

# Completing the Revolution?

*The United States and Bolivia's Long Revolution*

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## Abstract

James Malloy's 1970 study, still one of the most systematic analytical attempts in English to understand Bolivia's 1952 National Revolution, argued that the revolution remained "uncompleted." However, the election and subsequent policies of the Morales government after 2005 moved Bolivia much closer to completing two important stated objectives of the revolution, as yet unfulfilled when Malloy wrote: inclusion of all Bolivians in the political system and increased national autonomy. While it is premature to call Bolivia's revolution "completed," the shift in the locus of power from Europeanized elites to more broadly popular forces and the growing independence of Bolivia from outside influence and direction under Morales are key achievements of what might be called Bolivia's "Long Revolution." Giving close attention to these two fundamental achievements—inclusion and autonomy—this paper provides a preliminary examination of the complicated and often paradoxical role the United States has played in Bolivia's long historical trajectory since April 1952. Directly and indirectly, through imposition and suggestion, purposefully and unintentionally, by providing assistance and at the same time stimulating fierce nationalist resistance, through design and through the twists and turns of historical contingency—the United States has contributed to Bolivia's slow revolutionary transformation. But patterns of imposition and resistance continue and this paper argues that it is time for the United States to examine its assumptions so that the two nations can escape the cyclical patterns of the past.

**Keywords**

*Bolivia's "long revolution", democracy, Evo Morales administration, National Revolution of 1952, neoliberal economic policy, US assistance to Bolivia, US interests and interventions in Bolivia*

**Resumen**

El trabajo que James Malloy publicó en 1970 (hasta hoy día uno de los esfuerzos analíticos más sistemáticos que se han hecho en inglés para entender la Revolución Nacional de 1952), argumentaba que la revolución permanecía "incompleta". Las elecciones y subsiguientes políticas del gobierno de Morales después de 2005 llevaron a Bolivia mucho más cerca de completar dos de los objetivos importantes que buscaba la revolución y que todavía no se habían cumplidos cuando Malloy publicó su trabajo: la inclusión de todos los bolivianos en el sistema político y el incremento de autonomía nacional. Si bien es prematuro pensar que la revolución boliviana esté "terminada", el cambio operado en el lugar del poder, que de elites europeizadas se ha desplazado a fuerzas más ampliamente populares, y la creciente independencia de Bolivia respecto a influencias y direcciones externas, son logros clave de lo que podría llamarse la "larga revolución" boliviana. Prestando atención a esos dos logros fundamentales (la inclusión y la autonomía), este artículo ofrece un examen preliminar del complicado y a menudo paradójico rol que Estados Unidos ha desempeñado en la larga trayectoria histórica de Bolivia desde abril de 1952. Directa e indirectamente, a través de la imposición y la sugerencia, de manera deliberada y no intencional, proporcionando asistencia y al mismo tiempo estimulando una feroz resistencia nacionalista, mediante programas diseñados y giros de la contingencia histórica, Estados Unidos ha contribuido a la lenta transformación revolucionaria en Bolivia. Pero los patrones de imposición y resistencia continúan, y este artículo sostiene que ha llegado la hora de que los Estados Unidos examinen sus supuestos para que las dos naciones puedan evitar la repetición de patrones cíclicos del pasado.

**Palabras claves**

*asistencia norteamericana a Bolivia, democracia, gobierno de Evo Morales, intereses e intervenciones norteamericanas en Bolivia, la "larga" revolución boliviana, políticas neoliberales, Revolución Nacional de 1952*

James Malloy's 1970 study, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, remains one of the most systematic analytical attempts in English to understand Bolivia's 1952 National Revolution. Malloy argued that the chief issues thwarting the completion of that revolution were the very issues that caused it:

The Bolivian Revolution can be interpreted, in part, as a reaction to the situation brought about by [a] skewed development pattern and ... the failure of the MNR (Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario) successfully to reorganize Bolivia either economically or politically after achieving formal power by insurrection was largely due to the persistence of the situational realities created by this previous development pattern. (317-18)

My own research into the 1952 revolution led me to argue that this same skewed development pattern led nationalist revolutionaries to seek assistance from the United States. Neither MNR dependency nor US hegemonic imposition fully explain the tight relationship that followed for the next twelve years; rather, revolutionary nationalists in La Paz and Cold War anti-communists in Washington shared a belief that previous patterns of development had to change—Bolivia needed to eliminate the semi-feudal nature of rural land-holdings and its dependence on tin in order to follow a capitalist path to development. (Lehman 1992 and 1999, chapter 4)

However, in light of differing objectives, conflicting ideas of how to reach those objectives, and the asymmetries of power and resources between Bolivia and the United States, the subsequent relationship displayed persistent elements of hegemonic imposition from Washington and frustrated acquiescence, dependency, and resistance from La Paz. The US, its interests, its influence, and assumptions, thwarted the revolution and frustrated goals that both nations claimed to share. A recent study released by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociales de la Vicepresidencia de Bolivia and coordinated by Loreta Tellería Escobar, *Hegemonía territorial fallida: Estrategias de control y dominación de Estados Unidos en Bolivia, 1985-2012*, amply and effectively details that patterns of imposition, dependency and resistance continue to persist well into the 21st century. Further corroboration comes from US Embassy dispatches from La Paz for the years 2005 to 2011 made available through WikiLeaks and posted on the Vicepresidencia website.

However, the election and subsequent policies of the Morales government mark two distinct achievements—the rise and empowerment of Bolivia's popular (indigenous, mestizo and cholo) majority and a new

willingness and unprecedented ability of Bolivia to choose its own economic and political path. These ostensibly were goals of the 1952 National Revolution—inclusion of all Bolivians in the national system, increased national autonomy, and the reduction of external dependency. And while it is premature to call Bolivia’s revolution “completed,” the shift in the locus of power from Europeanized elites to more authentically popular forces and the growing independence of Bolivia from US influence and direction are key achievements of what I will call Bolivia’s “Long Revolution.”

Bolivia’s path from April 1952 to December 2005 has been circuitous but, giving close attention to these two fundamental achievements—inclusion and autonomy, this paper lays out the framework of my current research into the complicated role the United States has played in Bolivia’s long historical trajectory from the 1952 revolution to the election of Evo Morales. The United States—directly and indirectly, through imposition and suggestion, purposefully and unintentionally, by providing assistance and at the same time stimulating fierce nationalist resentments, through design and through the twists and turns of historical contingency—has contributed to Bolivia’s slow but revolutionary transformation. US policy is both hegemonic and idealistic and Bolivian policy has been alternately cooperative, fiercely resistive, and creatively subversive, meaning that the history of their relationship has been marked by alternating cycles of cooperation and resistance. However, a secular process is also at work and while the conflictual elements of the relationship have created tensions, they have also opened space for a new and increasingly independent and inclusive Bolivia to emerge—proclaimed goals of the 1952 revolution and ostensibly among the goals that the United States also seeks in the hemisphere. But patterns of imposition and resistance continue and this paper argues that it is time for the United States to examine its assumptions so that the two nations can escape the cyclical patterns of the past.

