Advancing Democracy Abroad
Why We Should and How We Can

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To posit that the United States should promote democracy is not an endorsement of the Bush policies. We must develop a new course to rebuild the international legitimacy and domestic support needed to sustain democracy promotion for the long haul. Chapters 5 and 6 offer a set of recommendations for charting this new course. Chapter 5 examines the changes needed in U.S. policy and Chapter 6 outlines actions that American leaders should take to further internationalize democracy promotion efforts.

2
The Value of Democracy

"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except all those others that have been tried from time to time."

Winston Churchill

If Churchill was right, it has taken the world a long time to appreciate his wisdom. For millennia, monarchs, emperors, and kings ruled on supposed authority from God. In the name of the Almighty, they claimed legitimacy over alternative methods of government, including democracy. In the twentieth century, communist and fascist thinkers crafted alternative political mod-
els to both monarchy and democracy. When these ideologues seized control of powerful states such as Germany and Russia, a normative debate about democracy and its alternatives accompanied the power struggle between the world’s superpowers. As late as 1942, only twelve democratic regimes existed in the world. The ideological contest between communism and democracy was particularly competitive, since communist doctrine championed normatively appealing goals, including modernization and equality. For a while, the Soviet economic model of state ownership and fixed prices produced growth rates on par with or higher than those of capitalist economies.

Eventually, command economies faltered, opponents to communist dictatorship strengthened, the Soviet empire collapsed, and this challenger to democracy as a system of government all but vanished, except for a few isolated pockets of true believers left in Havana, Moscow, and Berkeley. However, the idea that autocracies are better than democracies at producing such valued public goods as economic growth, stability, and order is alive and well throughout the world. The Chinese economic miracle, stewarded by a Communist Party dictatorship, provides a powerful contemporary challenge to Churchill’s claim. Stability is another highly valued condition that some think autocracies are better at providing than democracies. The calm and predictability of monarchies in Morocco and Saudi Arabia look rather attractive when compared to the chaos of Afghanistan or Iraq.

Some democracy critics also claim that autocracies are better at providing order and rule of law. Others contend that democratizing states are more likely to initiate war than other kinds of regimes. Still others believe democratization weakens state power and therefore the ability of these states to fight terrorism or other nasty authoritarian regimes. More subtly, some argue that democracy is a good system of government, but only for some peoples and at the appropriate time. In addition, the close association of the idea of democracy with the United States has compelled some critics of American power to become opponents of democracy. Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants have been most adept in using this line of thought to develop an ideological movement, which not only rejects democracy as the best system of government, but offers an alternative values-based polity. Few people in the world actually subscribe to Osama bin Ladenism and its ideological soul mates, but anti-Americanism around the world has generated increased antipathy towards liberal and democratic values.

These critics are wrong. Democracy is a difficult form of government. As a construct for making governing decisions, democracy cannot solve all problems immediately. But compared to other regimes, democracy is a better system of government—one that can produce economic development just as well as autocracies do and one that does not produce or encourage greater conflict than other forms of government.

To understand the virtues of democracy, we need first to have a working definition of the term, recognizing that this system of government takes many forms, some of which bear little resemblance to American democracy. That will be the assignment for the first part of this chapter. Section two makes the case for why democracy is the best system of government. Section three provides evidence to support the claim that most people around the world have come to accept democracy as the best system of government. Section four explores the relationship between democracy and development, demonstrating that democracies on average do not grow at a slower rate than autocracies and that under certain circumstances, democratic transitions can spur increased growth. Section five examines the relationship between democracy and security, making the case that democracy is a
more peaceful and stable form of government than others. Section six reexamines arguments about sequencing, addressing hypotheses about the need for modernization, state-building, and liberalism before democracy.

**Defining Democracy**

There is no universally accepted definition of democracy. Analysts and leaders have stretched the concept to describe so many different varieties of political systems that the term has lost some of its descriptive meaning. As Seymour Martin Lipset and Jason Lakin have remarked, "There are almost as many theoretical definitions of democracy as there are scholars who study democratic politics." The method of selection almost always now must come through elections of some sort, in which all citizens of a certain age can participate. Universal franchise is now a necessary component of democracy. Elections also must be conducted according to fixed or certain rules, but with some uncertainty about the outcomes—that is, some competition. As Adam Przeworski pithily stated, "Democracy is a system in which parties lose elections." Once an election occurs, those who lost or who oppose the outcome may not reverse the results, be they incumbents, the military, or a religious authority. Elections also must be held for offices that actually govern, not for decorative bodies with little or no power. This minimal definition of democracy is often called electoral democracy.

Electoral democracy is qualitatively different from autocracy. Autocracy also comes in many forms, but its essence consists of one distinctive feature: a subset of the population, not all citizens, selects the government. This subset can consist of a royal family, the landed aristocracy, a hegemonic party, a military junta, or religious leaders. In democracies, citizens elect the leaders. In autocracies, a group of elites selects the leaders.

The distinction between democracy and autocracy is not always easy to discern, both because many autocracies contain some democratic elements, and because some democracies have learned how to disguise their system of rule by mimicking democratic procedures. For instance, almost all countries in the world today hold elections in which most people can participate. Nonetheless, elections do not guarantee democracy because autocratic leaders can hold formal elections without allowing voters truly to have a say in who governs. Autocrats may manipulate the electoral process by limiting who can appear on the ballot, constraining the campaign arena by denying some candidates access to financial resources or national media outlets, or falsifying the actual election results. Clever autocrats also allow some degree of independent media, organized civil society, and even opposition political parties to give the regime a democratic veneer. This kind of autocracy has become especially prevalent since the 1990s.

A competitive and meaningful election is the pivotal feature of a democratic political system—the one attribute that distinguishes democracy from autocracy. More developed or what some refer to as liberal, democracies have many other features beyond elections. Terry Karl and others have warned rightly about the "fallacy of electoralism," cautioning against an overemphasis on elections accompanied by a neglect of other institutions that make democracies work. Many agree with this observation, but arguments quickly emerge over what else needs to be included in the definition of liberal democracy. More expansive def-
institutions, for instance, add themes of equality, justice, private property, and "economic democracy." Liberal democracy as defined in this book is more restrictive, and includes only political components, as outlined most comprehensively by Larry Diamond:

1. Control of the state and its key decisions and allocations lies, in fact as well as in constitutional theory, with elected officials (and not democratically accountable actors or foreign powers); in particular, the military is subordinate to the authority of elected civilian officials.

2. Executive power is constrained, constitutionally and in fact, by the autonomous power of other government institutions (such as an independent judiciary, parliament, and other mechanisms of horizontal accountability).

3. Not only are electoral outcomes uncertain, with a significant opposition vote and the presumption of party alteration in government, but no group that adheres to constitutional principles is denied the right to form a party and contest elections (even if electoral thresholds and other rules exclude small parties from winning representations in parliament).

4. Cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups (as well as historically disadvantaged majorities) are not prohibited (legally or in practice) from expressing their interests in the political process or from speaking their language or practicing their culture.

5. Beyond parties and elections, citizens have multiple, ongoing channels for expression and representation of their interests and values, including diverse, independent associations and movements, which they have the freedom to form and join.

6. There are alternative sources of information (including independent media) to which citizens have politically unfettered access.

7. Individuals also have substantial freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration, and petition.

8. Citizens are politically equal under law (even though they are invariably unequal in their political resources).

9. Individual and group liberties are effectively protected by an independent, nondiscriminatory judiciary, whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centers of power.

10. The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture, and undue interference in their personal lives not only by the state but also by organized non-state or anti-state forces.¹²

No regime in the world meets Diamond's high standards. As Robert Dahl has observed, "In every democratic country a substantial gap exists between actual and ideal democracy."¹³ Every democracy can be improved. Nonetheless, Diamond's list does
help us establish a benchmark for measuring different kinds of democracies and making judgments about why some democracies should be considered of higher quality than others. Scholars and politicians do not recognize a universal set of metrics for measuring democracy. In the United States, the non-partisan, non-governmental organization Freedom House has the longest tenure in measuring freedom, but several new indices, including the Polity index, have begun to challenge its monopoly on judging the extent of democracy in other countries.\textsuperscript{14} Broad agreement in academia and the policy community has emerged on both a minimalist definition of democracy and the kinds of institutions and attributes needed to transform electoral democracies into more robust democratic systems of government.

**Varieties of Democracy**

The adjective “American” does not appear on Diamond’s list of ideal characteristics for liberal democracy. The American political system is a liberal democracy, but many other different designs work equally well if not better. In fact, many institutional features of the American political system work less effectively and less democratically in other countries. For instance, the creation of the office of the president and the separation between the executive and legislative branches of government—a constitutional feature Americans celebrate for guaranteeing checks and balances—has helped to undermine democracy in other regions of the world.\textsuperscript{15} According to Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi,

the expected life of democracy in the developing world between 1950 and 1990 under presidentialism is approximately twenty-one years, whereas under parliamantaryism it is seventy-three years.\textsuperscript{16}

Presidential systems are more prone to coups than are parliamentary systems, and they also breed what Guillermo O’Donnell has called delegative democracy, in which whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office.\textsuperscript{17}

Under Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, or Vladimir Putin in Russia, delegative democracy devolved into autocratic rule. By contrast, Steven Fish has demonstrated that “the presence of a powerful legislature is an unmixed blessing for democratization” because it strengthens horizontal accountability and promotes the development of political parties.\textsuperscript{18} In parliamentary systems, decision-making can be cumbersome, and direct accountability is far less than in presidential systems, where the people get to vote directly for the single most powerful person in the government. Yet, the advantages of parliamentary democracy and the disadvantages of presidential systems are numerous enough to undermine any claim of superiority by champions of the American model.

The American electoral system of voting for a single representative from an electoral district or state also has endured for two centuries, a real record of success.\textsuperscript{19} Yet, other ways of electing officials to legislative and executive office are equally if not more democratic, and also foster stability. The electoral system of proportional representation in which voters select parties rather than individuals has produced stable and accountable government on the European continent for several decades. When minimum thresholds are not too high, proportional representation provides a tighter correlation between votes and seats. By
contrast, first-past-the-post systems can generate a majority of seats in parliament for a party that won only a minority of the votes. A mixed electoral system that includes some direct elections of representatives and some party list voting is an alternative that blends the benefits of both.

Federalism is a third institutional feature of the U.S. system of government and was essential for launching American democracy in the first place. As the American political system evolved, federalism has provided a critical constraint on federal and executive power, a feature of the system that also has helped democracy endure in other larger, diverse countries. However, federalism also helped sow the seeds of the American Civil War and then provided institutional protection for highly anti-democratic policies in the South for decades afterward. In other new democracies, such as Nigeria and Russia, federal structures have fueled secessionist movements and exacerbated ethnic conflicts. Corruption and federalism often go hand in hand. Democracy in unitary states, especially in smaller countries, has thrived and endured, leaving the jury out as to which design is best.

Many different democratic systems perform equally well. Although parliamentary systems with some degree of proportional representation tend to outperform other designs in stability and accountability, the exceptions are numerous enough to warrant caution about recommending one institutional blueprint for all countries. Different political challenges require different institutional solutions.

Democracy as the Best System of Government

From time to time, benevolent leaders have come to power in autocratic regimes and governed effectively and justly. European and Asian history is peppered with kings and queens who seemed to rule with an eye toward the common good. More recently, Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s autocratic ruler for three decades, is credited by some with providing peace, stable government, and economic growth for his people without egregiously violating their human rights. A few monarchs in the Middle East and Asia, as well as a couple of strongmen in Central Asia and Southeast Asia, also have provided public goods to those beyond their immediate families or entourages. At the same time, some democracies do not govern effectively, failing to protect human rights or represent the will of the people. Yet, on average, a democratic system of government benefits the populace more than any other system. Churchill was right.

First and foremost, democracy provides the best institutional arrangement for holding rulers accountable to the people. If leaders must compete for popular support to stay in power, they will respond to their citizens’ preferences. Rulers who do not need popular support to gain or maintain power will likely be more responsive to whatever group—the family, the military, the mullahs, or the communist party—controls their fate. The larger the number of people needed to elect a leader, the more inclined that leader will be to pursue public policies that benefit the majority. Not surprisingly, therefore, democracies “have consistently generated superior levels of social welfare” compared to autocracies at similar income levels.

Second, the institutions of democracy prevent abusive rule, constrain bad government, and provide a mechanism for getting rid of corrupt or ineffective leaders. Truly oppressive leaders cannot remain in power for long if they must seek the electoral mandate of those being oppressed. Autocrats face no such constraints. Mass terror and genocide occur in autocracies, not democracies. Democracies do not prevent all abusive behavior, but over the centuries, democratic leaders have unquestionably
The Value of Democracy

inflicted less pain and suffering on their people than have autocratic leaders. Joseph Stalin and the Soviet regime sent 28.7 million to forced labor camps, 2.7 million of whom died while incarcerated. Stalin consciously starved millions in Ukraine in the 1932-33 holodomor, and ordered the political execution of millions more during his bloody reign. Adolf Hitler not only unleashed carnage through war, he murdered six million Jews and millions more Poles, gypsies, and others in his concentration camps. In China, Mao may have killed more than seventy million people during his reign, including the roughly thirty-eight million people who died during a horrific famine generated by government policies. In only four years, Pol Pot exterminated roughly a quarter of Cambodia’s population. Idi Amin in Uganda, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Slobodan Milošević in Yugoslavia also systematically slaughtered their own citizens.

The carnage within democracies during the same century is tragic, but its breadth is not on the same scale. In the twenty-first century, autocratic regimes in Sudan, Zimbabwe, North Korea, and Burma inflict pain on their citizens in a manner no parallel in democratic countries.

