

# Axis of identities: how socially constructed perceptions affect the foreign policy of nations

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AXIS OF IDENTITIES:  
HOW SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED PERCEPTIONS AFFECT  
THE FOREIGN POLICY OF NATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science

College of Sciences

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Orlando, Florida

Spring Term 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

Contrary to the assumptions of realist theory, this thesis suggests that reality is subjected to social constructions. The national discourse of one country constitutes the context from which societies will generate perceptions and ideas about another society. It is from these socially constructed ideas that states' interests are formed. States interests are what constitute the foreign policy of a country. Given that the United States is the world's hegemon, understanding the process by which countries' interests take shape and evolve will give the United States social awareness and strategic advantage to lead the world's current speedy integration with less volatile rivalries.

In order to grasp the factors contributing to the relationship between specific states, some context is needed beforehand. By tracing and comparing historical events in the relations between the United States, Venezuela, and Iran, this thesis examines the constructivist claim that states behavior towards another is directly affected by the social interpretation of their interactions. It is social constructions, not power, what determines if states will view each other as "enemy" or "ally". National identity and worldview ultimately drive state behavior and how countries choose to utilize their capabilities.

## **DEDICATION**

To my mother who has supported me with unconditional patience and understanding. Thank you for being so loving during my academic endeavors.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my dear thesis committee. Dr. Houman Sadri for our long conversations trying to settle the big ideas for this thesis. Dr. Joseph Vasquez for challenging my assumptions and helping me see shortcomings in my research. Dr. Yovanna Pineda for your professionalism and advice. I hope to achieve your level of academic effortlessness one day.

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## **Introduction**

Political scientists formulate theories with a premise of assumptions about the real world. But, with the exception of the constructivist literature of the last 20 years, rarely do they acknowledge the socially constructed nature of those assumptions or how social constructs can alter perceptions of reality at a given time and place (Wendt, et al, 1992). The dominant framework for the way science is conducted in international relations has traditionally been based on the assumptions of realist theory. The influence that governments' national identity and worldview might have on states' behavior is something that realism completely leaves out of the equation. Instead of recognizing that multiple realities exist in the world, and that they are shaped by the interactions between political units (community, region, country, etc.), realist theory insists that states' behavior is the direct result of the anarchical nature of the international system. Given its status of super power, understanding the process by which states' interests are formed and evolve will give the United States social awareness and strategic advantage to lead today's rapidly interconnecting world with less volatile rivalries (Burgelman, 1983). The leadership in the United States should be cautious about holding on to a worldview that might be becoming obsolete.

Constructivist theory aims to parsimonious explanations by having one theory that explains phenomena across fields of study and levels of analysis. Social constructions, like what is considered good or appropriate in a society, play a role on shaping the context through which the "real world" is understood. This must be acknowledged as an epistemological requirement to validate new knowledge in social sciences. Controlling for the effect that social identities exert

on perceptions of reality might help scholars understand states behavior more realistically. In this thesis, I propose that a country's social interpretation of reality is the context for its national identity, and identity determines a state's interests in the international system. Interests are more significant to states' behavior in the international society than the distribution of power among countries (Went, 1999).

To illustrate the explanatory potential of the identity-interest-behavior causation in international relations, this paper examines key historical interactions between the United States, Iran, and Venezuela that contributed to the current perceptions of one another. Iran and Venezuela, regardless of being in completely opposite global regions, both have a foreign policy of resistance against domination and anti-imperialist rhetoric against the United States. Tracing historically how each country's current perception of the other evolved will help understand how the identity formation process of societies affects the likelihood that a state will view another as an enemy rather than an ally, or vice versa.

Social constructions in the international system are significant for a state that wants to preserve its hegemony in today's interconnected world. The United States retains more capacity than any other state to improve the quality of the international system (Buzan, 2009). My question is, to what extent is the United States hegemony affected by the presence of self-identified "anti-imperialist" states? Is it possible that past interventions in Latin America or in the Middle East have set into motion an ill perception of the United States in countries like Venezuela and Iran, which drove them to adopt their anti-hegemonic ideology? Does that affect the reach of hegemonic power? Considering that now are times of economic austerity and budget limitations, perhaps learning about social constructs might help the United States produce a well-

crafted foreign policy that applies political science to improve relations in the Middle East and Latin America simultaneously.

### **Literature review**

In the study of international relations, an approach that incorporates social constructions has to take into consideration the ongoing assumptions of an established perception of reality (Zehfuss, 2002). The moment one begins to study political science it becomes clear that there are established agreements among scholars and politicians. Realist theory is the oldest and most dominant approach to explain world phenomena within the field of international relations. Hence, mainstream realist theory has an effect on the way international relations are studied and understood, especially regarding interactions between states with uneasy relations, like the ones analyzed in this thesis.

Realism asserts that scientific theories ought to describe a reality that is largely independent of human thought. In other words, that reality exists independently of the observer (Boyd, 1983). The realist perspective draws intellectually from the materialist and individualist assumptions of Hobbes, Locke, and Bentham, in which the struggle for power is universal in time and space (Wendt, 1992). Realist theory assumes that since the world is in a state of anarchy, the condition of the system means states are forced to give in to their natural instinct to survive, and survival is tightly linked to a state's power relative to others in the international system. Realism is often presented in international relations as if it were a 'commonsense' view of the world against which all other perspectives should be judged. However, because national

interest can be construed to mean anything, realist explanations of world phenomena are limited social context of a given time and place (Sadri, 2013).

Realist theory sees security dilemma and balance of power as structural conditions, in which anarchy and self-help leaves states with no choice but to look after their security needs and expect the worst from others, which tends to lead to rising insecurity when states interpret the defensive capacity of others as a latent threat (Hertz, 1950). Under these assumptions, states react mainly to the arrangement of military capabilities within the system. But to assume that, by natural inertia, states are bound to always compete for power, is a depiction of the world that could be self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating, leading to unhealthy competition among states.

In this thesis would like to invoke the thinking of economist Steven Levitt when he said: “the modern world, despite a surfeit of obfuscation, complication, and downright deceit, is not impenetrable, is not unknowable, and if the right questions are asked, is even more intriguing than we think. All it takes is a new way of looking” (2011). Constructivist approaches might be this “new way of looking” for international relations.

Constructivism views the world that theories attempt to describe as constructed by society, which turns the ideational context of a given moment into a control variable in order for social theories to be interpreted realistically, and reduces the application of social sciences to the cognitive limitations of given social constructions (Boyd, 1983).

Constructivists criticize material-oriented worldviews because they disregard the social nature and content of state interests, as well as the role of social variables in world politics (Checkel, 2011), and it offers an approach to study how states’ identities and interest are formed and then pursued. States try to do what they perceive as exemplary behavior, or the right thing by

the community. Normative rationality of what a “good” state is supposed to behave like depends on social norms and institutions, assuming that these not only define social identities, but also regulates behavior (Nia, 2010). If states behavior is viewed through the lens of collective understandings, then security dilemmas are not given by self-help but, instead, are a social construction states believe in and they make worst-case assumptions about each other's intentions (Wendt, 1992).

If constructivist assumptions are used to analyze the international behavior of Iran and Venezuela, then they are understood as the result of a social phenomenon: both Iran and Venezuela were pushed by foreign entities (associated mainly with the United States) in a direction they did not want to go politically and economically. Grievances among the population produced a discourse against the way the United States exercises its power in the world. This discourse became the context for a desire for independence, understood as eliminating foreign influence through revolution. Both Iran and Venezuela ended up acquiring a revolutionary identity along with behavior associated with that identity. This fundamentally influences the manners by which they formulate foreign policy, and thus the way they behave in the international arena. Each state has shown ambitions to exert international leadership to challenge the international status quo, and each of them has petroleum wealth to leverage influence for that goal (Dodson and Dorraj, 2008).

## Research Design

For the analysis conducted in the present paper, I conceptualize reality as a socially constructed product of agreements among observers in the world (Mathias, 1999). I believe this definition captures the explanatory potential of constructivist theory, but also the significance of realist theory as the dominant approach to understanding international relations. I follow the assumption that a state will behave in accordance to its government's identity. States are hierarchical "corporate actors" with an authority structure capable of imposing binding decisions on their population and are intrinsically dependent on social context (Wendt, 2004).

Discourse is an agreed description of reality, and states are the institutions from which the government's discourse produces communities of agreement within society (Von Glaserfeld, 1995). It is in the best interest of governments to influence constituencies' understanding of what is appropriate or desired, and since collective ideas are socially constructed by interactions between the governments and their population over time, then Iran, Venezuela, and the United States, all have recognizable official themes which could be linked to historical events and analyzed to better understand the formation of state interests.

I decided to analyze Iran and Venezuela because of their seemingly unusual and warm alliance in spite of their cultural and geographic distance. Both governments stand together in the international realm, in an alliance that is knit together by a rejection of the current international order and the modus operandi of the United States government. In order to grasp the causes of the rivalry between Iran and Venezuela with the United States some context is needed beforehand. Perhaps their similar behavior is not caused by a material factor but by ideational forces instead.

Ideologies and identities are key to determine political orientations (like non-aligned, or anti-imperialist). Socially constructed values that link historical events and moral notions to citizens are summoned upon by leaders to define a political project, and through this process, consensus are generated resulting in a dominant national discourse. In arguing for history to be used as a predominant mode of inquiry, Barrett and Srivastva (1991) suggest that all organizational activity contains the stamp of past events as influences on the organization's present and future.

To determine which historical occurrences are significant requires a critique of observable events and the social structures that generated them (Wendt, 1987). Also, discourse itself contains the interpretation of historical events used to justify its tone. For example, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela said:

There are moments in which the entire flow of history reveals itself and determines the new path to be followed by the people. There are moments that become a compromise and an indication of a destiny that has to happen in order to calibrate the past and witness with clarity the libertarian horizon; such was the glorious [coup attempt of] February 4<sup>th</sup> of 1992 (Chavez, 2013).

