ‘enemy’ (2001: 65).” Since “non-liberal governments are in a state of aggression with their own people, their foreign relations become for liberal governments deeply suspect. In short, fellow liberals benefit from a presumption of amity; non-liberals suffer from a presumption of enmity (Doyle, 1986).”

Are leaders in a democracy principled and uniform when they decide whom to trust as democrats abroad?² Admittedly, some proponents of DPT (e.g. Risse-Kappen, 1995 and Owen, 1994) have pointed out that the subjective perceptions of other states can be more important than objective characteristics. Subjective perceptions can be powerful, and they encourage leaders and the public to heighten differences and ignore similarities when conflicts arise (Geva and Hanson, 1999). Oren (1995:147) argued there is a tendency in the United States to redefine its self-image so that it is consistent with the attributes of its allies and inconsistent with those of its adversaries. When friends later became adversaries, differences that previously went unnoticed became amplified. In the case of Wilhelmine Germany, Woodrow Wilson and US academics that once considered the country a constitutional order began emphasizing its autocratic nature as rivalries intensified (Oren, 1995: 148 and 158-159). During the Spanish-American War, US leaders believed Spain was a tyranny despite similarities among the democratic systems of the two countries at the time (Peceny, 1997). A dispute in 1971 between democratic India and the United States, which almost turned to violent confrontation, reflected shared perceptions that the other denied the “true” meaning of democracy (Widmaier,

² During his stint in the Reagan administration, Thomas Carothers observed: “Within the government I was struck that US officials constantly referred to democracy and its promotion in Latin America, but almost never discussed the specific meaning of the term.” Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: United States Policy Toward Latin America in the Reagan Years* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991). The quote is from page 7.

2005). The struggle over the meaning of democracy may lead to conflict among states making different claims to democratic legitimacy. Thus, “institutional qualities do not speak for themselves” and the mutual recognition claim made by DPT incorrectly treats “public interests, institutional interests and the meaning of democracy itself as exogenously given (Widmaier, 2005: 432 and 435).”

In the next section, I review three cases where US leaders insisted that the Latin American governments they targeted were not truly democratic and presumptions of enmity abounded. My account of the cases is specifically meant to unsettle DPT’s suggestion that a democracy has clearly understood and commonly-held standards for recognizing other democracies. I accomplish this task by demonstrating that US perceptions of the governments in question were not determined by examining their political practices at home. Rather, US leaders were skeptical about the democratic credentials of the governments in question and harbored animosities toward them *before* they even took office. Once in office, US leaders accused these governments of undemocratic behavior when they took positions that appeared to be independent of Washington’s interests. As tensions escalated, US leaders then confirmed their biases by selecting and interpreting facts that cast these governments in the worst light. I then explain that US belligerence against elected governments in Latin America is essentially a product of US ideological and cultural proclivities that originated in the nineteenth century. The persistence of these proclivities impedes the formation of a democratic zone of peace in the Western Hemisphere. Neither the end of the Cold War nor the ongoing democratization of Latin American states will end US belligerence.

Guatemala

The dispute between the United States and Guatemala over President Jacobo Arbenz's expropriation of land owned by United Fruit Company (UFCO), a US corporation with deep ties to members of the Eisenhower administration is well known. However, US preoccupation with Guatemala's elected governments actually began with President Juan Jose Arevalo (1944-1950). The US State Department insisted Arevalo was overly sympathetic and influenced by communists. Arevalo's support for unionization efforts by employees of UFCO and his land reform efforts were seen as incubators for communist agitation. During a visit to Washington, Richard Patterson, the United States Ambassador to Guatemala, insinuated the Arevalo government had hidden motives that could be easily exposed:

Many times it is impossible to prove legally that a certain individual is a communist; but for cases of this sort I recommend a practical method of detection – the 'duck test.' The duck test works this way: suppose you see a bird walking around a farm yard. This bird wears no label that says 'duck.' But the bird certainly looks like a duck. Also he goes to the pond and you notice he swims like a duck. Then he opens his beak and quacks like a duck. Well, by this time you have probably reached the conclusion that the bird is a duck, whether he's wearing a label or not (in LaFeber, 1993: 116).³

