

Military Intervention in the Western Hemisphere: The Challenge of Justifying Intervention Against Venezuela

A Monograph

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Abstract

Military Intervention in the Western Hemisphere: The Challenge of Justifying Intervention Against Venezuela, by MAJ Donald W. Irwin, 54 pages.

During the twenty-first century, the Western hemisphere has enjoyed relative stability compared to the global tensions faced by the United States during the Global War on Terrorism. One exception to this hemispheric stability is the failed state of Venezuela which has collapsed economically, deteriorated into a dictatorship, and sparked a human rights disaster.

After nearly two decades of counter-insurgency warfare in the Middle East, the United States is returning its focus to great-power competition and large-scale combat operations. Accompanying this pivot away from the Global War on Terrorism has been an increase in hostile rhetoric between the United States and Venezuela, to include threats of an American military intervention against the fledgling Maduro regime. While US military intervention in Latin America is not without precedent, a potential intervention in Venezuela is not analogous to previous interventions and may actually create greater instability throughout the hemisphere.

This monograph examines two case studies of US military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean and then compares them to the current situation in Venezuela. The first case, Operation Power Pack, describes the United States' decision to intervene in the Dominican Republic in 1965. The second case, Operation Just Cause, examines the justification to intervene in Panama in 1989. In both of these scenarios, the United States justified its use of military force as a means to protect American lives, defend democracy, and balance against an external threat. Although the overwhelming success achieved in these historical interventions may be alluring to future policy-makers seeking to justify a military intervention against Venezuela, the final section of this paper warns that these interventions are not analogous to a potential US military intervention in Venezuela in the twenty-first century.

Contents

Abstract	iii
Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Section 1: Introduction	1
Section 2: Operation Power Pack and the US Military Intervention in Santo Domingo.....	10
Section 3: Operation Just Cause and Military Intervention in Panama	19
Section 4: The Venezuelan Crisis and the US Threat of Military Intervention.....	30
Section 5: Similarities and Differences in the Historic Case Studies and the Venezuelan Situation.....	35
Section 6: Conclusion.....	42
Bibliography	44

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Section 1: Introduction

Venezuela is an increasingly unstable state in the Western hemisphere. Tensions between the United States and Venezuela began to escalate in 2002 when former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez survived a coup attempt that he believed the United States orchestrated.¹ After Chavez' death in 2013, his successor, Nicolas Maduro, continued the regime's escalatory hostile rhetoric towards the United States. This hostile rhetoric coincided with Venezuela's economic deterioration and the regime's democratic deconsolidation into a dictatorship, as Maduro attempted to deflect the blame for the socialist state's failure towards the capitalist United States.

Beginning in 2017, tensions between the United States and Venezuela once again escalated as Maduro consolidated power by dismissing the duly elected and opposition-led National Assembly and then seating a Constituent Assembly via a sham plebiscitary process.² The process of dismissing, electing, and seating the Constituent Assembly initiated months of mass protests throughout Venezuela which sparked the United States' first mention of a potential military intervention. Days after the referendum, US President Donald Trump stated that the United States had "a possible military option" for Venezuela and continued on to state that "we have troops all over the world in places that are very far away. Venezuela is not very far away and the people are suffering and they [are] dying."³ Since the United States' first overt threat of military action in 2017: Venezuela's government and economy continued their downward spiral;

¹ Richard Lapper, "Venezuela and the Rise of Chavez: A Background Discussion Paper," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/venezuela-and-rise-chavez-background-discussion-paper>.

² Camila Domonoske, "Fear and Fury In Venezuela, As Strike Protesting 'Dictatorship' Begins," NPR (July 20, 2017), accessed July 20, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/2017/07/20/538317797/fear-and-fury-in-venezuela-as-strike-protesting-dictatorship-begins>; "Venezuela Vote: Turnout Figure 'Tampered With'," BBC News (August 02, 2017), accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40804812>.

³ "Trump Does Not Rule Out Military Response to Venezuela Crisis," BBC News (August 12, 2017), accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-40906290>.

Russia and China increased support and aid to the Maduro regime; and the United States took escalatory diplomatic, informational, and economic measures against the regime.⁴

While the United States continues to threaten military intervention against the Maduro government, it has yet to use the military instrument of national power in direct opposition to the regime. Although US military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean is not without precedent, this monograph examines historical instances of US military intervention to determine similarities to the Venezuelan situation and provide insight for the potential decision to employ the military instrument of national power. A US military intervention in Venezuela may not be analogous to previous US military interventions in Latin America or the Caribbean due to changes in both domestic and international political conditions despite outward similarities in motives.

This monograph uses a comparative case study methodology, analyzing two historical cases to compare with a hypothetical US-led military intervention in Venezuela. The first case study will analyze the 1965 intervention by the United States in the Dominican Republic. The political context for this military intervention was based on the United States' Monroe Doctrine and its subsequent Roosevelt Corollary. The second case study will examine the United States' intervention during Operation Just Cause in Panama. While intervention in the Dominican Republic could be tied directly to the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary, the road to military intervention in Panama was not as straightforward.

In both comparative case studies (and later the Venezuelan case), this paper analyzes the United States' decision to intervene militarily against the following three criteria:

⁴ US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command* (116th Cong., 1st sess., February 7, 2019), accessed July 3, 2019, https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/Posture%20Statements/SOUTHCOM_2019_Posture_Statement_Final.pdf.

Balancing against an external threat. In the historic cases, the United States attempted to balance against the influence of an additional, more powerful state actor. In the Dominican Republic and Panama, the American government feared malicious influence by the Soviet Union via Cuba. The Venezuelan regime is influenced and supported by the Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and Cuban governments. Understanding the underlying threat of the influence of the United States' competitors in Latin America and the Caribbean is necessary to understand the American decision to employ military force.

Defense of democracy. One reason why the United States intervened in the two historic case studies was to defend democracy in countries facing a legitimacy crisis. The Venezuelan case seems to be similar as fifty countries, to include the United States, no longer recognize Maduro as the legitimate president of Venezuela.⁵

Protection of human rights. Both historic case studies cite protection of US citizens as one of many reasons for military intervention. Although US citizens are not targeted by the Maduro regime, the overall humanitarian situation in Venezuela is dire and the Trump Administration alluded to the justification of humanitarian intervention in its threat of military intervention.

Before examining the implications of a potential military intervention, it is important to understand the evolution of America's national security policy and its justification for the employment of military force. Since this monograph examines American military intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine serves as the foundational idea that established the Western hemisphere as the United States' sphere of influence.⁶ While the Monroe

⁵ US Department of State, "More than 50 countries support Venezuela's Juan Guaido," ShareAmerica: Bureau of Global Public Affairs, November 15, 2019, accessed January 21, 2020, <https://share.america.gov/support-for-venezuelas-juan-guaido-grows-infographic/>.

⁶ James Monroe, "Seventh Annual Message to Congress: December 2, 1823," accessed December 18, 2019, https://www.ourdocuments.gov/print_friendly.php?flash=false&page=transcript&doc=23&title=transcript+of+Monroe+Doctrine+%281823%29; Amos A. Jordan et al., eds., *American National Security*, 6th ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 515-516.

Doctrine warned European powers against meddling in the Western hemisphere, its subsequent Roosevelt Corollary, issued by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1904, established justification for the use of American military power as an international police force.⁷ Roosevelt and his successors established precedence for intervening militarily in Latin America and the Caribbean by invoking the terms of the Roosevelt Corollary during military interventions in Cuba (1906), Nicaragua (1911), Haiti (1915), and the Dominican Republic (1916).⁸

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy of 1933 attempted to curb the United States' use of military intervention in Latin America and emphasized the sovereignty of all states in their internal and external affairs.⁹ While World War II diverted the majority of the United States' focus away from its neighbors in the Western hemisphere, the post-war US foreign policy relations with Latin America continued the trend of abstention from military intervention and focused rather on economic development assistance and diplomatic pressure. Under President John F. Kennedy, US-Latin American relations were defined by the Alliance for Progress. Kennedy described his vision as "a vast cooperative effort, unparalleled in magnitude and nobility of purpose to satisfy the basic needs of the [Latin] American people for homes, work and land, health and schools," a measure he hoped would foster economic cooperation and development and dissuade the allure and spread of Cuban Communism.¹⁰

⁷ Jordan et al., eds., *American National Security*, 515-516; Theodore Roosevelt, "Message of the President to the Senate and House of Representatives (December 6, 1904)," accessed December 18, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1904/message-of-the-president>.

⁸ US Department of State, "Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1904," Office of the Historian: Milestones 1899-1913, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1899-1913/roosevelt-and-monroe-doctrine>; Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean, 1898-1934* (Chicago, IL: Dorsey Press, 1988), 5-9, 63-68.

⁹ US Department of State, "Good Neighbor Policy, 1933," Office of the Historian: Milestones 1921-1936, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor>.

¹⁰ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Alliance for Progress," accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/alliance-for-progress>.