By listening the government's message, it is obvious that the coup attempt in 1992 against a neo-liberal president is a significant event in shaping Venezuela's official discourse. By applying constructivist theory to study international relations, then it could be said that the nature of the international reality is the result of social interactions in a community of states that pursue their interest as defined by the context of a socially instituted perception. Within the limitations of context in a given time and place, social discourse is to state behavior what an independent variable is to a dependent variable.

By performing a historical inquiry of the nature and evolution of the international identity of Iran, Venezuela, and the United States, it is possible to determine the degree in which discourse impacted state's behavior, and to make an educated guess as to what relations would look like had one of the actors engaged in a different behavior than the one that led to the current situation. If the dynamics at work between national identity and state behavior could be identified, then capable countries like the United States could strategize and the roots of conflictual discourse could be managed.

## **Chapter 1: Iran-United States**

Diplomatic relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States have been turbulent and charged with mutual distrust since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Iranian leaders have been characterized as "crazy," "backward," "violent," by American politicians and media outlets. For instance, former President Richard Nixon described these leaders as "irrational" (Nixon, 1979) in the sense that attempting to have a serious dialogue would be ineffective. In a similar manner, Iran's supreme leader has depicted the United States as an imperial oppressor. He has criticized the United States government for being "arrogant, bullying, expansionist, and colonialist" with whom it is impossible to negotiate due to its corrupted tendencies (Khamenei, 2003). But this was not always the case; at one point Iran was one of the most precious U.S. allies in the Middle East. In order to understand how these two countries turned from being allies to existential enemies, the historical context from which the current hostile discourse emerged must be considered.

In the United States, the dominant social discourse that shapes national identity sprung from the notion of American exceptionalism, which took its current form when conservative thinkers assumed a triumphalist identity of national superiority after the Allies victory in World War II (McCoy, 2012). Based on the agreement that the American Revolution and the American Constitution promotes individual liberty, equality under the law, and democracy, then many Americans believe the United States possesses a unique qualitative superiority among countries (Wood, 2011). The United States adopted a vision of self as a crusader (Kissinger, 1994) and ever since, a combination of American exceptionalism with a status of unrivaled superpower has

resulted in a popular view that perceives the United States as the greatest force for good, and having a moral duty to lead the world to freedom (Boot, 2003).

With time, doubting exceptionalism is seen as "un-American" (McCoy, 2012). The assumption that the United States only acts in functions of its revolutionary values is socially ingrained in the American people since infancy, making it difficult for the population to face flaws in its moral history, such as slavery or cruelty against natives (Zinn, 1980). American exceptionalism has driven United States foreign policies into actions that were perceived as self-righteous and are used to justify deep-rooted resentment against the United States government in places like Iran and Venezuela. Becoming aware of how the dynamic of national identity affects international relations might reveal the way to creating lasting partnerships with rival states and achieve a new level of international cooperation. President Barack Obama acknowledged this possibility when he stated,

I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism (Kirchick, 2009)... but I see no contradiction between believing that America has a continued extraordinary role in leading the world towards peace and prosperity and recognizing that that leadership is incumbent, depends on, our ability to create partnerships because we can't solve these problems alone (Shear & Wilson, 2009).

Iranians certainly believe in Iranian exceptionalism as defined by their connection with their past and their revolutionary values. Iranians take pride in their civilization's rich history and their accomplishments in literature, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and art (Johnson, 2012). European powers have intruded Iranian territories since the fifteenth century, beginning with the Netherlands and Portugal, and later Britain and Russia (Johnson, 2012).

Because of its historical colonial experience, Iranians perceive the world as a hostile and threatening place. They tend to be concerned about foreign powers and their intentions within their country. Similarly to the American Revolution's rejection of foreign domination by the end of the nineteenth century, a perception that the Shah was *giving away* Iran's resources to foreigners enabled religious leaders and intellectuals to mobilize the people of Iran into demanding constitution to limit monarch's power to administer national resources (Hunter, 2010).

### **Historical Backdrop**

After the constitutional revolution, there have been a series of events in the interactions between Iran and the United States governments that became the context for both countries to create a social notion of the other. Iran sees the U.S. as an arrogant power that should not be trusted, while the U.S. views the Iranian leadership as an evil and irrational regime with whom no direct form of dialogue is worth having. The historical episodes that shaped these views begin with the CIA engineered coup d'état against Iranian prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh, followed by the U.S. unconditional support for the Shah for twenty-six years. Also, the Iranian Revolution that brought the Muslim clerics to power, the Hostage Crisis in which a group of students, encouraged by the revolution, took hostage the American embassy, and finally U.S. support for Saddam Hussein in its military venture into Iran. Each historical episode contributed to the construction of ideas that drive the relations of the United States and Iran even today. Understanding how these discourses were born can help understand how to strategize towards better relations in the future.

## **The CIA-Led Coup of 1953**

Iranians democratically elected a widely respected statesman and champion of nationalization, Mohammad Mosaddegh, as their prime minister (Abrahamian, 1982). The first event that crafted the current discourse regarding the United States in Iran happened after the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) was nationalized by Iran, as it wanted to be more independent and take control of its own resources. Emboldened by popular strikes and intense anti-colonialist sentiments, Mosaddegh decided that it was unfair for Iran's oil to be controlled by a single British company that kept most of the profits. By 1951 Iranian support for nationalization of the AIOC (today BP) was intense (Kinzer, 2003). Mossadegh was regarded as a national hero and he took on this role to make political, economic, and societal changes, directed at ridding Iran of “its reliance on foreign powers” (Latorre, 2006). After a unanimous vote of both houses in parliament, oil was nationalized in Iran (Abrahamian, 2008).

Iranian oil nationalization caused a reaction in Washington and London as policymakers recognized the West’s reliance on oil imports. The Eisenhower administration estimated in 1954 that the United States would be 90 per cent dependent on Middle Eastern oil by 1975 and that it would be indefensible from the Soviet Union in the event of supplies being lost (Marsh, 2007).

Within the context of post World War II American exceptionalism, and realist fundamentalism, President Eisenhower was advised by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and his brother CIA Director Allen Welsh Dulles, to execute a plan to remove Prime Minister Mosaddegh and gain control of Iran’s natural resources by force. The Dulles brothers used a moralistic outlook to justify extreme reactions to world phenomena, which they viewed in stark black and white. They believed in the Machiavellian notion that the actions they took would be

justified by the end result of perpetuation of U.S. economic dominance (Schlesinger, 1999). There was also concern that if the USSR gained access to Persian Gulf oil, it would acquire advantages with grave repercussions for western wartime capabilities and for peacetime economic reconstruction and rearmament (Marsh, 2007).

The decision to exercise American power with the Dulles brothers' CIA covert operation seemed as a success at the time. Mossadegh was removed, and the Shah, who would align Iran interest with those of the United States, was placed back to power in Tehran. Restoring the Shah's rule led to Iran becoming a client state of the United States, relying heavily on American support to stay in power. After the 1953 coup, the CIA (together with Israel's intelligence agency Mossad) assisted the Shah in establishing SAVAK, a domestic security and intelligence force used by the Shah to suppress popular uprisings and hold on to power. SAVAK soon penetrated every layer of Iranian society, creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust among the Iranian population (Sadri, 2009).

The twenty-six years of repression that followed the coup resulted in a powerful social idea that associates the Shah with foreign domination of Iran. The 1953 CIA coup against Mossadegh became a key event for the formation of an anti-hegemonic identity in the Iranian government, and now this anti-hegemonic identity determines how Iran behaves in the international arena (the discourse it adopts, the ideas it conceives, the interests it pursues).

This popular perception would determine the history of post-monarch Iran. It is from this time in Iranian history that the current national discourse of the Iranian government receives its inspiration. Ayatollah Khomeini would emerge from the post-coup period embracing an ideology that was fueled by mistrust of the West. He stated, "No state is truly independent unless it

confronts the hegemonic powers” (Sadri, 1999). All Iranian school children today know 1953 as the year when the United States carried out a covert violent operation to oppress Iran.

Backlash against the United States’ interventions have had a significant impact on Iran’s official discourse and foreign policy goals. For example, speaking about Operation AJAX, Supreme Leader Khamenei expressed:

The U.S. government has not yet lost its insatiable greed for domination of our country. They are still thinking of restoring their evil domination of Iran, which intensified with the coup on August 19, 1953, and continued until the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. They are still dreaming of the days when the head of state in this country, namely the corrupt and treacherous Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, made no decisions until he consulted with U.S. officials” (Khamenei, 2002).

With his message against U.S. political interventions in Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini emerged as a political and spiritual opposition leader during the Shah’s oppressive era. His message resonated with the Iranian public, which had been harvesting a long repressed hatred for the Shah and his allies for his campaign to secularize Iran, dismissing Islam as a backward force, and bringing forth rapid social change and instability. Ayatollah Khomeini became a revered figure by multitudes of Iranian people (Christ, 2012).

### **U.S. Unconditional Support for the Shah**

President Nixon continued U.S. support for the Shah in what was known as the twin pillar strategy, in which the Saudi and Iranian regimes were the most important strategic energy partners for the United States government (Christ, 2012). President Carter even forged a personal

friendship with the Shah. When they ushered in the New Year 1978 together at a party in the Niavaran palace in Tehran Carter stated, “Because of the great leadership of the Shah, Iran is an island of stability in one of the more troubled areas of the world... There is no leader with whom I have a deeper sense of personal gratitude and personal friendship,” (Armstrong, 1980). It is precisely because of continuous American support for the Shah, who was perceived as a puppet of the West and a tyrant, that the United States was widely seen as intrusive, exploitative, unilateralist, hypocritical, and engaging in what they label ‘financial imperialism’ and ‘cultural colonialism’ (Huntington, 1999).

