

## Confronting (Neo)Imperialism: The Resurgence of Bolivarianism

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# Confronting (Neo)Imperialism: The Resurgence of Bolivarianism

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## I. Introduction: Simón Bolívar, The Liberator

Simón Bolívar serves as a perennial icon in Latin American history and culture, having fought wars to liberate multiple nation-states from the grip of imperialism and provided the theoretical frameworks for the institutional design of multiple Latin American republics. After Spain lost its sovereignty over the newly independent states in Latin America, there was an immediate need for governance, order, and identity. Bolívar, a Spanish Creole, traveled to Spanish America and determined that the new nation-states ought to be republics, freed from the colonial institutions that Spain had left behind. Known as “The Liberator,” he served as president of Peru, Bolivia, Gran Colombia, and Venezuela. His ambitious visions for large, unified political entities<sup>1</sup> in Latin America led to the establishment of Gran Colombia, which later dissolved into five separate states.

Bolívar’s calls for political unity and rejection of colonial Spanish institutions have not disappeared from political discourse in Latin America. In fact, toward the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, then-president of Venezuela Hugo Chávez adopted Bolívar’s calls for Latin American nationalism and unity, and formulated his own project to forge unity between Central and Latin American states. He founded the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas<sup>2</sup> (ALBA) in 2004, along with the late Cuban president, Fidel Castro. The question remains: why have Bolívar’s ideas for Latin American integration persisted for so long, and why did Hugo Chávez revive them in the form of ALBA at the dawn of the twenty-first century? Surprisingly, little theoretical research or literature exists on the topic of ALBA, Venezuelan foreign policy, or Chávez’s Neo-Bolivarianism (Williams 2011, 259). This paper explores these topics for their significance to the fields of international politics and comparative political theory, as well as the bridge between the two. ALBA has also served as a potential model of South-South cooperation and socialist economic integration. Furthermore, the resurgence of Bolívar’s ideas raises the question of how political theory from the past can inform policies of the present. This paper will address the reasons Hugo Chávez brought Simón Bolívar into the twenty-first century, and the implications of doing so. Ultimately, Simón Bolívar had believed that political unity would propel Latin American states to economic and cultural independence

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<sup>1</sup> When I speak of Bolívar’s calls for political unity, I am referring to the political union of multiple preexisting nation-states, not the internal unity of a single nation state.

<sup>2</sup> In Spanish, it is called *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*. It was formerly called the Bolivarian *Alternative* for the Americas, but it was changed to *Alliance* in 2009.

from Spain. His theories have now resurged with Hugo Chávez's Neo-Bolivarianism, in order to protect Central America's independence from the cultural, economic, and political hegemony of the United States, the neo-imperial power of the twenty-first century.

## **II. Bolívar's Call for Political Unity and Destruction of Spanish Colonial Legacies**

Throughout his political writings, Bolívar has emphasized the need for political integration of Latin American states. While he did not believe that the entire continent should be integrated into one state—an idea he referred to as “both grandiose and impractical”—he did believe that neighboring states should unite to create more powerful and independent republics (Bolívar 2003, 26, 27). This vision was actualized through the creation of Gran Colombia in 1821, which existed as a unified state until internal divisions eventually caused its dissolution into separate republics in 1831. During its existence, Gran Colombia encompassed land that is now modern-day Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador, as well as parts of Guyana, Peru, and Brazil. Bolívar had believed strongly that integration was the best hope for a prosperous nation-state, ambitiously asserting, “undoubtedly, unity is what we need to complete our project of regeneration” (Bolívar 2003, 29). He acknowledged that divisions had persisted among the Latin American nations, for this is “the nature of civil wars” (Bolívar 2003, 29). He also understood that ideological divisions between “conservatives and reformers” and the constant threat of civil war could divide these new, fragile states at any time (Bolívar 2003, 29). Thus, remaining realistic, he wrote that unity will only come “through sensible action and well-organized effort” (2003, 29). This organized action failed during his time, but appeared to be more promising under the leadership of Venezuela, as this paper will discuss later. In sum, Bolívar believed that integration of Latin American states was the best plan for the region's stability and good governance.