During the Cold War, the United States' political justification for the use of the military instrument of power reflected the Western world's fear of the spread of Soviet communism.¹¹ The United States focused on containing communism and, "containment became the theoretical framework that structured American strategic policy for the next four decades. Opposition to communist expansion became the fundamental principle of American foreign policy."¹² This period was characterized by large-scale military interventions in Korea and Vietnam as well as covert, clandestine, and various small-scale military interventions as the United States and its allies sought to balance against Soviet influence throughout the world.¹³

The US military intervention in the Dominican Republic during Operation Power Pack, this paper's first case study, occurred at the height of Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union. While small in scale compared to Cold War conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, Operation Power Pack operationalized the Monroe Doctrine, its Roosevelt Corollary, and the policy of containment as the United States intervened in an unstable situation in Santo Domingo to ultimately prevent the spread of Communism.¹⁴ Studies of the Banana Wars and limited wars in Latin America by authors like Ivan Musicant, Kevin Dougherty, and Rene De La Pedraja contextualize the Power Pack intervention within the narrative of other US military interventions throughout Latin American and the Caribbean as the United States' perpetually sought hemispheric stability.¹⁵ Specific to this case study, a series of public speeches and statements by President Lyndon B. Johnson best show the evolution of the United States' justification to intervene militarily. As the

¹¹ Jordan et al., *American National Security*, 43-46.

¹² Ibid, 44.

¹³ Ibid, 462-465.

¹⁴ Kevin Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War: Case Studies in Success and Failure, 1945-1999* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012), 54-56.

¹⁵ Ivan Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (New York: Macmillan, 1990); Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War*; René De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America, 1948-1982: The Rise of the Guerrillas* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013).

intervention progressed, the President's overt reasons for intervention went from the evacuation of non-combatants, then to the protection of American lives, and ultimately to the containment of Communism.¹⁶

After the Cold War, the international system shifted from one of bi-polar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, to one dominated by an American superpower. As liberal democratic norms triumphed over communism, the US-led international community's purpose of order shifted to the promotion and securing of democracy, capitalism, and human rights and the principal justifications for military intervention shifted to enforcing violations of sovereign territory, humanitarian crises, and acts of terrorism.¹⁷ Paradoxically, as ideas justifying military intervention changed, the American appetite to use military force in pursuit of these limited political aims decreased. In 1984, US Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger created a set of criteria that sought to restrict the use of the American military instrument of power to cases where overwhelming combat power would be applied in pursuit of clearly defined political and military objectives.¹⁸ In 1991, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, GEN Colin Powell modified Weinberger's doctrine to include an exit strategy with an associated timeline, a measure intended to keep America out of protracted foreign war.¹⁹

Operation Just Cause in Panama, this monograph's second case study, signified a shift in the United States' justification for military intervention that coincided with the end of US-Soviet Cold War tensions. While the Hay-Bunai-Varilla treaty and the Torrijos-Carter treaties describe the United States' historical national interests in Panama, the intervention itself is best viewed

¹⁶ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic* (89th Cong., 1st sess., July, 1965) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965).

¹⁷ Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force*, Cornell studies in security affairs (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 97-98.

¹⁸ Jordan et al., *American National Security*, 281-282.

¹⁹ Walter LaFeber, "The Rise and Fall of Colin Powell and the Powell Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly* 124, no. 1 (2009), 76.

from a holistic analysis of the military, political, and diplomatic measures that the United States took to depose Panamanian military dictator Manuel Noriega.²⁰ Works by Bob Woodward and Rebecca Grant detail President Bush's decision to intervene (and the decision's political implications) justified as a means to protect American lives and restore Panamanian democracy.²¹ One major difference between Operation Just Cause and previous military interventions, however, lay in its underlying justification. Previous interventions sought ways to contain Communism. Operation Just Cause, which occurred at the height of the United States' War on Drugs, ultimately allowed the United States to wash its hands of its relationship with Noriega, whose drug indictments and ties to the Medellin Cartel were a stain on both the Reagan and Bush Administrations.²²

The twenty-first century's Global War on Terrorism was the most recent paradigm shift in America's justification for the use of military force. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, DC, American politicians have used the military in pursuit of limited national security-oriented objectives in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria (to name a few) while declining to intervene militarily to enforce violations of sovereign territory after the Russians annexed Crimea.²³ While the United States threatened to intervene militarily

²⁰ US Department of State, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties," Office of the Historian: Milestones 1977-1980, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal>.

²¹ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Pocket Star Books, 1991); Rebecca L. Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991).

²² Ronald H. Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995), 6; Lawrence Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2008), 42; Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, 86-88.

²³ Josh Lederman, "Where Has the US Military Intervened in the 21st Century?" PBS News Hour (April 7, 2017), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/u-s-military-intervened-21st-century>; Steven Pifer, "Five Years After Crimea's Illegal Annexation, the Issue is no Closer to Resolution," *Order from Chaos*(blog), *Brookings* (March 18, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/03/18/five-years-after-crimeas-illegal-annexation-the-issue-is-no-closer-to-resolution/>.

against Venezuela’s Maduro Regime, to date it has employed primarily diplomatic and economic instruments of national power. Diplomatically, the Trump Administration recognized Juan Guaidó—the legitimate and duly elected President of Venezuela’s legislature—as the legitimate president of Venezuela and suspended embassy operations in Caracas.²⁴ Economically, US Presidents Obama and Trump levied multiple rounds of economic sanctions against the Maduro Regime.²⁵

Latin America is often overlooked as a US national security concern because the Western hemisphere has enjoyed relative stability compared to the tensions faced by the United States elsewhere. US national security documents only briefly address Latin American concerns and threats. The 2017 US National Security Strategy recognizes that Venezuela’s authoritarian regime receives support from China and Russia and states that the aim of US political action in the Western hemisphere is to help the Venezuelans eventually achieve and enjoy freedom.²⁶ Similarly, the 2018 summary of the US National Defense Strategy emphasized that the United States derives immense benefit from a stable and peaceful hemisphere.²⁷ The USSOUTHCOM commander’s most recent posture statement to the Senate Armed Services Committee emphasizes the importance of strengthening partnerships in the region as the best option for addressing the regional and global threats that we see manifest in Venezuela. The statement also highlights that

²⁴ Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “US Relations with Venezuela: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet (July 8, 2019),” US Department of State, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-venezuela/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy of The United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 51.

²⁷ US Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 9.

the primary threats in Latin America are Russia, China, and Iran via their authoritarian allies of Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua.²⁸

This monograph demonstrates that a potential US intervention in Venezuela, when viewed through the aforementioned criteria, may seem justified but there are several aspects that differentiate this case from the historical cases. The focus of the monograph is on the policies, justifications, and decisions to use the military instrument of national power for the purposes of intervention and thus it does not examine the specific military actions or subsequent stability operations undertaken as part of each historic operation nor does it speculate on any operational approach for potential future intervention.

The first section examines the United States' 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic as a manifestation of the Monroe Doctrine's Roosevelt Corollary in the context of the national policy narrative of containment. The next section reviews Operation Just Cause and the US military intervention in Panama in the context of the national policy narratives of containment and the War on Drugs. Next, the monograph examines the current Venezuelan situation with regard to balancing against threats, defense of democracy, and protection of human rights in the context of the Global War on Terror. Finally, this paper expounds upon the differences between the decision to intervene in the case studies and a potential decision to intervene in Venezuela. This case study comparison shows that the magnitude of Venezuela's humanitarian crisis, the degree to which Venezuelan democracy has already decayed, the multi-polar international threat presented in the twenty-first century (vice the bi-polar threat during the Cold War), and the US military's prioritization of action in the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe are all factors that indicate a potential Venezuelan intervention may not be analogous to previous interventions.

²⁸ US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command*.

Section 2: Operation Power Pack and the US Military Intervention in Santo Domingo

From the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine until the 1965 military intervention in Santo Domingo, US foreign policy and policy justifying US military intervention in Latin America evolved in iterations. President Theodore Roosevelt established the Roosevelt Corollary to balance against European influence and military intervention in Latin America.²⁹ More specifically, the corollary sought to prevent European powers from using force to collect debts in Latin America and it sought to protect the Panama Canal from non-US foreign interference.³⁰ Roosevelt authorized the US military to intervene at his behest in cases of perceived instability, thus “transform[ing] the Monroe Doctrine from a doctrine of isolation into one of intervention.”³¹ The doctrine states:

If a nation shows that it knows how to act with reasonable efficiency and decency in social and political matters, if it keeps order and pays its obligations, it need fear no interference from the United States. Chronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation, and in the Western Hemisphere the adherence of the United States to the Monroe Doctrine may force the United States, however reluctantly, in flagrant cases of such wrongdoing or impotence, to the exercise of an international police power.³²

As the twentieth century progressed, the Roosevelt Corollary was the foundational doctrine for multiple US military interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

After World War I, the European powers that the Roosevelt Corollary originally balanced against (Germany, France, and Britain) were greatly weakened or defeated and thus the United States' need to exert military dominance in the Western hemisphere to balance against these

²⁹ Musicant, *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama*, 2-3.

³⁰ John B. Judis, *The Folly of Empire: What George W. Bush Could Learn from Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 69.

³¹ Mariah Ananda Zeisberg, *War Powers: The Politics of Constitutional Authority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 97.

