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Why does the United States support Juan Guaidó in Venezuela?

An analysis of U.S. foreign policy

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate why the United States supports Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president of Venezuela. To do so, foreign policy analysis was utilized, in order to assess the collected empirical data through different theoretical frameworks. This study also demonstrates that it is possible to combine different theories from international relations in order to achieve a more accurate representation of reality. The ontological presupposition from neoliberalism and neorealism provides different levels of analyses which are utilized in this foreign policy analysis. The findings show that the United States supports Juan Guaidó in order to counteract Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Furthermore, the findings also demonstrate that the U.S. utilizes democratization abroad in order to promote security, whilst also providing American companies access to foreign markets. However, it must be highlighted that this subject of study is very recent, and therefore it is difficult to find empirical data from peer reviewed sources.

Keywords: United States, Venezuela, Juan Guaidó, Nicolás Maduro, Foreign Policy Analysis, Neoliberalism, Neorealism, International relations, International politics

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Part I: Introduction

Venezuela is in the midst of an unprecedented political crisis. Currently, this Latin American country has effectively two competing presidencies. But most importantly, this crisis has escalated into a global conflict between the world's greatest powers. The United States, alongside many of its allies, is claiming that Juan Guaidó is the legitimate president of Venezuela. The other president, Nicolás Maduro, also has powerful friends, many of whom are America's main adversaries, China and Russia (Gill, 2019b). Simultaneously, the Venezuelan economy is in jeopardy. Apart from having the single largest oil reserve in the world, everyday Venezuelans are suffering. The country is experiencing one of the worst hyperinflations in recent history, which has led to food shortages and lack of lifesaving medicines (Specia, 2019).

Alongside this conflict, there is a contemporary debate between neoliberalism and neorealism. In international relations (IR), neorealism has dominated this academic subject for years, as a result of Waltz's (1979) theory of structural realism. According to this theory, all states aim to preserve their own autonomy in an anarchic structure. In this anarchy, the states will naturally drift towards an equilibrium of power, and by analyzing this equilibrium, one might predict the states' behavior (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Waltz, 1979). On the opposite side, are the neoliberals. They argue that Waltz's theory is too simple, because it fails to explain the behavior of liberal democracies of the West (Moravcsik, 1997; Nye & Welch, 2017).

In the discipline of IR, the results of a study are predetermined by the theory one chooses to employ in the analysis (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003). In order to fill this gap in the literature, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that one may utilize several different IR-theories through a Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), in order to achieve a more accurate representation of reality. FPA utilizes different theories in order to assess the external and internal environment, of which the foreign policy makers draw their conclusions (Fermann, 2013). From this perspective, the present study aims to answer the following research questions: "Why does the U.S. support Juan Guaidó in Venezuela?"; "Was it the external or internal environment that had the greatest impact?"; "Which paradigmatic alternative provides the most satisfying answer?".

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first one justifies the research questions. The second chapter briefly describes the relevant theories for this thesis. The third chapter demonstrates relevant empirical evidence, while the fourth one explains the methodology of this study, and the key concepts of FPA. The fifth chapter addresses the proposed. Then, the sixth and seventh chapters provide the discussion and concluding remarks.

Part II: Theory – Two rivaling paradigms

When undertaking a systematic study, most scientists utilize techniques and tools from a predetermined theoretical framework. This framework is commonly called a *paradigm*, which specifies the basic concepts, assumptions, values, beliefs and techniques utilized by a specific school of thought. From these paradigms, scholars derive theories, which they use to explain how the world works. Sometimes, paradigms go through a revolutionary period, where the scientific theories no longer give satisfactory answers to anomalous observations. When this happens, a *paradigmatic debate* can occur (Levy, 1998; Nye & Welch; 2017).

In the field of IR theory, such a debate occurred during the 1970s and 80s, mainly between *liberalism* and *realism* (Levy, 1998). Prior to this debate, the liberals had been labeled by its critics as a normative utopian ideology, rather than a paradigmatic alternative to IR theory. During the interwar period, liberals thought The League of Nations would prevent a new major war. This international organization proved powerless against the rise of the authoritarian regimes of Germany, Italy and Japan, and thus a new war started between the major nations of that time. Around this period, the classical realists dominated IR theory, since they were the ones who managed to make sense of the world. However, this changed during the paradigmatic debate of the 70s and 80s, where both liberalism and realism went through major changes (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Knutsen, 2016)

Around the Second World War, these two rivaling approaches to IR were grounded in the scholars' view of *human nature*. Liberals tended to hold a positive view of human nature, whereas the realists held a negative view. They saw human beings as capable of evil. Although these rivaling views continue to separate liberals and realists, human nature is no longer the main point of the debate. Scholars from both camps have realized that 'human nature' is highly complex, and, therefore, the focus of study must be on the social and political structure (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003).

For realists, this shift of focus was mainly due to Kenneth Waltz's book *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Waltz focused on the structure of the international system, rather than human nature from classical realism. Liberals (having lost the prior debate) repudiated idealism, but kept their old liberal ideas concerning trade, democracy, communication and progress. This debate led to the development of *Neoliberalism* and *Neorealism* (Levy, 1998), which will be further defined in the next two sections.