Bolívar also emphasized the need to expunge the institutional legacies of Spanish colonial rule, which he believed could be done best through political unification. In *The Jamaica Letter*, Bolívar warns: “we are dominated by the vices contracted under the rule of a nation like Spain, which has shown itself to excel only in pride, ambition, vengeance, and greed” (2003, 23). He was contemptuous of Spain and its cultural legacies, and had wished to reinvent an American culture without Spanish trace. Furthermore, he believed that the institutions left behind by colonial Spain, such as slavery and mercantilism, were detrimental to the development of democratic republics. At the time, Spain's economy had run based on the system of mercantilism and was commandeered by a monarchy. Furthermore, Spanish colonizers introduced slavery into the Americas. Bolívar claimed that each of these Spanish institutions made Latin America less amenable to capitalism, self-governance, and republicanism, lamenting the lack of “political skills and virtues that distinguish our brothers to the north,” referring to the United States, which had been a newly formed republic at the time (2003, 23). Bolívar felt that Spanish hegemony and colonial institutions had socialized Americans to not desire the republican values of self-governance and individual liberty. For these reasons, Bolívar informs “exactly what we need to

ready ourselves to expel the Spaniards and form a free government: unity” (2003, 29). In short, Bolívar had sought to protect Latin America from what he considered damaging colonial remnants, through establishing strong, unified, republican states.

### **III. Republican Imperialism as a Solution to Spanish Hegemony**

The tension between Latin America and Spanish institutions, ideologies, and culture forced America to engage in a rather contradictory power struggle that Joshua Simon refers to as republican imperialism (2012, 280). In his political projects and war efforts, Bolívar engaged in republican imperialism, which involved “a renewed imperial project as a means of overcoming the legacies of Spanish rule and consolidating American independence” (Simon 2012, 282, 283). Paradoxically, in order to avoid reconquest, post-colonial states sometimes employed imperialistic methods of governance to consolidate their power. To maintain control of the newly established republics and uphold their independence from the daunting Spanish Empire, Bolívar employed more authoritarian methods of governance, such as his establishment of a presidency with concentrated power and lifetime appointment. Bolívar fought imperialism and protected republicanism by engaging in imperialistic governance, essentially forcing the residents of the newly formed republics to be free. His imperialism also involved annexing regions into his integrated states through military force, based on the idea that a larger, unified state was more capable of defending itself from reconquest (Simon 2012, 294). Bolívar’s political writings are haunted by the paradox of republican imperialism: the inhabitants of Latin America are too beholden to Spanish hegemony to recognize the benefits of republicanism, and thus, they must be forced to acquire the freedoms that Bolívar deems necessary for citizens of an independent republic. Bolívar was fighting “the reflexive loyalism of people long denied the right to rule themselves” (Simon 2012, 284). According to Bolívar, the newly freed states must embrace elements of imperialism to prevent reconquest by the Spanish Empire and consolidate republican institutions.

This paradox also reveals the driving urgency behind Bolívar’s philosophies: the need to solidify and integrate independent states that could defend themselves against the empires of the world, including Spain. Justifying his call for political unity, he draws on the specter of “a Spain that wields more machinery for war than anything we can amass in secret” (Bolívar 2003, 29). In a sense, political unity is a system of defense against the militarily formidable nations throughout the world. In some ways, this resembles the “soft balancing” approach taken in contemporary international politics (Williams 2011). Nations engage in soft balancing by employing “non-military tools to protect their interests, and to delay, frustrate, and undermine a hegemonic state’s capacity to impose its preferences” (Williams 2011, 261). In Bolívar’s time, creating a large, politically unified state could set up a Latin American republic to experience economic growth and a more strategic geopolitical positioning. Five small states cannot negotiate on the world stage, but one large state can engage in this style of “power politics” (Williams 2011, 261).

As such, Bolívar’s call for unity served as a means to counteract the cultural hegemony, ideologies, colonial institutions, and political power of the Spanish empire. His emphasis on the strength of the Spanish military, and the weakness of smaller individual states demonstrates that

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his call for unity was primarily intended to protect against Spanish encroachment, and expel the legacies of colonization. Though there may have been some internal benefits to political unification, Bolívar's priority was defense against external powers and strategic positioning in international affairs.

