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by

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**Brothers on the Periphery:
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez**

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Report

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Abstract

Brothers on the Periphery: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez

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After more than decade of official disuse, the Trump Administration revived the phrase “Rogue State” in 2017, coinciding with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s return to the political stage in the Islamic Republic of Iran as he suggested his candidacy in the state’s 2021 Presidential election. This shift in U.S. foreign policy and the return of a “rogue” actor require examination of the literature surrounding the “Rogue State” and the subsequent “Axis of Evil.” This paper specifically examines the relationship between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the late Hugo Chávez and its treatment in academia. This work finds that authors focused on outlying statements that presented the pair’s relationship as an ill-matched alliance of convenience built off of shared anti-American sentiments. I argue the pair’s perception as being located in the world’s economic periphery support a more nuanced understanding of their relationship that relies on Dependency Theory as a framework for Ahmadinejad’s and Chávez’s understanding of the world and their positions in it. Indeed, their speeches focus on international economic and power disparity far more than an unfounded antagonism towards the United States. Utilizing this perception and

taking advantage of the recession of 2008, the two attempted to form an international coalition of developing states to better negotiate their positions in trade and development projects. I believe focusing on their material concerns provides a more accurate understanding Iranian-Venezuelan relations at the time and provides reason behind their supposedly incompatible relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

With the recent administration change in Washington D.C., American foreign policy is being reshaped. The dialogue has been noted as increasingly militaristic and aggressive. This in addition to the reintroduction of “rogue state” in official use suggests that policy is shifting towards the dichotomous narratives that became popular under the administrations of George H. Bush and George W. Bush. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez serve recent reminders of these policies and narratives extent to which they carved the world into polarized threats. In beginning the examination of the relationship between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez, few moments are as visually striking as its closing—the consoling embrace between Ahmadinejad and Elena Frias de Chávez, Chávez’s mother. Conservative critics within Iran, already displeased by the bombastic language and close relation to one of Latin America’s most vocal leftist leaders, took the opportunity to criticize Iran’s president of impropriety. A series of doctored photos attempting to either mitigate or augment the damage added to the controversy. It seemed only fitting that the contentious pair’s final parting was received divisively.

Ahmadinejad’s and Chávez’s relationship began to gain international attention even before Ahmadinejad became the dark horse candidate for the 2005 Iranian presidential election. While Mayor, he named Tehran the sister city to Caracas, and as a gift, Tehran received a statue of Simon Bolivar from the Bolivarian Republic to emphasize the two states’ revolutionary past (See Fig. 1).¹ After Ahmadinejad became president of

the Islamic Republic, much of the pair's controversy and public interest surrounding the two in the American press revolved around depictions of the two as threats to the United States' interests, if not the state itself. Policy advisors wrote both Ahmadinejad (and the Islamic Republic of Iran in general) and Chávez into the list of post-Soviet existential foes as the new great threat to American interests and world democracy was found in the rogue state. Linking Ahmadinejad to *Hezbollah* and Chávez to *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (here after referred to as FARC) reaffirmed fears that the new age of conflict would be against shadow states, terrorist organizations, non-rational actors. In moving past the existential threat posed by communism and the Soviet Union towards the rogue state, many of the arguments couched in communism and socialism receded from mind, including those based in dependency theory.

While the literature on Ahmadinejad's and Chávez's relationship centered on the undesirable union of two rogue states, the pair's exchanges took on a much more material tone. Rather than the simplified anti-American sentiment portrayed by American journals, the two noted global economic changes and their perceived, undesirable location at the world's economic semi-periphery. Their dialogue protested contemporary trade treaties, criticized economic stagnation, and promoted their revolutionary qualities. Rather than attempting to prove or disprove Dependency Theory, this paper seeks to reframe the narrative surrounding Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez by examining the traces of perceived economic marginalization in their speeches and addresses. This provides a

¹“Edayi ehtram-e safir-e Venezoeyla beh mojasameh yadbud Simon Bolivar,” *Khabargozari Daneshjuyan-e Iran*.