When Arbenz won the elections by 65 percent of the vote, the US Embassy in Guatemala declared him a "realist" who would quietly push the communists aside. Nevertheless, Arbenz's democratic credentials would be measured according to his

³ According to Richard Immerman (1985: 97), Patterson was a "miscast" that had little diplomatic experience and knew "virtually nothing about Latin America."

loyalty to US geo-strategic and corporate interests in Guatemala. Despite initial optimism, Arbenz failed to meet the standards of US officials. By 1952, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had contacted Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas - a former Guatemalan military officer and long-time adversary of Arbenz – and drafted plans to overthrow the elected government (Immerman, 1985: 142-143). A 1952 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) – written before Guatemala’s elected legislature passed a bill that led to the Arbenz government’s expropriation of land owned by UFCO – reveals the frame of mind of US officials. The NIE dismissed Arbenz as an opportunist and his presidency was purportedly a “historical accident.” The NIE viewed Francisco Arana (Arbenz’ presidential contender) as “the one hope of moderate and conservative elements in Guatemala,” and that his assassination in 1949 “cleared the way” for Arbenz’ “succession” to the Presidency (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 2003a: 8-9)” The narrative exposes how American officials reasoned their hostility towards Guatemala’s elected government. A “true” democratic path in Guatemala would have led to a victory for Arana, but his death was a deviation (“cleared the way”) and led to the “succession” (rather than the election) of Arbenz.⁴

An NIE written in 1953 also illustrates how Guatemala’s democracy was measured according to its loyalty to the United States:

Although they (the Guatemalan regime) have not been systematically antagonistic toward the United States, Guatemala has frequently taken occasion to demonstrate its independence of US leadership and in general has been less than cooperative than could be desired, particularly in Hemispheric affairs. Moreover, the regime

⁴ Piero Gleijeses’ (1991: chapter 3) account of the Guatemalan revolution suggests that an Arana victory was not certain and that he may not have pursued a different course from Arbenz if he were elected.

has systematically been hostile toward US private economic interests in Guatemala (the United Fruit Company, the International Railways of Central America, and Empresas Electrica) (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 2003b: 1068).

Guatemala's democratic credentials were also tested by measuring Arbenz's "toleration" for the "infiltration" of communists in the agrarian movement, labor organizations, and government posts. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report complained: "The Communists continue to be very active in Guatemala and continue to receive government support." The document details one case of what the CIA considered support: "The Communist newspaper *Octubre* is published regularly and circulates freely." The open and free activity of communists lead the report to conclude: "President Arbenz has shown no sign of changing the policy set by Arevalo as regards Communism. He has stated his opposition to the anti-Communist movement (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 2003b: 3)."

There is little indication that the United States assessed Arbenz' commitment to democracy by seriously examining his observation of civil liberties and democratic institutions at home. Limited references to Arbenz' domestic practices vainly attempted to portray his regime as repressive and bent on dictatorship. The 1953 National Intelligence Estimate (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 2003b: 1066) laments that the anti-Communist elements (i.e. large landholders, the Catholic Church, or the urban opposition):

...have shown little capacity to organize for effective counteraction. In general, each has tended to react only as its own peculiar interests were directly affected

and all have been deterred by the success of Administration propaganda in stigmatizing any criticism as opposition to principles of the Revolution of 1944 and support of “feudalism” and “foreign economic imperialism.”

However, this suggests that the opposition suffered from its own inertia and timidity, not governmental repression. Other information in the NIE directly contradicts claims regarding an erosion of democracy. In particular, it notes that the opposition won the mayoral election in Guatemala City in December 1951 and the majority of seats for that city’s congressional representation in 1953.

President Dwight Eisenhower’s account of events in Guatemala further illustrates the uninformed claims of US officials. Arbenz purportedly “came to power and by his actions soon created the strong suspicion that he was merely a puppet manipulated by Communists,” answered protests by “suspending constitutional rights, conducting mass arrests, and killing leaders in the political opposition” and “declared a state of siege and launched a reign of terror (Eisenhower, 1964: 504 and 509).” However, the constitution was not suspended until June 8, 1954 after press reports had revealed a plot to overthrow the Guatemalan government (Cook, 1981:273). Eisenhower’s account also does not indicate that his advisors handling Guatemala provided him with evidence of massive repression.