³² Theodore Roosevelt, “Message of the President to the Senate and House of Representatives (December 6, 1904),” XLI.

neutralized threats diminished.³³ A 1927 US intervention in Nicaragua sparked the United States to revisit and revise the premises of the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary to better reflect the reality of the post-World War I world order. Walter LaFeber effectively summarized this sentiment by stating:

Intervention only brought on anti-Yankee feelings in Latin America and headaches for State Department officials who had more important problems in Asia and Europe. It was also becoming a debilitating business: the more the United States intervened in Honduras or Nicaragua, for example, the more unpleasant those societies seemed to become. Washington officials began to see what a distinguished historian of the Monroe Doctrine meant when he observed: "It cannot be stated that the civilizing influence of the United States is an inevitable condition of progress in Latin America."³⁴

As a result of weakened European powers and the waning interest in using military force in Latin America, the United States' self-proclaimed right to intervene shifted its focus away from protection of outside influence (using the military instrument of national power) and towards the preservation of North American interests (using primarily economic and diplomatic instruments of national power).³⁵ This new stance on military intervention became the foundation for President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy. This policy accepted the presence of Latin American dictators if they maintained a façade of democratic process, maintained order and stability, and protected private property.³⁶ From 1933 onwards, the United States maintained its dominance in the region via economic and political measures. Local troops, funded and advised by the US military, conducted actions to counter guerilla movements in Latin America during this period.³⁷ The United States' lack of military intervention under the Good Neighbor Policy came to an end in 1965 when President Lyndon Johnson authorized the Marines and the 82nd Airborne

³³ Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, 1983), 78-79.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 79.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 80.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 81.

³⁷ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America, 1948-1982: The Rise of the Guerrillas*, 135.

Division to intervene in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.³⁸ The United States was now at the height of the Cold War, and President Johnson invoked the Johnson Doctrine, which allowed the US to intervene unilaterally “in any Latin American country menaced by a communist threat...it was nothing but a reconfigured, dusted off version of the old Roosevelt Corollary.”³⁹

The Situation

The government of the Dominican Republic was tumultuous for much of the twentieth century. Dictator Rafael Trujillo ruled from 1930 until his assassination in 1961.⁴⁰ During his tenure as president, Trujillo consolidated and maintained his power in part by buying the loyalty of the armed forces.⁴¹ Trujillo’s predecessor was Joaquin Balaguer Ricardo, who was removed from office by a coup and replaced by the democratically elected, left-leaning Juan Bosch Gavino in December 1962.⁴² In September 1963, a coup overthrew Bosch and replaced him with a civilian junta known as the Triumvirate, from which Donald Reid Cabral rose as the state’s leader. Many Dominicans, to include many junior and a few senior officers in the armed forces, viewed Donald Reid Cabral’s rule as illegitimate and began plotting a coup to remove him from power.⁴³ Contributing to the country’s instability under Donald Reid Cabral’s leadership was the military’s corruption that was a remnant of the Trujillo era. Rene De La Pedraja noted that, “Trujillo always used graft and corruption as a way to keep his officers loyal, but without the restraining influence of the dictator, many senior officers embarked on an orgy of stealing public funds.”⁴⁴ On April 24, 1965, four junior officers seized an opportunity to spark a *coup d’etat* and

³⁸ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America 1948-1982*, 149.

³⁹ Musicant, *The Banana Wars*, 364.

⁴⁰ Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War*, 53.

⁴¹ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America, 1948-1982*, 140-141.

⁴² Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War*, 53-54.

⁴³ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America, 1948-1982*, 141-142.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

demanded that the duly elected Bosch be restored to the presidency.⁴⁵ The return of Bosch, however, was not an amenable option for the Johnson Administration.

After Trujillo's assassination, the United States' stated foreign policy goals for the Dominican Republic were to ensure free elections and subsequently enable the winner to peacefully take office, while its unstated goals were the prevention of Communism, support of the Dominican economy, and assurance that the new government could assimilate into the Organization of American States.⁴⁶ After Bosch's ouster, the United States (under President Johnson) recognized the legitimacy of Cabral's junta on the condition that free elections would be held in 1965.⁴⁷ Once the April 1965 coup led to civil war in Santo Domingo, the United States opposed the reinstatement of Bosch, who was viewed as "soft on Communism," as the president and instead cast its support behind General Wessin y Wessin's forces with the aim of bringing Trujillo's immediate predecessor Balaguer back into power.⁴⁸

The Decision to Intervene

The decision to intervene in Santo Domingo was ultimately a result of Ambassador Bennett and his country team's recommendation to land Marines from Task Group 44.9 with the immediate goal of protecting American lives.⁴⁹ On April 25 and 26, 1965, Joint Chiefs of Staff began preparing for a military intervention into Santo Domingo by positioning naval vessels laden with Marines out of sight off the Dominican shore and then by alerting two of the 82nd

⁴⁵ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America 1948-1982*, 141-142.

⁴⁶ Quinten Allen Kelso, "The Dominican Crisis of 1965: A New Appraisal" (doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, 1982), 18.

⁴⁷ Jack K. Ringler and Henry I. Shaw, Jr., "US Marine Corps Operations in the Dominican Republic: April-June 1965" (occasional paper, Historical Division, Headquarters, US Marine Corps, Washington, DC, 1970), 4.

⁴⁸ De La Pedraja, *Wars of Latin America 1948-1982*, 149; Ringler and Shaw, "US Marine Corps Operations in the Dominican Republic: April-June 1965," 6; Kelso, "The Dominican Crisis of 1965: A New Appraisal", 26-27.

⁴⁹ Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, vol. 15, Leavenworth Papers (US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1988), 53.

Airborne Division's battalion combat teams of a potential deployment to the Dominican Republic.⁵⁰ At this point, Ambassador Bennett's country team warned the State Department of the threat of a Communist takeover on the island, but noted that the situation did not warrant a US military intervention.⁵¹ As the violence in the civil war escalated and American lives became endangered, Bennett requested that the *USS Boxer* move closer to the shore to conduct a demonstration of US presence.⁵² As fighting continued, the leader of the US-backed junta, Colonel Pedro Bartolome Benoit, requested military assistance as the rebel factions were proving to be a formidable opposition to the Dominican forces. The situation, as depicted by Bennett and his country team, seemed clear: the Johnson Administration could choose to commit forces or risk a Communist faction rising to power amidst the chaos in Santo Domingo.⁵³ The final pre-intervention messages transmitted from Bennett to the State Department described the scene: "If the rebels are victorious now...let us make no mistake about it, this will be a takeover by the extreme left...I recommend immediate landing."⁵⁴

On April 28, 1965, Operation Power Pack—the joint US Marine Corps and US Army intervention effort into Santo Domingo—commenced when President Johnson authorized 500 Marines to land in Santo Domingo with the primary purpose of conducting defensive operations and non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO) for US citizens caught up in the rapidly escalating civil war in Santo Domingo.⁵⁵ President Johnson's public statement from April 28, 1965 notes that he authorized the landing of Marines because American lives were in danger, the Dominican junta could no longer guarantee their safety, and that the purpose of the military was

⁵⁰ Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 182.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 40.

⁵² *Ibid*, 44.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 49.

⁵⁴ Kelso, "The Dominican Crisis of 1965: A New Appraisal", 90-95.

⁵⁵ Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War*, 54; Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 49.

to protect and evacuate these stranded citizens.⁵⁶ Operation Power Pack would, however, rapidly transition from an intervention in defense of human rights to one that sought to balance against an external threat, the spread of communism.

Defense of Democracy and Human Rights

From the beginning of the intervention, the United States' overt justification for the employment of military force was the protection of American lives. On April 28, 1965, President Johnson released a statement about the landing of 500 US Marines in Santo Domingo. He stated, "...American lives are in danger...I have ordered the Secretary of Defense to put the necessary American troops ashore in order to give protection to hundreds of Americans who are still in the Dominican Republic and to escort them safely back to this country."⁵⁷ The United States also offered protection and evacuation assistance for foreign citizens who wanted to flee the impending civil war.⁵⁸ At the beginning of the conflict but prior to US intervention, US military actions to evacuate American citizens was "purely precautionary...US citizens and American property in Santo Domingo had not become targets of rebel violence."⁵⁹

Once the Johnson Administration made the decision to land the Marines at Santo Domingo, officials emphasized that the Marines were not taking sides in the civil war and had the sole mission of protecting American citizens and facilitating their evacuation of the island.⁶⁰ On April 29, 1965, an additional 1,500 Marines landed, and the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division received orders to conduct an air-land operation at San Isidro airfield (the paratroopers landed at

⁵⁶ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic* (89th Cong., 1st sess., July, 1965) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1965), 51.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 41.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁰ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic*, 16.

0200 on April 30, 1965).⁶¹ On April 30, 1965, President Johnson activated the XVIII Airborne Corps as the Joint Task Force headquarters; approved the deployment of the remainder of the 82nd Airborne Division and the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade; and placed the 101st Airborne Division on Defense Readiness Condition (DEFCON) 3 alert status.⁶² As the size of the intervening force increased, the administration's narrative also escalated, and on April 30, 1965, President Johnson's statement introduced to the American public the idea that the Santo Domingo operation was no longer solely about the protection of American citizens, it was also about the containment of Communism. The President stated that: "...there are signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control. Thus the legitimate aspirations of the Dominican people and most of their leaders for progress, democracy, and social justice are threatened..."⁶³ The Johnson Administration's subsequent statements would clearly indicate the new purpose of the intervention, the prevention of a Communist takeover in Santo Domingo.