Famine is also a phenomenon of dictatorships, not democracies. Amartya Sen notes in his work “the remarkable fact that, in the terrible history of modern famines in the world, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press.” Ironicaly, skeptics in the democracy promotion debate in the U.S., often argue that “bread and butter issues should come first,” or “it is harsh to care about your vote when you are starving.” What these critics fail to recognize is that people often starve because they do not have the power to vote.

More generally, democracies are better at guaranteeing human rights and individual freedoms than are autocracies, be-

cause they do not rely on the goodwill of leaders. The correlation between Freedom House scores on political liberties and civil liberties is robust. For every liberal autocrat like Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew or the King of Jordan, there are several more Hitlers, Stalins, and Mugabes.

Finally, democracy stimulates political competition that helps to generate higher quality officials in government. Just as market competition leads to better products, political competition produces better leaders, ideas, and organizations. At a minimum, democracy provides a mechanism for getting rid of bad or incompetent rulers in a way that autocracy does not. The absence of political competition in autocracies produces complacency, corruption, and no mechanism for generating new talent.

The Decline of Ideological Challengers to Democracy

For most of history, non-democratic forms of government enjoyed normative legitimacy and were widely practiced. For thousands of years, monarchies (and the Supreme Leader in Iran still today) claimed that their authority to rule came from God, and their subjects often believed them. Earlier in history, monarchies also were considered to be effective regimes compared to other forms of government. Colonial rulers claimed that spreading civilization to the savages was the normative justification for their non-democratic subjugation of others. Similarly, autocrats in ethnically divided countries have invoked ideas of ethnic superiority of one group over another as justification for dictatorship. In the twentieth century, fascist and communist regimes offered a new, modern alternative to both earlier forms of autocracy and democracy.
As serious ideological challengers to democracy, most of these earlier forms of government have lost their appeal. A handful of monarchies persists in the Middle East and Asia, but only just barely. Fascism thankfully disappeared after World War II, resurrecting its ugly head only intermittently since then. The communist challenge lasted longer because the Soviet Union’s command economy produced growth rates on par with or higher than those of capitalist economies for several decades, but eventually they faltered, and therefore so too that model of government.

Since 1991, new variants of autocracy have taken root in several states emerging from the USSR’s dissolution, while autocrats who still call their regimes communist remain in power in China and Vietnam. Yet none of these dictators now champions an alternative form of government, claiming instead that their regimes are in fact democratic—just a particular kind of democracy such as the “sovereign” democracy in Russia. Other rulers embrace an abstract idea of democracy, and contend they are moving their countries slowly and pragmatically towards developing this form of government. In his speech to the 17th Congress of the Chinese Community Party on October 15, 2007, General Secretary Hu Jintao mentioned the word “democracy” sixty-one times. In a similar spirit, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao argued in a September 2008 interview that China was progressing towards democracy:

I believe that while moving ahead with economic reforms, we also need to advance political reforms. When it comes to the development of democracy in China, we can talk about progress in three areas. No. 1: we need to gradually improve the democratic elections system so that state power will truly belong to the people and state power will be used by the people. No. 2: we need to improve the legal system, run by the country according to law and [have] an independent and just judicial system. No. 3: government should be subject to oversight by the people. . . . It’s hard for me to predict what will happen in 25 years. That being said, I have this conviction: that China’s democracy will continue to grow.

In this interview, the Chinese premier was not challenging the desirability of a more democratic system of government in China and may even have hinted at the eventual necessity of pursuing one.

Illegitimate creeds, racist norms, patrimonial rituals, and antidemocratic ideologies persist in pockets throughout the world, but only Osama bin Ladenism and its variants constitute a serious transnational alternative to liberal democracy today. Bin Laden is currently the world’s most successful propagandist of a set of illiberal, anti-modern, anti-democratic, quasi-religious ideas. Bin Laden and the more serious thinkers who preceded him, including the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb, reject democracy as the best system of government and recommend an alternative theocratic system. Bin Laden views democracy as a concept closely associated with the Judeo-American alliance, whose goal, he believes, is “to get rid of Islam itself.” In what he sees as a Manichean struggle to preserve his religion and way of life, bin Laden rejects all Western liberal concepts and instead promotes a form of governance that places religious laws he believes are dictated by God above man-made rules. Periodically, bin Laden also has called for the restoration of the Caliphate. For radical Islamists, democracy is a foreign concept closely associated with non-Muslim cultures and religions, which makes its practice anti-Muslim. As Al Qaeda’s
second-in-command, Ayman Al Zawahari, put it, “Whoever labels himself as a Muslim democrat or a Muslim who calls for democracy is like saying he is a Jewish Muslim or a Christian Muslim.”

More generally, adherents to this strain of Islamic fundamentalism “perceive democracy as the replacement of the will of Allah with the will of people; thus they deem it anti-Islamic.”

After decades of decline, Osama bin Ladenism gained new vibrancy after September 11, 2001 and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. Yet the spike in Bin Laden’s appeal did not last long, and this ideological alternative has been unable to challenge democracy’s reputation as the world’s most valued political system. Even as disdained for U.S. power in the Middle East skyrocketed, proponents of anti-democratic ideas and forms of government have not enjoyed a commensurate rise in support. In a survey conducted in six Arab countries in October 2005, Shibley Telhami found that 77 percent of respondents believed Iraqis were worse off since the American-led invasion, but only 6 percent of these respondents sympathized with Al Qaeda’s goal of creating an Islamic state.

Nor have political organizations sympathetic to Al Qaeda’s anti-democratic theorems gained power. Terrorist organizations continue to attack citizens living in democracies, but they have yet to actually threaten any democratic regime’s hold on power. In Iraq, Al Qaeda’s presence rose in 2004-05 but declined precipitously in 2007-08. Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine remain powerful actors, but their guns and social services—not their embrace of anti-democratic ideologies—are the determinants of their political success. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is gaining strength, but that is due in large measure to the ineffectiveness of the Karzai administration in Kabul, not to a renaissance in illiberal thinking among the Afghan people. In Iran, the actual institutions of dictatorship remain, but the ideological appeal of the Islamic Republic of Iran as an alternative regime has faded dramatically, and even Iranian government officials claim to be practicing a form of democracy.

Paradoxically, bin Laden’s resurgence after September 11 has helped to provoke greater discussion about democracy in the wider Middle East. Arab intellectuals who contributed to the United Nations Arab Human Development Report propelled the issue of democracy to the forefront 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 recent years, Arab civil leaders and intellectuals have convened several international conferences to discuss and promote democracy’s development. Even Islamist parties in the region, including the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Parti de la Justice et Developpement (PJD) in Morocco, and Islamist parties in Bahrain, Yemen, Kuwait, and Jordan have embraced a discourse about democracy as the best system of government. Of course, Islamist leaders may interpret democracy very differently from those in the West, and may be using this tentative discussion of democracy as a tactical move to seize power. But the fact that these Islamist groups propose no alternative to democracy represents a major and recent change in the ideological debate about democracy and its alternatives.

**Democracy as a World Value**

If clear-cut alternatives to democracy are not as prevalent or popular today as they were in previous eras, cultural arguments against the practice or promotion of democracy do continue from a peculiar alliance of American conservatives and liberal multi-culturalists, as well as an array of ruling elites in autocracies and religious leaders around the world. Conservatives have argued
that Muslims do not want and are unfit for democracy. Adam Garfinkle has warned that Arab societies lack certain dispositional prerequisites for democracy; let us mention just three: the belief that the proximate source of political authority is intrinsic to the society; a concept of majority rule; and the acceptance of all citizens' essential equality before the law.

Those on the left worry about shielding sovereign third world states from American hegemony or preserving indigenous cultures from globalization. Thus they defend some anti-democratic practices in the name of multiculturalism or anti-imperialism. Autocratic leaders around the world also invoke culture—Asian values, Islamic religion, or Slavic traditions—to explain why their citizens do not want or are not ready for democracy. Some scholars also have tried to trace cultural sources of autocratic government.

These cultural arguments were much more prevalent in prior centuries. Hundreds of years ago, European thinkers developed sophisticated theories based on race and ethnicity to explain why populations in the colonized world (and slaves in the first world) could not govern themselves. In retrospect, these cultural arguments look archaic. Nonetheless, only half a century ago, American politicians and analysts invoked ethnic arguments to explain why Germans, Italians, and Japanese people embraced autocratic rule. Only a few decades ago, scholars tried to develop theories to explain the autocratic tendencies of Catholics, since there was a correlation in the 1960s and 1970s between countries with a majority Catholic population and autocracy (Spain, Portugal, and most of Latin America). More recently, analysts have advanced similar arguments to explain why Orthodox Christian countries sustain autocratic governments. Today, immense popular and academic literature focuses on the autocratic elements of Islam.

That so many of these cultural arguments against democracy have not stood the test of time should give contemporary advocates pause. Proponents of the Asian values theory have a hard time explaining why Asian culture causes autocracy in China or Singapore, but not in Taiwan, Japan, or South Korea. Similar variations of regime type are present in the Christian Orthodox world. Autocratic rule is the norm in most Arab countries, but in the wider Islamic world, democracies and autocracies both exist, suggesting that religious values cannot be the sole cause of autocracy in the Middle East.

Public opinion data also undermine these cultural arguments and instead suggest that democracy is becoming a universal value that cuts across all regions, religions, and cultures. As Table One illustrates, majorities around the world agree with Churchill that democracy is the best system of government.

In some countries, respondents are ready to trade some democracy for more order, but in no country where survey work is conducted on this subject does support for dictatorship exceed support for democracy.

There are regional variations. In the post-communist world, support for democratic values is less robust than the world average. The first democratic governments after the collapse of communism guided many of the countries through a painful, tumultuous, and uncertain period of economic transformation. Citizens in these countries equated the practice of democracy with economic decline, and not surprisingly expressed skepticism about the performance of democrats and democratic institutions. In Latin America, support for democracy has declined as new democracies have struggled to deliver economic development,
but democracy still remains the most popular system of government there. In the Arab world, the region with the fewest democratic regimes, surveys show solid majorities in support of democracy, suggesting that commitment to Islamic ideas does not hinder the embrace of democratic values.\textsuperscript{55} The real values gap between the Arab world and the West is not over the general idea of democratic rule, but between men’s attitudes about the rights of women and liberal values more generally.\textsuperscript{56} In Africa, support for democracy varies among countries, but still remains robust. In Asia, the once popular notion that Asian values were antithetical to democracy has not stood up to empirical tests. The wealthier an Asian country is, the more likely its population is to support democratic values.\textsuperscript{57} Democracy still faces ideological challengers, but these opponents are less popular today than at any time in history.\textsuperscript{58}

Percent Agree: “Democracy may have its problems, but it’s better than any other form of government.”

Although direct ideological rebuttals of democracy are rare, more subtle criticism remains prevalent both in the developing world and the developed world’s policy debates about democracy promotion. Three charges are most common: (1) autocracies are better than democracies at producing economic growth, (2) democracies, especially new democracies, are unstable and war-prone, and (3) democracy is a worthy goal, but it only works after certain preconditions are met. Each of these arguments requires elaboration, engagement, and refutation.

**Democracy and Economic Growth**

The most powerful indictment of democracy today is that it fails to deliver what people most want: economic development. When given the choice between democracy and prosperity, so the argument goes, people prefer prosperity. In a similar vein,
critics contend that people struggling to survive cannot afford the luxury of democracy. Thus the most serious competitor to democracy in the past century and still today is the modernizing autocrat. In the 1930s, while the democratic West was languishing in a painful economic depression, the Soviet dictatorship was reorganizing national resources to sustain remarkable growth rates. For several decades in the twentieth century, Moscow helped to inspire and export this model of state-led economic development under a communist party dictatorship. In the 1960s and 1970s, authoritarian regimes in Asia’s tigers—Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea—provided a capitalist model for advocates of growth under autocracy. Today, the Chinese economic miracle provides a serious alternative to the legitimacy and attractiveness of democracy.

The relationship between regime type and economic performance, however, is much more complicated than this select sample of cases suggests. Proponents of democracy overpromise and ignore empirical reality when they claim that democracies always and everywhere outperform autocracies in developing economies, but cheerleaders for the Chinese development model often overlook fundamental pitfalls in China’s autocratic experience and overestimate the applicability of the model to other countries.

Just as democracy immunizes a society from the worst forms of governments, democracy also protects a society from the worst forms of economic disasters. Autocracies do not. No democracy has ever experienced the level of economic and social dislocation of Stalinism, Maoism, or Pol Potism. To be sure, democratic countries all suffered during the Great Depression, and economic downturns continue to occur in the democratic world. However, the frequency and the scale of these economic swings are much more moderate in the democratic world compared to the autocratic world. According to Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Hilton Root, “[T]he variance in economic growth rates for autocracies is about twice what it is for democracies.” Or put another way, Mort Halperin, Joseph Siegle, and Michael Weinstein calculate that, “Over the past 40 years, autocracies have been twice as likely to experience economic collapse [that is, a shrinkage in annual GDP per capita of 10 percent or more] as democracies.” Really bad policies that can bring economic ruin occur less frequently in democracies.

In the long run, democratic regimes produce policies that favor sustained growth and prosperity just as well as authoritarian regimes do. On average, democratic regimes also have higher levels of trade liberalization, which in turn generates higher growth rates. Democratic regimes also foster the accumulation of human capital, which has a positive effect on economic development. Rulers in democracies also must be more responsive to the basic needs of their population, which does not always produce positive economic results in the short run, but does compel political leaders to pursue policies beneficial to majorities over the long run. In contrast, authoritarian regimes are accountable to a powerful rich minority, and thus are more likely to prey on parts of society. These regimes also have incentives to extract the maximum possible surplus to use for their own purposes, not for the welfare of the population as a whole.

