

**U.S. Public Diplomacy and Nationalistic Leaders
The Dangers of Applying Strategies in Cuba to Venezuela**

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I. Official Diplomatic Relations

1. Background on U.S. Policy and Latin America

Before turning to U.S. policy toward Venezuela and Cuba, it is important to look at the rationale behind U.S. policy toward the Latin American region, particularly because U.S. policy tends to be packaged toward the entire region and avoids a state-by-state policy strategy.¹ U.S. interventionism was never as prevalent as it was during the Cold War era, when policy rationale rested on three factors: (1) proximity, (2) maintaining U.S. regional hegemony, (3) and defeating communism.² The first two factors were born out of the geopolitics of the region, and have been considered in U.S. foreign policy since the independence of Latin American states, starting in the early 1800s. The third factor, however, was a response to the war of ideals that engulfed the world by the 1960s. Desperate to contain communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the U.S. pursued a policy of supporting authoritarian governments in Latin America, so long as communist ideals remained out of Latin American leaders' intentions.³ If a democratically elected leader, however, pursued a socialist agenda to the economy, U.S. policy was to ensure his ouster from office.⁴ The timely anti-communism American consensus allowed for such policies.

At the end of the Cold War, however, with the factor of defeating communism out of U.S. policy and the spread of democratization throughout the Latin American region, Latin American states began to move away from the U.S.'s sphere of influence and find their own places in international politics. No longer able to directly intervene in the domestic politics of Latin American states, the U.S. responded to the new world order that came about in the 1990s

¹ For a complete account of U.S.-Latin American relations, see Michael LaRosa and Frank O. Mora, *Neighborly Adversaries* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999).

² Laura Carlsen and Tom Barry, "U.S. Hegemony or Global Good Neighbor Policy?" International Relations Center, February 2006 (available at www.irc-online.org), 2.

³ Examples include Cuba's Juan Batista, Chile's Augusto Pinochet, and Panamá's Manuel Noriega.

⁴ Examples include Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala, who was removed with CIA assistance in 1954, and Salvador Allende of Chile, who was overthrown with U.S. assistance in 1973.

by pursuing more aggressive diplomatic and economic policies toward the region.⁵ The 1990s period, however, did not present many threats to U.S. hegemonic power, not only because most Latin American states had started to embrace democracy, but also because their pursuit of neo-liberal economic strategies pushed Latin American economies into the world market to levels never seen before, and the region was beginning to benefit from the economic returns.⁶

Today, however, the current Bush II administration has had to respond to a new wave of political idealism described as leftist populism. Populism in Latin American politics has come to be characterized by a nationalistic leader who embraces socialism, and who derives his support by relating to the mass poor, exploiting their socioeconomic needs, and making promises of change. Leftist populism's embrace of socialism, anti-democratic ways of governing, and turning away from world markets presents a threat to U.S. regional interests because it blocks the diplomatic and interventionist channels that allow the U.S. to maintain influence with Latin American states and make their economies dependent on the U.S.'s. This has forced the U.S. to pursue what Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice has come to call "transformational diplomacy".⁷ Transformational diplomacy is the Bush II administration's belief that the U.S. has the right to transform the domestic politics of states to reflect its interests. If Latin American states reject neo-liberalism and conservatism, this will affect U.S. interests and erode U.S. hegemonic control over the hemisphere by blurring the channels – democratic influence and the economy – that allow room for continued U.S. control. While Cuba was the main target of anti-communist policy during the Cold War, Venezuela stands to take its place in Bush II's policy today.

⁵ For example, the U.S. passed two new laws that tightened the economic sanctions on Cuba, entered into a free trade agreement with México, and began to militarize the illegal narcotics issue in the Andes.

⁶ Javier Corrales, "Market Reforms," in Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter, eds., *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁷ Laura Carlsen and Tom Barry, "U.S. Hegemony or Global Good Neighbor Policy?" International Relations Center, February 2006 (available at www.irc-online.org), 6.

2. Official Policy: U.S. – Venezuela

The U.S. and Venezuela enjoyed friendly diplomatic ties from 1958 up until recent years.⁸ In 1958, the Venezuelan people rejected the military dictatorship that had been in place for years and turned to civilian-elected rule. The new government, led by Romulo Betancourt, made it a priority to institute free-market policies. The system, however, proved resistant to change due to political and economic special interests. The U.S., nonetheless, welcomed the Betancourt administration's intentions, and relaxed at the notion that Venezuela had embraced two factors important to U.S. policy – democracy and a free market economy. In turning to a civilian-elected government, the U.S. did not have to worry about a communist threat in the country, and in turning to market-led growth, U.S. business interests would be able to enter the petroleum market as well as other sectors of the Venezuelan economy. The dual factors of democratic government and a liberal economy allowed the U.S. government to maintain influence with those in charge, while aligning U.S. and Venezuelan economic interests and making the Venezuelan economy, the least powerful of the two, more dependent on the U.S.'s.

In the 1970s, however, Venezuela nationalized the oil industry and the health of the Venezuelan economy was left to the mercy of fluctuating market prices.⁹ As a result, the average Venezuelan became poorer and the U.S. no longer had direct influence over the oil industry. It wasn't until the 1980s that the country liberalized the economy once again, along with the rest of its Latin American neighbors.¹⁰ Despite the economic growth experienced during the 1990s, the capitalist economy widened the gap between the wealthy and the poor. No South American country deteriorated at the rate that Venezuela did during this period, and by

⁸ Stephen Johnson and Ariel Cohen, "Minimizing Mischief in Venezuela, Stabilizing the U.S. Oil Supply," *Backgrounder*, No. 1787 (The Heritage Foundation, April 12, 2004), 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ Javier Corrales, "Market Reforms," in Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter, eds., *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) 76.

1999, the country was ripe for change.¹¹ Those living in poverty, who made up three-quarters of the population, became vulnerable to the words of Hugo Chávez, a nationalistic leader who condemned the current economic system and blamed it for all of the people's ills.¹² Chávez took advantage of the public's perception of him as a hero after he failed to overthrow President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992 by promising to rid the country of corruption fed by special interests – a symptom of a capitalist economy – and reduce the level of poverty in the country.¹³

Venezuela's socio-economic ills that spilled over from the 1980s thus created the type of setting that Chávez needed in order to gain the support of the people and effectuate the changes that he promised during his 1998 campaign. In 1999, a year after he took office, Chávez instituted a number of changes that eroded democratic aspects of governing and increased his executive powers: he changed the constitution to allow for his reelection, he formed an electoral council maintained under his control, he added twelve judges to the Supreme Court, he made it illegal to show disrespect to the president, he took full control of the military, and he had direct control of one-third of regional governments.¹⁴ In effect, Chávez rid the political system of most venues of accountability, thereby making it more difficult for congress, opposition governments, and civil society to have a voice in the governing process. In eroding democracy and turning away from market-led growth, Chávez began to threaten the two factors most allied with U.S. foreign policy objectives.¹⁵ To worsen the situation, Chávez's agenda of exporting his socialist idealism to neighboring countries has turned him into a regional threat for U.S. policy.

¹¹ Michael Shifter, "In Search of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (New York, NY: The Council on Foreign Relations, May/June 2006).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Stephen Johnson and Ariel Cohen, "Minimizing Mischief in Venezuela, Stabilizing the U.S. Oil Supply," *Background*, No. 1787 (The Heritage Foundation, April 12, 2004), 2.

¹⁴ Michael Shifter, "In Search of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (New York, NY: The Council on Foreign Relations, May/June 2006).

¹⁵ Tom Barry, "Transitioning Venezuela," International Relations Center, December 2005 (available at www.irc-online.org), 1.

As of this year, transformational diplomacy has come to be defined by four important factors for U.S. policy toward Venezuela: (1) to consolidate democracy and the democratic gains of the past, (2) to promote prosperity and economic opportunity, (3) to invest in people, and (4) to protect the security of democratic states.¹⁶ While the first two factors are in tune with previous U.S. foreign policy and rest on the fear that a turn to socialist government and socialist economies will worsen the situation in a country and U.S. influence, the second two are more current, and they can be seen as a response to Chávez's growing regional influence.¹⁷

Understanding that poverty and socioeconomic problems are what have led to mass Venezuelan support of Chávez, investing in youth education, health care to families, and investing in infrastructure is as important as overall economic growth.¹⁸ Through trade promotion acts and regional security initiatives, U.S. policy aims to protect neighboring democratic states by assisting them with domestic violence and by linking socioeconomic prosperity to security, thus allowing room for the U.S. to push its militarization and free trade agenda in the region.¹⁹

In response, Venezuela has been able to create and pursue focused policy toward the U.S. due primarily to four factors: (1) domestic political changes since 1999, (2) the growing internationalization of Venezuela, (3) new notions of international solidarity that oppose U.S. policy, and (4) political and economic support of sub-national actors that reinforce Chávez's control of the state.²⁰ Domestic political changes, which include doing away with institutions of

¹⁶ Thomas A. Shannon, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, "With Castro Stepping Down, What's Next for Cuba and the Western Hemisphere," Statement Before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere of House of Representatives (Washington, DC, March 5, 2008, available at www.state.gov).

¹⁷ Chávez has been involved in the election of several leftist leaders, including Evo Morales of Bolivia, Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua, and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, as well as Ollanta Humala's failed campaign in Perú.