Balancing Against an External Threat

The ulterior motive of Operation Power Pack was the prevention of the spread of communism. While the United States' goal of protecting American lives drove the narrative to gain a foothold on the island, the anti-communist narrative of the Cold War provided the Johnson Administration legitimacy in the military's action beyond the initial NEO.⁶⁴ In his discussion of

⁶¹ Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 183; Lawrence M. Greenberg, "United States Army Unilateral and Coalition Operations in the 1965 Dominican Republic Intervention" (historical analysis series paper, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 1987), v.

⁶² Ringler and Shaw, "US Marine Corps Operations in the Dominican Republic: April-June 1965," 9-31; Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 183; Greenberg, "United States Army Unilateral and Coalition Operations in the 1965 Dominican Republic Intervention," v.

⁶³ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic*, 53.

⁶⁴ Stephen Lauer, "Blue Whales and Tiger Sharks: Politics, Policy, and the Operational Artist," *Strategy Bridge Journal* (February 2018), accessed January 15, 2020, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2018/2/20/blue-whales-and-tiger-sharks-politics-policy-and-the-military-operational-artist>.

how the policymaker creates a narrative to support the greater political aims of the military intervention, Stephen Lauer proposed the following questions:

What is the political resolution the policy seeks? Upon what local, legitimate political stakeholder does the military solution support and for which its execution of violence will provide temporal and political space—the end that will allow the departure of U.S. military forces upon accomplishment? This is fundamentally and necessarily a political responsibility. .⁶⁵

President Johnson’s shifting narrative indicated that the grand scheme of the intervention would not be deemed legitimate unless a non-communist local government was in control of the Dominican Republic following the US military intervention.⁶⁶

As the operation progressed, this seemingly secondary objective of military intervention came to the forefront and eclipsed the intervention’s initial NEO justification.⁶⁷ Prior to deploying to Santo Domingo to assume command of Operation Power Pack, Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer received guidance from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Earle Wheeler: “Your announced mission is to save American lives. Your unstated mission is to prevent the Dominican Republic from going communist. The President has stated that he will not allow another Cuba... You are to take all necessary measures... to accomplish this mission.”⁶⁸ Throughout the duration of the operation, the Johnson Administration’s justification for the escalation of forces in Santo Domingo became increasingly linked to countering the spread of communism.

President Johnson’s statements on May 1, 1965 reiterated that the troops deployed in Santo Domingo “...are engaged in protecting human life” and then went on to note that “we intend to carry on the struggle against tyranny no matter in what ideology it cloaks itself.”⁶⁹ The

⁶⁵ Lauer, “Blue Whales and Tiger Sharks.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Dougherty, *The United States Military in Limited War*, 55.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 55; Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 86.

⁶⁹ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic*, 54-55.

following day, May 2, 1965, President Johnson addressed the American people and highlighted that many Cuban-trained Communists joined the revolutionary movement in the Dominican Republic and then made a statement justifying the United States' (and other states within the Organization of American States) military intervention into the Dominican Republic:

We believe that change comes, and we are glad it does, and it should come through peaceful process. But revolution in any country is a matter for that country to deal with. It becomes a matter calling for hemispheric action only—repeat, only—when the object is the establishment of a communist dictatorship...Our goal is a simple one. We are there to save the lives of our citizens and to save the lives of all people. Our goal...is to help prevent another Communist state in this hemisphere.⁷⁰

Nine days after the Dominican coup against Donald Reid Cabral began, President Johnson's rhetorical shift towards highlighting the Communist threat cast doubt upon the true intentions of the US intervention.

As the Dominican unrest settled down in the months following Operation Power Pack, the Johnson Administration, realizing that the Communist threat they portrayed was exaggerated compared to reality on the ground, again tried to highlight the fact that the real mission was NEO and protection operations while acknowledging that even a small number of Communists warranted the United States' consideration as a potential serious threat to the future of the Dominican people. Johnson acknowledged in a press-conference on June 1, 1965 that: "The Communists did not...originate this revolution, but they joined it and they participated in it. They were active in it, and in a good many places they were in charge of it."⁷¹

⁷⁰ US Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Background Information Relating to the Dominican Republic*, 55-60.

⁷¹ Lyndon B. Johnson and Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Johnson Presidential Press Conferences*, vol. 1 (New York: E. M. Coleman Enterprises, 1978), 313.

Section 3: Operation Just Cause and Military Intervention in Panama

After Operation Power Pack in the Dominican Republic, the United States engaged in various other overt and covert Latin American interventions throughout the remainder of the Cold War. In 1973, the US secretly backed a *coup d'état* that overthrew Chile's democratically elected leftist President Salvador Allende. This incident was not isolated. The United States' desire to prevent the spread of Communism led to its support of militant opposition to populist, nationalist, and socialist movements in countries like Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, and Nicaragua.⁷² The United States' covert and passive support to anticommunist forces in Latin America followed a pattern throughout the remainder of the Cold War: "the US national security establishment ranked security interests and anticommunism above human rights and democracy."⁷³ Aside from covert assistance to anti-Communist forces in the Western hemisphere, in 1983 the United States also intervened militarily in the island nation of Grenada to rescue American citizens and topple the Marxist regime.⁷⁴ As the 1980s progressed and the Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union decreased, the United States' calculus for intervening militarily in Latin America changed. In 1989, the isthmus of Panama became the location of the first US intervention in the Western hemisphere where the fear of Communist influence played only a minor role in the decision to use military power. This case study examines the United States' unilateral military intervention during Operation Just Cause.

Background

The United States' national interest in Panama dates back to the 1903 Hay-Bunai-Varilla treaty, which gave the United States permanent rights to what would become known as the

⁷² J. Patrice McSherry, "Tracking the Origins of a State Terror Network: Operation Condor," *Latin American Perspectives* 29:1 (2002), accessed December 18, 2019, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3185071?seq=18#metadata_info_tab_contents, 55.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 56.

⁷⁴ Musicant, *The Banana Wars*, 370-373.

Panama Canal Zone. By 1914, the United States completed the Panama Canal, a feat that not only linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans but also gave America a new advantage in both force projection and commercial shipping.⁷⁵ The Panama Canal was a strategically important asset worth protecting, and the provisions of the Hay-Bunai-Varilla treaty gave the United States the right to occupy and control the 10-mile wide canal zone in perpetuity in return for a \$10 million initial payment to the government of Panama followed by annual payments of \$250,000.⁷⁶ As protectorate of the canal zone, the United States maintained army garrisons in Panama from 1903 until withdrawal by treaty in the year 2000.⁷⁷ US troops numbered anywhere from six thousand troops to as many as sixty-eight thousand troops during World War II.⁷⁸ During the 1960s, Panamanian nationalist movements grew and tensions between US military forces and Panamanian security forces—the Panamanian Guardia Nacional or The Guardia—escalated. In 1968, a coup initiated the dictatorial rule of Omar Torrijos and the subsequent rise of Manuel Noriega to the upper echelons of leadership within the Guardia.⁷⁹ Throughout the 1970s, both Torrijos and the United States, under Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter, wanted to re-negotiate American control of the canal zone. Transcontinental air travel and intercontinental ballistic missiles were two of several factors that diminished the importance of the Panama Canal as a strategic interest to the United States.⁸⁰ Coupled with the rising nationalism in Panama and tensions between US Army and Guardia forces in the canal zone, the military aims of

⁷⁵ US Department of State, “The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties,” Office of the Historian: Milestones 1977-1980, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1977-1980/panama-canal>; Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990*, 5.

⁷⁶ Peter Huchthausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars: A Short History of US Military Engagements: 1975-2000* (New York: Viking, 2003), 114-115.

⁷⁷ US Department of State, “The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties.”

⁷⁸ Huchthausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars: A Short History of US Military Engagements: 1975-2000*, 115.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 116.

⁸⁰ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990*, 5.

negotiations were: to incrementally phase out the United States' control of the canal and existence of a US-owned canal zone; the United States' military-backed assurance that the canal would remain neutral; the United States' perpetual usage of the canal.⁸¹ Ultimately, the United States hoped the negotiations and subsequent treaties would "ensure that Panama would make progress toward democratization and toward economic and political stability."⁸² In September 1977, the Torrijos-Carter Treaties were signed and were then ratified by the US Congress in September 1979.⁸³ The Torrijos-Carter Treaties dictated that the United States would cede control of the Panama Canal back to Panama by the year 2000, but that it would defend the neutrality of the canal indefinitely.⁸⁴ The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) still viewed the canal as a strategically important asset and throughout the 1980s, the JCS believed that Panama and the canal zone, if not controlled by the United States, could be a potential base of operations of the Soviets or Cubans to attack US interests or foment instability throughout Central America.⁸⁵

After Omar Torrijos died in a plane crash on July 31, 1981, Manuel Noriega filled the power vacuum left by the deceased dictator. In August 1983, Noriega became the Guardia's commanding general and soon thereafter he became commander-in-chief of the newly established Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF).⁸⁶ Under Torrijos, the Guardia Nacional became the most powerful institution in Panamanian politics, although it always, in theory, remained subordinate to civilian governmental control.⁸⁷ As commander-in-chief of the PDF, Noriega ousted civilian presidents and manipulated elections, controlled the puppet civilian regime, and was effectively

⁸¹ US Department of State, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties."