#### **IV. Chávez Confronts a Neo-Imperial Power<sup>3</sup>**

Classical Bolivarianism, or the philosophies of Bolívar himself, arose out of the need to counteract a formidable empire and its legacies. In the times of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, Neo-Bolivarianism has arisen as a response to a neo-imperial, unipolar world power: the United States. Because the U.S. possesses a military stronger than any other in the world, Latin American states have benefitted from its protection. However, the U.S. stipulates many conditions for that protection, which range from participation in its war on drugs to free trade agreements. The cultural, political, and economic hegemony of the U.S. positions itself as the neo-imperial, unipolar power presiding over Latin America, guaranteeing it the right to intervene on behalf of its own interests for its role in protecting the region as a whole.

To begin with, the current historical moment can be accurately characterized as a unipolar world order. The most recent example of a non-unipolar moment in history is the Cold War era, in which the Soviet Union and its satellite states counterbalanced the power of the United States and its allies in a bipolar world. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States emerged as the unipolar world power, a towering hegemon that no other nation could counterbalance against. Scholars of international relations generally agree with this characterization, arguing that a combination of the U.S.'s cultural hegemony, political dominion, and military prowess situates it as the obvious unipolar world power (Posen 2003; Mowle and Sacko 2007; Ikenberry 1998). The U.S.'s behavior on the international stage confirms Mowle and Sacko's hypotheses predicting the behavior of unipolar powers. Mowle and Sacko predict that while non-unipolar powers abide by the statutes, conventions, and norms of international law and institutions, unipolar powers often reject these constraints as they see fit (2007, 101). The U.S. has a prolific history of conducting military interventions around the world that violate international treaties, laws, and norms. For instance, scholars of international law consider the NATO bombing of Serbian forces in 1999, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Posen 2003, 12), airstrikes in undeclared war zones, and many other actions of the United States violations and war crimes. The United States is not a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC), even though 124 states, including the majority of the U.S.'s allies and trade partners, are

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<sup>3</sup> For more detailed accounts of the historical events in this section, see Slatta, "Time Line of US-Latin American Relations"; Petras, "U.S. Offensive"; Vanderbush, "Good Neighbor Imperialism"; and Kryzanek, *U.S.-Latin American Relations*.

registered as member states. The U.S. continues its unconventional and likely illegal drone war in nations it is not at war with, at times killing its own citizens without due process, in violation of international treaties (Scahill 2016). In short, the U.S. does as it pleases and faces very few consequences for its actions. While actors from the Global South (such as Joseph Kony of Uganda and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya) have been prosecuted by the ICC, U.S. actors have never been held accountable by the ICC or any comparable institution. Furthermore, the U.S.'s military dominance provides it "command of the global commons" (Posen 2003, 8). It maintains command of the seas, conflict zones, space, and air (Posen 2003). The U.S.'s command of the commons manifests physically in the form of its Unified Command Plan, with bases throughout the world prepared for military action at any moment (Posen 2003, 18). With the ability to physically defeat any other existing power on the world stage, the U.S. is able to maintain unipolar power while exploiting its political, cultural, and economic hegemony over the world (Posen 2003, 8-9). According to its behavior in the realm of international law and its military prowess, the U.S. acts as a unipolar world power at this historical moment.

In addition to its status as the unipolar world power, the U.S. has developed into a neo-imperial power in Latin America. Some elements of U.S. hegemony in Latin America are imperialistic in the traditional sense of the word, meaning that the U.S. has political sovereignty over some Latin American territory. The U.S. primed itself for interventionism in Latin America with the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, but truly began taking over the imperial legacy of Spain during the Spanish-American War of 1898 (Kryzanek 1996, 28-41). In this war, Spain lost sovereignty over its last remaining colonies: Cuba, the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico (Kryzanek 1996, 39-41). Cuba gained independence, but was required to agree to a set of conditions in the controversial Platt Amendment that institutionalized the power imbalance between the new state and the U.S. Simultaneously, the United States inserted itself as the new sovereign entity for the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico (Kryzanek 1996, 39-41). Today, the U.S. retains its sovereignty over Guam and Puerto Rico, further indicating that the U.S. replaced Spain as colonizer of the Americas. The U.S.'s political sovereignty over these colonies demonstrates its political imperialism, but for the rest of Latin America, the U.S.'s encroachments in the region take the form of cultural and economic hegemony as well as military interventions against threats to its domination in the region, all of which constitute neo-imperialism.

