The Democratic-Peace Thesis and U.S. Relations with Colombia and Venezuela

William Avilés

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The democratic-peace thesis is the argument that democracies do not fight wars against each other because of shared norms, economic trade relationships, and/or institutional and societal checks upon the power of executives. The effect of public opinion upon political behavior or the requirement of legislative approval for executive action or even the belief that disputes should be resolved through cooperative mechanisms is viewed as conducive to the cooperative resolution of conflicts between democracies. Though substantial evidence exists that democracies have rarely fought large-scale wars[1] with each other, it has been shown that they have intervened militarily intervened and engaged in covert actions against other democracies to achieve their goals (Kegley and Hermann, 1995: 3; Forsythe, 1992). Advocates of the democratic-peace thesis consider this explainable in terms of differences in the "level" of democracy. They argue that these interventions and covert actions have been employed against democratic states that are weakly consolidated or have been directed at "promoting" or "safeguarding" democracy rather than undermining it. An analysis of U.S. responses to political crises in Colombia and Venezuela reveals that, despite the long history of competitive democratic institutions in these countries, U.S. policy worked to weaken or oust their democratically elected leaders to achieve its national-security objectives and establish an inviting business environment for transnational corporations. The objective of U.S. policy was not to preserve democracy but to undermine it. Furthermore, the predicted cooperative resolution of conflicts between democracies was weak to nonexistent.

Cultural and institutional restrictions upon state leaders and economic relations between states have often been cited as reasons that democracies do not engage in wars or militarized disputes[2] with each other (Doyle, 1986; Morgan and Campbell, 1991). The externalization of democratic norms (i.e., the importance of dialogue and negotiation), trade relations, and similar

William Avilés is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Nebraska, Kearney, and the author of a forthcoming book on Colombian civil-military relations and democracy.
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institutional checks (i.e., congressional checks upon executive powers) should contribute to democracies' trusting and respecting one another when a conflict of interest arises between them (Rosato, 2003). David Forsythe (1992: 386), however, points out that the United States "organized or aided at least six covert forcible actions against elected governments between 1947 and 1991." Charles Kegley and Margaret Hermann (1995: 9) have shown that a significant number of military interventions[3] transpired between "free" and "partly free" states between 1974 and 1988.

Forsythe (1992: 393) suggests that "the political regimes targeted by U.S. covert action, especially forcible action, did not meet the threshold conditions for complete liberalism. They may have been 'barely participatory,' but in some cases they were not fully representational with functioning separate institutions of government. . . . The targets of U.S. covert action qualified as 'weak, non-liberal states.'" Bruce Russett asserts that the regimes that were targeted for covert action were all "anoncracies" (1993: 121–122)—states with a mixture of democratic and autocratic characteristics or a low concentration of power (1993: 77). Similarly, Patrick James and Glenn E. Mitchell argue that the covert actions undertaken by the United States against democracies tend to involve "relatively weak democracies that seek changes in structural dependencies and are vulnerable to outside efforts at destabilization" (1995: 92). Kegley and Hermann concluded that "free states directed the greatest proportion of the interventionary activity toward *maintaining and enhancing* the democratic community, in particular to ensuring that partly free states remained part of the community" (1997: 356, italics mine).

In summary, the literature that has examined extreme conflicts between democracies short of wars or militarized disputes has concluded that these interventions can be explained by the nature of one or both of the democracies involved in the conflict. Can this conclusion explain the policies of U.S. governments with regard to conflict with Venezuela and Colombia? Are there competing arguments that can account for U.S. behavior? Most important, how significant are the variables cited by proponents of the democratic-peace thesis for understanding the resolution of conflicts between democracies?

The cases of Colombia and Venezuela are important because in contrast to most countries of the region, each has maintained the procedures and institutional rules of an electoral democracy since 1958. Both had completed their political transitions long before the democratic wave swept Latin America, and both maintained relatively liberal economic systems and have enjoyed important trade and economic relations with the United States. If the democratic-peace proponents are correct, one should expect that conflicts between the United States and these two nations would be resolved through trust and cooperation, and any U.S. meddling or intervention in their internal affairs should have been motivated by the desire to preserve and enhance democracy.

In contrast, U.S. foreign policy in these two cases was conditioned by the degree of divergence between these nations' policies and U.S. goals in the region and internationally. Common interests were key in both cases in explaining U.S. action. The narrow focus upon institutional rules and/or domestic norms is insufficient in explaining U.S. behavior in the two cases. As Deborah Yashar (1999: 79) argues, scholars "need to *analyze* democratic politics in the context of *state-society relations* by evaluating the reach of state institutions and assessing the broader social forces that surround, support, and oppose the terms of democracy's new institutions." The assessment of "broader social forces" cannot simply stop at the nation's borders but must include a changing international context that structures state behavior and influences the organization of nation-states.

The cold-war policy thinker George Kennan wrote in 1948 that "we have 50 percent of the world's wealth, but only 6.3 percent of its population. . . . In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. . . . Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will allow us to maintain this position of disparity" (as cited in Robinson, 1995: 644). This view guided U.S. interventions prior to the cold war, with the U.S. invading Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and the Philippines, among others—protecting U.S. economic interests and/or obtaining the raw materials and markets viewed necessary for U.S. capitalist development. During the cold-war period (1945–1991) different U.S. governments achieved these ends through the defense of anticommunist authoritarian regimes, even helping to overthrow democratic governments in Guatemala (in 1954), Brazil (in 1964), and Chile (in 1973) to help establish these regimes. The crises of legitimacy that many authoritarian regimes faced during the 1970s and 1980s led to a shift in U.S. policy, with policy makers prioritizing limited democratic regimes, low-intensity democracies, over authoritarian regimes in the region (Robinson, 1996; Gills Rocamora, and Wilson, 1993).