Incidents of political violence in the country-side occurred when peasants attempted to seize land and landowners and local authorities resisted with force. According to US officials reporting from Guatemala, these incidents actually decreased over time. Violence increased again in the last few weeks of Arbenz’s government as peasants defended themselves against attacks by landowners and as fear of a US-abetted

coup mounted (Gleijesis, 1991: 161-163). Perhaps the sole piece of evidence supporting US claims regarding Arbenz's dictatorial style occurred in February 1953 when the Guatemalan president urged congress to remove several Supreme Court judges because they ruled that a bill prohibiting judicial review of expropriated lands was unconstitutional. Piero Gleijeses, an academic expert on the Guatemalan revolution, provides some context for the incident: "The impeachment of the four Supreme Court Justices in February 1953 was the only illegal act committed by the Guatemalan Congress during the entire Arbenz period, and it was done solely so that the agrarian reform would not be paralyzed. It is striking that those Americans who showed the most indulgence for the 'pecadillos' of men like Somoza and Trujillo were the most outraged by this transgression by Arbenz and the Guatemalan Congress (1991: 164)."

US Ambassador John Peurifoy's report on a dinner meeting with Arbenz reveals that US officials had drawn rigid conclusions about Arbenz and discounted the possibility of negotiations by 1953 (*Foreign Relations of the United States*, 2003b: 1091-1095). The Guatemalan president was eager to discuss a settlement over the expropriation of UFCO's land, but Peurifoy saw priorities differently: "I interrupted here to say I thought we should put first things first, that as long as Communists exerted their present influence in Guatemalan Government I did not see real hope of better relations." Peurifoy presented a number of US concerns regarding the influence of communist in the country, including Guatemala's vote against a US-sponsored resolution in the Organization of American States which condemned communism. The exchange came to an end when Arbenz stated the issue was tantamount to interference in Guatemala's internal affairs.

Peurifoy left the meeting believing he was dealing with a communist dupe. He further reported:

...on leaving I told President I was disappointed because we had not accomplished anything. He said after I had become familiar with country, I would probably come around to his way of thinking. I told him I did not believe anything would make me convert to Communism and feared the situation would get worse because Americans had given blood and paid high taxes and would continue to do so as long as Communism threatened free nations.

Since Arbenz' regime was signified by its tolerance of communist activities rather than its legitimacy as an elected government, US officials acted as if they were dealing with a dictatorship. In other words, they chose presumptions of enmity over amity because Arbenz' regime did not meet their qualifications of a "real" democracy. The day after the meeting, Peurifoy's reported to the State Department:

I am convinced Communists will continue gain strength here as long as he remains in office. My staff agrees fully on this. Therefore, in my view of inadequacy of normal diplomatic procedures in dealing with situation, there appears no alternative to our taking steps which would tend to make more difficult continuation of his regime in Guatemala.

By summer 1954, Colonel Armas led a rebellion financed by the CIA that dislodged Arbenz from office and resulted in over thirty years of repressive dictatorships.

Chile

The United States plotted against Salvador Allende even before he won the presidency and committed any trespasses against US interests in Chile. The findings of

the Church Report (1975), an investigation conducted by the United States Senate in 1975, reveal that US officials were hostile to an Allende presidential bid as early as 1961. US officials also insisted that his victory alone endangered democracy and ignored key pieces of information from their own intelligence community that indicated Chile's democracy remained strong and vibrant during his presidency. During the 1964 elections, US covert operations enabled the victory of the Christian Democrats presidential candidate, Eduardo Frei and resulted in subsequent victories by CIA-supported candidates in the 1969 Chilean congressional elections. In the months leading to the 1970 presidential elections, some US officials were certain that Chileans would elect Allende as their next president. The White House's National Security Council organized the "40 Committee" to fund and oversee a large-scale propaganda campaign against Allende's candidacy.

