Princeton Model United Nations Conference 2017

Historic Cabinet of Venezuela
Chair: Audrey Spensley
CONTENTS

Letter from the Chair ................................................................. 3
Committee Description ............................................................. 5

Topic A: ................................................................................. 5
  Introduction ........................................................................... 5
  History of the Topic ............................................................... 8
  Current Status ....................................................................... 12
  Keywords ............................................................................... 16
  Questions for Consideration ................................................... 17

Topic B: ................................................................................. 19
  Introduction ........................................................................... 19
  History of the Topic ............................................................... 20
  Current Status ....................................................................... 23
  Country Policy ...................................................................... 27
  Keywords ............................................................................... 28
  Questions for Consideration ................................................... 29
Dear delegates,

Hello and welcome to the Historical Cabinet of Venezuela! My name is Audrey Spensley and I’m so excited to be your chair this year. To introduce myself – I am a sophomore from Cleveland, Ohio majoring in Economics with certificates (minors) in Creative Writing and Spanish Language and Culture. On campus, I write for the news and sports sections of The Daily Princetonian, edit poetry for the campus literary magazine, and serve as an orientation leader for the Outdoor Action program, a week-long hiking trip for incoming freshmen.

You may have heard in the news recently about Venezuela’s ongoing difficulties with runaway inflation and election fraud. It is worth noting that Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has requested aid from the United Nations this March in combating continued recession, highlighting the relevance of the UN to social and economic issues in the country today. By tracing instability both domestically and in the realm of foreign relations back to the pivotal year of 1959, we will not only gain a clearer idea of the trajectory that led to Venezuela’s current crisis, but enjoy an opportunity to use historical context in our research and debate.

I’m excited for productive discussions on two key issues– achieving political stability and navigating relations with Cuba. Both topics invite debate on not only the relevant political factors, but the direction of Venezuela as a whole. 1959 is historically significant in Venezuela for the signing of the Puntofijo pact, an agreement between the three major parties of the period -- Acción Democrática (AD), COPEI (known as the Green Party or Social Christian Party), and Unión Republicana Democrática (URD) – to respect the results of the 1958 election. This committee will be tasked with designing a plan for Venezuela that mediates between these competing interests. How can different
political groups, often with opposing goals, cooperate, or at least fulfill their pact to uphold transparency? Venezuela possesses rich oil reserves, but does not always use them effectively -- how do economic considerations factor into the political situation? In conducting your research and preparing for the conference, I encourage you to examine Betancourt’s policies as jumping-off points for a successful framework. What was effective within a historical context, and what could the committee change?

In a similar vein, the relationship between Venezuela and Cuba – two countries inextricably linked by geography and history – appeared brighter in 1959 than later decades would prove. Oil again played a key role in the relationship; although Castro initially expressed gratitude for Venezuelan support of his ‘Cuban Revolution,’ relations soured when Castro attempted to utilize Venezuelan oil to support his goals within Cuba. Delegates will be tasked with designing a plan for approaching relations with Cuba. What can Venezuela gain from a positive relationship between the two countries, and what factors may be preventing cooperation?

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions as you prepare for debate. Looking forward to meeting each of you in November!

Best,

Audrey
As a historical cabinet, our role is unique. Unlike other committees discussing current issues, the outcome of our debate is already known – the repercussions of Venezuelan policy decisions in 1959 are understood (and continue to be felt) today. As a committee, we will essentially be reimagining historical events in order to create our own resolution, using the facts of the era to build new and creative solutions. Delegates will be roleplaying members of the 1959 Venezuelan cabinet, and their actions should remain consistent with the goals of their characters. With that being said, we will likely do quite a bit of historical revisionism – delegates should feel free to depart from the path of history as they create their own solutions to Venezuela’s most pressing problems.

In conducting your research, I encourage you to focus on your character’s perspective, and keep your recommendations aligned with what you feel your character would want to happen. This is important to remember as the committee deviates from historical fact – generally, keep your character’s goals in mind as debate considers ideas never actually entertained in Venezuela at the time. Furthermore, because debate is conducted in a cabinet style, no one member will have power over others (e.g. veto power) and recommendations from one member to another do not necessarily have to be taken.