According to Malloy, Bolivia’s National Revolution remained uncompleted because multiple structural dysfunctions under its elitist, tin-based development model placed powerful constraints on the way the revolution could be institutionalized. The Liberal elites that governed Bolivia after the War of the Pacific were buoyed by a Positivist faith in progress that was reinforced by a Social Darwinist notion that they were the natural guides of that process. In that sense, Malloy observes that the Liberals merely redefined and reinforced the colonial bifurcation of two Bolivias—one urban, Western, and modern, the other rural, heavily indigenous, and traditional. The modern sector was tied to international markets through the extraction and sale of tin

while the traditional sector was considered an unquestioned drag on orderly progress except to the degree that its members could be marshaled as cheap labor. Their subordinate position was reinforced in the minds of the elite by the racial and ethnic prejudices of the time. (19-24)

Drawing on the work of Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Malloy argued that the two Bolivias were not disconnected but rather were functionally linked in a relationship of internal colonialism. Bolivia's mining methods and high labor inputs made tin expensive to produce. The depressed, quasi-feudal state of the countryside kept labor costs low and served as a form of social control to keep rural indigenous populations subservient and political power securely controlled by the "modern" elite. Malloy noted that this dualistic system served the interests of the mining elite while leaving the large mass of the population effectively controlled and rendered passive (25-32). Arguing from a different theoretical base, René Zavaleta confirmed Malloy's point by noting the paradoxical position of the tin elite:

Era una burguesía que no era una burguesa sino en ciertos aspectos muy específicos de su acumulación, o sea burguesa en su riqueza pero no en su proyecto; como alcance nacional, en cambio, fundaba su propio poder en una articulación no burguesa de las relaciones productivas existentes en el país y, en último término, era la burguesía la que impedía la ampliación de la burguesía, la generalización del proceso capitalista y, en general, la realización *in pleno* de las tareas burguesas. (68)

But challenges to this system began to appear after World War I. Malloy along with Herbert Klein emphasized the emergence of counter-elites from within Bolivia's petite bourgeoisie and intellectual class. Others highlight the crucial role of labor in formulating the first effective resistance to the liberal tin system while recent studies by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Laura Gotkowitz and others have situated the first acts of resistance in the "traditional sector" as Indigenous *campesinos* organized to resist attacks on their land and to defend their communities.<sup>1</sup> Malloy downplays this rural upheaval, but acknowledges

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<sup>1</sup> See Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (55-63); and Herbert Klein, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia, 1880-1952*. For the labor perspective see Guillermo Lora, *A History of the Bolivian Labour Movement and Obras Completas*, particularly Tomo I; Robert L. Smale, *I sweat the Flavor of Tin: Labor Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Bolivia*; Steven S. Volk, "Class, Union, Party: The Development of a Revolutionary Union Movement in Bolivia (1905-1952);" and John S. Sándor, *Bolivia's Radical Tradition: Permanent Revolution in the Andes*, among others. On the peasant role, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Oppressed but not Defeated*, and Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1952*.

that changing conditions in the 1920s already had elites on the defensive even before the twin shocks of economic depression and the Chaco War. Out of these changing conditions emerged a powerful critique of the liberal, tin-based system. The “military socialist” regimes of Toro, Busch, and Villarroel disrupted the limited-participation party rule of Liberals and challenged the essence of their ideology with an emphasis on empowering the state to carry out social and economic reforms. Carlos Montenegro articulated a new history for Bolivia in *Nacionalismo y coloniaje*; Augusto Céspedes shook the pillars of the old liberal establishment with his powerful blend of literature and historical critique; the new nationalist press provided a loud and alternative voice to a press that was controlled by the tin barons; and parties on the nationalist left (the MNR) and the Stalinist and Trotskyist left (the PIR and the POR) called for revolution and “*tierras al indio, minas al estado*” though from differing ideological perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

Malloy observes that a “revolutionary situation” (which perpetually existed in this deeply divided country) now reached “revolutionary potential” due to the “accelerators” of depression and war, but notes that “potential” still does not guarantee revolution (chapter 5). World War II increased demand for Bolivia’s tin under wartime conditions and resulted in an augmentation of the organization, power, and leverage of Bolivian miners. Then the *sexenio* that followed (1946-1952) brought a weakening of the tin-based economy and a fracturing of the old tin-based elite. Malloy observes that the system entered crisis as tin barons divested and moved their assets from the country, tin miners radicalized, and the final political defenses of the existing order crumbled. These historical contingencies turned “revolutionary potential” into revolution and in only three short but momentous days in April 1952, an MNR coup left the tin elite and its retainers in shambles and the military in retreat.<sup>3</sup>

But was it a revolution? The initial goals of the MNR coup might have been limited, but the results were rapid and far reaching reform—nationalization of the largest tin mines, land reform, universal suffrage, and a reconstituted “revolutionary” military. Malloy observes that reforms were of

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<sup>2</sup> See Malloy (chapters 4 and 5); Carlos Montenegro, *Nacionalismo y Coloniaje*; Augusto Céspedes, *Metal del diablo*; Klein, *Parties and Political Change* (chapters 5-10); and Jerry Knudson, *Bolivia, Press and Revolution*. MNR stands for Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario, PIR for Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria, and POR for Partido Obrero Revolucionario.

<sup>3</sup> Malloy (chapters 5-7) covers this process. The Mexican Revolution had taken nearly a decade to accomplish what the Bolivian revolution accomplished in three days, a validation of Malloy’s thesis.

an *ad hoc* nature and filled with all the contradictions inherent in the MNR's multi-class and non-ideological nature. They were further limited, he argued, by dysfunctions inherited from the system the now defeated liberal elite had created and the military had defended, and the resulting contradictions kept the revolution uncompleted. Christopher Mitchell agreed, but added that MNR leaders set the course of the revolution in defense of a narrow class-based vision. In a direct challenge to earlier accounts of the revolution by Robert Alexander and Malloy, Mitchell asserted that, "the MNR [was] neither hero nor victim, but [rather] the major architect of Bolivia's political dilemma" (viii).<sup>4</sup> Zavaleta states that this was a revolution of the bourgeoisie (petite and intellectual) against a bourgeoisie that was *not* a true national bourgeoisie because of its international interests and domestic feudal project. It was also a workers' revolution with heavy proletarian participation, though from a proletariat not yet fully formed: "La insurrección triunfante, en efecto, crea un momento de disponibilidad total del poder. La clave la dieron las masas, porque se sitúa en la destrucción del viejo aparato represivo" (67). Under these conditions it is only in retrospect, Zavaleta observes, that it becomes clear "que estos que llamamos los activos pequeño-burgueses del MNR eran, en verdad, miembros desheredados de la vieja casta maldita dominante en el país, cuyos orígenes están en la propia Conquista" (80). Malloy, Mitchell, and Zavaleta agree that the revolution was limited, yet, by not merely seizing power but also redistributing it; by taking the first steps toward creating one nation from the two Bolivias; and by attempting to tackle the skewed nature of Bolivia's development, the moderate reformers who led that revolution also took the first steps in Bolivia's "Long Revolution."