Contemporary comparisons of regime type and growth usually focus on the developing world, but leaving out the developed economies skews the sample. When all countries are included in the analysis, the oldest democracies in the world are also the richest countries in the world: only two of the twenty-five highest ranking countries on the Human Development Index—Hong Kong (if it is still counted as an independent political entity) and Singapore—are not democracies.
Among the poorest countries in the world, regime type varies considerably.

This correlation is not an accident of history. The rise of the Western world involved a complex interaction between institutional, cultural, and geographic factors, but a state constrained by democratic institutions and therefore capable of protecting property rights proved critical for market formation and expansion. Countries such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United States developed institutions that constrained the abusive power of the state and protected private property rights before they experienced rapid economic expansion. After 1688, England had in place a parliament capable of checking the Crown’s power and compelling the state to consult its taxpayers before spending their money. Of course, neither England in the seventeenth century nor the United States at its founding in the eighteenth century were full-blown democracies, since only a fraction of people in both countries at the time had the right to vote. Yet these regimes exhibited some degree of rule by the people (democracy) and some degree of checks and balances between different entities within the state (liberalism). This form of government provided the stable and predictable environment necessary for individual economic actors to make long-term investments.

The comparison between the United States and Canada on the one hand and the rest of the Americas on the other hand is also illustrative. Two hundred years ago, both of these regions enjoyed a similar set of rich endowments. Only 100 years ago, people living in Argentina enjoyed the same levels of prosperity as people living in the United States. Beginning in the nineteenth century, however, Latin American growth did not keep pace with North American growth. Many factors contributed to the increasing disparity, but political institutions, particularly the stability offered by democratic institutions in the North, played a major role. As Douglass North, William Summerhill, and Barry Weingast have concluded,

In the half-century following independence, the presence of widespread political instability and violence distinguished much of Latin America, especially Spanish America, from the United States. While the United States enjoyed an enduring set of political arrangements that both provided for stability and protected markets from predation, most of Spanish America erupted in internecine war. This instability imposed several types of costs. It diverted resources from economic activity and channeled them into caudillo (“strongman”) armies and a variety of praetorian efforts. Importantly, instability also made it impossible to establish institutions that could bring the expected private returns to investments close in line with social returns. The results were disastrous.

This outcome was not anticipated. Back in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many political theorists thought that democracy was incapable of securing private property to the extent necessary for investment and growth. Under majority rule, so the argument went, the average voter would have an incentive to ally with the poorer voters—the majority—in order to transfer income from the rich, the minority. Universal suffrage was supposed to weaken property rights. These fears proved to be unfounded. By the twentieth century, the historical record demonstrated that democracies were capable of constraining populist appeals for redistribution and appropriation, and instead provided strong property rights essential for economic development.
### Richest Countries in the World

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<th>High Human Development</th>
<th>Country</th>
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<tr>
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### Least Developed Countries in the World

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<tr>
<th>HDI Rank</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Chad</td>
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<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>Guinea Bissau</td>
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<td>Mozambique</td>
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<td>Malawi</td>
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<td>U. Rep. of Tanzania</td>
<td>Partly Free</td>
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<td>Cote D’Ivoire</td>
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<td>Kenya</td>
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<tr>
<td>153</td>
<td>Haiti</td>
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The positive influence of democratic institutions on economic growth in the developed world should not be overstated. After all, sustained growth in most of Europe started before full-fledged liberal democracy took root.\textsuperscript{75} This sequence seems to support Lipset’s famous thesis that “[t]he more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.”\textsuperscript{76} The converse also is true. Democratic regimes in poorer countries are more likely to revert back to autocracies compared with democratic regimes in richer countries.\textsuperscript{77} Furthermore, new democracies that produce economic growth are much more likely to consolidate than those that do not.

Some pivot from this relationship between wealth and democratic sustainability to suggest a sequencing of economic and political development: get richer first, worry about democracy later. For decades, this idea dominated thinking about development assistance in Western aid agencies and international financial institutions. The assumption behind this policy recommendation is that autocracies can sustain levels of economic growth similar to those witnessed in Europe before democracy and thereby prepare developing countries for democracy. In fact, some autocracies facilitate economic growth and development and some do not. On average, autocracies in the developing world have performed no better than democracies over the past four decades. Although some scholars have posited a positive relationship between democracy and growth,\textsuperscript{78} others have found a negative relationship,\textsuperscript{79} and a third school has found no relationship at all.\textsuperscript{80} In the aggregate, this last finding seems most robust. In their study of the relationship between regimes and growth over four decades, Przeworski, Alvarez, Chebub, and Limongi conclude that “there is no trade-off between democracy and development, not even in poor countries” and “[t]here is little difference in favor of dictatorships in the observed rates of growth.”\textsuperscript{81} Looking at all countries around the world over a similar period, Robert Barro comes to a similar conclusion: “[T]he net effect of more political freedom on growth is theoretically ambiguous.”\textsuperscript{82} John Helliwell also concludes that democracies are as capable as authoritarian regimes of combining redistribution and growth in such a way as to broaden markets and achieve economic expansion and economic growth.\textsuperscript{83}

But what about China? Over the past three decades, autocratic China has maintained an average annual growth rate of 10 percent, making it the fastest expanding economy in the world.\textsuperscript{84} That growth has occurred at a historically unprecedented rate, with the economy expanding eight-fold and per capita income increasing from $151 in 1978 to $1,740 in 2006 (measured by Purchasing Power Parity, the per capita figure is even more impressive: $7,600). No democracy has ever come close to matching this pace.

Growth under autocracy, however, is not the rule. For every China under Deng Xiaoping, there is a Zaire under Mobuto Sese Seko; for every Singapore, a Burma; for every South Korea, a North Korea; for every Uganda, a Zimbabwe. In the economic growth race in the developing world, autocracies are the hares and the snails, while democracies are the tortoises. On average, democracies have a slower rate of growth than the best autocratic performers but a much better rate of growth than most autocratic regimes. Democracies also grow at a steadier pace. In the past 10 years, Chinese growth accounts for the lion’s share of growth generated under autocracy worldwide. Autocratic regimes in control of oil, gas, and mineral exports also have experienced growth rates in the past 10 years, but when raw mate-
rial exporters are excluded from the equation, autocracies vastly underperform democracies.\textsuperscript{85}

Even in China, the direct role of autocracy in steering economic growth is not so clear. Guided by progressive-sounding slogans like the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, autocratic China in the 1950s and 1960s produced very different economic results, including famine, dislocation, and death for millions of innocent people. The 1961 famine may rank as the greatest man-made disaster in history. So even in China, autocracy was no guarantee of economic growth. In fact, the withdrawal of the state from the economy—not its guiding presence—helped to launch China’s extraordinary run of sustained growth over the past 30 years.\textsuperscript{86} Liberalizing political reforms—including greater rural self-government, a strengthened parliament, mandatory government retirements, and diminished controls on the media and civil society “either preceded or accompanied China’s economic growth. It was not a result of economic success.”\textsuperscript{87} China’s regime today is more constrained in its ability to influence Chinese society and Chinese citizens are freer today than at any time since the communist revolution.

The relationship between democracy and growth also varies over time after the introduction of democracy. In his seminal study, Barro found that when democracy is introduced in countries with harsh autocratic regimes, it tends to generate higher levels of growth than it does when introduced incrementally in middle-income countries that already have some degree of democracy in place. As he explains,

One way to interpret the results is that in the worst dictatorships, an increase in political rights tends to increase growth and investment because the benefit from limitations on government power is the key mater-

ter. But in places that have already achieved a moderate amount of democracy, a further increase in political rights impairs growth and investment because the dominant effect comes from the intensified concern with income redistribution.\textsuperscript{88}

A final economic attack against democracy pertains to transition. Some have posited that the transition to democracy makes people economically worse off.\textsuperscript{89} They suggest that democratic leaders are bad at painful but necessary economic reforms because they fear electoral backlash.\textsuperscript{90} Instead, leaders acquiesce to pressure for immediate consumption at the expense of investment and hence growth.\textsuperscript{91} Authoritarian regimes, insulated from voter pressures, are purportedly more effective at mobilizing savings by reducing current consumption and implementing needed economic reforms, even if they hurt a majority of people in the short run.\textsuperscript{92} In this model, political participation must be held down to promote economic development. Chile under Augusto Pinochet or China under the Communist Party today are often cited as the most efficient regimes at implementing painful economic reforms.\textsuperscript{93}

The historical record, however, is much more complex. Again, in the aggregate over the past several decades, careful cross-national research does not support this popular assumption. Dani Rodrik and Roman Wacziarg’s examination of the relationship between democratic transition and economic growth around the world shows that “major democratic transitions have, if anything, a positive effect on economic growth in the short run,” and contrary to the pundits’ claims, “this is especially true for the poorest countries in the world and those marked by sharp ethnic divisions.”\textsuperscript{94} Confirming Barro’s earlier findings, Rodrik and Wacziarg also report that “democratic transitions are associated with a decline in growth volatility.”\textsuperscript{95}
It is difficult to see a clear pattern in which autocratic regimes decisively implement economic reforms more successfully than democratic regimes do. Instead, what we should admit is that we still have much to learn about the relationship between regime type and economic development. So many factors play a role in triggering economic growth in one country and stifling it in another that isolating the precise effects of democratic or autocratic institutions on economic development is complex and difficult. What we can say definitively is that the alleged benefits of autocracy for economic growth are not supported by empirical data. Denying people the right to select their government, therefore, cannot be justified in the name of growth or development.

**Democracy and Security**

A different set of democracy critics argues that dictatorships provide a more stable system of government. Amy Chua, for instance, has argued that in the multiethnic countries in which the minority holds a dominant position in the economy, “adding democracy to markets has been a recipe for instability, upheaval and conflagration.” In Africa, according to Fareed Zakaria, the introduction of democracy has produced “a degree of chaos and instability that has actually made corruption and lawlessness worse in many countries.” Democratization allegedly also weakens state capacity, which makes it difficult for these new democracies to provide basic public goods, or to fight terrorist organizations. In sounding caution about the deleterious consequences of democratic change, Jack Snyder and Edward Mansfield argue that “the beginning stages of transitions to democracy often give rise to war rather than peace. Since the end of the Cold War, this causal connection between democratization and war has been especially striking, but the fundamental pattern is as old as democracy itself, dating at least to the French Revolution.” In explaining why democratizing states are belligerent, Mansfield and Snyder focus on unleashed nationalism: “In democratizing states, nationalism is an ideology with tremendous appeal for elites whose privileges are threatened. It can be used to convince newly empowered constituencies that the cleavage between the privileged and the masses is unimportant compared to the cleavages that divide nations, ethnic groups, or races.” All these authors contend that while democracy may have many positive attributes in theory, its practice in the real world—and especially its introduction in countries formerly ruled by autocrats—is dangerous, destabilizing, and ultimately may cause war. They are wrong.

**Democracy and Stability**

Consolidated democracies have in place a predictable and peaceful mechanism for transferring power from one ruling group to the next: elections. Autocracies, especially in the contemporary era, do not. Liberal democracies rarely unravel and wealthy liberal democracies almost never collapse. The longer a democratic regime survives, the less likely it will collapse. By contrast, autocracies that sustain economic growth continually face the challenge that an increasingly wealthy, educated, and urbanized society may eventually demand political change. Conversely, autocracies that fail to generate economic growth can become unstable. The longer an autocracy survives, the more likely it will collapse.

Few argue that liberal democracies are unstable political systems. Rather, the critique is focused on democratization or new democracies, especially in the developing world. New democra-
cies in poorer countries, are more likely to revert back to autocracy than are those in richer countries. Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi estimate that, in countries with per capita income below $1,000, the expected life of a democracy is eight years; in those with per capita income between $1,001 and $2,000, the expected duration of a democracy is eighteen years; and in countries with a per capita income above $4,000, the probability of democratic survival is nearly 100 percent. Likewise, new democracies that fail to generate economic growth are much more likely to collapse than are new democracies that do generate economic growth.

But these probabilities for new democracies’ survival do not imply that autocracies are more stable. On the contrary, what is striking about the last three decades is autocratic instability. In 1973, forty of the 150 countries (26.7 percent) in the world were democracies. In 2007, 119 of 193 countries (61.7 percent) were democracies. This period represents the most radical decline in autocratic rule in world history. In addition, the survival rate for new democracies increased to roughly 75 percent in the 1980s and 1990s, a sharp increase over the rate in the previous two decades. Moreover, the length of rule of new autocracies coming to power through military coups also has shortened dramatically in the past two decades as international norms about a return to civilian rule pressure these soldiers to get out of government and return to the barracks.

Democracy and Peace

The second concern about democracies being more prone to war is also exaggerated. Democracies do not go to war with each other. More precisely, Bruce Russett, one of the closest observers of this phenomenon, writes,

First, democratically organized political systems in general operate under restraints that make them more peaceful in their relations with other democracies. Second, in the modern international system, democracies are less likely to use lethal violence toward other democracies than toward autocratically governed states or than autocratically governed states are toward each other. Furthermore, there are no clear-cut cases of sovereign stable democracies waging war with each other in the modern international system.

Reflecting on a vast academic literature on the causes of war, Jack Levy concluded that the democratic peace theory is “the closest thing we have to empirical law in the study of international relations.” Democracies are not pacifist regimes when dealing with autocracies. But democracies are peaceful when interacting with other democracies.