Finally, I encourage you to consider how your ideas may play out in the real historical context of 1959. Unlike many other UN committees, members should generally try to make their recommendations within the scope of the available resources at the time. Although Venezuela is rich in natural resources, it would be difficult to implement capital-heavy policy ideas, as Venezuela was still a relatively young and developing nation in 1959.
TOPIC A: COMBATING CORRUPTION AND ESTABLISHING STABLE GOVERNMENT

Introduction

How can we create a stable, productive, and just government? This is the universal question that delegates will seek to address, focusing specifically on an important point in South American history – 1959, the “Dawn of Democracy” in Venezuela. That year is considered the beginning of the Fourth Republic of Venezuela, a period of increased democratic representation which marked a shift from years of dictatorships and caudillo rule.\(^1\) After the first uncontested and relatively transparent democratic election in the nation’s history, Romulo Betancourt’s administration took hold and was immediately faced with various political, social, and economic challenges.\(^2\) Betancourt was a member of the Accion Democratic (AD) Party, a group which prioritized laborers’ rights, social welfare programs, and state-led development programs for economic growth.\(^3\) When Betancourt assumed power in 1959, Venezuela’s oil reserves were by far the most significant aspect of the nation’s economy, and were growing in importance as foreign companies invested and infiltrated oil reserves. In the past, oil profits have mainly been distributed among the elites and have had little impact on public infrastructure or increased private investment. This leads the committee to another important facet of the social landscape of Venezuela in 1959: the divisions and inequality between the largely illiterate working class and the largely foreign-born elite class. Finally, in terms of politics, Betancourt faced two major related challenges: maintaining democracy in a politically fragile


environment, and ensuring the continuation of a two-party system. After a century of the caudillo system, in which power was distributed among various localities, and a series of dictators who attempted to limit rights within the country, it was difficult for Betancourt to convince citizens to support democracy. In fact, the AD had its roots in the Communist movement, and many Venezuelans continued to be supportive of communism.

In reality, Betancourt’s administration focused on infrastructure and welfare, making huge concessions to various political enemies in an effort to win bipartisan support. While this effort was successful in winning more popular support for Betancourt, he was unable to prevent various powers – abroad and domestic – from attempting to derail democracy in Venezuela. How should the committee approach the question of concessions – are they productive or likely to backfire? How should Betancourt’s early policies be designed to make them as effective as possible?

In general, the committee should focus on the three broad facets of consideration in creating a new government – economic, political, social – keeping in mind that Venezuela has historically struggled with maintaining democracy, and that it is a crucial point in its development, one which historians have termed a transformative moment.

It is extremely important to note that, although the committee is debating political ideas and although this background guide will use terms such as ‘left,’ ‘right,’ and ‘center’ to describe party platforms, these descriptions should be understood in the context of 1950s Venezuelan politics. Delegate should not substitute their personal political views for those of the parties they are representing. When conducting research, delegates should acquaint themselves with the policies and preferences of this time period rather than substitute those of the United States today.

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History of the topic

Like many South American countries, Venezuela’s history is inextricably linked to its origins as a Spanish colony. Although the land which would become present-day Venezuela – named for its tributaries, which appeared similar to the canals of Venice, Italy – was originally claimed by Spain in 1522, it remained relatively overlooked by European interests throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\(^5\) Partially as a result, Venezuela became one of the first South American countries to declare its independence, drawing from the ideals of freedom and equality expressed in the US Declaration in designing its own Declaration of Independence, which was signed in July of 1811.\(^6\) In 1820, martial and political leader Simón Bolívar led the liberation of New Granada, an area of land including Venezuela and other present-day South American countries; this lasting independence was established nine years after the Declaration. Venezuela did not become its own independent nation until the dissolution of New Granada in 1830.\(^7\) Thus, political and social upheaval has its roots in the country’s very origins; it is also worth noting that democratic principles extend to pre-independent Venezuela, although tradition, geography, and other facts made democracy difficult to attain.

Post-independence was a tumultuous period in Venezuela, characterized by the ‘caudillo’ system, an oligarchy in which various independent and powerful individuals – nearly all originating from Caracas, the nation’s capital and a key power center -- competed for political control over the country.\(^8\) The nineteenth century became known as the “Caudillo Century” due to frequent conflicts

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\(^7\) “The Colonial Era.” Encyclopedia Britannica.

\(^8\) Ibid.
and power transfers. A key figure of the time period was José Antonio Páez, a distinguished military leader who ascended to power immediately following Venezuelan independence. Páez succeeded in modernizing the nation’s infrastructure and maintaining the support of the social elites – ‘criollos,’ or men born in South America but with European heritage, although Páez himself was mestizo, with both South American and European heritage.