The steps were tentative, however, and multiple group interests mobilized by the revolution drove the MNR in contradictory directions. Ideological visions within the revolutionary coalition ranged from westernized modernization to indigenous restoration and its goals from socialist transformation to capitalist invigoration. The MNR was a party of reformers working constantly to contain and manipulate the labor and peasant sectors of the party who held conflicting ideological visions and practical goals. The

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Alexander wrote the first detailed account in English of the revolution: *The Bolivian National Revolution* (1958). He was an early advocate of the new regime, writing the State Department a month after the revolution to advocate recognize the new government. He argued that the revolution was not one that the United States either could or should try to reverse.

leadership core of the party did not fully embrace Bolivia's indigenous/cholo majority but rather sought to melt them into the nation and Che Guevara, who visited Bolivia soon after the revolution, saw lingering signs that their views remained paternalistic and elitist.<sup>5</sup> The heterodox nature and clash of ideas within the multi-class MNR coalition meant party leaders could not appeal to a unifying revolutionary discipline. The revolution had dispersed armed power to miner, worker, and party militias and reduced the state's coercive capacity; therefore, the balancing of competing demands became the principle method by which the party reinforced its legitimacy and consolidated its base of support.<sup>6</sup>

Nationalization of the tin mines and land reform were responses to pressures from below, but were also designed to carry out the nationalist goals of greater self-determination and national unity along lines acceptable to the petite-bourgeois interests and ideology of party leaders. The paradox, however, was that these revolutionary acts, particularly nationalization, also revealed the extent of Bolivia's external dependency. Nationalized tin had to be sold to the Texas City Smelter in the United States or to smelters owned and operated by the old tin barons. Breaking dependency on such markets and on declining deposits of tin required external funding to diversify Bolivia's productive base. In light of these facts, party and labor leaders from across the ideological spectrum believed that the revolutionary government needed external assistance. Meanwhile in Washington the Eisenhower administration was calculating how best to keep the revolution from drifting further left and decided that under the circumstances the best option was to bolster the pragmatic party center. Thus, a decision made mutually in La Paz and Washington brought the United States into a complicated relationship with Bolivia's nationalist revolutionaries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Ricardo Rojo, *My Friend Ché* (27-28); John Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (100-109); and Martin Ebon, *Che: The Making of a Legend* (23-24).

<sup>6</sup> Malloy covers this process in *Unfinished Revolution* (Part III), as does Christopher Mitchell in *Legacy of Populism* (6, 49-54).

<sup>7</sup> Carlos Navia Ribera is particularly good at exploring the seemingly pragmatic basis of the Bolivian decision to seek aid from the United States (*Los Estados Unidos y la revolución nacional, entre el pragmatismo y el sometimiento*). For US calculations behind the decision to provide assistance see Lehman, "Revolutions and Attributions." Victor Andrade provides the Bolivian perspective in *My Missions for Revolutionary Bolivia*.

Malloy did not stress the US role in assuring the incompleteness of the Nationalist Revolution, but others have made the connection quite explicitly.<sup>8</sup> René Zavaleta acknowledged that nationalism could not shield Bolivia from the real world and its position of dependency in that world. The MNR submitted perhaps because it had to, perhaps because it thought it could control the relationship, but in the end, he argues, the result was not national independence but *entreguismo* (90-92). It is clear that the United States used its leverage as a key purchaser of Bolivia's tin, now with sufficient strategic tin reserves to manipulate the price, to force compliance with general US positions in the hemisphere. The MNR government even fell in line against another middle-class reform government that had carried out nationalization and land reform in Guatemala. When the price of tin dropped sharply in mid-1953, it gave the US considerable ability to push the regime toward a more favorable position on foreign capital. The Petroleum Code written in 1955 by US advisors was enacted without public debate and a year later a US imposed IMF team led by George Jackson Eder worked on a stabilization plan that in Eder's own words, "meant the repudiation, at least tacitly, of virtually everything that the Revolutionary Government had done over the previous four years" (87). Eder's remarkably candid memoir shows how he used threats to withhold US assistance and leave Bolivia economically isolated as ways to accomplish this end. It was an end that he accomplished with some success and the "Plan Eder" became a key factor frustrating Bolivia's National Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a now somewhat dated listing of these sources, see Lehman, "Bibliographical Essay" in *Bolivia and the United States: A Limited Partnership* (277-85). An incomplete listing of more recent books on US-Bolivian relations includes James Siekmeier, *Aid, Nationalism, and Inter-American Relations: Guatemala, Bolivia, and the United States, 1945-1961* (1999) and *The Bolivian Revolution and the United States* (2011); Glen Dorn, *The Truman Administration and Bolivia: Making the World Safe for Liberal Oligarchy* (2011); and Thomas Field, *From Development to Dictatorship* (2014).

<sup>9</sup> See George Jackson Eder, *Inflation and Development in Latin America: A Case History of Inflation and Stabilization in Bolivia*. These cases of US pressure are discussed in some detail by Laurence Whitehead, *The United States and Bolivia, A Case of Neocolonialism*; Stephen Zunes, "The United States and Bolivia: The Taming of a Revolution, 1952-1951;" Kevin Young, "Purging the Forces of Darkness: The United States, Monetary Stabilization, and the Containment of the Bolivian Revolution;" James Siekmeier, "Fighting Economic Nationalism;" Rebecca Scott, "Economic Aid and Imperialism in Bolivia;" and James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952-82* (83-103).

Eder's "reforms" widened and polarized the splits within the MNR. As protests on the left mounted, moderate and rightist party leaders turned to the US to assist its now reconstituted military. Soon after Eder arrived, a memo circulated the State Department suggesting a contingency plan to strengthen the military as a fallback, "should political chaos come to Bolivia through a collapse of, or an unfavorable reorientation of the MNR regime." Party leaders met with key military officers and US embassy officials and made plans to increase budget allocations for the armed forces just as the stabilization plan was drastically cutting government spending in other areas. By the late 1950s president Siles was using the reconstituted military against civilian protestors within his own party.<sup>10</sup>

Then in the early 1960s with Victor Paz Estenssoro back in the presidency in Bolivia and John Kennedy assuming office in the United States, it appeared that the original partnership, now buttressed by the Alliance for Progress, was ready to move toward closer coordination between the two nations and more genuine cooperation in the quest for development. But a recent book by Thomas Field, *From Development to Dictatorship*, observes that the developmental ideology behind the Alliance for Progress actually buttressed authoritarianism. "Far from abandoning [development] ideology in favor of authoritarian anti-Communism," Field argues, "the Kennedy administration's approach was authoritarian from the beginning."<sup>11</sup> The authoritarian drift of the final Paz Estenssoro years and then of the military government that followed, was not in conflict with the developmental goals of the Alliance or the interests of the United States, but was rather its concomitants. In short, there is a substantial body of historical research that supports the contention that the United States policy in Bolivia was hegemonic rather than supportive and that it played a significant role in keeping the revolution from being completed. As Laurence Whitehead has written, "an examination of neo-colonialism in Bolivia displays in particularly pure form the nature of this type of relationship." (4)

Sergio Almaraz Paz's devastating post-mortem in *Requiem para una República*, bears repeating:

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<sup>10</sup> See Lehman, *Bolivia and the United States* (148-52).

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas C. Field Jr. "Ideology as Strategy: Military-Led Modernization and the Origins of the Alliance for Progress in Bolivia" (149-53). His subsequent book, *From Development to Dictatorship*, supports this argument with detailed interviews and archival work in both Bolivia and the United States.