These "democracies" are largely procedural democracies that allow political opposition, greater individual freedoms, a reduced institutional role for the armed forces, and a more permeable environment for the investments of transnational capital (Robinson, 1996). This type of "democracy" is viewed favorably by transnational corporations and the U.S. government for its ability to co-opt radical movements that challenge the dominant political and/or socioeconomic order, as well as its perceived greater effectiveness in obtaining the consent necessary for capitalist globalization (Robinson, 1996: 38). Low-intensity democracies are viewed as a necessary complement to economic neoliberalism or what some have referred to as "free-market" democracies (McSherry, 2000: 26–34; Robinson, 1996).

During Ernesto Samper's administration (1994–1998) in Colombia and the Hugo Chávez administration (1998–2006) in Venezuela, democratically elected governments were faced with severe political challenges. The responses of the U.S. government to these threats to constitutional order revealed the prioritization of competing interests over "democracy preservation." In contrast to the expectations of the democratic-peace thesis, negotiated and diplomatic solutions were subordinated to covert and overt strategies for weakening or replacing democratic governments. In both cases the interests of transnational corporations and/or the need to maintain a neoliberal agenda played central roles in U.S. state behavior.

DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA

According to Graeme Gil, democratic consolidation is "the embedding of democratic procedures into the infrastructure as a whole so that the system is secure and is generally seen as the appropriate way of organizing political life" (2000: 235). Samuel Huntington (1991: 267) submits that democracy can be considered consolidated when there have been two changes of government through the electoral process. The governments of Colombia and Venezuela have been selected through relatively competitive elections for decades. In both countries arrangements have been established among political elites to govern their respective nations through "a system of alternation, democratic freedoms, and competence" (Cardozo da Silva, 2002: 33). In 1997 (the third year of the Samper administration) the U.S. State Department concluded that Colombia was "a constitutional, multiparty democracy." In March 2002, just prior to the April military coup, the U.S. State Department reported that Venezuela was "a democratic republic with a freely elected president and unicameral legislature" and that the government generally respected the constitutional protection for freedom of speech and of the press.

POLITICAL CRISIS IN COLOMBIA

Ernesto Samper became president of Colombia after winning an extremely close election against Andrés Pastrana in 1994. He had run on a platform that included maintaining the country's neoliberal economic model, peaceful resolution of internal conflict,[4] and the continuation of economic growth. Samper's economic plans were broadly consistent with a model of trade and economic liberalization (Ahumada, 1996: 16). Samper's first development plan, the Salto Social, pledged that the government would "not only continue with the 'opening' [the economic opening to international trade and investment begun under the previous administration], but actually consolidate this process through a more aggressive strategy of internationalization" (as quoted in Ahumada, 1996: 16). In addition, in 1997 Samper attempted to renegotiate the country's oil contracts with international investors in an effort to increase foreign investment by about US$4 billion (Dudley and Murillo, 1998). Though these efforts were resisted by the oil workers' union, which the Samper government labeled a "terrorist cartel," foreign direct investment almost doubled between 1996 and 2002 as a percentage of the country's gross domestic product (from 12 percent to 23 percent), largely in the energy and finance sectors (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2002: 2). The interest in increasing foreign investment complemented the call for the privatization of a number of state-owned enterprises in Samper's Salto Social plan (Ahumada, 1996: 19–20).

Though Samper's election did not represent a significant break from previous neoliberal policies, the election did become a center of controversy with the public release of evidence that his campaign had received US$6 million from the Cali drug cartel (Leal Buitrago, 1996). The preliminary evidence consisted of tapes provided to the U.S. embassy of police intercepts of narcotraffickers discussing their campaign contributions. The tapes were released to the press by U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency agent Joe Toft, who viewed the Colombian government as a "narcodemocracy" and Samper as personally corrupt (Crandall, 2002: 37, 103). Robert Gelbard, a Latin American specialist in the State Department and assistant secretary of state, concluded in August 1994 that the evidence against Samper was credible. Gelbard informed President Samper and Foreign Minister Rodrigo Pardo that the U.S. government was aware that the Samper campaign had received funding from the Cali cartel (*El Espectador*, August 4, 1994). He made it clear that only through significant advances in the drug war, arresting the leaders of the Cali cartel, the reinstatement of extradition, and an increase in the eradication of coca could Samper ensure good relations with the United States.

Colombia's attorney general formally opened the investigation of the Samper campaign on April 21, 1995. Key campaign advisers such as Santiago Medina and Fernando Botero were arrested and found guilty of "illegal enrichment." Botero would later admit that Samper himself was fully aware of the Cali cartel's support, an allegation that Samper denied. His revelations led to the resignations of key advisers and ten ambassadors and demands from the international media, retired military officers, and members of the business community that Samper resign (Cañon, 1998: 353).[5] The charges against Samper contributed to a rising opposition to the continuation of his presidency, and political attacks by the U.S. government helped to drive this opposition.

U.S. POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND THE WEAKENING OF DEMOCRACY IN COLOMBIA

The Clinton administration's decisions to decertify the Colombian government in 1996 and 1997 were major blows to the Samper administration. The certification policy had been initiated as a mechanism for assessing the progress and cooperation of major drug-producing or drug-trafficking countries. If the U.S. secretary of state determined that a nation was not cooperating sufficiently in the war on drugs, that nation faced the termination of U.S. government assistance and possible economic sanctions (Crandall, 2002: 42). The sanctions imposed automatically with decertification included the suspension of 50 percent of U.S. assistance for the current fiscal year (except for narcotics control aid or humanitarian aid) and a requirement that U.S. representatives in multilateral development banks vote against loans to the offending country (Carpenter, 2003: 125). Discretionary sanctions included the elimination of preferential treatment for Colombia's exports and landing-rights for its U.S.-bound aircraft and duty increases of up to 50 percent of the value of the country's export possibilities that could dramatically affect the interests of transnational corporations (see Crandall, 2002: 42–45 for a discussion of the certification process).

