

SCUSA 60 THEME:
MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES

STATE BUILDING AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Since its creation more than 350 years ago, the modern state system has rested on the concept of sovereignty. It was always assumed that every state could control and direct the threats emerging from its territory. It was also assumed that weak and poorly governed states were merely a burden to their people, or at most, an international humanitarian concern but never a true security threat. Today, however, these old assumptions no longer hold. Technology is collapsing the distance that once clearly separated right here from over there. And the greatest threats now emerge more within states than between them. The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power.

- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, January 18, 2006¹

Introduction: Democracy Promotion and American Foreign Policy

An enduring component of America's foreign policy is the existence of tensions between goals of promoting democracy abroad and goals of achieving peace and security at home.² The first pillar of the 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States makes it clear that promoting democracy abroad is central to the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. "The first pillar [of the 2006 strategy] is promoting freedom, justice, and human dignity – working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies, and to extend prosperity through free and fair trade and wise development policies...Free governments do not oppress their people or attack other free nations."³ This is a clear statement that the United States regards the promotion of democracy as an essential aspect of securing its interests. However, some suggest that this approach is misguided and dangerous. "...[T]he evidence is building up that in the decade following the end of the Cold War, the United States largely abandoned a reliance on diplomacy, economic aid, international law, and multilateral institutions in carrying out its foreign policies and resorted much of the time to bluster, military force, and financial manipulation. The world may not be a safer place as a result."⁴

The debate over the wisdom of promoting democratization abroad as a means of ensuring security at home has become even clearer as the American occupation of Iraq continues. For a time, it appeared that a primary goal of the United States was the transition of Iraq to a democracy.⁵ While this goal has seemingly been replaced by a more security-oriented approach, the fact remains that the promotion of democracy continues to be a prevalent theme in the debate

¹ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, "Transformational Diplomacy: Remarks at Georgetown School of Foreign Service," January 18, 2006, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

² Tony Smith, "Making the World Safe for Democracy," *Diplomatic History* 23 (Spring 1999):189-218.

³ Office of the President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2006), ii.

⁴ Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2000), 216.

⁵ Some point out that the United States did not initially focus on democratization as a justification for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. However, the emphasis on democratization within the 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq* makes it clear that democratization became a key component of American policy. National Security Council, *National Strategy for Victory In Iraq* (Washington: National Security Council, 2005), 3.

over American policy in Iraq. This debate illuminates a number of questions about American democratization policy. Does democratization represent a means of reducing international conflict? Should the United States promote democratization throughout the world? Does the United States have the economic, military, and political resources to promote democratization around the world?

In order to address these questions and effectively craft proposals for U.S. foreign policy, it is useful to consider some theoretical considerations found in research about democratization. Debates over the wisdom of promoting democratization abroad as a means of achieving peace and security at home might benefit from considering the difficulties associated with the transition to democracy and how those difficulties influence American democratization policy.

Uncertainty and Change

The uncertainty inherent in the transition to democracy can be considered through examination of what Posusney and Geddes describe as the Transitions Paradigm.⁶ This literature examines how the strategic interactions of key political actors within specific institutional contexts explains how states transition (or not) to democracy. One point that becomes evident in discussion of this literature is that while democracy may increase freedom in the long run it may do quite the opposite in the short run. The transitions literature considers a wide variety of variables that highlights the contingency associated with how states execute the transition.⁷ For example, Rustow proposes a model that accounts for an “ideal type” transition. His model makes broad assertions about the indispensable ingredients for democracy and suggests a sequence that proceeds from national unity to struggle, compromise, and habituation.⁸ Dahl highlights that favorable sequences to democracy involve increasing levels of liberalization before increasing levels of participation.⁹ Mansfield and Snyder elaborate on this theme. They argue that states with strong representative political institutions are more likely to be able to manage the stresses associated with the transition to democracy. Like Dahl, they argue for the need to strengthen political institutions before increasing levels of mass participation.¹⁰ The transitions literature would seem to indicate that one important role that American can play in promoting democratization is to promote specific transitions to democracy only when those transitions are likely to develop favorably. Yet, given the contingency and complexity of individual transitions, such a policy might be difficult to both develop and manage. In addition, study of transitions raises questions about whether democratic transitions actually improve freedom.