On January 7, 1978, an article published in a government newspaper ridiculed Ayatollah Khomeini, questioning his religious credentials and even his sexual preference. Khomeini’s supporters, in an extraordinary response, staged a series of massive demonstrations to demand the removal of the Shah. Troops were sent to restore social order and hundreds of Iranians were killed in Jaleh Square on a day that is remembered today as “Black Friday” (Abrahamian, 2008). Today’s Iranian leaders tell people that the suffering they endured at Jaleh Square was because of the doings of an evil Shah who was supported by the United States and Israel. This is significant because in many ways it is true, and it makes it easy to justify current Iranian anti-hegemonic foreign policy.

A few days after Black Friday, President Carter called the Shah and ensured continued American support. The Shah published the exchange verbatim in the newspapers, which angered the Iranian masses as they perceived it as though the United States stood behind a government that had just shot down thousands of unarmed civilians in Jaleh Square, fueling hatred of the Shah and its Washington enabler (Christ, 2012).

The kind of discourse that gets triggered by the hegemon's approach to a political situation abroad will yield the ideational context for future identities, interests, and foreign policies. When President Carter refused to accept the reality that Khomeini was the result of a salient grievance among the Iranian population, it then left the new Iranian leadership with no choice but to consider the United States' government as an existential enemy. Hence, the United States lent the foundation for a social identity in Iran not only of itself (as revolutionaries) but also of the United States (as oppressors).

As discontent for the Shah and his foreign allies grew and public support for Khomeini became more evident in Iran, the U.S. ambassador in Tehran, William Sullivan, advocated for the United States to engage in conversations with the Iranian opposition. In a memo titled "Thinking the Unthinkable," Sullivan expressed that the Shah's downfall was inevitable, and that a more moderate and democratic regime would replace his monarchy (The Jerusalem Post, 2012). Sullivan observed that any post-Shah government would require Khomeini's support to facilitate an orderly transfer of power to a new democratic government, and the sooner Washington recognized this the better for America's standing in the future Iran (Christ, 2012).

The U.S. Embassy had worked toward an arrangement between the Iranian military and the evident new regime, making a deal in which detailed understandings were reached between the armed forces and the revolutionary leaders for a transfer of allegiance. The plan was discussed with the Shah, and he approved. On the day of the meeting with Khomeini, the mission was cancelled (Lewis, 1980). Carter's security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, viewed the issue mainly in realist terms of the Cold War and he preferred a military intervention to ensure a pro-U.S. leader in Iran.

As the world's superpower, the United States has a unique consequential effect on the future of another nation's political identity. Cancellation of the mission must have given the Ayatollah no reason to believe Washington respected Iranian self-determination. The U.S. could have approached the situation differently on the leading moments to the Iranian revolution, but the most striking pattern is a disregard for the sentiments and perception of the Iranian people. It is as if the leadership of the United States at the time did not think that public discontent was significant at all. The Iranian revolution was brought forth by forcing the system to surrender through popular resistance.

President Carter sent a message to Khomeini asking him to support the government appointed by the Shah in order to prevent a military coup. Khomeini answered that the prime minister was not legitimate, and that the Iranian army is "in the hands of the Americans", he continued, "if there is a coup, people will know that it is American and they will resist it" (Christ, 2012). This shows very clearly the Ayatollah's emotional rejection of the idea of American influence inside Iran.

After a year of intense public demonstrations, a parade of five prime ministers in less than a year, and the departure of the Shah from Iran, the Islamic Revolution brought Khomeini to power in February 1979. A BBC reporter in Tehran described the mass demonstrations in favor of Khomeini as being "extraordinary that one man can command such adoration, how so many people can believe that this old priest holds all the answers to Iran's problems". Undoubtedly, the people of Iran had a sense of hope that Khomeini was a just and intelligent man and that he wouldn't betray Iran. These ideas were the product of the Shah's dictatorship, which gave the masses the naïve notion that one person could reverse the massive social discontent. When

Khomeini arrived back to Iran from exile the welcoming was overwhelming; the army declared itself neutral to the political situation, and Khomeini appointed a new government, taking over the ministries, the armed forces, and the media.

### **The 1979 Hostage Crisis**

Khomeini's message of blaming America for everything that is wrong, coupled with the fact that President Carter gave the former Shah political asylum in the U.S. led Iranians to suspect that the U.S. was planning another 1953-style coup to return the Shah to the throne once more (Sadri, 2007). This suspicion peaked in November 1979 when a group of students stormed and took over the American Embassy in Tehran demanding the Shah's extradition from the United States. Ayatollah Khomeini gave them his blessings. For Americans, the hostage crisis took an emotional toll, and it ultimately established the rhetoric and ideational context of Iran for a whole generation of Americans.

This moment marked the complete break in US-Iranian diplomatic relations, and it poisoned all future interactions until this day. A reporter asked President Carter at a news conference during the hostage crisis, "Mr. President, do you think it was proper for the United States to restore the Shah to the throne in 1953 against the popular will within Iran?" to which Carter replied "That's ancient history" (Kinzer, 2008). But this was the main reason that prompted the students to move on the American embassy in a day that in Iran is remembered as the Conquest of the American Spy Den. For the Iranian leadership, the hostage crisis represented a demonstration of assertiveness and of taking control of Iran's sovereignty and

independence from foreign actors. This single incident drove all moderates out from the revolutionary government, and it radicalized the Iranian regime in the eyes of the Americans. Later that month Khomeini assumed the position of Supreme Leader and the U.S. imposed economic sanctions on Iran banning its oil imports.

After a series of deals in which the U.S. returned all frozen assets back to the Iranian government, and after a humiliating hold up at the airport to ensure the hostages would not be freed under Carter's presidency, the hostages finally left Iran. The Iranian Hostage Crisis resulted in no deaths, and everyone was released as soon as President Reagan took office under the condition that the U.S. would never interfere with Iranian internal matters ever again (Sadri, 2007). But it created the perception that Iran does not abide by international norms in the eyes of many in America.

### **U.S. Support for Iraq During the Iraq-Iran War**

The following year the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Iraq and, in Iran's perception, gave Iraq the green light to invade Iran. President Ronald Reagan sent a special envoy, Donald Rumsfeld, to Baghdad to discuss ways the United States could help Saddam. In the wake of his visits, Washington provided Iraq with aid, including helicopters and satellite intelligence that was used in selecting bombing targets (Kinzer, 2008). It was clear to Iran that the West had not only allowed Saddam to break international law, but it had also armed Iraq to help him win. No one would sell weapons to Iran.

To witness the American support of a foreign aggression that cost it roughly 1 million lives created a greater anti-American feeling in Iran. Also, the U.S. provided chemical weapons to Iraq which it later used against Iran and that the United Nations failed to do something about Saddam's use of such weapons was proof to Iranian leaders that the super powers were not to be trusted, for they will disregard international law like the Geneva Convention that condemns the use of chemical weapons, as long as they are used against independent minded states like Iran. The U.S. might have wanted Iraq to stop using chemical weapons, but at the same time it did not want Iran to win the war, so it decided to give it a blind eye (Schultz, 2009). The Iranian leadership felt as if they were not only fighting Saddam, but they were fighting against the world.

### **Aftermath**

The history between Iran and the United States has made each side view the other as an enemy rather than a rival state. Rivals exist in healthy competition like sport teams (perhaps how the U.S. sees China today). Enemies threaten one another because of who they are. Opposing worldviews make them mutually unacceptable, and they seek to convert or eliminate the other. A savage enemy is an indispensable part of the political identity of the Islamic Republic, thus, Iran's foreign policy in dealing with the United States is based on a worldview of "good versus evil". The idea is considered a mission of justice, freedom and truth against a "great Satan." The discourse of enemy that resulted from the repeated intervention shows that Iran has deep mistrust of the outside world, especially the West.

Iran's constitution after the revolution makes negating hegemony and subjugation a national duty and part of the Iranian revolutionary identity. U.S. economic sanctions and past

endeavors in Iran could be the primary cause of extremism in the Iranian government, which since its beginnings feels vulnerable and exposed to super-powers. Anti-hegemony and non-alignment serves as a defense mechanism to diminish their lesser capabilities. The Iranian leadership has adopted an anti-status quo discourse in its international relations as to resist the “domination” of the United States.

Although debatable, Iranians perceive that the U.S. government has never sent clear signals that it intends to improve relations and play by the rules. The U.S. leadership is constantly calling for a regime change in Iran. Because of this, Iran’s leaders see the hard economic, military, and political sanctions as an outright aggression against the Iranian people, and will not change their behavior unless they see a meaningful intension from the leaders of the United States to ease the sanction assaults against their sovereignty.

Today the relations between Iran and the United States are dominated by concerns over Iran’s nuclear program. The United States accuses Iran of trying to acquire weapons of mass destruction in spite of the fact that after the 1979 revolution, a clandestine, Shah era, nuclear weapons research program was disbanded by Khomeini through a public religious decree (fatwa) against the development, production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons which he considered forbidden under Muslim ethics and jurisprudence (Khamenei, 2010), and that Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said he had never “been able to find evidence that Iran has been weaponizing”, in terms of building nuclear-weapons facilities and using enriched materials (Hersh, 2011). The intelligence community in the United States corroborates this. In a 2007 report, the CIA stated that Tehran “is less determined to develop nuclear weapons than we have been judging” and that “some combination of threats

of intensified international scrutiny and pressures, along with opportunities for Iran to achieve its security, prestige, and goals for regional influence in other ways, might—if perceived by Iran’s leaders as credible—prompt Tehran to extend the current halt to its nuclear weapons program” (NIE, 2007).

The grievances expressed by the Iranian people all revolve around a perceived the lack of respect for their territorial dignity. Investigative journalist illustrates the complaints of the Iranian regime in an interview when he states:

Cheney, the former vice president, was convinced there was a secret [nuclear] facility... He was convinced there was an underground facility somewhere. And we had Special Forces units in there since '04, really, perhaps as late as '05, looking. We've been paying off people—the Kurds, the Azeris, the opposition groups. We've been giving a lot of money to various defectors. We've been looking with satellites for telltale signs, air holes, air vents, somewhere in the desert or somewhere in an arid area. And we've found nothing, not for lack of trying. We looked very hard. And there's just no evidence on the inside (Hersh, 2011).