U.S. decertifications took place despite Samper's exoneration by an investigating committee of the Colombian Congress. On two separate occasions (in December 1995 and June 1996) it voted not to pursue criminal charges against the president (Crandall, 2002: 120–123). Neither of these votes prevented the United States from continuing to undermine Samper's position. Ten days before the June 1996 congressional inquiry, the U.S. State Department released a list of the various sanctions and punishments that could face Colombia if Samper were to be absolved (Samper, 2000: 146). When these warnings failed to prevent the congressional committee from exonerating him, the U.S. government questioned the integrity of the congressional vote, arguing that too many congressmen were linked to narcotraffickers themselves and/or allied with Samper.

The United States responded to the exoneration on July 11 by revoking Samper's visa, citing "substantial evidence" that his campaign had "solicited and received something over US$6.5 million" from known drug traffickers (*Washington Post*, July 12, 1996). The Colombianist Bert Ruiz asserts that "hard-liners" in the U.S. State Department hoped that the visa revocation would "knock Samper out of power" (2001: 219; see also Franco, 1998: 52). Ambassador Myles Frechette, in a June 30 memorandum, urged the U.S. government to "isolate and debilitate" Samper (Crandall, 2002: 122), and Jesse Helms, head of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote to Senate majority leader Robert Dole, "The Colombian government will never be dedicated to fighting drugs or drug corruption as long as Ernesto Samper is their leader" (quoted in Crandall, 2002: 119).[6] U.S. opposition to Samper became so heated that he was convinced that the United States was actively seeking to overthrow his government (Samper, 2000: 257, 285).

However, in June 1996 a senior U.S. administration official stated, "Our objective is not to remove the president. The options on the table are aimed at pressing the Colombian government to deliver more aggressive action [in the drug war]" (*Washington Post*, June 30, 1996). Speaking in March 1996, Robert Gelbard (1996) argued that the government's approach was "designed to maintain support for essential counternarcotics programs and institutions in Colombia, while pressing the government to take specific policy and legislative actions that would enhance the capabilities of the law enforcement and judicial sectors." The Colombian desk officer in the U.S. embassy in Colombia, Denise Malczewsky, informed Samper in 1996 that the United States "wanted to maintain the pressure of the scandal as a weapon . . . in order to obtain greater results [in the drug war]" (Samper, 2000: 270). Andrés Franco refers to this period as "fragmented cooperation," with the U.S. government maintaining close relations with sectors of the Colombian state (i.e., the national police, the attorney general) but hostile relations with Samper himself (1998: 37).

In response to these pressures the Samper administration imprisoned the leaders of the Cali cartel, appointed a U.S.-supported candidate to head the national police, and toughened laws against money laundering. In addition, by the end of Samper's term the policy of extradition had been reinstated (allowing drug traffickers to be sent to the United States for trial) and the eradication of coca and poppy plants had substantially increased (Esguerra, 1997: 5; Samper, 2000; Crandall, 2002: 108–111). This coca eradication took place largely in southern Colombia where the bulk of the crop was being grown, a region in which the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) dominated.

The strategy of increasing coca eradication was tied directly to the war against the guerrillas (viewed as "narco-guerrillas" by the Colombian army and the national police), as the Colombian security forces increasingly utilized U.S. drug-war aid in counterinsurgency operations (Vargas, 1997). Between 1989 and 1997 Colombia was the number-one recipient of military aid in Latin America; U.S. counternarcotics aid increased in a year in which the country was decertified (Salinas, 1997: 12). This aid directly assisted human rights violators, and according to Carlos Salinas (1997: 12), "Of the thirteen offending [military] units identified in a 1994 Amnesty International report on Colombia, twelve had received U.S. aid." In 1997, 3,500 Colombians were killed, the vast majority by public security forces and their paramilitary allies, most of the victims being peasants perceived as supporters of the insurgency, trade unionists, and human rights and leftist activists (Salinas, 1997: 12). The war on drugs contributed to this human rights crisis. Though the decertification decisions of the U.S. government effectively produced results with regard to the war on drugs, they also exacerbated a legitimacy crisis within Colombia, as Samper faced increasing opposition from sectors of the armed forces and business elites.

On several occasions the armed forces threatened to disobey direct commands by President Samper in relationship to Samper's negotiating strategy with the armed insurgency. In 1995 the military contributed to stopping an effort to demilitarize a region of the country in exchange for negotiations by publicly questioning the constitutionality of the action (*Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, July 18, 1995, 46; *Semana*, July 4, 1995). Again in 1997, when the Samper administration proposed a demilitarization to secure the release of captured by guerrillas in an earlier battle, General Haroldo Bedoya argued that the move would place national security at risk (*Semana*, June 16, 1997). This time the government ignored the military's opposition. Within a month of the release of the prisoners, Samper removed General Bedoya from his post for insubordination (*Semana*, July 18, 1997; *El Tiempo*, July 26, 1997). Bedoya protested Samper's order to leave the armed forces, arguing that Samper was not "reliable" and that he was being "questioned not only nationally but internationally as well" (*Semana*, July 18, 1997). His removal sparked an unprecedented protest within the armed forces; more than 200 junior officers of the army came together to demand that he disobey the order. Samper made special security arrangements for the Presidential Palace in anticipation of a potential challenge to his authority (Samper, 2000: 181). Daniel García-Peña, Samper's adviser in the peace negotiations, reported that "the night that he decided to oust Bedoya was the closest we have come in a long time to a military coup in Colombia" (interview, May 1999). Bedoya ultimately stepped down, and no military coup was attempted.

Throughout the Samper administration, a number of military leaders, especially General Bedoya, publicly criticized the government's human rights agencies for pressuring the military to adhere to human rights norms. General Ricardo Emilio Cifuentes resigned as Second Army Division commander in January 1996, claiming that he no longer believed in Samper (*Cambio16*, January 29, 1996). The open opposition of sectors of the military to Samper's administration was ultimately coupled with meetings between these sectors and conservative political elites to discuss the removal of Samper (*Semana*, July 29, 1997; *Semana*, October 17, 1995).