¹⁸ Thomas A. Shannon, Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs, "With Castro Stepping Down, What's Next for Cuba and the Western Hemisphere," Statement Before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere of House of Representatives (Washington, DC, March 5, 2008, available at www.state.gov).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ Carlos A. Romero, "Venezuela y Estados Unidos: ¿una relación esquizofrénica?" *Nueva sociedad*, No. 206 (Caracas, Venezuela: Universidad Central de Venezuela, noviembre-diciembre de 2006).

accountability and the increase of executive power, are what allow Chávez to pursue the policies he desires. Internationalizing Venezuela has given Chávez the ability to engage in close relations with countries such as China, Iran, and Cuba – countries either on the U.S.’s “Axis of Evil” list or proponents of socialism. In opposing U.S. regional policy, Chávez has declared solidarity with many people, instituting cheap petroleum programs with Caribbean nations and the state of Massachusetts.²¹ And in providing political and economic support of sub-national actors, Chávez is buying off actors that would otherwise speak out against him.

On March 16, 2008, the Venezuelan government announced an entrance into a new phase in policy toward the U.S.²² While the Venezuelan government did not specify what this “new phase” entails, it did mention that it came about as a result of President Bush’s recent comments that Chávez is full of empty promises and a hunger for power. This “hunger for power”, in the eyes of the U.S., has been manifested in the shape of Chávez’s Bolivarian Alternative.²³ Meant to counter U.S. hegemony, the Bolivarian Alternative sees democratic values as constraints that make it more difficult to counter U.S. hegemony, pursues economic diversification with other neighboring countries in opposition to free trade agreements with the U.S., promotes a multipolar world in opposition to the U.S.’s unipolar world, and seeks to make allies with large international blocs against the U.S. Because leftist populism, by its nature, sees economic performance, democratic values, programmatic achievements, and good relations with the U.S. as bothersome constraints, Venezuelan policy toward the U.S. directly opposes U.S. policies and interests.²⁴

²¹ Steve Ellner, “Toward a ‘Multipolar World’: Using Oil Diplomacy to Sever Venezuela’s Dependence,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* (New York, NY: The North American Congress on Latin America, 2007), 2.

²² “Venezuela anuncia que relaciones con EE.UU. “entrarán en una nueva fase,” *El Mercurio*. Caracas, Venezuela, March 16, 2008 (available at www.emol.com).

²³ Laura Carlsen and Tom Barry, “U.S. Hegemony or Global Good Neighbor Policy?” International Relations Center, February 2006 (available at www.irc-online.org), 4.

²⁴ Jorge G. Castañeda, “Latin America’s Left Turn,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (New York, NY: The Council on Foreign Relations, May/June 2006).

3. Main Issues Concerning U.S. – Venezuelan Relations

Democracy, the economy, and U.S. regional intervention are three issues wherein the U.S. and Venezuela oppose each other and remain in dispute. For Chávez, U.S. ideals of democracy only allow for the exploitation of the poor masses and for the strong influence of private interests in government. For him, a government for the people and by the people is one that does not leave those in poverty behind. At least this is the message that Chávez continues to expound on a regular basis, because during his first four years in office, despite many anti-democratic changes, poverty rose by nine percent.²⁵ Chávez has used history as his strongest case to the Venezuelan people that capitalism will be the destruction of humanity, even if he hasn't produced the necessary results that prove his argument and that demonstrate that a socialist economy is a better strategy.²⁶ Regional intervention ties into these two factors, for the Latin American region, for Chávez, will never be secure so long as the U.S. continues to be able to exert its influence over domestic politics and the economy. The Bolivarian Revolution, therefore, strives to implement the same institutionalized solidarity between Latin American states that Simón Bolívar himself, the man who brought independence to South America, sought in efforts to protect the region from the U.S. – the powerful neighbor to the north.²⁷

Despite all of Chávez's anti-capitalist rhetoric, Venezuela continues to agree with the U.S. over the oil industry and trade, if only on a *de facto* basis. There are three reasons why the oil industry has not allowed Chávez to turn oil trade into another issue of disagreement. First, Chávez's leverage and power are largely dependent on the price of oil, and the U.S. continues to be the world's largest consumer of oil. To add a third influential factor, Venezuelan crude oil is

²⁵ Michael Shifter, "In Search of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (New York, NY: The Council on Foreign Relations, May/June 2006).

²⁶ Simon Romero, "U.S.-Venezuelan Trade Grows Despite Political Divide," *The New York Times* (August 16, 2005), 1.

²⁷ Carlos O. Stoetzer, *The Organization of American States*, 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 8.

of such a unique consistency, that only certain refineries can withstand it, and most of those refineries are found in the U.S.²⁸ Venezuelan's thirst for American products such as cars, machinery, and computers, further contribute to growing trade between the two countries, ensuring that the U.S. and Venezuela will continue to be best trading partners as they have been for the last century.²⁹ Economic ties, therefore, are making it difficult for Chávez to truly push U.S. power and influence away from Venezuela and from the region, as U.S. and Venezuelan consumer and production interests are inevitably interlinked.

4. Official Policy: U.S. – Cuba

Since the early 1960s, U.S. policy toward Cuba has come to stand as the most aggressive toward any Latin American country, and remains the longest policy still in place. Before the 1959 revolution that brought such policies, however, Cuba and the U.S. enjoyed amicable relations. The U.S. occupied the island militarily from 1906 to 1909, and the U.S. government refused to withdraw troops until the Platt Amendment, which granted Cuban territory for U.S. naval bases, was added into the Cuban constitution.³⁰ Because Cuba is so small and so close to the U.S., the U.S. was able to control Cuba's economy and political process. Fulgencio Batista, president of Cuba from 1944 to 1959, ruled with complete political support from the U.S., and over a country whose economy and businesses were primarily controlled by U.S. companies and private interests.³¹ Under such control, Cuba did not pose any threat to U.S. interests and hegemonic power, even as the Cold War and the threat of communism began to grow.

²⁸ Stephen Johnson and Ariel Cohen, "Minimizing Mischief in Venezuela, Stabilizing the U.S. Oil Supply," *Background*, No. 1787 (The Heritage Foundation, April 12, 2004), 5.

²⁹ Simon Romero, "U.S.-Venezuelan Trade Grows Despite Political Divide," *The New York Times* (August 16, 2005), 1.

³⁰ Jorge I. Domínguez, "U.S.-Cuban Relations: from the Cold War to the Colder War," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* (Miami, FL: University of Miami, 1997), 58.

³¹ Carlos Alberto Montaner, "La transición española y el caso cubano," *Cuba Transition Project* (Miami, FL: University of Miami, 2002), 7.

In 1959, however, Fidel Castro's revolution engulfed the entire country, and Batista fled the country with all of the money in the treasury in his hands. After Castro embraced communist ideals in 1962, the Cuban model, unique in the region, forced U.S. policymakers to highlight "defeating communism" as the most important factor behind the rationale for U.S. policy toward Latin America. In efforts to ensure that Cuba remain the first and last communist state in the Western Hemisphere, and in order to protect the region from Castro's idealistic influence, U.S. policy toward Cuba came to be defined by the following three terms: economic sanctions, political isolation, and travel restrictions.³² In instituting economic sanctions on Cuba, the U.S. sought to make it more difficult for the Castro regime to acquire the economic growth and power necessary to keep his nation alive, as well as to demonstrate to the rest of Latin America the extent to which the U.S. was willing to go in the face of communism in the region. The political isolation factor was designed to prevent Cuba from gaining diplomatic leverage by making allies with other states, as well as to quarantine and prevent it from influencing the rest of the region. And the travel restrictions were designed to further submit Cuba into isolationism by preventing outsiders from entering the country.

The end of the Cold War in 1992 did not mark an end to the communist regime that had come to govern Cuba for the previous three decades. During the decade of the 1990s, U.S. Congress passed two laws that sought to diplomatically put more pressure on the Castro regime in efforts to end his leadership power more quickly. The Cuban Democracy Act of 1992, also known as the Torricelli Law, maintained firm opposition to the Cuban government and tightened certain aspects of the embargo while providing support for the Cuban people by increasing the information flow between the two countries, facilitating humanitarian donations, and

³² Roberto C. Andujar, "Information Elements of Power: The Role of Public Diplomacy in United States-Cuba Policy Implementation," (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 18, 2005), 12.

encouraging more people-to-people contact.³³ The Helms-Burton Bill of 1996 intensified the blockade by expanding its extraterritorial scope and broadening sanctions against Cuba by denying visas and taking legal action against non-U.S. citizens and companies who had traveled to or invested in Cuba.³⁴ As of 2003, with the notion of transformational diplomacy in place, the State Department defined new policy toward Cuba as seeking a peaceful transition to democracy, seeking cooperation of other democratic countries in this policy, opposing human rights violations, and encouraging free and fair elections.³⁵ As more time passes, U.S. policy toward Cuba only keeps tightening. The recent news that Fidel Castro would no longer nominate himself for president and that his brother, Raúl, would be taking over for him, are yet to demonstrate how much change will come about in Cuba.

Cuba has had a difficult time creating policy toward the U.S. due to two reasons. First is the fact that Cuba, geographically speaking, is isolated and only ninety miles from U.S. territory. This has made it difficult for Cuba to gain allies willing to exert their own influence in the U.S.'s own backyard. Second, U.S. policies have been extremely effective at reinforcing such isolation, making it much more difficult for the Cuban government to try to counter U.S. policy. Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations website contains little or no information on official diplomatic policy toward the U.S.³⁶ Information regarding the effects of the U.S.'s economic blockade, statistics on the number of Cuban people who have died due to the blockade, criticisms of President Bush's *Plan for a Democratic and Free Cuba*, as well as information on how the rest of the world opposes the U.S.'s blockade is not, on the other hand, at all scarce.

³³ Taylor C. Boas, "The Dictator's Dilemma? The Internet and U.S. Policy Toward Cuba." *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2000, 59.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 60.

³⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Democracy Act of 1992." November 2, 2003 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at www.state.gov/www/regions/wha/cuba/democ_act_1992.html), 2.

³⁶ I made such an attempt on March 7, 2008, on the following website: www.cubagob.cu/.

Historically, the Castro regime came to define policy toward the U.S. based on communist ideals and on the history of U.S. intervention in the country. Fidel Castro, however, was never a true communist. He only came to embrace communist ideals in 1962, in efforts to align himself with the U.S.'s most powerful enemy at the time, the Soviet Union.³⁷ The fact that the Castro regime has never enjoyed diplomatic relations with the U.S. has made it even more difficult for the Cuban government to create a coherent policy. Without an embassy in the U.S. and without a U.S. embassy in Cuba, top Cuban officials cannot easily meet with U.S. officials.³⁸ This reduces any efforts regarding policy toward the U.S. to a strategy of instilling a sense of fear within Cuban society of the U.S., and to a repetition of rhetoric based on exaggerations.³⁹

5. Main Issues Concerning U.S. – Cuban Relations

Perhaps the situation with the building that houses the U.S. Interests Sections (USIS) best illustrates the tense relations between the two countries: the U.S. government used to display information from the top of the building via a ticker.⁴⁰ The Cuban government set up dozens of black flags that would block the information from being seen. The black flags remain, and are joined by a statue of Jose Martí pointing at the USIS in defiance, while clutching a baby. Under this tense setting, issues in dispute between the U.S. and Cuba can be reduced down to politics, the economy, and human rights. Cuban officials argue that U.S. policy needs to change because it violates international law and because it is at fault for the socioeconomic conditions that Cuban society faces on a daily basis.⁴¹ The U.S., on the other hand, maintains that U.S. policy will not change until a change in Cuban politics and the economy occurs. Because the economy is what

³⁷ Michael LaRosa and Frank O. Mora, *Neighborly Adversaries* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 72.

³⁸ A discussion on how this affects relations and public diplomacy will come in a later section.

³⁹ Information dictated during an interview with “Rodrigo”, a grassroots organizer in Cuba, on March 8, 2008.

⁴⁰ USIS Chief Michael Parmly stopped the display of information in 2007.

⁴¹ Arlen Specter and Christopher Bradish, “Dialogue with Adversaries,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006-2007, 22.

affects Cuban society the most, it has become the most important bilateral issue in dispute between the two countries. Billboards in and around Havana try to push this point to the Cuban people, as they list the number of Cuban children who have died or the amount of international aid that has been denied to Cuba due to U.S. policies.⁴² Regarding human rights and the arrest of dissenters, activists, and journalists, Cuba continues to clamp down on these people, although it has recently released the number of political prisoners in detention thanks to an agreement it made with the Spanish government.⁴³

Despite the long history of tense relations and no official diplomatic relations, the U.S. and Cuba have come to agree on more social issues such as drug interdiction.⁴⁴ Cuba has become an important transit point of drugs in the Caribbean region. When Arlen Specter, who was sent by the U.S. Congress on a special diplomatic mission, met with Fidel Castro regarding this policy issue of national security, Castro said that he was willing to cooperate with U.S. interdiction efforts.⁴⁵ The U.S. and Cuba have also cooperated over medical research. In 1999, a partnership between researchers at the Finlay Institute in Havana, working on a meningitis B vaccine, and GlaxoSmithKline was made, indicating that venues by which the two countries can communicate and operate remain, despite history and the lack of official diplomatic ties. Medical research, however, hardly carries the weight necessary for two countries to enter into more diplomatic relations, but Fidel Castro's willingness to cooperate in a regional security issue such as the drug trade indicates that it remains important for the U.S. to maintain communication with Cuba. The U.S., after all, has invested millions of dollars in counter-narcotics efforts in the Andes and the Caribbean, and Cuban cooperation remains necessary.

⁴² I made these observations in January 2007, when I traveled to Havana and Trinidad.

⁴³ Information dictated during an interview with "Juan", a grassroots organizer in Cuba, on March 8, 2008.

⁴⁴ ⁴⁴ Arlen Specter and Christopher Bradish, "Dialogue with Adversaries," *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2006-2007, 23.

⁴⁵ Congress members can get permission to travel to Cuba for national security-related reasons.

II. The Role of Public Opinion

1. Public Opinion in Venezuela

In assessing Venezuelan public opinion, it is important to look at the state of media affairs in Venezuela, since media outlets and instruments of communication can reflect public opinion and can also, at the same time, influence how a society thinks and feels about certain issues. According to Freedom House, Venezuela is one of two countries in the Western Hemisphere without a “free media”.⁴⁶ Both the 2005 Media Law, which prohibits any material deemed to harm national security and makes the government the main shareholder of media corporations, and the government’s clamping down on private media corporations that do not favor the Chávez government, have contributed to this conclusion.⁴⁷ In 2007, the government closed RCTV, the country’s oldest private media corporation, under the excuse of technical “licensure” reasons. VeneVision and GloboVision remain the only two privately owned media corporations in the country, although VeneVision has taken a more pro-government stance and GloboVision can only be seen in Caracas.⁴⁸ Chávez also controls sixty local newspapers, in efforts to further counter opposition media.⁴⁹ Most Venezuelans were against the shutting down of RCTV, and mass protests were seen after the closure was announced.⁵⁰ Despite the worsening media condition, and the public response, fifty-eight percent of Venezuelans report that they trust their media; a figure close to the number of those who also trust their country’s leadership.⁵¹

⁴⁶ “Venezuela’s RCTV,” *Gallup Poll*, May 25, 2007 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.gallup.com/video/27691/Venezuelas-RCTV.aspx).

⁴⁷ “Country Profile – Venezuela,” BBC (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1229345.stm) and “International community urged to rally to defense of Venezuela’s media after RCTV’s closure,” *Reporters Without Borders*, May 28, 2007 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=22326).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Venezuela’s RCTV,” *Gallup Poll*, May 25, 2007 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.gallup.com/video/27691/Venezuelas-RCTV.aspx).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

In efforts to gain even more clout in the media broadcasting industry, Chávez has created his own media broadcasting company called Telesur, designed to become Chávez's tool for promoting radical socialism and to denounce the U.S.⁵² Telesur is shown in fifteen countries through fifty-three cable services, and Argentina, Cuba, and Uruguay are co-funding it.⁵³ Despite the fact that the station is government backed and owned, a recent study indicates that the broadcasting station is in fact more of a public service than Chávez's official channel for communicating propaganda to the people.⁵⁴ While observers initially feared Chávez's intentions when he created Telesur because it came into existence in a polarized mass political and media climate, the broadcasts are not directly related to the expected Telesur agenda. According to the study, the news that emanate from the Telesur broadcasts are not much different from other international news broadcasts concerning the topics discussed. The broadcasts do, however, tend to be focused around politics (rather than economics) and segments are concentrated to and around Venezuela, reflecting Chávez's focus on political rhetoric rather than economic realities.

The Venezuelan public is forced to make perceptions and hold opinions toward the U.S. and other policy issues under this polarized context and climate, and opinion polls suggest that Chávez's rhetoric is in some ways influencing the sense of nationalism felt by Venezuelans and how they perceive the U.S. Venezuelans and Americans now lead the world in national pride, with Venezuelans actually being more nationalistic than Americans.⁵⁵ As the report put it, "National identity is the cohesive force that both holds nation states together and shapes their relationships with the family of nations," and it is for this reason that such changes in

⁵² Stephen Johnson, Helle C. Dale, and Patrick Cronin, "Strengthening U.S. Public Diplomacy Requires Organization, Coordination, and Strategy," *Backgrounders*, No. 1875 (The Heritage Foundation, August 5, 2005), 7.

⁵³ Marcel Honore, "TV station backed by Chávez goes on air," *The Associated Press*, October 31, 2005.

⁵⁴ Freja Salö and Elisabeth Terenius, "Telesur: 'Tele-Chávez' or the public service of Latin America?" (Stockholm, Sweden: Södertörn University College, 2008). 5.

⁵⁵ "Americans and Venezuelan's Lead the World in National Pride," *The University of Chicago News Office*, March 1, 2006 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.news.uchicago.edu/releases/06/060301.nationalpride.shtml).

Venezuelan nationalism are important for U.S.-Venezuela relations. Venezuelans, in general, have already come to refuse to call the U.S. the “United States of America” because all of Latin America is also America, not just the U.S.⁵⁶ In this sense, Chávez has been successful at reclaiming the notion and ideal of “America”, and while the effects of this are difficult to measure and quantify, they certainly illustrate a departure from usual Latin American notions of their neighbor to the north.

Regarding Venezuelan perceptions of the U.S., despite all of Chávez’s anti-Bush rhetoric, opinion polls indicate that Venezuelans hold favorable views toward the U.S. – it’s the U.S. government they dislike.⁵⁷ During the 2004 election, Venezuelans made it clear that they preferred a Democrat in the White House, as forty-eight percent of them favored John Kerry over those who favored George W. Bush (twenty-two percent).⁵⁸ In 2007, seventy-five percent of Venezuelans did not have confidence in President Bush that he would do “what’s right” in foreign affairs.⁵⁹ As a result, twenty-five percent of Venezuelans have come to approve of Bush’s leadership, compared to the forty-nine percent who approve of the Venezuelan leadership.⁶⁰ What’s more interesting about how Venezuelans feel about President Bush is how he rates compared with former Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Both President Bush and Fidel Castro received a 4.6 out of 10 when Venezuelans were asked to rate their levels of likeability.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Amar C. Bakshi, “The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,” *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2008 (accessed on March 8, 2008 and available at newsweek.washingtonpost.com/postglobal/america/2008/01/the_bolivarian_republic_venezuela.html?nav=rss_blog)

⁵⁷ J. Michael Waller, “What to do About Venezuela,” *Center for Security Policy* (May 2005, No. 6), 6.

