

Ethics of Development in a Global Environment

# United States' Declining Sphere of Influence in Latin America

Jeremiah Dillon  
Spring 2003  
Engineering 297C  
Bruce Lusignan  
Sahil Khanna

## **Introduction**

The social and political history of the Americas is one of stark disparity, despite strikingly similar origins. All of the nations of the New World sprung from comparable European colonial roots, founded on a displaced and exploited indigenous population. All up and down the two continents of the Americas, colonial nation states fought against their mother countries back in Europe and one by one these states gained independence and struggled to emerge as self sufficient, homogenous nations. Despite the many parallels and similarities in the struggles of each country to win and establish independence, one nation rose above the others; one nation ascended to a position of regional dominance and shaped the political and social landscape of the entire hemisphere for decade upon decade. A relatively small country nestled on the eastern coast of North America, recently liberated from the tyrannical control of its European mother nation, and desperately attempting to position itself to endure in tumultuous and dangerous times, set itself on a course that would eventually lead to dominion over an entire hemisphere. This nation was, of course, the United States of America and though its borders expanded greatly over the next several centuries, its power and influence expanded much further and much more rapidly.

Despite the deep-rooted profundity and extent of the United States influence over Latin America, the collection of Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries that make up the vast majority of the nations on the continents in question, recent years have seen this power begin to dissolve and diminish. The United States is no longer able to dictate policy so easily, or intervene with military force so readily. The economic and political structures of Latin America are beginning to grow apart from the United States and

abandon their historically unstable foundations for more secure and independent systems. A close analysis of how the United States attained its power over the Western Hemisphere, an investigation of how it flexed its muscles and used this power for its benefit, and an examination of some of the signals of this powers' decline will reveal some of the causative factors that lead to the United States shrinking sphere of influence in Latin America.

### **Expansion of Power**

The initial establishment of United States power in Latin America was made with little consideration for the populations of Latin America themselves, or for their intentions, but rather for the intentions of the European nations that still maintained much control in the region in the early part of the nineteenth century. Although Latin America formed much of the border with the fledgling nation, "the leaders of the new United States of America were not terribly interested in affairs to their south and instead defined this country's foreign policy objectives in terms of circumstances and conditions in Europe" (Kryzanek 25). The United States, although it had rallied enough military strength and popular will to drive the British forces from its shores, was still a relatively weak player on the international scene, and had much to fear from other, stronger international powers.

The first decades of the nineteenth century saw much conflict between the colonists of Latin America and their mother nation Spain, and when these clashes ended in the eventual independence of many of the Latin American nations, European countries took note (Mecham 25-42). A coalition of European powers called the "Holy Alliance" consisting of Austria, England, France, Prussia, and Russia was formed with the

expressed purpose of trouncing the infantile nations of the Americas (Kryzanek 28). Rumors of a combined French and Spanish fleet, and aggressive moves by Russia in the Northwest caused the United States to feel threatened and spurred the composition of one of the most overarching and defining pieces of United States policy concerning Latin America, the Monroe Doctrine (Sicker 21). The Monroe Doctrine was delivered by President Monroe on December second of 1823 and would define the attitude of the United States concerning the other nations on the continent for decades to come. The salient points of the Monroe Doctrine read:

“We owe it, therefore, to candor, and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those powers, to declare that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety. With the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power we have not interfered and shall not interfere. But with the governments who have declared their independence and maintain it, and whose independence we have, on great consideration and on just principles, acknowledged, we could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner their destiny, by any European power, in any other light than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States.” (Mecham 48, Sicker 22)

Thus, with this declaration, the United States formally affirmed that the international powers of Europe no longer had any right to meddle in the affairs of Latin America. The government of the United States implicitly claimed exclusive rights to shape and control the formation and administration of the newly established nations of Latin America. Although the United States was not entirely powerful enough to back up the Monroe Doctrine with military strength to ensure that the countries of Europe abided by it, this was an essential and pivotal paradigm in the attitudes and policies of the United States towards Latin America and began the growth of the sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere.