The Church Report noted that the effort was similar to that undertaken in 1964: to equate an Allende victory with violence and repression (1975: 11). Nevertheless, Allende won a plurality of votes on September 4, 1970. Since the Chilean constitution required the president to win a majority of votes, the Chilean congress would have to choose between Allende and his runner-up, Jorge Alessandri, on October 24. The Chilean congress usually selected the candidate holding a plurality in such a case. US officials then attempted bribery of Chilean legislatures, military coup plots, new propaganda campaigns, and economic blackmail to prevent Allende from taking office. Within the 40 committee, there was some disagreement over the significance of an Allende presidency and its bearing on US interests. A rationale for these operations was provided by Henry Kissinger, who served on the 40 Committee: "I don't see why we need to stand by and

watch a country go communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people (in Blum, 1995: 209).” The US Ambassador to Chile, Edward Korry, also held that an Allende victory must be treated as the same thing as a Communist victory and that an Allende government would be worse than a Castro government (Church Report, 1975: 20). US covert operations would continue to undermine Allende after his inauguration and up to the 1973 coup. The Church Report further notes: “Broadly speaking, US policy sought to maximize pressures on the Allende government to prevent its consolidation and limit its ability to implement policies contrary to US and hemispheric interests (1975: 14).”

Members of the Nixon administration and the US business community were infuriated when the Chilean government nationalized the assets of two US companies, Anaconda and Kennecott, in July 1971. When Allende announced that no compensation was owed since the companies had made “excess profits” from its copper mines in Chile, Ambassador Korry proposed a settlement. The Chilean government rejected the proposal, and the US worked with the two companies to place intense economic pressure on the country (Petras and Morley, 1975: 110-113). There is no indication that the US made any further attempts to resolve the dispute peacefully. The CIA and other government agencies were reportedly counseling the White House to rebuff any attempts by Allende to work out a settlement (Blum, 1995: 215). The United States own 1972 National Intelligence Estimate noted that Allende “sought to avoid irreparable damage to his relations with Washington” and “had taken pains to publicly stress his desire for amicable relations.” The 1973 NIE “concluded that Allende has kept lines open to Washington on possible Chilean compensation for expropriated US copper companies (Church Report, 1975: 22).”

One could make the argument that the US abandoned attempts at peaceful settlement of its disputes with Chile because it could not trust a fragile or corrupted democracy to negotiate faithfully. However, the findings of four National Intelligence Estimates written from 1970 to 1973 belie alarming claims about Allende's political practices at home. According to the Church Report's summary, the 1970 NIE speculated that the Allende administration would move rapidly to a "Chilean version of a Soviet-style Eastern European Communist state," but the 1971 NIE found that Allende "had taken great care to observe constitutional forms and was enjoying considerable popularity in Chile." The 1972 and 1973 NIE's held "the prospects for the continuation of democracy in Chile appeared to be better than any time since Allende's inauguration," that the "traditional political system in Chile continued to demonstrate remarkable resiliency," and "legislative, student, and trade union elections continued to take place in normal fashion, with pro-government forces accepting the results when they were adverse (Church Report, 1975: 21)." The Church Report concluded, "It appears that the Chile NIE's were either, at best, selectively used or, at worst, disregarded by policy makers when the time came to make decisions regarding US covert involvement in Chile. 40 Committee decisions regarding Chile reflected greater concern about the internal and international consequences of an Allende government than was reflected in the intelligence estimates (1975: 23)."

Not only did US officials ignore the NIE's, there is no evidence that they had any real regard for the complicated political climate in Chile. The situation since Allende's presidential victory was, indeed, tense and polarized. A government stalemate occurred in 1972 when the Christian Democrats attempted to use its congressional seats to limit

Allende's economic power and impeach several of his ministers. Allende vetoed the measures, and congress voted to override by a simple majority. Allende then claimed a two-thirds majority was required for an override, but members of congress held that an amendment to the 1970 constitution made a simple majority sufficient. Political violence was also widespread. A group to the left of Allende assassinated a former member of the Eduardo Frei's government, and a violent clash took place when government security forces moved against peasants that had seized land (see Sater, 1990: 174-182). A strike by mine workers – who had backed Allende's presidential bid – and another strike by truck drivers also contributed to economic deterioration and political strife. Nevertheless, municipal elections and three congressional by-elections to fill in sudden vacancies took place in 1971 and 1972. The by-elections resulted in victories for Allende's opponents. In March 1973 – just six months before Allende's overthrow – congressional elections resulted in the opposition winning 56 percent of the vote to the government's 44 percent. Despite their victory, the opposition accused the government of voter fraud but they lacked substantial evidence (Sigmund, 1993: 72-73). During his entire presidency, Allende made no move to resolve the crisis through extra-constitutional measures or other undemocratic practices.