⁸² Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process," 6.

⁸³ US Department of State, "The Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties."

⁸⁴ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990*, 5.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 9-11.

⁸⁷ Rebecca L. Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process," 6-8.

the military dictator of Panama.⁸⁸ Noriega's behavior, although nefarious, was no surprise to the United States. In fact, the US government had largely accepted Noriega's double dealing because he was a useful asset to American interests in Panama and Central America. Despite US knowledge of his ties to Cuban intelligence officials and the Medellin Drug Cartel, US officials were generally willing to "look the other way" when dealing with Noriega. Yates summed up the relationship effectively by noting that:

Noriega allowed the US military command based in Panama "extensive leeway" in its activities, and, over the years, he had provided useful intelligence to the United States on Latin American insurgencies and on Cuban activities in the region... The general permitted various US organizations to maintain intelligence-gathering facilities in Panama... Many US government officials had important ties to Noriega and believed that his value to America's strategic interests in the region warranted their downplaying his friendly relations with Cuba and his various illicit activities... When the administration held a policy review on Panama, Abrams [Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs] supported the decision to shelve official concerns about Noriega until the conflict with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua was resolved.⁸⁹

The bottom line about the United States' relationship with Panama and Noriega through the early 1980s was that, "Panama was not a priority as long as US forces there were safe."⁹⁰

The United States' patience with Noriega began to wane in September 1985. The regime-orchestrated murder of one of Noriega's vocal political opponents, Hugo Spadafora, followed by the resignation of Panama's President Nicolas Ardito Barletta sparked anti-Noriega protests in Panama which were suppressed with a heavy hand by Panamanian riot police.⁹¹ Barletta was a proponent of bolstering Panama's legitimate economy as part of the democratization efforts outlined by the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, but Noriega, who controlled and profited handsomely off

⁸⁸ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 11; Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process," 8-9.

⁸⁹ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 13-14.

⁹⁰ Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process," 9.

⁹¹ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990*, 6; Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 12.

of Panama's black-market, had zero interest in furthering this cause.⁹² Following these incidents, the US Senate investigated Noriega. The *New York Times* published stories linking him to illicit drug trafficking and deals with Communist guerillas and the Cuban government, yet the CIA and Pentagon still did not advocate for the general's removal.⁹³ Noriega's rhetoric became more bombastic and anti-American. The strained relations came to a head in the fall of 1987, when two grand juries in Florida indicted Noriega "on several counts of drug trafficking, racketeering, and money laundering."⁹⁴ The public revelation of these charges in February 1988 placed the Reagan Administration in a dilemma. One of the Reagan Administration's domestic initiatives was the "War on Drugs," and thus turning a blind eye to Noriega's sins became an increasingly untenable political position. Yates concludes that:

In short, two prosecutors in Florida, operating without the blessing of the US attorney general, had placed the Reagan Administration in a position of making the normalization of US-Panamanian relations contingent upon Noriega's removal from power and, at least in theory, his prosecution in the United States.⁹⁵

The Decision to Intervene

American escalation towards intervention in Panama was gradual. Noriega's indictments by the Floridian grand juries provoked responses from both the US government and from Noriega. The United States' challenge was to deal with Noriega while maintaining a working professional relationship with the PDF. Both the Reagan and Bush Administrations used diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of national power to try and remove Noriega from power and to nudge Panama towards democracy without the use of military force. In February 1988, the United States cast its support behind Panama's president, Eric Arturo Delvalle (who ascended to power from the vice presidency after former president Nicolas Ardito

⁹² Grant, "Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process," 14-15.

⁹³ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 13-20.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*.

Barletta resigned), and encouraged him to call for Noriega to step down as the head of the PDF.⁹⁶ Noriega dismissed Delvalle and then survived a subsequent coup attempt.⁹⁷ Further American attempts to replace Noriega, to include tightening economic sanctions and attempting to negotiate an option for Noriega to abdicate his position with relative immunity from US extradition or prosecution, failed and only caused Noriega to further entrench and increase the PDF's hostility towards the United States.⁹⁸

Noriega was defiant and his rhetoric was openly hostile towards the United States. His rule was also resilient, as his tight control over the PDF allowed him to counter any US efforts to passively remove him from power by encouraging and supporting “protests, demonstrations, and strikes.”⁹⁹ Despite calls from Noriega's opposition for a US military option, the Reagan Administration did not intend to intervene with military force.¹⁰⁰ Instead, US-Panamanian tensions became status quo for the remainder of 1988, as the United States' focus temporarily shifted inwards towards domestic politics and the presidential election. The status quo tensions remained as US President George H.W. Bush took office in January. The United States still maintained 12,000 military personnel (and their families) in Panama, but Noriega's interference in the May 7, 1989 Panamanian elections and the subsequent violence in the streets of Panama marked the beginning of the United States' build-up towards military intervention and Operation Just Cause.¹⁰¹

Noriega annulled the May 7, 1989 elections and he dispatched paramilitary “Dignity Battalions” to attack his political opponents, to include opposition vice presidential candidate

⁹⁶ Grant, “Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process,” 11, 23.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 23-24.

⁹⁹ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 97.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 52-53.

Guillermo “Billy” Ford, in the streets of Panama City.¹⁰² President Bush’s stance on this wave of violence, as summarized by Bob Woodward, was: “If the harassment of US servicemen were to escalate to physical attacks on Americans similar to the attacks on the Panamanian opposition leaders, the situation would be intolerable.”¹⁰³ The existing American military contingency plan known as “Prayer Book” anticipated potential intervention to conduct NEO, defend the canal, conduct offensive operations against the PDF, and to conduct stability operations.¹⁰⁴ The Bush Administration instead began incrementally deploying additional troops to Panama as a precautionary step. On May 11, 1989, President Bush announced the deployment of 1,716 Army Soldiers and 165 Marines to Panama (an additional Delta squadron and part of SEAL Team 6 were also secretly deployed as part of this operation) under the code name Operation Nimrod Dancer.¹⁰⁵ The 13,000 troops in Panama, and units in the continental United States assigned to the “Prayer Book” contingency plans, spent the ensuing months rehearsing offensive operations code named Operation Blue Spoon (which would later be renamed Operation Just Cause). Tensions ebbed and flowed throughout the remainder of 1989. On November 20, a bomb threat against the Gorgas US Army Hospital in Panama led to an emergency activation of the Joint Task Force that would eventually execute Operation Just Cause.¹⁰⁶ On December 16, PDF soldiers shot and killed an American Marine and unlawfully detained, interrogated, and physically abused a US Navy Lieutenant and his wife.¹⁰⁷ This was the ultimate trigger for US military intervention.

¹⁰² Woodward, *The Commanders*, 53-54.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 55.

¹⁰⁴ Yates, *The U.S. Military Intervention in Panama: Origins, Planning, and Crisis Management June 1987-December 1989*, 88; Woodward, *The Commanders*, 56.

¹⁰⁵ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 60.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 115-117.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 131-137.

On the night of December 19, 1989, the US military intervention in Panama known as Operation Just Cause began.¹⁰⁸

Defense of Democracy and Human Rights

In his May 11, 1989 press conference announcing the precautionary deployment of additional forces to Panama, President Bush stated that, “I’ve asserted what my interest is at this point. It is democracy in Panama; it is protection of the life of Americans in Panama.”¹⁰⁹ After the invasion of forces during Operation Just Cause, White House Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater stated the following in a televised news briefing: “The President has directed United States forces to execute ... missions in Panama to protect American lives, restore the democratic process, preserve the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties and apprehend Manuel Noriega.”¹¹⁰ The Bush Administration’s overt reasoning and justification for both the United States’ increasing force level and the subsequent military intervention in Panama remained consistent during the months leading up to Operation Just Cause. The protection of American lives and defense of democracy were always at the forefront of American political and military leaders during the lead-up to Operation Just Cause.

Similar to the gradual build-up of troops in Panama in anticipation of increased violence following the stolen election of May 1989, USSOUTHCOM took some initial measures to protect American lives. USSOUTHCOM made limited efforts to return some dependent family members to the United States and ordered servicemen and women and their families who were living amongst the Panamanian population to move onto military bases.¹¹¹ Despite these actions, PDF violence against American servicemen and the wife of a US Navy officer ultimately triggered the

¹⁰⁸ Grant, “Operation Just Cause and the US Policy Process,” 38.

¹⁰⁹ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 161.

¹¹¹ Edward M. Flanagan, *Battle For Panama: Inside Operation Just Cause* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s Inc., 1993), 17.

intervention. In his first televised address to the nation a few hours after the invasion, President Bush stated: “General Noriega’s reckless threats and attacks upon Americans in Panama created an imminent danger to the thirty-five thousand American citizens in Panama.”¹¹² President Bush could not, and did not, let violence against American citizens by Noriega’s regime go unchecked.