La revolución boliviana se empequeñeció, y con ella, sus hombres, sus proyectos, sus esperanzas. La política se realiza a base de concesiones, y entre éstas y la derrota no hay más que deferencias sutiles. ... En 1953 llegaron los primeros alimentos norteamericanos. En 1957 se impulsó el plan de estabilización monetaria. Más tarde se reorganizó el ejército. Se aceptaron asesores norteamericanos en los mecanismos más importantes del Estado. Se votó el Código del Petróleo. Una cosa predisponía a la otra. En este complejísimo juego, la entrega alternaba con la defensa. La lucidez no estaba ausente: “nos mantenemos firmes aquí para ceder allá; esto es más importante que aquello.” Estas valoraciones, productos de circunstancias dadas, tenían el inconveniente de escapar el propio control [...] la revolución no se derrumbó de un solo golpe, cayó poco a poco, pedazo a pedazo.” (17-19)

The military coup that brought down the Paz Estenssoro government in November 1964 was nothing more than “a shot fired into a corpse,” he notes. Zavaleta adds that in a country like Bolivia, the US ultimately preferred working directly with a strongman like new president, Air Force General René Barrientos Ortuño, rather than having to negotiate with Víctor Paz and his party (106). Field reports that during an interview much later with Larry Sternfield, the CIA Station Chief at the time, Sternfield boasted that until Barrientos death in 1969, “nothing happened in Bolivia without our involvement” (2014, 190). Support had turned into domination and Bolivia’s Long Revolution went into a forty-year hiatus, though it lingered unfulfilled beneath the surface of military and neoliberal governments.

For twelve years, between 1952 and the military coup of 1964, the United States simultaneously nurtured Bolivia’s moderate leaders and its reconstituted military so that together they could contain the popular forces that the revolution had unleashed—particularly Bolivia’s powerful and often radical labor movement. Finally, in 1964 the experiment ended, the military intervened and ruled the country for most of the next two decades. For the United States, its security interests had trumped any democratic or reform ideals it might have held, and as Field asserts, was supported by an authoritarian and hegemonic vision of development. However, the military repeatedly failed to reign in the popular democratic forces unleashed by the revolution and in multiple ways failed to bring either long-term political stability or sustained economic growth. By the early 1980s, the military’s legitimacy evaporated under a *junta* so deeply involved in the drug trade that it lost US support. For a second time in thirty years, the power and authority of the Bolivian military had largely collapsed, this time beneath its own corruption, veniality, and incompetence.

In 1982, Bolivia became one of the first countries in Latin America to return to civilian rule but it faced conditions of mounting indebtedness, a collapse in the prices of its key legitimate exports, and escalating inflationary pressures. By 1985, Central Bank credits covered 93% of Bolivia's domestic expenditures, the government defaulted on its international obligations, the IMF and World Bank cut the country adrift, and Bolivia's first elected civilian government since the 1960s collapsed.<sup>12</sup> The economic crisis opened the way for a second revolution, again led by Victor Paz Estenssoro—this one from above, reversing the economic nationalism he had earlier championed, and dismantling the state bureaucracy his first revolution helped create. Washington lauded the shift in economic policy and the emerging political stability. During two decades of military rule, the US had interfered far less in Bolivia's internal affairs, but now rapidly reengaged after Bolivia's return to constitutional government and its shift to neoliberal economic policy. With the Cold War ending, the US embassy, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Pentagon became central players in Bolivia for the next twenty years.

The first three promoted neoliberal reforms and by the IMF's own calculations, Bolivia's policies were more in line with Washington Consensus prescriptions than were those of any other country in the hemisphere.<sup>13</sup> In 1997, Hugo Banzer Suárez was elected to the position he had held *de facto* in the 1970s and pledged to also end Bolivia's role in the international cocaine market by the time his term ended in 2002. The Pentagon enthusiastically supported this pledge and in early 2001 Banzer announced that illegal coca production had decreased by 40,000 hectares (officially only 600 hectares remained) and that his government had substituted 115,000 hectares of alternative crops.<sup>14</sup> Two months later the new George W. Bush administration unveiled its Andean Regional Initiative. The program built upon and extended President Clinton's Plan Colombia by increasing economic and social assistance and by making the Initiative regional so as to reduce the spillover effects of

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<sup>12</sup> The price of petroleum fell from \$30/bbl in 1980 to \$10/bbl in 1985, tin from \$6.80/lb. to \$2.40/lb. overnight in mid-1985. See Lehman 1999 (191-98).

<sup>13</sup> Data reported by the International Monetary Fund, *Bolivia: Ex Post assessment of Longer-Term Program Engagement - Staff Report and Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion*, IMF Country Report 5.139 (April 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Andean Group Report (Published monthly by Latin American Newsletters) London, February 27, 2001, and US Department of State, "International Narcotics Control Strategy Report: South America - 2000."

“successes” in Colombia. At a mid-May briefing on the Initiative, administration officials set out three overarching objectives for the Andean region—the “three Ds:” democracy, development, and drug control.<sup>15</sup>

The following year, 2002, PBS ran a special on globalization, *Commanding Heights*, which featured Bolivia as an example of how democracy, when coupled with “Washington Consensus” neoliberal policies of privatization, trade liberalization, and market reforms, could result in stable development. By then Bolivia had become something of a showcase of Washington Consensus orthodoxy; democracy seemed well-established, inflation was low, growth was solid—if unspectacular, and drug production was down. But in reality, as the *Commanding Heights* program aired, the Bolivian model was unraveling and its second revolution also remained uncompleted.<sup>16</sup> The study implemented by the Vicepresidencia de Bolivia, *Hegemonía territorial fallida* (hereafter referred to as the “Study”) helps explain the US role in this process.

If US objectives were the 3-Ds (democracy, development, and drug control), there were three key instruments to achieve those objectives: 1) neoliberal economic policies largely determined in Washington; 2) a form of brokered democracy (*democracia pactada*) under which the United States became involved in the selection of Bolivia’s presidents, and 3) heavy US insertion into Bolivia’s security apparatus in the war against drugs. According to the Study, decision-making and even territorial control increasingly slipped from Bolivia’s hands during the two decades from 1985 to 2005. All three policies were pursued in ways that were more in line with US than Bolivian interests, though US officials seemed to assume the two were synonymous (Tellería Escobar 65-66). Much of the economic assistance the US provided went to highly paid outside advisors or remained in the United States. The funds that actually made it to Bolivia, the Study charges, were used to subsidize and influence officials who became more responsive to US concerns—stabilization, opening of the economy, fighting drugs, or protecting US investments—than to Bolivia’s own policy priorities (Tellería Escobar 66-73). US assistance to the military and police remained steady through the two decades, but economic and social assistance fluctuated and was used as a carrot and a stick in response to Bolivia’s perceived cooperation with US objectives. As the

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<sup>15</sup> Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report RL31016. *Andean Regional Initiative (ARI): FY2002 Assistance for Colombia and Neighbors*, by K. Larry Storrs and Nina M. Serafino. WikiLeaks Document Release.