While the Monroe Doctrine was stated in terms of ensuring the security of the continent, after its declaration “the United States showed that it was not so much interested in protecting Latin America as in spreading its influence and control over the region” (Kryzanek 31). The United States held its individual objectives very highly and was willing to use any means necessary to achieve them. In a bid to radically expand its territories in the early and mid nineteenth century, the United States annexed Texas from Mexico and used military force to procure the territory which is now Arizona, New Mexico, and California. The use of military force to secure these territories from Mexico provides interesting insight into the attitudes and perceptions held by the United States regarding the nations of Latin America.

Military force was used against Mexico in the acquisition of new western territories for the United States more as a show of dominance and supremacy than as an actual tool of necessity. Little resistance was encountered as the troops moved through the territories themselves and secured them for the United States, but despite the fact that the new lands were firmly under control, the army advanced southward into Mexico and proceeded to capture the capital city. Many analysts see the offensive against Mexico and the capital city as entirely unnecessary (Kryzanek 33). The United States simply wished to display its superior military might and prove its dominance to the Mexican people. Rather than simply defend its newly acquired territory, the United States felt that it was fully within its rights to bring war deep into the lands of another country and send a strong message of dominance and power to the people of that nation in order to prevent any future hostilities. This attitude exhibited by the United States set up an archetype of military intervention that was mimicked and followed for years and years to come.

The United States didn't always find it necessary to annex or conquer new territory in its quest to expand its sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere. Often the policies opted for shaping the governments of the Latin American nations in such a way that the United States would maintain direct influence while preserving an image of independence for the nation in question. One such example of this is the liberation of Cuba from Spain in the Spanish American war at the turn of the nineteenth century. Animosity between Spain and the United States led to war after a U.S. battle ship was destroyed in Havana Harbor. War broke out between these two international powers, and resulted in the independence of Cuba from Spain, but "Cuba's independence from Spain did not mean independence from the United States" (Smith 34). After the conflict ended Cuba was placed under the control of the War Department, and the United States allowed Cuban leaders to formulate their own form of government, but insisted that a small piece of legislation known as the Platt Amendment be included in the constitution (Bevins). The United States refused to remove its occupying military force until this amendment was added, an amendment which would give the United States vast influence over the state of Cuba.

The Platt Amendment officially made Cuba a United States protectorate and while outwardly giving Cuba characteristics of an independent nation, ensured that it was firmly in the grasp of the United States. The Platt Amendment contained a number of provisions, some of which granted blanket powers to the United States:

"The government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, [and] the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. [...] To enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the

government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points.” (Holden 82)

The broad stipulations set out in the Platt Amendment gave the United States sweeping power over the small island nation, and “the United States made and unmade Cuban governments” at will for decades (Blasier 184). The Platt Amendment in Cuba is just one example of the United States influencing the formation of governments in Latin America to afford itself the discretion to exert any form of power that it saw fit. Often it was not necessary to conquer the nations of Latin America, simply to exercise control over them; it is evident that “what had started as a war to liberate Cuba [...] became a war to expand the American empire” (Smith 34).

While in the situations concerning Mexico and Cuba the United States used direct military force to seize territory from its owner, other situations exist in which the people of Latin America themselves were employed to realize U.S. policy goals. There are a myriad of such examples throughout the expansion of the United States sphere of influence, one such instance being the acquisition of the rights to the Panama Canal. The United States had continually sought a faster and more efficient way to connect its Atlantic and Pacific coasts and digging a canal in Central America was the logical solution because it was the narrowest section of the continent (Bevins). It was decided that the ideal location for a canal would be the isthmus of Panama, which was owned by the government of Colombia. The United States’ bid to buy the territory in question was unanimously rejected by the Colombian government, however, because not enough compensation was offered (Holden 91). This setback was completely unacceptable to the United States, and while a direct offensive against Columbia in order to seize the isthmus was considered, more a subtle and less inflammatory plot was hatched.