2.1 Neoliberalism

Having lost the first major debate against realism, the liberals had to reformulate their stand on IR theory in order to be accepted as a paradigmatic alternative. During the Cold War, the East-West rivalry tended to support the alternative of the realists, because they managed to make sense of the power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. In spite of the overwhelming dominance of realism during the Cold War, elements such as trade, investment, travel and communication seemed to play an increasingly important role in IR during the 60s and 70s. Realists didn't concern themselves with these elements, but liberals argued that they were important because they were central concepts when understanding the behavior of liberal democracies of the West. This gave the scholars of liberalism a chance to renew themselves, and introduce a new liberal approach to IR theory without the idealistic notions from earlier liberalism. This new approach has been labeled 'neoliberalism', which strives to formulate new scientific theories and methods to IR (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Knutsen, 2016).

Two of the most influential scholars of neoliberalism are Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, which have contributed to the theory *complex interdependence* (CI) as a part of neoliberalism. This theory argues that the world is highly complex, with many different factors affecting the policy makers in a government. Realists argue that the primary goal of every state is security and survival, or the so-called 'high politics', which include military and defense. Scholars of CI, however, argue that economics and welfare ('low politics') are the driving forces behind the *modern state*, defined as industrialized, pluralist countries. These modern states are usually liberal democracies, all tied together in a complex web of trade and commerce. This makes the states interdependent of each other, and thus military security no longer dominate the agenda. This theory, therefore, aims to explain why modernization of states are becoming more peaceful and cooperative, and why military force is becoming less efficient as a source of power (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017).

Neoliberals also argue that transnational actors, such as transnational companies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international governmental organizations (IGOs) are becoming more influential. These organizations can pursue their own goals independently and potentially influence the different branches of a state's government. In addition, when states focus on 'low politics', IR tend to become more like domestic politics. Transnational companies, then, tend to influence the agenda of policy makers, in order to promote more trade, commerce and communications between different states (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Moravcsik, 1997; Nye & Welch, 2017).

2.2 Neorealism

As mentioned earlier, realism also went through major changes during the 70s and 80s. Kenneth Waltz (1979) introduced the theory of *structural realism*, which tries to emulate the natural sciences by generating systematic theories to IR. This new approach to realism has been labeled 'neorealism', and departs from the classical way of thinking by rejecting the elements of morals and ethics of the humanistic approach. In contrast, structural realism focuses on the structure of the international system, which in Waltz's theory, comprise very few elements. Firstly, the international system is an anarchy. There is no political authority to rule as a global government. Secondly, the international system contain many states, which all have a government that function in similar fashion. Thirdly, the only element that differentiate the states from each other, is their power. Lastly, according to Waltz, the anarchic system is likely to persists due to the states' desire to maintain their autonomy (Nye & Welch, 2017; Waltz, 1979).

Neorealism consists of two main theories: Waltz's *defensive realism* and Mearsheimer's *offensive realism*. The former claim that the main desire of the state is security, whereas the latter stresses power and hegemony as its primary objective (Nye & Welch, 2017). The states are the dominant actors, and anarchy defines their behavior. Waltz argue that the structure of the anarchic system leads countries to adopt policies, which aims to strengthen their own position, and potentially contain their adversaries. The logic of this argument is based on the notion of 'self-help'-system, in which states wish to preserve their own autonomy. In such a system, every state will attempt to contain each other, and thus, an equilibrium of power would naturally emerge. This is called *balance-of-power* (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Waltz, 1979).

Balance-of-power can change over time, and scholars of IR have identified three different systems which are tied to this concept: *multipolarity*, *bipolarity* and *unipolarity*. Before The Cold War, the international system was multipolar, meaning three or more countries possessed an unusual amount of power, equal to each other. Powerful states in such a system are called *great powers*. During The Cold War, the system was bipolar, where only two states dominated the world stage. USA and Soviet Union were wielding an overwhelming amount of power and influence over their respected spheres of influence, being called *superpowers*. Ever since the end of The Cold War, USA has been seen as the world's sole superpower, and thus the anarchic system has been unipolar. This is called a *hegemon*, where one state can effectively advance its agenda, and shape the international system to its advantage. Under such a system, U.S.' rivals are likely to challenge its hegemony (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017).

2.3 Comparison

Even though these two paradigms are quite different in their approach, they do share a few similarities. For instance, they both agree that the international system is anarchic. They do differ concerning their variables. Neorealists see the state as the absolute most important actor, while neoliberals see the state merely as an important actor next to many other. Neoliberals argue that transnational companies, NGOs and IGOs play an important role in how the states act in the international system. They also argue that these institutions promote peace through ‘complex interdependence’, where liberal democracies get tied together through an intricate web of connections. In such as system, the state is preoccupied with ‘low politics’, where welfare and prosperity are the main objective of the state. In neorealism, the focus lies on the ‘high politics’, where safety and security dominate the state’s agenda. They also stress that IGOs, such as the United Nations, are simply a stage where power play unfolds (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017)

The view of humanity also differ between neoliberalism and neorealism. The former believes that humans desire to live well, whilst the latter believes that humans desire security and domination. This is prevalent in both their approach to *absolute* and *relative gains*. The liberals believe in absolute gains, which means that a state accepts the premise of another state doing better, as long as its own state is doing well. The realists favor relative gains, which implies that a state will do its utmost to prevent another state from getting ahead. In a nutshell, for liberalists the state prioritizes welfare, whereas for realists it prioritizes security (Fermann, 2013; Jackson & Sørensen, 2003).