Fernando Botero's allegations energized business interests into action. Leading elites took to the airwaves to call for Samper's resignation, arguing that the scandal was undermining the Colombian stock market and would endanger foreign investment in the country (*Washington Post*, January 24, 1996). U.S. decertification of Colombia in March 1996 served to intensify this opposition (Rettberg, 2001a: 5). According to Sabas Peralt, an influential business leader and head of the opposition group the Movement of National Reconstruction, "This decision [decertification] greatly damages the image of our country. . . . The money we are losing directly because of this decision is not much . . . but the negative image will stigmatize the country" (*Washington Post*, March 2, 1996). During the months that followed the leading business lobbies and more than 1,000 business leaders rallied in Medellín to urge Samper to step down (McBeth, 1999: 151). Strategies for resolving the political situation discussed among the business leadership included not only asking Samper to resign but pressuring the vice president to take action to remove him, a national production strike, and utilizing alliances with sectors of the armed forces to remove him by force. The head of one of the largest business organizations, the National Association of Industries, Luis Carlos Villegas, reported that there had been discussions of a business strike to pressure Samper to resign (*El Espectador*, May 5, 1996). The construction industry's Germán Holguín Zamoran also called for a business strike (Cañon, 1998: 385). Individuals linked with this opposition to Samper and a select group of military officers approached Ambassador Frechette in August 1995 to ask whether the United States would support the forcible removal of Samper and a transition government to new elections. Frechette responded that in no way would the United States support a military takeover, despite the fact that U.S. pressure was exacerbating this opposition, arguing that Samper's removal should be conducted through a legal, constitutional process (*Semana*, August 20, 1996; see also Díaz Callejas, 1997: 2).

The damage being done to U.S.-Colombian relations greatly contributed to the business community's concern. The United States was Colombia's number-one trade partner. In 1996 bilateral trade between Colombia and the United States represented 36 percent of all of Colombia's exports and 35 percent of its imports (Franco, 1998: 69). Colombia had been decertified twice by the Clinton administration because of the alleged linkages between Samper and the Cali cartel, threatening major Colombian exporters with possible sanctions upon their trade with the United States (Rettberg, 2001a). However, the emergence of divisions within the movement and the expression of support for Samper by the largest economic conglomerates in the nation would eventually stymie the opposition of the business community (Rettberg, 2001a: 5–21). The Grupo Empresarial Bavaria, the Organización Ardila Lulleand, the Organización Sarmiento Angulo, and the Sindicato Antioqueño largely ignored the political challenge initiated by the opposition and pursued their own political agenda (Rettberg, 2001a). [7]

The economic conglomerates publicly supported Samper during this crisis, representing as they did the largest source of contributions to his presidential campaign (Rojas Morales, 1997: 118–121). The Grupo Empresarial Bavaria, the largest conglomerate at this time and the largest contributor, had donated US$3.7 million in 1994 (Rettberg, 2001a: 12; *Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 1996). The Organización Sarmiento Angulo had donated almost US$1 million to Samper's campaign and had been rewarded with control of the Banco Popular when it was privatized during his administration. Likewise, the Grupo Empresarial Bavaria was awarded lucrative communication and media licenses that allowed it to enjoy immense profits during the Samper years (Rojas Morales, 1997: 118–122). Angelika Rettberg (2001b: 55) reports that the economic conglomerates benefited from "the allocation of private television channels, the distribution of long distance and cellular calling services, sales tax breaks, and the preferential assignment of regional development projects."

Another factor in the failure of business and military opposition to the Samper presidency was that the United States stopped short of fully sanctioning the Colombian economy. Though it decertified the Samper administration twice, in neither instance did the Clinton administration choose to implement the optional sanctions that would have undermined the economic welfare of business elites in Colombia as well as the investments of U.S.-based transnational corporations.

In response to the possibility of harsher sanctions, U.S.- and British-based transnational corporations mobilized to prevent them (Center for Public Integrity, 2001). Almost 60 U.S.-based transnational corporations had investments in Colombia in 1996, representing more than half of all foreign direct investment (*Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 1996). The March 1996 decertification mandated the interruption of governmental credit and financial assistance to these corporations and allowed for the possibility of optional sanctions. Exxon spent almost US$7.66 million on lobbying to prevent any further negative consequences for their investments in Colombia, in particular for the Colombian coal mine that was bringing the company over US$1 billion a year in revenue (Colombia Solidarity Campaign, 2005). An important collective response was represented in the establishment of U.S.-Colombian Business Partnership, a lobbying group whose members included Occidental Petroleum, the Enron Corporation, BP Amoco, and Colgate-Palmolive. Michael Skol, until 1997 the deputy assistant secretary of state for Latin America in the Clinton administration, headed the partnership (Silverstein, 2000; Dunning and Wirpsa, 2001). It actively lobbied Congress and the Clinton administration to avoid the implementation of harsh economic sanctions, citing the potential damage to members' investments in Colombia (*Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 1996). Transnational corporations such as BP, Enron, Texaco, and Occidental sent a group letter to the State Department in 1996 asking it to reconsider imposing sanctions upon Colombia, referring specifically to the over US$4 billion that had already been invested and the future plans to invest more, especially in the oil sector. Members of the partnership also had more direct ties with the Clinton administration. For example, the family of former Vice President Al Gore controlled at least US$250,000 of Occidental Petroleum stock and maintained a close relationship with the company. Occidental contributed to Gore's 2000 presidential campaign and to the Democratic party a combined amount of US$500,000 between 1992 and 2000 (Silverstein, 2000).