The United States chose enmity over amity in Chile because some US officials discredited Allende even before he took office. The actual state of Chile's democracy and the political practices of Allende at home were never seriously considered when making the decisions to use covert operations. What mattered most to US officials was where Allende's ideological stance vis-à-vis US interests in Latin America. As William Blum argued, "Washington knows no heresy in the Third World but independence. In the

case of Salvador Allende independence came clothed in an especially provocative costume – a Marxist constitutionally elected who continued to honor the constitution. This would not do. (...) There could only be one thing worse than a Marxist in power – an *elected* Marxist in power (1995: 215, emphasis in original text).” By the time a concrete dispute arose (i.e. the expropriation), the United States posture “had hardened beyond compromise” (Petras and Morley, 1975: 118).

Venezuela

President Hugo Chavez’s trip to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, his embrace of the Castro government, his relations with Colombia’s rebels (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – the FARC), and his refusal to permit US military aircraft conducting antinarcotics operations to fly over Venezuelan airspace were the main grievances of the United States prior to the April 2002 coup against his government. US officials may claim that President Hugo Chavez’s presumed lack of democratic practices at home make it impossible for them to settle disputes with him peacefully. While relations between Venezuela and the United States were not visibly tense until after Chavez criticized US military actions in Afghanistan as “fighting terror with terror,” there is ample evidence that the US was suspicious of his presidency from the start and sought to counteract him by funding his opponents. From Chavez’s first presidential election in 1998 to fall 2001, Washington’s grievances with Caracas were relatively mild and political polarization in Venezuela had not yet hardened. Nevertheless, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) – an organization funded almost entirely by the US Congress⁵ – had been meddling in Venezuela’s domestic political affairs well before

⁵ The NED was created by Congress with the backing of the Reagan administration in 1983 as a “semi-private” organization to fund political groups abroad. The NED’s governing structure consists of individuals who either work or have worked as public officials. For example, the current chairman of the organization is former Congressman Vin Weber. Included on its current Board of Directors are Senators

Chavez took actions abroad that the US regarded warily or made moves at home that some might consider autocratic. There are no indications that either the Clinton or Bush administrations attempted pacific settlement when the opportunity was ripe. The only clear policy was (and continues to be) one of discrediting Chavez and funding his opposition. As relations between the United States and the Chavez government continue to deteriorate, this policy gains greater momentum.

Venezuela's relations with the Clinton administration appeared to be mostly friendly and mutually respectful. Beneath the surface, however, members of the administration were questioning Chavez's commitment to democracy at home and the NED was funding his opponents as he pursued foreign policy and domestic prerogatives independent of Washington. There seems to be only two indications that US officials were willing to recognize the Chavez government as a democracy. In July 2000, the State Department congratulated Chavez on his reelection and noted the election process was managed professionally and successfully (Congressional Research Service, 2000: 4-5). In November, Donna Hrinak, the newly-appointed US Ambassador to Venezuela affirmed the country was "an active partner in building an integrated hemisphere through the economy, through a consolidated democracy and through sustainable development (Clement, 2007: 190)." After Chavez's visit to Iraq, however, State Department spokesperson Richard Boucher made a statement that may be interpreted as a questioning of the Venezuelan president's democratic credentials, "We do think it's a rather dubious

William Frist, Evan Bayh, and Paul Sarbanes, Congressmen Richard Gephardt and Gregory Meeks, retired General Wesley Clark, and former Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. Allen Weinstein, a key architect of the NED, stated the organization does the work that "was done covertly twenty-five years ago by the CIA" (in Blum, 2000). The NED has been criticized for failing to provide specific disclosures of how groups receiving funds spend the money and its lack of accountability for the decisions it makes abroad (Conry: 1993).

distinction to be the first democratically elected head of state to go meet with the dictator of Iraq (Clement, 2007: 190).” Secretary of State Madeline Albright also noted that Chavez was different from Castro in that the former is elected but noted that Washington was concerned about some of his methods (*Inter Press Services*, 2000). The strongest admonition came from Peter Romero, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, who had clashed with the Chavez government over its economic reform plans, the lack of cooperation with the US antinarcotics campaign, and its plans for the drafting of a new constitution and holding presidential elections in 2000: “You don’t see a government in charge, only plebiscites, referendums, and more elections and they tell us ‘wait,’ but we gringos are not known for our patience (*The Economist*, 2000).”