Along these lines, Fareed Zakaria has made an important contribution to the debate with his argument concerning the dangers of ‘illiberal democracy.’ “The American diplomat Richard Holbrooke pondered a problem on the eve of...elections in Bosnia... ‘...Suppose the election was declared free and fair,’ he said, and those elected are ‘racists, fascists, separatists...’ That is the dilemma.”¹¹ While the intent of democratization is to promote liberal constitutional government and the rule of law, democratization in practice has often produced very different results.

⁶ Ibid, 3 and 12-15; Geddes, 119-121.

⁷ Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 4-5.

⁸ Rustow, 350-361.

⁹ Dahl, 34-40.

¹⁰ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go To War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹ Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 76, Issue 6, p. 22-44.

The transitions literature also examines factors that make political actors more or less likely to accept democratization. Dahl argues that the best transition consists of the transformation of existing legitimate institutions so that there are “...no lasting cleavages or widespread doubts about the legitimacy of the new regime.”¹² He also asserts that if democracy is to be promoted from above, it is most likely to be successful when political activists agree that democracy is desirable and when “prolonged and massive coercion” is not used.¹³ Another key factor at work during transitions to democracy is the strength of a state's repressive institutions relative to its civil society.¹⁴ This is especially evident in the Middle East, where authoritarian regimes are strong and civil society weak.¹⁵ The freedom from external pressure and the ability to defeat all internal opposition leads to a situation where authoritarian regimes in the Middle East can persevere in the face of conditions that have theoretically led similar regimes in other regions to fall.¹⁶ This literature illuminates a number of considerations relevant to debates over American democratization policy. For example, the sequence taking place in Iraq involves the abrupt transition of a closed autocracy to democracy as a result of military conquest. While transitions to democracy as a result of occupation are difficult, they can occur when the occupation is either weak or temporary.¹⁷ In addition, any occupation to impose democracy may create doubts about the legitimacy of imposed democratic institutions.¹⁸

Security

One way to evaluate the relationship between security and democratization involves analysis of the relationship between access to violence and socioeconomic sanctions and the probability of democratization. This relationship is not always as simple as just defeating forces opposed to democracy. For example, Dahl argues that toleration of opposition increases as government resources for suppression decline relative to opposition resources to resist and with “...a reduction in the capacity of the government to use violence or socioeconomic sanctions to suppress an opposition.”¹⁹ In Dahl's analysis, dispersed or neutralized access to violence and socioeconomic sanctions is a favorable condition for the transition to democracy.²⁰ The difficulty of this dynamic becomes even more evident when considering the number of security threats in the world today. In the Middle East, many argue of a hypothesized relationship between Islam, and especially Political Islam, and the prospects for democratization in the Middle East. Such a debate engages with whether culture, religion, and political tradition can explain democratization. Yet, since scholars argue that the core values of Islam are both

¹² Dahl, 46-47.

¹³ *ibid*, 189-201. Yet, the beliefs of political activists are so complex that when “...political activists acquire their beliefs that an outside power, particularly when it is itself a polyarchy, can have only limited success in generating support for a particular ideology; the foreign power is caught in a tough network of historical and cultural forces that frequently it can do very little to manipulate.”

¹⁴ Jason Brownlee, “Political Crisis and Restabilization: Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia,” in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, eds. Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 44 and 46-48).

¹⁵ Posusney, 16; Przeworski, 54; and Bellin, 22.

¹⁶ Bellin, 25-26. Democratic forces in the Middle East are consistently repressed by unusually strong coercive institutions with both the will and capacity to repress.

¹⁷ Dahl, 203.

¹⁸ William B. Quandt, comments at the J.B. Moore Conference to Examine Democracy Movement in the Middle East, 24 Feb 2006, University of Virginia Law School, Charlottesville, Virginia. See also Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds; *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 82).

¹⁹ Dahl, 48-49.

²⁰ *ibid*, 203.

compatible and incompatible with democracy, it is safe to assert that there is no clear consensus on this issue. Given this lack of consensus, high levels of diversity in the Middle East combined with the lack of a central religious authority in Islam, make it unlikely that religion or other cultural factors can account for the relative lack of democratization in the Middle East.²¹

The literature would seem to indicate that one role that America can play in promoting democratization is to ensure that no one side of any conflict obtains a monopoly on the use of force in a democratizing state. This role implies a need to defeat extremist groups seeking to marginalize the role of many states throughout the world. For example, former United States Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad argued that keeping any side of that conflict from obtaining a monopoly on the use of force made the Iraqi Government more willing to tolerate the inclusion of opposition groups.²² This involves not only ensuring that no single group achieves a predominant role, but also ensuring that levels of violence remain relatively low. The difficulty of maintaining this dynamic is clear in Iraq today. In addition, debate over this issue is further complicated by the argument that civil war may in fact be necessary to achieve successful democratization.²³

