

Democracy and Democracy Promotion as International Norms

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Since September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush has pledged rhetorically to make the promotion of democracy abroad a central objective of American foreign policy. All of his major foreign policy speeches after September have emphasized the moral and strategic imperatives for advancing freedom around the world. In parallel to Bush's new stated commitment to promoting democracy, the United States has become less liked and less admired by both governments and societies around the world. Bush's most important foreign policy initiative—the invasion of Iraq—is extremely unpopular in both democratic and non-democratic states. It is difficult to identify a time in American history when the United States has suffered such a low international standing.

This correlation between Bush's rhetoric about democracy promotion and America's unpopularity around the world has created a false impression that the governments and people of the world do not support the ideas of democracy or foreign policies that might advance these ideas. In Europe, foreign policy elites equate presidential statements about democracy and human rights as evidence of a new virulent form of American imperialism. In Iran, officials argue that Bush's rhetoric about democracy camouflages American ulterior motives of seizing Iraqi oil. In China, government leaders cite American unilateralism and inattention to world public opinion as evidence that United States has no real commitment to advancing democratic practices. Animated by this correlation between democracy promotion rhetoric and America's unpopularity around the world, many American commentators have reached a similar conclusion. To become more respected abroad and more effective in defending American national interests, so these critics argue, the United States must abandon the *ideological* mission of democracy promotion, both in Iraq and throughout the world, and instead follow a more *pragmatic, realist* foreign policy. As Dimitri Simes has argued, "Pursuit of a universal utopia is damaging American interests."¹

¹ Dimitri Simes, "America's Imperial Dilemma," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (November/December 2003) p. 95. See also George Will, "A Lethal Idea Still Lives," *Newsweek*, ???; Anthony Cordesman, "US Policy in Iraq: A "Realist" Approach to its Challenges and Opportunities," working paper, Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 6, 2004.

This interpretation of the relationship between American foreign policy and the status of democratic values in international society is misleading. First, democracy as an international norm is stronger today than ever before. As a system of government, democracy as an ideal type faces few serious competitors. As a value, democracy has near universal appeal among people from every ethnic group, practicing every religion, in every region of the world.

Second, even democracy promotion as a goal of foreign policy has more acceptance today than ever before. Norms protecting the sovereignty of states still trump the norms protecting the rights of individuals, but the balance is shifting. The United States, especially in the last century, has played a pivotal role in making the advance of democratic values a legitimate foreign policy objective. Today, however, the United States no longer holds a monopoly on the democracy promotion business, a sign that this policy is not just an American national interest (or camouflage for other American national interests), but an international norm embraced by other states, transnational organizations, and international networks.

The existence of norms does not mean that they are always followed. Billions of people for centuries have recognized the normative wisdom of the Ten Commandments, but the murder, adultery, and theft still occur. Nonetheless, the violation of norms does not prove that normative frameworks have no meaning or influence. Even at a time when American power and preaching is loathed by many around the world, what is most striking about the current international system is how universal the norm of democracy has become. Democracy promotion, even when embraced (and thereby, according to many, tainted) by the most powerful country in the international system, has also become an international norm.

Democracy as the Best System of Government

In *On Democracy*, Robert Dahl succinctly summarized the advantages of democracy as a system of government:²

1. Democracy helps to prevent rule by cruel and vicious autocrats.,
2. Democracy guarantees its citizens a number of fundamental rights that non-democratic systems do not, and cannot, grant.
3. Democracy insures its citizens a broader range of personal freedom than any feasible alternative to it.
4. Democracy helps people to protect their own fundamental interests.
5. Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for person to exercise the freedom of self-determination – that is to live under laws of their own choosing.
6. Only a democratic government can provide a maximum opportunity for exercising moral responsibility.
7. Democracy fosters human development more fully than any feasible alternative.

² Robert Dahl, *On Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

8. Only a democratic government can foster a relatively high degree of political equality.
9. Modern representative democracies do not fight one another
10. Countries with democratic governments tend to be more prosperous than countries with nondemocratic governments.

For most of modern history, Dahl's claims would have invoked heated debate. For millennia, monarchs, emperors, mullahs, and kings ruled on the (alleged) authority from God. With the Almighty on their side, they claimed legitimacy over alternative methods of government. In pockets of the world, these kinds of autocrats still remain, but God's blessing is no longer a sufficient justification for their tenure in power. Invoking a higher being must be supplemented with other cultural or developmental arguments about why democracy is in inappropriate or premature.