Perhaps the strongest efforts against Chavez’s presidency came from the International Republic Institute (IRI), the Republican Party’s international organization and a core NED affiliate. An IRI report on the 1998 Venezuelan elections urged Washington to regard Chavez’s victory warily:

Accustomed to a stable and democratic Venezuela, many US policymakers have yet to confront the possibility that the country may veer away from the democratic path being followed by most Latin American countries. The consequences of such a development would be profound: the United States imports more oil from Venezuela than from any other country and bilateral trade has been expanding rapidly in the 1990s. For these reasons, the travails of Venezuela’s democracy bear watching (Clement, 2007: 191).

Other than Chavez's election, there is not much to support the IRI's gloomy warnings. A subsequent report states "Venezuelans are surprisingly united in their desire for political reform (IRI, 1999: 23)." More importantly, the report also acknowledges that the Chavez government worked through democratic mechanisms (a Supreme Court-approved referendum) to convene an assembly that would write a new constitution and that the opposition, which had previously believed the Chavez government's reform proposals were a means of concentrating dictatorial power, eventually supported the call.

If US officials wanted to get a balanced assessment of the political climate in Venezuela, they could have also turned to the annual United States State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices (1999, 2000, and 2001). All four reports note that the police and other security forces were responsible for extra-judicial killings of criminal suspects but found no politically-motivated cases. The reports also acknowledged that the Chavez government had struggled to implement a new criminal procedure code in 1999, which might have addressed these grievances. The 2000 report finds that the elections leading to Chavez's reappointment were generally free and fair despite localized technical problems and irregularities. Concerns over freedom of the press emerged in 2000 and 2001 reports. However, the reports focus on accusations and complaints by journalists and make no mention of systematic government harassment or censorship.

US officials chose to overreact to mild grievances with the Chavez government and make claims regarding Chavez's domestic political practices that were not well supported by the information available to them at the time. Just two months before the coup, Secretary of State Colin Powell informed Congress that the administration was

concerned about Chavez's comments regarding the US campaign against terrorism and his visits to "some of the strangest countries." This behavior, according to Powell, raised questions regarding "(Chavez's) understanding of what a democratic system is all about." Powell and other officials also claimed the Chavez government was informed about the US's displeasure and was apparently told him to "keep his mouth shut on these important issues (Clement, 2007: 193)." There is no indication that US made real efforts at direct dialog with the Chavez government. The sole response that has emerged is one of intervention in Venezuela's internal political affairs. By 1999, NED funds to Venezuela were the highest of the eleven targeted countries in Latin America. The IRI was the main recipient of such funds and used the bulk of the money to interfere in Chavez's push for a new constitution. In 2001, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Democratic Party's international organization, used NED funds to open an office in Venezuela and worked closely with Chavez's opponents (Clement, 2007: 194). The coup leadership consisted of individuals affiliated with organizations receiving funds from the NED and had met with the US ambassador in Caracas and the IRI and NDI leadership just a month before the coup (Clement, 2007: 194-195).

Chavez's verbal attacks on President Bush, his relations with Iran, the FARC rebels in Colombia, and other leftist governments in Latin America, and his non-cooperation with the US anti-narcotic trafficking campaign continue to irritate the United States. US officials have insisted they are dealing with a dictator and chosen to back his opponents, mobilize Latin American countries against Venezuela, and considered placing the Chavez government on the State Department list of states sponsoring terrorism.⁶ In

⁶ After the September 11th terrorist attacks, Bush declared that nations were either "with us or against us" and made clear there would be no distinction between terrorists and states that harbor and support them. It is likely that Chavez's criticism of US military operations in Afghanistan and his relations with the FARC (whom the US considers a terrorist organization) led US officials to place his government in the camp of