Also, these two paradigms give different explanations to how conflict occurs. Realists argue that conflict between states occurs naturally when the balance-of-power is unbalanced. Neoliberals stress that the state requires a purpose in order to promote a conflict, which is not necessarily tied to the international system. A state might pursue conflict if it would be beneficial for its economy. A state could, for instance, actively democratize another state so that commercial ties between them would be more likely, and so that translational companies would have access to a new market. Transnational companies could therefore benefit from promoting such actions. In this sense, neoliberals focuses their attention on internal variables in order to explain conflict, while neorealists focuses on the external factors. In other words, neoliberals favor an inside-out perspective, whilst the neorealists favor an outside-in approach (Fermann, 2013; Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Moravcsik, 1997).

Part III: Empirical evidence

In order to understand the variables that could affect the policy makers in Washington, this chapter demonstrates relevant empirical data. Firstly, it presents the current political landscape in Venezuela, the chronicle of events leading up to this situation and the international reactions to this crisis. Secondly, it gives a short overview of Venezuela's relationship with the United States, Russia and China. Then, it presents an introduction to America's position after The Cold War, and the factors that influence U.S. foreign policy.

3.1 Crisis in Venezuela

At the time of writing¹, Venezuela is in the midst of a humanitarian and financial crisis. According to Specia (2019), the nation is experiencing one of the worst hyperinflations in recent history. The grocery stores are struggling to restock their shelves, and consequently, the prices of essential goods and services are skyrocketing (Specia, 2019). The situation is not any better in the public health system neither, which struggles to supply the people with vital medicine and medical treatment. While many Venezuelans suffer, the political system is also in turmoil. Since January of 2019, the country has had two presidents, both claiming legitimacy of their presidency: Nicolás Maduro and the opposition leader Juan Guaidó (Bronstein & Cobb, 2017; Specia, 2019).

The origin of this crisis can be traced back to the previous president, Hugo Chavez, who became president of Venezuela in 1999, after a democratic election in 1998. Prior to his presidency, Venezuela and the United States had a close relationship. But after he took office, this relationship gradually decayed due to his anti-American rhetoric and due to his strengthening relations of Venezuela with U.S.' adversaries, mainly Russia and China (Gill, 2019b). Immediately after his election, he started reforming the government in various ways, most notably by giving the presidency more power by extending the presidential term to six years, and removing term-limits all together (Labrador, 2019b; Romero, 2009).

In 2002, he experienced a coup d'état attempt. It did not succeed, and after only 48 hours, Chavez regained power. Washington supported the group responsible for the coup attempt, which further hurt the Venezuelan-U.S. relationship (Imbert & Macias, 2019; Vulliamy, 2002). In the years following this event, Chavez established a close relationship with Russia, through militarily and economic cooperation (Gill, 2019b). In 2007, he granted to the

¹ This paper was written in the spring of 2019.

Venezuelan state owned oil company (PDVSA), complete control over Venezuela's oil reserves, in an act of nationalizing the oil industry in the country. This disrupted several foreign oil projects in the region, most notably by the American oil companies, ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.; Gill, 2019b). These companies have fought several legal battles against the country, claiming compensation for the 2007 nationalization process (Parraga, 2019).

The ICSID (International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes) ruled in 2019 that ConocoPhillips was entitled to a compensation of over \$8 billion. According to Reuters, Venezuela has refused to comply to such demands in the past, and it is possible they will do so again. Similarly, ExxonMobil is also claiming reparations for their disrupted oil projects, but so far, their demands has not yet been satisfied (Parraga, 2019; Ulmer, 2017).

During Chavez's reign, he used the nationalized oil industry to found several expensive welfare programs, which made him very popular amongst the poor and working-class people. Unfortunately, due to Venezuela's oil dependency, the nation's economy was very vulnerable to shifts in the oil price. In the beginning of his presidency, the oil price was at a rise, but in 2014, the value of oil tumbled, and so did the Venezuelan economy (Labrador, 2019b).

Chavez passed away in 2013, and his then vice president, Nicolás Maduro, took to power. In May 2018, Maduro was re-elected as Venezuela's president for his second term in office (Phillips, 2019). He overwhelmingly defeated his adversaries, winning 67.8 percent of the votes in what turned out to be the nation's lowest voter turnout in recent history. According to official numbers, the 2018 presidential election had a voting participation of only 46 percent (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2018), whereas the 2013 presidential election had a participation of almost 80 percent (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2013). The sudden drop in participation have had many people question the validity of the most recent election. The United States announced already in advance that it would not recognize the result of the election, calling it undemocratic due to lack of transparency (Casey & Neuman, 2018).

3.2 Two presidents, one country: international reactions

After Nicolás Maduro was sworn in as president in January of 2019, the opposition led National Assembly elected Juan Guaidó as the nation's new president. The National Assembly did not recognize the 2018 election, and thus, from their perspective, the country had no president. They then cited the constitution, which states that in an event of a vacant presidency, the leader of the National Assembly will be proclaimed as interim president (Specia, 2019).

The United States immediately voiced its support for Juan Guaidó as interim president, claiming that the National Assembly is the only democratic body of the government (Specia, 2019). More than 50 other countries have also expressed their support for Juan Guaidó (ShareAmerica, 2019), many of which are allied with the United States (U.S. Department of State, n.d. -b).

On the other side of the political landscape, Maduro has also gained international support. Many of U.S.’ adversaries, most notably Russia and China, claim that Nicolás Maduro is the legitimate president of Venezuela (Labrador, 2019a). Figure 3.1 illustrates the international division on the subject of presidential legitimacy in Venezuela.