In the last century, communist and fascist ideologues crafted new alternative political models to democracy. When these ideologues or their patrons seized control of powerful states such as Germany and Russia, a normative debate about democracy and its alternatives accompanied the power struggle between world's superpowers. The ideological contest between communism and democracy was especially competitive, since the Soviet economic model of state ownership and fixed prices produced growth rates on par or higher than capitalist economies for several decades. Eventually, however, command economies faltered, opponents to communist dictatorship strengthened, and the Soviet empire collapsed. New variants of autocracy have rooted in several states that emerged from the USSR's dissolution while autocrats still calling their regimes communist remain in China and Vietnam. Yet, in all of these dictatorships, those in power no longer champion an *alternative* form of government to democracy. Rather, they either claim that their regimes are already democratic even if they are not (Russia) or that their political leaders are moving their countries "step-by-step" toward democracy (China). For the vast majority of the world, then, democracy is either the practice or the stated goal.

Another twentieth century competitor to democracy as the best system of government was the modernizing autocrat, who managed exceptional growth rates in newly industrializing economies. In the 1960s and 1970s, authoritarian regimes in Asia's tigers -- Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea -- all sustained annual growth rates of nine percent. For a time, a model of East Asian exceptionalism did challenge the democratic model as the better performing alternative in the developing world. Students of development posited a tradeoff between democracy and development, and therefore advocated a sequence, development first, democracy second. Today, Chinese leaders still champion a variant of this model. However, only one of the original tigers, Singapore, still clings to this regime type and even there the normative debate about regime type has changed dramatically; democracy is now the goal, however distant. Nor have the practices of East Asia transferred very effectively to other regions. For every China, there is an Angola; for every Singapore, a Burma; for every South Korea, a North Korea. Recent aggregate worldwide data show that dictatorships and democracies grow at

roughly the same pace.³ In some regions, such as post-communist Europe, the relationship between democracy and economic growth is clearly positive: the fastest democratizers also succeeded the quickest in regenerating economic growth after communism's collapse.⁴ And in the grander sweep of economic history, it is no accident that the oldest democracies in the world are also the richest countries in the world.

Pockets of illiberal creeds, racist norms, patrimonial rituals, and anti-democratic ideologies exist throughout the world, but only Osama bin Ladenism and its variants constitute a serious *transnational* alternative to liberal democracy today. Osama bin Laden is the most successful propagandist of a set of illiberal, anti-modern, anti-democratic, quasi-religious ideas commonly referred to as Islamic fundamentalism. The reference, however, is a misleading one since many Muslims around the world practice a form of Islamic fundamentalism but in no way endorse much less pursue bin Laden's anti-systemic objectives. Bin Laden and the more serious thinkers who preceded him (if bin Laden is the Lenin of this anti-systematic movement, Qutb is the Marx) have developed a comprehensive set of beliefs that claim to explain everything in the world. According to their worldview, the central drama in international affairs is not between states, but a normative, Manichean struggle between the forces of good and evil. This ideological movement not only rejects democracy as the best system of government, but offers an alternative values-based polity, which they submit, is both better than any Western model and also essential for living a proper Muslim life.

After decades of decline, Osama bin Ladenism and its ideological soul mates gained new vibrancy after September 11th and the American-led invasion of Iraq. Yet, even in these perilous times, this ideological alternative is hardly a worldwide challenger to democracy as the most valued political system in the world. Adherents to bin Ladenism have not (yet) seized control of a major state. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is now gone. The ideological energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also extinguished even if the mullah's dictatorship lingers on. And even in Iran, officials from the government claim to be practicing democracy, or more minimally, introducing changes to make the regime more democratic.⁵ Osama bin Laden and his ideological

³ Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and the Well Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robert Barro, *Getting It Right: Markets and Choices in a Free Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

⁴ Joel S. Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions," *World Politics*, vol. 50 (January 1998), pp. 203--34; Valerie Bunce, "The Political Economy of Postsocialism," *Slavic Review*, vol. 58 (Winter 1999), pp. 756--93; Anders Åslund, *Building Capitalism: The Transformation of the Former Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), chap. 9.

