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Introduction

The question that provides the title of this volume has now returned to the center of public discussion, largely because of the severe difficulties in building democratic regimes following the successful military invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. In the 1990s a fairly wide consensus had developed both in the United States and internationally, in favor of active efforts to assist those seeking to establish and maintain democratic institutions. Today, however, that consensus is fraying, and people once again are asking: Is democracy exportable? Can or should the United States or other democratic countries try to export it?

How one answers this question depends in substantial part on how the meaning of the word “export” is understood. It is clear that democracy cannot be exported in the way that food, or clothing, or machinery can be. In fact, organizations that are devoted to promoting the growth of democracy abroad do not like to characterize their own activity as being aimed at the “export” of democracy. The five-year strategy document adopted by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 2007 even proclaims, “Democracy cannot be exported or imposed.”

In disclaiming the idea that they are in the export business, democracy-promotion organizations acknowledge that there is a kernel of truth in the argument that democracy can take root only if it is homegrown. By its very nature, democracy is a political system that is founded on the consent of the governed. Obviously, if the people of a given country do not consent to be governed democratically, no outside efforts to implant democracy can succeed. One may go even further, and say, that unless the people of a country are willing to support and even defend democracy, no democratic system can long survive. The experience of decolonization in the twentieth century offered decisive proof that establishing a

democratic institutional framework is by itself insufficient to enable democracy to persist. The limits of what external support can achieve are recognized by the sensible proponents of democracy promotion as well as by its critics.

Many of the critics, however, go beyond emphasizing these limits and assert that the “export” of democracy is unwise or impossible. Some claim that democracy is an American or European or Western idea that does not fit other cultures or civilizations and, thus, is always in some sense imposed on other peoples. Others say that democracy can only arise “organically,” that it requires a long gestation period of social, economic, and cultural change of the sort that first gave rise to democratic (or at least proto-democratic) government in Britain and the United States. Still others emphasize the importance of socioeconomic “prerequisites” for democracy – a certain level of economic development and of literacy, a substantial middle class, and the like.

Once again, there is something to these arguments – certainly, the overall correlation between levels of economic development and democratic stability still seems to hold. But, there is a massive problem with the contention that democracy cannot be exported – namely, that over the past two centuries it has been spreading around the world at a remarkable and accelerating pace. Moreover, in recent decades democracy has successfully taken root in countries with a wide variety of different cultures and different levels of economic development. Hence, the view that democracy can thrive only where particular cultural, historical, or socioeconomic factors are present is no longer compelling.

Of course, one could argue that democracy’s undeniable spread to something like half the world’s countries has been propelled solely by internal factors. This seems highly implausible, however, given the fact that historically democracy has expanded in a series of “waves,” and that countries in the same region have often democratized in quick succession. In any case, drawing a bright line between “exported” and home-grown political change is inherently difficult, especially in light of the high degree of international connectivity in today’s world. Even in the distant past, various kinds of doctrines and institutional arrangements that first arose in one society have often been adopted – and adapted – by others. All the great world religions have been “exported” in this way. If we look at the alleged protagonists of Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilizations,” we find that almost all of these civilizations are formed around religious teachings that had their origins elsewhere. The influence of these teachings radiated out through a variety of means ranging from

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the book to the sword. Does that mean that Islam should be regarded as an export item in Iran or Indonesia? Or Christianity in Italy or Britain?

It is not only religions that have been diffused in this way. In the last century, communism proved to be a remarkably successful export item in almost every region of the world. It was diffused through a variety of means, both military and intellectual, including direct assistance from Moscow to communist parties across the globe. Since the demise and discrediting of communism, however, it is democracy that has become the only political system with a plausible claim to universal legitimacy. As Amartya Sen has put it,

In any age and social climate, there are some sweeping beliefs that seem to command respect as a kind of general rule – like a “default” setting in a computer program; they are considered right *unless* their claim is somehow precisely negated. While democracy is not yet universally practiced, nor indeed uniformly accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right. The ball is very much in the court of those who want to rubbish democracy to provide justification for that rejection.

Another arresting formulation of the attractions of democracy comes from the Georgian political thinker Ghia Nodia:

[W]hy do transitions occur? A major reason is imitation (which is what political scientists are talking about when they use terms like “demonstration effect” and “diffusion”). The greatest victory of democracy in the modern world is that – for one reason or another – it has become fashionable. To live under autocracy, or even to *be* an autocrat, seems backward, uncivilized, distasteful, not quite *comme il faut* – in a word, “uncool.” In a world where democracy is synonymous less with freedom than with civilization itself, nobody can wait to be “ready” for democracy.