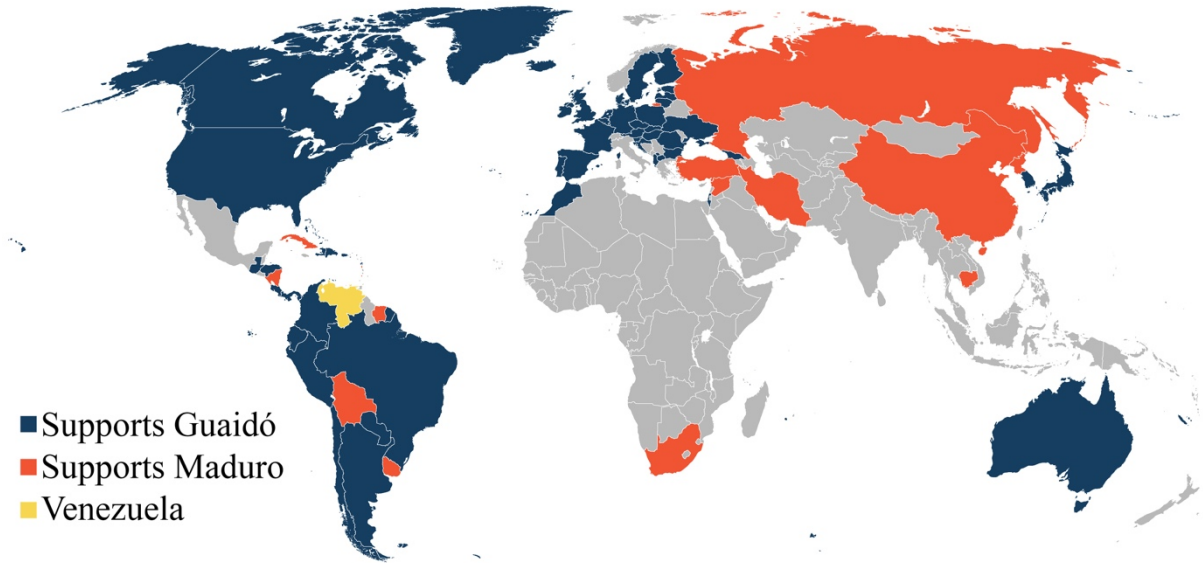


Figure 3.1. Map of nations’ recognition of presidential power in Venezuela as of February 2019. Data for Guaidó from ShareAmerica (2019), for Maduro and Venezuela from Mackinnon (2019).

3.3 Russia-Venezuela relations

Russia and Venezuela have had a close relationship since 2006, after Venezuela purchased several fighter aircrafts from Russia, valued at around \$2.9 billion (Labrador, 2019a). In 2011, Venezuela became Russia’s fifth largest arms recipient, and in between 2007 to 2011, it is estimated that Venezuela received military hardware from Russia, valued around \$13 billion (Farah & Reyes, 2016). Russia also has access to many of the oilfields in Venezuela, and the Russian state-backed oil company, Rosneft, is working together with PDVSA with several oil projects in the country. Furthermore, Venezuela supplies Russia with discounted oil. In return, Rosneft and Russia have granted financial aid to Venezuela, through various loans and bailouts (Labrador, 2019a).

The two countries conduct occasional joint military exercises, and in March of 2019, Russia has employed at least 100 troops and several tons of military equipment. Few weeks before Nicolás Maduro's presidency was challenged by Guaidó, Russia already sent two bomber aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons to Venezuela, which illustrates Russia's commitment to the support of Maduro's presidency (Gill, 2019b; Marcus, 2019). This relationship has also been crucial for Venezuela, considering that Russia has veto power in the United Nations Security Council, which means that Russia could potentially stop any joint United Nation intervention against Maduro's presidency (Labrador, 2019a).

3.4 China-Venezuela relations

Alongside Russia, China is also playing an important role as one of Venezuela's key partners. China is one of their most important financial backers, and in exchange for future oil shipments, they have lent close to \$70 billion to Venezuela. They are also one of Venezuela's major oil importers (Labrador, 2019a).

However, this relationship is tied to Venezuela's ability to repay their loans. According to Labrador (2019a) China has been growing wary considering the unstable political situation in Venezuela, which may lead them to support Guaidó, if he were to guarantee that the debt would be paid in full. But for the time being, they have remained supportive of the Maduro presidency (Labrador, 2019a).

3.5 United States-Venezuela relations

The United States and Venezuela have had a cooperative relationship in the past. However, this changed after Hugo Chavez took over the presidency in 1999 (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.). He criticized U.S.' policy of promoting liberal economics and democracies abroad, claiming that the U.S. would destabilize leftists governments. So in order to transform Venezuela's economy into a state controlled socialist economy, Chavez had to align his country with America's adversaries (Gill, 2019b).

According to Timothy Gill (2019b), The United States has worked closely together with American NGOs in order to promote democracy in Venezuela. This include the International Republican Institute (IRI) (Gill, 2019b). IRI's Board of Directors comprise many elite individuals from the American Republican Party² (GOP), such as United States senators, representatives and governors (Congress.gov, n.d.; International Republican Institute, n.d. -a).

² Republican Party (Grand Old Party – GOP) is one of the two major political parties in U.S. (Congress.gov, n.d.).

This organisation was actively working with Venezuela's opposition since 2001, and in 2006 it assisted with political activities and sponsored trips for Republican members to meet the opposition in Venezuela (Gill, 2019b).

The American federal agency, The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has supported the opposition since at least 2001, and since 2006, it has worked with student movements that opposed the Venezuelans socialist government. Several members of these U.S. supported movements are now high-ranking opposition leaders in Venezuela, including the partially recognized president, Juan Guaidó (Gill, 2019a).