⁵ Author's discussions with Iranian government officials, Esfahan and Tehran, Iran, October 2003.

mentors would never make such claims. However paradoxically, greater discussion about democracy in the wider Middle East has paralleled bin Laden's resurgence after September 11th. Arab intellectuals who contributed to the *Arab Human Development Report* propelled the issue of democracy to front and center by stating boldly that the "freedom deficit [in the Arab region] undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development." In the last three years, Arab civil leaders and intellectuals have convened several international conferences to discuss and promote democracy's development. Even as disdain for American power in the region skyrockets, debate about democratic values and democratic reforms has never been more serious.

That hardly any state leader in the world today embraces an anti-democratic regime type does not mean that all or even most leaders in the world actually practice democracy. Since the collapse of dictatorship in Portugal in 1974, the consolidation of democratic regimes has increased dramatically. According to Freedom House, there were 43 Free (their equivalent of "full democracy"), 38 Partly Free, and 69 Not Free countries in the world in 1972; thirty years later, there were 89 Free, 56 Partly Free, and 47 Not Free countries.⁶ Despite impressive gains, these rough estimates of democracy's advance still show that major populations of the world still live under dictatorship. The democracy deficit is still greatest in the Middle East, where autocrats have only recently introduced minor political reforms that may in the long run delay rather than spur genuine democratization.⁷ As worrisome is the growing gap between liberal democracies and electoral democracies, as well as the consolidation of façade democracies in many recent transitions from authoritarian rule.⁸ Most tyrants and pseudo-democrats, however, would claim that they either practice democracy or are trying to chart an evolutionary transition to democracy. They are not advocating an alternative to democracy. Fukuyama

⁶ Adrian Karatnycky, "Liberty's Advances in a Troubled World," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol, 14, No 1 (January 2003), p. 100-113.

⁷ Daniel Brumberg, "Beyond Liberalization?" *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2004.

⁸ On the differences between electoral and liberal democracy, see Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). On the gray-zone between democracy and dictatorship, see Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 2002) pp. 5-21.

was right.⁹ In fact, elections occur in most dictatorships around the world, and sometimes such as Serbia in 2000 or Kenya in 2002, they even play an instrumental role in toppling an entrenched autocrat.¹⁰ Obviously, to willfully undertake such risky actions, leaders in authoritarian regimes must feel some normative and exogenous pressure to hold elections. For the time being, serious debate around the world about the best system of government appears to be over.

Of course, the statement, “*American* democracy is the best system of government,” still provokes argument if not anger and resentment. And so it should, since the American practice of democracy has many flaws as well as several democratic competitors from around the world. Ironically, however, international resentment of U.S. power and policies may in fact have liberated the democratic norm from its close association during the Cold War with the United States and the American way. It is no longer a contradiction to be pro-democracy and anti-American.

Democracy as a World Value

Democracy is not only a system of government better than all the rest. It is also a value embraced by most people around the world.¹¹ Leaders in some autocratic regimes try to defend their slow approach to political liberalization by arguing that their people are not ready for democracy. Their people, so the argument goes, are either not wealthy enough to afford the luxury of democracy or not Western enough to desire democracy.

Wealthier countries do have a greater prospect of sustaining democratic regimes than poorer countries.¹² Yet, there is little evidence to suggest that only wealthy people desire democracy. Nor, contrary to popular myths, do cultural and religious differences

⁹ Frank Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Nikolay Marinov, “The Emergence and Survival of Competitive Elections Around the World 1977-2002: The International Dimension,” unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 2004.

¹¹ For elaboration as to why, see Amartya Sen, “Democracy as a Universal Value,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July 1999) pp. 3-17.

¹² Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and the Well Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

drive variation in support for democracy as a value.¹³ Instead, survey data suggest that support for democracy is robust and at relatively similar levels in every region of the world.¹⁴ Surveys in the Arab world suggest that a strong commitment to Islamic ideas does not hinder the embrace of democratic ideas.¹⁵ The real values gap between the Arab world and the West is not about the general idea about democracy as a system of rule, but between men's attitudes about the rights of women.¹⁶ Support for anti-democratic ideologies varies throughout the world, and in some countries, respondents are ready to trade some democracy for more order, but in no country surveyed does support for dictatorship exceed support for democracy.