While the decision to intervene in defense of American lives was reactionary based on escalating violence against Americans from May to December 1989, America’s justification to intervene in defense of democracy had both a long-seated justification and a short-term cause. During the negotiations for the Torrijos-Carter treaties, President Torrijos promised to take steps towards Panama’s democratization. Initially, he allowed the return of political exiles, expanded freedom of the press, and legalized the establishment of political parties.¹¹³ He also promised to return Panama to civilian rule via democratic elections scheduled for 1984.¹¹⁴ When Torrijos died in 1981, so did Panama’s timeline for democratization. Throughout the 1980s, Noriega’s resistance to follow through on Torrijos’ democratization initiatives drew protest from the US, but it did not warrant military intervention.

In the short-term, the United States’ defense of democracy in Panama was a response to Noriega’s flagrant dismissal of the election’s results. Former American Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford led an international observation team to Panama for the May 7, 1989 election and decried its results as fraudulent, blaming the PDF for interfering in the process by falsifying results and ultimately annulling the election.¹¹⁵ During a May 9, 1989 press conference, President Bush neither confirmed nor denied having a military option for Panama that he was willing to

¹¹² Woodward, *The Commanders*, 164.

¹¹³ International Delegation Report, “The May 7, 1989 Panamanian Elections,” National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and National Republican Institute for International Affairs (1989), accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/electionreports/democracy/FinalReportPanama1989.pdf>, 15-16.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 15-16.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 79-81.

execute, but he did condemn Noriega by stating: “What I want to do now is encourage this last moment for General Noriega to heed the appeal of those people who favor democracy and to heed the will of the Panamanian people.”¹¹⁶ Noriega’s blatant interference in Panama’s democratic process coupled with the public violence against members of the legitimately elected administration (which the international media distributed throughout the globe) added to President Bush’s laundry list of justifications for military intervention against the Noriega regime.

Balance Against an External Threat

When President Bush decided to intervene militarily, the Cold War was largely over and the Soviet threat was waning. Noriega’s nefarious ties to Cuba and to Communists in Central America were largely known to the CIA, and they did not preclude the agency from keeping Noriega on its payroll. Perhaps more troubling for the Bush Administration were Noriega’s ties to the increasingly powerful Pablo Escobar and the Colombian-based Medellin Drug Cartel.¹¹⁷ The United States was at the height of the War on Drugs, and one American poll noted that in September 1989, 64 percent of Americans believed that drug abuse was the country’s top problem.¹¹⁸ Leading up to Operation Just Cause, various US intelligence reports postulated that Escobar was in talks with Noriega to move his headquarters to Panama in order to escape increasing anti-drug law enforcement activities spreading through Colombia. Noriega would offer Escobar protection and Escobar, in turn, would line Noriega’s pockets.¹¹⁹ The Bush Administration sought a win in the drug war and a September 1989 coordinated attempt by the DEA, FBI, and DOD to arrest Escobar in Panama did not come to fruition. The US failure to catch Escobar red-handed in Panama led Bob Woodward to note that: “All the publicity on the

¹¹⁶ International Delegation Report, “The May 7, 1989 Panamanian Elections,” 118.

¹¹⁷ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 86-89.

¹¹⁸ The Drug Policy Alliance, “A Brief History of the Drug War,” *The Drug Policy Alliance*, accessed December 18, 2019, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/brief-history-drug-war>.

¹¹⁹ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 86-87.

drugs put the spotlight once again on Noriega, an unpleasant symbol of American impotence in the face of illegal narcotics.”¹²⁰ Just three months later, President Bush addressed the nation immediately following the US military invasion during Operation Just Cause. In his justification for the invasion, he highlighted Noriega’s drug ties:

The goals of the United States have been to safeguard the lives of Americans, to defend democracy in Panama, to combat drug trafficking, and to protect the integrity of the Panama Canal Treaty. Many attempts have been made to resolve the crisis through diplomacy and negotiations. All were rejected by the dictator of Panama, General Manuel A. Noriega, an indicted drug trafficker.¹²¹

The United States was uniquely postured to intervene during Operation Just Cause. Increasingly public knowledge of Noriega’s criminal ties (and the US government’s acceptance of his behavior) coupled with the military dictator’s blatant affront to Panama’s democracy caused the Bush Administration to increase its military posture and alert level in Panama. PDF violence against the increasingly large American military footprint in Panama provided the Bush Administration with both a justification (an increased threat to American lives) and the convenient means to intervene and remove Noriega from power.¹²²

¹²⁰ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 88.

¹²¹ Cole, *Operation Just Cause: The Planning and Execution of Joint Operations in Panama February 1988-January 1990*, 42.

¹²² Huchthausen, *America’s Splendid Little Wars: A Short History of US Military Engagements: 1975-2000*, 117.

Section 4: The Venezuelan Crisis and the US Threat of Military Intervention

Venezuela is an economically and politically unstable country. Throughout the twenty-first century, Presidents Chavez and Maduro systematically undermined and manipulated Venezuela's democratic institutions, resulting in the current unchecked and illegitimate dictatorial presidency of Nicolas Maduro.¹²³ Venezuela is also in the midst of a human rights crisis, as the country's economic turmoil coupled with the lack of an effective government response led to widespread poverty and shortages of basic necessities like food, medicine, and health care.¹²⁴ Fallout from these internally destabilizing factors resulted in mass migration, with more than 4 million Venezuelans being displaced by mid-2019.¹²⁵ Additionally, in 2018, Venezuela was the world's leading source of asylum claims with more than 340,000 Venezuelans seeking asylum abroad.¹²⁶ This section discusses the United States' diplomatic and economic responses to the Venezuelan crisis.

The United States primarily employs the diplomatic and economic instruments of national power against the Maduro regime. Diplomacy is the first instrument of power and it encompasses negotiations, treaties and other international agreements, and "all declaratory policy statements issued to influence others."¹²⁷ Traditional diplomatic engagement is challenging between the United States and Venezuela because of the perpetual unrest and violence in

¹²³ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2019: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/venezuela>.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Venezuela's Humanitarian Emergency: Large Scale UN Response Needed to Address Health and Food Crises," *Human Rights Watch*, accessed January 9, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/04/04/venezuelas-humanitarian-emergency/large-scale-un-response-needed-address-health>.

¹²⁵ Marie McAuliffe and Binod Khadria, eds., *World Migration Report 2020* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2019), accessed January 9, 2020, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf, 102.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 99

¹²⁷ Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 238.

Venezuela. In March 2019, the United States suspended operations of its embassy in Caracas and withdrew all diplomatic personnel.¹²⁸ Additionally, due to Venezuela's high crime rates and frequent periods of violent unrest and mass protests, the Department of State issued the highest level travel warning to US citizens, urging them not to travel to the country and warning any US citizens currently in Venezuela that there are no existing plans for the US government to conduct NEO operations.¹²⁹

The channels of diplomacy between the United States and Venezuela are complicated. The Department of State recognizes and maintains diplomatic relations with the US-recognized President of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, but its declaratory policy is directed at the Maduro regime, with which there are no formal diplomatic ties.¹³⁰ The main channels for diplomatic engagement between the Trump Administration and Maduro regime are public statements and dialogue via statements to international institutional assemblies (most recently the UN Security Council). United States public statements of declaratory policy towards the Maduro regime range from President Trump's declaration that the United States has a military option to former National Security Advisor John Bolton's statement that, "In this administration, we're not afraid to use the phrase 'Monroe Doctrine,' ... This is a country in our hemisphere; it's been the objective of presidents going back to Ronald Reagan to have a completely democratic hemisphere."¹³¹ Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Senator Marco Rubio also reinforce the administration's

¹²⁸ US Department of State, "Emergency Notification—Venezuela Unrest March 12, 2019," US Virtual Embassy, Venezuela, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://ve.usembassy.gov/emergency-notification-venezuela-unrest/>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, "US Relations with Venezuela: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet (July 8, 2019)," US Department of State, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-venezuela/>.

¹³¹ Adam Taylor, "What is the Monroe Doctrine? John Bolton's justification for Trump's push against Maduro," *The Washington Post* (March 4, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/03/04/what-is-monroe-doctrine-john-boltons-justification-trumps-push-against-maduro/>.

stance that the United States always has a military option available and will use it if needed to oust Maduro and support Guaidó.¹³² In October 2019, Vice President Mike Pence addressed the UN Security Council and he highlighted Venezuela's humanitarian crisis and the extent of its democratic deconsolidation. He also emphasized the fact that Venezuela is a failed state that is influenced and controlled by China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, narco-traffickers, and terrorist organizations (to include Hezbollah).¹³³

The United States also employs the economic instrument of power towards Venezuela. Under President George W. Bush, the United States waived sanctions for various narcotics related charges against the Chavez regime. Such sanctions would have impeded American efforts to bolster civil society and democratization programs in Venezuela.¹³⁴ Subsequent US Presidents have, however, taken a more heavy-handed approach with sanctions. There are currently seven active executive orders, signed by Presidents Obama and Trump, that detail the extent of US sanctions against Venezuela and the Maduro Regime. The Trump Administration most recently issued Executive Order (EO) 13884 on August 5, 2019, which expanded the scope of previous sanctions levied against Venezuela.¹³⁵ Although it is not the most current order, EO 13857 (January 25, 2019), best describes the justification for exercising the economic instrument of

¹³² Vanessa Romo, "Pompeo Says US Prepared to Offer Guaidó 'Full Range of Options' to oust Maduro," *NPR* (May 5, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/05/720481685/pompeo-says-u-s-prepared-to-offer-guaido-full-range-of-options-to-oust-maduro>; Benjamin Fearnow, "Marco Rubio Warns US Military Intervention in Venezuela 'Always' an Option, Says Guaidó Needs Foreign Help," *Newsweek* (May 9, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/marco-rubio-venezuela-us-military-guaido-maduro-war-russia-terrorists-drug-1420975>.