The petroleum companies were particularly important to Colombia's economy because its energy sector was increasingly viewed as a potentially profitable source of foreign investment. During the 1990s the oil and coal sectors became leading sources of foreign exchange, with both surpassing coffee by 2001 (Energy Information Administration, 2004). By the end of the 1990s Colombia was the fourth-largest and fastest-growing major exporter of oil in South America (*Colombia Bulletin*, Winter-1997/1998, 39). Between 1990 and 1999 the production of oil increased by 78 percent, with most of this oil being exported to the United States, placing Colombia among its top eight U.S. international suppliers (Dunning and Wirpsa, 2001). Oil investments in Colombia by transnational oil corporations more than doubled between 1993 and 1996 to US$1.9 billion, increasing by 50 percent in 1995 alone (*Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 1996). This growth in the energy sector generated changes in security priorities and the involvement of transnational corporations in maintaining security.[8] Ensuring that these companies were defended was central to the future of Colombia's oil production and economic development, as petroleum investment represented an increasing proportion of foreign direct investment. The members of the U.S.-Colombian Business Partnership were concerned not only about the financial costs of draconian sanctions but also about the potential costs to the physical security of their investments of any further deterioration of U.S-Colombian relations. Their lobbying campaign ultimately paid off. As Skol put it, "While Samper was decertified, the private sector was certified" (*Multinational Monitor*, 1997; see also Colombia Solidarity Campaign, 2005). In other words, the severer sanctions were not implemented, and this indirectly prevented the exacerbation of Samper's legitimacy crisis and contributed to his political survival.

The support for the elected government of Samper by economic conglomerates within Colombia and transnational corporations within the United States illustrated the degree to which the Colombian state was maintaining economic policies consistent with their interests. Transnational capital's opposition to a tougher U.S. policy against Samper complemented the continued support that the U.S. government demonstrated for coercive sectors of Colombia's low-intensity democracy (its national police) while simultaneously pressing it to do more to achieve U.S. objectives in the drug war. Key interests guiding U.S. policy were the continuation of a more aggressive drug war that indirectly and directly aided coercive sectors fighting an internal insurgency and the maintenance of a business environment favorable to the interests of transnational corporations.

POLITICAL CRISIS IN VENEZUELA

In 1998, the one-time coup leader Hugo Chávez won the presidential election in Venezuela at the head of a personalist movement called the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement—MBR). Multiple factors contributed to Chávez's victory, including the excessive and extensive clientelistic and corrupt practices of the dominant parties, which alienated much of the public, and the country's growing social and economic inequality (Buxton, 2001: 30–42). For example, 2 percent of the population owned 60 percent of the land, 80 percent of the population lived in poverty, and unemployment had reached about 16 percent in 1998. An added factor was the diminishing distribution of the country's oil wealth to the Venezuelan population (Hallinan, 2002). Voters blamed the increasing poverty and economic inequality on the policies of the traditional political parties and specifically the neoliberal economic model being implemented by those parties (Ellner, 2003: 16–17).

The centrality of oil to Venezuela's development did not change under the Chávez administration, but the direction and control of that industry did change. The Chávez government committed itself to increasing the amount of revenue obtained by the state from the oil industry and resisting efforts at privatizing particular sectors of the industry. Furthermore, Chávez increased Venezuela's role within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with the aim of increasing the international price for oil by reducing the supply of the product internationally (Mommer, 2003). These policies contrasted with the direction that Venezuela's oil industry had taken in the years prior to the Chávez administration. The management of PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A., the Venezuelan state oil company) had been assumed by a neoliberal elite committed to reducing the role of central government in regulating or profiting from the industry (Mommer, 2003). Market-based decision making, greater foreign direct investment, and a reduced role for the state were highly valued by these managers. The Chávez administration replaced them with its supporters and increased the amount of funds captured by the state in an effort to reverse the state's declining share.[9] It also moved to reduce corruption in the country's central oil workers' union with the aim of increasing the number of Chávez supporters within its leadership.

Viewing neoliberalism as the source of many of Venezuela's economic and social problems, Chávez called for the implementation of a "third way" of economic development. The government's policies with regard to the oil industry were one important example of this approach. The new constitution created largely by supporters of the Chávez government in 1999 also reflected this attitude, including the expansion of public welfare and labor protections and rejection of the privatization of PDVSA (Buxton, 2001: 128; Gott, 2000: 153–159). Other initiatives unfriendly to foreign investment included the doubling of the royalties paid by ExxonMobil and other oil operators from about 16 percent to roughly 30 percent on new finds (Palast, 2003). Finally, landowners who failed to utilize more than 80 percent of their land became subject to an "inactivity tax" and possible expropriation (Palast, 2003: 129). Chávez's political opposition viewed this land reform as a threat to the economic system and its own economic well-being (Wilpert, 2003).[10] Many of these policies were inconsistent with the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. government. In fact, in the second half of the 1990s the U.S. National Endowment of Democracy (NED), a quasi-governmental agency with a commitment to supporting democracy internationally, steadily increased funding to various groups in Venezuela advocating neoliberal reform (Teresa Romero, 2001: 114).

These economic and political policies were accompanied by anti-U.S. rhetoric and anti-U.S. activities on the part of the Chávez government, among them diplomatic visits to Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar el-Qaddafi and public criticism of the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[11] The government opposed the Free Trade Area of the Americas and prohibited overflights by U.S. forces pursuing narcotics traffickers. Finally, the prohibition of privatization of the state industry ran counter to U.S. advocacy of the privatization of oil industries throughout the world (Mommer, 2003: 139; Isacson, 2000: 8). For example, a Bush administration energy report emphasized the importance of opening markets throughout the world to greater foreign investment in oil industries and improving the energy investment climate in South America (Aslam and Lobe, 2001; National Energy Policy Development Group, 2001: 5–8).[12] It called for the expansion of oil production and supply as a strategy for resolving concerns about U.S. energy consumption.