Democracy Promotion as a Legitimate International Norm

Since the Treaty of Westphalia, state leaders have recognized the legitimacy of state sovereignty as one of the most important norms in international affairs. States, especially powerful states, have violated this norm for hundreds of years.¹⁷ The norm nonetheless has endured and continues to influence the conduct of international affairs.

¹³ Larry Diamond, "Universal Democracy?" *Policy Review*, June/July 2003, pp. 3-25.

¹⁴ See the cluster of articles under the rubric, "How People View Democracy" in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (January 2001) pp. 93-145. The cluster is comprised of four articles based on surveys in postcommunist Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. On attitudes in the Middle East, see James Zogby, *What Arabs Think: Values Beliefs and Concerns* (Washington: Zogby International, 2002).

¹⁵ Mark Tessler, "Do Islamic Orientations Influence Attitudes toward Democracy in the Arab World? Evidence from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Algeria," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 43, Nos. 3-5 (June 2002) pp. 229-249.

¹⁶ See Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2003, pp. 63-69; or for more detail, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Writing two decades ago, Stephen Krasner could still rightfully assert, “in international relations, the most important diffuse principle is sovereignty.”¹⁸

At the end of World War II and the creation of the United Nations, the sovereignty norm obtained a new institutional ally and emerged as a powerful battering ram for destroying empires and undermining the legitimacy of colonization. Eventually, empire became an illegitimate and near extinct form of government. During this period, many hoped that acquiring state sovereignty would be the first step toward popular sovereignty. People living in colonies could choose their rulers only after shedding their colonial masters. Decolonization, self determination, and democratization were to go hand in hand. They did not. Instead, new leaders in many (but not all) parts of the former colonized world trumpeted the importance of the state sovereignty as an international norm to excuse their denial of popular sovereignty to their citizens. During the Cold War, the specter of Soviet and American “neoimperialism” armed these autocrats with additional arguments for why their state sovereignty had to be recognized and defended. In their respective orbits, both superpowers also invoked state sovereignty to suppress internal agents of regime change (be they “socialists” in Chile or “anti-communists” in Czechoslovakia) and their external allies.

Over the last several decades, however, the sanctity of state sovereignty as an international norm has eroded at the same time as new international norms protecting the human rights of individuals have gained strength. Relations between states remains the defining feature of international affairs, but interactions, encounters, and conflicts between regime types as well as transnational interventions into the domestic affairs of states now account for much of the drama as well. When first penned, international agreements about human rights -- such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, or the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights -- seemed to have little meaning in world politics. These conventions were thought to be nice words, but little else. Those living under tyranny, however, assigned real meaning to these normative statements. Perhaps most famously, East European dissidents invoked basket three of the Helsinki Final Act to demand the recognition of their human rights. Eventually, they succeeded.¹⁹

After the collapse of communism in Europe, the strengthening of norms defending the individual and the weakening of norms defending the state have proceeded even further. General Secretary of the United Nations Kofi Annan underscored this change in his speech accepting his Nobel Peace Prize in 2001 when he argued, “Today’s real borders are not between states, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated.” Coming from the head of the United Nations, the international body constituted in large measure to defend and advance the norm of state sovereignty, Annan’s statement is remarkable. He went further;

¹⁸ Stephen Krasner, “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” in Stephen Krasner, ed., *International Regimes*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) p. 17.

¹⁹ Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

In the 21st century I believe the mission of the United Nations will be defined by a new, more profound awareness of the sanctity and dignity of every human life, regardless of race or religion. This will require us to look beyond the framework of States, and beneath the surface of nations or communities. ...Over the past five years, I have often recalled that the United Nations' Charter begins with the words, 'we the peoples.' What is not always recognized is that "we the peoples" are made up of individuals whose claims to the most fundamental rights have too often been sacrificed in the supposed interest of the state or the nation.