Even apart from its intrinsic appeal, the global legitimacy of democracy makes it an object of aspiration for people across the globe. Just as most people in most places today want economic growth and equality of treatment, they also want to be able to choose their own government and to have their rights respected. As Nodia puts it, “Democratic... models are not so much imposed by the West as sought by local elites.... The West need not feel guilty about ‘imposing’ its models on ‘the rest’: It is ‘the rest’ who recognize the centrality of the modern Western democratic project and want to participate in it.”

The constellation of goals characteristic of modernity – self-government, individual freedom, political equality, the rule of law, and economic prosperity – along with the institutions that serve them, may indeed have first emerged in Britain and America, but they can hardly be considered an Anglo-American preserve. The British and American political models were, early on, presented most forcefully to the rest of the world by two Frenchmen – Montesquieu and Tocqueville, respectively. Clearly, the fact that democracy is now deeply rooted in almost all of Europe and in much of the Western Hemisphere results from the spread of these models, adjusted in various ways to national circumstances. Understood in this way, the “export” of democracy is an old, old story.

DEMOCRACY AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

As Thomas L. Pangle indicates in the essay that opens this collection, support for efforts to advance democracy abroad is also quite an old story in American history, with origins going all the way back to the beginnings of the Republic. At least since the First World War, the defense of democracy has been an explicit aim of U.S. foreign policy, and it has continued to be invoked through the Second World War, the Cold War, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The goal of making the world more democratic has been justified both on moral grounds and in terms of *realpolitik*. The moral argument holds that human rights and democracy should be extended because people everywhere are entitled to enjoy them. At the same time, by encouraging the spread of democracy we serve our own security interests by helping to bring into being regimes that are much more likely to be our allies than our foes. This dual case in favor of promoting democracy was given its most prominent and expansive expression in George W. Bush’s second inaugural address:

We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.

America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights and dignity and matchless value because they bear the image of the maker of heaven and earth. Across the generations, we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave.

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Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation's security, and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.

It is hard to dispute the contention that, *in the long run*, the spread of democracy to other lands serves America's "vital interests" as well as its "deepest beliefs." Even in the short term, the imperatives of security and democracy promotion often point in the same direction. Yet, it cannot plausibly be denied that in other cases immediate and urgent security goals come into sharp conflict with the goal of advancing democracy in a particular country. Such situations are likely to produce compromises with our democratic beliefs. (The classic, if extreme, example is the alliance of the democracies with Stalin's Russia in the war against Nazi Germany.) This is a reality that the Bush administration has been forced to rediscover, as is reflected in its policy toward such key countries as Egypt, Pakistan, Russia, and China.

During the course of American history, the goal of advancing democracy has been pursued by the use of virtually every tool in the foreign policy arsenal: military force, financial assistance, economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, covert action, presidential rhetoric, public diplomacy, and so on. But, since the 1980s, a new tool has been added – the open provision of financial support and training to prodemocratic groups abroad. This new approach, often referred to as "democracy assistance" or "political development assistance," has an interesting history of its own.

The story begins in the 1970s with the rise to prominence of the issue of international human rights. First given political salience in Congress, human rights were elevated to a central place in American foreign policy under the presidency of Jimmy Carter. This initiative, citing the official international acceptance of various human rights declarations as its justification, breached what had been the ordinary peacetime constraints against "interfering" in the internal affairs of other states.

Initially, however, the new boldness in asserting support for human rights abroad was not matched by equivalent efforts on behalf of democracy. That step was taken under the presidency of Ronald Reagan. In his historic June 1982 speech to the British parliament, Reagan noted the bipartisan efforts then underway to "determine how the United States can best contribute as a nation to the global campaign for democracy now gathering force." That speech led to the creation in late 1983 of the

National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a nongovernmental, but congressionally funded, institution that awarded its first grants in 1984.

In the NED's early years, the very idea of democracy assistance remained intensely controversial. The NED was set up as a nongovernmental organization precisely because it was felt that giving support to prodemocratic groups in other countries amounted to intervening in their internal affairs. This was widely viewed as something that government could not legitimately and openly do; it had to be done by a private organization at arm's length from the government. The NED also could draw on the precedent of the German political party foundations, which had long provided aid to their counterparts abroad and had played a particularly important role in assisting the transitions to democracy in Spain and Portugal. Yet, in the United States, despite strong bipartisan backing for the NED from the leaders of labor, business, and the two political parties, skepticism was widespread.