Oil has also played an important role in United States-Venezuela relationship. Venezuela has the single largest oil reserve in the world, and several American oil companies have been active in the country, until they were expelled in 2007. According to Jaffe (2019), it would be very costly for foreign companies to reestablish their production, given that years of decay and lack of investments have disrupted the oil infrastructure in the country. The author also claims that it could take decades before operations would be profitable. "Many international oil companies are less interested in amassing large reserves that take many years to develop and might become stranded assets that won't be needed in twenty or thirty years." (Jaffe, 2019, para. 7).

3.6 Hegemony and U.S. foreign policy

After the Cold War, the international system was unipolar. The U.S. practiced a hegemony, spreading its culture, values, and ideals throughout the world (Knutsen, 2016). This is still true today, however, this global position has been in a decline. In 2003, the U.S. failed to get approval from the United Nations for an invasion of Iraq. It even failed to secure votes from Mexico and Chile, which historically, has been part of U.S.' sphere of influence, alongside the rest of Latin America (Nye & Welch, 2017).

Throughout the Cold War, the United States supported several right-wing authoritarian governments in Latin America, as long as they respected the U.S. hegemony, and didn't align themselves with the Soviet Union. In more recent years, it has gradually diminished its support of authoritarian regimes, and have switched to focus on economic coercion, in order to prevent the Latin American states to swing too far to the left on the political and economic axis (Gill, 2019b). According to the author, this mainly entails "the use of structural adjustment reform packages that tethered Latin American governments to the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, which ultimately prioritized the interests of private investors and large corporations, many of were located and headquartered in the U.S." (Gill, 2019b, p. 5).

According to the U.S. Department of State (n.d -a), promotion of democracy abroad is one of the central component of the American foreign policy today. Their reasoning for this policy is tied to the perception that democracies promote security, stability and prosperity. In addition to this, democratization promotes U.S.' interest, because such a political system is more likely to have an open market policy (U.S. Department of State, n.d. -a). U.S.' policy of spreading democracy is almost as old as the nation itself. According to Kissinger (2014), the United States is guided by the notion that they have a moral reasonability to free the world from tyranny, since in their mind, all humans desire freedom and liberty (Kissinger, 2014). The NGO, IRI shares this ideology (International Republican Institute, n.d. -b).

3.7 Oil and U.S. foreign policy

Another important element which affects Washington's foreign policy, is the indispensable resource: oil (Knutsen, 2016). According to Painter (2012), maintaining a steady access to foreign oil reserves has been one of U.S.' main priorities. In 1990, Iraq threatened to dominate the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf, which comprise two-thirds of the world's oil. The United States intervened in this conflict, because if Iraq controlled such a large portion of the world's oil supply, that would mean that it could manipulate the global oil price, by either oversupplying or undersupplying the market. In order to lessen U.S.' dependence on oil from the Persian Gulf, it promoted a development of oil industries in other parts of the world, including Venezuela. Since oil is such an important resource, American oil companies wield a lot of influence in U.S. domestic and foreign policy (Painter, 2012).

Oil is also a crucial component of American national security, since the modern world is dependent on it for transportation and energy. According to Crane, et al. (2009), American policy makers have raised concerns that oil exporting nations can potentially sought support from oil importing countries, which may harm U.S. interests (Crane, et al., 2009). In recent years, the United States has become less reliant on foreign oil imports. U.S. is becoming more self-reliant, which means that they are less vulnerable against aggression from foreign oil exporters (Brown, 2018). According to the author, this means that "oil security has become less of a policy concern" (Brown, 2018, p. 171).

Part IV: Methodology

This thesis is a case study of American foreign policy, and their involvement in the Venezuelan presidential crisis of 2019. The research question “Why does the U.S. support Juan Guaidó in Venezuela?” opens up for a Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which is a theoretical and empirical analysis of the variables which could explain the motivations behind foreign policy makers. Foreign policy exists in the middle of the state’s global and local environment. FPA is therefore useful, because it takes into account several different levels of analyzes (perspectives) in order to determine the variables, from which foreign policy makers assess their possibilities, risks and motivations, and develop policies. Also, it is important to include both empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks in the discussion, because the theories can substitute lack of empirical data. The goal of FPA is, thus, to formulate a convincing story, backed by a logical discussion of *necessary* and *contributory* causes (Fermann, 2013).

Instead of using a singular IR-theory to give answer to the proposed research question, FPA utilizes a multi-level analysis, which provides the study with comprehensive debt, which according to Fermann (2013), comes closer to reality than regular IR-theory. Different IR-theories, however, can be used in order to give a theoretical foundation to the different levels of analyzes. These levels account for the internal and external environment, as an inside-out and outside-in perspective (Fermann, 2013).

The two paradigmatic alternatives presented in chapter two favors different ontological positions. Neoliberals focus on the internal environment, which involves an inside-out perspective. Neorealists favors the opposite: the external environment and an outside-in perspective (Fermann, 2013; Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Moravcsik, 1997). Thus, these IR-theories can be utilized in a multi-level FPA analysis (Fermann, 2013). (Nye & Welch, 2017, p. 318) also expresses the importance of both of these two paradigms, stating that “The real world lies somewhere between the two”. For neorealism, this thesis utilize Waltz’s defensive realism instead of than Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, because the empirical data might indicate that this U.S. policy is prioritizing security against China and Russia. For neoliberalism, it will focus on complex interdependence, because this theory prioritize internal factors, and it explains the behavior of liberal democracies (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017).