Annan's vision is already unfolding. International treaties and laws crafted to protect the human rights of individuals in all countries have expanded dramatically their reach and scope. With sovereignty comes the responsibility to protect basic human rights. When a ruler in the state house fails in meeting this obligation, external actors can now assume the right and may even have the responsibility to step in according to the new norms of today's international system.²⁰ Under the doctrine of universal jurisdiction, domestic courts can try foreign defendants accused of slavery, genocide, torture, and war crimes. Spain's attempt to extradite and try Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet for human rights crimes committed during his seventeen year rule as president decades earlier is perhaps the most dramatic refutation of the sovereignty norm, but the practice now occurs throughout the world.²¹ Importantly, the Spanish courts and other legal bodies involved in enforcing universal jurisdiction do not claim to be violating the norm of sovereignty. Rather, they are challenging the legitimacy of the norm. The International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunal, and most boldly, the newly formed International Criminal Court represent institutions designed to centralize and further legitimate the exercise of universal jurisdiction. International non-governmental organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, working closely with local human rights groups, have dramatically increased their activity in documenting the abuse of human rights as a strategy for putting pressure on the abusive regimes to change. Domestic democratic groups have invoked international treaties and norms to put pressure on their own government for change.

Most boldly, military intervention for the defense of individual human rights is not only considered legitimate by a majority of states and people around the world; it also happens, even if real debate still remains over who has the right to authorize such humanitarian missions. Although the world's lone superpower has initiated or led most of these interventions, it is striking how other regional actors and their armed forces have begun to undertake humanitarian interventions without American participation, be it

²⁰ Gareth Evans and Mohamed Sahnoun, "The Responsibility to Protect," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, (November/December 2002) pp 99-110.

²¹ Tyche Hendricks, "Ex-Salvadoran officer ruled liable in killing of archbishop in 1980," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 4, 2004, at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/09/04/BAG6H8JUL11.DTL>

Australia in East Timor, the Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and then its UN reincarnation, the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), or the European Union in Eastern Congo. Even the American intervention in Haiti in 1994 was prodded in part by the democratic members of the Organization of American States (OAS).²² In all of these cases, the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights featured prominently in the justification of military action. Two hundred years ago, democracy would not have been part of the lexicon of the intervening powers.

Power, as always, can still trump ideas. Powerful states, including first and foremost the United States, have not yet felt the pinch of this growing challenge to the sovereignty norm. Moreover, the methods deployed for protecting individual human rights are still highly contentious, and at times contradict other normative goals held more dearly by some actors in the world. The American led invasion of Iraq is an obvious example, which Kofi Annan has called “illegal”, but so too was the NATO war against Serbia, since the campaign was not sanctioned by the United Nations and violated the principle of non-intervention. More generally, the application of universal jurisdiction by different national courts has been not uniform or always consistent with other normative goals such as national reconciliation in war-torn states.²³ And American reluctance to recognize the International Criminal Court is not only an expression of American power, but also a statement about the flaws in this international regime that must be addressed in order for the Court to be effective. Nonetheless, it is a radical and growing idea that individuals have rights, no matter where they live, and rulers face constraints, no matter what challenges they face.

External actors have intervened more often and aggressively to enforce human rights laws in other states than they have to promote democratic regime change. Western democracies have a long and mixed history of exporting various forms of democracy. Yet, as the idea that people have a right to democracy gains support, the legitimacy and practice of democracy promotion by external actors -- be they states, non-governmental organizations, or international institutions -- has also grown in the last two decades.²⁴ In

²² Marc Peceny, “The Democratic Peace and Contemporary U.S. Military Interventions,” unpublished manuscript presented International Studies Association, March 14-18, 2000, p. 5.

²³ See Jack Goldsmith and Stephen Krasner, “The Limits of Idealism,” *Daedalus*, Winter 2003, pp. 47-63.

²⁴ Thomas Franck, “The Emerging Right to Democratic Governance,” *American Journal of International Law*, No. 86 (1992), pp. 46-91; Morton Halperin, “Guaranteeing Democracy,” *Foreign Policy*, (Summer 1993) pp. 105-122; Laurence Whitehead, 2003; Roland Rich, “Bringing Democracy into International Law,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No 3 (July 2001) pp. 20-34.