The United States seems more preoccupied with Iran having nuclear capabilities and expertise than anything else. It was perhaps the U.S. unconcerned attitude towards the use of unconventional weapons against Iranian soldiers during the Iraq-Iran war that convinced Iranian leaders that they needed latent nuclear weapons capabilities. Latency is the possession of sophisticated scientific establishment and of nuclear energy infrastructure, which would allow the production of an atomic bomb on short notice if an extreme danger to national autonomy seemed imminent (Cole, 2009). But to pressure Iran to give up its nuclear program and "surrender" might, in reality, make Iran more determined to develop its nuclear program, which it currently insists has exclusively peaceful civilian purposes.

Iran faces cyber attacks, scientist assassinations, and sanctions on medicine and foodstuff from outside actors. Because of this, Iranians feel they cannot give anything in the negotiating table in order to avoid looking weak. Iran's Supreme Leader has stated, "Rights cannot be achieved by entreating. If you supplicate, withdraw and show flexibility, arrogant powers will make their threat more serious" (Sadjadpour, 2008).

Because the United States sees Iran as an existential enemy, it is determined to prevent it from becoming a real threat. The method employed by the U.S. to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capabilities is rough economic sanctions, and indeed, the Iranian economy is feeling the pain. But the economic problems caused by the sanctions might prove to be counterproductive at achieving Washington's goal of weakening the Islamic regime. Under the sanctions, to import anything merchants have to be aligned with the regime because it will have to be smuggled, which is very difficult without government involvement. Their basic effect has been to weaken civil society and strengthen the state — the opposite of what we should be trying to do in that country (Zakaria, 2011). Perhaps the most regrettable effect the sanctions could have is making people develop deep resentment and discontent towards Western nations for strangling their economy and for hurting them more than the regime.

An Iranian diplomat in Caracas told me that the issue between Iran and the United States is not its nuclear program, but that it is the United States anxiety over an independent state like Iran reaching its full capacities (Nikahd, 2012). He refers to the U.S. preoccupation with what the CIA report that stated, "We assess with high confidence that Iran has the scientific, technical and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons if it decides to do so" (NIE, 2007). This diplomat expressed his confidence that it is the United States most important foreign

policy goal to ensure that no challenger to American predominance shall emerge in the world. Iran has all the requirements to become a formidable deterrence for the U.S. in the Middle East, and a hegemon would never tolerate deterrence.

The main obstacle for improvement is that the U.S. does not try to understand the government and society that have emerged in Iran since the Islamic revolution. U.S. policy makers are in the dark about Tehran's true intentions, and thus they assume the worst (Sadri, 2007). A policy that is meant to bring the Iranian regime to its knees and beg for forgiveness is precisely what makes Iranian leaders hang on and resist. They will not tolerate a move that embarrasses them or undermines Iran's dignity and honor. If U.S. leaders were to deal directly and respectfully with Iran, they would be more likely to understand the justifications for Iran's resistance policies and could then work toward a solution based on mutual understanding.

## **Chapter 2: USA-Venezuela**

Venezuela and the United States have had stable bilateral relations regardless of geopolitical disagreements. Venezuela has historically been able to combine its alliance with the United States with positions like being a founding member of OPEC, among others. Since refineries on the U.S. Gulf Coast are specifically designed to handle heavy Venezuelan crude, Venezuela was the third-largest exporter of petroleum products to the United States from 2002 through 2009, hence the Venezuelan economy is deeply interconnected to the United States and international oil markets (EIA, 2012). U.S. goods account for 25% of Venezuela's imports, and 60% of its exports go to the United States (Bonfili, 2010).

But since the turn of the century this tradition of close ties, commerce, and investment has been overshadowed by political animosity since the Venezuelan government adopted an emancipatory attitude towards the United States. To understand how the Venezuela-U.S. relations went from partnership to a national security concern, it is necessary to discuss the worldview of president Hugo Chavez and the normative narrative of his Bolivarian Revolution.

Chavez was perhaps best known for his offensive foreign policy and his posture against the United States. As in the case of Iran, a revolutionary government that portrays the United States as an exploitative imperial power has taken control through a popular movement in Venezuela. Since then, Chávez focused his foreign policy to repel U.S. influence from Latin America, assert his worldview in the region, and show that developing countries are better off independent of Washington's wishes. The chavista ideology is a mixture of ideals; on international affairs, Chavez draws his inspiration from Simon Bolivar, the Venezuelan military

and political leader who led the independence movement against the Spanish Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chavez managed to successfully associate Bolivar's struggle against colonialism with his own struggle against exploitative foreign imperialists and neo-liberals.

Domestically, Chavez exhibited Castro-style populism; he established a series of social welfare programs he called "missions" implemented with extensive Cuban expertise. Chavismo promotes a combative stance against what Chavez refers to as "the savage capitalism that Washington intends to impose on [Latin America]" (Chavez, 2013).

### **Historical Backdrop**

There are four events in Venezuelan history that are referred to often by the Venezuelan government to justify its international behavior. First, the riots and killings known as the *caracazo* of 1989; a series of protests and lootings that culminated in a massacre by the hands of national security forces, popularly perceived as catering to international financial institutions. Second, the 1992 failed coup d'état that followed the *caracazo* riots and catapulted then Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chavez to the national spotlight. Third, the 1998 landslide presidential election of Hugo Chavez, and finally, the 2002 coup attempt against President Chavez by pro-business elites who were allegedly supported by the Bush administration. These four historical moments represent the moral justifications in the chavista official narrative for their angst against free market economic policies, the United States foreign policy towards Latin America, and for the current anti-imperialist foreign policy of Venezuela.

Latin America's search for identity has been profoundly entangled with its relationship with the United States. Resistance to the U.S. is an integral part of national self-assertion in Latin America. As early as the early nineteenth century, the U.S. President James Monroe stated: “we should consider any attempt on [foreign entities] to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.” With what came to be known as the “Monroe Doctrine,” President Monroe adopted a dominant role over the entire American continent, and laid down the mental outlook for United States’ foreign policy in the region for centuries to come, turning hemispheric domination into full-fledged foreign policy (Erikson, 2008).

By the end of the nineteenth century, vast oil reserves were discovered in Venezuela, turning it into a strategic market for U.S. oil companies, and the American model became the foundation for the private economy of Venezuela (McManus, 2003). Since the 1960s Washington gave its full support to anti-communist regimes, often welcoming right-wing military governments in spite of popular discontent. For Chavez supporters, U.S. imperialism concentrated on the establishment and preservation of spheres of influence in Latin America as to extend control through informal means of economic and political relations. This way it would be possible to obtain the benefits of imperialism at a minimum cost. Many in Venezuela are quick to point out that interventions by the U.S. in Latin America have consistently been intended to legitimize the acceptance of a dominant status quo.

### **The Caracazo**

Turbulent social events can generate drastic and antagonist changes that manifest in norms and customs of society, affecting its identity (Mirabal, 1996). The caracazo marked the beginning of a social process that produced the anti-American discourse that currently drives

Venezuelan foreign policy. By the late 1980s the Venezuela government was going through an economic crisis due to a steady decline in the international oil prices. The International Monetary Fund (perceived as an extension of the United States government by most Venezuelans) encouraged the Venezuelan government to execute various measures in order to secure billions of dollars in loans. These measures included public austerity, the elimination of subsidies, freezing of salaries, and raising prices of fuels by 100% overnight.

These measures were extremely unpopular in Venezuela, especially among the urban poor who saw the economic reforms as unfairly trying to resolve the state's fiscal crisis by placing the burden onto the poor people (Lindsay, 2012). Venezuela's poor experienced considerable rage against the Washington inspired structural reforms on the one hand, but inability to mobilize this anger constructively on the other hand (Kohli, 2009). On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989, massive protests erupted all over Caracas among the urban poor to protest the liberalization package.

It was the way that the Venezuelan government decided to react to the protests that would set a national discourse into motion for years to come. The armed forces were called in by President Perez to control the situation and to repress acts of violence. Official figures cite less than 300 deaths, but this numbers were invalidated by the appearance of mass graves (Inter-American Court, 1999). Some estimate the number of casualties in the thousands (Robertson, 2011). Young inexperienced soldiers fired at unarmed civilians, many executed at close range, in an attempt to stop the social upheaval (Ciccariello, 2012).

President Perez suspended basic constitutional guarantees including individual freedom, right to immunity of domicile, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, right of assembly, and right to take part in peaceful manifestations; a nationwide 6pm-to-6am curfew was imposed and hundreds of arrests were reported (Inter-American Court, 1999). Many perceived that the Venezuelan government's main objective was to guarantee the social stability that is so precious to international investors, and the political elite and the media portrayed the killings as a "necessary measure to safeguard the social order in a period of neoliberal restructuring" (Coronil, 2011).

Perhaps for a lack of a better scapegoat, Chavez's government portrays the events of the *caracazo* as a fight against the Washington Consensus. Officials turned the massacre into an emotionally charged historical moment, like the way Americans think of the Boston Tea-party. Chavez said:

The day came when the fields and streets were filled with blood and courage! When the Venezuelan people gave an example of historical awareness, said no to the International Monetary Fund and neo-liberalism, and took to the streets on 27 February 1989! Long live the martyrs of the people! (BBC, 2005).

Chavez supporters consider the events of February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989 as the foundation of the Bolivarian Revolution. It gave conspiring members of the armed forces the necessary assurance they needed to take arms against what they described as a "murderous regime".

## **The 1992 coup**

It was under this social-political environment that Hugo Chavez and other military officers carried out their plan to overthrow the government of Carlos Andres Perez on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1992. Chavez mentioned that his military movement sprang up as a reaction to the US-led overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende, but he added that the caracazo was a defining event in the establishment of a revolutionary identity among many Venezuelans. Chavez explained:

[The caracazo was] the trigger that marked the start of the offensive because the Venezuelan people were saying no to neo-liberalism and we soldiers had been the armed force of the IMF (referring to the caracazo massacre)... If imperialists ever mess with Venezuela, they will have to face the people of Bolivar who will be willing to defend their sovereignty and dignity! (BBC, 2005).