<sup>16</sup> See Robert R. Barr, “Bolivia: Another Uncompleted Revolution.”

country's economy lagged and then began to shrink at the turn of the millennium, it became clear that economic assistance under neoliberal policies had not achieved its stated goals, leading the Study to assert that, "two decades of neoliberal reforms had only served to enhance US hegemony and to assist in the plundering Bolivia's resources." (Tellería Escobar 99-107. My translation)

*Democracia pactada* appeared during the political and economic crisis of the mid-1980s when US pressure brought the MNR and Victor Paz Estenssoro into a brokered agreement with their chief political rivals, *Acción Democrática* and, its head, former military dictator Hugo Banzer Suárez. *Democracia pactada* was based on such power-sharing agreements among Bolivia's leading parties and became increasingly undemocratic, elitist, and technocratic. Bolivians showed their ambivalence in each election of the period by repudiating the party in power—a sign of their growing unhappiness—then reconfirming the model by voting for candidates who would reconstruct a new pact and continue neoliberal policies (Tellería Escobar 109-11).<sup>17</sup> The Study charges that *democracia pactada* enhanced the political role of the United States in the selection of presidents while USAID's attempts to "encourage democracy," responded more to US interests than to the furthering of democratic self-rule. Particularly galling to many Bolivians was US insistence on an extradition agreement and its refusal to grant visas to certain Bolivians considered tainted by the narcotics trade while insisting on impunity and a *Convenio de Inmunidad* for its own personnel in Bolivia. The Study ends this section with a powerful indictment of US intervention and of the servitude of the neoliberal governments that allowed it.

El gobierno de Estados Unidos, en la construcción de un sistema político aliado y proclive a la descapitalización de nuestras empresas, al saqueo de los recursos naturales y al vaciamiento de la soberanía nacional erosionó el sistema político democrático y su sistema de partidos a partir de su influencia y dominio en la conformación de coaliciones de gobierno poco legítimas que, con el tiempo, socavaron al sistema mismo hasta llegar a una profunda crisis que comprometió su propia institucionalidad. (Tellería Escobar 140. Background on pages 109-40)

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<sup>17</sup> Eduardo Gamarra has discussed these party pacts. The "pact system" allowed presidents since Paz Estenssoro to govern, even though all were elected by a minority of the popular vote, essentially by forming shifting alliances among the MNR, the MIR, and the ADN. See Gamarra, "The Construction of Bolivia's Multiparty System" (289-91).

The security strategy of the United States was yet another hegemonic tool according to the Study. The battle against narcotics became a low-intensity war in which the United States and key US agencies like the DEA increasingly took the initiative while displaying a basic lack of trust in Bolivians and their own internal processes. A key bone of contention for Bolivians was Presidential Certification which allowed the US president each year to score their country on the basis of its compliance with US drug policies; a far from transparent process that often seemed more politically motivated than rooted in solid data. The US sugar daddy led Bolivia's security forces to compete for favors, resources, and invitations to attend US military training facilities, all means by which the US subtly insinuated its influence into Bolivia's security apparatus. All the while, the US seemed ever further from winning its war on drugs, leading the Study to charge that its purpose had always been to control Bolivia, not drugs. "US policy developed a dependency that was total and absolute; a systematic process that deinstitutionalized Bolivia's Armed Forces and Police with all the implications that held for the construction of a viable, sovereign, popularly-supported democracy." (Tellería Escobar 140. Background on pages 109-40. My translation)

Support for this assessment comes from former US president Jimmy Carter who after a visit to Bolivia in late 2003, noted in his "Bolivia Trip Report" that "it was interesting" that all political leaders to whom he spoke "took for granted the deep involvement of the United States in the internal political affairs of Bolivia;" an observation not that different from CIA station-chief Sternfield's own observation in the late 1960s. Carter's visit came immediately following the 2003 Gas War and the former US president understood there was a connection between his observation and the explosion of popular fury that had just occurred. Neoliberal economic policy had failed to bring enough economic growth to offset the political, economic, and social disruptions it had created; the political process had become closed and technocratic rather than open and participatory; and security institutions that were created to defend state sovereignty had been compromised by a powerful and wealthy outside patron, then turned back against Bolivia's own people during the Gas War. A fundamental problem had been that while US officials identified their "three Ds" in one order—democracy, development, and drug control—actual policies reversed those priorities. Drug control almost always came first, development assistance was made conditional on effective drug control measures and on the degree it could further neoliberal objectives, and too often the advancement of democracy—beyond the technical matter of holding regular elections—

received little more than lip-service in Washington or from the Embassy in La Paz Estenssoro. In fact, US policy thwarted both democracy and development by its heavy-handed insertion into Bolivia's affairs.<sup>18</sup>

The Study ascribes these undeniable dynamics and outcomes to the hegemonic designs of the United States. But imputing cynical hegemonic clarity to US policy misses the fact that US policy is neither that clear nor that cynical. US policy results from a cumbersome bureaucratic process checked by legislative oversight that interjects local interests and political grandstanding. It is the product of competing interests within a Smithian marketplace and a pluralistic Madisonian state and combines short-term elements of Realpolitik and parochial interests with undergirding cultural continuities of liberal universalism, and arrogance. It goes through recurring cycles of interventionism in the belief that "America is the indispensable nation," followed by retreat into angry "America First" defensive isolationism when its interventions create inevitable "blow-back."

I have argued elsewhere that the United States shows two faces to the world, one that of a self-interested great power (the United States) and the other of a cultural hegemon (America.) The United States does not consider itself imperialistic, but possesses a great deal of power, which it exerts far beyond its borders with an imperial logic as old as Thucydides: "the strong do what they have the power to do" (*The Melian Dialogue*). The people of the United States have commandeered the name "America" from their hemispheric neighbors, illustrating the universalist assumptions of their *Weltanschauung*. The American *Weltanschauung* is built on dreams, hopes, myths, and a missionary ideology and William Appleman Williams has noted that these ideals do not merely obfuscate, validate, or sanction "America's" *real* objectives but are themselves a real "American" objective—to bring liberal capitalist order to the world. "America" believes in itself and its place in history and seeks to export the benefits of its system. Unacknowledged imperialism, a hegemony based on liberal universalism, national interest, the various more parochial interests of US citizens and interest groups, the ideals, hubris, and intermittent paranoid terrors of "America" all exist within a complicated policy-

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<sup>18</sup> This is the case I made in "¿Un 'remedio que mata'?' las políticas de Estados Unidos y el desafío de Bolivia," published in 2010. See also US General Accounting Office Reports on Bolivia, which clearly recognized the contradicting features and failures of US policy. The International Crisis Group, (an independent, non-profit organization based in Brussels), noted that the State Department "has a difficult time disentangling what is democracy assistance and what is counter-narcotics-related funding." (*Latin America Report* 14-15).

making framework that muddles US foreign policy and complicates all attempts to analyze it. (Lehman 1999, ix-xiv)

I have been following Bolivia's story closely for almost forty-five years, fascinated by the country's highly complicated and evolving relationship with my own. When I wrote a volume for the "America and the Americas" series in the late 1990s, I was struck by repeating cycles in what I argued was essentially a clientelistic relationship. I argued that Bolivia, then one of the poorest and most politically unstable countries in the hemisphere, would face a crisis and seek assistance from the hemisphere's most wealthy and powerful patron—the US. The US, for its own reasons, would provide assistance along with heavy doses of US "know-how," advice, and direction. Such impositions would increase Bolivia's dependency, quickly its resentment, and eventually its resistance. The resistance inevitably fed US frustration until, finally, Washington would either withdraw or reduce assistance, thus completing the cycle. Driving the cycles on the US side were the contradictions between its conservative self-interest as a regional hegemon and its more idealistic faith in the positive effect its culture, ideas, system, and know-how would have on a country like Bolivia. For Bolivians, an awareness of their country's weakness and need for assistance has always been countered by strong nationalist pride and resentment at dependency. All of this, I argued, resulted in a "limited partnership," in which ostensibly friendly cooperation has persistently been accompanied by conflict and antipathy.