⁵⁸ “Latinobarómetro Poll: Latin Americans, Despite Stereotype, Are Political Moderates,” *World Public Opinion*, January 10, 2007 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/brlatinamericara/299.php?nid=&id=&pnt=299>).

⁵⁹ “Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey,” *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, June 27, 2007, p. 65.

⁶⁰ “Venezuela’s RCTV,” *Gallup Poll*, May 25, 2007 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.gallup.com/video/27691/Venezuelas-RCTV.aspx).

⁶¹ “Americans and Venezuelan’s Lead the World in National Pride,” *The University of Chicago News Office*, March 1, 2006 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.news.uchicago.edu/releases/06/060301.nationalpride.shtml).

Chávez, on the other hand, scored a high 7.1 in the same poll. The fact that the nation's two largest newspapers, *El Universal* and *El Nacional*, largely remain independent of the government, has only helped to balance out Chávez's domestic propaganda and rhetoric.⁶²

Despite the fact that the majority of Venezuelans continue to view America favorably, the figures have drastically fallen in the last seven years. In 2000, eighty-nine percent of Venezuelans viewed the U.S. favorably, and this number has declined further from 2002 to 2007, where it stood at fifty-six percent.⁶³ The biggest declines in Latin American public perception toward the U.S. occurred in three countries with a form of socialist government: Venezuela, Argentina, and Bolivia.⁶⁴ American ideals and policy fare even worse than the leadership, with twenty-seven percent viewing U.S. notions of democracy favorably, and thirty-four percent feeling that U.S. policy takes their needs into account.⁶⁵ When it comes to the American way of doing "business", fifty-one percent of Venezuelans dislike it, while forty percent like it.⁶⁶ American popular culture gains more favorable ratings: about three-quarters of Venezuelans admire American music, movies, TV, and science and technology.⁶⁷

Regarding domestic public opinion issues, Venezuelan responses indicate that notions of a representative government and maintaining friendly relations with states remain alive in the minds of the people. Eighty-three percent of Venezuelans said they preferred democracy over any other form of government. Less than twenty-five percent, however, do not agree with U.S.

⁶² Interview with PAO Ben Ziff, U.S. Embassy in Caracas, March 27, 2008.

⁶³ "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2007, p. 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 23-24.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

ideals and values of democracy, indicating a discrepancy in the definition of the word.⁶⁸ While fifty-two percent of Venezuelans do not approve of their leader's public anti-Bush remarks, when it comes to the economy, they tend to prefer Chávez's socialist strategy to the U.S.'s preference of capitalist market-led growth.⁶⁹ Chávez himself maintains high favorability rates, with fifty-four percent of Venezuelans reporting that they have confidence in him, and with Chávez's approval rating standing steady at forty percent in 2003, during the country's worst economic turmoil since Chávez took power.⁷⁰ Fifty-seven percent, however, did report feeling afraid to vote against him in 2006.⁷¹ These figures are indicative of leftist populist governments, wherein the leader who comes to embody the country's newfound sense of nationalism is highly respected and admired, even if his leadership isn't and economic conditions remain unchanged.

2. Public Opinion in Cuba

According to Freedom House, Cuba is the second of two countries in the Western Hemisphere without a free media.⁷² Radio and TV broadcasts and newspapers are entirely controlled by the Cuban government. The government also goes to great lengths to control foreign journalists in the country. U.S., UK, and Mexican correspondents all lost their journalism credentials for portraying Cuba "negatively" in their articles, and any journalist who does not work for the official media is considered an "enemy of the state".⁷³ In 2006, Cuba was

⁶⁸ Pamela Starr, "Lessons from the Venezuelan Plebiscite: A Democratic Image Makes for Good Public Diplomacy Strategy," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, December 7, 2007 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at usepublicdiplomacy.com).

⁶⁹ "Gauging the Chávez Effect," *Gallup Poll*, September 29, 2006 (accessed on March 29, 2008 and available at www.gallup.com/poll/24814/Gauging-Chavez-Effect.aspx).

⁷⁰ "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2007, p. 68.

⁷¹ Stephen Johnson, "What a Chávez Win Means in Venezuela and for U.S. Policy" (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, December 12, 2006 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at usepublicdiplomacy.com)).

⁷² "2007 Cuba Country Report," Freedom House (accessed on April 3, 2008 and available at freedomhouse.org).

⁷³ "Updated Information on Imprisoned Cuban Journalists," Reporters Without Borders (accessed on April 3, 2008 and available at www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=367).

the second biggest prison in the world for journalists after China, and at least twenty-four journalists remain in jail today.⁷⁴ The country's official newspaper is the communist *Granma*, available daily and literally at every street corner in Havana. The Castro regime also goes to great lengths to ensure that the Cuban public does not receive information from outside venues. The government blocks high-speed links, which forces Cubans to turn to illegal satellite equipment so they can listen to Radio Martí. Reporters Without Borders reports that less than two percent of Cubans have easy access to the Internet, making Cuba one of the most Internet backward societies in the world.⁷⁵ If Cubans are caught accessing Internet portals at hotels, which are designed for tourist uses, they can receive up to five years in prison.⁷⁶

Public opinion toward the U.S. in Cuba is not so different from the rest of Latin America.⁷⁷ Public opinion toward the American people, there remains an intense sense of curiosity among the Cuban people.⁷⁸ Cubans are aware of the close distance of the U.S., remain aware of U.S. popular culture thanks to Cuban-Americans who visit the country, and have a general sense of positive regard toward Americans. Despite the fact that the U.S. government only receives a fourteen percent approval, forty-four percent of Cubans mentioned that the U.S. would be the most ideal country with which to make economic ties.⁷⁹ It is also important to note that when it comes to the leadership of another country that they admire, Brazil ranks first, China ranks second, and Venezuela ranks third. The fact that Brazil, a country that enjoys a socialist

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Updated Information on Imprisoned Cuban Journalists," Reporters Without Borders (accessed on April 3, 2008 and available at www.rsf.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=367).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey," The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2007.

⁷⁸ Information dictated during an interview with "Juan", a grassroots organizer in Cuba, on March 8, 2008.

⁷⁹ "Change in Cuba," *Gallup Poll*, December 20, 2006 (accessed on April 3, 2008 and available at www.gallup.com/video/25957/Change-Cuba.aspx).

democratic government with a healthy economy, ranks before China and Venezuela indicates that Cubans admire yearn for democratic socialism and healthy economy.⁸⁰

The Cuban people have been forced to experiment with a socialist economic and political system since the early 1960s, and as such, their responses to socialism, capitalism, and democracy are quite different from those in Venezuela and other Latin American countries with some sort of socialist government.⁸¹ Beginning with how Cubans feel about their situation in general, three-quarters of them feel that the situation is “bad”, “very bad”, or “so-so”, while only one in four described it as “well” or “very well”.⁸² This same study found that low salaries and high living costs is considered the biggest problem in Cuba (forty-three percent), followed by a lack of freedom and politics (eighteen percent), and food scarcity (twelve percent). When it asked if the government had the ability to fix these problems, close to eighty percent believe that the government will not fix the problem within a year.

As a result of such dire perceptions of the general state of Cuban society, and with the belief that the current government will not fix the problems within a year, seventy-five percent believe that democracy will improve life, and eighty-three percent believe that a market economy will do the same.⁸³ Furthermore, ninety-one percent believe that the Cuban situation is unique, and forty percent said that Cuba most resembles Venezuela, followed by Bolivia and China. U.S. influence has very little to do with these sentiments, considering that only seven percent admit to listening to Radio Martí and thirteen percent admit watching TV Martí (albeit most of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers, 47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey,” The Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 27, 2007.

⁸² “Cuban Public Opinion Survey: September 5-October 4, 2007,” The International Republican Institute (accessed on April 3, 2008 and available at www.iri.org).

⁸³ Ibid.

the respondents claimed they saw it while waiting in line at the USIS).⁸⁴ This same study also concluded that seventy percent do not belong to any mass organization, only eleven percent cared about human rights, and the majority of the people do not read local newspapers. In summation, Cuba is an isolated country, and its people, who are ready for democratic and economic change, are mostly only exposed to government-filtered information.

III. U.S. Public Diplomacy Strategy

1. Defining Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy needs to be designed with official diplomatic policy in mind in order for it to effectuate the overall goals of the U.S. government toward a particular country. In defining the term “public diplomacy” in respect to Latin America, it is important that it resembles and supports the general policy toward the region. In 1953, at the start of the Cold War, President Eisenhower linked public diplomacy to U.S. policy when he described it as the submission of evidence “to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives of the U.S. are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace.”⁸⁵ The problem with this definition in regard to Latin America, however, is that the objectives of the U.S. and Latin American states were not necessarily in harmony with each other, as evidenced by the many authoritarian regimes of the 1970s.

Either aware or not of the differences between U.S. and other country objectives, subsequent definitions of USIA’s mission and of public diplomacy began to include the word “influence”. In 1953 President Kennedy defined public diplomacy as the “influencing” of attitudes in other nations. In the 1970s, USIA described its mission as the promotion of national interests through the “influencing” of foreign publics and creating a broader dialogue between

⁸⁴ Ernesto F. Betancourt and Guillermo Grenier, “Measuring Cuban Public Opinion: Economic, Social, and Political Issues” (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1999).