A further security challenge evident in analysis of democratization involves the relationship between democratization and war. Some argue that democratization represents a threat to international security. For example, Mansfield and Snyder's examination of the empirical relationship between incomplete transitions to democracy and war indicates that in states with weak political institutions, factors including nationalism, the degree of threat to elite interests, and coalition processes during the early phases of democratization create incentives for elites to mobilize the public using nationalist rhetoric. These strategies are associated with a number of factors that lead states toward war.²⁴ For example, with regards to Iraq the American government recognizes that "[t]he neighborhood [in the Middle East] is inhospitable. Iran and Syria have failed to provide support to Iraq's new government and have in many ways actively undermined it."²⁵ The relationship between the presence of American forces in Iraq and the probability of war in the Middle East remains an open question.

A final issue is whether democratization actually reduces international terrorism, a claim that the Bush administration advances as justification for the continuation of the American presence in Iraq. Whether the spread of democratization causes a decline in terrorism is a difficult question. For example, Robert Pape argues that suicide terrorism is a strategy advanced by nationalists or separatists to counter the occupation of their homelands by the militaries of democratic governments. According to Pape, if the United States wants to reduce suicide attacks, it should stop devoting resources to foreign occupation and instead focus on bolstering homeland

²¹ Waterbury, 35; Przeworski, 61-62; Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 22-23; Khaled Abu El-Fadl, "Islam and the Challenge of Democracy," *Boston Review*; Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, trans. S. Badrul Hasan (Karachi: International Islamic Publishers, 1981); Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Reza Aslan, *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House, 2005).

²² Comments by the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad. Jonathan Finer and Ellen Knickmeyer, "Envoy Accuses Iran of Duplicity on Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 24 Mar 2006, A12.

²³ Rustow's "hot family feud" argument.

²⁴ Mansfield and Snyder, 11 and 171. For an example specific to the Middle East see Larry Jay Diamond, *Squandered Victory: the American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005). See also Liam D Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

²⁵ National Security Council, 13. While it is impossible to completely separate these accusations from the ongoing diplomatic disputes between the United States and Iran over the Iranian nuclear program, they represent indications of the unfavorable international context for democratization in Iraq. Jonathan Finer and Ellen Knickmeyer, "Envoy Accuses Iran of Duplicity on Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 24 Mar 2006, A12.

security.²⁶ Similarly, Gregory Gause argues that democratization in the Middle East is likely to produce even greater levels of anti-Americanism and do little if anything to stop the spread of terrorism.²⁷ The SCUSA roundtable on the U.S. Role in Democratization must wrestle with these problems and decide whether promoting democratization abroad is worth the cost.

Development and Democratization

In addition to security justifications for the U.S. promotion of democratization, another prominent question that must be addressed is whether the United States has a responsibility to promote peace and development in the world. In the second decade after the end of the Cold War, the U.S. retains a dominant position in the international system. Can a country founded on liberal principles of equality and justice stand by while economic disparity in the world increases dramatically? One block of the democratization literature, what Posusney describes as the Prerequisites School, highlights the importance of this question.²⁸ Modernization theory advances the argument that the best way to promote democratization is to focus on certain conditions found in countries that have made the transition.²⁹ Some argue that high levels of socioeconomic development favor both the transition to democracy and the consolidation of a democratizing regime.³⁰ For example, Dahl argues that the probability of the consolidation of a democratic transition depends on “the extent to which the country’s society and economy...provide literacy, education, and communication, create a pluralistic rather than a centrally dominated social order, and prevent extreme inequalities among the politically relevant strata of the country.”³¹ Yet, the unsettled nature of the question is evident in Waterbury’s conclusion that economic development is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for democracy.³² The causal direction of the relationship is not clear and there is no clear consensus concerning the mechanisms explaining the relationship.³³

²⁶ Robert Pape, “The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 97, no. 3 (August 2003), pp. 1-19.

²⁷ Gregory Gause, III, “Can Democracy Stop Terrorism?” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 5 (September-October 2005): 62-76.

²⁸ Marsha Pripstein Posusney, “The Middle East’s Democracy Deficit in Comparative Perspective,” in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, eds. Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 3-13.

²⁹ See Lipset’s seminal account of the indices of economic development, legitimacy, and systems associated with democracy. Seymour M. Lipset, “Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959): 75-85.