The first cycle began after World War I when US investments and Bolivia's debt problems led to heavy US insertion into Bolivia's banking and financial systems followed by abandonment when depression hit the United States. A second cycle played out around World War II (1938-1952) when the United States needed a strong and friendly hemispheric "good neighbor" who would provide it a secure "back yard" and essential war materials. US interest and intervention in Bolivia grew significantly during the war, as did its commitments to Bolivia's economic and political development. But after the war, when normal markets were restored and developing Cold War interests refocused US attention, it backed away from those wartime commitments, blaming Bolivia's backwardness and government corruption for the lack of results to that point. That cycle ended in the tin-contract dispute of 1951-1952 and the April 1952 revolution. The third cycle (1953-1964) began with the US decision to support the revolutionary MNR government while also guiding it down a path consistent with US values and interests. That cycle played out in mutual frustration undermining the MNR and leading US officials to look to Bolivia's

military to maintain non-Communist order and capitalist development in Bolivia following Cuba. A two-decade military interregnum (1964-1982) was in many ways a fourth cycle as US faith in the ability of the Bolivian military to maintain either non-Communist order or foster capitalist development eroded due to a combination of factors: a president (Carter) who made democratization and human rights a priority; the rise in the early 1980s of a military government deeply involved in the drug trade; and an economic crisis fed by debt and by the collapsing prices for Bolivia's two key (legitimate) exports that rapidly escalated by the mid-1980s. Cycle five (1985-2003) began with the return of the MNR and of Víctor Paz Estenssoro as its democratically elected, civilian president in 1985. That cycle was in mid-course when I wrote *Bolivia and the United States: A Limited Partnership* in the late 1990s and came to an abrupt and definitive end with the Gas War and the election of Evo Morales.

The end of the third cycle (1953-1964) prompted Laurence Whitehead to make his observation that US policies in Bolivia during that period had become "a particularly pure form of neocolonialism" (4) and the end of the fifth cycle (1985-2003) led to Jimmy Carter's surprised observation of the "matter-of-fact way that Bolivian leaders referred to deep US involvement in the internal affairs of their country." But that cycle ended not with another military coup that confirmed an authoritarian path to development, favored by the United States, but instead with the election of a president who has redefined relations with the United States and has pursued a self-proclaimed "socialist," authentically Bolivian, and pro-Indigenous path to change.

That *dénouement* has convinced me that behind the cyclical features I had observed in my study for the "America and Americas" series is a secular process that is far more creative. The election of Morales marks two distinct turning points in the advancing story—the rise and empowerment of Bolivia's popular (indigenous, mestizo and cholo) majority and Bolivia's new willingness and unprecedented ability to find its own economic and policy paths. These achievements were foreshadowed in the slogan of the Nationalist Revolution: "*tierras al indio y minas al estado*," but the underlying quest for inclusion and autonomy remained uncompleted when that MNR fell in 1964. The goal of empowering the popular majority was limited by the lingering attitudes, assumptions, and prejudices of the revolution's Hispanized, middle class leaders and the quest for Bolivian autonomy by deep initial dependency on tin, the need to market nationalized tin, the seeming necessity of external assistance to escape that dependency, and the reality of US Cold War hegemony in the region. But though the path from 1952 to 2005 was

circuitous, Bolivia took its first steps down that path with the 1952 Nationalist Revolution.

In 1952, MNR leaders were dealt a bad hand and though they did not play that hand perfectly, and while their commitment to radical change was limited and their interest in preserving their own power perhaps a primary consideration, they successfully enlisted the assistance of a powerful outside patron who they believed could help them consolidate revolutionary gains and retain control of their revolution. Their commonsensical understanding was that power matters and is unequally distributed, placing limitations on those who possess little of it. Dependency studies imply that the choice confronting Latin American states during the Cold War era was either to break from the Center through revolution, or to choose some form of dependent association. Most *dependentista* scholars argued the merits of breaking away, but Juan Carlos Puig and Carlos Escudé, among others, saw the value of dependent association as a way to link US power and resources to projects of national consolidation and development. This is essentially the position taken by all members of the Bolivian ruling coalition—including labor leader Juan Lechín—after the revolution. US hegemony in the hemisphere in 1952 was nearly unassailable and to challenge it was dangerous, as the counter-case of Guatemala was illustrating at that very time. On the other hand, to seek assistance from the United States brought access to multilateral organizations, international lending and commerce, external security assistance, and—for the pragmatic moderates who held key positions—was a way to check the domestic influence of the labor-left.

In 1952, Bolivia's strategic importance to the United States was limited. Its tin, quinine, and rubber, in demand during the war, were no longer needed. But with Bolivia located in the heart of South America, the United States worried about the hemispheric implications of Bolivia's unrest.<sup>19</sup> Paz Estenssoro astutely played on US fear that Bolivia's revolutionary and nationalist fevers might prove contagious while he highlighted the limited

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<sup>19</sup> There were also those like President Eisenhower's brother, Milton, sent on a special mission to Bolivia, and Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, John Moors Cabot, who believed—in light of simultaneous and deeply contrasting US policies in Guatemala—that the United States could demonstrate in Bolivia that it was opposed to communism and not to reform. G. Earl Sanders explores this, more positive impulse behind US assistance, in "The Quiet Experiment in American Diplomacy: An Interpretative Essay on United States Aid to the Bolivian Revolution" (25-49). It is an argument more recently made as well by Oliver Murphey in "The USA's Reaction to the Bolivian Revolution of 1952."

objectives of his revolution so long as moderate pragmatists, like himself, remained in power. The labor-left wing of the party served as a useful foil in these negotiations because it represented the direction the revolution would likely take if Paz Estenssoro did not continue to hold power and he negotiated shrewdly and effectively with the regional hegemon. The MNR consolidated its revolution, nationalized the mines, redistributed land, and held onto power for 12 years. But since hegemony is real, so were the costs and eventually Paz Estenssoro lost control of his revolution and of power itself.

Then in 1985 facing a new but very different crisis, Paz and the MNR renewed this strategy. The circumstances were different, Bolivia's economy was in free fall, inflation had reached 24,000 percent and if it were to continue on its current course for another 20 days, would become the highest ever experienced by any nation in history. Bolivia had just defaulted on its international obligations and the previous president had been forced to resign. Elections to replace him were muddled, providing Paz Estenssoro no clear mandate. Nonetheless, he knew he had to act. "Either we have the moral courage to make the sacrifices necessary to put in place a radical new policy," he told his fellow citizens after taking office, "or quite simply, Bolivia will die." (Mesa Gisbert 174). He adopted a radical shock therapy that stabilized the *peso*, slashed government spending, opened Bolivia's economy to market disciplines and set the course for two decades of neoliberal policy.