⁸⁵ 1953 Mission Statement for the U.S. Information Agency.

the U.S. and other peoples. And, more recently, the Planning Group for the Integration of USIA into the State Department defined public diplomacy in 1997 as seeking to promote the national interests of the U.S. through understanding, informing, and “influencing” foreign audiences. Because U.S. policy toward Latin America continues to be designed through the lens of wanting to maintain influence in the region, these definitions of public diplomacy are quite apt.

2. U.S. Public Diplomacy in Venezuela

Thanks to Venezuela’s democratic history, the U.S. government has been able to target many different groups in its public diplomacy strategies in Venezuela.⁸⁶ Targeted individuals within civil society include youth, people in low socioeconomic conditions, academics, intellectuals, people who have never traveled to, and people who do not have any relatives in, the U.S. These individuals have been targeted because of the U.S. government’s belief that they have a unique standing in civil society to either promote U.S. public diplomacy themselves or because their opinion in domestic politics matters. Academics and intellectuals, for example, have the ability to influence people via their publications or in their classrooms. Youth, people in low socioeconomic conditions, and people who have not traveled to the U.S. and/or do not have any relatives here matter because they make up the majority of the population, and their opinion toward the U.S. affect the way they see U.S. and Venezuelan politics.

Organized groups, such as NGOs, the media, and local governments are targeted because of their ability to influence the Venezuelan civil society, as their presence is visible in daily life. NGOs are issue-specific organizations that work directly with communities, and therefore have a closer understanding of the local population. The media, despite Chávez’s goal to close independent media outlets, continues to play an important role in Venezuelan society, as much of

⁸⁶ Interview with PAO Ben Ziff, U.S. Embassy in Caracas, March 27, 2008.

the population has access to DirecTV, satellite television, and two large newspapers – *El Universal* and *El Nacional* – remain independent of government control. Local governments, for their part, are important because in rural areas the federal government has minimal presence, and many people come to depend more on their local government. There is also potential for local governments to be free of Chávez’s control and governed by members of a different party.

The U.S. government has had to rely on traditional methods in its public diplomacy instruments because the Venezuelan government refuses to cooperate with the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, to coordinate cultural events and agree on mutual bilateral issues, or to even contact any U.S. officials.⁸⁷ As a result of the lack of contact between the U.S. and Venezuelan governments, the main instrument in U.S. public diplomacy in Venezuela is talking directly to the people. As PAO Ziff mentioned, there is simply no substitute for person-to-person public diplomacy strategies, even in today’s highly technologically advanced world. In being true to this notion, U.S. officials go into rural cities, to community centers, and work with different organizations to host events where Venezuelans can speak and interact with them. Speakers and cultural events are held for people to gain a better understanding of the U.S. and its policies, and for people to gain a more clear sense of American culture and values.

Teaching English, such as through the College Horizon’s Program, are further instruments whereby Americans interact directly with Venezuelans. The strong demand for learning the English language, thanks to society’s belief that learning English will provide people with better career opportunities, has allowed the U.S. to organize centers through which Americans teach English to Venezuelans and take advantage of the curriculum by also

⁸⁷ Ibid.

introducing American literature and culture.⁸⁸ The American Corners Program further advances the use of American books and electronics by partnering the U.S. Embassy with universities, schools, and bar associations and providing “mini-reading rooms” where Venezuelans of all social classes can go in and read more about U.S. culture, history, and policy. Because this strategy works in conjunction with domestic groups, people are not as hesitant to visit these centers. The U.S. Embassy is currently trying to expand it in scope and in geographic presence.

Educational exchanges that allow Venezuelans to travel to the U.S. make up a second instrument of U.S. public diplomacy.⁸⁹ The Venezuelan Embassy considers exchanges one of the most useful and valuable public diplomacy tools, for they have the potential of having the most long-term impact, especially within the youth population. Through these exchanges, Venezuelans have the opportunity to travel to the U.S., to expose themselves to American culture and the American lifestyle, to be directly impacted by their experiences, and to make their own unbiased opinions of the U.S. and of Americans. In the past five years there has been more of a demand in applications, and the number of Venezuelans traveling to the U.S. through such exchanges has increased.⁹⁰ The globalized world, and the fact that in Venezuela even those in the poorest socioeconomic conditions have access to satellite TV, are what fuel such a demand for exchanges, as well as the fact that many Venezuelans have relatives in the U.S. or follow the careers of Venezuelan baseball players playing for the Major Leagues in the U.S.

The U.S. Embassy tries to target bright and energetic people who have the potential of working in various aspects of society as leaders after they return to Venezuela, so that their experiences in the U.S. have the opportunity to be relayed to other Venezuelans and have a stronger impact. The career interests of participants are taken into consideration, as they are

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

paired with companies or individuals involved in similar industries, thereby providing a neutral setting of mutual interest for those traveling to the U.S., so they can return to Venezuela and share with their communities stories of cooperative entrepreneurship. In doing so, the U.S. also tries to find specific areas that people don't already know about or haven't already seen regarding the United States, such as the recycling industry and its effects on the environment; areas and issues in which both countries have an interest to cooperate and share knowledge.

Democracy promotion is a program with various instruments, and it reinforces Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's assertion that the U.S. will deal with any government so long as it is freely elected and democratic. This program is also an example of the Bush II's global strategy of focusing on democracy-promotion programs throughout the world, especially in Latin America.⁹¹ In Venezuela, this component has received special focus because of Chávez's attempts to erode democratic values and rights in Venezuela. The U.S. is very interested in ensuring that important institutions of democracy, particularly civil society and the media, remain free and prosper. Therefore, the U.S. has made it a priority to educate people about the dangers of placing limitations on freedom of speech and democracy. The job of a PAO is to bring what are believed to be the fundamentals and ideals of democracy of the U.S. to Venezuela, and freedom of speech and a free and democracy civil society are two crucial ones.⁹²

In efforts to increase democracy-promotion projects, the U.S. Embassy in Caracas opened an Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in 2003. The mission of OTI is to strengthen democratic institutions and promote space for democratic dialogue, and to encourage citizen participation in the democratic process.⁹³ USAID, the International Republican Institute (IRI),

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Tom Barry, "Transitioning Venezuela" *Americas Program, Center for International Policy*, 2005 (accessed on March 15, 2008 and available at www.americas.irc-online.org).

and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) all work within OTI, designing and implementing democracy-promotion programs.⁹⁴ Plan Consensus, for example, was designed to meet with various civil society groups, hold a discussion about how best to address economic and political issues, and draft and disseminate a policy paper to media outlets. The individuals involved in this discussion were either representatives of opposition parties, workers unions, or business associations who oppose Chávez. The Venezuela Construction of Confidence Initiative was designed to assist Venezuelans in fostering political conditions that would preclude violent conflict and systemic breakdown by airing TV commercials that convey messages of solidarity and democratic values. The Democratic Coordinator, for its part, produces TV commercials that blame Chávez for all of the nation's socioeconomic ills. Because current government officials are Chavistas who by their nature oppose U.S. policies, the U.S. has had to target opposition party members and rural local leaders, a strategy that has not been free of controversy.⁹⁵ The U.S. largely favors these groups over the Chávez government, as evidenced by the U.S.'s refusal to back the 2002 OAS resolution only after it appeared the coup against Chávez had failed.⁹⁶

The fourth instrument of U.S. public diplomacy relates to the media. U.S. officials make it a priority to talk to the Venezuelan media, particularly through interviews on U.S. policy and U.S.-Venezuelan relations.⁹⁷ The relationship between U.S. officials and the media continues on cooperative terms, while the relationship with state-sponsored media is practically non-existent. Independent media outlets, however, have to work very carefully in order to ensure that they do not incur any more retaliation from the Venezuelan government. The U.S. government is also

⁹⁴ Tom Barry, "The New Politics of Political Aid in Venezuela," *Right Web Analysis* (Silver City, NM: International Relations Center, 2007).

⁹⁵ Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs Vol. 85, No. 2* (New York, NY: The Council on Foreign Relations, 2006).

⁹⁶ Michael Coppedge, "Venezuela: Popular Sovereignty versus Liberal Democracy," In Jorge I. Domínguez and Michael Shifter, eds. *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999, 165-192), 192.

⁹⁷ Interview with PAO Ben Ziff, U.S. Embassy in Caracas, March 27, 2008.

working on increasing the presence and role of Voice of America (VOA) into Venezuela.⁹⁸

Congress recently passed a bill that calls for more VOA funding so that such a strategy can be implemented. Given the fact that many Venezuelans have access to radios and television, it is hoped that such broadcasts will reach a much wider audience than in Cuba.

3. U.S. Public Diplomacy in Cuba

Who the targets of public diplomacy are is every bit as important as the public diplomacy strategy. In Cuba, this is difficult to achieve due to the absence of an embassy and official diplomatic relations, both necessary for implementing public diplomacy programs. It's also difficult because the types of targets available in Cuba are very broad and vague because it encompasses all of Cuban civil society in general. In Cuba there are no known local opposition groups, no truly functioning NGOs, and no mass organizations, largely because of the political situation of the country.⁹⁹ The organized groups that do exist mostly work underground, or their organized mission is simply reduced to activities that do not present a threat to the government. The fact that only a limited amount of people have cell phones, have access to the Internet, listen to the radio, or watch TV, makes organizing much more difficult to do, and it affects the speed of communication, further hampering the potential spread of news and information.

As a result of this, and in efforts to find targets through which U.S. public diplomacy will have a stronger impact, the U.S. has targeted four types of people in its public diplomacy strategy: (1) youth dissidents, (2) journalists, (3) human rights activists, and (4) the Afro-Cuban

⁹⁸ Alvin Snyder, "TV/Radio Martí Boost their Volume to Cuba, Expanding their Services," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, January 4, 2007 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at www.uscpublicdiplomacy.com).