“Mojasameh Simon Bolivar dar Tehran ruznameh shod,” *Khabargozari-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami*.

more nuanced understanding than the current one-dimensional narrative focused on security threats that was largely informed by Rogue State theory. This examination opens with a survey of the existing literature before turning to review Dependency Theory and Ahmadinejad's and Chávez's statements.



Figure 1: Hugo Chávez unveils the Statue at Dialogue Park in Tehran Nov. 24, 2004.²

² Amir Kholoosi. *Khabargozari-ye Daneshjuyan-e Iran*. Found at “Statue of Venezuela’s founding father unveiled in presence of Chávez,” *Payvand News of Iran*, Nov. 24, 2004.

SECURITY AND ROGUE STATE DOCTRINE

The narrative of superpower versus superpower had been in place for decades, essentially from the United States' initiation into global prominence after the Second World War. As resources shifted to support this dichotomy, many elites profited from the increasing fortune of defense industries. Defense structures and policies had been formed to counter Soviet expansion, and anti-communist rhetoric emerged as an overarching justification. Beginning in the 1980s, policy makers began to re-evaluate sources of threat to the United States. Elites faced a possible systemic change as new threats replaced the danger posed by the Soviet Union. The U.S. increasingly faced conflicts with terrorist organizations, developing states, and in general, opponents willing to enter highly asymmetrical conflicts. This willingness to enter into asymmetrical conflicts was perceived to be demonstrative of the emergence of non-rational actors, and it was feared non-rational actors would be undeterred in using weapons of mass destruction, specifically nuclear weapons. While an atmosphere of uncertainty emerged amongst these changes, elites stood to gain from the continuation of existing defense structures justified by a dichotomous narrative.

While many policy analysts have held that defense policy and its changes are results of discrete events, Alexandra Homolar argues that events are presented in a manner to continue the stability of general narratives that exist to justify defense spending. Major events, like the end the Soviet Union or September 11th, 2001, can punctuate these

narratives.³ Policy must adapt to these events or incorporate them into existing narratives. These events, if traumatic, can bring defense narratives into the public sphere.

As the Soviet threat waned, think tanks, particularly the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), formed a theory suggesting that "...the US would still face considerable threats to its security after the Cold War, namely from rogue states in the developing world that possessed weapons of mass destruction and the capability to threaten vital US geostrategic interests in key regions of the world."⁴ After the release of thirty-nine American hostages in Lebanon, President Reagan phrased these same concerns in the vernacular while addressing the Bar Association, saying, "The American people are not—I repeat, not—going to tolerate intimidation, terror and outright acts of war against this nation and its people...And we are especially not going to tolerate these attacks from outlaw states run by the strangest collection of misfits, Looney Tunes and squalid criminals since the advent of the Third Reich."⁵ In this same address Reagan described Iran, Libya, North Korea, Cuba and Nicaragua as terrorist states, and it is believed to be the first public iteration of Rogue Doctrine.

More than a decade later, Secretary of State Madeline Albright announced the State Department would no longer use the term "Rogue State" and instead move to "States of

³Alexandra Homolar, "Rebels without a conscience: The evolution of the rogue states narrative in US security policy," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 4 (2011): 708-09.

⁴ Ronald W. Cox, "The Military-Industrial Complex and US Military Spending After 9/11," *Class Race and Corporate Power* 2, no. 2 (2014): 6.

⁵ Bernard Weinraub, "President Accuses 5 'Outlaw States' of World Terror," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jul. 9, 1985.