Today the Chavez' regime celebrates February 4<sup>th</sup> as a national holiday called "Day of National Dignity" in which the failed coup attempt is described to the population as a struggle for liberation. This is the type of discourse that has become the context for the international identity of Venezuela.

The Chavez-led coup failed to take control of the government, and he and many of his men were arrested. But it was successful at turning Hugo Chavez into a national hero; many saw him as someone who was willing to stand up to a corrupt and dysfunctional political system. His popularity was so high that presidential candidates in 1994 promised to release the coup plotters as a campaign promise. After spending two years in prison, Chavez was pardoned by incoming president Rafael Caldera in 1994 (Carlson, 2013).

## **The Elections of 1998**

The dialectic dynamic between history and social forces can transform societies, sometimes radically, resulting in the opposite behavior of what it had traditionally been (Mirabal, 1996). The coup attempt forced Venezuelan people to undergo a deep reflection, and to desire political rectification. Popular masses and political groups felt excluded in the early 1990's and had no enthusiasm for the defense of institutions and constitutional order. People, feeling that their politicians had failed them and that democracy and freedom were not securing them access to food and shelter, were craving a different message; one that would address the causes of the *caracazo* and the military uprising.

Chavez embodied the sentiment that democracy cannot exist if people are not eating, and that Latin American democracies have to rethink their partnership with international financial cartels. He enjoyed impressive popular support, and he ran for the Venezuelan presidency on a platform that looked for viable alternatives that were more responsive to local conditions in the economic, social, and political spheres than the one-size-fits-all model of market-oriented liberal democracy (Cannon, 2011). Chavez appealed to the population by successfully associating foreign bankers with the colonial oppressors of the past. Like Simon Bolivar had promised to throw out the imperial masters, Chavez promised to throw out the neo-liberal international capitalists with their economic packages and one-sided trading propositions. Chavez's populist message appealed to the working classes and an electoral coalition with leftist elements proved unstoppable; he won in landslide in 1998 (Sylvia & Danopoulos, 2003).

## **The 2002 Coup**

Oil was key for Chavez to be able to re-distribute Venezuela's wealth and finance the social reforms he had in mind for the country. Energy interests had historically driven the relations between the U.S. and Venezuela, and Chavez had been the only president in Venezuela's history to pursue far-reaching changes at home that would support a truly independent economic policy. These reforms included a new hydrocarbons law that declared the oil industry under the domain of the Venezuelan government, and increased royalties paid by foreign corporations from 16.6% to 30% in a move to redirect more petroleum earnings to address Venezuela's social needs (Kozloff, 2006).

In the same fashion of Prime Minister Mossadegh, the hydrocarbons reform was a direct blow against economic elites and American interests in the region. The hydrocarbons law was portrayed by the government as a step to re-connect the nation's wealth with the social development of Venezuela. Tapping into collective frustration and perceived opportunism by trans-national companies, the hydrocarbons reform was seen as a patriotic wish to advance, to progress, and some called it a second independence.

In the United States, relations with Venezuela are usually framed in the context of highlighting the vulnerability of energy dependence on foreign (rather hostile) suppliers. Because of this, the United States' anxiety about Hugo Chavez's radical populist government revolves around the concern that it might become uncooperative, or inefficient at keeping up with oil production. Hugo Chavez quickly became a hated figure among the United States government and Venezuelan wealthy population (Gunson, 2001). His demonization of banks, crack down on the media, anti-status quo rhetoric, and manipulation of his political base with

generous handouts, fomented a desire to remove Chavez and his popular movement from office among factions wanting to regain political control of Venezuelan natural resources.

On April 11, 2002, opposition leaders organized a massive demonstration with a message that quickly evolved from protesting Chavez's hydrocarbons reforms to demanding the president's resignation. Later that day, 19 people were shot dead and the opposition media outlets blamed government forces for the killings. Major civilian figures insisted that it was no longer possible to tolerate a government that supposedly had soiled its hands with the blood of the people. In the early morning hours of Friday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, President Chavez was arrested and replaced by Pedro Carmona, the head of Venezuela's business confederation and widely perceived as being friendly to U.S. interests. The coup plotters proceeded to annul the constitution, and dissolve all public bodies (Sylvia & Danopoulos, 2003).

While all other hemispheric leaders were condemning the interim government in Venezuela, Bush administration Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, stated that Chavez had provoked his own downfall for having attacked protesters. "We know that the action encouraged by the Chavez government provoked this crisis," Fleischer said. "According to the best information available, the Chavez government suppressed peaceful demonstrations and fired on unarmed, peaceful protesters" (Fleischer, 2002).

It was later proved that the images used to justify the arrest of President Chavez were manipulated to make believe that government forces were firing at protesters. Another video taken at exactly the same time surfaced, showing Metropolitan Police officers on foot and from armored vehicles shooting at the chavistas while they fired back (Coronil, 2011). There was an immediate rejection of Carmona and massive spontaneous protests and sectors of the army

returned Chavez to power on April 13th.

As business groups were threatening the Chavez presidency, the United States government was financing factions within these groups (Marquis, 2002). The U.S. Department of State stated, “It is clear that National Endowment for Democracy, Department of Defense, and other U.S. assistance programs provided training, institution building, and other support to individuals and organizations understood to be actively involved in the brief ouster of the Chavez government” (2002). The permissive attitude by the United States to what was perceived as an undemocratic interim government gave Chavez supporters the impression that the United States had at least tolerated or encouraged the 2002 coup. The Central Intelligence Agency was aware that dissident military officers and opposition figures in Venezuela were planning a coup against President Hugo Chávez. But immediately after the overthrow, the Bush administration blamed Mr. Chávez for his own downfall and denied knowing about the threats (Forero, 2004).

Today, the Venezuelan government depicts the 2002 coup as an illegal action by the Chamber of Commerce, the private media, and the American embassy. This illegal action is explained as being defeated by the hard work of patriotic warriors that remained loyal to the defense of national sovereignty, integrity, and dignity. He used this event to turn PDVSA into a personal, unchecked, branch of his government. And to prevent any other major challenge, he staffed the government and the armed forces based on loyalty (or lack of will) rather than merit and character, and he surrounded himself with Cuban security. After the 2002 coup Chavez began to portray the United States as a dangerous enemy to Venezuela; one that would take any opportunity to regain its influence over Venezuelan national resources. Some believed that President Bush was not concerned with promoting democracy in Venezuela, but with merely

getting rid of Chavez through very illiberal means (Cole, 2007).

Today Venezuela is suffering a mismanagement of its economy and social institutions. Corruptions is among the worst in the world, ranking 165 out of 176 (Transparency International, 2010), crime is perhaps the most cited concern among the urban population, and the harassment and exclusion of non-chavistas is quite shameless. Venezuelans may come to realize that Chavez wasted a colossal opportunity to endow their country with the necessary infrastructure for sustained development and the best social services, but as of now, it seems this lesson has not been learned (The Economist, 2013).

### **Aftermath**

Historically, Venezuela has always exhibited international activism based on the belief that the Venezuelan model ought to be imitated by other countries in the world. “Follow the example given by Caracas” are lyrics of the Venezuelan National Anthem. Simon Bolivar thought so when he initiated his military campaigns outside of Venezuela. The Chavista project is no different, as government officials in Caracas equate it with a revolutionary mission of global scale (Romero, 2006). The institutionalized historical context of Venezuela’s worldview as explained by the chavista interpretation, turned Venezuela’s foreign service into a branch of Mr. Chavez’s revolution, and redefined the strategic perception of what is “good” for Venezuela.

Today Venezuelan’s foreign policy is shaped by a belief that the U.S. seeks to dominate Latin America’s national economies, and because of this, independence from U.S. markets has been made a rather unrealistic priority. The new anti-imperialist identity of the Venezuelan government has transformed its foreign interests into advocating the creation of an international

coalition to reduce U.S. influence in the region. Hugo Chavez pioneered the creation of regional organizations that will increase Venezuela's voice in the Western Hemisphere and advocate a multipolar world-order to alleviate the "predatory effects" of neoliberal trade policies "imposed by US hegemony" on weaker countries (Dodson and Dorraj, 2008). Some examples of these organizations include ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America), which envisions becoming an alternative to the IMF and World Bank for the region, focusing mainly on economic aid, social welfare, poverty reduction, bartering, and overall integration.

Another example is PetroCaribe, an international social program that provides discounted oil and wide reaching social components to poor Caribbean nations. Venezuela also promoted the creation of a multistate oil company formed by the national oil companies of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Venezuela named PetroSur , and the creation of TeleSUR, a pan-Latin American TV channel, meant to counter channels like CNN and to promote the integration of Latin American countries (Smith, 2004).

Although Chavez dealt with plenty of opposition, he enjoyed a strong body of support domestically. Some people I met in Venezuela have adopted the official line so religiously that their personal identity is based first around the fact that they are chavistas; they see Hugo Chavez as an extension of themselves. His message managed to persuade the biggest population in the country, the poorest people, including the slum population, to embrace his interpretation of history. They not only supported Hugo Chavez but they also adored him. Being chavista is not just a political view that one can be talked out of, but it is a life-style. I had to be tactful and relaxed about sharing my thoughts of what "could be better" about some of Chavez's policies, because supporters might take government criticism personal and offensive.

As I write this paper news broke out that Hugo Chavez lost his battle against cancer. The Venezuelan government's identity is based so heavily on Chavez's worldview that it is to be seen what shape will it take after his death. Nicolas Maduro, the defacto president of Venezuela after Chavez's death, does not have the authority and charisma Chavez did. Now that the elections of 2012 are over, the Venezuelan economy is in trouble. Shortages of commonly used products are widespread as well as shortages of foreign currencies. There is a rationing system in place to control foreign exchange, and Maduro already devalued the Venezuelan Bolivar by 32% in February (The Economist, 2013). Politically, the only thing Maduro has in his favor is that Chavez anointed him as the successor, and his political message seems to consist on securing a sympathy vote from Chavez supporters.