⁹⁹ Information dictated during an interview with "Juan", a grassroots organizer in Cuba, on March 8, 2008, and from a U.S. official who was interviewed on March 25, 2008.

community.¹⁰⁰ As most dissidents in Cuba reach their fifties, the U.S. governments wants to ensure that the youth, who have not lived through the same experiences as those alive before, during and immediately after the revolution, continue to have a venue to express their ideals. Cuban journalists who do not agree with the Castro regime are targeted because they provide on-the-ground reports of the Cuban situation through an insider's perspective, which has more of an impact. Because human rights is an important issue for the U.S., it seeks to alleviate the problem by working with activists who can spread their influence to the general public. And because Afro-Cubans are the largest demographic in the country, they are also important targets.

The USIS has become the venue by which the U.S. designs and implements public diplomacy in Cuba. Created in 1977 by President Carter in efforts to thaw U.S.-Cuban ties, the USIS in no way formally recognizes diplomatic relations with Cuba.¹⁰¹ As a result, the USIS works under significant handicaps compared with embassies, including a lack of Cuban approval of the U.S.-appointed chief, the small size of the staff, and the lack of direct access to the local government.¹⁰² Because the objective of the USIS – “to promote a peaceful transition to a democratic system based on respect for rule of law, individual human rights and open economic and communication systems” – directly oppose Cuban policy toward the U.S. and Cuban politics, a fourth weakness can be added to the previous three.¹⁰³ Wanting to control the reach of the U.S. government, Cuba reduces the scope of U.S. officials to a 25-mile radius jurisdiction.¹⁰⁴

Due to the relations between the U.S. and Cuba, U.S. public diplomacy instruments are limited to three.¹⁰⁵ The first involves Cuban journalists who have fallen out of favor with the

¹⁰⁰ Interview with U.S. official on March 25, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad, 1750 to the Present* (New York, NY: Norton and Company, 1994), 692.

¹⁰² G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 143.

¹⁰³ See State Department information on the U.S. Interests Section in Havana, available at www.state.gov.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with U.S. official on March 25, 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with U.S. official on March 25, 2008.

Cuban government. The USIS houses approximately fifteen Internet portals, which are open to the Cuban public, albeit it is these journalists that mostly use them. Because Internet access in Cuba is so limited, the USIS believes it is important to provide alternate venues by which journalists can post uncensored articles on the real situation of Cuba on the Internet.

Approximately sixty to seventy people access these portals on a daily basis, while the number of Cubans who access them is considerably small, considering the lack of Internet access.

A book donation program makes up the second U.S. public diplomacy instrument. Through it, the USIS is able to donate books on American culture and history the schools throughout Havana. In providing books on events such as the American revolution, texts on the Declaration of Independence, biographies of U.S. presidents, as well as popular children's stories, the USIS hopes to expose Cuban children and youth to American history and culture so they can gather a more positive perspective of the U.S. The themes of the books tend to be universal, so that the material speaks to the children without any political limits or influence. The books are provided in both English and Spanish, establishing a communication channel made up of the languages of both countries. U.S. officials visit the schools that receive the books to ensure that they are being used. Of course, the biggest weakness of this instrument is its reach, as millions of Cubans in rural, poorer, and less educated areas are left out.

One U.S. public diplomacy program is perhaps the most ambitious, as it strives to reach out to youth dissidents, particularly those of Afro-Cuban descent. The USIS has set up videoconferences with American students, particularly Cuban-Americans at the University of Miami, with youth dissidents in order to create a dialogue free of media reports for the two. During the videoconferences, youth from both countries exchange their thoughts and feelings on the U.S., Cuba, and U.S.-Cuban relations. Cuban youth also get a better understanding of what

the youth in the U.S. are thinking and how they feel about Cuba, which influences their general perception of the American public. This instrument is ambitious not only because it creates direct temporary ties with Cuban and American youth, but also because the Cuban youth who participate risk a lot in doing so. If caught, youth can be expelled from school or from the university, their parents can lose their jobs, and their families can be ostracized from society. As a result, not many youth dissidents are willing to participate in such an exchange.

The U.S. has relied on radio and TV broadcasting as its most invasive public diplomacy instrument in Cuba for many years particularly because of the territorial restrictions that limit the work of U.S. officials. Radio Martí began broadcasting to Cuba in 1985 and was coupled with its sister outlet, TV Martí in 1990.¹⁰⁶ The mission of the broadcasts was to disseminate international news from independent journalists inside of Cuba, as well as present American culture and better explain U.S. policies toward the country.¹⁰⁷ The Martí's, as they are often called, have been described as the Castro regime's enemy number one, and Castro certainly has gone to great lengths to jam radio and TV broadcasts.¹⁰⁸ As a result, very few Cubans report ever listening to Radio Martí or watching TV Martí.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the majority of Cubans are too preoccupied with real problems to tune in to political rhetoric. In 1997, the U.S. decided to test how effective Martí broadcasting was by airing an important address by President Clinton over Radio Martí many times for an extended period of time. A poll was conducted, and only sixteen percent of Cubans reported hearing the address.¹¹⁰ Responding to the poor audience numbers, and as part of President Bush II's attempts to put more force on the Castro regime, the

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Johnson and Helle C. Dale, "How to Reinvigorate U.S. Public Diplomacy," *Backgrounders*, No. 1645. (The Heritage Foundation, April 23, 2003), 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ Alvin Snyder, "Broadcasting in Cuba: The Martí's are Castro's Enemy Number One," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, May 4, 2006 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at www.uscpublicdiplomacy.com).

¹⁰⁹ Ernesto F. Betancourt and Guillermo Grenier, "Measuring Cuban Public Opinion: Economic, Social, and Political Issues" (Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1999).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

U.S. government has invested more on the Martí broadcasts. Radio Martí now has four shortwave channels that frequently change frequencies, and a new ten million dollar plane provides broadcasting from the sky.¹¹¹ Cubans only perceive such improvements, however, as another example of a multi-million dollar waste on behalf of the U.S. government.¹¹²

IV. Main Observations: U.S. Relations with Venezuela and Cuba

1. Official Diplomatic Policies and Issues

The similarities between official diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Venezuela and the U.S. and Cuba originate out of the notion that U.S. policy is a reaction to political and economic events in both countries, and Cuban and Venezuelan policies are, in turn, reactions to U.S. policy. Because of this, diplomatic relations between the U.S. and each of the two countries can be defined as in opposition to each other and on the defensive. To state it more clearly, U.S. policy toward each country has been out of reaction to political and economic events in Cuba during the early 1960s and to Venezuela in recent years. U.S. policies sought then in Cuba and seek today in Venezuela to counter anti-democratic and anti-capitalist policies that oppose U.S. interests and undermine U.S. influence. As a result, the policies of each side begin to depend on another for sustenance and to ensure support from the people. For example, the more the U.S. attacks Cuba on its anti-democratic ways, the more the Cuban government feels the need to defend itself and respond by criticizing U.S. policy. Chávez continues to do the same, criticizing U.S. policy at every turn and portraying it as the polar opposite of Venezuelan ideals.

The differences in U.S. official diplomatic relations between Venezuela and Cuba are numerous, thanks to three factors: (1) time, (2) geopolitics, and (3) interests. The U.S. was able to enforce such aggressive policies toward Cuba because it was done under the context of the

¹¹¹ Alvin Snyder, "TV/Radio Martí Boost their Volume to Cuba, Expanding their Services," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, January 4, 2007 (accessed on March 7, 2008 and available at www.uscpublicdiplomacy.com).

¹¹² Information dictated during an interview with "Juan", a grassroots organizer in Cuba, on March 8, 2008.

Cold War and while the U.S. had much clout as a superpower. With the end of the Truman Doctrine that created the consensus amongst the American public for implementing such policies, the U.S. government lost the ability to exert its policies as policymakers saw fit. Because the U.S. cannot treat Venezuela today the way it treated Cuba before, U.S. officials need to turn to better diplomatic relations with the country. Geopolitics is a second factor that supports this argument. Because the island of Cuba is geographically isolated, and because it is located within ninety miles of U.S. territory, it was easy to politically isolate the country and ensure that no other country approached Cuba (or, the U.S.'s backyard) to assist it. Venezuela, on the other hand, holds a strategic geopolitical position, as it lies between the Caribbean and the rest of South America, and the country is itself much larger, both geographically and demographically. The third important difference is that of U.S. interests in both countries. In Cuba the U.S. had no tangible interests. Cuba is not home to any goods that the U.S. has not been able to find elsewhere. In Venezuela, however, many interests exist, primarily because of the long economic relationship between the two countries and due to Venezuela's oil.

The implications of these conclusions are that the U.S. policy cannot continue to be designed in the same way that it has designed its policy on Cuba, both because of the differences in time and geopolitics, and because U.S. interests make it expensive for the U.S. to continue to do so. As long as U.S. and Venezuelan policies continue to be designed in reaction to one another, U.S. public diplomacy will be opposed by Venezuela and remain uncooperative, adding further tension to the bilateral relations. John Maisto, former Ambassador to Venezuela under President Clinton and director for hemispheric affairs under President Bush's National Security Council, supports this change in course, as he has recommended that the U.S. watch what

Venezuela does, not what they say.¹¹³ The rhetoric between the two countries is but a product of opposed policies, and while the majority of Venezuelans do not support Chávez's anti-Bush comments, Venezuelan opinion of the U.S. has declined in recent years. If U.S. policy does not change, the U.S. risks seeing public opinion toward the U.S. deteriorate even more. If U.S. policy continues to be reactionary, it will continue to be formulated under an anti-Chávez umbrella, and as long as he enjoys large public support, ultimately anti-Venezuelan as well.