Instead of mounting an assault against Columbia, the government of the United States instead contacted a small group of Columbian insurgents on the isthmus of Panama and assured them that if they attempted to secede, they would have the support of the United States (Holden 91). The battleship *Nashville* and a detachment of marines were sent to Panama to ensure the security of “the free flow of traffic that the United States had committed itself to protect” (Small Planet, Sicker 58). The United States had suppressed revolutions in Panama before, but this time it was clear that the show of military force was intended to intimidate the current Columbian government. A force of 500 Columbian troops who had been bribed with private money with suspected ties to the United States raised the Panamanian flag on November third of 1903 and declared independence for Panama (Bevins). The new government installed in Panama immediately granted the United States the rights to build the canal in addition to “the right of perpetual occupation and control over a ten-mile-wide canal zone” (Sicker 58). Without firing a single shot or engaging in any direct conflict, the United States was able to achieve its objective and expand its influence by claiming to support the interests of the local people who desired revolution. This example, one of many such similar examples, forms a paradigm of indirect U.S. involvement through the support of rebel factions. Without ever committing itself to direct conflict, the United States was able to stretch its influence wide and far, deep into the lands of Latin America.

These few examples set forth stand out from a sea of incidents, the details of which range from being well documented to relatively unknown, and whose effects are both negligible and profound. The examination of only a few of these incidents illustrates how the United States sought to ensure its security and growth often at the expense of the

liberties and territories of its Latin American neighbors. It is clear that in the formative years of this sphere of influence in Latin America, the United States used both political pressure and direct military force to establish itself as an influential party in every single corner of the continent. Everywhere from large, powerful nations like Mexico to the struggling “banana republics” of Central America and the Caribbean, the United States stuck its proverbial foot in the door by establishing occupying military forces, shaping the governments of nations as they formed, or by simply applying brute military force.

### **Exertion of Power**

By the early twentieth century the United States had established itself as an international super power and its sphere of influence engulfing Latin America was beginning to crystallize. During the years spanning the First and Second World Wars, the attention of the United States was preoccupied with combat, but after the end of the Second World War a new danger emerged. With the beginning of the Cold War, a new threat presented itself to the United States, a threat with many similarities to the danger presented by the European Imperialists who had prompted the Monroe Doctrine: this threat was Communism. The Domino Theory was prevalent among United States policy makers, and there was great fear that if Communism or Socialism were allowed to take hold in one of the countries of Latin America, that the rest would fall in turn and the United States would be put at risk (Britannica). This fear of the spread of Communism caused the United States to take advantage of the great influence that it had in Latin America and exert some of the power that it had cultivated over the course of the previous century.

In 1950, the fears of the United States were realized when the leftist Colonel Jacobo Arbenz was elected president of Guatemala. Arbenz was intent on instituting wide reforms in order to “convert [Guatemala] from a dependent nation with a semi-colonial economy to an economically independent country” (Smith 134). Not only did Arbenz’s leftist policies threaten the security of the continent against Communist influence, but his reforms endangered the assets of a very influential U.S. corporation, the United Fruit Company (Fejes 117). Arbenz set out to redistribute millions of acres owned by United Fruit to Guatemalan families through his agrarian reform policies, to nationalize the International Railways of Central America built and owned by United Fruit to transport its products, and to take control of Empresa Electrical de Guatemala, a power company owned by United Fruit that supplied the vast majority of Guatemala’s power (Smith 134, Blasier 55). The presence of a Communist state in Latin America coupled with the great economic threat that was posed to such an influential U.S. corporation resulted in strong repercussions for Guatemala and the government of Arbenz (Cotler 185).

The United States could not allow a Communist government to reside on the continent of America any more than it could allow one of its largest corporations to have its economic interests threatened. Political pressure was put on Arbenz’s government to break its ties with socialist activists and to compensate United Fruit fully for any properties seized by the government (Mecham 218). When Arbenz did not respond to political pressure, the United States began organizing a small force of Guatemalan rebels in Honduras who were provided with weapons and trained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Pastor 227). The arms were appropriated with the expressed purpose of defending Nicaragua and Honduras against “Communist aggression”, but they were truly

intended to facilitate the overthrow of the leftist regime in Guatemala (Mecham 218). The rebel force of only a few hundred men crossed the border from Honduras, meeting only minimal resistance along the way. When news of the rebel invasion reached the capital city, the Guatemalan army defected and demanded the resignation of President Arbenz. The Communist influence in Guatemala was removed and the leader of the rebel force was eventually appointed as the head of the new military government (Sicker 114). The United States immediately recognized the new government and sent it economic aid to ensure its viability. Without ever having to engage the enemy or risk any of its assets, the United States was able to overturn a popularly elected government in Latin America in order to eliminate Communism and ensure its economic interests. Such an exhibition of power makes it clear just how intense the United States' influence was in Latin America and how comfortable the government was with exercising it.

