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## Venezuela: None of Our Business

On January 23, the President of Venezuela's National Assembly, Juan Guaido, was sworn in as "interim president." In what was presumably a pre-coordinated move, Guaido's administration was quickly recognized by the governments of the United States, Canada, and several countries in Latin America.

Guaido's claim rests on a provision in Venezuela's constitution which allows him to assume the office should it become vacant. The Assembly says that it is. Nicolas Maduro, elected to a second term as president in 2018, begs to differ. A number of countries, including Russia and China, continue to recognize his government.

All of which seems either remarkably simple or incredibly complicated, depending on who you ask and which side they're on. From an American who's on neither side, like me, it comes down to two simple facts:

First, Venezuela's government does not and never has represented any kind of military threat to the United States. It has never invaded the United States. It has never attacked the United States. It has never threatened to do either, nor does it seem to be well-equipped to do so if it desired to.

Secondly, Venezuela is not and never has been either a state or territory of the United States. It achieved independence from Spain in 1821 as part of the Republic of Gran Colombia, and became a completely independent nation in 1830.

Taken together, these two facts lead inexorably to one conclusion:

How Venezuelans choose to conduct their political affairs never has been and is not now the business of the US government. One need support neither Maduro nor Guaido to reach

this conclusion. It's simply not up to Donald Trump, Mike Pence, Marco Rubio, or any other American politician to run Venezuela.

Unfortunately, US administrations since the 1950s seem to have lost or mis-filed the above memo. Usually in the name of anti-communism, though in reality mostly for the benefit of American oil companies, the US has continuously intervened to ensure "friendly" regimes in Caracas.

That began to backfire in 1998 with the election of Maduro's predecessor and mentor, Hugo Chavez. Chavez cultivated closer relations with communist (Cuba and China) and former communist (Russia) countries, while implementing socialist economic programs.

Two decades later, Venezuela is an economic and humanitarian wreck. American politicians blame Chavez/Maduro and socialism for the country's decline. Maduro and his supporters blame US sanctions and secret support for the opposition.

Both sides are right, but on only one of those claims is the US rightfully positioned to act. It should lift all economic sanctions on Venezuela, withdraw diplomatic recognition of any claimant, close its embassy, and leave a note on the door: "Work this out yourselves; when you have, let us know if you'd like to resume relations."