the United States, the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy in 1983 marked a new stage of providing direct, public support for human rights activists and democratic organizations in other countries. At the time of its creation, critics denounced NED as a tool of American imperialism. Two decades later, many still make the claim, but what is more surprising is how legitimate, common, and internationalized the practices of NED have become. Whether organized by the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), or the Carter Center, foreign nationals regularly amass in others countries to monitor elections. Even many autocratic states now feel compelled to invite international monitors to observe their elections, a normative pressure that did not exist just a few decades ago. Many of these same organizations provide technical assistance to state and societies in new democracies, providing blueprints, sharing experiences, and giving advice on a range of institutional design and organizational questions.²⁵ External actors provide direct material support and technical assistance to electoral commissions, parliaments, courts, human rights monitors, political parties, trade unions, and business associations. Foundations, some supported by government money and other by private sources, routinely give grants to non-governmental organizations in other countries dedicated to the advancement and consolidation of democracy. By supporting NGOs committed to democratic norms, these foreign donors help to change

²⁵ See Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); and Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives*, (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995); Peter Burnell, “Democracy Assistance: The State of the Art.” in Peter Burnell, ed. *Democracy Assistance: International Cooperation for Democratization*. London: Frank Cass. (2000).

the balance of power within domestic politics in favor of the “democrats.”²⁶ All these exporters of democratic values are not American, but include the party institutes in Germany, the Westminster Foundation in Great Britain, the European Union, and dozens of other foundations, some state-sponsored, some not. In the business of election monitoring, the OSCE is the major world player, not any American organization. In 1998, many of these transnational actors came together to form the World Movement for Democracy. Today, the community of democracy advocates is truly global.

Democracy and good governance also have emerged as a new priority of aid organizations traditionally focused solely on the promotion of economic development. Both the World Bank and the United National Development Fund have elevated good governance as a bigger component of their work. In its most recent statement of strategy in a document called *Foreign Aid in the National Interest*, the United States Agency for International Development codified democracy promotion as a principle objective.²⁷ The Bush Administration’s new Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) includes a few good governance variables in assessing a country’s eligibility to receive funds from this new source of aid.

In addition to direct aid and economic assistance tied progress in political reforms, membership into multilateral institutions has become a new and effective tool for promoting democratic consolidation and preventing democratic erosion. In Europe, the allure of membership in the European Union or NATO did not *start* transitions from authoritarian rule in the south or east of Europe. After initial democratic breakthroughs, however, the European Union played a pivotal role in anchoring democracy in Portugal, Spain, and Greece, while the promise of NATO and EU membership helped to spur to the process of democratic consolidation in East Central Europe and provided real incentives for the democratic laggards in the region, Bulgaria and Romania, to speed the process of political reform. Integration is an especially benign tool of democracy promotion, since the mechanism provides incentives for internal change that the leadership of a democratizing country chooses to pursue. The Organization for American States was not

²⁶ Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, “Lessons from the Russia Campaign: Foreign Assistance, International Norms, and NGO Development,” *International Organization*, forthcoming.

²⁷ USAID, *Foreign Aid in the National Interest*, (Washington: United States Agency for International Development, 2002). “Promoting Democratic Governance” is chapter one of this document.

only constituted to “promote and consolidate representative democracy” but has acted collectively to help sustain fragile democracies in the region.²⁸

Coordination between national governments to undermine authoritarian rule and promote democratization in third areas does not enjoy universal support within the democratic community of states. Although increasing numbers of governments and people around the world now endorse the norm of democracy promotion, few believe that military force is a justified means for advancing democratization. The slogan, “you cannot force them to be free,” still resonates with many champions of democracy. That military intervention has a mixed record of success in promoting democracy only strengthens the moral argument against the use of force. Real disagreements between democratic states also emerge about both the morality and utility of using economic sanctions as a method for promoting democratic regime change. Proponents cite South Africa as the great success story; opponents cite Cuba as the great failure. More generally, there is little consensus within the community of democracy promoters about how and with whom to do the job. Should external actors press for elections to occur first or adoption of a constitution? Should they push for presidential or parliamentary systems, federal or unitary states, proportional representation in parliament or majoritarian electoral systems? Should outsiders work with the state or society to press for change? There is no blueprint that all recognize as the most effective, and many even reject the idea that there even can be a blueprint. Finally, the American initiative to formalize an organization of democratic states, the Community of Democracies, has to date gained much less traction than the non-governmental World Movement of Democracy.

Disputes about the morality and effectiveness of means, however, does not signal divergences about the objective. Within the community of democratic states, democratic promotion is understood today as legitimate. In fact, within this community, the normative burden has shifted to those not interested in advocating democracy promotion. They are the state leaders who must explain why they are not doing more to advance democracy’s cause worldwide.