Why this pattern occurs remains the subject of heated academic debate. Some argue that democratic institutions compel leaders to pursue the natural, peaceful preferences of society at large. Populations in democracies can hold their leaders more accountable than those in autocracies regarding the costs of war. If constitutional law governs relations between state leaders and societal groups, then rulers will be more cautious in engaging in costly military activity for which citizens must pay. Others argue that democratic institutions create transparency regarding a state’s international intentions, making them more predictable than those of an autocratic state whose leaders who do not reveal their preferences nor have to justify their preferences before publics. Like-minded democracies also encounter much less uncertainty when interacting with one another. As a result,
democracies neither fight each other nor tend to engage in arms races with one another.¹¹¹

A related argument suggests this democratic peace results from norms in democracies against fighting other democracies.¹¹² These peaceful norms develop more slowly than democratic institutions, but once in place provide a more powerful constraint on belligerent behavior than the institutions themselves. Another line of argument posits that democratic states build up more linkages among one another, which raise the costs of conflict.¹¹³ Over time, liberals argue, repeated, peaceful interactions between democracies produce self-enforcing habits and institutions, which every state has a stake in maintaining.¹¹⁴ These democratic states form a Kantian “pacific union” or an international society in which interstate interaction is much more predictable and peaceful than interstate relations either between non-democratic states or between democratic states and non-democratic states. The international institutions that emerge from this peaceful interaction in turn help to keep the peace.¹¹⁵ Other interactions that may serve to reduce uncertainty and thereby enhance peace include alliances, trade, and the presence of transnational actors. Among democracies, conquest does not pay.¹¹⁶ In a related manner, peace among democracies in Europe may result from fifty years of a shared historical experience of containing communism, which nurtured a homogenization of interests and values, reinforced by robust international institutions.¹¹⁷ In established democracies, those democratic norms that produce compromise within states also will spawn compromise between liberal democratic states.¹¹⁸ Whatever the causal relationship between peace and democracies, the empirical correlation is robust.

Although few dispute the observation that liberal democracies enjoy peaceful relations with other democracies, some claim that the process of democratization instigates conflict and war. The evidence, however, does not support this sweeping generalization. Most importantly, countries making successful transitions to democracy rarely go to war. As Mansfield and Snyder themselves write, “[T]here is only scattered evidence that transitions culminating in a coherent democracy influence war.”¹¹⁹ In addition, democratizing states rarely initiate war. In the “third wave” of democratization, from 1973 to 2004, Freedom House cataloged 179 instances of democratization, defined as countries moving from either “Not Free” to “Free” (25 cases) or “Not Free” to “Partly Free” (154 cases).¹²⁰ In this same time period, only 30 of these democratizing states (16 percent) experienced political violence—civil war or interstate war—within five years after democratization, and the majority saw internal wars, not interstate wars.¹²¹ Moreover, we do not know if these conflicts would have occurred anyway, irrespective of regime type or regime change.

But Mansfield and Snyder make the narrower argument that democratizing states are more likely to go to war than either stable democratic or authoritarian regimes. This narrower claim will seem counterintuitive to any student of twentieth-century history. In recalling the millions slaughtered in the twentieth century, we think of ruthless dictators like Stalin, Mao, Hitler, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, and Saddam Hussein, not leaders of democratizing states like Adolfo Suarez in Spain, Lech Walesa in Poland, or Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Mansfield and Snyder, however, are concerned not with democratizing countries in general but with a subset they call stalled transitions or incomplete democratizations.¹²² They then make the universe of belligerent democratizers smaller by focusing only on those countries that have weak political institutions. Without the presence of this “weak institutions” variable, there is no statistical relationship between democratization and war. Once the importance of
“stalled transitions” and “weak institutions” to the authors’ causal argument becomes clear, one has to wonder why Mansfield and Snyder continue to name “democratization” as the causal force for war in these cases. In fact, what they are really explaining is why failed state-building and failed democratization lead to war. Most of the countries discussed in their analysis are not democratizing states, but ones with regime collapse or a return to autocracy, such as belligerent France in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman empire on the eve of World War I, war-prone Germany under the Nazis, the military junta in Argentina during the Falklands War, or Serbia under Milošević. In these cases, democratization did not cause conflict. Rather, the failure of democracy allowed nationalist dictators to usurp power and then instigate conflict. The policy solution, therefore, is not to avoid democratization altogether, but to make sure it succeeds.

Sequencing and Preconditions

Another argument against democracy promotion is that some societies and countries are not ready for democracy. Proponents of this view invoke several preconditions.

Modernization is often cited as a prerequisite for democracy. Societies need to achieve a certain level of economic development, so the argument goes, before they can practice democracy. People can be too poor or too uneducated to participate effectively in democratic institutions.

A second school advocates the consolidation of liberal institutions as a precondition for the introduction of democracy. Liberal institutions are those laws, procedures, and norms that protect the individual against the indiscriminate power of the state or society (or in earlier times, from the church or society). Covenants and constitutions that establish liberalism have little
to do with how to select a government and everything to do with how to define the relationship between government and the individual. As Fareed Zakaria, one of the most articulate proponents of this sequencing argument, rightly points out, “liberty came to the West centuries before democracy.” Institutions that checked the power of majorities such as the (unelected) Supreme Court in the United States or the House of Lords in Great Britain were part of the constitutional configuration before all adults were allowed to vote. By the time countries like Great Britain and the Nordics began to open the franchise to large numbers of voters, liberal practices had been in place for centuries.

Many suggest that a third precondition for democracy is the presence of a sovereign and functioning state. As Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan have argued categorically, “without a state, no modern democracy is possible.” Two dimensions of stateness must be present, or so the argument goes. First, there must be general agreement inside a country about who is in the state and who is not. “National unity,” in Dankwart Rustow’s formulation, “must precede all other phases of democratization” and works best as a precondition for democracy “when national unity is accepted unthinkingly.” Colonies of empires, therefore, cannot be democracies until they obtain independence. Ethnically divided societies cannot make the move to democracy until all sides agree who is a member of the polity. Second, the state must have some capacity to govern. Weak or collapsing states cannot sustain even minimal forms of democratic governments.

In the extreme, all these arguments about preconditions are true. Societies in which the vast majority cannot read or write will have difficulty practicing democracy effectively. As for liberty before democracy, elections in countries with no tradition of the rule of law, checks and balances within the state, or government constraint have little chance of making democracy work. Coun-
tries without states or well-defined nations are less likely to make successful democratic transitions. However, generalizing from these extremes is dangerous. Waiting for preconditions to appear under autocracy is neither practical nor necessary.

Regarding modernization, as discussed above, there is no reason to assume that autocracies are more likely than democracies to produce economic growth, development, or higher literacy rates. Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi found that

... there is no trade-off between democracy and development, not even in poor countries. ... [T]here was never solid evidence that democracies were somehow inferior in generating growth—certainly not enough to justify supporting or even condoning dictatorships ... [T]here is little difference in favor of dictatorships in the observed rates of growth.  

Freedom is a luxury when you are starving, but you might very well be starving because you have no ability to control your government. To assume a sequence—first economic growth, then democracy—might very well relegate people to live in poverty forever.

In addition, levels of economic development or degrees of modernization are terrible predictors of when a country democratizes. The United States, after all, was a largely agrarian society with low literacy levels when it democratized. In the developing world over the past 50 years, there is no correlation between modernization and democratization.  

Several successful democracies in the developing world, including Mali, India, and Botswana, made successful transitions to democracy at very low levels of development and have sustained democracy nonetheless. China, on the other hand, has experienced tremendous growth over the past two decades, yet democratization has not even begun. Over the past 10 years, economic modernization in Russia has undermined, not promoted, democratic development.

As for the suggestion that liberalism must precede democracy, it is clear that elections alone neither make a democracy nor push a country along a path to liberal democracy. Elections that occur in authoritarian regimes only sometimes have a liberalizing effect; they did in the Soviet Union in 1989, but did not in Egypt in 2005. Especially in post-conflict settings, as the world learned tragically in Angola in 1992, Bosnia in 1996, Liberia in 1997, and Iraq in 2005, elections held prematurely can weaken liberal institutions.

But does the alternative—no elections—generate better or faster progress towards liberalism? There is no reason to assume today that autocracies are better than democracies at facilitating the emergence of constitutional liberalism. Leaders in Hong Kong and Singapore are the exception, not the rule. Many more dictatorships continue to impede the development of both liberal and democratic institutions.

And the introduction of elections can facilitate the emergence and consolidation of liberal democracy. As Barro observed in comparing 100 countries between 1960 and 1990,

the civil-liberties variable is highly correlated with the democracy index: 0.8 in 1972, 0.93 in 1980, 0.94 in 1990 and 0.91 in 1994. ... This result suggests that the economic and social forces that promote political rights are similar to those that stimulate civil liberties.

In East Central Europe, liberalism did not develop under communism, but quickly took root after the first round of elections
in 1989 and 1990. After the first wave of democratization, many other countries in the post-communist region did get stuck in the grey zone between democracy and autocracy. It was electoral breakthroughs—a mobilized opposition seeking to overturn falsified election results—not reforming autocrats, that jumpstarted the process of deepening liberal democracy in Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, and Ukraine in 2004. In all three places, the quality of democracy improved after these so-called revolutions, which would not have occurred without elections. In his analysis of nearly 200 elections in more than 30 African countries, Staffan Lindberg concluded that the introduction of elections did improve the quality of democracy, especially after the third round of elections. Nikolay Marinov has demonstrated that elections even in semi-autocracies tend over time to have a democratizing influence on political systems.

Very few autocratic regimes in the world today are building and strengthening liberal institutions. Hoping that eighteenth century England might be a model today is far more utopian than believing that these same countries might become democracies. Monarchies might be the only modern system of government that could sustain a liberalizing autocracy, since a benevolent king or queen might be able press for liberal changes before allowing democratic changes. Such regimes, however, are also rare, and include only a handful of the Gulf States, Morocco, and Jordan.

Those who pine for the European pathway to democracy via liberalism also forget just how bloody, volatile, and long the process of liberal state-building on the continent was. Liberalism in Great Britain did not evolve peacefully and gradually, but was forged over centuries of revolution, war, oppression, and rebellion. The process in France was just as contentious, and more violent. The emergence of a German liberal state occurred more rapidly, but also at a higher cost, both to the German people and to Europe as whole. More recently, South Africa’s first democratically elected government did inherit much greater state capacity and constitutional liberalism when compared to many other states making the transition from colonial to black African leadership, but the human cost of building this capacious state under apartheid was enormous.

Finally, advocates of liberalism preceding democracy must acknowledge a practical political constraint: the people will not wait. As the Americans learned in both Afghanistan and Iraq, outsiders cannot ask or coerce people in another country to accept disenfranchisement until their elites build strong liberal institutions, especially when today’s autocracies have such a poor record of actually building them. After the American-led invasion of their country, Afghan leaders demanded that elections occur sooner rather than later. In Iraq, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani rejected the American-proposed procedure of indirect elections and insisted instead on direct elections. Once a process of political liberalization begins, denying citizens the right to vote is normatively indefensible and politically dangerous.

**Stateness**

Clearly, only people in a sovereign state with some minimal level of capacity can participate in democracy. This need for state sovereignty was exemplified in Africa and Asia in the twentieth century, where people first had to rid their lands of colonial rulers before they could begin to experiment with democracy.

Agreement about the borders of the state or nation most certainly facilitates democratic development. When the national boundaries of the state are contested, democratization is less likely. But agreement is not a necessary precondition to democratic development. The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Serbia,
and Georgia are a few examples of countries that democratized before settling on new state borders. Ethnic conflicts over state borders made transitions in the Balkans and the Caucasus more difficult, but border disputes did not have to be resolved before democratization could occur. In Africa, local disputes about externally drawn borders have delayed and derailed democracy, but the introduction of regular, competitive elections has helped to reduce violent conflict within states and stimulate the development of “shared beliefs of citizenship and the rights, obligations, and benefits of collective action in both the political and societal spheres.”139 In countries where border disputes fester, there is little evidence and no guarantee that delaying democratization helps to resolve these boundary disputes.

**Conclusion**

If one were to argue that the United States is morally compelled to help make the world a better place, then it would follow that supporting democratic development in other countries should be a goal of American foreign policy. As a system of government, democracy has clear advantages over other kinds of regimes. Democracies represent the will of the people and constrain the power of the state. They avoid the worst kinds of economic disasters, such as famine, and the political horrors, such as genocide, that occur in autocracies. On average, democracies also produce economic development just as well as other forms of governments. Democracies also tend to provide for more stable government and more peaceful relations with other states compared to other regime types. Finally, most people in the world want democracy.

The central purpose of American power, however, is not to make the world a better place. Rather, American leaders must first ensure the security and prosperity of the American people. The next chapter explores how the promotion of democracy abroad serves these American national interests.
3
Democracy and American National Interests

The previous chapter outlined the benefits of democracy as an effective and just system of government, but also as a type of political regime that generates other valuable outcomes such as economic growth and security. We also saw that democracy and democratization are not as inimical to development and peace as is often claimed. In addition, public opinion polls demonstrate that most people in the world, regardless of income or culture, want democracy. The promotion of democracy, therefore, is morally justified. If American leaders want to practice an ethical foreign policy by supporting valuable and good causes, then democracy—like clean air, peace, and prosperity—is an international public good that the United States should promote.