The foreign policies of Theodore Roosevelt provide ample evidence of the U.S.'s burgeoning neo-imperialistic exploitation of Latin America in the early twentieth century. In a letter to his son regarding the U.S.'s involvement in the Dominican Republic, T. Roosevelt laments that it seems "inevitable that the United States should assume an attitude of protection and regulation in regard to all these little states in the neighborhood of the Caribbean" (1994, 308). Since the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, the U.S. has been poised to take an attitude of protection and regulation toward Latin America. In return for the protection of Latin American states, the U.S. expects full compliance with its ideological, economic, and military agendas. This attitude has manifested itself in various acts of neo-imperialistic intervention, particularly during T. Roosevelt's presidency. José Ingenieros, an Argentine scholar and anti-

imperialism activist, speaks out against this neo-imperialist effect of U.S. protection in the region, noting during a speech in 1922 that, “the famous Monroe Doctrine, which for a century seemed to be the guarantee of our political independence against the threat of European conquests, has gradually proved to be a declaration of the American right to protect us and intervene in our affairs” (1994, 310). Following the declaration of the Roosevelt Corollary in 1904, the U.S. intervened militarily in Honduras (1905), Cuba (1906-09), Nicaragua (1912-25), Mexico (1914), Haiti (1915-34), the Dominican Republic (1916-24), and Panama (1918) (Kryzanek 1996, 44-59; Slatta). The U.S. also supported a *coup d'état* and regime change in Guatemala from 1920-21 (Slatta).

Despite Franklin D. Roosevelt’s implementation of the “Good Neighbor Policy” in 1933, which was intended to be a move away from interventionism, military presence and interventions continued in the region (Kryzanek 1996, 59-62). U.S. support and instigation of regime changes and coups continued throughout the century, especially with the beginning of the Cold War (Kryzanek 1996, 62-65). During the Red Scare, the U.S. was determined to prevent Latin American states from becoming satellites of the Soviet Union (USSR) or sparking communist revolutions of their own (Kryzanek 1996, 62-65). As such, the U.S. intervened against any regime or movement it deemed threatening to its ideological dominance (in the form of capitalist hegemony) in the region. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) ousted Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala (1954) and Salvador Allende in Chile (1973) due to their ideological linkages to socialism, despite the fact that both were democratically elected to their respective roles of leadership (Kryzanek 1996, 62-65; Slatta). The U.S. also supported multiple dictators in the region, including the Somozas in Nicaragua, the Duvaliers in Haiti, and Fulgencio Batista in Cuba (Kryzanek 1996, 67-81, 102; Slatta). This is not an exhaustive look at U.S. military interventions in Latin America, but it demonstrates the degree to which the U.S. intervenes against threatening regimes and protects its ideological and economic interests, even when it means ousting democratic rulers and supporting dictatorships. In sum, throughout the early- and mid-twentieth century, the U.S. demonstrated its commitment to neo-imperialistic interventions against any threat to its interests in Latin America.