The imprint of Víctor Paz Estenssoro on Bolivia's political history is undeniable, but its exact nature will long be debated by historians; particularly his tendency through four administrations to forge close, clientelist ties to the United States. As a pragmatic and essentially a twentieth-century liberal nationalist, Paz Estenssoro accepted Bolivia's dependency and worked to turn it to advantage: manipulating as well as being manipulated, bargaining shrewdly, and utilizing the "weapons of the weak" to successfully link the resources and influence of the United States to policies he favored all along. But the weapons of the weak are nonetheless the products of weakness and, as the Study clearly demonstrates, because hegemony remains hegemony, again the costs were real. US policy in Bolivia after 1985 was particularly ham-handed, revealing what Peter Beinart in *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris* calls the "hubris of dominance." In the aftermath of the Cold War, from 1985 until 2005, the US exerted unprecedented power in what its enthusiasts increasingly saw as a unipolar world and America assumed an "end of history" conceit. Icarus flew high and "America's" distinctive and ugly blend

of idealism and arrogance was on particular display until exposed in places as distant and distinct as Iraq and Bolivia.<sup>20</sup>

Dependency purists and foreign policy realists share a belief that sovereignty is unitary—a nation either has it or not and if not, is a colony rather than a state. However, David Lake and others argue that sovereignty is always a “negotiated relationship that states hold in different degrees in different issue areas at different times” (175). This opens dependent association to analysis and Arlene Tickner has recently argued that, when a state chooses a dependent association with the United States, the benefits provided by that association depend in part on the ability of the dependent state to preserve enough autonomy to influence decision-making in the US.<sup>21</sup> This is what Paz Estenssoro tried to do in 1952 and again in 1985 though in both cases the ability of Bolivia to influence decision-making in Washington deteriorated with time. Evo Morales has recalibrated the relationship stressing that respect for Bolivia’s autonomy is essential to any association with the US. The final results are not yet clear.

As noted before, Bolivia’s Long Revolution is not over; it has, just moved to another phase. Still, the fact that, unlike the 1953-1964 cycle, the 1985-2005 cycle ended not with a military coup but instead with the election of an authentically nationalist and indigenous social activist illustrates all that has changed. Evo Morales’ election was the product of many factors, but among them was a process set in motion by the 1952 revolution as well as by the authentic popular reaction to two decades of particularly virulent US intervention and “American” hubris. US policy is far from the only, the determinative, or even the most influential factor shaping Bolivia’s Long Revolution, but its impact on that long process has been significant, if patchy and paradoxical. The reality of US power; the influence of its wealth; the appeal and repulsion of its culture—its movies, its music, its materialistic values; the impact of its tin policies and its decision to aid Bolivia’s National Revolution after 1952; the impositions that accompanied that assistance including monetary stabilization and rebuilding the military; US support for Bolivia’s

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<sup>20</sup> See Peter Beinart, *The Icarus Syndrome: A History of American Hubris*, particularly Part III, “The Hubris of Dominance” (243-390).

<sup>21</sup> I owe many of the insights in the two preceding paragraphs to the introduction of an unpublished paper by Eric Hershberg and Sebastian Bitar, “North-South Relations in the Western Hemisphere: The Shifting Distribution of Sovereignty in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” delivered at the Middle Atlantic Conference of Latin American Studies at American University, March 22-24, 2012.

suitably anti-communist military regimes from 1964-1982; Carter's human rights policies; Reagan's anti-Communism; George H.W. Bush's drug war; post-Cold War support of liberal democracies while pushing the fundamentals of neoliberal Washington consensus economic policies; the heavy insertion of US agencies and personnel into Bolivia; all these and more played significant if only occasionally the anticipated roles in Bolivia's Long Revolution.

By definition, revolutions disturb the *status quo* and by design and by their inevitably unplanned trajectories both destroy and create. The US has played too important a role in Bolivia since 1952 not to have had a hand in both the destruction and the creation. The *status quo* in Bolivia has been disturbed in ways that US officials in Washington helped guide, but more often in ways they neither anticipated nor wanted. Agents in Bolivia, both leaders and *el pueblo*, have been dependent upon and occasionally dominated by the United States, but they have also successfully disturbed, destroyed, and created beneath its watchful hegemony. As in war, the trajectory of a revolution, particularly a long one, is hard to plan or predict though in retrospect it is possible to discern patterns and turning points that may have been hard to see at the time. It is the job of the historian to look for those patterns and turning points and that is the history that interests me now: the complex legacy of a relationship between two distant and very different nations and how that relationship directly and indirectly affected the trajectory of Bolivia's Long Revolution.

But *Hegemonía territorial fallida* documents that US interventions in Bolivia's internal affairs continue since the election of Morales. The US has reduced assistance and has found multiple ways to irritate and harass the Morales government: visa bans, placing Bolivian officials on "terrorist watch lists," convincing European nations to withdraw permissions for Evo's official plane to enter their air space on the erroneous tip that Edward Snowden was aboard, etc. The US has decertified Bolivia for lack of cooperation in the perennial war on drugs despite conflicting data from the UN and Bolivia's own assessments. Bolivia has been placed on the terrorist watch list due more to lack of cooperation than to any credible terrorist threat emanating from the Andean country. Most seriously, the Study charges that the US Embassy plotted with separatists in Santa Cruz in what is now known as the "*golpe cívico prefectural*." Those charges led to Ambassador Philip Goldberg being declared *persona non grata* and expelled from the country in late 2008. The two countries have not had formal ambassadorial-level relations since. (Tellería Escobar 208-21 and 235-44)

The Morales government has responded to such provocations with provocations of its own: ousting the DEA, abandoning the Rio Pact, and

charging the Embassy with spying and supporting terrorist acts. On May 1, 2013, Evo expelled USAID from Bolivia on charges that it worked to strengthen the opposition, intervened in the election process, and sought to alienate Indigenous communities from the Morales government (Tellería Escobar 241-45). Relations with the US have been tense, but the Study observes that as Bolivia's autonomy has grown, so has its economy. Assistance from the United States is down, but trade with the US is up. Since Bolivia restored national control of gas sales, the economy has grown, levels of poverty are down, and Bolivia has found alternative trading partners and sources of support (Tellería Escobar 169-75). One observer noted in 2011 that "even Morales's critics agree that his administration has achieved a more dignified and autonomous position relative to the US than has any prior Bolivian government." (Achtenberg)

From that position of strength, Bolivian officials met with officials of the Obama administration in November of 2011 to work on ways to restore relations. The result was an eleven-page Framework Agreement that pledged US respect for Bolivia's sovereignty and Bolivian collaboration in projects of mutual interest.<sup>22</sup> Yet the "High-Level Bolivia-US Joint Commission created by the agreement met only once and in May 2013, the Morales government expelled USAID from Bolivia after its efforts in the war against drugs again came under attack in Washington and Secretary of State John Kerry made an infelicitous reference to the region as the US "backyard."