It is to be seen how Chavez's death will affect Venezuela's international relations with the United States and with Iran. Upon news of Chavez's death president Ahmadinejad said, "Hugo Chavez is a name known to all nations. His name is a reminder of cleanliness and kindness, bravery...dedication, and tireless efforts to serve the people, especially the poor and those scarred by colonialism and imperialism" (George, 2013). His words exemplify the tenants on which Iran and Venezuela's relations are based: personal friendship of leaders and a commitment to anti-hegemony. Obama said, "At this challenging time of President Hugo Chavez's passing the United States reaffirms its support for the Venezuelan people and its interest in developing a constructive relationship with the Venezuelan government" (Alpert, 2013); his message also shows the nature of the relations between the U.S. and Venezuela, which is more based on mutual interests than in solidarity or friendship.

It is now that the U.S. must play its cards in a way that it could regain some of its lost influence in the region and become a good productive partner for all countries in Latin America. Given the significant power of national discourse on shaping the foreign behavior of nations, engaging in the right type of diplomacy could set in motion a pattern of behavior that will prove to be extremely beneficial to the United States and the region.

### **Chapter 3: Iran-Venezuela**

The phrase “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” has been used to describe alliances that are rooted in cooperation against a shared adversary. It is evident that the Iran-Venezuela alliance is not a coincidence and that it is knit together by distrust for United States foreign policies and a desire to boost south-to-south cooperation and alliances, as to free themselves from the influences of the United States (Dorraj, 2010). The political and economic alliance between Iran and Venezuela could be understood as different manifestations of the same phenomena. A perception of American foreign policy as egotistic, and solely interested on controlling natural resources has birthed a two headed monster: two revolutionary governments that promote an anti-imperialist ideology from which their international interests and anti-hegemonic identities have been defined.

Both Iran and Venezuela try restlessly to infuse a certain narrative into the everyday vocabulary of their people. Anti-hegemony, resistance, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism, are concepts that both governments embrace passionately and they encourage their populations to do the same. From this discourse is that the ideas and values that drive Venezuela and Iran’s international behavior spring from. Chavez and Ahmadinejad shared anti-hegemony as their ideological backbone of their foreign policy. They see each other as fellow revolutionaries on the same side of a geopolitical struggle against an international status quo of core and periphery countries. This kind of rhetoric seems to be one of most unifying features of the relationship between the two nations, from which they created a “cozy financial, political, and [to a lesser degree] military partnership rooted in anti-American animus” (Morgenthau, 2009).

In my conversation with an Iranian diplomat in Caracas, he made a comparison between the relations of Venezuela and both the United States and Iran. He said, “the relations between Iran and Venezuela are based on mutual respect and trust, they exemplify solidarity and a desire for cooperation and sovereignty is always honored.” He added, “relations between Venezuela and the United States are based on interests (mineral fuels and oil) and on domination (exercising hegemony)... the United States has a complete disregard for the democratic character of the Venezuelan revolution and would gladly intervene in Venezuela domestic affairs” (Nikahd, 2012). His comment is the perfect example of the official pitch in Venezuela concerning the increasing Iranian presence. Iran has doubled its embassies and cultural centers in Latin America since 2005, but nowhere has Iran’s search for allies been more fruitful than in Venezuela, where by far the highest Iranian presence is exhibited in the region today (Morgan, 2010).

There has been increasing anxiety in Washington about Iran’s foreign policy towards Venezuela, and the warm welcome exhibited by some Latin American countries to Iranian diplomats. There are two narratives in the United States concerning the Iran- Venezuela friendship. One that sees it as an “axis of annoyance” which main goal is to generate angst against Washington (Pressly, 2009). The other sees the sudden increase of Iran’s relations in Latin America as a “hostile provocations” in the Western Hemisphere that must be confronted (U.S. Congress, 2012). But since the force driving their sudden closeness is a perception of the U.S. as being interventionist, the manner in which the United States responds [or not] to their growing ties will have a critical effect on the dynamics between Iran and Venezuela. Overreacting could easily set into motion a discourse that could deepen anti-American sentiments in both regions.

Because of past CIA ventures in places like Guatemala, Cuba, and Chile, as well as in Iran, the United States has gained a reputation in Latin America and the Middle East of patronizing repressive governments that represented American interests. Accusations blaming the U.S. of smothering popular movements created resentment towards foreign interference, which is exploited daily by politicians in both Iran and Venezuela. The sudden surge of diplomatic activity between Iran and Venezuela is caused by a mutual understanding of being on the same side of a geopolitical struggle against oppressive super-powers. They see the fight for a more plural and just world as their constitutional duty and moral crusade, and so they push an anti-American message on their constituencies so they can pursue a revolutionary alternative to what they see as American imperialism.

This is all happening at a time when there is a popular notion in Latin America that the United States does not care about the region, and as a consequence American influence has probably never been lower than now (Associated Press, 2008). This marked an opportunity for Iran to build up its influence and a foothold in a region that Washington has always regarded as its own backyard. The Ahmadinejad administration saw the growing anti-US sentiments in Latin America as a strategic opportunity to embark in a diplomatic offensive there. It is unprecedented for a Middle Eastern nation to try to gather so much goodwill from Latin America, which makes one wonder what kind of political results are expected by the Islamic nation. Perhaps, in its efforts to defuse worsening economic sanctions and diplomatic pressures imposed by the United States, Venezuela became a top priority for Iranian diplomats. As sanctions get more severe and multilateral, we should expect to see Iran reach out more frequently to Venezuela and others in Latin America for political aid (Johnson, 2012).

Iran hopes that these peripheral partnerships could amount to a serious and meaningful political force against hostile U.S. measures. Chavez was drawn by Iranian appeals of resistance against what he perceived as the “arrogance” of the United States, and by Iranian promises of economic cooperation in areas like construction, agriculture, and industry, particularly in the energy sector (Cordesman, 2012). He saw Iran as a country that managed to achieve high levels of technological development independently, which Venezuela could possibly emulate.

The history of interactions between Iran and Venezuela is not very eventful; the tantalizing feature that links Iran and Venezuela is exclusively their geopolitical stance. The governments of Iran and Venezuela have perpetuated the belief that the United States’ sole objective is to dominate weaker countries. To defend their national identity and independence in a world ruled by stronger states, they understand foreign policy as the internationalization of the interests of less developed countries, with an agenda of dominating international meetings, conferences, and organizations with their common economic, political, and social problems (Sadri, 1999).

From the American perspective, any type of joint activities from “enemy states” is good enough reason to keep a close watch and possibly react. Although senior State Department and intelligence officials have indicated there is no real threat in the relations between Iran and Venezuela, Washington has stated that it is “closely monitoring Tehran’s activities in Latin America” (Baroud, 2013).

## **Historical Backdrop**

It is important to acknowledge that Ahmadinejad himself did not initiate relations between Iran and Latin America. Iran exchanged diplomatic representatives with Mexico in 1889. Argentina and Brazil initiated relations with Iran in 1902 and 1903, respectively. Relations between Iran and Venezuela date to the 1940s. Back then, both countries were struggling to achieve better treatment from foreign oil companies, and thus, were among the founders of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960. It was the Shah of Iran who opened embassies in Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela, implementing his non-aligned National Independent Foreign Policy (Johnson, 2012). The Islamic Revolution of 1979 [which had profound similarities with leftist ideologies, especially in regards to defending the oppressed] led to warm relations with Cuba during the 1980s, and with Nicaragua under the Sandinistas (Johnson, 2012). Commerce with Argentina picked up as Iran stopped buying wheat from the United States. Iran then looked to Brazil for help setting up industries, resulting in teams visiting Iran to discuss supplying equipment for power plants (Johnson, 2012).

President Khatami (1997-2005) pioneered the most recent surge of Iranian activity in Latin America, most notably with Venezuela. A strategy that would increase political ties and develop an outlet for Iranian exports started with bilateral economic and industrial cooperation commission established in 2001 (El Universal, 2001). In 2003 an agreement was signed by Iran and Venezuela to set up a joint venture for the production of tractors in Venezuela using Iranian technology and know-how. Then President Khatami and President Chavez inaugurated the manufacturing plant on March 2005. Referring to this joint venture in his inauguration speech, Khatami said that this plant was a small affair for a great country such as Venezuela, but it could

be considered as a good starting point (Arabbaghi, 2005). That year, Iran signed its first-ever free trade agreement with Venezuela.

Under Ahmadinejad's presidency, Iran's foreign policy resembles an "eye for an eye" type of logic, suggesting that Iran should move aggressively into the United States' own backyard to actively retaliate against the US attempts to become the most powerful entity in the Middle East (Iran's backyard), and its desire to isolate Iran economically and diplomatically (Farhi, 2010).

Meanwhile, a populist turn in Latin America gave Ahmadinejad an opportunity to pursue an active foreign policy. The recent push for cooperation started in 2005 with projects meant to create economic links between the two nations. Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA), signed a deal with Iran's state company Petropars to explore oil deposits in Venezuela's Orinoco River basin. The study will form the basis of future joint ventures to extract crude in which the Venezuelan government would have a 51 percent stake. By September 2006 PDVSA and Petropars had begun drilling in the block (Business News Americas, 2006).

Also in 2006 Iran announced it anticipated \$4 billion investment in Venezuelan oilfields and an agreement to help explore Venezuela's offshore gas blocks (Bodzin, 2007). Another joint project intended to strengthen ties materialized when Chavez and Ahmadinejad inaugurated the construction of a petrochemical plant in southern Iran (Nasseri, 2007). Both leaders revealed plans to open a \$1 billion joint petroleum trading international company like Chevron or Shell, to be named the Venezuelan-Iranian Oil and Gas Company, or VENIROGC. The company is meant to deal in the international oil and gas markets along the entire value chain, from production to

gas stations. This company will mainly focus on activities outside both countries such as oil activities in Bolivia and Syria (BBC Worldwide, 2007).