Though various presidents in the latter half of the twentieth century attempted to reform U.S. interventionism in Latin America, U.S. neo-imperialism reproduced itself with tactics old and new. During the Iran-Contra Scandal, the U.S. supported forces fighting against the Sandinista government—an example of its continued military intervention in the region (Kryzanek 1996, 91-104). Though the U.S. continued with these military tactics, it also employed new forms of hegemonic dominance, particularly in pressuring Latin American states to participate in free trade agreements that set up asymmetrical advantages for the U.S. and fostered an economic dependency of Latin American states (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). Cardoso and Faletto note that free trade among underdeveloped economies (the majority of Latin American states) and developed economies (such as the U.S.) “requires a definite structure of relations of domination to assure an international trade based on merchandise produced at unequal levels of technology and cost of labor force” (1979, 17). A concept known as import-substitution, dependent Latin American nations export raw products and import expensive

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manufactured goods from developed economies, to the benefit of the latter (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). This paper will expand on the impact of neoliberal trade policies in the next section, but in regards to neo-imperialism, the dependency of Latin American nations on the U.S. for imports of manufactured goods and advanced technology has positioned the U.S. as economically dominant, and Latin American states as economically dependent. The U.S.'s use of free market trade policies demonstrates its use of economic tactics in neo-imperialism.

U.S. military intervention is not a thing of the past; the U.S. continues to instigate coups against regimes it perceives as threatening and has pressured Latin American states into participating in its so-called "war on drugs." The U.S. has been especially concerned with the regimes of Cuba and Venezuela, who oppose the U.S.'s neoliberal trade agenda and propose alternatives such as ALBA. It has been alleged that the U.S. was involved in the attempted *coup d'état* to oust Hugo Chávez in 2002 (Petras 2002, 19). Regardless of whether the U.S. was directly involved, it certainly would have supported a regime change in Venezuela, since Chávez has repeatedly spoken out against what he refers to as the U.S.'s imperialism (Petras 2002, 19). Furthermore, the U.S. has used its war on drugs as a means to intervene in the political affairs of various Latin American nations (Petras 2002, 16, 17). The U.S. utilized its "anti-narcotics campaign" to enter Colombia and work against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), likely because FARC was "the most powerful anti-imperialist formation contending for state power" in Latin America (Petras 2002, 16, 17). Whether through the auspices of the war on drugs or covert CIA operations, the U.S. has continuously intervened in Latin America to oust and/or neutralize perceived threats to its dominance. This pattern is especially clear in that most of the targets of U.S. intervention have been outspoken against what they refer to as U.S. imperialism and the imposition of neoliberalism (Petras 2002).

The U.S.'s neo-imperialism parallels the imperialism of Spain in that both empires simultaneously protect and exploit their dependent states. Because the U.S. and Spain protect(ed) their dependent states with their vast military resources, they intervene in the affairs of those states under the presumption that they have an unlimited right to do so. And because Latin American states are or have been dependent on these empires politically, culturally, economically, and militarily, they are trapped by their dependencies and are often coerced into submission to the demands and interventions of the empire. The only way to escape this duality of protection and intervention is to forge independence and expunge the legacies of dependence on (neo)imperial powers, so that these states can protect themselves on the world stage.

## **V. Neo-Bolivarianism as a Method of Counterbalancing U.S. Hegemony**

As previously stated, Bolívar called for unity to counteract Spanish hegemony. In the same way, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the ideologies, cultural hegemony, and imperialism of the United States inspired the rise of Neo-Bolivarianism. Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, both of whom were vociferously anti-U.S. political figures, recognized the danger of allowing the U.S.'s power over Latin America to continue growing unhindered. For this reason, Chávez developed a plan to revive Bolívar's vision of a unified Latin American polity of multiple states and used it to defend against the United States, a country Chávez considered a

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(neo)imperial power. H. Michael Erisman refers to Chávez's revival of Bolívar's theories as "Neo-Bolivarianism," a term this paper also uses to refer to Chávez's political ideologies and projects based on the writings of Bolívar (2011, 235). Moreover, Erisman characterizes the political goals of Neo-Bolivarianism as "mobilizing the hemisphere into a left-wing front against what Havana [and Caracas] sees as Washington's ongoing hegemonic pretensions" (2011, 252). Most notably, these projects include the aforementioned ALBA. Chávez, as president of Venezuela, announced his plans for ALBA as a revival of Bolívar's vision of a unified Latin American state in 2001 at a conference of Caribbean states (Hirst 2016, n.p.). Chávez then officially founded ALBA along with Cuba, under the leadership of Fidel Castro, in 2004. Venezuela and Cuba intended ALBA to foster economic cooperation between Central American states, provide legitimacy to socialism in those states, and, ultimately, counteract various ideological and cultural encroachments of the United States. Today, ALBA's eight member states include Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Antigua & Barbuda, Ecuador, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines (Hirst 2016, n.p.). Its three observer nations include Haiti, Iran, and Syria (Hirst 2016, n.p.). Chávez's project of Central American political integration resembles that of Simón Bolívar in a number of ways, particularly because both figures utilized political unity as a defense against an imperial power.