Concern” after Iran, Libya, and North Korea improved diplomatic channels to the U.S. during the Clinton administration.⁶ While the term had officially fallen out of use in 2000, President George W. Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address reintroduced the concept, phrasing it as the “Axis of Evil” that was honed down to include Iran, Iraq, and North Korea.⁷ The term has recently been renewed to the original moniker, “rogue state,” by the Trump administration, and includes Iran, North Korea and Venezuela.⁸

The prevalence of Rogue State Doctrine has certainly left an imprint on how academia has discussed the exchanges between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez. The topic has largely been shaped by the policy sphere, but economists offer important insights that appear to have mainly minimal impact on the writers the policy field. They have reduced the pair’s relationship to convenient marriage of anti-American sentiment, one stating:

The two countries’ self-styled ‘axis of unity’ is more bombastic than substantive. However, the substance is enough to cause concern. Chávez and Ahmadinejad have clearly formed an alliance of convenience based on formulaic anti-Americanism. Their nations are so incompatible that most of their partnering efforts have resulted in unfulfilled promises and empty rhetoric.⁹

⁶ Christopher Marquis, “U.S. Declares ‘Rogue Nations’ Are Now ‘States of Concern’,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Jun. 20, 2000.

⁷George W. Bush, 2002 State of the Union Address, as printed in *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 29, 2002.

⁸Donald Trump, Remarks to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, as published by *The White House Briefings and Statements*, Sep. 19, 2017.

⁹ Kavon “Hak” Hakimzadeh, “Iran & Venezuela: The ‘Axis of Annoyance’,” *Military Review* 89, no. 3 (2009): 78.

The author further states that relationship is fated to be a short-lived affront to the United States because “the foundations of the relationship are flawed. These two nations are based on opposite principles.”¹⁰ Venezuela is described as a radically leftist state and Iran simply as a conservative theocracy—avoiding any treatment of the Islamic Republic’s own radical foundation. Even decades later in the early 2000s, conservative Iranians self-identified and stressed their radical and revolutionary nature.¹¹ In the literature about Iranian politics, liberals are those who support increased personal liberties and conservatives are those who support maintaining the status quo. When opposition to existing economic structures is voiced in ways that challenge or undermine this simple polarization, it is often avoided to maintain the notion that the religious are necessarily conservative and staunchly capitalist. That those who supported the creation of new state structure and the overthrow of the existing one are deemed conservative serves as evidence of this simplifying narrative that leads to statements like “their nations [Ahmadinejad’s and Chávez’s] are so incompatible.” Ahmadinejad certainly had conservative detractors as well as liberal that opposed his rhetoric with Chávez, but that does not support confining radicalism to liberals.

As state leaders, both Ahmadinejad and Chávez have a wealth of speeches laying out their thoughts, but often the literature glosses over to focus on more controversial or threatening parts. This attraction to fascinating or controversial quotes rather than the

¹⁰ Kavon “Hak” Hakimzadeh, “Iran & Venezuela: The ‘Axis of Annoyance’,” *Military Review* 89, no. 3 (2009): 83.

¹¹ Angus McDowall, “Iran Observed: The Rise of The Iranian New-Conservatives,” *Asian Affairs* 39, no 3 (2008): 383. Here McDowall recalls a 2003 Interview with Hossain Shariat-Madari, the editor in chief at the paper *Kayhan*, that was largely considered a state organ.

substantial contents leads to preoccupation with the unknown at the expense of the explicit. Rumors of Iranian missiles housed in a facility built by a Revolutionary Armed Guard contracting company persistently surfaced and resurfaced despite the U.S. State Department's quick denial of the claim. Newspapers began to conspire that Miami and the Florida peninsula would soon be under threat of Iranian missiles and some news sources even accused the State Department of being party to a cover up.

While these narratives are undoubtedly rooted in neo-conservative rhetoric and narratives, they do elucidate some inescapable facts. The shared goals of Ahmadinejad and Chávez did fail, even before the latter's death. The tangible effects of their partnerships—joint tractor and bicycle factories, a bank, and petrochemical factories located in Venezuela failed within a couple of years of opening.¹² Just as these ventures failed though, so did the predicted threats of an Iranian-Venezuelan alliance.