Conversely, the normative defense for indifference to autocracy is weak. For several decades, American leaders and thinkers championed nonintervention in the internal affairs of other countries, and cited that norm to justify ignoring domestic
abuses in autocratic regimes. In earlier eras of American history, doctrines against imperialism and in support of sovereignty carried moral weight, especially during the wave of decolonization that took place in Africa and Asia after World War II. Today, however, respecting the sovereignty of despotic regimes more often than not means doing nothing to stop human rights violations, be they the arrest of political dissidents in China, Iran, or Russia, or genocide in Rwanda in 1994 or in Sudan today. American foreign policy makers can invoke security or material interests to justify American inaction in such instances, but they are hard pressed to invoke ethical or normative arguments to justify their indifference to human rights abuses practiced by autocratic regimes.

The same is true regarding the active support of autocracies. When the United States provides billions of dollars in aid over several decades to prop up the Egyptian dictatorship, the sovereignty of the Egyptian people is being violated. Such a foreign policy may meet other American interests, but cannot be defended on normative grounds. Likewise, when the United States provided military and financial support to Saddam Hussein so he could fight the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1980s—a war that brought massive suffering to both the Iraqi and Iranian people—the policy had no moral defense, especially when Iraq used chemical weapons in the fight. American support for the apartheid regime in South Africa, Augusto Pinochet in Chile, and Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in Iran are other examples in which norms were not the decisive factor shaping American foreign policy.

In pursuing these policies, American leaders always have invoked the national interest. But what is the national interest, who defines it, and how is it best achieved? In digging down to the bare essentials, few would disagree that the central aim of American foreign policy must be to provide the greatest security possible to the American people. Division erupts over strategy.

Which foreign policies most effectively make Americans safer? For two centuries, American politicians, academics, and commentators have advanced very different answers guided by competing analytical assumptions. The contours and cleavages of this contest over strategy are complex, but two fundamental issues have framed the debate: the degree of American involvement in the world and the nature of this involvement.

Isolation versus Engagement

The central cleavage in American foreign policy thinking for much of the country’s first century was between advocates of isolation and proponents of international engagement. President George Washington’s famous warning to avoid “entangling alliances” launched a longstanding and successful isolationist tradition of remaining detached from the unpredictable zigs and zags of international politics, especially in amoral, self-interested, and imperial Europe. The pursuit of this objective subsequently entailed repelling European advances into American affairs, defined at first narrowly to mean the territory of the United States and later, as codified in the Monroe Doctrine, to encompass the entire Western hemisphere. For more than a century, this isolationist and unilateralist doctrine dominated American strategic thinking. Geography and relative American weakness helped the isolationist cause. Back then, American leaders did not have the military or economic wherewithal to project power across the oceans and participate in global politics, even if they had aspired to do so. As late as 1885, President Grover Cleveland could declare in his first message to Congress:

Maintaining, as I do, the tenets of a line of precedents from Washington’s day, which proscribe entangling al-
liances with foreign states, I do not favor a policy of acquisition of new and distant territory or the incorporation of remote interests with our own.

Just a decade after Cleveland's affirmation of Washingtonian isolationism, the imperial bug so widespread in Europe at the time finally infected American leaders. When the United States emerged as a genuine great power in the decades after the Civil War and reached the geographic limits of the continent, American strategic thinkers embraced a policy of "acquisition of new and distant territory," an impulse that eventually helped to produce the 1898 Spanish-American War and the creation of American colonies in the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. In deciding to enter World War I in 1917 and then subsequently participating in the post-war settlement in Versailles, President Woodrow Wilson broke firmly with Washington's warnings. Wilson joined with one set of European powers against another, and then helped create the archetypal entangling alliance: the League of Nations.

Isolationism enjoyed one last surge of popularity in the inter-war period, especially in reaction to the Great Depression. During this period, Congress refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles or join the League of Nations, and individuals such as Charles Lindbergh and groups such as the America First Committee forcefully articulated the American desire to stay out of World War II. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, forever shattered the isolationist assumption that the United States could keep safe through disengagement. Since then, growing American power and emergent technologies that have made the world more connected (ballistic missiles, electronic trading in emerging markets, jet travel, the internet, etc.) have greatly diminished the analytic and prescriptive power of isolationist arguments. The isolationist impulse remains alive in both the Republican and Democratic parties, but only at the fringes of the debate, not the center.

**Wilsonian Liberalism versus Realism**

A second debate about strategies for making the American people safe and prosperous pits the so-called liberals and so-called realists—"so-called" because neither label actually captures the essence of either side's arguments.

Wilsonian liberals—so dubbed in honor of Woodrow Wilson—contend that a country's internal political regime influences the way the country behaves externally. Liberals have adopted a thesis first expounded more than 200 years ago by Immanuel Kant, arguing that democracies rarely go to war with each other, while autocracies are more likely to engage in conflict with both other autocracies and democracies.

As discussed in the previous chapter, empirical research shows that democracies do not fight each other, even if the causes for this correlation are still poorly understood. As a result, the "democratic peace" thesis yields a clear prescriptive strategy: the United States (along with other democracies) has a national security interest in the expansion of democratic regimes throughout the world. In Wilson's famous formulation, the United States had to change the world to make Americans safe. In Wilson's view, the best way to achieve American security was not to defend or isolate the United States from the outside world, but to change the political character of the outside world.

This approach to American foreign policy is not confined to the Democratic Party. During the Cold War, one of the staunchest Wilsonian liberals in foreign policy was Republican President Ronald Reagan, who also believed that the advance of democracy abroad enhanced American security at home.
Realism is a second important tradition in American foreign policy and academia, one that has dominated American thinking for most of the last century.\(^{11}\) Realism as a theory of international relations and ideological guide to foreign policymaking is based on three core assumptions.\(^{12}\) First, states are the central actors in an anarchic world. International institutions, NGOs, multi-national corporations and other non-state actors are either unimportant or a reflection of the interests of the most powerful states. Second, domestic regime type does not influence the external behavior of states. Third, rather than type of government, the external behavior of states is determined largely by their external environment, specifically, the balance of power between the major states in the international system. Realists believe that because power—not ideals or ethics—is so central to a state’s well being, states constantly compete to acquire more power relative to other states in the world. As John Mearsheimer argues, “A zero-sum quality characterizes that competition, sometimes making it intense and unforgiving. States may cooperate with each other on occasion, but at root they have conflicting interests.”\(^{13}\) American realists, therefore, see any country with great or growing military and economic power as a threat to the United States. Rising powers in particular such as Germany and the Soviet Union in the last century and China today are especially frightening because they disrupt the global balance of power and can trigger conflict between old and new great powers.

This theory prescribes that the United States has a security interest in increasing its military and economic power and fostering and maintaining alliances with powerful states to check the influence of other great or rising powers. As President Nixon once told Chinese leader Mao Zedong, “What is important is not a nation’s internal political philosophy. What is important is its policy toward the rest of the world and toward us.”\(^{14}\) In Nixon’s view, the balance of power was the crucial ingredient in international politics and therefore preserving America’s power position, in this case by reaching out to China to balance against a rising Soviet power, was the best strategy to make Americans more secure.\(^{15}\) To accumulate power to balance against potential challengers, realists argue that the United States needs access to oil, minerals, basing rights, and trade from all countries willing to cooperate, irrespective of whether they are autocratic or democratic.

This philosophy about world politics also prompts a policy prescription that it is best to refrain from democracy promotion. Realists argue that democracy promotion can undermine allies, empower anti-American forces, and generate both domestic and international instability. By pushing for democratization, so the argument goes, the United States “might help set forces in motion that it cannot control and that threaten its vital interests. . . And even if it is accepted that stability has not brought [the US] security in all respects, it scarcely follows that instability will do so. That assumes that things cannot get worse than they are, a hazardous assumption for a statesman to make and one belied by much of human history.”\(^{16}\)

Like liberalism, realism as a guide for foreign policymaking is not confined to one political party in the United States.\(^{17}\) The consummate realist of the twentieth century, Richard Nixon, was a Republican just like Ronald Reagan, the consummate Wilsonian liberal of the same century. Realism has a long tradition within the Democratic Party as well, recently energized in reaction to George W. Bush’s alleged embrace of neo-conservative or Wilsonian liberal policies.\(^{18}\) In American academia, realism has dominated the study of international relations for decades.\(^{19}\)
The Case for Wilsonian Liberalism with a Realist Core

The realist premise that power matters is self-evident. The accumulation of military and economic power over the last two centuries has transformed the United States from a peripheral player in international politics to a world superpower. This accumulation of power has helped to deter and defeat foes. Conversely, countries with massive militaries and successful economies have impacted U.S. national security more directly over the past two centuries than weaker countries have, no matter what the internal composition of these great powers. Today, autocratic China and democratic India matter more to U.S. national security than autocratic Zimbabwe or democratic Honduras.

The stronger claim that only power matters is equally self-evidently wrong. Not all great powers have threatened American national security. Only great powers run by autocrats have posed real threats. At the other end of the power spectrum, very weak but highly motivated illiberal anti-democratic movements have threatened American national security. Neither America’s armed forces nor its mighty nuclear arsenal—once thought to be the ultimate deterrent and preserver of peace in a rational world—prevented the Al Qaeda terrorist attacks on September 11. As John Lewis Gaddis has observed,

Neither [George W.] Bush nor his successors, whatever their party, can ignore what the events of September 11, 2001, made clear; that deterrence against states affords insufficient protection from attacks by gangs, which can now inflict the kind of damage only states fighting wars used to be able to achieve.

Classic realist frameworks for assessing threats to U.S. national security fail to appreciate these kinds of very real threats.

To make Americans secure and prosperous, neither purely realist dogma nor purely liberal ideology provides good guidance. At times, the United States has needed to work with autocratic regimes to pursue vital national interests. Without French military intervention in the American Revolution (an instance of military intervention to promote democracy), the United States would not have become an independent country when it did. Without the Soviet Union as an ally, the United States would have suffered much higher casualties in World War II and could easily have failed to defeat the Nazi regime. Without the illiberal kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a trade partner today, the United States would not have enough affordable energy to support our current way of life. A foreign policy that refused French military assistance, an alliance with Stalin, or oil from Saudi Arabia would not have served American national interests.

At the same time, the claim that internal regime type of other countries has no impact on American national interests is ahistorical. The idea that promoting balance-of-power politics is a more prudent ideological guide for American foreign policy than promoting democracy is equally naïve. The history of the last 200 years, but especially the last 80 years, shows that American security, economic, and moral interests have been enhanced by the expansion of democracy abroad, while reliance on realpolitik frameworks as a guide for foreign policy has produced some short-term gains but many long-term setbacks for American national interests. The remainder of this chapter explains why, by looking at (1) the dangers of autocratic foes; (2) the tenuous benefits of autocratic allies; (3) the long-term security advantages from alliances with democracies; (4) the security benefits of democratization; (5) the security threats from democratic break-
(6) the economic dividends of democratic expansion; and (7) the positive reputational gains of supporting democracy abroad. These factors all point to America’s security and economic interests being enhanced by the advance of democracy around the world.

**Autocratic Enemies**

Every foreign enemy of the United States has been a dictatorship. Autocracies, not democracies, have attacked and threatened the United States. The consolidation of democratic regimes in states ruled by formerly anti-American, autocratic regimes has transformed such countries from enemies into allies of the United States. Over the last two centuries, the advance of democracy abroad has made Americans safer at home.

The first war fought by Americans as independent citizens (or, more precisely, people striving to become independent citizens) was sparked in part by a disagreement between autocrats and democrats. The American Revolution is often portrayed as an anti-colonial war of independence, compared with later struggles for sovereignty in Africa and Asia in the twentieth century. However, the “Americans” who fought the British were in large measure colonialists on the North American continent. (Thus the appropriate analogy is not Indians fighting to regain their independence, but white Rhodesians breaking with their native country in an attempt to establish a new country). As Robert Kagan has written, “Mid-eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans thus became the most enthusiastic of British imperialists . . . [C]olonial elites, far from seeking separation from the Old World, aspired to be more British in their habits, their manners, and their dress.” The manner of rule—not ethnic conflict or anti-imperialism—precipitated conflict. A British autocracy sought to sustain and expand antidemocratic practices in the American territories. The American colonialists who eventually led the struggle for independence mobilized initially to resist King George III’s attempts to abrogate their rights as Englishmen. Under the battle cry, “no taxation without representation,” Americans rebelled as a means of ending perceived antidemocratic practices in the American colonies.

Victory in the War of Independence did not eliminate the British threat to American national security; British troops burned the White House to the ground in 1814. But regime change in the United States did help to make Americans more secure, first and foremost by limiting radically the scope of British interference in the lives of American citizens. The initial institutional design for American democracy—the 1781 Articles of Confederation—failed to create an effective state capable of sustaining economic growth or defending American citizens, but the subsequent 1787 democratic Constitution provided the institutional structure for sustaining one of the most successful economies in the modern era. In addition, the type of government established by this constitution eventually (though not immediately) provided the framework for accumulating military power capable of deterring most American foes. Other kinds of regimes, including most prominently the Soviet dictatorship in the twentieth century, have replicated this concentration of coercive power, but in trying to sustain superpower capacities by means of a command economy and a totalitarian political system, the Soviet state eventually collapsed.

In the 100 years following the War of 1812, the American republic faced minor threats and encroachments from European autocracies. Of these European threats, the one that diminished most dramatically over time and then disappeared altogether was Great Britain. Despite a tumultuous beginning, bilateral ties be-
tween Great Britain and the United States evolved into a cooperative relationship capable of settling international disputes through negotiation rather than military conflict. England was always more liberal than the rest of Europe. The Magna Carta of 1215, Henry VIII’s break with Rome, and the Glorious Revolution in 1688 were historic milestones on the path to creating a liberal state, from which both British and American political institutions evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This common liberal heritage provided the glue for a deep and lasting relationship. By the end of the nineteenth century, Arthur Balfour, the leader of the British Tory Party, rightly predicted that “the day would come” when “statesman of authority” would “lay down the doctrine that between English speaking peoples” war was “impossible.” In the twentieth century, British-American ties developed into a “special relationship” that anchored a strategic alliance in World War I, World War II, and the Cold War. As powerful ideological challengers to democracy emerged in the twentieth century, the United States and Great Britain worked closely to defend and later expand liberal democracy.