ALBA counteracts the U.S.'s imperialism through soft balancing, the tactic of international politics mentioned earlier in relation to Bolívar's plans to defend against the Spanish empire. The ultimate objective of soft balancing "is to protect the interests of the weak against the strong or the potentially threatening," which in this case are the threatening interventions of the neo-imperial U.S. (Williams 2011, 262). Both Bolívar and Chávez aimed to protect the interests of weak Latin American states from the encroachments and remnants of (neo)imperial nations. For instance, ALBA proposes an alternative to the U.S.-driven ideology of neoliberal economics. The U.S. has attempted to implement free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in Mexico and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in the rest of the Americas, while ALBA proposes an alternative based on cooperation rather than competition. These U.S.-supported neoliberal trade policies are detrimental to Latin American political and economic growth because of the unequal terms inherent to them (Yaffe 2011, 129). Similarly to Cardoso and Faletto's analysis of dependency in Latin America, Helen Yaffe illuminates the "comparative advantage...under which capitalist countries, the first to industrialize, should export high value added products and services to 'developing countries', which provide the low value added raw materials and agricultural products needed for the industrialized world" (2011, 129). Ultimately, this model of neoliberal trade "perpetuates underdevelopment" in Latin America (Yaffe 2011, 129). Some scholars contend this characterization, arguing that free trade agreements are generally beneficial to the economic development of the region; nonetheless, the U.S.'s imposition of these trade policies through the so-called "Washington Consensus" limits the self-determination of political actors within the region, some of whom prefer cooperative rather than competitive economic models.

So, rather than engage in a competitive arrangement rigged in favor of highly industrialized nations like the United States, ALBA proposes cooperative exchanges between

ideologically similar and more equally industrialized neighboring nations. These exchanges are then based on improvement of the quality of life, rather than increase of profits, in accordance with the socialist ideologies held by Chávez and Castro (Yaffe 2011, 132). The most significant way that ALBA's alternative to neoliberalism challenges U.S. economic hegemony is by simply offering another choice. Because dependent Latin American states do not have the advanced technology required to manufacture their own goods, they have the "false choice" between depending on the U.S. through free trade agreements or struggling to provide for themselves without the means to do so (Castañeda 1992, 674). ALBA provides an alternative option and thus undermines the U.S.'s ability to coerce Latin American states into free trade agreements, as participation in these agreements is no longer the only practical option. In this case, ALBA's soft balancing prevents the U.S. from unilaterally exploiting the underdevelopment of Latin American nations through neoliberal trade agreements.

Furthermore, ALBA proposes soft balancing strategies to counteract the cultural hegemony of the United States. As part of ALBA, Venezuela created Telesur, a television network meant to compete with U.S.-based networks like CNN (Williams 2011, 267). This Spanish language broadcast is designed to "promote a multipolar international order to balance U.S. hegemony" and "to balance Washington's soft power in telecommunications and, potentially, limit the economic benefits it derives from broadcasts to Latin America" (Williams 2011, 268). Because CNN and CNN Español are headquartered in the U.S., they present political events in a manner biased towards the interests of the U.S. and often against anti-U.S. figures such as Chávez (Williams 2011, 268). Telesur allows these Central American states to frame world events in their own context, rather than relying on the interpretive lens of the United States as the only source of information. Similar to how ALBA provides an alternate economic option where there was previously only one, Telesur provides an alternate option for telecommunications where previously CNN and other U.S.-based media conglomerates were some of the only stations being broadcast. This interrupts the U.S.'s hegemonic control over communication and information, which is a powerful mechanism in checking U.S.'s cultural imperialism over Latin America.