Hostility to democracy promotion was sometimes based on fiscal conservatism or on isolationism, but some of the sharpest opposition came from those most committed to a vigorous human rights policy. Today, the once-sharp split between the "human rights community" and the "democracy community" may seem difficult to comprehend, given the close interrelationship in both theory and practice between human rights and democracy. In part, this rift derived from the accidents of partisan rivalry in the United States, notably the disputes over Central America that roiled American politics in the mid-1980s. Democracy promotion came to be identified by some with the Reagan administration in the same way that human rights had been identified with the Carter administration.

These partisan divisions, however, were largely effaced by the end of the Cold War. The Clinton administration, upon taking office in 1993, made "democratic enlargement" one of the pillars of its foreign policy, and it proposed a large increase in the budget of the NED. In a move that symbolized the transcending of the rift between human rights advocates and democracy advocates, it reconstituted the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, which had been established under President Carter, into the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Differences between the human rights and democracy communities are still sometimes visible, especially in debates over the role of international institutions, but for most practical purposes the two communities today are strong allies. Whether in Russia, Burma, Zimbabwe,

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China, or Uzbekistan, contemporary struggles for human rights are also struggles for democracy.

The new consensus in favor of democracy, of course, was powerfully influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of communism. These momentous events not only eliminated the old Cold War context, but brought about a real sea change in the way democracy was perceived. The worldwide prestige and legitimacy of democracy rose to unprecedented heights, and suddenly a wide range of individuals and institutions were in favor of promoting it. The change was remarkably swift. For example, career officers at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which previously had regarded itself as a nonpolitical, technical agency devoted to fostering economic progress in poorer countries, were initially horrified by the notion of becoming involved in political assistance aimed at supporting democracy. Their chiefs soon realized, however, that this was going to be a growth area of American foreign assistance and decided that USAID had better begin participating.

The new consensus in favor of democracy assistance was far from being an exclusively American phenomenon. Everyone was jumping on the bandwagon, including international and regional organizations as well as democratic governments. The UN secretariat now includes an Electoral Assistance Division charged with helping member states to carry out free and fair elections. A new United Nations Democracy Fund has been established to provide grants to nongovernmental organizations working to promote democracy. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, and other specialized agencies have instituted programs aimed at supporting democracy. Among regional organizations, it is not just the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe, and the OSCE that have gotten involved with democracy promotion. The same is true of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Commonwealth. Even the African Union (AU, formerly the Organization of African Unity) and ASEAN, organizations that include nondemocratic member states and had traditionally been leery of any intervention in one another's domestic politics, have taken the plunge. Moreover, the EU and the bilateral assistance agencies of most major democratic countries now fund programs aimed at strengthening democracy in developing and post-communist countries.

In the 1990s, citizens and government officials in the new democracies were eager to receive "political development assistance," and external donors were eager to provide it. Especially in the post-communist

countries, recipients tended to have no qualms about accepting democracy assistance, even if it came directly from Western governments. Very quickly, the amounts spent directly by government agencies began to dwarf the expenditures of nongovernmental organizations like NED. USAID's democracy and governance expenditures alone are now estimated to exceed \$1 billion per year. Soon, democracy promotion itself became not only a very large enterprise but, as Michael McFaul has put it, a kind of international norm.

THE NEW CONTROVERSY

More recently, however, democracy promotion has started to become more controversial again – although spending on it has not declined and support for it in the U.S. Congress remains strong. I would say that the reemerging controversy has two sources. One, is what has been described as the “backlash” or “pushback” against democracy assistance. This comes largely from semi-democratic or “competitive authoritarian” regimes that, in the aftermath of the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, see democracy assistance as a threat to their power. Foremost among the countries that have begun imposing tighter restrictions on domestic NGOs and their receipt of foreign funding are Chavez's Venezuela and Putin's Russia; others include Mubarak's Egypt, Mugabe's Zimbabwe, and Lukashenka's Belarus. These new restrictions are typically justified in terms of protecting national sovereignty or resisting Western hegemony. By making the provision of democracy assistance more difficult and harassing its recipients, these regimes have sown doubts in some quarters about its usefulness.