America’s relations with France were more volatile, not because of France’s fluctuating power capabilities, but rather because of internal dynamics in the French Republic. American revolutionaries had no qualms about accepting military assistance from a French monarch, but the French Revolution presented a dilemma for American statesmen. Thomas Jefferson and his Republican allies applauded the revolutionaries and wanted to provide assistance to “the freedom struggle,” while John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and their Federalist friends lamented the loss of an ally in the ancien régime and worried about antagonizing Great Britain. The debate resulted in American neutrality, driven mostly by American weakness, but also by American ideological division. However, the restoration of absolutism that followed the Napoleonic wars appeared threatening to the new American republic. At the time, the United States lacked the military capacity or inclination to become involved in Europe’s wars, but American elite sentiment clearly turned against France as the regime governing this former U.S. ally became increasingly autocratic.

In the early 1820s, the great powers in Europe colluded to squash rebellions in Italy, Portugal, and Greece. Contemporary and subsequent champions of realist philosophy applauded these military interventions on the grounds that they preserved the balance of power on the continent. More generally, the Concert of Europe, which maintained the balance of power in Europe for most of the nineteenth century, is often celebrated as a brilliant application of realist ideology in the name of world peace. The relative peace on the continent kept Americans out of war with rising European powers for several decades. Europe’s imperial impulses during the nineteenth century, which fundamentally reshaped borders and governance in most of Africa and parts of Asia, did not threaten American security or sovereignty directly. American leaders, however, viewed the Concert’s autocratic actions as potential threats to the American experiment with democracy. As John Quincy Adams warned in 1816, “All the restored governments of Europe are deeply hostile to us.”

During this period, American presidents applauded and sometimes aided the movements of independence in South America, thereby indirectly pitting the United States against absolutist regimes in Europe. As eventually codified in 1823 in the Monroe Doctrine, American leaders sought to push all European actors—irrespective of regime type—out of the American hemisphere. Rhetorically, U.S. officials framed this policy in moral terms: fledgling American republics battling against absolutist monarchs.
In the nineteenth century, the real autocratic threat to American security, prosperity, and territorial integrity came from within the U.S., not from Europe. The political regimes in place in the American South before the Civil War can only be understood as an autocratic, just as South Africa under apartheid was a dictatorship, even though white elites in both places enjoyed some liberal and democratic rights. When drafting the 1787 Constitution, northern leaders compromised with their southern counterparts, believing that northern acquiescence to slavery was the only way to preserve the Union. They did so, however, knowing full well that this “grand compromise” threatened the long-term future of American democracy. As Washington warned, “nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our union, by consolidating it in a bond of principle.”

Over time, the northern and southern systems of government grew further apart, and so too did their conceptions of American foreign policy. For instance, in a debate about democratization and stability with echoes today, northern antislavery politicians applauded Haiti’s successful struggle for independence in 1804, while southern leaders denounced the slave rebellion as destabilizing and threatening to American national interests. Later, northern leaders applauded the Monroe Doctrine as an assertion of American power in the name of republicanism, while southern leaders saw the doctrine and efforts to expand it as dangerous examples of the federal government wielding its power to influence the internal politics of foreign governments. Eventually, some northerners aspired to use American power to promote “regime change” in the South. “Realist” southerners, in contrast, wanted to preserve the balance of power within the republic and avoid using federal power to meddle in the internal affairs of states. It was only with the elimination of this regime type in the South, after a long and tragic civil war, that the illiberal threat to American democracy from within disappeared. Over time, the advance of democracy in the South made the United States a more secure and wealthier country.

The North’s occupation of the South after the Civil War might be considered the first instance of the United States using military force to pursue democratic regime change and nation building. Before the war, southern states enjoyed tremendous autonomy from the federal government, and during the Civil War itself, of course, these states declared their independence from the United States. The North’s post-war occupation aimed not only to reincorporate these states into the Union, but also to establish more democratic practices in the occupied territories, including first and foremost the extension of the franchise to former slaves. Like future attempts to use military force for democracy promotion, the results were limited; early gains were eventually undermined by more enduring anti-democratic social and political institutions in the South, which circumscribed the human and democratic rights of African-Americans for decades after the Civil War. Only a major grassroots social movement launched nearly a century later completed the South’s transformation from autocracy to democracy.

The Civil War aside, other American military conflicts in the nineteenth century can hardly be blamed on a supposed threat emanating from autocracies. Presidents did concoct arguments about the spread of civilization as an excuse for seizing the land of indigenous nations in North America and Hawaii. Even before independence, American settlers championed the virtues of empire and the legitimacy of expanding Western civilization through conquest. After the creation of the United States, American leaders saw little contradiction between their democratic values and the expansion of their country across the continent, even when this expansion meant the destruction or
relocation of indigenous nations or going to war with Mexico. Not all American leaders agreed with these tactics or the arguments that justified them, but those in favor of using force to enlarge the country prevailed. These conflicts had little to do with the internal organization of the Mexican or Native American governments and everything to do with the American desire for more territory.

Beyond North America, American leaders did perceive new threats emanating from the expansionist impulses of European and Asian empires in the nineteenth century. This new global competition for colonies and resources compelled American leaders to reexamine the relationship between American power and principles. By the end of the nineteenth century, the United States was no longer a fragile new state, but a major industrial power. Given this new level of power and the growing international interests of Americans producers that accompanied it, some American leaders wanted to join the international scramble for new territory, believing that colonies would make the United States stronger and richer. Others supported imperialism because they believed in a special missionary role for the United States as a promoter of civilization in lands occupied by barbarians.

As a result of this new American flirtation with imperialism, conflict eventually erupted in 1898. American leaders framed the Spanish-American War in moral terms—Spanish tyranny versus American liberty. Similar brushes with conflict with the more liberal British Empire, for instance in the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana at the end of the nineteenth century, did not lead to war. On the contrary, the peaceful resolution of this crisis proved to some that the prospect of war between Great Britain and the United States would be similar to the “unnatural horror of civil war.” Nonetheless, it would be a stretch to argue that Spanish autocracy precipitated the Spanish-American War, or even that autocratic Spain threatened the democratic United States in Cuba. American leaders wanted this war as a way to get into the colonial game.

After a quick victory, the United States acquired Puerto Rico, established a protectorate in Cuba, and occupied the former Spanish colonies of Guam and the Philippine islands. As with North American territories annexed earlier and the occupation of the South after the Civil War, American leaders proclaimed the promotion of freedom a core objective of the American presence in the Philippines. The mission did not go well. In the Philippines, American forces fought a prolonged war against insurgents, resulting in the deaths of 220,000 Filipino soldiers and civilians and 4,000 American soldiers over 14 years. Such bitter experiences with colonization and state-building tempered further American imperial aspirations. President Woodrow Wilson in particular rejected the imperial ambitions and “gunboat diplomacy” of Theodore Roosevelt, promising instead to restore American traditions of anti-colonialism. Never again did the United States seek to obtain colonies, and once this anti-colonial norm in American foreign policy was reaffirmed, the United States clashed increasingly with those non-democratic regimes that continued to seek territorial gain through military conquest.

World Wars Against Dictatorships

For most world leaders and political analysts, World War I represented the breakdown of the brilliantly orchestrated realepolitiik as practiced on the European continent for a good part of the nineteenth century. In President Wilson’s view, however, the war erupted not only because of changes in the balance of power in Europe, but also because of the distribution of ideas and political systems on the continent. The United States, according to Wilson,
was threatened not simply by German military power, but by German autocratic power. After seeking in vain to preserve American neutrality and to negotiate a “peace without victors,” Wilson eventually responded to German submarine attacks on American ships by joining the war on the side of Great Britain, France, and Russia. In explaining American motivations for joining the war, Wilson emphasized that the U.S.

seeks no material profit or aggrandizement of any kind. She is fighting for no advantage or selfish object of her own but for the liberation of peoples everywhere from the aggressions of autocratic force.\textsuperscript{38}

Wilson argued for American involvement in World War I as a defensive move, a way to protect America’s freedoms and republican system of government from the autocratic, illiberal ways of Germany and its allies. Of course, World War I was not solely a conflict between democracies and autocracies. Great Britain and France allied with tsarist Russia, one of the most rigid autocracies in Europe at the time, to fight Germany and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.\textsuperscript{39} Nonetheless, in making the case for joining this foreign war, Wilson explicitly framed American interests in normative terms, emphasizing that the United States “had no quarrel with the German people” but instead aimed to repel the belligerent behavior of Germany’s autocratic regime.\textsuperscript{40} Wilson saw American involvement in the war as a means to expand freedom for all mankind:

The tragic events of the three months of vital turmoil through which we have just passed have made us citizens of the world. There can be no turning back. Our fortunes as a nation are involved, whether we like it or not. . . . And yet we are not the less American on that account. We shall be the more American if we but remain true to the principles in which we have been bred. They are not principles of a province or of a single continent. We have known and boasted all along that they were the principles of a liberated mankind.\textsuperscript{41}

It is difficult to imagine that the United States would have fought in World War I if Germany had been a liberal democracy.

Even more virulent forms of autocracy defined the nature of the threat to the United States in World War II. All American foes in this war were autocracies. The conflict was not simply a struggle between the world’s great military powers, but a war that pitted Western democracies against German and Italian fascism as well as Japanese imperialism.\textsuperscript{42} The nature of the settlement that ended World War I helped to fuel German nationalism well before Hitler derailed the Weimar Republic and seized power in January 1933.\textsuperscript{43} Hitler took advantage of elections and a relatively pluralist political system to build his Nazi party. Yet, Hitler invaded Poland six years after Germany had become a full-blown dictatorship. Moreover, his blitzkrieg on Poland’s western border was so effective in part because he had an autocratic ally, the Soviet Union, invading Poland from the east. The secret Molotov-Ribbentrop pact would not have been concluded between a democratic and fascist regime.

Nonetheless, the same totalitarian regime that colluded with Hitler in 1939 to start World War II eventually played a decisive role in defeating the Nazi regime. Without question, the United States, Great Britain, and the rest of the free world needed the highly undemocratic Soviet regime to save the democratic world. For Roosevelt, cooperating with Stalin was part of a strategy for
minimizing American casualties. More than 27 million Soviets died during World War II, most of them civilians felled by disease, deportation, or conflict; Red Army deaths exceeded 8 million. According to John Lewis Gaddis, "for every American who died in the war . . . fifty-three Russians died." Had Roosevelt refused to cooperate with the Soviet Union at the time because of Stalin's inhumane methods of governing at home, American national security interests would have suffered.

The Cold War

The anti-democratic nature of Stalin's regime, however, doomed Roosevelt's desire for long-term cooperation with the Soviet Union after World War II. Roosevelt hoped for collective security, embodied first in his concept of the "Four Policemen" and later in the creation of the United Nations Security Council. But it did not work in large part because of the ideological conflict between American democracy and capitalism on the one hand and Soviet communism on the other. To be sure, the notion of collective security was also derailed by mutual distrust over the massive military power amassed by the United States and the Soviet Union—which eventually spawned the Cold War. But the key obstacle was the fact that these Soviet military resources lay in the hands of a competing political and economic system that presented a tremendous threat to American national security for several decades after World War II. Because both countries believed their respective systems were superior, they actively promoted the replication of these political and socio-economic systems in other countries and resisted expansion of the other's system elsewhere in the world. The Soviet Union and the United States were rivals not only because they were the two greatest military and political powers in the international system, but because they were two powers with antithetical visions about how domestic polities and economies should be organized.

Realists sometimes reflect fondly on the stability of the Cold War era, and the supposedly more manageable threats facing the U.S. compared to our current era. In fact, the Cold War was anything but stable and peaceful for the United States or the rest of the world. By one estimate, 120 wars killed roughly 20 million people during this period of bipolar "stability." The nuclear stalemate did keep the Soviet-American rivalry from becoming a full scale third world war, yet millions of people in the developing world, as well as American and Soviet soldiers fighting in these wars, died during this so-called Cold War to preserve this so-called stability. To contain communism, American soldiers fought directly in wars in Korea and Vietnam and the U.S. provided military advisors and assistance to dozens of proxy armed forces fighting against Soviet-sponsored proxies (sometimes real, sometimes imaginary) in all corners of the world, from Greece to Turkey, from Iran to Guatemala, from Cuba to Laos, from Angola to El Salvador, from the Dominican Republic to Zaire. For the people of these countries, as well as those living in Korea, Hungary, Congo, Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, Cambodia, Chile, El Salvador, Angola, Afghanistan (all non-democracies at the time of these conflicts) or for the American and Soviet soldiers who died fighting in many of them, the post-war international system did not provide stability or peace.

Miscalculations about the nature of the communist threat also undermined American national security interests. American presidents initially treated the entire communist world as monolithic, a mistake with disastrous consequences for American strategic interests, especially in Asia. Oftentimes U.S. leaders confused means and ends, so that all users of violence against non-communist states were considered part of the world com-
munist movement. Nelson Mandela, for instance, was considered for decades to be a “communist terrorist.” The American inability to distinguish between anti-colonial movements struggling for independence and Soviet proxies struggling for world communist revolution also led to many strategic errors in fighting the Cold War, including most tragically in Vietnam. The overzealous search for communist enemies from within in the 1950s also weakened the American model of democracy, a valuable tool in fighting against real ideological enemies. These challenges to American security all emanated from a perception of ideological threats that would not have existed in a world governed only by democratic regimes.