Altogether, the Neo-Bolivarian initiatives and programs of ALBA present various soft balancing tactics to counteract the hegemonic, imperialistic encroachments of the United States. They provide alternatives to the neo-imperialistic agendas of the U.S., and, through the power of choice, undermine the U.S.'s dominance over the region.

## **VI. The Potential for South-South Cooperation and a Multi-Polar World Order**

When envisioning political unity in Latin America, Bolívar imagined "our brothers to the north" who have, since his time, prospered economically, culturally, and politically (2003, 23). He understood that political unity, as the United States had achieved early on, could lead to this kind of prosperity. Joshua Simon explores the "American development gap" and its institutional roots in his article, "The Americas' More Perfect Unions" (2014, 818). He emphasizes the "effects of institutions" on "economic investment, exchange, and growth" and ultimately concludes that "political unity is, in and of itself, an institutional impetus for economic growth"

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(Simon 2014, 810, 812). He verifies Bolívar's original claims that rejecting colonial Spanish institutions was key to developing a new polity and set of institutions that would be conducive to the development of industrialization and economic prosperity. Specifically, "ALBA could foster cooperation, rather than competition, amongst member states, allowing Latin Americans to realize gains from specialization and trade between regions with complementary comparative advantages, while also pursuing reforms aimed at sustained growth by reducing entrenched inequalities and diversifying domestic industries" (Simon 2014, 822). Chávez seems to have understood the truth to Bolívar's call for establishing the institutional means for economic growth: political unity—even when the mechanism to achieve it involves force.

Political unity in the form of ALBA also serves as a model of South-South Cooperation and how such cooperation could potentially offset the unipolar power of the United States. As mentioned earlier, Neo-Bolivarianism arose as a result of the U.S.'s new position as the unipolar world power. South-South Cooperation through ALBA offers a pathway toward a multi-polar world order in which a unified polity of Central American states can engage in international politics and negotiation with power comparable to that of the United States. One of the goals of ALBA is to bring about a multi-polar world order and significantly decrease the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of the United States. But, in order to quarrel with the United States, Chávez must embrace some of its most imperialistic aspects for his own endeavors. Thus, we come full circle to the republican imperialism used by Bolívar to forcibly unify various Latin American states. To defend against a (neo)imperial power, a state must utilize imperialism for its own protection. Just as Bolívar is often criticized for authoritarianism and militarism, Chávez is accused of humanitarian abuses, "imperial ambitions," and restrictions of freedom (Hirst 2016, n.p.). In fact, ALBA could be seen as an imperial project in and of itself. A way Chávez's republican imperialism mirrors that of Bolívar is Chávez's use of oil to entice (or coerce) other states into joining ALBA (Ellner 2007). If these states want to benefit from the "preferential treatment for Southern nations" promised by ALBA, they must enter a union that requires various ideological commitments in return (Ellner 2007, 16). So, was Chávez really trying to foster cooperation among his neighboring states, or was he maneuvering to extend his political power farther across Latin America? Was he simply trying to develop Venezuela's economy by exporting oil to neighboring nations? Was Bolívar truly trying to protect the interests of Latin American republicanism, or was he simply trying to expand the jurisdiction of his presidency? In their attempts to counteract the influence of (neo)imperial powers, Chávez and Bolívar both embarked on imperialist projects of their own. Nonetheless, they can both be said to have made considerable progress in protecting their interests.

## **VII. Conclusion: Propagandistic Icon or Source of Political Theory?**

Critics of Neo-Bolivarianism may argue that Chávez is merely using the iconography of Bolívar as a historic hero to mobilize the people and propagandize his political endeavors, whereas in actuality he does not care for Bolívar's ideas. In *Hugo Chávez: The Transformation from Democracy to a Mafia State*, Ari Chaplin contends that Chávez uses the legendary symbolism of Bolívar as a means to legitimate his authoritarian rule (2014, 2). He further argues

that Bolívar's thought is not applicable to the twenty-first century, because it "has little to do with the requirements of the twenty-first century in fields such as education, science, technology, productivity, and globalization" (Chaplin 2014, 2). He invokes various dictatorships and authoritarian regimes of the past that have also used Bolívar or similarly legendary icons to legitimize their regimes. He even refers to the member-states of ALBA as "satellites of the Chávez regime," invoking a comparison between Venezuela and the Soviet Empire (18). Ultimately, he argues that there is no modern-day use for Bolívar's ideas, and that the only possible reason for his invocation is to manipulate the Venezuelan people and gain power.