Looking at issues in dispute and in agreement between the U.S. and both countries, it is clear that diplomatic relations between the U.S. and the two are certainly affecting how they deal with such issues. Despite the fact that the U.S. and Cuba do not enjoy official diplomatic relations, both countries have been able to create a dialogue and work in cooperation regarding a serious regional security problem: illegal narcotics. Fidel Castro himself promised to be cooperative with U.S. efforts in the region. Besides the many other issues of disagreement between the two countries, the areas of agreement have stemmed out of diplomatic contact and communication. When it comes to the U.S. and Venezuela, however, the two countries are in "agreement" with each other regarding trade and oil, but out of *de facto* reasons. In other words, the long history of friendly economic relations between the two countries, and the fact that Venezuela depends on U.S. refineries to process its petroleum, are what sustain friendly relations between the two countries, and not via official diplomatic meetings and dialogue.

Because the U.S. and Venezuela are logistically bound to each other, at least for the time being, there remains room for further communication. The two may not agree on how to manage an economy, yet their economies are linked. They may not agree on politics, but they maintain diplomatic relations. They may not agree on a strategy in response to illegal narcotics, yet both are affected by it. As such, the two countries are bound by their disagreements and affected by

¹¹³ J. Michael Waller, "What to do About Venezuela," *Center for Security Policy* (May 2005, No. 6), 5.

them, further increasing the potential for cooperation. While domestic events in Cuba do not directly affect the U.S. because of the lack of tangible interests there and due to Cuba's isolation, the domestic events in Venezuela do affect the region and the U.S., for Chávez has used these to exploit the political situation and increase his power. Therefore, the third factor in current U.S. policy – investing in people – should be highlighted. Because Chávez's support comes from the majority poor, U.S. policy should do more to help people out of poverty.

2. Public Opinion

The state of public opinion in Venezuela and Cuba has become more similar in recent years thanks to Chávez's intense crackdown on media broadcasts. The differences, however, still abound, and this is largely due to the fact that the majority of Venezuelans, regardless of socioeconomic status, have access to various media outlets. This alone makes it possible for U.S. public diplomacy to have the ability to target many people throughout the country via media broadcasts and the up-and-coming VOA. What is of concern, however, is the fact that while both of these countries do not have a free media, over half of the population in each country claims to have confidence in it. The good news for U.S. public diplomacy is that in Venezuela there are indicators that point to the fact that the people are very much aware of government control, and that they disagree with it, as demonstrated by the mass protests that took place against the government when it declared that RCTV would be closing. Caracas, home to approximately twenty percent of the country's population, is also proving difficult to control, as evidenced by the fact that two broadcasting corporations independent of the government still operate, and given that the two largest newspapers in the country remain independent.

Public opinion toward the U.S. further reveals potentially positive markers for U.S. public diplomacy in both countries. Cubans and Venezuelans value the U.S. for its economy,

generally view Americans favorably, and only dislike the current leadership of the U.S. What is of concern, however, is that favorable public opinion toward the U.S. in Venezuela has been on the decline since 2002, and this is something that U.S. public diplomacy needs to take seriously. At the same time, however, it is important to note that favorable public opinion toward the U.S. has declined throughout the region, even in countries with more friendly ties to the U.S. than Venezuela, such as in México and Colombia. What this indicates is that domestic politics within Latin American nations has less effect on public opinion toward the U.S. than U.S. foreign policy toward the region does, for favorable public opinion is similar in countries as democratic as Chile and as “undemocratic” as Venezuela. Public opinion in Venezuela also indicates a general dislike for Castro – the man idolized by Chávez as the epitome of a socialist leader – and for Chávez’s anti-Bush remarks, indicating that Venezuelans have not fallen to Chávez’s rhetoric and that friendly and diplomatic relations with the U.S. are still valued. The admiration of American culture and economic prosperity should be highlighted in U.S. public diplomacy.

Venezuelans and Cubans also seem to agree on public opinion issues, as both countries see economic hardships as the most salient ones. The differences, however, lie on the fact that Cubans seem to be disillusioned with their leader and their leadership, while Venezuelans are not. The majority of Venezuelans in fact do not regard their leadership positively, but the majority of them do continue to trust Chávez himself. What this indicates is that Chávez is by far the most important factor in the glue that holds the populist movement in Venezuela together. As a result of this, the majority of Venezuelans prefer socialism to capitalism in dealing with the economy, even while most of them agree that democracy is a better way of governing than any other type. In Cuba, on the other hand, people prefer democracy and market-led growth to any other options, as they have been experimenting with a socialist market for decades now. What

this means for U.S. policy is that Chávez's support is related to levels of poverty and a poor economy, and it his nationalistic and personalistic "charisma" that maintains his support, even while the economy continues to fluctuate and stagnate. The fact that most Venezuelans list Brazil as a positive example, further points to an absence of socialist extremism in Venezuela. The U.S. should therefore find out what democratic values and definitions do remain instilled amongst the Venezuelan public and highlight these in its public diplomacy programs.

3. U.S. Public Diplomacy

Due to the nature of civil society, and thanks to the different political and economic experiences, the biggest differences between these Venezuela and Cuba lie in the targeted audiences selected for public diplomacy. In Cuba, public diplomacy has been reduced to targeting individuals within civil society at large, thanks to the fact that very few organized groups and NGOs exist, that local governments are non-existent, and that the government controls all media and blocks U.S. broadcasts from Radio and TV Martí. In Venezuela, however, the U.S. can target specific organized groups, such as NGOs, local parties, media outlets, workers unions, and business associations. These actors products of democratic and capitalist systems, and for this reason, it is only logical that a U.S. strategy would want to work with these groups in efforts to ensure a wider and long-term approach to public diplomacy. The majority of Venezuelans have access to various media outlets; meaning that the U.S. can reach rural areas, and illustrating that Chávez has a long way to go before he is in control of all media.

While this information points to positive signs, the U.S. must also exercise discretion when working with local groups. OTI and its work on democracy promotion is dangerous because it works with unbiased organizations that have been sued and shut down by the Venezuelan government due to their collaboration with the U.S., therefore putting the guise of

any genuine U.S. public diplomacy in the eyes of Venezuelans at risk.¹¹⁴ U.S. public diplomacy needs to shift the focus on democracy promotion from organizations to the general public, and this can be done by exploiting the vast avenues of media available to the public and in also addressing socioeconomic factors, for these lay the groundwork for Chávez's continued support. Venezuelans still prefer democracy to any other form of government, yet refuse the U.S.'s definition of democratic ideals, and the U.S. must be careful not to treat this as a moot point.

The similarities between U.S. public diplomacy instruments in Venezuela and Cuba lie on the relationship with the host government and loosely on their very own design. What this means is that U.S. officials have a difficult time making the most out of public diplomacy programs due to the lack of cooperation and coordination with the host governments. In Cuba, this is expected thanks to the lack of official diplomatic relations with the government since the early 1960s. In Venezuela, however, despite the fact that both countries maintain official diplomatic relations, the Venezuelan government refuses to even contact any U.S. officials at the U.S. Embassy. It would be obvious to turn to the opposing policies between the two countries, but it is important to also look at the public diplomacy instruments. Because public diplomacy instruments are aligned with U.S. diplomatic policy, and because this opposes Venezuelan policies and changes, then the Venezuelan government is bound to oppose public diplomacy instruments and refuse to coordinate anything with the U.S. The tasks that OIT performs certainly has not alleviated this tension, and Chávez has pointed out to the Venezuelan people that OTI offices have only been used before in places like Haiti, Kosovo, and Guatemala, where the country really was in transition, while Venezuela is not a country in transition.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ The organization Súmate was sued by the Venezuelan government in 2004.

¹¹⁵ Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking U.S. Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 85.

The differences between public diplomacy instruments in Venezuela and Cuba are many. In Cuba, instruments of people-to-people contact, student exchanges, democracy promotion via working with local organizations, and working with the media, is just impossible thanks to official diplomatic relations. Another important difference lies in the fact that the U.S. government wants to have normal relations with Venezuela, while in Cuba the same could not be said without acknowledging that a change in Cuban politics would have to come first.¹¹⁶ As such, both the public diplomacy instruments themselves and the desire (or not) for engaging in normal diplomatic relations is what distinguishes our relations with these two countries. However, the only aspect that truly deviates from this goes back to the mission of OTI. OTI's mission resembles the State Department's 2004 Plan for Assistance to a Free Cuba, as both plans strive to undermine the regimes' succession strategies, work to illuminate the reality of the political situation, and empower local civil society. OTI is exploiting the fact that diplomatic relations exist between the two countries, instead of taking advantage of it by working as neutrally as possible with civil society, understanding the democratic values that matter to Venezuelans, and designing policies with these factors in mind.

The two hundred years of very intimate relations and the strong economic ties between the two countries are two factors that continue to link the U.S. and Venezuela together, albeit on a *de facto* basis. Public diplomacy must be more attuned to this and not treat the delicate relations between the two countries lightly. One way of doing this is by making sure that public diplomacy is more sensitive to the people's needs and their perceptions of the U.S., and by eliminating some of the strategies within the democracy promotion program that concentrates on the weapons that can hurt Chávez the most. In working with organized groups and local governments, the U.S. might win battles, such as the 2007 defeat of Chávez's referendum that

¹¹⁶ Interview with PAO Ben Ziff, U.S. Embassy in Caracas, March 27, 2008.

would have eliminated any restrictions from allowing him to run for president, but it will not be successful in the long-term, so long as Chávez continues to polarize the country and the region. Perhaps the case of the city of Petare illustrates the sensitivity of the Venezuelan population's needs: USAID canvassed in the city in 2007 and educated them on the benefits of democracy, and also gave bags of food to the people. As a result, the majority of the community voted against Chávez in the referendum.¹¹⁷ Indeed, other factors other than democracy do matter.