Both George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney enjoyed close ties with the oil industry prior to taking office. In addition, the oil industry contributed substantially to the political campaigns of the Republican party, with ExxonMobil and its employees contributing over US$1 million in the 2000 election cycle (Pacific Environment, 2005). The Center for Public Integrity reported that Bush was the leading recipient of campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry between 1997 and 2003, with the Republican politicians receiving US$13.9 million in 1998 compared with US$3.2 million for the Democratic party (Williams and Bogardus, 2003).

The core of the political opposition to the Chávez government was the Coordinadora Democrática, a coalition of parties, business groups, and labor unions. The two largest member groups were Federación Venezolana de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción (Venezuelan Federation of Chambers and Associations of Commerce and Production—FEDECAMARAS) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers— CTV), a conservative federation of unions (Smith, 2002). On April 9, 2002, the CTV, at the behest of FEDECAMARAS, called a series of strikes to protest the changes being made within the oil sector, and these strikes became the catalyst for an outbreak of violence between supporters and opponents of Chávez in which 19 Venezuelans died. Opponents within the military blamed all of the deaths on Chávez and pointed to them as justification for removing him by force (Hallinan, 2002; López Maya, and Lander, 2002; Ellner and Hellinger, 2003). The president of FEDECAMARAS, Pedro Carmona Estanga, declared that Chávez had resigned and that he himself would lead a transition government until new elections were held within a year (Tamayo, 2002).

Other members of Venezuela's economic establishment joined Carmona's transition government, including the president of Venezuela's bankers' association, Ignazio Salvatierra, and the head of Venezuela's largest media conglomerate, Gustavo Cisneros (Palast, 2003: 2; Klein, 2003). Cisneros led the Cisneros Group, a transnational corporation that had engaged in numerous joint ventures with transnational corporations based in the United States (Klein, 2003) and enjoyed a close friendship with George H. W. Bush and other ties with the U.S. political and economic establishment (Contreras and Isikoff, 2002: 36). His television station and other media outlets contributed to undermining the Chávez government through ceaseless attacks (Adams and Gunson, 2002; Lemoine, 2003; Klein, 2003). Prior to and during the coup, Cisneros's television station and others replaced regular programming with ads attacking Chávez and demands that people take to the streets to challenge him (Klein, 2003). Carmona's first decision as president was to close down public broadcasting stations sympathetic to Chávez.

In addition, he dissolved the legislature (which contained a majority of elected Chávez supporters) and rescinded many of the Chávez government's land reform and oil reform policies (*New York Times*, April 13, 2002). He directed the security forces to raid the offices of pro-Chávez supporters, arrest mayors and governors linked to his movement, and detain several members of the recently dissolved National Assembly (López Maya, Lander, and Lander, 2002). He ended oil deliveries to Cuba, withdrew support from OPEC, and reappointed PDVSA managers who had long supported the market-opening and privatization policy of previous administrations (Lander and López Maya, 2002: 23). In response to these policies and the refusal to accept the claim that Chávez had resigned, there were massive protests throughout the country in opposition to the coup. Thousands were involved in this protest, and it had significant sympathizers within the armed forces. In response to the popular expression of opposition, military factions supportive of Chávez returned him to power on the morning of April 14 (Gunson and Adams, 2003).

U.S. POLITICAL INTERVENTION AND THE ENDING OF DEMOCRACY IN VENEZUELA

The United States and Venezuela had enjoyed oil and trade relations for decades, with Venezuela representing one of the top five sources of imported oil for the United States by the end of the 1990s (Energy Information

Administration, October 2002). Furthermore, Venezuela had increasingly undermined OPEC's efforts at maintaining high international prices for oil, thus winning the favor of various U.S. governments. In 1992 the U.S. representative to the Organization of American States referred to Venezuela as "the banner-bearer of democracy in Latin America" (Teresa Romero, 2002: 109). In that year Venezuela's democracy was threatened by a series of coup attempts (one led by Hugo Chávez), and the United States condemned these attempts, issuing a declaration that "the basis of U.S. policy in the region is the support of democracy, and even if we understand that Venezuela, among other nations, is going through a difficult period, authoritarianism is not the solution" (as quoted in Teresa Romero, 2002: 110). This cooperation and positive support of Venezuela's democracy was not to be repeated in the face of the threat facing the Chávez government during the U.S. administration of George W. Bush.

Republican foreign policy advisers emphasized the importance of isolating Chávez from alliances with other Latin American nations and cultivating contacts within the Venezuelan military (*New York Times*, December 27, 2000). Partly in response to Chávez's criticisms of the U.S. government's decision to bomb Afghanistan and his refusal to supply the U.S. government with information about Venezuela's large Arab community, representatives of the U.S. National Security Agency, the Pentagon, and the U.S. State Department met on November 5 and 7, 2001, to discuss the "Venezuelan situation." Conclusions from the interagency meeting included requiring that the Venezuelan government "unequivocally" condemn terrorism, that the U.S. ambassador return temporarily to the United States for consultation, and that certain developmental loans be frozen (Hallinan, 2003; Busby, Turck, and Mitchell, 2002). This interagency meeting was followed by even more direct criticism from the U.S. State Department's specialist on Latin America, Peter Romero, who accused the Chávez government, with little evidence, of supporting terrorism in Colombia, Bolivia, and Ecuador (Hallinan, 2003). Finally, on February 5, 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed concern about Chávez's understanding of "democracy" (Easton, 2002).