On the other hand, ALBA's programs have achieved a considerable degree of success since its inception. For instance, under ALBA, Cuba provided "total scholarships for the training of 10,000 Venezuelan doctors and nurses" (Erisman 2011, 242). This helped to counterbalance the "brain drain" Cuba experienced as a result of generous and flexible immigration and asylum policies the U.S. extended to Cubans. Cuba and Venezuela have also agreed on various preferential trade and work arrangements, such as the exchange of doctors between the two nations, the creation of "some 100,000 jobs in Venezuela," and preferential tariffs for Cuba (Erisman 2011, 242). Furthermore, ALBA established a central bank able to provide loans to debt-ridden nations such as Nicaragua, which was boycotted by the International Monetary Fund (Yaffe 2011, 137). The implementation and success of these ALBA programs serve as a counterpoint to Chaplin's arguments. If Chávez only intended to utilize the iconography of Bolívar to rise to power and gain popularity, he would not have made the effort to implement Bolívar's ideas in the form of tangible, beneficial programs. The efficacy and scale of these programs require further assessment, but from the proliferation of programming, it is clear that ALBA is more than just rhetoric. Nonetheless, the future of ALBA is uncertain, with shifting relations between the U.S. and Cuba following the removal of the trade embargo, and the new regimes of Raúl Castro and Nicolás Maduro. If U.S.-Cuba relations continue to normalize, the benefits of a political alliance meant to counter the influence of the United States may dwindle for the younger Castro. Without this significant player in ALBA, the alliance could falter.

As Simon questions, "What can policymakers of the present learn from the political thinkers of the past?" (2014, 821). Further research into ALBA and Central American foreign policy could illuminate the potential efficacy of such integrationist projects in establishing political power and cultivating economic growth. In the process, scholars could also look into various other post-colonial thinkers from the times of Bolívar, and evaluate the situational factors that have caused certain ideas to diminish and others to resurge in projects like ALBA. In sum, there is considerable room for research into the intersection between Central American international politics and the history of Latin American political thought. Under what conditions can we continue to formulate effective policies and programs in the present day on the basis of political theories set forward centuries ago? And what can the resurgence of certain political ideas tell us about the current historical moment?

A unipolar world order such as our current international system is more predictable than a multipolar world order, where multiplicity of ideas and experimentation with methods

of governance can generate a variety among political bodies, economic systems, and cultural endeavors. With the U.S. as liberal hegemon, capitalism seems to be the only truly viable economic system. However, under a multipolar world order similar to what ALBA seeks to create, alternative economic systems grounded in cooperation rather than competition could be viable. In some ways, though, this lack of predictability could generate instability. In a multipolar world order, world superpowers might continue to war with one another, as they did in the First and Second World Wars. In a unipolar world order, the unipolar power wars primarily with weaker states and non-state actors, as seen in airstrikes throughout the Middle East, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the global war on terror. A multipolar world order might bring with it variety and choice, but will it also bring with it instability and destruction?

Overall, this paper contends that Bolívar's insights and calls for political unity have persisted into the present day because he understood the necessary institutional mechanisms for competing with (neo)imperial power. Political unity, combined with a paradoxical but necessary republican imperialism, allows for economic growth and the soft balancing tactics of ALBA. These tactics allow weaker states to align, in the sense of South-South Cooperation, and present themselves as worthy opponents to the existing hegemonic powers. Ultimately, Bolívar presented his ideas at a time when it was necessary to relinquish ties with the colonial empire of Spain, and Chávez revived Bolívar's visions at a time when it was necessary to interrupt the neo-imperialistic hegemony of the new unipolar world power, the United States.

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