¹³³ United Nations Security Council, "The Situation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela," United Nations Security Council, 8506th meeting (April 10, 2019), accessed December 10, 2019, <https://undocs.org/en/S/PV.8506>, 6-8.

¹³⁴ Mark P. Sullivan, "Venezuela: Political Conditions and US Policy," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Washington DC: Library of Congress, July 28, 2009), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32488.pdf>, 2.

¹³⁵ The White House, "Executive Order 13884 of August 5, 2019: Blocking Property of the Government of Venezuela," *Federal Register* 84: 152 (August 7, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/13884.pdf>.

power against the Venezuelan regime. EO 13857 classifies the Maduro regime as illegitimate, and states the following as the United States' indictment and justification for imposition of sanctions:

...including human rights violations and abuses in response to anti-Maduro protests, arbitrary arrest and detention of anti-Maduro protestors, curtailment of press freedom, harassment of political opponents, and continued attempts to undermine the Interim President of Venezuela and undermine the National Assembly, the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people, and to prevent the Interim President and the National Assembly from exercising legitimate authority in Venezuela...¹³⁶

In describing the limitations of continually escalating with the economic instrument of power, Robert Worley astutely noted that:

The economic instrument is wielded abroad by providing or withdrawing foreign aid to developing countries and imposing economic sanctions on those who oppose US policies. A major issue with the economic instrument is that sanctions (sticks) and aid (carrots) have not worked with dictators, and especially not with dictators who rule over an extractive economy (e.g., with a nationalized oil industry). The common result is the punishment of innocents. The government we are trying to influence through sanctions is able to ignore the sticks and carrots and live comfortably, while the population at large goes without food, water, and public services.¹³⁷

The most recent set of economic sanctions levied against Venezuela, Maduro, and those influential individuals within his regime clearly lay out the United States' position with regards to human rights and defense of democracy. However, as Worley pointed out, these measures will have a limited effect against Maduro and increasingly adverse consequences against the Venezuelan population.

In recent years, many US officials have overtly touted the potential of a military intervention in Venezuela. The Chavez and Maduro regimes effectively destroyed Venezuela's democracy and violated the human rights of many Venezuelans. Even though the United States

¹³⁶ The White House, "Executive Order 13857 of January 25, 2019: Taking Additional Steps to Address the National Emergency with Respect to Venezuela," Federal Register 84:20 (January 30, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/13857.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System*, 233.

and much of the international community responded diplomatically and economically to sanction the regime, Venezuela continued to spiral into poverty, instability, and dictatorship. The final section describes why, despite the exhaustion of diplomatic and economic corrective measures to correct seemingly similar issues that the United States saw in Panama and the Dominican Republic, a potential military intervention in Venezuela would not be analogous to these previous interventions.

Section 5: Similarities and Differences in the Historic Case Studies and the Venezuelan Situation

America's military interventions in the Dominican Republic and Panama were ultimately successful in achieving their limited political aims. These interventions protected American lives, called to account human rights violations, defended democracy, and neutralized the threats posed by the spread of Soviet Communism and the expansion of the Medellin Cartel. On the surface, the situation in Venezuela currently seems to exhibit many of the same issues that pre-intervention Dominican Republic and Panama did. The Maduro regime ruined Venezuela's economy and violates the human rights of a large portion of its population. The once democratic nation now is a functioning dictatorship. The revisionist states of China and Russia, America's two great power competitors, and the rogue regime of Iran, already have deep seated influence in Venezuela.¹³⁸ This section outlines the similarities between Venezuela and the two case studies and will then explain why, although seemingly similar, the situations are not analogous.

President Johnson and President Bush both initially justified military intervention to protect American lives. Evacuation of Americans (and other foreigners wanting to escape the impending civil war) from Santo Domingo was the primary justification for President Johnson's initiation of Operation Power Pack. Similarly, the protection of American lives in Panama was both a trigger and a central justification for military intervention.

Any potential decision to intervene in defense of American lives in Venezuela would be different than in previous situations. According to the US State Department, diplomatic relations between the US government and the Maduro regime have been suspended since March 2019. The US embassy and its personnel suspended operations, removed its ambassadorial staff, and issued a warning to Americans in Venezuela that the US government has no contingencies in place to conduct a NEO should unrest escalate to unacceptable levels.¹³⁹ Operations Power Pack and Just

¹³⁸ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, 51.

¹³⁹ US Department of State, "Emergency Notification—Venezuela Unrest March 12, 2019; Bureau

Cause both had robust established country teams coordinating the military's intervention with the United States' continued efforts towards a diplomatic solution. Should the threat towards American citizens escalate in Venezuela, no pre-existing diplomatic infrastructure (like Ambassador Bennett's Santo Domingo country team) or military presence (like the 13,000 American military personnel stationed in the Canal Zone) is in place to facilitate an uncontested NEO. Presidents Johnson and Bush anchored their justification for intervention on the notion of protecting American lives. The degree to which Venezuela has already become a failed state and the State Department's suspension of operations there and warning to Americans that they are on their own is the first reason why the justification of a military intervention for the protection of American lives is not analogous to previous US interventions in Latin America.

The US intervention in the Dominican Republic was in the wake of multiple *coups d'état*, and while the United States desired democracy for the Dominican people, it ultimately backed the return of authoritarian-leaning Joaquin Balaguer Ricardo to power—the vice president of former dictator Rafael Trujillo.¹⁴⁰ In the context of the Cold War, the United States' desire for democracy was overshadowed by its fear of the spread of Communism. The American ambassadorial country team in Santo Domingo favored the return to a Dominican junta under Balaguer rather than Bosch's return to power because “the return of Bosch would mean surrendering the country to communists.”¹⁴¹ The United States' planning prior to intervention favored resisting a potential Communist takeover by “establish[ing] a temporary junta that would promise elections in the fall.”¹⁴² The logic behind this choice was to save the island from Communism first, and then continue its march towards democracy.

of Western Hemisphere Affairs, “US Relations with Venezuela: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet (July 8, 2019).”

¹⁴⁰ Yates, *Power Pack: US Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 31.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

Defense of democracy in Panama was more tangible, as Noriega's flagrant violation of the collective will of the Panamanian people in view of the international media elicited a visceral response from the Bush Administration. Movement towards Panamanian democracy began under Torrijos. Although Noriega hindered democratization, the May 1989 elections showed that Panama was ready to transition from a military regime to a civilian-controlled democracy. Noriega was surprised by the result, and his extreme response was unacceptable to the US. The US intervened militarily in Panama to restore the democratic process, which ultimately enabled Panama to democratize and comply with the Torrijos-Carter Treaties in a manner that was politically acceptable to the US.¹⁴³

A potential military intervention in defense of Venezuelan democracy would not be analogous to the Dominican or Panamanian case because Venezuela is moving away from, not towards, democracy. Under Presidents Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro, Venezuela's once thriving democracy has deteriorated into a dictatorship and the country's democratic institutions have been crippled.¹⁴⁴ Since Chavez assumed power in 1998, Venezuela's government slid from democratic to semi-democratic and then, in 2009, became a competitive authoritarian state.¹⁴⁵ One aspect of competitive authoritarianism is that a "hybrid regimes sponsor[s] regular elections that are competitive, but which take place on seriously tilted playing fields and without full respect for democratic rights and liberties."¹⁴⁶ During the period of 2002-2013, or roughly from Chavez reassuming power after a failed 2002 *coup d'état* until his death, Venezuela's Freedom House score (a measure and rating of a country's political rights and civil liberties) dropped from

¹⁴³ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 161.

¹⁴⁴ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2019: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/venezuela>.

¹⁴⁵ Scott Mainwaring and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Cross-Currents in Latin America," *Journal of Democracy* 26:1 (2015), accessed February 18, 2018 from <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/565643>, 116.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

59.2 to 37.5.¹⁴⁷ Chavez' successor, Nicolas Maduro, oversaw continued systematic undermining of institutional checks and balances, leading to continued Freedom House rating decline. In 2017, Venezuela crossed the threshold from being a 'partly free' country to a 'not free' country.¹⁴⁸

In January 2019, President Trump recognized Juan Guaidó, the President of the Venezuelan National Assembly (legislature), as the country's interim president. President Trump stated, "I will continue to use the full weight of United States economic and diplomatic power to press for the restoration of Venezuelan democracy."¹⁴⁹ But an escalation towards US military intervention to restore democracy would not simply be a matter of toppling the Maduro regime and installing the duly elected National Assembly President as the nation's president. Maduro, as the so-called illegitimate ruler, is backed by the military and the newly formed Constituent Assembly—a legislative body created to both supplant the National Assembly and serve the whims of Maduro, thus negating horizontal accountability and checks and balances within the Venezuelan governmental structure.¹⁵⁰ During the previous intervention in the Dominican Republic, an authoritarian junta was an acceptable placeholder until the conditions were safe for democracy. In Panama, democratic institutions and processes were alive and well and were interrupted by the whims of one man. A military intervention on behalf of Guaidó, however, would be different because it would require significant external military effort to defeat

¹⁴⁷ Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán, "Cross-Currents in Latin America," 123.