Since FPA utilize two levels of analysis and different theoretical frameworks, this thesis also contains two additional research questions: “Was it the external or internal environment

that had the greatest impact?” and “Which paradigmatic alternative provides the most satisfying answer?”.

The empirical evidences in this thesis are gathered from secondary sources, such as books, scientific journals, web data, think tanks and newspapers. In order to promote reliability and validity, this paper prioritizes scholarly peer reviewed sources, such as relevant books and scientific journals from NTNU’s universal library and archives, and the digital library JSTOR. It also gather sources from governmental websites when available. However, considering that the subject of study is very recent, some of these sources don’t provide sufficient empirical evidence. When this is the case, it will prioritize news outlets and think tanks. This might be an issue when it comes to the validity of this study, since news outlets and think tanks are usually not peer reviewed. When it comes to data collection, it utilize the index section of the literature when available. When considering non-peer reviewed sources, it attempts to find other sources with identical information, in order to improve validity.

Part V: Hypotheses

In order to answer the research question of this study (“why does the United States support Juan Guaidó?”) it is necessary to understand the process behind the foreign policy makers in Washington. The field of FPA espouse that every state goes through an in-depth process before they act (Fermann, 2013).

In the second chapter of this paper, two different paradigmatic alternatives are presented: neorealism and neoliberalism. These two paradigms agree on the structure of the international system, but they differ in their perspectives. The neorealists favor an outside-in perspective, in which a state’s foreign policy reflect the situation in the international system, where it tries to preserve its sovereignty (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Waltz, 1979). Neoliberals argue that an inside-out perspective comes closer to reality, since it takes into account internal transnational companies and NGOs political influence. Since they are not tied to the international system and hold substantial amount of political power, they can sway foreign policy makers in a different direction (Moravcsik, 1997; Nye & Welch, 2017).

Considering Waltz’s (1979) notion that states attempt to maximize their own security, a foreign military presence in America’s sphere of influence could potentially threaten United States’ security. In 2018, after Nicolás Maduro was elected as president in Venezuela, Russia began to prop up their military presence in the country (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.) As of spring of 2019, Russia has stationed at least 100 troops in Venezuela, two nuclear weapon capable bomber aircrafts and several tons of equipment (Gill, 2019b; Marcus, 2019). They also have an arms deal with Venezuela, valued around \$13 billion (Farah & Reyes, 2016).

With a Russian military presence, which includes two bomber aircraft, capable of carrying nuclear weapons so close to the United States, Nicolás Maduro may be characterized as a direct security threat against America. Thus, it could be beneficial if Venezuela changed their leadership to one which is cooperative with the United States, and not with their adversaries. This sets the basis for the first hypotheses:

H1: U.S. supports Juan Guaidó in order to prevent Russian military presence in Venezuela

As mentioned previously, oil is an absolute indispensable resource, which according to Crane, et al. (2009), is a crucial part of U.S.’ national security. Because of United States’ dependency on oil, countries that export this resource can potentially harm the U.S.’ interests

by blocking oil supplies, or manipulating the global oil price through over- or undersupplying the market (Crane, et al., 2009). Venezuela has the single largest oil reserve in the world, and China, one of U.S.' main adversary, has invested \$70 billion in Venezuela, which in return has been promised future oil shipments. Similarly, the other U.S.' adversary, Russia, has also invested interests in Venezuela. The Russian oil company Rosneft is working together with PDVSA on several oil projects in Venezuela. Furthermore, Russia receives discounted oil from Venezuela (Labrador, 2019a). While China and Russia enjoy a prospering relationship with Venezuela, the American oil companies ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips were abolished from Venezuela by president Hugo Chavez in 2007 (Gill, 2019a).

Considering that Venezuela is pursuing an anti-American policy, it could be plausible that the U.S., in the future, would lose access to the single largest oil reserve in the world, unless they actively work to prevent this. According to Crane, et al. (2009), oil is linked to U.S national security, and since Waltz (1979) emphasize that states maximize security, U.S.' desire to change leadership could be based on safeguarding access to Venezuelan oil in the future. This sets the basis for the second hypotheses:

H2: U.S. supports Juan Guaidó in order to secure access to foreign oil resources in Venezuela

Neoliberal theories, which are represented in chapter two, claim that foreign policy is a product of domestic groups interests, such as NGOs and transnational companies (Moravcsik, 1997). The American companies ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips were abolished from Venezuela in 2007 (Gill, 2019a). Since then, they have attempted to claim compensation from the Venezuelan government and PDVSA, but so far, they have not succeeded (Parraga, 2019; Ulmer, 2017). According to Painter (2012), american oil companies wield a lot of influence over U.S. domestic and foreign policy. In order to be granted compensation, or potentially reopen the oil production in Venezuela, it is plausible that these American companies influence U.S. foreign policy makers into supporting the opposition in Venezuela, which potentially could allow American companies to resume operation. This sets the basis of the third hypotheses:

H3: U.S. supports Juan Guaidó because transnational companies desire access to oil in Venezuela

American NGOs, such as IRI, have directly worked together with the opposition in Venezuela. IRI comprises of several elite republican party members (Congress.gov, n.d.;

International Republican Institute, n.d. -a). This organization claims to promote democracy aboard (International Republican Institute, n.d. -b). Since IRI consists of many elite politicians within the American government, it is plausible that they wield enough political power to sway foreign policy in their favor. This sets the basis for the forth hypotheses:

H4: *U.S. supports Juan Guaidó because NGOs desire to democratize Venezuela*

Part VI: Discussion

Firstly, this chapter discusses the four proposed explanations to why the United States supports Juan Guaidó as the president of Venezuela. Secondly, it determines whether it was internal or external factors that deemed most important for the American foreign policy makers. Lastly, it demonstrates which of the two paradigms gives the most satisfactory answer to this scenario.