In 1979, the United States was again presented with a Communist threat when the Sandinista National Liberation Front staged a coup in Nicaragua and ousted the U.S. backed government of Anastasio Somoza Dabayle. The Sandinista government called for widespread social and economic reform based on its Marxist ideology (Holden 294). The establishment of such a leftist government in the Americas was completely at odds with the United States Cold War policies, and it became time again for the United States to exert its power in Latin America. Over the course of the previous century and a half the United States had carried out countless military incursions into Nicaragua and maintained a number of armed occupations to ensure U.S. interests and to install new regimes, but this was a new situation (Rosenfelder). Due to a number of factors, including the unusual dynamics of the Cold War, open, direct military action was not an option for the United

States in its pursuit of a solution to this problem. As in the situation concerning the rights to the Panama Canal, a different more subtle approach would be needed.

As the Sandinista government began to take control in Nicaragua and implement its reforms, the United States began to support and organize insurgent guerilla forces to undermine the leftist regime. In the early nineteen eighties the CIA trained and supplied anti-Sandinista operatives called *Contras* to fight a covert war against the government of Nicaragua (Kryzanek 93). This guerilla force was based in Honduras along the border and carried out numerous incursions into Nicaraguan territory with the aim of disrupting the Sandinista regime (Cottam 122). The United States was able to carry out this covert war against the Marxist government of Nicaragua with funds appropriated for humanitarian aid in addition to secret funds solicited from outside international sources for the *Contra* forces from countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Columbian Medellín Drug Cartel (Kenworthy 58). The *Contra* forces continued to destabilize the Nicaraguan social and economic structure while the United States backed a new leader from the National Opposition Union who was elected president in 1990 marking the end of the leftist regime. While it took a decade for the United States to realize its goal of regime change in Nicaragua after the Sandinista government took control, it was able to completely disrupt and destabilize any of the reforms that the leftist government attempted to implement, and eventually the will and influence of the United States was too much to resist. This is just one of many examples of the United States exertion of power in Latin America to fulfill its policy goals by using local guerilla forces and risking minimal exposure.

The nation of Panama had been squarely under the thumb of the United States since its creation when the U.S. backed its succession from Columbia. In the United States' bid to ensure that Communism did not establish a firm foothold on the continent, a young general named Manuel Noriega garnered strong political support from the U.S. and became the head of the country's military branch, the Panamanian Defense Force. Quickly Noriega "maneuvered himself into Panama's de facto head of state" and began assisting the United States in their war on Communism in Nicaragua and other Central American nations (Cottam 142). In exchange for Noriega's cooperation in the battle to safeguard the continent against Communism, he retained continued support from the United States Government, who looked the other way and ignored some of the General's more illicit practices which included involvement with drugs and human rights violations. Eventually, in the late nineteen eighties, as the threat of Communism was subsiding, Noriega had outlived his usefulness and the U.S. government would no longer tolerate his illicit activities (Holden 321). Despite political pressure from the United States, Noriega would not relinquish his control of Panama and falsified election results to ensure that his puppet candidate would again be elected president. In the long tradition of United States – Latin American relations, such insolence and defiance would not be tolerated for long; it was time once again for the United States to display the vast depth and reach of its power in Latin America.