2004, a referendum, backed by the US and shepherded by a Venezuelan organization funded by the State Department and NED (Clement, 2007: 198 and Golinger, 2006), would have recalled Chavez. Voters rejected the referendum, and the US grudgingly recognized the results after international observers confirmed the election was free and fair. Nevertheless, the US continued to dismiss Chavez's democratic credentials as the country held three more elections (including one resulting in a defeat for reform proposals made by Chavez) that were certified free and fair by international observers. While the 2006 United States State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practices charged that Venezuela has experienced the "politicization of the judiciary, harassment of the media, and the harassment of the political opposition," it also conceded that the 2006 reelection of Chavez was free and fair. The report also acknowledged signs of progress in the handling of criminal suspects, found no reports of politically-motivated killings by the government or its agents, and stated the government was open to inquiry by human rights organizations. A leading Venezuelan human rights organization that the State Department regularly uses as a source of information objected to repeated characterizations made by US officials that cast the Chavez government as undemocratic. In a letter to the US ambassador to Venezuela, the organization stated, "The existing structural and cyclical deficits that plague Venezuela's democracy are far from converting the current political regime into a dictatorship and its foreign policy into a threat to the region (The Venezuelan Program for Education and Action in Human Rights, 2005)."

Conclusion

those who were "against us." This may possibly explain why US officials never considered dialogue and negotiation.

Why did US leaders prejudge these Latin American elected governments?

Sorenson (1992: 405) explained, “the USA turns against some democracies because it fears that they will hurt US economic interests, or they will develop into communist regimes which threaten US security, or they will do both. (...) It appears that those who are met with enmity instead of amity are mass-dominated democracies, defined as regimes where ‘mass actors have gained the upper hand’ and push for reforms from below, attacking the power and privilege of the elites.” Barkawi (2001: 117-121) similarly suggested that US leaders during the Cold War assumed international communism inspired and directed anti-colonial, nationalist, and revolutionary movements in the Third World. In the three cases reviewed in this paper, US leaders could not accept the possibility that Latin American people might elect leaders that have different priorities and concerns or pursue a course of action independent of US interests. During the Cold War, such leadership in Latin America and elsewhere in the Third World were considered signs of communism and treated as a threat to the “free world” by US leaders. Arbenz inherited the left-leaning politics of his predecessor, and Allende was a self-declared Marxist. Consequently, both were quickly discredited and became targets of US belligerence.

From a slightly different perspective, Weart (1998: 222 and 228) argued that an “undemocratic, secretive, lawless, and coercive subculture,” urged Eisenhower and Nixon’s respective covert actions against Guatemala and Chile. The Central Intelligence Agency was the leading agency behind plans to overthrow Arbenz, and the National Security Council had almost total control over the response to Allende’s presidency. The National Endowment for Democracy, in particular its affiliate – the International

Republican Institute – took the lead in formulating US policy toward the Chavez government from 1998 to 2002. In all three cases, groupthink might have been responsible for a belligerent posture toward the governments in question and the preclusion of the possibility of peaceful means of settling disputes.

However, there was ample information that could have led US leaders to draw different assessment of the governments in question and thus pursue a more peaceful course of action. In Guatemala and Chile, the intelligence available at the time indicated the communists did not have the upper hand and probably never would. Some US officials today believe Chavez's relationship with Castro, the FARC, and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is proof of the Venezuelan leader's collusion in terrorism. Others have also insinuated that a recent rise in cocaine trafficking to the United States may be a result of Chavez's refusal to cooperate with US antinarcotics efforts in Latin America. One might read elements of the current human rights reports and draw the conclusion that Venezuela is today a fragile and unstable democracy that cannot be trusted to negotiate peacefully. What is important here is that the US missed a window of opportunity that might have prevented escalation, between 1998 to April 2002 – when disputes were mild and political conditions in Venezuela had not yet become extremely polarized. Washington's support for the 2002 coup and its blatant support for the 2004 recall referendum may now mean any gesture of compromise by either country will be regarded with suspicion.