Meanwhile, various agencies and actors within the U.S. government were supporting different groups in Venezuela that were agitating for the removal of Chávez from power. An investigation by the State Department's inspector general into the role of the U.S. government in the coup concluded that the NED, the Pentagon, and other assistance programs had "provided training, institution-building, and support to individuals and organizations understood to be actively involved in the brief ouster of the Chávez government" (as quoted in Jones, 2004). In the year preceding the overthrow of the Chávez administration the NED quadrupled its assistance to various groups that opposed the Chávez administration to more than US$877,000 (Encarnacion, 2002: 6; Marquis, 2002a; Caesar, 2002). This included over US$100,000 to the central labor confederation, whose leadership would work closely with the coup leader, Pedro Carmona (Encarnacion, 2002: 6; Marquis, 2002a). The International Republican Institute (IRI), a division of the NED, received over US$300,000 from the NED for "party-building activities" in Venezuela and dedicated most of these funds to anti-Chávez organizations. In March 2002 the IRI funded the visit of a group of anti-Chávez politicians, unionists, and activists to Washington to meet with U.S. officials (Caesar, 2002). Also, in November 2001 an eight-member delegation of Venezuelan business leaders led by Pedro Carmona visited Washington and met with John Maisto, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham, and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Otto Reich (Vullaimy, 2003; Busby, Turck, and Mitchell, 2002). These trips took place in an environment of intensifying coup talk and strident attacks upon Chávez. According to the *Washington Post*, opposition leaders were repeatedly received at the U.S. embassy, where they sought support for overthrowing the Chávez government in the months preceding the coup (*Washington Post*, April 17, 2002; see also Hallinan, 2002; Contreras and Isikoff, 2002). With regard to these meetings in the embassy, a U.S. Defense Department official who is involved in the development of policy toward Venezuela stated, "We were not discouraging people. . . . We were sending informal, subtle signals that we don't like this guy. We didn't say, 'no don't you dare,' and we weren't advocates saying, 'Here are some arms; we'll help you overthrow this guy.' We were not doing that" (*New York Times*, April 16, 2002). Apparently, the U.S. government was also not informing the Venezuelan government of the specific coup plans. The Central Intelligence Agency reported in an April 6, 2002, intelligence brief that military officers were planning a coup and that the coup would exploit civil unrest expected later that month (Forero, 2004). Sources in the Organization of the American States and other diplomatic sources claimed that the United States sanctioned the coup and considered it destined to succeed (Vullaimy, 2003).

In response to the coup of April 2002, the United States recognized the new government of Pedro Carmona; in the Western Hemisphere only El Salvador joined it in doing so officially. According to the former Mexican foreign minister Jorge Casteñeda, after the coup Mexico and Chile successfully opposed attempts by the United States, Spain, Colombia, and El Salvador to construct diplomatic support for the Carmona government (Forero, 2004). The U.S. recognition took place through communications between Otto Reich, who advised Carmona on how best to govern (*New York Times*, April 16, 2002). In fact, on the day that Carmona came to power, Reich invited ambassadors from Latin America and the Caribbean to his office to inform them that the departure of Chávez *was not* a departure from democratic rule, since he had resigned and was "responsible for his fate" (Vullaimy, 2003; Busby, Turck, and Mitchell, 2002). U.S. State Department spokesperson Phillip Reeker announced only hours after the arrest of Chávez, "We wish to express our solidarity with the Venezuelan people and look forward to working with all democratic forces in Venezuela to ensure the full expression of democratic rights" (Hallinan, 2002). On April 13 the new ambassador to Venezuela, Charles Shapiro (who had arrived in Caracas just days before the coup), met with Pedro Carmona and referred to him as president (López Maya, Lander, and Lander, 2002). Shapiro says that in his meeting with Carmona he urged him to restore the National Assembly, a claim that Carmona denies (Campbell, 2002). Immediately after the coup, George A. Folsum, the IRI's president, stated, "The Venezuelan people rose up to defend democracy in their country" (Marquis, 2002a).

Venezuela's constitution had a number of procedures in place in the case of a presidential resignation that were completely ignored as the U.S. government proceeded to establish formal relations with the coup leaders. The Bush administration reported to the U.S. Congress on the night of the coup that Chávez had resigned and that he had left power because of his own actions, repeating the claims of the coup leaders without confirming their accuracy (Marquis, 2002c). The administration ultimately reversed its support for this coup once Carmona had been forced to resign in the face of mass protests and challenges by pro-Chávez factions within the military, supporting a motion by the Organization of American States that condemned the coup as unconstitutional (Marquis, 2002b).[13]

Though by the summer of 2004 the administration supported a "constitutional" resolution of the continuing conflict between Chávez and his opposition, sympathy with the illegal removal of Chávez from power persists. For example, leaders of the coup and other militant anti-Chávez opposition leaders, among them Juan Fernández, a former member of the board of directors for PDVSA, the FEDECAMARAS president Carlos Fernández, and the arms dealer and heir to an oil fortune Isaac Perez Recao, have enjoyed extensive stays in the United States (Adams, 2002; O'Donoghue, 2003). In April 2003 the two Fernándezes met in Miami at a gathering of the group Todos por Venezuela to develop new strategies for removing Chávez from power (O'Donoghue, 2003). In addition, anti-Chávez activities have been organized in Miami between leaders of the April 2002 coup and right-wing Cuban exiles. The Venezuelan Captain Luis Eduardo García (one of the military leaders who stormed the Presidential Palace during the removal of Chávez) and his supporters in the Venezuelan emigrant community, calling themselves the Venezuelan Patriotic Junta, have allied themselves with an anti-Castro military group. The two groups plan to exchange intelligence and counterintelligence in opposition to Castro and Chávez, and García has been providing military training for about 50 of their members. More than a year after this was discovered by the U.S. authorities, little had been done to close down the military training (see de Cordoba, 2003; Vann, 2003).

The NED made financial contributions to various anti-Chávez organizations in their failed effort to remove Chávez through a recall referendum in August 2004. Central organizers of the recall drive and organizations led by Leonardo Carvajal and Leopoldo Martínez (who were selected to be Carmona's education minister and finance minister respectively) (Jones, 2004: 1) have all received NED funds. In the two years following the April 2002 coup the NED distributed more than US $800,000 to various anti-Chávez organizations involved not only in the recall drive but also in destabilizing strikes at the end of 2002 and early 2003 (Golinger, 2004a; Robles, 2004). During the same period the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) committed more than US$5 million annually to different groups in Venezuela, many of them part of Chávez's political opposition (Golinger, 2004b).