¹² Sean Goforth, *Axis of Unity: Venezuela, Iran & the Threat to America* (Washington, D.C., Potomac Books, 2012): xv, 140-41, 146.

THE LANGUAGE OF DEPENDENCY

I argue that Ahmadinejad's and Chávez's addresses and relationship are better understood from the vantage point of perceived underdevelopment rather than solely anti-Americanism or security concerns. A review of Dependency Theory is necessary to understand why they feel marginalized at the hands of dominant world powers, attempt to form coalitions with other developing states, and tend promote revolutionary and socially just actions. These characteristics make possible the "incompatible" alliance between Iran and Venezuela as portrayed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez.

One of Ahmadinejad's and Chávez's preferred platforms, the United Nations, was instrumental to the conception of Dependency Theory. The formation of the U.N. provided a new impetus for studying economies around the world as well as a medium to publish the consequent data. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, some writers—Singer, Prebisch, and Baran—began to present alternatives to Modernizing Theory after many observed the persistent economic underdevelopment in many parts of the world that countered Marx's original prescribed, teleological predictions. Underdeveloped states had been depicted as pre-capitalist, and it was assumed that once they entered into the capitalist phase they would develop linearly in a similar manner to what had been predominantly studied—mainly the economic histories of Britain, Germany, and the United States. However, this assumption was challenged by the level of economic integration between underdeveloped and developed states. Could a state primarily exporting to and importing from capitalist states, and the flow of commodities between them be considered to fall outside capitalism?

Baran's initial work on surplus capital is similar to Hobson's earlier studies on the motivations and narrative surrounding Britain's imperialism and Luxemburg's arguments on imperialism but is set in a post-colonial context as well as includes underdeveloped states that were never colonized.¹³ Baran further develops his study in *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957) that serves as a foundational text to American-Marxist Dependency Theory. In *The Political Economy of Growth* Baran concludes European and North American capitalists replaced previous systems of self-sustenance with systems that favored cash-crop production or resource extraction. Those commodities were utilized to produce cheap consumer goods in the center economies that are then re-exported to the periphery and impoverish the craftsmen there. Additionally, Peripheral economies can no longer utilize the valuable resources that are under effective or legal control imperial powers. These factors are detrimental to the periphery's ability to accumulate the surplus necessary for its own investment.¹⁴

While Baran notes the economic entanglement between developed and underdeveloped states in depth, Wallerstein adds a degree of nuance by offering a slightly more complicated world theory model in which there is a periphery, semi-periphery, and center. He also finds that early capitalist intervention severely altered preexisting economies and early potential paths for alternative development.¹⁵ In Wallerstein's world

¹³ John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York, Cosimo, 2005).
Brenner, "What Is, and What Is Not, Imperialism?," *Historical Materialism* 14, no. 4 (2006): 79-105.

¹⁴Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957): 134-144.

¹⁵Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," *Comparative studies in society and history* 16, no. 4 (1974): 387-415.

theory Iran and Venezuela most likely fall in the semi-periphery as evidenced by their expertise in and exportation of engineering and engineered chemicals. A perceived position as semi-peripheral also explains their presentations as leaders among under developed nations that are better positioned to oppose the United States.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

When articles utilize the pair's speeches, they often only reproduce the most remarkable one-liners, like Chávez remarking on the smell of Sulphur when taking the podium of George W. Bush at a U.N. general assembly. When the speeches are examined in their entirety, they reveal a much more significant treatment of global economic disparity and hopes for unity among developing states, particularly in Ahmadinejad's speeches. While Chávez offers the blunt and often disjointed jabs at the United States that we are most familiar with, authors often bypass speeches that mainly focus on Latin American and Iranian (Sometimes Libyan) cooperation. Ahmadinejad offers lengthy, if not rambling, monologues that emphasize the universal aspects of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Although he is known for vocalizing the ridiculous, he often exercises more caution than Chávez. In his 2006 UN address, he dedicates much of his speech to inequalities in power in the U.N.'s structure, inconsistent demands for human rights, and hypocrisy in nuclear regulation. His remarks surrounding the holocaust are remembered as some of his most controversial, but when turning to the issue of Israel and Palestine, he avoids blatantly inflammatory statements. He states:

The roots of the Palestinian problem go back to the Second World War. Under the pretext of protecting some of the survivors of that War, the land of Palestine was occupied through war, aggression and the displacement of millions of its inhabitants; it was placed under the control of some of the War survivors, bringing even larger population groups from elsewhere in the world, who had not been even affected by the Second World War.¹⁶

¹⁶Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Transcript of Remarks to United Nations Assembly, as published by *NPR*, Sep. 19, 2006.

Ahmadinejad unquestionably criticized the United States but offered more nuanced critiques than simple expressions of ‘anti-Americanism’. He argued that the Security Council was an outdated structure that granted states undue influence that is no longer applicable and denounced the states most vocally opposed to nuclear programs as those who had been the responsible parties for weaponizing and employing it. He provided an overarching theme that the existing structure of the United Nations divided power unfairly and often granted it to those who had abused it, explaining:

The abuse of the Security Council, as an instrument of threat and coercion, is indeed a source of grave concern. Some permanent members of the Security Council, even when they are themselves parties to international disputes, conveniently threaten others with the Security Council and declare, even before any decision by the Council, the condemnation of their opponents by the Council.¹⁷

Ahmadinejad reflected on the significance of Chávez’s life shortly after his death. While much of his praise focused on Chaves’s opposition to the United States, he applauded the leader for supporting his people in standing against material challenges. Known for millenarianism, Ahmadinejad blended it with material and revolutionary concerns. He saw Chávez as a support for his people and the Americas, preparing them for a time of justice yet to come.¹⁸

¹⁷Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Transcript of Remarks to United Nations Assembly, as published by *NPR*, Sep. 19, 2006.

¹⁸Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. “Khoda eradeh kardeh ta mostazafin varas zemin shovand,” *Paygah Etela’-e-ye Resani-ye Doktor Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*, Feb. 1, 2015.

Aside from his U.N. addresses, Ahmadinejad often reimagined what it meant to spread the Islamic Revolution beyond the border of Iran in a speech roughly titled, “We did not rebel to replace power, the goal of the Islamic Revolution was to prepare for the establishment of a unified world government and justice under the leadership of the Imam.”¹⁹ He presented a universal struggle outside of the tradition of Marx and socialism in which social revolutions paved the way for the return of a Shi’a spiritual leader that would usher in a reign of justice across the world. He focused on what he viewed as universal qualities embodied in the Islamic Revolution and by the Mahdi. After decades of efforts to export the Islamic Revolution, he argued now was the time Iranians were making gains. He exemplified Chávez as a participant in the work of spreading these values, merging the socialist characteristics of Chávez into his address to an audience of mosque attendees marking the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution. While Ahmadinejad overestimated the global recognition of Iran’s Revolution, he fervently portrayed in language very akin to leftist terms, saying, “...everybody knows, all the world knows that the Iranian nation supports the emancipation of the Iranian nation and all nations from all exactions, from all the chains that cause the captivity of mankind.”²⁰

¹⁹Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Barayeh jابهجايي-e ghodrat-e enghelab nakardim, arman-e enghelab-e eslami tamhid-e moghdemat barayeh esteghrar-e hokumat-e tavid va edalat beh rahbary amam asr,” *Paygah Etela’e-ye Resani-ye Doktor Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*, Feb. 9, 2015. In Shi’ism, the twelfth and final Imam (in Ithna’ahariyyah or Twelver Shi’ism) is believed to be the Mahdi and is often referred to as Imam al-Mahdi. In this tradition the twelfth Imam was taken into occultation, thus never having died, to return to the visible world at an indeterminable date. In both Sunni and Shi’a Islam, the Mahdi is an eschatological figure that prepares the world for the final judgement, however, in Sunnism, the Mahdi is not associated with any of the Shi’a Imams, and in fact the usage of the word Imam differs significantly between the two branches.