³⁰ In addition to socioeconomic development, the literature also stresses the importance of a number of other conditions. For example, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens argue that the minimal condition for democracy is strong institutional separations that alleviate differences in power, wealth, and status in societies divided by class. Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens; *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 41. Moore argues that the presence (or absence) of a middle class explains the success (or failure) of democratization. Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993). Rustow makes national unity an essential background condition for democratization while Przeworski frames his model in opposition to the proposition that democratization is more difficult in multinational states. Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2:3 (1970), 350-352 and Adam Przeworski, *Sustainable Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20-21.

³¹ Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 62-67 and, 74-80.

³² John Waterbury, “Democracy Without Democrats?: The Potential for Political Liberalization in the Middle East.” In *Democracy without Democrats: The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salame. London: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 23-24.

³³ Geddes, Barbara. 1999. “What Do We Know about Democratization After Twenty Years?” *Annual Review Political Science* 2 (1999):117-119 and Dahl, 70. See also Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49 (1997):157-158; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); and Rustow, 337-341.

The prerequisites literature would seem to indicate that one important role for the U.S. is the promotion of socioeconomic development abroad. The challenge to such a policy is evident in Iraq today where efforts have proven both difficult and costly.³⁴ In addition, many question whether support for socioeconomic development alone offers a viable strategy for promoting democratization. It may increase the probability of successful democratization, but that remains an open debate. In addition, support for socioeconomic development as a policy is also subject to other theoretical considerations, such as the implications of the rentier state thesis on the relationship between socioeconomic development and democracy.³⁵ Since rentier states are dependent on external sources of funding that make the state autonomous from its society, higher levels of socioeconomic development in those states tends to create conditions that are not conducive to democratization. Since revenue in rentier states is not based on domestic economic performance or taxation, the state is able to resist pressure for reform and political accountability.³⁶ This is exacerbated by the influence of international actors who often use aid as a strategic rent that contributes to the coercive strength of rentier states.³⁷

Defining Future Challenges

Re-examination of the United States role in democratization is required in light of the number of issues that remain open to debate in the literature. We have only to look at the situation in Iraq to see an extreme example of the dangers and complexity involved in democratization. Yet, even if the United States envisions more indirect approaches in the future, these efforts are subject to the same theoretical considerations. While the exact relationship between socioeconomic development and democratization remains unproven, there are indications that higher levels are correlated with an increased probability of the consolidation of democracy. The question is whether the United States will be able to sustain efforts to promote socioeconomic development abroad. Yet, even if America is not be able to turn everyone into a committed democrat, by creating and strengthening democratic institutions abroad it may be possible to convince key elites in other states that they will benefit more from continued participation than they will from continued conflict.

³⁴ American efforts in Iraq are summarized in the quarterly State Department reports mandated Public Law 108-106 (Section 2207) which established the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund (IRRF). These efforts include disbursement of \$4.1 billion to support Iraqi Security Forces and \$5.9 billion on non-security programs to repair Iraqi infrastructure. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs; *Section 2207 Report on Iraq Relief and Reconstruction: January 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 2006), 2.

³⁵ William B. Quandt, comments at the J.B. Moore Conference to Examine Democracy Movement in the Middle East, 24 Feb 2006, University of Virginia Law School, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³⁶ Howard Handelman and Mark Tessler, eds; *Democracy and its Limits: Lessons from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 70. See also Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 1993), 37.

³⁷ Posusney, 6-7 and 15.

QUESTIONS

1. Does democracy promotion abroad represent a path to peace and security at home? Can the United States sustain the economic, military, and political expenses associated with promoting democracy abroad?

2. Is democracy the ideal form of government for all peoples and cultures? If so, can nations become democracies through external influence, or must the political transformation occur internal to the nation-state?

3. Will promoting democracy abroad be subordinated to other considerations when it may result in a democratic regime hostile to American interests?

4. Should the United States maintain robust trade with China in the hope that a more economically liberal China will become more democratic politically? Or, should America reverse its course with China, believing instead that eventually China will be a powerful peer competitor that American economic support helped create?

5. Is it reasonable to state that die-hard insurgents in Iraq, for example, see U.S. democratizing efforts as "proof" of the Islamist message and are therefore undeterred, even inspired to attack U.S. forces on these grounds?

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Aslan, Reza. *No God but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam*. New York: Random House, 2005.

Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist Bellin, Eva. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, eds. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005.

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