The behavior of the Bush administration prior to, during, and after the Venezuelan coup fell well short of the type of trust and cooperation that is to be expected between democracies according to the democratic-peace argument. The United States attempted to resolve conflicts with the Chávez government via highly illiberal means and worked not to preserve democracy in the country but to support and legitimize its termination.

CONCLUSION: LOW-INTENSITY DEMOCRACIES AND DEMOCRATIC PEACE

The cases of the Samper and Chávez administrations raise important questions about the nature of relations between democracies. Proponents of the democratic-peace argument view the spread of democracy in Latin America as a welcome change in the international system in that democracies do not war with each other. Less sanguine observers have concluded that they do fight each other in less dramatic ways.

The explanations given for various U.S. interventions into the politics of other democracies have stressed the "weakness" and "fragility" of the democracies involved and/or pointed to evidence that intervention was required to save them. Venezuela and Colombia were cited as models by different U.S. governments as a democratic alternative to communist revolution or right-wing authoritarianism during the cold war and were viewed as democracies by the U.S. government well into the 1990s. Finally, both countries enjoyed substantial trade relations with the United States, with neoliberal economic reforms only strengthening those relations. Throughout the Samper and Chávez administrations democracy was under assault. In both cases the response of the U.S. government to threats to democratic control was conditioned by their impact upon competing policy objectives such as the maintenance of the drug war, the security of transnational capital's investments, and an oil policy consistent with the interests of transnational corporations.

In the case of Venezuela, the United States stood almost alone among the countries in the Western Hemisphere in supporting a military coup against a democratic government. Both before and after the coup it financially supported the actors who directly challenged democratic control. In this case, the OPEC politics of the Chávez administration, its open criticism of the U.S. drug war and antiterrorism policies, and its opposition to neoliberalism all ran counter to U.S. national interests and/or the interests of transnational corporations. In contrast, its support of the coup leader Pedro Carmona, who immediately implemented policies consistent with the neoliberal agenda, suggests that relations based on mutual trust and cooperation are contingent upon similar policies.

In the Colombian case, the United States pursued a policy agenda that contributed to destabilizing an elected leader in the hope of achieving gains in the drug war, despite the threat to democratic institutions. However, U.S. pressure stopped short of creating conditions that might have led to the overthrow of Samper because U.S.-based transnational corporations, Colombian economic conglomerates, and representatives of Colombia's export sector played crucial roles in lessening the effect of U.S. policy.

In neither case did the U.S. engage in military intervention or war with these two democracies, but the lack of military conflict between the two states had little to do with shared norms or institutional checks upon executive power. The United States accomplished its goals in the Colombian case; its government intensified the war on drugs while maintaining an economic environment consistent with the needs of capitalist globalization. The future of the Venezuelan case is less clear, because the Chávez administration remains in place. It has not, however, eliminated all foreign investment in Venezuela's oil industry or made a complete break with neoliberalism. Further radicalization of Venezuela's government may lead to an escalation of U.S. efforts to isolate it and support a political opposition working for its downfall, whether the country remains democratic or not.

NOTES

1. Small and Singer's (1982) definition of "war" is a clash between system members that leads "to a minimum of 1,000 battle fatalities."

2. A militarized interstate dispute is a dispute in which one or both states threaten to use force, make a demonstration of force, or actually use military force against the other (Oneal and Russett, 1999: 10).

3. A military intervention is "the movement of regular troops or forces (airborne, seaborne, shelling, etc.) of one country into the territory or territorial waters of another country, or forceful military action by troops already stationed by one country inside another, in the context of some political dispute" (Kegley and Hermann, 1995: 3).

4. An internal war ongoing for over four decades, with governments periodically pursuing negotiating strategies along with paramilitary and state repression to defeat (or co-opt) multiple guerrilla movements. The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Columbia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army—ELN) were the central guerrilla movements fighting the government during the Samper administration.

5. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Miami Herald*, and the *Economist* all called for Samper's resignation.

6. In most examinations of U.S.-Colombian relations during this period the U.S. Congress is cited repeatedly as a source of continuing pressure upon the White House to "get tougher" with the Samper government. The institutional checks expected to mitigate conflicts between democracies according to the democratic-peace argument worked decidedly in the opposite direction in this case (see Rosato, 2003: 593 on the bellicosity of parliaments).

7. The four largest economic groups own approximately 25 percent of the 100 largest public and private companies in Colombia (including multinationals with branches in Colombia) and have controlling ownership of internationally competitive companies in the beer industry, cement industry, the food industry, the financial sector, and the media (Rettberg, 2001a: 9).

8. For example, in 1996 British Petroleum and Occidental signed a three-year protection contract with the defense ministry valued at US$54 to US$60 million to create battalions specifically designated for securing their investments (*New York Times*, August 26, 1996).

9. Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A., the Venezuelan state oil company (PDVSA), paid US$13.9 billion in fiscal revenues from its hydrocarbon production, including refining, in 1981 but only US$11.3 billion in 2000, despite an almost 50 percent increase in the company's income (Mommer, 2003: 137).

10. Many of Chávez's economic reforms were implemented during the fall of 2001, a period in which opposition to him intensified (Arvelaiz and Porras Ponceleón, 2003: 31–32). For example, on December 10, 2001, the leading business federation called for a general strike to protest Chavez's "attacks on the free market" (Lemoine, 2003: 104).

11. Ellner argues that these visits were part of an effort to strengthen the unity of OPEC and its commitment to production quotas (2002: 90).

12. One of the promoters of the market-opening policy advocated by PDVSA was its former president Luis Giusti, who would become an oil adviser to the Bush administration (Lander and López Maya, 2002: 23).

13. Even this support came only after U.S. lobbying for "softer language" in the Organization of American States's resolution (Weiner, 2002).

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