Obviously, the norm of democracy promotion is not universal because the many autocrats still control major chunks of the world. While few of these dictators would argue against democracy as a value or system of government, they do rail against exporters of democracy as illegitimate, illegal, and imperial. Their shield is always state sovereignty. It still works as a normative defense, but much less persuasively than fifty years ago.

Paradoxically, the consolidation of democracy is the only lasting and effective tool available to leaders for protect or restore state sovereignty. Whether by military or non-military means, the United States has more capacity to violate the sovereignty of other states in the world. Never, however, has the United States attacked a genuine

²⁸ Juan Mendez, “The Inter-American System of Protection: Its Contributions to the International Law of Human Rights, in Samatha Power and Graham Allison, eds., *Realizing Human Rights: Moving from Inspiration to Impact* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000) pp. 111-142,

democracy. Democracies do not go to war with each other. Terrorist organizations can attack democratic regimes, but have yet to actually threaten the regime or territorial integrity of a democratic state. China still looms as a possible threat to democratic elected government in Taiwan, and may in the long, long run present a threat to Asian democracies. But such scenarios seem very remote, and much less likely than Chinese democratization, a transformation which would diffuse tensions across the Taiwan Straits and at the same time all but eliminate the possibility of an American defense of Taiwan should military conflict between China and Taiwan occur.

Disaggregating American Policy and Democracy Promotion

The correlation between the advance of democracy and democratic norms worldwide on the one hand and the growth of American power on the other is not spurious. No country has done more to strengthen the norms and practices of democracy around the world than the United States. Think simply of some counterfactuals. If Hitler had prevailed in World War II, democratic values would have survived but few democratic regimes would have remained. Similarly, if the Cold War ended with American disintegration rather than Soviet dissolution, command economies run by one-party dictatorships would be the norm, democracy the exception. Even good ideas need powerful actors to defend and advance them.

At the same time, only the most arrogant or most naïve track the ebb and flow of democracy's advance in the world with the successes and failures of American foreign policy. The United States pursues many foreign policies that are not designed to promote democracy. Most American presidents have defined democracy promotion as an American strategic interest, but it most certainly is not the only American foreign policy interest and oftentimes is not considered the highest or most-immediate objective. Over the long run, the growth of democracy around the world has made the United States more secure.²⁹ Presidents in power, however, are rarely thinking about the long run. They frequently sacrifice strategic objectives like democracy promotion for security or economic interests *perceived* to be more immediate and consequential. They also choose selectively when and where to promote democracy. Franklin Roosevelt cared more about democracy in France than Poland. Reagan pushed for democratization harder in the communist world than in Latin America. George W. Bush seems passionate about helping democrats in Iraq, but indifferent to the democrats fighting authoritarian drift in Pakistan and Russia.

Moreover, even when American presidents claim to be promoting democracy, the gap between rhetoric and action is sometimes so glaring that observers question the depth of the normative commitment to the democratic cause. Bush's post-war plan for Iraq is a tragic example.³⁰ Especially compared to the plans and resources devoted to regime

²⁹ Michael McFaul, "The Liberty Doctrine: Reclaiming the Purpose of American Power," *Policy Review*, No. 112 (April/May 2002) pp. 3-24.

³⁰ Larry Diamond, "What Went Wrong in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5 (September/October 2004), pp. 34-56.

destruction, the blueprint for regime construction in Iraq was so poorly articulated and changed so many times and the resources for rebuilding have been so thin and so slowly spent that even the most fervent supporters of democratic regime change in Iraq has been compelled to question the president's genuine commitment to the project. Within the region, Bush's policies *to date* have resulted in a net loss of freedom. Authoritarian leaders in Egypt, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan are stronger today than they were two years ago, while anti-democratic ideologues like Osama bin Laden also enjoy more support today than before Bush came to power.

And yet, American foreign policies that do not aid the growth of democracy and even American foreign policy failures in promoting democracy (whether by design or not) cannot not necessarily or automatically be equated with a failure in democracy promotion as an objective in a given country or as a norm in international affairs more generally. The United States is still the most powerful actor in the international system, and therefore has more power than any state or non-state actor to promote or impede democratic development. At the same time, the United States is no longer the only force in the world pushing for democracy or helping to legitimize democracy promotion as an international norm. Although the principle of democracy promotion originally may have only mattered in world politics because of American hegemony, today the norm exhibits influence beyond and autonomous from the reach of American state power.