¹⁴⁸ Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2017: Venezuela," *Freedom House*, accessed December 15, 2019, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/venezuela>.

¹⁴⁹ The White House, "Statement from President Donald J. Trump Recognizing Venezuelan National Assembly President Juan Guaido as the Interim President of Venezuela," Washington DC (January 23, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-recognizing-venezuelan-national-assembly-president-juan-guaido-interim-president-venezuela/>.

¹⁵⁰ Jennifer L. McCoy, "Venezuela's Controversial New Constituent Assembly, Explained," *The Washington Post* (August 1, 2017), accessed March 26, 2018 from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/01/venezuelas-dubious-new-constituent-assembly-explained/?utm_term=.7b22e3cf7ade; International Crisis Group, "Venezuela's Military Enigma," Crisis Group Latin America Briefing no. 39 (September 16, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/039-venezuelas-military-enigma>.

Venezuelan security forces and would then require a significant post-conflict effort to rebuild the nation's democratic institutions.

Finally, both interventions in the Dominican Republic and Panama served as a means towards balancing against an external threat. At the height of the Cold War, Operation Power Pack's ulterior motive, which became overt after the military seized a foothold for the NEO, was prevention of the spread of Soviet influenced Communism. Operation Just Cause occurred at the end of the Cold War but at the height of the United States' War on Drugs. Noriega had ties to Communists in Cuba and Central America, yet he remained on the CIA's informant payroll. His indictments by a US grand jury as a narco-trafficker and his ties to Pablo Escobar and the Medellin Cartel were a black-eye to the Reagan and Bush Administrations. The threat of an expanding transnational drug empire was one of four justifications President Bush gave for Operation Just Cause.

The case for a potential military intervention in Venezuela justified as a means to balance against an external threat would not be analogous to Panama or the Dominican Republic. While the case studies justified military intervention as a balance against a single threat, Venezuela is a focal point for many states and malign actors that are competitors and threats to US national security. The 2017 US National Security Strategy identified Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and transnational threat groups as the main threats to the US-led international order, with Russian and China subsequently identified as the United States' great power competitors.¹⁵¹

USSOUTHCOM Commander Admiral Faller's 2019 posture statement to Congress identified various Russian, Chinese, and Cuban diplomatic, military, and informational efforts to support and prop-up the fledgling the Maduro regime.¹⁵² The entanglement of multiple competitor states

¹⁵¹ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, 1-4.

¹⁵² US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command*, 6-9.

and transnational threat organizations in Venezuela complicates a potential US response beyond the bilateral balancing efforts of the Cold War.

In February 2019, the Chinese and Russian governments both vetoed a US resolution brought before the UN Security Council that declared the May 2018 elections illegitimate and called for the restoration of democracy.¹⁵³ Any future action against Venezuela that the United States tries to legitimize via the UN Security Council will almost certainly be vetoed by China and Russia. While China's influence in Venezuela is primarily diplomatic, economic, and informational, Russia has provided military support to the Maduro regime, and any US military intervention would likely be countered by a Russian-influenced military response.¹⁵⁴ In the past decade, Russian-Venezuelan military relations have included arms deals, allowing Russian nuclear-capable bombers to operate out of Venezuelan airfields, and the deployment of Russian mercenaries within Venezuela to help prop up Maduro in the wake of unrest.¹⁵⁵ While a US military intervention would not pit conventional forces against Russian conventional forces, Dr. R. Evan Ellis postulates that:

In Venezuela, US-led military intervention could lead Russia to opportunistically join Cuba in supporting elements of the military and collectivos that remain loyal to Maduro, and attempt to wage a protracted guerilla campaign against the Guaidó government (per Cuban doctrine adopted by the Venezuelan military), as well as support other criminal groups resisting the imposition of order, including the FLN, FARC, dissidents, and "sindicatos" in the Venezuelan interior, among others.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ United Nations Security Council, "Competing United States, Russian Federation Draft Resolutions on Political, Humanitarian Situation in Venezuela Blocked in Security Council," United Nations Security Council, 8476th meeting (February 28, 2019), accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13725.doc.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command*, 6-9.

¹⁵⁵ R. Evan Ellis, "Russian Activities in Latin America," in *Russian Strategic Intentions* (Monterrey, CA: Calhoun, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/62483/SMA-TRADOC-Russian-Strategic-Intentions-White-Paper.pdf?sequence=1#page=96>, 78.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

Unlike in the Dominican Republic, where the United States was balancing against the potential of Communist incursion, a potential US intervention in Venezuela will contend with the established influence and presence of China, Russia, and Cuba, and potentially adding to rather than decreasing the region's stability.

One of the United States' justifications for Operation Just Cause was to balance against the increasingly powerful Medellin Cartel and to prevent Colombian drug cartels from expanding their operations into Panama. This justification would not hold weight in a potential intervention in Venezuela because narco-trafficking is already rampant in Venezuela. Similar to Noriega's facilitation of drug trade through Panama in the 1980s, the Chavez and Maduro regimes have embraced the illicit activity to add to the failing state's coffers, but to a much greater extent. The Cartel de los Soles (Cartel of the Suns) is, "a disparate network of traffickers, including both state and non-state actors, but all operating with the blessing and protection of senior figures in the Venezuelan government."¹⁵⁷ Maduro has promoted the most prominent narco-traffickers to the most senior levels of government and military, inextricably enmeshing the drug trade with the regime and incentivizing loyalty amongst senior government officials and military generals.¹⁵⁸ Since Noriega was the singular point of failure for most of Panama's illicit activity prior to Operation Just Cause, the Bush Administration could justify its intervention as a targeted action to remove him from power and thus curb the region's drug trade. Trying to use a similar narrative in Venezuela would be misplaced, since intervening to balance against the threat of drug-trafficking would be a declaration of war against the entirety of the Maduro regime.

¹⁵⁷ Venezuela Investigative Unit, "Drug Trafficking Within the Venezuelan Regime: The 'Cartel of the Suns'," *InSight Crime* (May 17, 2019), accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/drug-trafficking-venezuelan-regime-cartel-of-the-sun/>.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Section 6: Conclusion

Although Operations Power Pack and Just Cause were overwhelmingly successful, the conditions surrounding the decision to intervene militarily are not analogous to the current situation in Venezuela. On January 30, 2020, the USSOUTHCOM Commander, Admiral Faller, delivered his annual posture statement to Congress. In this address, he warned that malign state actors like China, Russia, and Cuba have created a vicious cycle of deliberately eroding stability in Latin America, which negatively impacts the US homeland.¹⁵⁹ (footnote) He stated that:

The final malign actors—Maduro and his cronies in Venezuela—pose one of the most direct threats to peace and security in the Western Hemisphere. Emboldened by Russian, Chinese, Iranian, and Cuban protection and patronage, Maduro has allowed Venezuela to become a safe haven for the ELN, FARC dissidents, and drug traffickers while the Venezuelan people starve...The consequences of the Venezuelan crisis will last generations; a post-Maduro Venezuela will require significant support to help Venezuelans address the decades of mismanagement, widespread insecurity, and corruption of defense and other institutions in order to realize the natural richness of their resources.¹⁶⁰

Admiral Faller's vicious cycle reflects the United States' paradoxical challenge of intervention in Venezuela. If the United States does not intervene, then Venezuela's economic and political decline may continue indefinitely, resulting in the protracted suffering of millions of Venezuelans. If the United States follows through with a military intervention, then military action may risk a protracted US presence in South America as the military attempts to restore order and stability in the midst of a Venezuelan civil war. Even a limited military intervention using special operations forces and partner nation forces risks a possible miscalculated escalation of force with Russian forces operating in Venezuela alongside Maduro's troops.

¹⁵⁹ US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Posture Statement of Admiral Craig S. Faller, Commander, United States Southern Command* (116th Cong., 2nd sess., January 30, 2020) accessed February 3, 2020, https://www.southcom.mil/Portals/7/Documents/Posture%20Statements/SASC%20SOUTHCOM%20Posture%20Statement_FINAL.pdf?ver=2020-01-30-081357-560, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

After two decades of counter-insurgency warfare in the Middle East, the United States is returning its focus to great-power competition. During this period of refocus and realignment of priorities, policy makers must take caution to not extrapolate past military success into the decision to intervene in future conflict scenarios. Operations Power Pack and Just Cause successfully projected US military force in Latin America and the Caribbean to protect American lives, defend democracy, and to balance against external threats. Since the scale and scope of Venezuela's state collapse far exceed the pre-intervention conditions present in the Dominican Republic and Panama, a potential intervention would not be directly analogous and may create more instability throughout the region.

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