Taking into account that the United States actively supports the opposition's claim for presidency, it is safe to assume that they desire a change in leadership. When Juan Guaidó was declared president by the National Assembly, the United States immediately announced its support, stating that he was the legitimate leader of Venezuela (Specia, 2019). However, Washington's disapproval of the Venezuelan leadership is nothing new. After the Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela in 1999, the United States has had a hostile relationship with the country (Gill, 2019b).

So why does Washington disapprove of leadership in Venezuela? According to Gill (2019b), the United States is actively working to prevent Latin American states from ending up too far to the left on the economic and political axis. The empirical evidence suggests that Nicolas Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chavez, have over the last two decades, pulled the Venezuelan economy to the left (Gill, 2019b).

This seems to be a problem for the United States for two reasons: Firstly, the nationalization of Venezuela's oil reserves has severely hurt American oil companies' financial interests, which was operating in the country until they were expelled in 2007 (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.; Gill, 2019b). Secondly, Venezuela has established close relationships with the United States' adversaries, China and Russia (Labrador, 2019a). The latter has a close military relationship with Venezuela, which conducts occasional joint military exercises in the region. Furthermore, Russia has an arms deal with Venezuela, valued at around \$13 billion (Farah & Reyes, 2016). Since December of 2018, Russia has been propping up its military presence in Venezuela. In March of 2019, they have stationed around 100 troops, several tons of military hardware, and two bomber aircraft, capable of carrying nuclear weapons (Marcus, 2019). This seems to indicate a direct security threat against the United States, due to its close proximity. It also poses a threat against U.S.' dominance over Latin America, since Russia and China have a close relationship with Venezuela, which gives them a foothold in the continent.

Waltz's neorealism theory claims that states will naturally drift towards an equilibrium of power, because they all desire autonomy. As presented in part 2.2, every state will adopt policies, which aims to strengthen their own position (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Waltz, 1979). With this in mind, and the fact that Washington's adversaries are gaining influence over a nation within America's sphere of influence, the empirical observations seem to support this theory. This also supports the claim of (H1), since an American-friendly government may be more inclined to support U.S.' interests, and not feel the necessity to align itself with American's adversaries for protection. (H1) is therefore a necessary cause.

Also, as presented in part 3.7, oil is a crucial element for national security, since this resource is indispensable for the modern world. For example, the United States has historically been dependent on foreign export for their oil consumptions. Due to political uncertainty in the Persian Gulf³, the U.S. has been promoting oil developments in other regions of the world, including Venezuela. The Persian Gulf is an immensely important supply of oil for the global market, so if an anti-American country were to dominate this region, it could threaten American security by manipulating oil prices (Crane, et al., 2009).

In more recent years, however, the United States has moved towards self-sufficiency of oil, which according to Brown (2018), makes the U.S. less vulnerable against aggression from oil exporting nations. Thus, according to him, oil is no longer an immediate threat against U.S. national security (Brown, 2018). Hence, (H2) might not be a dominant for American foreign policy makers. Although, it is only in recent years that the U.S. has managed to approach a self-sustaining oil supply, which means that it could have been a priority in the past. However, considering that Venezuela has the single largest oil reserve in the world (Labrador, 2019a), it may have the potential to manipulate the oil value, similarly to that of the Persian Gulf.

In neorealism, the balance-of-power system is crucial in order to understand states behaviors (Waltz, 1979). Considering that America has been practicing a hegemony since The Cold War ended (Kissinger, 2014; Nye & Welch, 2017), neorealism predicts that other states will attempt to balance America's power, whilst U.S. will attempt to preserve their position. If America's adversaries were to dominate the oil market, they would wield a substantial amount of power. Theories of neorealism and the empirical data seem to indicate towards this notion, thus (H2) will be labeled as a necessary cause.

Similarly, American oil companies could see it as their interests to change the leadership in Venezuela to one which is cooperative with American commerce. As presented in 2.1,

³ The Persian Gulf contains two-thirds of the total oil reserves in the world (Crane, et al., 2009)

neoliberals claims that liberal democracies are focusing on ‘low politics’, such as welfare and commerce, which implies that transnational companies wield political influence over policy makers, in order to promote more commerce, both domestically and internationally (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017). The empirical evidence shows that the American oil companies, ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, were expelled from Venezuela in 2007 (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.; Gill, 2019b), and since then they have attempted to claim compensations from PDVSA, valued at several billion dollars, but so far, they have not succeed in getting this (Parraga, 2019; Ulmer, 2017).

There is, however, no empirical evidence in this paper to suggest that they have influenced the foreign policy makers in Washington. Although, Painter (2012) suggests that because oil is such a crucial resource, American oil companies do in fact wield a substantial amount of influence over U.S. domestic and foreign policy. However, empirical evidence indicates that the U.S. has supported the opposition before these oil companies were expelled from Venezuela⁴. Furthermore, according to Jaffe (2019), it would be very expensive for oil companies to reestablish operations in Venezuela, considering the years of decay and poor management of the country’s oil infrastructure. Thus, it could potentially take several decades before it would be profitable (Jaffe, 2019). These empirical observations suggest that (H3) was not a major factor for the policy makers, but rather a contributory cause.