The semi-unity that Páez achieved was disrupted by two factors: a flailing economy, which had relied mainly on coffee bean exportation, and geographical disparity. Venezuela is a physically large nation, with mountainous, tropical, and coastal areas – these distinct regions grew to develop different cultures and political ideologies over time, complicating unified rule. By the mid-nineteenth century, federalism – a dual form of government in which control is divided between the federal and state or local levels – was the supposedly dominant political ideology. In practice, however, various caudillos ruled over different areas, often through a dictatorial style, and the federal government lacked any real power. Furthermore, elections – although not always at the local level – were rigged, staged, or ignored altogether. In 1870, Antonio Guzmán Blanco wrested control back to the national level and served as dictator of Venezuela for the following eighteen years, restricting social rights but establishing a more unified political front. Guzmán’s rule also coincided with a period of economic success, in which coffee production and foreign investment increased in the country. Education, infrastructure, and agriculture benefitted from this increased economic production as

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9 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
well, which contributed to a time of relative peace, although core rights of the citizens continued to be violated.\textsuperscript{14}

Twentieth-century Venezuelan politics were highly influenced by the discovery of oil in the country. From 1908 to 1935, Juan Vicente Gómez oversaw a dictatorship which achieved rapid economic growth but severely restricted social rights and mobility. A harsh and ruthless leader, Gómez created six different constitutions to legalize his extended ruling; he also utilized the army to maintain control and prevent political enemies from gaining power and established a dystopian secret police force which imprisoned and tortured thousands.\textsuperscript{15} Gómez’s rule extended the racist themes playing in the country; he believed that foreigners should be responsible for developing Venezuela, emphasizing the social and political divides within the country. While much of the population was illiterate and living in poverty, the elites – those high in the levels of the army and the government, almost invariably foreigners – continued to live lavishly. Such disparity was strongly increased by the transformative economic changes occurring in the country due to both the booming coffee export industry and foreign investment in petroleum reserves.\textsuperscript{16} While profits from oil allowed Gomez to pay off the nation’s debt and build its public infrastructure, few working-class citizens saw its benefits. Instead, employment fell, public education continued to stagnate, and small-scale industry was not promoted.\textsuperscript{17} After twenty-seven years in power, Gomez died of natural causes: his passing is considered symbolic of the beginning of the modern era in Venezuela.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{thebibliography}{18}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
Gomez’s death was quickly followed by violent riots and acts of protest, including the murder of Gomez’s family: the subsequent government power vacuum resulted in the armed forces gaining more power, and former Minister of War General Eleazar López Contreras assumed power. To assuage the continuing riots, he took small steps towards liberalizing the state, including freeing political prisoners and dismantling the secret police. As political expression increased, exiles returned to the nation – one of these, Romulo Betancourt, who would later become president, established the Organización Venezolana—Orve, a populist organization. López’s successor, Isaías Medina Angarita, also allowed for the legalization of the Acción Democrática (Democratic Action) party, formerly known as the Partido Democrático Nacional (Democratic National Party). Both organizations gained much public support and become important minority political voices.

Ultimately, Medina was overthrown in a military coup by a group of young officers working in conjunction with AD. As a result, Betancourt assumed power and instituted a governing ‘junta’ or cabinet. Their first action was to institute sweeping political reform, including granting universal suffrage for citizens over 18. In 1946, AD easily defeated the newly-formed Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente—COPEI in the elections. However, the victory party tried to push through an aggressive agenda which generated hostility among elites and ultimately resulted in the twenty-plus year harsh dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who voided the past years’ reforms.

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
Current situation

By January of 1958, Pérez had fled Venezuela after a public uprising and subsequent coup d’état perpetuated by the national military, resulting in a transitional government headed by armed force leaders. Meanwhile, the three major political parties of the time – COPEI, AD, and the URD – benefitted from what would become known as the “Spirit of the 23rd of January,” a general desire for cooperation and increased stability to counteract the disoriented and alarmed atmosphere invoked by the recent coup and a sense of economic distrust and weakening.