Although much of the speech is devoted to global struggles against injustice, Ahmadinejad saves room for nationalist concerns as well. He praises the economic and infrastructural development of Iran; after centuries of territorial losses under the Qajars and Pahlavis, he boasts no one dare even think of invading Iran now. Nor does he ignore the United States. Often, he makes no direct mention of the U.S., referring instead to a nation that invades others across the world or to a hegemon, but at times he makes explicit references. In a speech to Arab dignitaries, he accuses the United States of going to far off lands to ruthlessly suppress criticism against it and even killing the “Servant of God,” Hugo Chávez.²¹

Ahmadinejad also expresses concern over inaction in the face of oppression. He claims there are radicals who promote passivity in order to pave the way for future justice.²² Although this claim is reminiscent of leftists particularly staunch in the teleological development of socialism, who discouraged small improvements in material condition as ultimately strengthening the position of capitalism, this statement was

²⁰ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Barayeh jابهجايي-e ghodrat-e enghelab nakardim, arman-e enghelab-e eslami tamhid-e moghdemat barayeh esteghrar-e hokumat-e tavid va edalat beh rahbary amam asr,” *Paygah Etela’e-ye Resani-ye Doktor Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*, Feb. 9, 2015.

²¹ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Nameh beh Obama, mohakameh tarikhi nezam-e solteh bud,” *Paygah Etela’e-ye Resani-ye Doktor Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*, Sep. 5, 2016.

²² Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Barayeh jابهجايي-e ghodrat enghelab nakardim, areman enghelab eslami tamhid moghdemat barayeh esteghrar hokumat-e tavid va edalat beh rahbary amam esr,” *Paygah Etela’e-ye Resani-ye Doktor Mahmud Ahmadinezhad*, Feb. 9, 2015.

actually leveled against other millenarianists that believed the Mahdi would arrive in a time of great corruption.

While the search for social justice and equality between nations are important tenets in dependency theory, these alone are not sufficient evidence of identifying oneself or one's nation as a peripheral state in global capitalist system. At the Millennium Development Goals summit at U.N. headquarters, Ahmadinejad delivered his explicit thoughts on the central and peripheral states—this speech may be primarily recalled as one in which Ahmadinejad apparently supported the conspiracy theory that the September 11th attacks were orchestrated by the United States' government to justify increased militarism for resource extraction. He explained:

A large portion of the world came under the domination of a few western states. Tens of millions of people were taken to slavery and tens of millions of families were shattered as a result. All the resources, the rights and the cultures of colonized nations were plundered. Lands were occupied and the indigenous people were humiliated and mass-murdered. Yet, nations rose up, colonialism was alienated and the independence of the nations was recognized.²³

One of his most controversial statements, the death of capitalism, also reaffirms this. “After about 100 years of domination, the system of capitalism and the existing world order has proved to be unable to provide appropriate solutions to the problems of societies, thus coming to an end.”²⁴ While this statement is perhaps his most explicit in

²³Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, remarks at United Nations General Assembly, broadcast by *C-SPAN* Sep. 23, 2010.

²⁴ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Remarks at United Nations General Assembly,” broadcast by *C-SPAN* Sep. 23, 2010.

naming and criticizing capitalism, Ahmadinejad expresses views throughout his career that aligned with Chávez's and his own millenarianism. It cannot be assumed that their ideologies are essentially mutually exclusive.