On December twentieth of 1989, at 1:00 A.M the United States beset the small isthmus nation of Panama with devastating force. In the largest U.S. military mobilization since the Vietnam War, 13,000 troops were sent to bolster the 13,000 soldiers already stationed in the Canal Zone (Holden 321). Helicopter gunships strafed Panama City with

machinegun fire while F-117A Stealth bombers dropped laser guided bombs on key military installations around the country. Amphibious landing vehicles and parachute drops were used to deposit the additional forces in strategic position on Panamanian soil as flames and chaos engulfed the nation (Smith 296). After only thirteen hours, the military action, dubbed Operation Just Cause, had secured the nation of Panama and readied it for the United States to install a new government more inline with its policy goals. Noriega was captured soon after and arraigned in Miami for his alleged crimes. The nations of Latin America were outraged at the unilateral use of force to displace the government of Panama, but “essentially [...] these were rhetorical gestures. The U.S. intervention was a fait accompli, and no one was about to take action against it” (Smith 297). It is clear in the light of this situation that the United States sphere of influence in Latin America was so solid and so powerful that it could exert its dominance with almost absolute impunity. Using force in Latin America, be it direct or clandestine, was effortless and acceptable for the United States.

### **Faltering Power**

Though the influence of the United States has grown and solidified over the past centuries to the point where unilateral intervention to fulfill policy goals had become routine and acceptable, in recent years there have been signs of a reversion of this power. Growing social, economic, and political independence in Latin America has challenged the ability of the United States to effortlessly and expeditiously incite policy change to fulfill its specific needs. In the past decade a number of incidents have arisen which the United States has not been able to control through its powers of influence. These situations have close parallels to past incidents that were dealt with through coercion or

force, but this time around the United States is unable to exert its dominance. These incidents are a testament to the fact that the United States' sphere of influence in Latin America may be evaporating. As the grip of the U.S. loosens, the nations of Latin America are able to exercise more control over their own destinies, and often wrest away some of the power that the United States has enjoyed.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), adopted in 1994 includes a number of provisions meant to increase the efficiency of trade on the continent and lead to greater economic gains for all involved, but some of its aspects have presented themselves as detrimental to the interests of the United States (Burgess). Specifically, the section that opens the borders of the United States to Mexican truck drivers carrying cargo to U.S. destinations has created much opposition and has been called the "most controversial aspect of NAFTA" (Blustein). Pervious to NAFTA Mexican truck drivers would transfer their domestic cargo to cities along the border with the United States where the trailers would be transferred to tractors owned by U.S. companies who would drive the cargo to its final destination. Under NAFTA, Mexican truck drivers were allowed to enter the United States and continue on with their cargo until delivery. This provision threatened the jobs of many American truck drivers who could not compete with the lower costs of using Mexican labor (Dewar). The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, a labor union which represents a large portion of the truck drivers in the nation, lobbied the government and quickly prompted an injunction against the permission of Mexican truck driver on American highways on grounds of safety concerns. For the time being, the jobs of the drivers were secure despite the widespread belief that "concern about safety [was] a cover for politics" (Burgess). This situation

presents parallels with the situation in which the rights of the United Fruit Company were affronted by the policies of the Guatemalan government, the outcome however proved to be very different.

In response to what the Mexican government claimed were amplified safety concerns and political motives, an official complaint was filed with NAFTA protesting the United States injunction against Mexican truck drivers being allowed to cross the border with their cargo and continue on to their final destinations. In light of the evidence, an international mediation committee ruled that “the United States had, indeed, breached its NAFTA responsibilities and that it must quickly get into compliance” (Aynesworth). With the ruling of the mediation committee, the United States’ attempt to protect the job security of its citizens and the interests of what had historically been one of the most powerful labor unions in the nation had failed. While in the past the United States had disregarded international pressure and instead continued to implement policy which fulfilled its specific goals, in January of 2002 Mexican trucks were allowed to cross the border into the United States to deliver their cargo and in the process threaten the jobs of United States citizens (Dewar). While in the case of United Fruit, the United States was able to use a combination of political pressure and covert armed conflict to fulfill its objectives, in this case Mexico won a victory and U.S. interests were damaged. The situation exemplifies the reality that in the current environment in Latin America, the United States is no longer able to exert the same brand of influence that it had become so accustomed to over the previous decades.