Party Platforms

Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) was based on Christian social theory and had strong appeal among conservative Roman Catholic voters. Its founder, Rafael Caldera Rodríguez, had participated in the 1934 Congress of Catholic Youth in Rome, which established the Christian Democratic movement, in which Catholics sought increased political involvement. Policy-wise, the group supported moderate reforms and better social and economic conditions for the working class, influenced by the Vatican’s recommendations. Although Caldera’s

supporters were fervent, they were not populous enough to gain him the 1958 election; he ultimately secured 16.2% of the vote.\footnote{Ibid.}

Accion Democratica, which was ultimately successful, was generally a populist labor party similar to Peronism in Argentina; furthermore, it is worth noting that Betancourt, the party’s representative, had previously wrested control in a 1945 military coup.\footnote{Blanksten, George I., and John D. Martz. "Accion Democratica: Evolution of a Modern Political Party in Venezuela."} Betancourt’s first term was somewhat harsh and dictator-like, yet highly accomplished. For example, he declared universal suffrage and obtained foreign oil company profit for the country.\footnote{Ibid.} Notably, he also worked with the International Refugee Organization to assume responsibility for the resettlement of the high refugee population inside Venezuela.\footnote{Rivas Leone, José Antonio. "TRANSFORMACIONES Y CRISIS DE LOS PARTIDOS POLÍTICOS. LA NUEVA CONFIGURACIÓN DEL SISTEMA DE PARTIDOS EN VENEZUELA." El Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials (ICPS), 2002.} Ultimately, he was exiled from the country before returning again for the 1958 election.\footnote{Ibid.} In the 1950s and 60s, the party was widely considered centrist in terms of policy; historians generally term it center-right for its support for its expansion of national industries and its strong support for the working class. The party has a strong support base in organized labor, and party leadership maintained strict control over the ultimate platforms.\footnote{Suarez, Jorge Orlando Blanco. "Estructuras clientelares y partidos políticos. Aproximaciones a la crisis y transformación de los sistemas de partidos en Colombia y Venezuela."} It is important to note, however, that AD’s platforms generally hinged on which leader was in control of the party at the time; the style of government was very personalist, and changes in leadership were swiftly reflected by changes in politics.\footnote{Crisp, Brian F. Democratic institutional design: the powers and incentives of Venezuelan politicians and interest groups.}
Puntofijo Pact

These three parties each sent representatives to sign a joint pact agreeing to respect the electoral results. 34 Because the pact contained pledges from party representatives to respect electoral results, it was a major step towards restoring faith in the democratic process and reestablishing political representation. However, critics of the pact argue that it was responsible for creating a rigid two-party system, preventing leftist factions from accessing the general elections. 35 This was intentional on the part of the AD and Betancourt, who were very anticommunist, and sought to restructure the political system to prevent communism. At the same time, the pact created a network of power between the two parties – even when one was not technically in power, it would share with the group that had won. Essentially, government became controlled by a coalition rather than a true two-party system, and both COPEI and AD dominated the political scene. This would become problematic, especially considering the complex system of corruption required to support both parties.

Ensuring cooperation between parties

Perhaps the greatest point at stake is the continuation of democracy itself. As the historical background demonstrates, Venezuela has had extreme difficulty in maintaining democracy even when the general population, as well as political coalitions, within the country appear to support it. Furthermore Betancourt’s administration did end in a slide towards dictatorship as well as horrendous economic conditions, despite continued oil wealth. A major goal of the committee should be to consider potential ways to avoid these shortcomings. One point of (at least symbolic)

35 Ibid.
success is The Betancourt Doctrine, which held that Venezuela would not grant diplomatic recognition to a regime which had secured power through military force. Measures like these worked against the antidemocratic traditions of the nation and showed promising steps towards political representation. Yet, many of the political leaders at the time – including Betancourt himself – remained associated with the dictatorial style of the past. Delegates should consider what steps the government could take to move closer towards democracy, beyond largely symbolic gestures like The Betancourt Doctrine. Of course, delegates need not be restricted by a democratic model, and could also consider the pros and cons of other government styles.

**Economic growth**

Oil has been a defining factor in Venezuela since the discovery in the 1920s of massive petroleum reserves in the nation. However, at the time of Betancourt’s election, the government was limited by a virtually empty treasury as well as large foreign debts accumulated by the Perez administration. Furthermore, petroleum remained at extremely low prices throughout the 1950s. During this time, the international oil cartel Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) allowed Venezuela more control over oil prices and exportation.

Another factor is agricultural production, which had been steadily declining throughout the early nineteenth century. Although Venezuela is rich in petroleum and precious metals such as gold, it lack agricultural resources. Furthermore, land throughout the country was not being used as effectively as possible, resulting in economic problems that preluded the runaway inflation and shortages that we see in Venezuela today. Delegates can focus on increasing agricultural production, making distribution more effective, or another position.