V. Conclusions: Transitioning Governments via Public Diplomacy?

1. General Implications of Main Observations

The purpose of this comparative analysis was to answer the following two questions: (1) does official foreign policy in Venezuela resemble that toward Cuba, and (2) do public diplomacy instruments reflect the differences and/or similarities in official policies? The answer to the first question would have to be both 'yes' and 'no'. Official U.S. policy toward Venezuela is similar to Cuba's because it is designed on the notion that the country is led by a nationalistic leader who presents a threat to democracy and market-led growth – two interests of the U.S. throughout the entire region. To reiterate, U.S. policy in both Venezuela and Cuba is designed out of a reaction to changing domestic events. Venezuelan and Cuban policy toward the U.S. is a response to this policy, and as a result, the two policies oppose each other and are on the defensive. What's important, however, is to concentrate on the 'no' part of the answer to the policy question. U.S. policy in Venezuela is not similar to that in Cuba for two important reasons: (1) the U.S. government wants to maintain good relations with Venezuela, and (2) the two countries are intricately linked via their economies. So long as these two factors retain their importance, U.S. policy toward Venezuela will not come close to fully resembling that in Cuba.

¹¹⁷ Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking U.S. Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006), 117.

U.S. public diplomacy toward Venezuela, and the differences between it and U.S. public diplomacy toward Cuba, clearly reflect this difference. The types of U.S. public diplomacy instruments employed in Venezuela – people-to-people contact, exchanges, speaking to the media, visiting community centers, holding cultural events – are not possible and have never been seen in Cuba. So long as the U.S. and Venezuela maintain diplomatic relations, the U.S. will be able to continue implementing these instruments. Venezuelan public opinion reflects, whether due to U.S. public diplomacy or not, that the country maintains generally good regards toward Americans and American popular culture. There is, however, cause for concern for U.S. public diplomacy officials, and that is the Venezuelan government's refusal to coordinate with or even contact the U.S. Embassy. U.S. officials at the Embassy need to try to engage Venezuelan officials in direct communication. If Arlen Specter can get Fidel Castro to agree on U.S. policy regarding the drug trade, then two countries with official diplomatic relations and strong economic ties should be able to do the same. The upcoming change in U.S. administration might be a good springboard toward instituting better communication with Venezuelan officials, but the success of such endeavor will partly be dependent on U.S. policy toward Venezuela.

Ultimately, what affects policies, public diplomacy instruments, and the relationship between the U.S. and Venezuela, depends on the issues of disagreement. How democracy and capitalism are defined, and how leftist populism and socialism are defined, by both countries, is what creates perceived differences between the countries and what leads to disagreements. In reality, the U.S. must be aware that the Venezuelan political system, established in 1958, has never permitted either true representative democracy or really free markets, especially in relation to how we define these two in the U.S. So what makes the Chávez regime so different, that the

U.S. feels the need to respond to his administration's changes?¹¹⁸ Ultimately, the difference between Chávez and past Latin American leaders who did not fully embrace democracy but still enjoyed U.S. support lies in the communication between him and U.S. officials. At present time, this communication is defined by rhetoric, mostly on Chávez's behalf. The U.S. has chosen to ignore him and pursue its own policy and public diplomacy strategies, not realizing that in the long-term, it is the relationship with leaders that come to influence the relationship between two countries the most, especially in countries where the leader enjoys such mass public support.

2. Lessons Learned Regarding Nationalist Leaders

What differentiates Chávez even more from previous leaders in the region who did not harbor a truly democratic system in their countries has to do with his nationalistic approach to everything he says in public and to all the political and economic changes he attempts to bring about. His 'charisma', in other words is what attracts his mass support. In seeing Chávez as another nationalistic leader, it is important to look at the most important lessons that have been learned from the U.S. experience with Fidel Castro, another nationalistic leader – perhaps the region's epitome of one – and what has been learned from Chávez himself so far.

The first lesson is that nationalistic leaders do not build institutions.¹¹⁹ To be fair, Venezuela has always mentioned a reputation for poor bureaucratic functioning.¹²⁰ This has made it easier for Chávez to take control of public institutions, thereby eliminating any sense of accountability on his executive power and decisions.¹²¹ What this means for public diplomacy is

¹¹⁸ Stephen Johnson and Ariel Cohen, "Minimizing Mischief in Venezuela, Stabilizing the U.S. Oil Supply," *Backgrounder*, No. 1787 (The Heritage Foundation, April 12, 2004), 2.

¹¹⁹ Georgie Anne Geyer, "As Fidel Fades," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 31-40 (Cambridge, MA: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2000), 3.

¹²⁰ Janet Kelly with the cooperation of Abelardo Daza, "Public Policy Education in Venezuela," In *Training a New Generation of Leaders* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Latin America Program, 2003), 109.

¹²¹ Stephen Johnson and Ariel Cohen, "Minimizing Mischief in Venezuela, Stabilizing the U.S. Oil Supply," *Backgrounder*, No. 1787 (The Heritage Foundation, April 12, 2004), 2.

that U.S. strategies will have a more difficult time creating long-term effects if it targets individuals, groups, or organizations whose influence is bound by a lack of institutional accountability. In targeting the general public, for example, if they can only hold Chávez accountable at election time, then public diplomacy instruments need to be designed with this in mind. If local parties cannot use institutions, such as the Supreme Court or Congress, to hold the Chávez government accountable for undemocratic changes, then who can? If institutions, which are necessary in order for the effects of public diplomacy to flow to the top, are not present, then what other efforts outside of public diplomacy, even, can the U.S. engage in?

The second lesson is that nationalistic leaders will always employ their own public relations campaign to counter outside public diplomacy instruments. The Castro regime has been successful at doing this by monopolizing the media, a strategy Chávez has already begun to put to use.¹²² The Castro regime has also done this by posting propaganda and false allegations of U.S. plans and intentions against the Cuban people, and Chávez has replicated this through public statements, such as when he declares that the military will be put on stand-by out of fear of a U.S. invasion.¹²³ In addressing public diplomacy in relation to this lesson, the U.S. needs to employ the same media strategies it employs now in Cuba via Radio and TV Martí, especially since most Venezuelans, regardless of class and unlike most Cubans, have access to such media outlets. The U.S. should also do more to support independent media, instead of investing on our own media outlets that often seem like propaganda to the intended audience.¹²⁴

¹²² Roberto C. Andujar, "Information Elements of Power: The Role of Public Diplomacy in United States-Cuba Policy Implementation," (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 18, 2005), 11.

¹²³ James Petras, "The coup was directed by the White House," ZNet Top Latin America News, May 9, 2002 (available at www.zmag.org and accessed on April 8, 2008).

¹²⁴ Hon. Timothy E. Wirth, "Public Diplomacy and Communication," Remarks made at the Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg Symposium at the University of Southern California, March 22, 2005.

The third and final lesson is that nationalistic leaders will always befriend your enemies and antagonize your friends. Castro did this in the early 1960s when he embraced communism and allied Cuba with the Soviet Union, and Chávez is doing this today by allying itself with Iran, Syria, and Cuba, by supporting leaders who support the Bolivarian Alternative in Latin America, and by antagonizing U.S. allies in the region, such as Colombia. In domestic terms, Chávez has also launched political attacks against groups and political parties that participate in the U.S.'s democracy promotion arm of public diplomacy.¹²⁵ The U.S. must respond to this by increasing the role of multilateralism in its policies toward Venezuela and gaining international support. With a slew of international actors behind it, U.S. policies will seem more neutral and unbiased.

3. Penetrating a Nationalistic Leader's 'Bubble'

When a country's inflation rate stands at twenty-five percent and consequently socioeconomic conditions worsen, and when a leader exploits this for his benefit, then U.S. policies need to be designed in a way so they address this issue. The fact that the State Department recently included "investment in people" as its third policy point toward Venezuela is an indicator of positive change in U.S. policy. Of course, how far this policy can be implemented is what will really determine the level of effect the policy will have. When Venezuelans at home see commercials wherein President Bush is portrayed as an imperialist thanks to the "Darth Vader" music that plays in the background while U.S. jetfighters fly overhead, the U.S. must ensure that public diplomacy is designed in a way that addresses the strong nationalistic bubble that engulfs such a society exposed to such propaganda.¹²⁶ The U.S. Embassy's focus on student exchanges and the large interest on behalf of Venezuelans are

¹²⁵ Eva Golinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking U.S. Intervention in Venezuela* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2006).

¹²⁶ Juan Forero, "Venezuelan Thrives on Seeing Threats from 'Mr. Danger'," *The New York Times*, October 11, 2005.

perhaps the strongest public diplomacy tool to bursting such a bubble, for individuals are physically removed from it and allowed to experience everyday American life.

U.S. policy and public diplomacy in Venezuela are, as is demanded, intricately linked. So long as the U.S.'s pro-democracy and pro-capitalist policies continue to oppose Chávez's anti-democratic and anti-capitalist policies, U.S. public diplomacy interests will continue to act on the defensive. This is the reason why the democracy promotion arm of U.S. public diplomacy has received the most criticism from the Venezuelan government, because it seeks to instill a sense of democracy defined by U.S. standards, not Venezuelan ones. The Venezuelan people continue to hold on to democratic values and continue to respect the U.S. Their only downfall is their socioeconomic circumstance; a lesson U.S. public diplomacy needs to learn.

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