NGOs and the United States government have worked closely together with the opposition for more than a decade. In 2006, IRI assisted the opposition by organizing workshops, assisting with political activities and sponsoring trips for GOP members to meet the opposition in Venezuela (Gill, 2019b) According to Henry Kissinger, the United States is guided by the notion that they have a moral reasonability to spread its freedom and liberty, because in their mind, all humans desire these principles (Kissinger, 2014). IRI also shares this vision (International Republican Institute, n.d. -b) Considering that many of their board members are also elite politicians from the GOP (Congress.gov, n.d.; International Republican Institute, n.d. -a), it does indicate that this organization wields substantial amount of political influence. This supports the neoliberalism’s claim the NGOs are influential when dealing with foreign policy. Thus, (H4) seems to indicate a necessary cause for U.S. foreign policy.

Nevertheless, it is unclear whether or not IRI sincerely believes that they have a moral responsibility to spread democracy abroad. For example, the empirical evidence suggests that Chavez was democratically elected by the Venezuelan people in 1998 (Council on Foreign

⁴ The U.S. recognized group responsible coup d’état attempt in 2002 (Imbert & Macias, 2019; Vulliamy, 2002), IRI and USAID has since 2001 been working with the opposition in Venezuela (Gill, 2019b).

Relations, n.d.; Gill, 2019). Furthermore, in 2002 the United States recognized the group behind the coup attempt as the legitimate government of Venezuela (Imbert & Macias, 2019; Vulliamy, 2002). This indicates that the U.S. doesn't have a policy for spreading autonomous democracy, but rather liberal democracy, which coexists with U.S.' interests. However, the years following Chavez's election victory, he did pursue a dictatorial path by strengthening his presidential power (Labrador, 2019b) which might indicate that IRI is sincere when promoting its ideology.

Furthermore, democratization abroad seems to be more than just a moral responsibility. Neoliberal theories, such as CI, explains why liberal democracies are more prone to be peaceful and cooperative, since they prioritize 'low politics', and thus promote commercial ties between other liberal democracies (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017). With that being said, the empirical evidence seem to suggest that democratization is beneficial for the United States in various ways. Alongside being a moral responsibility, it also benefits American commerce, since liberal democracies are likely to adopt policies which promote trade and commerce (Jackson & Sørensen, 2003; Nye & Welch, 2017). According to Gill (2019b), the implementation of such policies is directly tied to the interests of American transnational companies and investors. In addition, according to Moravcsik (1997), in addition to be beneficial for American commerce, democratization also promotes security, since democracies are less prone to be aggressive against other democracies.

With that being said, it seems that U.S. policy makers were influenced by both internal and external factors. From the external hypotheses (H1 and H2), both are shown to be necessary causes, whereas from the internal ones, (H4) appears to be a necessary cause, and (H3) a contributory cause. All things considered, spreading democracy abroad seems to be the most important variable, because it satisfies all other factors, as the previous paragraph demonstrates.

As this chapter demonstrates, democratization seems to be at par with neorealism, since it also promotes security for the United States. With that being said, the empirical evidence shows that the balance-of-power from neorealism is still relevant, considering Russia and China's involvement in the presidential crisis. However, it fails to explain the tools utilized by liberal democracies in order to promote security, since it isn't necessarily tied to military power. On the other hand, CI theory from neoliberalism gives an explanation to why democratization promotes peace and security, but gives no answer to the balance-of-power phenomena.

Part VII: Conclusion

By analyzing the empirical evidence through different theoretical frameworks, it can be inferred that the U.S. policy makers chose to support Juan Guaidó as the legitimate president, because the current leadership in Venezuela has allowed China and Russia to gain a foothold in America's sphere of influence. The oil reserve in Venezuela is also of outmost importance, since it can be utilized as a source of power against the United States, if it were to be controlled by U.S.' adversaries. The American support to Juan Guaidó is also tied to U.S.' commercial interests, since a Guaidó presidency could promote a liberal democracy to the country, which entails an open market policy. This could benefit American oil companies, although only in the long term, given the high investment costs due to years of decay of Venezuela's oil infrastructure.

According to neoliberal theories, the establishment of a liberal democracy in Venezuela would also provide the United States with security from its adversaries, since these nations get bound together by complex interdependence. Waltz's neorealism theory, which claims that the state maximizes security, is reinforced due to U.S.' agenda to spread democracy, since it can be correlated with providing security. With that being said, there is no clear answer of whether it was the external or internal environment that had the greatest impact on the United States policy makers. It can be said that both environments contributed towards U.S.' decision to support Guaidó, due to the multi-use of democratization.

When it comes to the question of which paradigm provides the best explanation of U.S. decision making, it can be said that both paradigms seem to give a satisfying answer, but in different regards. Neoliberal CI theory explains how liberal democracies achieve peace and prosperity amongst themselves, whilst neorealism explains why balance-of-power determines U.S.' actions in order to preserve its hegemony. Therefore it can be inferred that neoliberalism explains the *means*, whilst neorealism explains the *ends*.

The strength of this thesis derives from the FPA's utilization of several IR-theories, which gives a broad overview over the various elements which effect the U.S. policy makers. A limitation of this thesis is that it does not take into account neoliberal theories which explains external factors. Future research should assess whether or not international institutions or norms affects U.S. foreign policy makers. This thesis simply gives an overview of the elements that motivated U.S. foreign policy. A separate study should be made about why the United States did not utilize other means to deal with the threat in Venezuela.

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