There are also indications that the specific disputes over expropriation in Guatemala and Chile may not have been the real issue. Indeed, US officials reacted harshly to Arbenz and Allende's respective clashes with US businesses; however, the

declassified documents and statements by some US officials suggest that business interests were never foremost matters. For example, a US official who followed the Chile episode stated that Kissinger “never gave a shit about the business community. What really underlay it was ideology.” The CIA also concluded there were no vital interests in Chile, and the military balance of power would remain the same even with an Allende victory (Blum, 1995:215). Hostile sentiments toward the three governments also went well beyond the groupthink of a “coercive subculture.” In all three cases, individual members of the US press and several notable news circulations contributed to the negative portrayals of the targeted governments. Some were just as responsible as US officials in making rash prejudgments that would preclude the possibility of peaceful settlement of disputes (on Guatemala see Appy, 2000; on Chile see Blum, 1990: 209-210; on Venezuela see Delacour, 2005).

Weart considered another possible reason for US belligerence against elected governments that might be helpful: racial prejudice and a general intolerance for perceived acts of disloyalty. In a similar vein, Barkawi and Laffey (1999: 409) charged that liberalism’s increasingly narrow and settled conception of democracy rules out alternative expressions of democratically-grounded claims and may license violence against them. Any democratic project outside the liberal framework sanctioned by the United States is held to suspicion and may be dismissed as phony. This appears to be the response of US leaders to the democratic claims made Arbenz, Allende, and Chavez.⁷

The claims of Weart and Barkawi and Laffey also suggest that cultural and ideological

⁷ As Steve Ellner (2000) states, “the US prefers the more limited, mundane concept of ‘representative democracy,’ which centers on elections and political parties, as opposed to participatory democracy’s emphasis on popular assemblies, social movements and continuous referendums.” Ellner thus notes one US embassy official in Caracas cynically remarked: “Participatory democracy can mean just about anything, and that’s why Chavez and (Peru’s president) Fujimori like the term so much.”

predisposition of US leaders might have been critical in formulating a course of actions against the targeted governments.

The history of US interventions in Latin America and the mindset that gave meaning to these actions go well beyond just the three cases discussed in this paper. Since the late nineteenth century, a belief in the inferiority of Latin American peoples and the correctness of US regional hegemony has informed US policy. Lars Shoultz (1998: xv-xvi) thus argued that a belief in Latin American inferiority determines the precise steps the US will take to protect its interests in the region. US leaders are, indeed, accustomed to dealing with Latin American peoples as subordinates and tend to react strongly and swiftly to perceived acts of defiance or incompetence in the region. US encounters in Latin America from the mid nineteenth to early twentieth century established a trend of interventionism and paternalism that continues to the present. US leaders have historically maintained the right to monitor the internal affairs of states in the region and intervene to correct course if they deemed it necessary. Fear of revolutionary change in Latin America frequently preoccupies US leadership and prompts calls for intervention (Hunt, 1988; LaFeber, 1993; Grandin, 2007). Although the maintains the right of intervention, US policy makers are often ignorant of specific countries or conditions in Latin America and cling to their preconceived beliefs regarding the priorities and interests of the region (Cottam, 1994:23). US expectations of its hemispheric neighbors “is based in part on the US perception of power but also on the US perception that it knows what is best for everyone concerned.” Dependent, child-like images of Latin American peoples lead to an unequal relationship where the United

States dictates the options and the region's leaders and population are expected to follow (Cottam, 1994: 25).

My intention is not to provide a one-sided account that releases Latin American governments of any responsibility. The tensions between the "representative democracy" of the United States and the "participatory democracy" of Arbenz, Allende, and Chavez probably led to mistrust and animosity on both sides. Beliefs in nationalism, anti-imperialism, and socialism surely influenced Latin American leaders to see US aggression and intransigence as inevitable. Many one-sided accounts already exist. They can be found mostly in the DPT literature which would have us believe that US covert operations against Third World democracies results primarily from defects or deficiencies in the democratic institutions of the latter. My purpose is to strike a balance by examining the cases where US biases against elected leaders in Latin America resulted in a presumption of enmity over amity and led US officials to choose belligerence rather than peaceful means of settling disputes. These biases, I argue, are byproducts of a paternalistic and interventionist ideology that has been at the core of US policy toward Latin America since the mid-nineteenth century.

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