The second and by far the most important reason for renewed controversy is that democracy promotion is increasingly conflated with the unpopular war in Iraq. In one sense, this is very misleading, as attempts to establish democracy through invasion have been, and most likely will continue to be, exceedingly rare. In another sense, however, the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan are part of a larger category, often labeled “post-conflict democracy-building,” that has been growing in prominence. Most of the countries in this category have experienced severe internal conflict, and the attempt to reconstruct them has been taken up by the international community under the aegis of the UN, as in the cases of Haiti, Mozambique, Cambodia, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, East Timor, Kosovo, and Liberia. In addition to having undergone the trauma of civil war, many of

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these countries are desperately poor. None of them would be considered a very promising candidate for popular self-government. Yet, democracy-building has been an integral component of the international reconstruction effort in all these places. Why?

Part of the explanation is that elections can be a useful mechanism for resolving longstanding civil conflicts. But, the more important factor lies in the legitimacy democracy enjoys in the international community. Both the international organizations and the great powers that have taken the lead in responding to post-conflict situations would find it exceedingly awkward to evade their proclaimed commitment to democracy in a jurisdiction under their protection. Although the United States continues to do business with friendly dictators, these days one cannot imagine a U.S. president justifying – or U.S. public opinion accepting – a decision to hand a territory under U.S. control over to an unelected authoritarian leader. And, although the UN readily accommodates authoritarian regimes among its member states, it too feels compelled to try to leave behind functioning democratic institutions in places where it takes direct responsibility for post-conflict situations.

Building democratic institutions under such inhospitable conditions is a task fraught with complications. Restoring peace and security and rebuilding the state demand a whole array of capabilities and resources that go far beyond the demands of democracy assistance in more settled conditions. Experience gained in providing political development assistance to countries with functioning states has very limited relevance to places where almost every institution needs to be rebuilt from scratch. And, the record of the international community in dealing with such situations leaves a lot to be desired. Still, given the number of fragile states in the world, democracy builders are likely to face many more such tough cases in the future.

So, in some ways, democracy assistance today is paying the price for its past success. Increasingly, it will be operating in two quite different but equally challenging environments. One is a set of countries where fearful, but shrewd, dictators have learned some lessons about how democratic transitions unfold and how to thwart them. And the other is a set of countries where chaos threatens and almost nothing functions without external support. The difficulties will be great, but as long as democracy retains its unrivaled legitimacy and the United States remains the world's leading power, there is every reason to expect that democracy assistance will continue to be a significant feature on the international landscape.

A VARIETY OF PERSPECTIVES

As the preceding discussion has indicated, the question of “exporting” or promoting democracy is a complex one that raises a host of moral, theoretical, and practical issues. The chapters that follow examine some of the most important of these issues from a variety of perspectives and with a variety of different scholarly approaches. Some of the chapters are based on the analysis of large amounts of data, whereas others take a wholly qualitative approach. Some chapters focus primarily on the requirements of democracy itself; others deal more directly with the challenges of promoting it in other lands.

This book does not attempt to cover the full range of questions posed by the effort to promote democracy. Indeed, given the vastness and the complexity of the subject, it is hard to imagine how any single volume could offer a comprehensive study. The goal of this book is to accomplish something less ambitious but still of great value – namely, to illuminate some of the key issues that must be confronted in thinking about whether and how democracy promotion can be successful.

The opening chapter by Thomas L. Pangle examines the morality of exporting democracy by comparing the different views put forward by political thinkers from the ancient, Christian, and modern philosophical traditions. It aims not to provide a strict set of guidelines governing whether, when, and by what means the spread of democracy should be pursued, but rather to weigh the competing philosophical frameworks and to illuminate the moral and prudential considerations that can be used to answer these questions.

The next four chapters are devoted to an examination of some of the “structural preconditions” of successful democracy and what these imply for the enterprise of democracy promotion. The emphasis here is not on the socioeconomic factors that are sometimes viewed as prerequisites for successful democratization. Instead, these chapters focus on questions of trust, tolerance, religion, association, culture, and ethnicity. Adam Seligman in chapter five and Sheri Berman in chapter two explore from different angles the newly rediscovered concept of civil society and its relation to democracy, with Seligman reflecting upon the relationship of civil society to the tolerance of difference, and Berman stressing the necessity of understanding civil society in the context of the political institutions that shape its development.

In chapter three, M. Steven Fish investigates the impact of culture on both the propensity of different countries to successfully sustain