Soon after their oil companies started to cooperate, other projects were executed. The Venirauto automobile-manufacturing project was established west of Caracas with a \$99 million investment to produce subsidized cars to be sold for much less than imports. The project had good intentions, including to generate value added output that would contribute to Venezuela's GNP and saving its currency spending by achieving local production of parts. The Iranian ambassador, Abdollah Zifan, said that he hoped these manufacturing plans could be seen as "an answer to the negative campaigns against [Iran]... We hope the production of this factory gets out to the whole nation and we hope to see the completion of other projects between the two countries" (Carlson, 2007). But the company has been struggling from its beginnings and could be forced to closed down due to financial problems (Correo del Caroni, 2008).

Also in 2007, the two countries revealed plans for a joint \$2 billion fund to finance investments for projects in friendly countries throughout the developing world. This move is one of the best examples of the political nature of the relationship between Iran and Venezuela. Chavez said the move "will permit us to underpin investments in those countries whose governments are making efforts to liberate themselves from the imperialist yoke... This fund, my brother will become a mechanism for liberation" (Pearson, 2007). Iran later announced plans to use Bolivia as a base to expand Iran's Red Crescent medical programs in South America, beginning with two low-cost health clinics (Fars news, 2008). It jointly funded a hospital with Venezuela worth \$2.5 million in El Alto, a barrio outside La Paz (Coster, 2010).

In 2009 Oil ministers Masoud Mirkazemi and Rafael Ramírez signed agreements, including a pact by which Venezuela would provide Iran with refined gasoline in case of shortages caused by economic sanctions. According to the deal, Iran will daily import 20,000 barrels of gasoline, worth \$800 million, from Venezuela as of October. Venezuela will import technology and machinery from Iran in exchange for the export-bound gasoline. Also in the deal PDVSA would invest \$760 million in South Pars gas field (Camacho, 2009).

By announcing this, Chavez was sending a clear message to the international community that he is standing by Iran in its struggle for independence. By 2010 VENIROGC's first priority became setting up a 140,000 barrel-per- day oil refinery in Syria. Venezuela would have a 33 percent stake, while Iran would control 26 percent. The rest of the shares would be divided between Syria and Malaysia. Half of the feedstock would come from Iran and Venezuela, while the rest would be supplied by Syria.

It is evident that the growing ties between Iran and Venezuela got a lot of people worried, to the point of allowing their imagination to run wild. In 2011, the U.S.-based Spanish-language network Univision aired an investigative documentary alleging that Venezuelan and Iranian diplomats were interested in an offer from a group of Mexican hackers to infiltrate the websites of the White House, FBI, Pentagon and U.S. nuclear sites. However, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said about the allegations, "we don't have any information at this point to corroborate it" (Castillo, 2011). The popularity of this program shows that there is a degree of preoccupation about Iran's ties with Venezuela, to the point that people would believe almost anything that portrays their relationship as threat. The German newspaper *Die Welt* joined the paranoia when it reported that a group of engineers from an Iranian Revolutionary Guard were

commissioned to building a missile base in Venezuela. The State Department stated that after reviewing all the information pertaining to Iranian military activities in the hemisphere, it could not verify the report. The department stated, "we have no evidence to support this claim and therefore no reason to believe the assertions made in the article are credible" (del Rincon, 2011).

The alliance between Tehran and Caracas is significant more for its symbolism than for its material threat. Most of the historical episodes between these two countries are nothing more than attempts to make a political point rather than to pose a military threat of any sort. The relations have not been dramatic enough to generate a lasting discourse among the population that could transcend through time. Given that the alliance is centered on both presidents, it is not clear at the moment whether Iran will continue to enjoy its close association with Venezuela now that Chavez lost his battle against cancer and an opposition candidate could take over the Venezuelan presidency. The projects did virtually nothing to create enduring institutions for broad-based, long-term economic and social development (Shifter, 2013).

### **Aftermath**

Chavez and Ahmadinejad's mutual cooperation has been beneficial to both their causes; domestically, their brotherly display of solidarity is portrayed as international support for their policies. Internationally, they stand united by a shared political stance that calls for a power balance in the world against neo-colonialism. Both presidents have embraced a message emphasizing autonomy and independence from great powers, citing unity in the struggle against capitalism. Ahmadinejad stated, "new orders should be established in the world... Iran, Brazil and Venezuela in particular can have determining roles in designing and establishing these new

orders" (Kraul, 2009). Chavez has whole-heartedly advocated third world comradeship, encouraging other developing countries to reduce dependence on "the empire" by diversifying foreign relations away from the US. In a speech at the Tehran University, Hugo Chavez told students, "We have to save humankind and put an end to the U.S. Empire" (El Universal, 2006).

Their growing ties certainly undermine United States efforts to isolate Iran economically and diplomatically. Iran and Venezuela see American power as a tool to expand and impose the capitalist order, and thus dominate and maintain dependency. Similar to the way the Soviets wanted to coordinate an international communist movement around the globe, both Iran and Venezuela want to lead a worldwide hegemony resistance effort, and thus they utilize all the means at their disposals for this goal. Most prominent is the use of petrodollars to build alliances under the banner of goodwill and south-to-south solidarity, to finance economic and humanitarian projects, international organizations, and public diplomacy against "Washington hegemonic agenda."

Iran's growing influence in the American continent is a fluid issue that requires continued observation in order to ensure the most efficacious response. United States' reaction to the Iran-Venezuela nexus must be carefully calculated, since exaggerating the alleged threat of Iran's ties with Venezuela could cause unintended reactions that would degrade U.S. relations with neighboring states (Johnson, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

This thesis attempts to raise the question: to what extent are collective perceptions significant to the international behavior of a country? Is it possible that the process that determines a state's foreign behavior starts with a national discourse that eventually becomes a code of conduct? Spending time in Venezuela it became clear to me that the message the government advocated was resonating among a lot of people within Venezuelan society. This was evident, not only by the display of support in the form of t-shirts, hats, and bumper stickers, but also by the type of language people used to describe the political reality. By engaging in small conversations with people I met daily, it was easy to notice the official discourse in people's "personal" opinion. Themes of revolution, justice, socialism, and independence are common among chavistas. This is not different to the way I can recognize the Republican Party line within evangelicals. Just like there are a set of norms that are associated with being a "born again Christian," there are also norms and values associated with being a revolutionary in the way that Hugo Chavez defined it, or perhaps in the way that Ayatollah Khomeini defined it.

To answer the above question, this thesis suggests that discourse and language are not simply the means through which we express ourselves, but they are also the means through which we describe the real world to each other. Discourse represents the contexts from which reality will be understood; discourse becomes the only ideational material for the construction of identities, and of the behavior associated to that identity. There is now a movement centered on criticizing the U.S. in the world. Perhaps the behavior of Iran and Venezuela towards the U.S. is a consequence of the type of reality that is being described to the public by their governments, and that this discourse is itself the consequence of a specific interpretation of historic events.

This becomes significant when the world is being described as “a fight against radicals that hate our freedom” or as a “resistance against arrogant powers that want to oppress us and make us dependent, like they did in the past”.

To fanatic followers of Chavez and Khomeini, there is no doubt that the United States government is an engine of oppression and exploitation in their region. They see no reality outside the context of chavismo or the Islamic Revolution. Whether anti-American idealism happened by elites manipulation of people's fears, or as an adoption of a stance to express a popular feeling, this culture of resistance set the tone for anti-U.S. nationalist movements in both their regions. The consequences of interventions like operation AJAX are impossible to quantify; the current nuclear crisis with Iran could very easily be the continuation of a problem that started in 1953 with the CIA coup in Iran that weakened the United States' prestige, and encouraged a nationalist mindset among “weaker” countries. This makes one wonder, were interventions like operation Ajax really necessary? Did Mosaddegh really represent a threat to the United States or was he a menace to an industrial monopoly?

Illegal behavior, like covert operations, does not advance the U.S. interests at the aggregate level. Removing Prime Minister Mosaddegh might have seemed successful at the time, but when we see what has happened to Iran after we overthrew its democracy, and then we look at Iran now, it doesn't look like a success at all. The ideology triggered by its intervention is giving the United States big headaches today, and might have accelerated the relative decline of its influence worldwide. The men that wrote the U.S. constitution were concerned that power be held accountable, not one person or party was to pick and choose along the laws to be obeyed. But how does the people cry foul about their government's behavior when officials can pursue

covert operations, and then wave the wand of national security to justify it?

Today, to be a nationalist in Iran or Venezuela means to be “anti-imperialist.” Anti-imperialist is understood as being anti-American. To be nationalists also implies solidarity with other countries in mutual support against a common "enemy" (Smith, 2008). This is the foundation for the current alliance between Iran and Venezuela. Ahmadinejad said about Chavez, “[he] is my brother, he is a friend of the Iranian nation and the people seeking freedom around the world. He works perpetually against the dominant system (El Universal, 2006).

The messages of the countries featured in this thesis have a conceptualizing effect on the manner in which populations attach meaning to the real world, by introducing themes into the political discourse of society. The moment large segments of the populations start to frame their worldview within the context of their national discourses, then the message becomes very significant to a country’s foreign behavior, perhaps much more significant than the balance of capabilities in the international system.

The social discourse in the United States is constantly referring to America’s superiority and exceptionalism. Unfortunately, the idea of the wellbeing of the fatherland has been constructed purely around realist definitions of security in the United States. As a direct result of America’s exceptionality identity mixed with realism, the U.S. has had covert operations in many nations under the justification of national security. The message regarding Iran in the United States has its roots on resentment from the Hostage Crisis of 1979, and it is dominated by the “all options are on the table” mentality. By 2010, 80% of Americans believed that Iran either had a nuclear bomb or will get one in short order (CNN, 2010). Even as Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has repeatedly stated that the US believes Iran has not decided yet whether to

initiate a nuclear weapons program (USA Today, 2012). Despite the *official* position that Iran has no weapons program, most of the political, military, and media are constantly regurgitating lines about blocking Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. Clearly, it is ideology and not material conditions what is driving the U.S. to impose sanctions against Iran's "defiance." Rather than facts driving beliefs, it is long established beliefs that are dictating the facts we chose to accept, and thus the behavior we engage in (Keohane, 2010).