Another great lapse in the power and influence of the United States is exemplified in Panama, a country that, for all intents and purposes, owes its very existence to the

United States. The only reason that Panama was able to successfully secede from Columbia and become a recognized nation was through U.S. involvement and support, and as evidenced by the longstanding military occupation of Panama, the United States has enjoyed a virtual stranglehold on Panamanian affairs for nearly a century. The ten mile wide strip of land that runs from the Pacific coast of the nation to the Atlantic coast has, for all intents and purposes, been considered fully under the jurisdiction of the United States since the signing of the canal contract in 1903 (Bevins). A number of military bases have been located in this Canal Zone and have allowed the United States to keep a close, watchful eye on much of Central and South America and have facilitated incursions into countries such as Columbia in the United States anti-drug efforts (Carrasco). In 1999 the United States rights to the canal were to run out, and with this a great attrition of power would transpire.

As required by the contract held with Panama, over the course of the late nineties, preparations were made for all of the United States' physical presence to be removed from the Canal Zone. Over the course of 1999, thousands of military personnel were relocated to Puerto Rico, leaving their previous facilities and installations in addition to the canal itself under the control of the Panamanian government despite concerns and objections raised by the U.S. government. United States distress with the lack of presence in Panama included the security of the canal, the ability to quickly respond to military situations in Central America, and the possibility that Communist China would gain control of the canal. The soldiers stationed in Panama had provided security for the canal against terrorism and guerilla insurgents from Colombia, and without the first-rate military protection of U.S. forces, many feared that the canal would be vulnerable. In

addition to canal security issues, the security of the entire region was also a question because a large and advanced concentration of U.S. military power in Latin America was being removed, leaving large holes in the sphere of influence encompassing the region. The final concern dealt with the takeover of both the Pacific and Atlantic canal terminuses by the Hong Kong owned Hutchinson Whampoa Company which has strong ties to the Communist government in Beijing (NotiCen). Much pressure was put on the government of Panama to allow the United States to maintain a military presence in order to preserve its sphere of influence in Central America. The United States Government offered many incentives and exerted much political pressure on Panama to allow the old U.S. bases to be reoccupied by military personnel in order to “fight the battle against drug traffickers” (Spadafora). Opposition to any U.S. presence in Panama was vehement, and even a proposition to have military personnel in Panama for advisory and training purposes was rejected. The expiration of the United States’ contract for the Canal Zone coupled with the fervent resistance to any continuation of a U.S. military presence in Panama created a huge vacuum of power in Central America as the United States’ ability to exert influence was drastically reduced.

Through its solid sphere of influence in Latin America, the United States has long enjoyed the ability to incite regime change at will, but in a very recent and controversially publicized example, such a regime change was completely out of the question. In 1998 the leftist candidate Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela by the largest margins in that country’s history, but despite his domestic popularity, many of his policies and affiliations with Marxist groups brought him disfavor in the United States. Chavez had ties to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the leftist militant

group fighting a guerilla war in Colombia and has personally met with Fidel Castro of Cuba, Momar Khadafey of Libya, and the United States favorite enemy Saddam Hussein of Iraq (DeYoung). In addition to his disreputable acquaintances, Chavez also attracted much concern and distrust from the United States by revoking overflight privileges for U.S. planes in action over Columbia and attempting to reorganize the valuable oil infrastructure in Venezuela. Venezuela is the third largest supplier of oil to the United State, and Chavez's bid to nationalize the largest oil drilling, refining, and distribution company, Venezuelan Petroleum S.A., caused much concern among Venezuelan capitalists as well as U.S. government officials. Chavez was hindering the United States' ability to exercise military control freely as well as threatening a vital oil source even as a potential armed conflict with Iraq was brewing on the horizons. These developments were very unsettling to U.S. officials, and certainly in the past governments have been overthrown for less drastic reasons than these, but those were different times.