**Labor rights**
Labor rights were at the forefront of the political landscape in 1959 due to the newly established democratic format of representation. Laborers composed a significant portion of the population, and tended to support Betancourt in the elections. Accordingly, Betancourt established a new labor code which guaranteed laborers the right to bargain, strengthening unions in the country. Betancourt also made significant movements towards increased welfare programs, which had a political aim: increasing citizen support for democracy.

Related to this theme, in 1959, Venezuela had a significant and growing population of citizens living in poverty. Impoverished rural populations termed campesinos struggled to feed themselves and their families, as farming was limited by both natural resources and restrictive government policies. In urban areas, poverty was also rampant as people struggled to compete for limited employment. Delegates should consider ways to address both the poverty in Venezuela and the divide between the urban and the rural; those living in either area, even with similar incomes, experience poverty drastically differently. Both sects, however, suffer from the economic consequences of combined high inflation and low employment.

Keywords

Romulo Betancourt: An extremely important political leader throughout the twentieth century. He won the 1958 elections and had also previously served as president from 1945-1948. He founded the Oganización Venezolana which later became the Accion Democratic (AD) Party. Although he sought to focus on economic and educational reform, he also faced fierce opposition from other political groups.
Puntofijo Pact: An agreement signed by the three major political parties in Venezuela in 1959 that pledged to respect the results of the 1958 election and cooperate to ensure democracy after years of dictatorship.


‘Caudillo’ system: A pattern of dictatorial government and power change that established itself in the post-independence years in Venezuela and endured throughout the nineteenth century, in which different powerful men established power for brief periods of time. This pattern contradicted the stated goals of democracy established by the Venezuelan constitution (and many caudillo leaders replaced the constitutions to legalize their power).

International Refugee Organization: a specialized agency of the United Nations founded in 1948 to help countries assist the overwhelming number of refugees from World War II. In 1952, it was replaced by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Questions

- What are the advantages of disadvantages of continuing to allow foreign-owned companies to operate tax-free in Buenos Aires? How can oil profits be utilized most effectively?
- What measures need to be taken to ensure cooperation between the major political parties?
- What are the limits of governmental power; how much should the Congress be capable of legislation and how should power be limited or divided?
• How can the government increased agricultural output and make land use more efficient as well as distribution?
TOPIC B: VENEZUELA-CUBA RELATIONS

Introduction

In the early 1960s, tensions between Cuba and Venezuela skyrocketed as the paths of the two countries veered apart, reversing their historical alliance. In Cuba, Fidel Castro was organizing the Cuban Revolution, an armed revolt with the aim of creating a new socialist government in the country. Venezuela, however, was under the helm of a new democratically elected president, Romulo Betancourt, whose administration’s goals contrasted sharply with those of Castro’s. As a result, Venezuela-Cuba relations quickly deteriorated from a form of allied partnership to openly hostile opposition.

Ultimately, delegates can operate with relatively more freedom while discussing this topic, as it is quite broad. The final goal of the committee should be to create a framework or plan for relations with Castro. This plan can include not only legislation that the congress will pass, but also the decision of whether to suspend constitutional guarantees (as the Betancourt administration did), and even the decision of whether to engage in open warfare with Cuba. Delegates should consider Castro’s reactions to their initial policies, and brainstorm several solutions to address relations with Cuba.

The aim of this background guide is to provide delegates with historical context from which they can craft their own solutions. Delegates should consider enacted strategies that failed in reality, and why – it is possible to implement the same strategy in a different manner in order to achieve

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more successful results? Of course, delegates should not feel constrained by historical reality and should brainstorm alternatives they think would have been most effective.

History of the topic

Early History

As former Spanish colonies, both Venezuela and Cuba have been inextricably linked from their earliest histories. In conflicts for independence from Spain, Cuban leaders fought for Venezuela and vice versa. Venezuela was one of the earliest Latin American colonies to gain its independence (attaining independence in 1811), nearly six decades before Cuba attained independence in 1868.\(^{37}\) As such, although leaders from both nations aided each other militarily, their roles were somewhat different. Cuban leaders were still colonists, fighting with Venezuela with the partial aim of gaining an ally and experience for eventually securing their own independence. Venezuelan leaders, in contrast, had already established independence and were aiding Cuba to assist other Latin American countries in freeing themselves from the Spanish empire.\(^{38}\)

Pre-Castro Cuban history:

To understand Cuba-Venezuela relations, it is necessary to provide a brief background on Cuban history before Castro’s revolution. For more information on Venezuela’s history during this time period, consult the background guide for Topic A. As noted above, Cuba secured independence much later than Venezuela – its path to that independence was also much rockier. From 1868 to 1878, Cuba fought in the Ten Years War for independence from Spain. It ended in


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
what was officially termed a truce, with Spain pledging reforms and more independence in the future. None of these pledges were fulfilled, and Cuba remained politically and economically bound to Spain. After years of continued unrest, Cuban national leader Jose Marti organized a second war for independence from 1895 to 1898. However, Cuba did not gain its independence from Spain until Spain lost a separate war to the United States, in which it was forced to cede Cuba entirely. Thus, the frustration that led to Castro’s rebellion has roots in the country’s very early history.

Even though Cuba was technically independent at this time it remained tightly bound to the United States under the Platt Amendment, which declared the United States’ right to intervene in Latin American nations’ political, economic, and foreign relations affairs if the U.S. deemed necessary. American control over Cuba as outlined by the Platt Amendment fostered a deep resentment among Cuban citizens and led to continuous on-and-off conflict throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The effects of this conflict are evident today.

Thus, after Cuba’s role in the Spanish-American war, its years of interdependence with the United States began. The U.S. played a major role in controlling Cuba’s first 1902 elections, which Tomas Estrada Palma won. However, from 1906 to 1909 Estrada’s government was damaged by a popular rebellion led by Jose Miguel Gomez. Gomez has been considered by historians as a precursor to Castro in that he was a popular figure able to effectively harness public support against the government of the time. Gomez also marked the beginning of an era of successive dictatorships and a struggling economy. Inequality marked the country, and most Cubans were living below the poverty line for much of the twentieth century. Although few dictators such as Gerado Machado,
who was in power from 1924 to 1933, established broad and largely effective public works programs, most failed to deliver prosperity to the country and strongly limited human rights.\textsuperscript{41} 

In 1925, the Socialist Party of Cuba was founded, laying groundwork for the later communist movement about twenty-five years prior to Castro’s revolution. The socialist movement remained largely underground during the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista until 1953, when Castro attempted a revolt against the Batista regime.\textsuperscript{42} 

\textit{Modern History of Venezuela-Cuba Relations}

Venezuela and Cuba established modern diplomatic relations in 1902. Their early twentieth-century relations were mutually positive, although the United States’ power in the region somewhat limited the capacity of the two nations to cooperate or negotiate, as both lacked the full geopolitical power to organize their own foreign policies independent of U.S. interests. The caudillo system in Venezuela resulted in two important foreign policy characteristics: (1) caudillos were generally more concerned with domestic policy than foreign, and (2) Venezuela’s foreign policy tended to shift rapidly with the ascension of new leaders.

World War II marked a transformation in the foreign policies of both Venezuela and Cuba. Cuba was one of the first Caribbean nations to enter the conflict, declaring war on the Axis powers in 1941. Cuba was successful in the conflict, becoming internationally recognized as possessing the most efficient military in the Caribbean. Venezuela was the top oil exporter in the world at the war’s outset, thus benefitting from U.S. economic assistance and gaining territory through diplomacy. While officially neutral, Venezuela secretly aligned itself with the Allied forces and officially declared war in 1945 shortly before the war’s conclusion.

\textsuperscript{41} Chapman, \textit{A History of the Cuban Republic}. 
\textsuperscript{42} Cuba profile - Timeline.” BBC News.
In the 1950s, as Castro fought to overthrow Batista, many Venezuelans expressed support for the former’s cause, and relations between the two countries remained friendly. This friendliness culminated with Castro’s 1959 visit to Venezuela.

Current situation

In January of this year, Fidel Castro visited the Venezuelan capital Caracas in a historic visit intended to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the fall of Marcos Pérez Jiménez’s long-term dictatorship. The visit has been considered a high point in Venezuelan-Cuban relations, but in reality it signaled the beginning of a period of rapid decline in cooperation between the two nations. Throughout the visit, Castro garnered support from young Venezuelans who were captivated by his public speaking skills and communist ideals. Castro contrasted sharply with Betancourt, who despite his popular election was perceived as corrupt and a holdover from more archaic Venezuelan politics.