There is a sense of denial in the part of the U.S. of having any responsibility for the ongoing crisis. Joe Biden stated, "We have made clear that Iran's leaders need not sentence their people to economic deprivation and international isolation... There is still space for diplomacy, backed by pressure, to succeed. The ball is in the government of Iran's court" (Croft, 2013). Statements like this serve as an affirmation of the notion of dealing with irrational leaders in Iran.

The Iranian message regarding the U.S. focuses on the "shameless" intervention to keep the Shah in power, and on the perception of the constant hostility Iran has endured from the West since its revolution. Hostilities rooted on the 1954 coup, and the 1979 hostage crisis have deterred any cooperation or strategic relations between Iran and the United States. The United States' led effort to punish Iran only perpetuates their commitment to their revolutionary identity, because the leadership of the Iranian regime believes in a moral duty to *resist* "imperial bullying." Iranian officials will not be compelled into doing anything unless they perceive that the West is acting on good faith. Ayatollah Khamenei illustrates this when he said, "I am not a diplomat. I am a revolutionary and speak frankly, honestly, and firmly. An offer of talks makes sense only when the side [that makes the offer] shows its goodwill" (Khamenei, 2013). Exactly

what he means when he says “I am a revolutionary” is perhaps the most important factor shaping his identity and his view of Iran in the world.

As long as economic sanctions, sabotage, and scientist assassinations continue, the crisis with Iran will never be resolved. Khamenei has expressed:

You [the Americans] point the gun at Iran and say either negotiate or we pull the trigger! You should know that pressure and negotiations don't go together, and that the [Iranian] nation will not be intimidated by such things (Khamenei, 2013).

The Ayatollah's concerns are justified by Pentagon's policy of deterring any nation or group of nations from challenging American primacy by “pursue[ing] endeavors that would prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power” (Tyler, 1992). It is precisely these “endeavors” that the Iranian are so uneasy about, and what feeds their perception of American's intentions. Iran refuses to be dominated by other powers and looks for complete elimination of all kinds of despotism in international relations. It is obvious that the current strategy of coercion through punishing sanctions is the most difficult and painful way to influence the behavior of Iran. As anti-realist as it may sound, the most effective way to persuade Iran into anything will rely on trust developing, not on domination.

The Venezuelan message regarding the U.S. focuses on economic dependency, periphery struggle, and in U.S. political interventions in Latin America. Larry King once asked Chavez what he considered to be his biggest threat, and without even thinking Chavez replied “the empire.” Refereeing to the events of the 2002 coup against him (which chavistas assert was

engineered by United States in the same evil practices as with operation AJAX) Chavez continued:

While I was captive I debated with the soldiers ordered to assassinate me, luckily a group of soldiers refused, but the orders came from the White House, I have no doubts in my mind. The same modus operandi as when they ordered to kill Salvador Allende, and to kill Che Guevara, and to kill Ojeda Rios. The same thing [when it was decided] to bombard Panama, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. That is our history and we want a new time. We want peace (Larry King Live, 2009).

The response from King flawlessly captures the American reaction to third world indignation: “as it may, true or not, that's the past. Let's look to today”; he then followed his response by questioning why Venezuela just bought so many weapons from Russia (Larry King Live, 2009).

The discourse about Iran and Venezuela is very positive and optimistic in both countries. They both share a populist rhetoric criticizing economic globalization and the notion that foreigners want to exert control over their national economies. They showcase their alliance to domestic audiences as a way to by-pass the hegemonic powers and their corruptive tendencies. The Iran-Venezuela alliance is an easy and comfortable relationship that takes pride on pointing out that it is based on respect and solidarity rather than on interests. The behavior associated with being a chavista in Venezuela, and with being an Islamic revolutionary in Iran are very similar, and thus their cooperation comes naturally. Anti-hegemony as a belief system is the cause for Iran and Venezuela's behavior. Identity explanations to the behavior of both Venezuela and Iran suggest that they genuinely believe that anti-hegemony would eventually vanquish imperialism and super powers domination.

Similarities of the behavior of Iran and Venezuela are summarized in the following table:

| Case Studies | Perception of Foreign Domination  | Anti-Hegemony  | South to South Solidarity   | Populist Leadership Style   |
|--------------|---|--|---|---|
| Iran         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong perception that foreigners seek to control its national economy.</li> <li>• Independence and self-reliance is valued above all.</li> <li>• Sees economic sanctions as foreign aggression.</li> <li>• See the U.S. as mainly being interested in its natural resources.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees Hegemony as a sin.</li> <li>• Sees itself as a system reformer.</li> <li>• Calls for a new international order that checks the influence of great powers.</li> <li>• Non-Alignment as a foreign policy option to politically counter hegemony.</li> <li>• Resist U.S. policies.</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees the world as divided between oppressors and oppressed.</li> <li>• Constitutionally it is required to help the least privileged of the world.</li> <li>• Charity used as public diplomacy to generate good will.</li> <li>• South-to-South solidarity is encouraged.</li> <li>• Determination to exert regional leadership.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charismatic leader that mobilizes marginalized masses.</li> <li>• Populist notion of nationalization of natural resources.</li> <li>• Inspiration from a cult-like leader: Khomeini.</li> <li>• Populism as a tool of power consolidation</li> <li>• Oil wealth invested into social programs.</li> </ul>        |
| Venezuela    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sees itself as being liberated from a sphere of foreign influence.</li> <li>• Independence and self-reliance is highly valued.</li> <li>• Sovereignty seen as a national security</li> <li>• Strong perception that foreigners seek to control its national economy.</li> <li>• See the U.S. as mainly being interested in its natural resources.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has actively advocated the creation of regional integration to counter super-powers influence.</li> <li>• Pursued regional integration with the goal of reforming the system.</li> <li>• Actively works to create an anti-hegemony political bloc in the third world.</li> <li>• Resist U.S. policies.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use petroleum wealth to pursue political integration among developing states.</li> <li>• Place great value into helping the least privileged.</li> <li>• Charity used as public diplomacy.</li> <li>• Determination to exert regional leadership.</li> <li>• Encourages poor countries to work together.</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charismatic leader that mobilizes marginalized masses.</li> <li>• Inspiration of a cult-like leader: Bolivar, Chavez.</li> <li>• Populism as a tool of power consolidation</li> <li>• Populist notion of nationalization of natural resources.</li> <li>• Populism more economic. Against inequality.</li> </ul> |

### Improving the Current Situation

The officer at the Iranian embassy in Caracas told me that it was a lack of trust that was getting in the way of improving relations between Iran and the United States. But how can either side ever rely on the actions of the other if expectations are developed exclusively on the grounds of an ideological struggle? Perhaps the biggest obstacle preventing improvement of the current situation is the absence of mechanisms for regular communication between Iran and Venezuela,

and the United States. To reverse such powerful belief systems the United States would need a systematic procedure for trust development. Social constructs become a reality through regular interaction, which can discipline perceptions of power (like making U.S. power less threatening to Iran and Venezuela, or Iranian capabilities less threatening to the U.S.).

The only interactions that exist today between Iran and the United States are in the form of sanctions, which are viewed by the regime as a plan to penetrate economically and then dominate politically. Iran accuses the U.S. of using illegal sanctions as a way to assault the country and force it to comply with its desires, thus violating Iran's sovereignty and undermining its rights. In Venezuela the predominant form of interaction is the acquisition of oil from American multi-national corporations. Chavez supporters are quick to point out that the only interest of the U.S. in Venezuela is not mutual cooperation but the exploitation of natural resources. There is a consensus that the United States follows a purely "business-like" policy in foreign affairs. Both forms of interactions reinforce and perpetuate perceived notions in each country. In a very different fashion, Ahmadinejad and Chavez had a warm friendship. They had interactions at the personal level, which makes it very easy for them to trust the other, and their cooperation is evidence of their mutual trust.

Since new social constructions inevitably starts from the current perception of reality, the United States would have to find ways to interact with the Venezuelan and Iranian leaders and people as to foster goodwill at a time when antipathy toward U.S. policies is at its highest. The United States might need to stop holding Iran and Venezuela as solely responsible for the failing of constructive talks, and use persuasive discourse that acknowledges grievances associated with past relations while focusing on economic and social rights for the future. Engaging with Iran

and Venezuela and finding areas of common interests should be foreign policy goals. Strategic engagement with an adversary can go hand in hand with a policy that encourages change in that country. That's how Washington dealt with the Soviet Union and China in the 1970s and 1980s (Zakaria, 2011). Any time the United States is able to show goodwill to the Venezuelan and Iranian people it should be regarded as a diplomatic success.

In "the long telegram," George Kennan stated the United States must "put forward for all nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see... it is not enough to urge the development of political processes similar to our own." He then concluded, "the greatest danger that can befall us is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping" (Kennan, 1947). Perhaps if international relations are strategized with a constructivist awareness, then the United States could lead a coordinated effort to a level of international cooperation not known yet to political science, in which idealism becomes the new realism.

### **Future Research**

This thesis focused on the government's adoption of a normative discourse that originated from a historical experience. In our ever-shrinking world, now more than ever it is imperative to acknowledge that humans are norm-adopting creatures in order to study political behavior realistically. Understanding the contextual variables that determine the norms, values, and interests of countries will expand the field of international relations, including the study of inter-state conflicts, cooperation, security, trust, and threat.

Perhaps the most exciting challenge for future inquiry will be merging qualitative and quantitative perspectives into new methodological approaches to research the identity formation process that drives the behavior of states. An instance in which perceptions of reality could be measure could be a closely contested election, in which one side feels that the elections were a fraud. Maybe it is possible to study empirically the effects of a group's perception of reality on its political behavior. Analyzing the various elements that contribute to states perception of reality could help develop empirical models to explain socially constructed facts, like a state's identity formation process that eventually results in foreign policy.

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