Chávez's associations with Marxist vocabulary and ideology are much more transparent and literal. He openly advocated for leftist policies and was a self-claimed student of Marxism; it is hardly surprising his ties to Dependency Theory would be more obvious than Ahmadinejad's. Strikingly similar to Baran's observation that peripheral states were forced to reimport their own natural resources in finished product, Chávez denounced the fact that third world oil producing states were often forced to import gasoline. In a 2006 national address he pointed to Bolivia and Ecuador; both are forced to import fuel despite their crude exports. In fact, many Latin American states (Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Chile) that exhibited growing crude exports had negative fuel balances in the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁵ Chávez quickly related the export of raw resources from developing nations that later forced to import the refined product to hallmark capitalism. Later, in 2011, Venezuela faced sanctions from the United States after exporting gasoline additives to Iran, causing Chávez to respond via social media, "Sanctions against the country of Bolivar? Imposed by the imperialist gringo

²⁵ Luisa Palacios, "The Petroleum Sector in Latin America: Reforming the Crown Jewels," *Centre d'études et de recherches internationales* no. 88 (2002): 5, 43.

government? Well: Welcome Mr. Obama! Do not forget that we are the children of Bolivar!”²⁶

²⁶Hugo Chávez, Tweet from May 24, 2011.
Michael Economides, “Silly Sanctions Against Venezuela Boost Hugo Chávez,” *Forbes* Jun. 13, 2011.

A SHIFTING GLOBAL HEGEMONY

Chávez's and Ahmadinejad's vocal opposition to the United States' policies did not arise as the mere confluence of two grandiose personalities. Since the 1990s east Asian countries began exercising additional international influence and trade, both in the Middle East and Latin America. The increased diversity in economic influence meant that United States' position to effectively exercise unilateral pressure in trade and diplomacy began to waver. In the case of Venezuela, Chávez mocked the already benign sanctions imposed by the United States and responded he would happily export surplus oil (should there be any) to China instead. Economic development projects that had largely been the purview of Washington were increasingly taken up by Beijing as Latin American-Chinese partnerships built increasing numbers of dams, ports, and economy-oriented infrastructure.²⁷

Iran, conversely, had been managing decades of U.S. backed sanctions. Due to the severe downturn in relations with the United States after 1979, Iran had been finding alternative trade partners. Russia offered military supplies, and trade with China had steadily been increasing since the 1990s into the 2000s. While the sanctions related to their nuclear enrichment program had extremely detrimental effects on the Iranian people, the state had very little to lose by further antagonizing relations with the United States.

Aside from the economic alternatives provided by East Asian states, China especially, the United States' relative decline in global position following its extreme recession and the failure of the Washington Consensus made its market and capitalist

²⁷ Macarena Gomez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2017), 25.

emphasis less appealing. While the United States necessarily curtailed spending after a routine market shock, a nominally communist state was left with a greater relative share of global spending.²⁸ Accordingly, leftist movements and the ‘pink washing’ of Latin America appeared more viable than in previous years, and Ahmadinejad and Chávez expressed an optimism in peripheral states moving towards the center.

As two oil exporting states, Iran and Venezuela were also in advantageous positions due to the spike in oil prices in the early 2000s.²⁹ Well known for his “Chavismo,” Chávez utilized these funds for domestic development and investment in other Latin American and Caribbean states. Both Ahmadinejad and Chávez expressed concerns about the longevity of their position though and believed that the U.S. invaded Iraq primarily to extract Iraq’s oil. Ahmadinejad notes Iran’s proximity to Iraq and the tense relations with what he describes as a militaristic nation. Their concerns were summarized as, “...because we are aware that imperialism will not rest in the effort to weaken us and one of its strategies is to weaken OPEC, weaken the price of oil, we know the aggressions against Venezuela, the coup d’état, the aggressions against Iraq, the threats against Iran, all are guided by the same imperialist interest to dominate our source of oil.”³⁰ Chávez expected the United States’ involvement in a failed coup against him

²⁸ Macarena Gomez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2017), 120.

²⁹ Shimshon Bichler and Jonathan Nitzan, “It’s All About Oil,” *Blue 2*, no. 70 (2003): 4.

³⁰ Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Intervención del Comandante Presidente Chávez durante acto de firma de acuerdos bilaterales entre la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y la República Islámica de Irán,” Jan. 13, 2007.