Thus, a sharp generational divide emerged among Venezuelans, with younger citizens far more likely to support Castro than their older counterparts, who continued to support Betancourt. Furthermore, the Acción Democratica party inadvertently contributed to this divide by rearranging its leadership, expelling youth leaders and more ideological communist party members. Acción Democratica also suffered from a flagging public image among all Venezuelans as it grappled with domestic issues such as unemployment.

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44 Ibid.
Even as Castro gained popularity among Venezuelan youth for his fiery rhetoric, his 1959 visit also sparked the deterioration of his relationship with Betancourt. At the conclusion of his visit, Castro met with Betancourt and requested a $300 million loan so that Cuba could work against the United States and reduce its dependency on the U.S. Betancourt refused citing a lack of Venezuelan economic resources to support Cuba’s endeavors and Castro returned to Cuba in anger.  

*Left-wing political parties in Venezuela*

Castro’s 1959 visit to Venezuela was effective in sparking the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Leftist Movement) or MIR, of Venezuela, which would soon become a highly influential political group. Founded the same year as Castro’s visit and a direct consequence of his encouragement, it was originally a faction of the *Acción Democratica* (Democratic Action) party, a popular group with wide appeal across various sectors of society, both economic and political. As the creation of the MIR revealed, Betancourt’s AD was too broad ideologically-- When the MIR was founded in 1959, it pledged to devote itself completely to installing socialism in Venezuela. Betancourt would eventually decide to effectively outlaw the MIR, which was once a branch of his own party, illustrating the political unrest in Venezuela. It eventually utilized increasingly violent techniques to achieve its proclaimed goal of socialism and protest the government’s banning of it.  

Castro also influenced the second major left-wing political party in Venezuela at the time, the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (Communist Party of Venezuela). The PCV originally functioned as a clandestine organization during Gomez’s dictatorship in the 1930s, but subsequently increased its mainstream appeal and, more importantly, its internal organization and leadership. At the time of the

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committee, it had begun modelling its actions after the Cuban Revolution and thus became much more radical. Like the MIR, it engaged in guerrilla tactics against Betancourt, with the aim of overthrowing the government. The Central Intelligence Agency estimates that Cuban insurgency in Venezuela began in 1959, although some accounts hold that intervention in Venezuela on behalf of Communist Cuban leaders began even earlier.

Economic considerations

During this time, Cuba’s economy was heavily suffering from trade restrictions imposed on the Batista administration by the United States. Once Castro seized control, he also began a system of immense nationalizations of industries such as the telephone trade. At the same time, Venezuela was benefitting from a strong oil market, although Betancourt was forced to grapple with immense debts from his predecessors. These debts ultimately were more important in terms of domestic policy, and high oil prices consistently offered Venezuela an advantage in international relations during the early 1960s.

It is important to note that during this time period, the U.S. was the largest single purchaser of Venezuelan oil, and the Venezuela was one of the largest recipients of U.S. foreign investment. Venezuela largely depended on the United States for its economic recovery after years of debt and for capitalist expansion. The result was that the United States had a major role in influencing Betancourt’s foreign policy.

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50 Acosta, Franklin, "An analysis of Venezuela's foreign policy during the period of the Betancourt doctrine and Caldera's ideological pluralism"
Problems to consider

At the organization of this cabinet meeting, Castro has achieved strong popular support in Venezuela, principally among the younger generation, that is, university students and those in their twenties. Two major left-wing political groups are active in Venezuela although they are technically illegal. The government has currently suspended constitutional guarantees to prohibit the political participation of these groups, and it continues to censor press and monitor socialists. The socialist movement is also disorganized and lacks direction or leadership. Castro continues to thoroughly support the socialist groups in Venezuela, although he is distracted by conflict with the United States.

In addressing this complex issue, delegates should first consider their positions as members of the Venezuelan cabinet. As noted, initial responses by the Venezuelan government to Castro’s growing popularity among young Venezuelans were harsh and authoritarian. Although the government was successful in limiting Castro’s influence by restricting his message, it became more unpopular among citizens. Delegates should take note of this historical failure and instead consider different options, while maintaining the stances that their cabinet members likely would have held.