Viewing communism as a global threat also prompted most American presidents to court anti-communist regimes around the world, including many unstable and unpredictable dictatorships. During this period, the Shah in Iran was a great ally of the U.S. for 37 years, but a terrible ally that 38th year, when the radical mullahs removed him from power and transformed the Islamic Republic of Iran into a serious enemy of the United States and its allies. In trying to recover from the loss of the Shah as an ally, the United States subsequently embraced Saddam Hussein in Iraq as he waged an inhumane war against Iran in the 1980s. Soon after the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein turned against the United States, invaded Kuwait, and thereby triggered the largest deployment of American military power since World War II. The American embrace of both of these autocratic rulers produced some ephemeral benefits for U.S. security, but the short-term gains were outweighed by the long-term negative consequences. Had both Iran and Iraq been ruled by democratic regimes at the time, they would have posed no great challenge to American national security interests.

As part of a strategy to roll back communism at its weakest links, President Reagan agreed to provide military assistance to national liberation fighters with dubious democratic credentials fighting against communist regimes in Angola, Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. The strategy had some success in weakening Soviet imperialism, but little success in nurturing new American allies, in large measure because of inattention to the internal governing structures in these countries and indifference to the norms that anti-communist movements embraced. By 2008, democracy had taken root only partially in just one of these four countries, Nicaragua, and ironically, Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista leader the American-backed contras sought to depose, was the democratically elected president. Cambodia in the twenty-first century does not pose a threat to American national security, but the regime in place there is not democratic and remains one of the most corrupt in the world. In Angola, the Reagan administration made a tragic error in backing the undemocratic Jonas Savimbi, who succeeded in prolonging a civil war for decades, which enabled him to stay in power in the territory he controlled until his death. The most detrimental error for American security, however, was Operation Cyclone, the program of covert U.S. support for the mujahedeen during the Soviet war in Afghanistan. These so-called freedom fighters were useful U.S. allies in driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan, but they were hardly Jeffersonian believers, as the world learned when they tried to govern Afghanistan in the early 1990s. On the contrary, their failure to build stable, accountable government helped to bring to power the Taliban, which in turn invited Al Qaeda to set up shop in Afghanistan. That alliance eventually yielded devastating consequences for American national security on September 11, 2001.

In the name of containing communism at various times during the twentieth century, American foreign policymakers also
helped to empower and sustain dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, El Salvador, Indonesia, the Philippines, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Taiwan, and Zaire, to name just a few of the most notorious regimes. None of these alliances posed direct or indirect threats to short-term national security interests, but they did undermine American moral standing in the international community, which subsequently constrained American efforts to promote democracy in other countries during the Cold War era.

After the Cold War

Since the end of the Cold War, America’s enemies have continued to be drawn from the ranks of autocratic regimes and antidemocratic movements. In the 1990s, no state directly threatened the United States, but American security interests in peace and stability in Europe were threatened by Serbia’s autocratic ruler, Slobodan Milošević, who wreaked havoc in the Balkans through war with his neighbors and ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Milošević never threatened American security directly, but his wars did undermine security in the backyard of America’s closest European allies. Consequently, American armed forces eventually became involved in the Balkan wars, including a major peacekeeping operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in the spring of 1999 to stop Milošević’s forced expulsion of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. Today, American troops remain in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.

In September 1994, the United States led a U.N.-sanctioned military intervention called Operation Uphold Democracy to overthrow a dictatorship in Haiti. Again, the Haitian military junta did not represent a direct threat to American national security, but the regime’s policies did constitute an assault on American values and a possible economic burden from tens of thousands of Haitians seeking refuge in the United States. American military interventions in Panama and Somalia were likewise not in response to direct threats to the United States, but both regimes were non-democracies.

In the 1990s, Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba, and Libya did not have the military capacity to threaten the United States directly. Nonetheless, relations that had been tense and confrontational with these countries during the Cold War remained so in the decade that followed. The only common feature among all these countries is autocracy. Certainly it is not the power capabilities of these countries that led American leaders—Democratic and Republican alike—to consider them threats to the United States. Even before September 11, 2001, U.S. military budgets were many times greater than the combined military spending in these countries.58

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Budget (in billions)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>281.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>6.9 (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>4.5 (€)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Korea</td>
<td>4.3 (P, R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>1.3 (R)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>0.6 (€, €)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>0.4 (€)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(R): Rough estimate

To deter impoverished North Korea, the United States has maintained more than 35 thousand troops in South Korea for over
half a century, while also supplying South Korea with billions of dollars in military and economic assistance. To contain Iran, the U.S. has supplied billions of dollars in military equipment and deployed the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf. Iran’s annual military budget is less than one-eighth that of the United States. To counter future ballistic missile threats from North Korea and Iran, American military planners have spent billions of dollars to develop national and theater ballistic missile defense systems. These asymmetric responses by American foreign policymakers to relatively minor military powers can only be explained if regime type in Iran and North Korea is part of the threat analysis.

After September 11, the Bush administration calculated wrongly that the future military threat from autocratic Iraq was so great that the United States had to intervene preemptively to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship. An assessment of threats based only on the balance of military power between Iraq and the United States would have produced a different conclusion. Think, however, of the other counterfactual: Had Iraq been ruled by a democratic regime, no amount of intelligence about Iraq’s secret nuclear weapons program would have convinced the American people to support a preemptive war.

U.S. policy toward Cuba can likewise be explained only with reference to Fidel Castro’s dictatorship. Cuba has virtually no military capacity to threaten the United States, and yet, for more than four decades, president after president—Democrats and Republicans alike—have maintained a sanctions regime against this island country, to the detriment of American economic interests. The People’s Republic of China has lingered somewhere between friend and foe of the United States since the end of the Cold War. China’s current military capacity and potential for even greater military might create the possibility of serious confrontation with the United States, yet China’s regime type also plays a direct role in exacerbating Sino-American tensions. Despite the enormous amount of trade and investment traffic between China and the United States, American leaders continue to support Taiwan’s security, both by selling military hardware and by maintaining a deliberately vague commitment to defending the island against attack from the mainland. This American support began when an autocratic regime ruled Taiwan, but has continued in part because Taiwan made the transition to democracy in 2000. Taiwanese leaders and diplomats constantly stress the democratic values they share with the United States as a central reason for close military cooperation. If mainland China were to become a democracy, then the case for defending Taiwanese sovereignty would be weakened.

The current successful management of American-Chinese relations underscores the important observation that conflicts between democracies and autocracies are not inevitable. The Bush administration’s casting of China as a “stakeholder” in the international system—that is, a force for the status quo rather than a revisionist power—produced stabilizing results. Nonetheless, there is no question that managing China’s rise will remain a central concern of American presidents for the next century. For the past 15 years, China has increased military spending steadily and gradually, a pattern that suggests China is seeking to counter if not challenge American military might. American concern about this military buildup is driven in large measure by the nature of the Chinese regime. A rising democratic China would be less threatening.

In the 1990s, non-governmental movements dedicated to nondemocratic ideologies also posed threats to the United States and its allies. As discussed in chapter 2, Al Qaeda espouses a set of beliefs antithetical to democracy, which Osama bin Laden and his followers associate with the evil West. In their quest to push the
United States out of the Middle East, bin Laden and his followers attacked the United States numerous times in the 1990s, culminating in the horrendous terrorist attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001. Once again, the United States is at war with a transnational, ideologically motivated enemy, whose core beliefs are anti-democratic, anti-liberal, and therefore anti-American.

Political organizations that use terrorism as a weapon do not all embrace the same antidemocratic political objectives as Al Qaeda. Hezbollah in Lebanon has participated in elections and followed the rule of law at times, while also pursuing a parallel terrorist campaign against Israel and justifying extra-constitutional acts within Lebanon when convenient. Hamas has followed a similar dual track strategy in the Palestinian Authority. Most absurdly, Hamas participated in and won the January 2006 parliamentary elections, then executed a coup d’etat to seize power in Gaza the following year. Neither Hamas nor Hezbollah can be considered democratic organizations or part of democratic governments. Both are adversaries of the United States and its democratic allies in the Middle East.

**Autocratic Allies: Short-Term Necessities and Long-Term Liabilities**

All enemies of the United States have been and are autocracies, but not all autocracies have been or are enemies of the United States. As just discussed, the United States has benefitted from a variety of alliances through the years with monarchists (in France during the American Revolution), and autocrats (in Russia during World War I and the Soviet Union during World War II). Autocratic allies, however, have posed three major national security problems for American leaders: sustainability, consistency, and cost.

Regarding sustainability, most autocratic regimes have no predictable or legitimate way to hand over power, meaning that transitions from one leader to the next can be precarious. Generally, though not always, democracies make leadership transitions more predictable. Even more problematic, autocrats often struggle to stay in power. In the face of societal unrest, autocrats typically resort to additional repression to hold onto power, a response that sidelines moderates and strengthens extremists, be they communists, fascists, or Islamic fundamentalists. These explosive situations often end in revolution, civil war, or state collapse, outcomes that almost never serve American interests. The fall of several autocratic allies, including Chiang Kai-shek in China, Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, the Shah in Iran, and Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua all produced new autocratic regimes hostile to American interests. In these cases, new extremists came to power and blamed the United States for propping up the *ancien régime* they had just toppled.

Second, autocratic leaders can change their allegiances quickly. Because they do not answer to parliaments or voters, they can move much faster and in much more unpredictable ways to reverse their international orientation. Stalin terminated cooperation with the western allies quickly after the end of the World War II, rejecting U.S. economic assistance offered through the Marshall Plan even though the Soviet economy at the time was in desperate need of such aid. Egyptian leader Gamal Adbul Nasser flip-flopped repeatedly in his relations with the United States before finally deciding to cast his lot with the Soviet Union. Saddam Hussein was eager to cooperate with the United States during his war with Iran from 1980 to 1988, but quickly and easily abandoned his American allies when he decided to invade Kuwait in 1990. Uzbekistan’s strong man, Islom Karimov, is a more recent flip-flopper: both Presidents Clinton and George
American spending on its own military forces, autocratic allies extracted tremendous military and economic subsidies from the United States as a price for maintaining their allegiance to the international anti-communist coalition. Maintaining regional balances of power between autocratic regimes or between autocratic and democratic regimes also proved costly in both financial and human terms. To maintain a balance of power in the Middle East, the United States has supplied billions of dollars in military and economic aid to both Israel and Egypt. American efforts at tweaking the balance of power between Iraq and Iran not only resulted in the death of more than one million Iraqi and Iranian soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war, but ultimately resulted in regimes hostile to the United States in both countries. In Asia, the U.S. strategy of balancing Soviet and Chinese power by supporting autocratic allies in Vietnam and Korea proved very costly in American lives and resources. There may have been no other options; for example, had the United States not defended autocratic South Korea against North Korean aggression, a democratic South Korea may never have emerged. But to assume that the embrace of autocratic allies to balance against autocratic enemies is always a more efficient means for pursuing U.S. security interests is also wrong. The short-term benefits of embracing autocratic allies are almost always overshadowed by the long-term costs.

Finally, when the United States embraces autocratic allies, its reputation as a country committed to democratic values suffers greatly. The people of Iran still remember bitterly Operation Ajax and the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 as well as American support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. Citizens throughout Latin America still associate the United States with embracing military dictators. Close American associations with Mobutu in Zaire or the apartheid regime in South Africa have made Africans suspicious of American inten-
tions and skeptical of American pronouncements on democracy and human rights. The Bush administration’s embrace of dictators in Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Kazakhstan undermined its calls for greater freedoms in Iran, Burma, and Russia.

**Enduring Democratic Allies**

Not every democracy in the world was or is a close ally of the United States, but no democracy in the world has been or is an American enemy. And all of America’s most enduring allies have been and remain democracies.

As mentioned above, Great Britain lingered as the most serious threat to the American republican experiment for decades after the revolution. Over time, however, the common liberal values that united Great Britain and the United States eventually eclipsed the differences and paved the way for a peaceful transition from British to American hegemony, a very rare occurrence in world history. The Anglo-American alliance gradually consolidated to anchor the free world, while the United States has benefited enormously from its military, economic, and cultural ties to Great Britain. The two countries have not sided together on every major foreign policy issue. In 1861, they inclined close to conflict during the so-called Trent affair involving the North’s blockade of Confederate ports into which British ships sailed, and again in 1895–1896 over a border dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela. After World War II, the United States and Great Britain clashed intermittently over various decolonization issues; perhaps most amazingly, the United States sided with the autocratic Soviet Union in supporting Egyptian dictator Nasser against democratic Britain and France during the Suez canal crisis in the fall of 1956. The Suez crisis, however, stands out as a rare exception in Anglo-American relations over the past century. Despite possessing roughly 200 nuclear warheads in its stockpile, Great Britain has posed no military threat whatsoever to the United States, and on most issues of war and peace, the United States and Great Britain have stood closely together.

The convergence of British and American foreign policy interests took place as both countries were deepening their democratic practices. Of course, they also share a common culture and history, which further contributed to the development of close relations. However, as relations today between Ukraine and Russia, for example, or North Korea and South Korea demonstrate, cultural and historical connections are not sufficient conditions for forging an alliance. Democratic consolidation in both the United States and Great Britain contributed significantly to the deepening of their “special relationship.”