2002, and the U.S.'s premature recognition of the would be usurpers did nothing to assuage his concerns. Because of their precarious position, Chávez made a commitment to continue good relations with oil producing states as well as rally any to his cause, saying, "we have agreed this afternoon to intensify our coordinated efforts within OPEC and beyond OPEC with the major oil producers to safeguard the price of our raw material, from here we sent this greeting this message to all the heads of state from the OPEC countries to continue strengthening our organization, in that direction Iran and Venezuela will continue to act as we have always acted as one."³¹

Despite oil producing states' improved economic position and growth of Chinese influence, the United States still attempted to maintain its impact in Latin America. In an attempt to protect intellectual property and copyrights, the U.S. proposed the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) extension of NAFTA in 2003. The proposal was met with strong opposition from Latin America as many interpreted it as being forced into importing more expensive manufactured goods from North America, a central argument to Dependency Theory. Chávez was among its most vocal opponents, and after its failure he stated, "...what happened in Iran almost 30 years ago and is what has happened here almost 10 years ago, a real awakening brother [Ahmadinejad], a sunrise...as you know, as we all know, the FTAA imperialist proposal of the United States was buried there in Mar del Plata Argentina and our ALBA proposal, the Bolivarian Alternative for our

³¹ Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "Intervencion del Comandante Presidente Chávez durante acto de firma de acuerdos bilaterales entre la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y la República Islámica de Irán," Jan. 13, 2007.

people continues to grow...”³² The ALBA proposal headed by Chávez was meant to provide alternative capital investments for development projects that would be funded by primarily Latin American member states. Chávez explained the cooperative fund would serve as “liberation mechanism” to counter the influence of IMF.³³ He later sought Chinese cooperation with ALBA-TCP (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our American America-People’s Trade Party), in their aim for a common Latin American currency and economic cooperation.³⁴ While most of ALBA-TCP’s supporting states were Caribbean and Latin American, Ahmadinejad had also signed his support.

Although increased Chinese investment in Latin America provided Latin American States more maneuverability in opposing the United States’ policies, and at least another set of terms and conditions to choose from, it largely served as the continuation of conditions surrounding surplus exportation from more central states to peripheral states. Increased exports to and imports from East Asia did serve as examples of mobility between the semi-periphery, the periphery and possibly the center, but the

³²Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Intervención del Comandante Presidente Chávez durante acto de firma de acuerdos bilaterales entre la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y la República Islámica de Irán,” Jan. 13, 2007.

³³ Hugo Chávez and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, “Intervención del Comandante Presidente Chávez durante acto de firma de acuerdos bilaterales entre la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y la República Islámica de Irán,” Jan. 13, 2007.

³⁴Hugo Chávez, “Firma de Acuerdos entre la Federación Rusa y la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y Rueda de prensa conjunta,” Nov. 11, 2008.

ultimate failure of Iranian-Venezuelan ventures and Latin American leftist coalitions do not suggest much hope for drastic shifts in the near future.

CONCLUSION

Existing scholarship on the relationship between Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hugo Chávez originates primarily from the foreign policy sphere, and much of that writing bears the imprints of neo-conservative narratives centered on Rogue State Doctrine. Often these writers have portrayed the two as in partnership of convenience bound by their anti-American sentiment. While they undoubtedly opposed the United States in grandiose terms, they expressed additional concerns and commonality. While many of these writers have written of the pair's economic failure as proof of their incompatibility, they pay little attention the reasoning behind their unsuccessful, joint economic endeavors.

When examining their speeches to discern their concerns, goals, and frustrations, similarities to Dependency Theory emerge. Studying the two from the vantage of Dependency Theory is not meant to replace the work done in foreign policy, only to add diversity the narratives surrounding it and reveal commonalities between the two. Ahmadinejad and Chávez time after time expressed dissatisfaction with their perceived positions in the world economy and just as frequently denounced the United States' position. Chávez recognized a shift in global economic hegemony within Latin American, and surge in oil prices in the early 2000s offered Venezuela and Iran maneuverability.

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