Second, political tensions cannot be considered in isolation. Venezuela and Cuba benefitted from strong economic ties, particularly regarding oil. Delegates should consider what role, if any, these economic considerations should play in their policies. It is also possible to consider imposing economic sanctions on Cuba – that is, international economic penalties, such as a ban on a sector of

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51 Ibid.
trade – in order to achieve a political aim. However, delegates should note that it would be difficult for Venezuela to act unilaterally because of its own economic dependence on Cuba.\(^2\)

Third, and with the preceding point in mind, delegates should consider the role of other nations, such as the United States, and of international organizations in dictating their policy. Betancourt allied himself with the United States, which, at the height of the Cold War, was committed to fighting communism globally.\(^3\) Betancourt may have won an important ally but simultaneously engendered resentment and further conflict among other Latin American countries. Ultimately, the relationship between the United States and Venezuela also deteriorated, evident in 21\(^{st}\) century politics. Delegates should consider both the potential aid that nations with aligned interests could provide, as well as the possible consequences of allying with a nation that many Venezuelan citizens perceive as an outsider or threat.

**Country policy**

**Venezuela:** Venezuela exhibits two contradictory attitudes towards Cuba. While Castro’s popular appeal remains strong among youth and many working or middle-class Venezuelans, the administration has taken a firm stance against him and is aligned with the United States in working to dissuade communism throughout the American region.

**Cuba:** Under Fidel Castro, Cuba is not seeking improved relations with the Venezuelan administration so much as it is seeking to aid Venezuelans in overthrowing it. Castro, frustrated by Betancourt’s close economic ties and political sympathy with the U.S., seeks a replication of the Cuban Revolution in Venezuela, turning the democratic government into a communist one.

\(^{2}\) Acosta, Franklin, "An analysis of Venezuela's foreign policy during the period of the Betancourt doctrine and Caldera's ideological pluralism"

\(^{3}\) Ibid.
United States: The United States has strong interests in both maintaining democracy in Venezuela – so as to keep Venezuela’s oil supply, which is the current primary provider of U.S. oil, flowing – and in punishing Castro for instilling communism in Cuba. Thus, it seeks to use its considerable foreign aid to persuade Venezuela to continue opposing Cuba, while simultaneously imposing its own sanctions on Cuba in to limit Castro’s power.

Keywords

Betancourt Doctrine: Rule issued by Betancourt which held that Venezuela would not supply aid to any nation in which the government did not secure power democratically. Under this rule, Venezuela stopped providing any aid to Cuba.

Counterinsurgency: Related to guerilla warfare, counterinsurgency is an umbrella term which refers to attempts by citizens or military to counteract, or fight against, a rebellion or uprising.

Cuban embargo: A strict set of sanctions imposed on Cuba by the United States in 1960 which legally prohibited virtually all commercial and economic commerce between Cuba and the U.S.

Economic sanctions: Penalties, most commonly economic, imposed on a nation unilaterally (by a single country or entity) or multilaterally (by multiple nations). A relevant, although extreme, example is the U.S.’s embargo of Cuba, initiated in 1958, in which the U.S. halted commercial exports to Cuba. Other examples including nationwide measures such as levying high import taxes and blocking exports or more specific, targeted sanctions such as freezing the assets of a particular leader.

Guerilla: A mode of conflict characterized by small, loosely organized troops which plan often irregular and violent attacks. Typically utilized by a smaller force against a larger, more organized army – in this instance, by left-wing political extremists against the government
Organization of American States: A multilateral organization of states located in the Americas which works towards economic and political cooperation between states. The Betancourt doctrine urged nations such as Cuba, that did not have democratically elected leaders, to be expelled from the OAS and thus lose both political leverage and economic advantages.

Radio Havana: A radio broadcast channel through which Castro disseminated propaganda and information to Venezuelan citizens, principally urban youth. It was outlawed by Betancourt.

Questions

- Would it be more effective to attempt cooperation with the left-wing political parties in Venezuela, to continue with Betancourt’s strategy of limiting their political participation, or to pursue a different option?
- Should the government attempt to begin negotiations or more open communications with Castro in order to limit his influence in Venezuela? Or should it pursue a harsher, more militaristic strategy?
- How should Venezuela align itself in relation to the United States? Should it seek to the U.S. as an ally or separate itself from the U.S.-Cuba conflict?
- How can the current government increase its efficiency and/or popular appeal among Venezuelans in order to win back popular support? Should it continue its policies of political restriction in order to maintain power in a time of conflict, or should it allow for more participation?
- How does oil and the economy factor into relations between Venezuela and Cuba? How would a particular policy affect Venezuela’s economy? How effective would economic sanctions or other market measures against Cuba ultimately be?
• How should the president act in this situation as a symbol of power? Should he visit Cuba and Castro if possible or should he make his harsher stance on Castro clear?