An insightful analysis of the Framework Agreement by Jonas Wolff argues that while the two countries entered a common negotiating space when they worked out the agreement, their underlying normative and ideological assumptions were quite different (2-3). Bolivia's "emphasis on state sovereignty and mutual respect based on an egalitarian understanding of inter-state relations" is now reinforced by a growing sense in governmental and certain intellectual circles that the West, its liberal assumptions that allow powerful elites to capture the bulk of the benefits, and its unsustainable demands on the *Pachamama*, provide no attractive or even viable pathway to

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<sup>22</sup> See Convenio Marco de Relaciones Bilaterales de Mutuo Respeto y Colaboración entre el Gobierno del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia y el Gobierno de los Estados Unidos de América, signed November 7, 2011. Discussion of the agreement can be found in Tellería Escobar (220-21).

the future.<sup>23</sup> Wolff notes that such views came up against a US normative “emphasis on common obligations and universal individual rights” informed by continuing ideological assumptions rooted in a “non-egalitarian, if implicit notion of liberal hegemony.” Wolff notes: “The US, at least implicitly, claimed a certain right to interfere, based on [its] notion of universal norms and established international practices” (12-13). In other words, US pledges to treat Bolivia as a sovereign and equal state were limited by ongoing expectations rooted in the asymmetries of power and American liberal hegemony. Bolivian agreements to collaborate on projects of mutual interest no longer included acquiescence to US definitions of “mutual interest,” or an underlying faith in liberal universalism.

US Embassy documents released by WikiLeaks and made available on the Vicepresidencia’s web page reveal the enduring power of assumptions rooted in the American *Weltanschauung* and buttressed by US power. Soon after Morales was elected, US Ambassador David Greenlee advised the State Department that the US should assume “a posture of passivity [...] avoiding an excessive eagerness to engage.” He believed this would “send the message that they need to come to us, and not vice-versa.” He went on: “Because the GOB depends on us more than they realize, the posture of the Embassy would be to take one step backwards, let them stumble so they understand our importance, and then give them an opportunity to request our assistance.” The memo includes various “sticks” that could be employed in the meantime to bring this continuing dependency on the US home to the new president. (WikiLeaks Cablegate 2006a)

The lingering hold of American liberal universalism comes into focus in a memo sent two months later titled, “Bolivia, the Attraction of Dreams over Reality.” “If every country relies on myths and dreams,” the memo begins, “Bolivia’s dependence [on them] crosses a critical threshold, often blinding political leaders to practical realities and to the pragmatic steps best suited to confront them.” The cable goes on to note that among the “fashionable illusions” were that “renewed state-centric economic policies will bring more Bolivians a better life; that non-U.S. investment and assistance are better attuned to Bolivia’s needs; and that the invocation of words like ‘sovereignty’ and ‘dignity’ will dispel the evil spirits of globalization.” Noting that reliance on such “dreams” is dangerous and leads to a “widening divide

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the provocative work of Rafael Bautista on decolonizing geopolitics: *Del Mito del Desarrollo al Horizonte del Suma Qamaña* (2012); *La Geopolítica y el Derecho al Mar* (2013); *La Descolonización de la Política* (2014); and *Reflexiones Descoloniales* (2014).

between myth and reality,” the writer of the cable predicted that the Morales’ government, “whose gift for dreaming is vast but whose handle on practical matters and whose administrative capabilities seem tenuous at best,” is bound to fall victim to the “turbulent and anxious expectations” of its own followers.

Yet a few months later, the Embassy belatedly acknowledged its own attraction “to dreams over reality.” A memo titled “Economic Roots of Bolivia’s Social Revolution” acknowledged that two decades of neoliberal policies heavily pushed by the United States had not led to growth, stability, or increased opportunity, but had instead “fed the growing political disaffection of Bolivia’s majority poor [and] helped fuel the country’s rolling *social revolution*.” “Notwithstanding the promises of politicians,” the memo continued, poverty rates remained “largely impervious to the liberal reforms of the late 80s and 90s.” Even in the best of those years, growth did little more than keep up with population growth and its distribution became increasingly skewed. Then, when regional recession hit in 1999, poverty rates and unemployment rose to levels that were socially and politically explosive.<sup>24</sup> Despite these acknowledgments, however, the writer again predicts that Evo’s reforms were unsustainable:

While President Morales’ populist promises may represent more a retreat of a failed “old” approach than a genuinely “new” one, they will probably continue to buy him popular support in the short term, in part because the traditional political order is seen as having failed so absolutely. That said, it is hard to see how the current government will avoid a collision with the same stubborn economic obstacles that proved so difficult for its predecessors. When that happens, more popular disappointment and frustration, and also renewed social and political turmoil, will certainly follow. (WikiLeaks Cablegate 2006c)

Yet for the next eight years Bolivia had one of the strongest growth rates in the hemisphere, poverty rates declined, wealth was better distributed, the country’s macroeconomic indicators were on a stronger footing than they had

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<sup>24</sup> See the following WikiLeaks cables: “Bolivia: The Attraction of Dreams over Reality” (April 7, 2006) and “Economic Roots of Bolivia Social Revolution” (May 17, 2006). See also Federico Fuentes, “WikiLeaks Cables on Bolivia: US embassy admits ‘economic roots of social revolution’” (2011). Fuentes has been a key researcher into the WikiLeaks cables concerning Bolivia, but also important is Martín Sivak’s article “Evo Morales through the Prism of WikiLeaks (2011).

been for a long time, and the Morales government successfully outmaneuvered strong domestic opponents.<sup>25</sup> During that same period, the United States suffered reversals that seemed to undermine its *Weltanschauung* and expose the pretensions of its power.

But sovereignty is always a “negotiated relationship that states hold in different degrees in different issue areas at different times” (Lake 175), and now, ten years into the Morales revolution, with gas revenues in sharp decline, Bolivia’s Venezuelan ally in turmoil, its economy slowing, and opposition to Evo’s *continuisimo* building, the prediction in the 2006 memo might yet be prescient, meaning that once again Bolivia’s Long Revolution could be, at least temporarily, stalled. But if recent foreign policy reversals and the 2016 election cycle in the US reveal anything, it is that US power and American assumptions rooted in liberal universalism are also in crisis. Bolivian philosopher Rafael Bautista presents the challenge in his paper for the Latin American Studies Association meeting in New York this year:

Si las fuerzas democráticas de Norteamérica logran equilibrar las relaciones de poder en Washington y se abren a un nuevo tipo de relacionamiento con Latinoamérica, entonces tendrán los insumos para, de modo mancomunado, ya no más aislado, ingresar a la nueva cartografía multipolar en condiciones de liderar el sentido de la transición global. (Bautista 2016)

This is the challenge facing the United States and is, in a sense, brought into focus by its role in Bolivia’s Long Revolution. It is perhaps with the dispelling of dreams and illusions on all sides that real dialogue can finally begin but, due to its historical strength and hegemonic position, that process has to start with the United States.

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<sup>25</sup> See Jake Johnston and Stephan Lefebvre, “Bolivia’s Economy under Evo in 10 Graphs” (2014).

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