On April 11, 2002 a small group of Venezuelan business and military leaders staged a coup removing President Hugo Chavez from power and installing a junta to govern the nation. While governments around Latin America condemned the coup as an affront to democracy, the United States did not denounce the coup at all, and in fact made official contact with the newly installed government (NotiSur). Two days later, supported by a mass uprising of the Venezuelan people, the junta was removed and Chavez was reinstated as the leader of the country. For two days the United States had its wish and Chavez was gone, but the U.S. had "vastly underestimated Chavez's residual strength" and the coup simply could not last (DeYoung). Because this occurrence is so recent and many government documents concerning it are still not in the public domain, information

concerning this incident is scarce, but a number of sources, especially Spanish language publications, point to more U.S. involvement than has been let on by the government. In the months following the coup, information came out indicating that high-ranking officials from the State Department, Department of Defense, and White House had met repeatedly with the perpetrators of the attempted ouster of Chavez. Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, the deputy assistant defense secretary for western hemisphere affairs who was deeply involved in coordinating the logistics of the *Contras* during the clandestine U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, was quoted as saying “we weren’t saying ‘Here’s some arms; we’ll help you overthrow this guy.’ [...] [But] we were not discouraging people” (NotiSur). A comment like this, in light of the fact that the perpetrators of the coup were in close contact with high ranking U.S. officials and that there was an ongoing labor strike described as “a classic destabilization campaign organized [by] US intelligence” rings like a hollow denial of guilt (Vann). Though it is impossible to say with surety, barring the declassification of secret government documents, exactly what the United States involvement in the coup was, but it is very evident that U.S. officials had met with the activists who carried out the coup, that these officials were in support of Chavez’s ouster, and that upon hearing news of the coup the United States was pleasantly unsurprised. The United States overestimated its power in Venezuela, the government was not aware that its sphere of influence had crumbled to the point that it could no longer incite regime change so easily and thus it was embarrassed by this international incident. A clear message was sent to the United States, echoed in graffiti on a wall in the capital city of Caracas: “Yankees, game over. You lost.”

## **Conclusion**

When examined, it is clear that the United States built a vast sphere of influence in the Western Hemisphere through exertion of political power and military might. Territories were annexed and conquered through force with little regard for their inhabitants. Constitutions and governments were shaped to allow the United States to exercise direct control in Latin American nations. Popular regimes were toppled, only to be replaced by oppressive governments agreeable to U.S. interests. Economic and social circumstances were accosted in order to destabilize ruling governments to prevent them from making decisions contrary to U.S. objectives. All of this was done solely with the interests of the United States in mind; it often went unnoticed by the world, and when the international community took note, the United States simply disregarded the concern with virtual impunity. There is no question that the United States enjoyed intensely strong influence in Latin America over the course of its existence, but in recent years it appears as if this influence has been waning. The United States can no longer stage coups, use the threat of military force, or apply lopsided political pressure as it was once able to. There are a few important factors that lead to this, and as a course of history it was only a matter of time before the countries of Latin America solidified their independence.

The United States never desired to have full control over the nations of Latin America. It has always been easier to take advantage of the resources provided by these nations without having to take the responsibilities involved in actually absorbing these nations into the country. The lands taken from Mexico, for example, are still fully under the control of the United States, but often the U.S. sought only to have influence in the nations of Latin America, and this is inherently weaker and more transient. By not directly controlling these nations, the U.S. left open the opportunity for them to split

away and become independent if they could exhibit enough will and resolve. It has taken much time and tumult for this process to come full circle but the age is arriving when the nations of Latin America do exhibit enough will and resolve, and they are beginning to become independent of the looming giant to the north. With the declaration of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States set itself on a course to hemispheric domination, but the same decisions would lead to the eventual decline of this domination.

The other strong causative factor in the diminishing U.S. influence in Latin America is the level of development that is being achieved. The shrinking United States sphere of influence is a product of the shrinking world. As transportation and communication become more advanced, it is much less difficult to communicate across great distances, and this makes it easier for people to band together and unite against any situation which they feel is unjust. This development in Latin America has allowed the people to cultivate social, political, and economic systems that are more independent from the United States than at any point in history. The irony of this situation is that much of the transportation and communication infrastructure that has fostered the independence of Latin America was constructed by the United States in order to better utilize the resources of these "banana republics." But now with these nations emerging from the third world into developing nations, it has become increasingly difficult to exert the pressures that came so naturally and simply only a few decades ago.