Contemporary Iraq is an excellent illustration. Most observers, including a majority of American voters now, believe that the war has not gone well. Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, American armed forces have suffered major casualties fighting a well-funded and highly motivated counterinsurgency. These military "setbacks" are often cited as evidence of the failure of democracy to take hold in Iraq. This is American-centric thinking at its worst. To be sure, democracy has a better chance to consolidate during peace. Iraqi citizens need some minimal level of security before they will participate in elementary practices of democracy such as voting and civic participation. Nonetheless, the number of attacks on American soldiers cannot be the metric by which Iraq's democratic development is measured. In fact, resistance to an occupying power could even be interpreted as a sign that Iraqi citizens are taking/seizing ownership of their own sovereignty. Obviously, some of those fighting against coalition forces are jihadists, fighting a global war against Western civilization. They have no interest in either Iraqi sovereignty or democracy. The alliance between these transnational fundamentalists and Iraqi nationalists is very similar to the united fronts of communists and nationalist in the developing world during the Cold War. Like nationalist leaders in the twentieth century, some of the Iraqi rebels might make the transition from an anti-colonial movement to democratic government.

The newly vibrant debate within the Arab world about democratic norms and practices is another illustration. Most Arab intellectuals fervently denounced the American occupation of Iraq, continue to rant against American support for Israel, and more generally would welcome a smaller American imprint in the Middle East. At the same time, some of these same critics of American foreign policy also welcome (privately if not publicly) Bush's statements about the need for more democracy in their region. The "United States" and "democracy" are not synonyms any longer, and this decoupling is a positive sign for democracy's advance.

Does the Norm of Promoting Democracy Matter?

A norm can coexist a long time and sometimes forever side by side the practice of violating that same norm. In international affairs, anti-slavery norms enjoyed widespread recognition hundreds of years before the practice of slavery finally ended. Norms about self-determination and decolonization also garnered international legitimacy well before the last great empire collapsed. Still today, slavery and colonization have not been fully eradicated. Nonetheless, the emergence of norms against slavery and decolonization eventually played a pivotal role in changing actual practices.

Might dictatorship as a system of government follow the same path of extinction as slavery and empire? It is still too early to tell. It is clear, however, that the normative basis for pushing history in this direction has already been constructed and democrats around the world have invoked this normative framework to strengthen their political power at home and international legitimacy abroad. In the last two decades, democrats fighting apartheid in South Africa or communism in Poland or dictatorship in the Philippines have invoked this international normative framework as a means to access resources and win legitimacy, while at the same time weakening the power and prestige of their autocratic enemies.

Influenced by this same set of values, governments in democratic states in turn have come to the aid of these democratic forces. Often, debate rages internally within democracies about the priority that these norms should play in the definition of national interests. The norms have become so powerful, however, that even elected head of states must *sometimes* execute foreign policies that they themselves did not advocate, as was the case when Reagan was compelled to introduce sanctions against apartheid South Africa or when George W. Bush's White House was compelled to cut assistance to Uzbekistan because of that government's human rights abuses (documented by the State Department with assistance from non-governmental human rights organizations). The democratic criteria for EU membership have become so institutionalized that individual leaders of states already in the EU have limited power now to impede the process of accession if certain standards are met.³¹ Even Turkish membership into the EU now has momentum because Turkey has made enormous progress in meeting the EU's own normative standards on democracy (and market reforms) even though most current EU members fear the prospect.³² Norms about democratic practices now permeate international affairs and at times can even influence the course of international politics in ways both independent from and unexpected by those powerful states that were once thought to be the only actors of consequence on the world stage.

Opponents of democracy promotion should beware. A hundred years from now, statements like Russians yearn for dictators or Islam is inimical to democracy might look

³¹ Frank Schimmelfenning: "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action and the Eastern Enlargement of the EU" *International Organization*, Vol. 55 no. 1 (Winter 2001), pp. 47-80.

³² Senem Aydin and Fuat Keyman: *European Integration and the Transformation of Turkish Democracy* EU-Turkey Working Papers No. 2 (August 2004) (<http://www.ceps.be>)

as backward as the outdated statements from colonial governors from the last century and plantation owners from two centuries ago.