As the United States' influence in Latin America contracts, other powers from Europe and Asia rush in to fill the void and stand in the footprints that are left. The United States policy was never aimed at direct control of the nations of Latin America, and though they enjoyed a surprisingly high level of control for an extended period of

time, the situation could not be permanent. Of course the United States still holds much political and economic power over the region, and in terms of military might there are no rivals, but the playing field has begun to level. The implications of the Monroe Doctrine have oscillated from a time when Europe was dominant over the Americas, to a time when the United States was at the peak of its power over the course of the past century, and now the falling action can be observed. The future is always uncertain, but all signs point to more normal, equal relations between the United States and the nations of Latin America, and though the U.S. will have to afford more respect and consideration to its neighbors to the south, it is by no means a zero sum game and both sides will benefit and prosper from a more equitable relationship.

## Works Cited

- Aynesworth, Hugh. "Open Road for Mexico Trucks." The Washington Times. June 25, 2001.
- Bevins, Vince. *US Military Intervention in Latin America 1900-1985*. (Accessed 5/7/2003) <<http://thepeoplesrevolution.tripod.com/intervention1.htm>>
- Blasier, Cole. *The Hovering Giant: U.S. Response to Revolutionary Change in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976.
- Blustein, Paul. "NAFTA Ruling Opens Border to Mexican Trucks." The Washington Post. Page E01. February 7, 2001.
- Burgess, John. "Battle at the Border: Mexico Truck Fight Rolls On." The Washington Post. Page H01. March 26, 2000.
- Carrasco, David. "US Holds on to Areas of Influence." InterPress Third World News Agency. December 22, 1999.
- Cotler, Julio. Richard R. Fargan. *Latin America and the United States: The Changing Political Realities*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974.
- Cottam, Martha L. *Images and Intervention: U.S. Policies in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994.
- Dewar, Helen. "Deal Struck on Mexican Truck Access." The Washington Post. Page A07. November 29, 2001.
- DeYoung, Karen. "Chavex Must Embrace Democracy, Bush Says." The Washinton Post. Page A22. April 19, 2002.
- "Domino Theory." □Encyclopædia Britannica . 2003. □Encyclopædia Britannica Online. (Accessed 6/2/2003) <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=31386>>.
- Fejes, Fred. *Imperialism, Media, and The Good Neighbor*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1986.
- Holden, Robert H. Eric Zolov. *Latin America and the United States: A Documented History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Kenworthy, Eldon. *America/Américas: Myth in the Making of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America*. University Park, Pensylvania: Pensylvania State University Press, 1995.
- Kryzanek, Michael J. *U.S. – Latin American Relations*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1996.

Mecham, J. Lloyd. *A Survey of United States Latin American Relations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

NotiCen. "Panama: Political Parties Agree on National Security Plan." Latin American Database. (Accessed 6/4/03)  
<[http://ladb.unm.edu/prot/search/retrieve.php3?ID\[0\]=24207](http://ladb.unm.edu/prot/search/retrieve.php3?ID[0]=24207)>

NotiSur. "Venezuela: Failed Coup in Venezuela Exposes U.S. Government Double Standard & Venezuelan Media Bias." Latin American Database. (Accessed 5/27/2003)  
<[http://ladb.unm.edu/prot/search/retrieve.php3?ID\[0\]=24925](http://ladb.unm.edu/prot/search/retrieve.php3?ID[0]=24925)>

Pastor, Robert A. *Exiting the Whirlpool: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Latin America and the Caribbean*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001.

Rosenfelder, Mark. *U.S. Intervention in Latin America*. (Accessed 5/17/2003)  
<<http://www.zompist.com/latam.html>>

Sicker, Martin. *The Geopolitics of Security in the Americas*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002.

Small Planet Communications. *The Panama Canal*. (Accessed 5/17/2003)  
<<http://www.smplanet.com/imperialism/joining.hml>>

Smith, Peter H. *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S. – Latin American Relations*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Spadafora, Winston. "Presencia Militar." El Siglo. Trans. February 21, 2000.

Vann, Bill. "Venezuela: Is the CIA Preparing Another Coup?" WSWS. (Accessed 6/4/2002) <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/dec2002/vene-d11.shtml>>