The United States also has enjoyed enduring alliances with other European and Asian democracies. In both world wars, it was not mere coincidence that the United States sided with the most liberal regimes. During the Cold War, American presidents developed ties with anti-communist autocrats as part of an international strategy of Soviet and communist containment, but the bedrock American allies during this decades-long struggle were European democracies, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse and the disappearance of a common enemy, some predicted that ties developed among Western (and Asian) democracies during the Cold War would weaken and would be replaced by multi-polar competition among these former allies. According to this realist analysis, the new multiple powers in Europe and the international system would be compelled to balance against each other by forming shifting alliances akin to the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century. To date, however, none of this predicted behavior
among the great powers in Europe or among the democracies in
the world has occurred: no arms races, spiraling threats, or even
trade wars. Nor has balancing occurred between the United
States and Europe. The democratic countries that composed the
core of the alliance to contain communism have continued to co-
operate to address common security threats, while democracies
outside this Cold War alliance system—most notably India—
have moved closer to the United States. Relations between states
in this democratic core have been driven by a different dynamic
than balance-of-power politics.79 Despite realist predictions of
its demise, the NATO military alliance has persevered and ex-
expanded, enlarging and protecting the democratic community of
states in Europe.80

The American decision to invade Iraq placed a serious strain
on the democratic community of states, since several important
democracies, including France and Germany, vehemently ob-
jected to the war. When these divisions crystallized in the spring
of 2003, some predicted a return to balance of power politics in
Europe, with France and Germany siding with Russia as one new
constellation, and the United States, Great Britain, and Poland
providing the backbone of an opposing axis.81 This new power
configuration never coalesced. Instead, relations between the
democracies started to improve well before the war was over and
even while President Bush was still in office. As newly elected
French president Nicolas Sarkozy perceptively stated upon his
arrival in the U.S. for a meeting with Bush in August 2007, “Do
we agree on everything? No. . . . Even within families there are
disagreements, but we are still the same family.”82

The United States has also maintained close military and
economic ties with the one democracy in the Middle East, Israel.
Common Judeo-Christian values, American sympathy for the
plight of the Jews during World War II, and a large Jewish popu-
lation in the United States have helped to fortify this special
American relationship with Israel, a bond that would probably
persist even if Israel were a dictatorship. Nonetheless, Israel’s
unique status as the only liberal democracy in the region provides
an added reason for close ties, and one that U.S. leaders fre-
quently invoke as a justification for the deep American commit-
ment to Israeli security. That traditional realist thinkers have
questioned the utility of this alliance and cannot explain this close
bilateral relationship using traditional metrics of state power sug-
gests that the regime type in both the United States and Israel is
critical in explaining this unique alliance.83

The United States never developed an alliance with demo-
cratic India during the Cold War. The world’s most populous
democracy instead maintained formal neutrality between East
and West. This anomaly resulted primarily from the American
decision to embrace Pakistan as a Cold War ally. However, the end
of the Cold War opened the possibility of developing deeper ties
with democratic India.84 In the new context of their “global war
on terror,” Bush administration officials perceived India as an
important ally both in combating Muslim terrorists and as a model
regime in which 100 million Muslims partisipated relatively
peacefully in a democratic system of government. This rapproche-
ment became so extensive that American and Indian diplomats
negotiated a deal in July 2007 that will provide India with U.S.
nuclear technology for civilian purposes, even though India has
refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and has
successfully developed and tested nuclear weapons. American
critics of the deal rightly claimed that the Bush administration’s
decision weakened the nonproliferation regime.85 Given this ran-
cor, the deal could only have been negotiated with a democratic
regime—one seen as posing no current or future threat to the
United States or its democratic allies.
Security Benefits from Democratic Change

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that democracy’s advance serves American national interests comes from those countries that have changed from autocratic to democratic regimes. In every case, the country in transition has developed better relations with the United States after consolidating democracy.

World War II Enemies to Allies

As autocracies, Germany, Japan, and Italy were enemies of the United States. As democracies, all three have developed into important American allies. Immediately after World War II, these three countries were occupied; their governments did not choose to ally with the United States. With time, all three countries put in place democratic institutions and in parallel gained greater sovereignty. As sovereign, democratic countries, Germany, Japan, and Italy all sought to maintain deep military ties with the United States. To be sure, these three countries sided with the United States in part as a response to the communist threat, compelling some to argue that the driving force behind these alliances was a common enemy. But why were they all threatened by communism in the first place? It is because they were democracies. Moreover, these alliance relationships persisted well after the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

After communism’s demise in Europe, transitions to democracy in East Central Europe, southern Europe, and the Baltic states also produced security benefits for the United States. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary all joined NATO at the first opportunity in 1999, and seven more countries in the region joined in the second wave of enlargement in 2004. Every new liberal democracy in the region has decided to seek NATO membership. Initially, the benefits of NATO expansion seemed to accrue only to the new members, which were eager to counter a perceived Russian threat. NATO also provided a multilateral bridge for these new members as they pursued European Union membership. With time, however, the security benefits to the United States have grown. East European members of NATO were most vocal in supporting the American-led war in Iraq, including a famous “letter of eight” signed by three East Central European leaders in support of Bush and in opposition to “Western” or “old” European resistance to the military intervention. At varying levels and for different periods of time, several new American allies in Europe, including Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, provided troops in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2006, Poland agreed to expand its forces fighting under NATO command in Afghanistan to one thousand, making Poland one of the largest contributors to the mission. Some of these new allies, including Slovenia and Hungary, also have supplied troops to the peacekeeping mission in Kosovo. The Czech Republic and Poland agreed to participate in a ballistic missile defense system aimed at thwarting a future threat from Iran. Romania and Bulgaria have agreed to provide territory for new NATO bases.

Soviet Transformation

American national security benefited from democratic transformation in East Central and Southern Europe only because of regime change inside the Soviet Union started by Mikhail Gorbachev. Conventional American accounts explain the end of the Cold War as a victory of American economic and military prowess. Ronald Reagan’s military spending increases, including
his plans to build a space-based missile shield, bankrupted the Soviet system and forced its collapse, or so the narrative goes.92 Like all tall tales, this triumphal explanation of the Cold War’s end has elements of truth embedded in it. Most certainly, the Soviet economy was not in good health by the 1980s and American increases in military spending did produce demands from the Red Army to increase its arsenal at the expense of civilian sectors of the economy.93 But Gorbachev was not forced to make the decisions he did in reaction to American power. After all, many dictatorships endure for decades with low economic growth and high levels of poverty. The Soviets could have done the same. The Soviet military also had several options to easily counter Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative.94 In other words, the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991 was not inevitable, but occurred because Gorbachev initiated a process of political change, which then spun out of his control.95

This political change within the Soviet Union ended the Cold War, which in turn had a profoundly positive impact on U.S. national security.96 Speaking to the British parliament in 1982, President Reagan argued that

there are new threats now to our freedom, indeed to our very existence, that other generations could never have even imagined. There is first the threat of global war. No president, no congress, no prime minister, no parliament can spend a day entirely free of this threat.97

Reagan was referring to the threat of war between the West and the Soviet Union. By the summer of 1991, President Bush was not spending much time worrying about world war with the Soviets. The specter of a nuclear holocaust faded, even if Russia maintained the ability to obliterate the United States overnight. The international contest to contain communism in far away places such as Angola or Nicaragua ended. Threats to American allies in Europe subsided.

In the wake of Soviet dissolution, some worried about war and instability resulting from democratization in the post-Soviet region.98 At the time, the collapse of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia underscored the potential for war in the wake of state collapse. And in the early 1990s, especially after the stunning electoral victory of nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky in Russia’s 1993 parliamentary elections, fascist forces within Russia were visible enough to evoke comparisons to the Weimar Republic.99 These nightmare scenarios did not unfold, however, because the nature of the political system that emerged in Russia in the 1990s was a weak form of democracy.100 In the 1990s, radical political and economic change in Russia produced leaders, political forces, and economic interest groups that identified with and benefited from liberal ideas, specifically democratic and market practices at home and integration into Western institutions abroad. Russia’s new leaders also rejected communist and fascist ideologies, building instead economic institutions (including first and foremost, private property rights) and to a lesser extent political institutions designed to constrain illiberal, anti-democratic forces. This new regime dramatically diluted the threat from Russia to the United States, to the point that leaders in Washington and Moscow began to refer to each other as strategic partners and friends.101 It was not Russia’s military decline that lessened the threat to the United States, but rather internal democratic change.

Because of their Western orientation, Russia’s leaders in the 1990s also cooperated with the United States in weakening other potential threats to the United States and its allies in the re-
region. Most importantly, President Yeltsin cooperated closely with President Clinton to negotiate the transfer of nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to Russia. Yeltsin opposed NATO expansion—his foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov, called the decision to enlarge NATO "probably the worst since the end of the Cold War." Negative Russian responses to NATO's war in Kosovo also threw a considerable chill over U.S.-Russian relations. Yet Yeltsin eventually played a critical role in pressuring Milosevic to capitulate in Kosovo. Despite the perceived threats to Russian security and the up-and-down quality of the U.S.-Russian relationship, the general thrust of Russian foreign policy in the 1990s was integration into rather than balancing against the international community of democratic states. Had Russia been ruled by a communist or fascist leader during the 1990s, the United States would have been less likely to pursue NATO enlargement or the bombing of Yugoslavia because of concerns about the potential for armed conflict with Russia. Had a radical nationalist been in the Kremlin during the NATO war against Serbia in 1999 or the American-led war in Iraq in 2003, Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein might have received Russian military assistance. In fact, under a communist or fascist dictatorship, Russian troops might still be stationed in Poland or the Baltic states.

The Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia

State collapse in Yugoslavia helped to produce one of the worst military conflicts in Europe since World War II. The federal dissolution coincided with greater political liberalization in the region, prompting some analysts to blame democratization for the Balkan wars in the 1990s. Yet, by the time Milosevic launched his project of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo in 1999, the Serbian regime was neither democratic nor democratizing. Milosevic was a dictator, albeit a weak one, who threatened the security interests of American allies and innocent civilians in the region. Milosevic eventually lost power in a dramatic democratic moment. After he tried to falsify the outcome of a presidential election in October 2000, his own people mobilized against him to protect the actual voting results and eventually organized a massive demonstration that toppled his dictatorship. This breakthrough made the regime more democratic, though still not a consolidated democracy. Nonetheless, since October 2000, Serbia has not initiated any wars. Democratization has made Serbia more peaceful and American allies in the region more secure, and it has facilitated a rapprochement between Serbia and the United States, an improving relationship that even survived American recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2007.

Toppling the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan

In the 1990s, an autocratic regime in Afghanistan emerged as an unlikely threat to American national security. Using traditional military and economic measures, Afghanistan did not rank as a major power in the international system. Instead, the threat to the United States came from the nature of the Taliban regime, which wholeheartedly embraced illiberal, totalitarian ideas and established an ideological alliance with another anti-democratic force, Al Qaeda. The Taliban regime offered Al Qaeda logistical support and a territorial base, which in turn aided Al Qaeda's terrorist activities abroad, including the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001.

By eliminating a base of operations for a major American enemy, the American-led military effort to destroy the Taliban
regime in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks produced immediate security benefits for the United States and its allies. Both the Taliban and Al Qaeda remain threats to American national security, but they are lesser threats because they no longer control a nation-state—a valuable asset for plotting, preparing, and launching terrorist attacks. Even in this weak, peripheral country, the nature of the regime governing Afghanistan produced a profound and direct effect on American national security interests. Whether Afghanistan emerges once again as a threat to American national security will depend heavily on what kind of regime eventually takes hold there.

Deepening Alliances after Democratization

During the Cold War, some American strategists argued that the United States had to defend autocratic allies who helped the United States pursue vital national interests, including containing communism, providing energy resources, protecting trade routes, or securing American investments. In the case of the Philippines, for instance, senior officials in the Reagan administration, including the president himself, worried that democratization would bring anti-American forces to power. A similar argument was advanced about the negative consequences of democratic change in Chile, Portugal, South Africa, and South Korea. In these countries, so the argument went, the process of democratization would bring to power communist forces, which would turn against the United States and undermine democracy. A very similar argument is made about the threat of anti-American, anti-democratic Islamists coming to power through elections in the Middle East.

However, transitions from autocracy to democracy in Chile, Portugal, South Africa, and South Korea, as well as Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, Spain, and Taiwan, did not damage American strategic interests as predicted. Instead the transitions served to consolidate deeper, more lasting relationships with the new democratic regimes in these countries. New democracies often face threats from autocratic regimes in their neighborhoods, making them more likely to become allies of the United States. Fears of pro-American autocrats giving way to anti-American democrats have been largely unfounded.

Threats from the Failure to Consolidate Democracy

The collapse of autocracy does not always lead to democracy. The end of tsarism in Russia in February 1917 created permissive conditions for the Bolsheviks to seize power in October of the same year. The dissolution of the Qing dynasty in China in 1911 resulted in an era of chaos, invasion, and civil war, which culminated in 1949 in the emergence of a more robust form of autocracy in the People’s Republic of China. The non-democratic outcomes of both the Russian and Chinese revolutions produced very real and serious threats to American national security. Similarly, the breakdowns of democratic regimes in Spain and Germany in the interwar years precipitated internationalized wars. In the past 50 years, the failure of democracy to replace fallen autocracies in Iraq, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, Iran, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan has created threats to American national security. Three of America’s most recent and serious security threats—from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan—are byproducts of Cold War decisions to befriend and support autocrats in the struggle against communist enemies (perceived or otherwise) which were then replaced by autocracies even more hostile to American national interests.
During the Cold War, American covert and overt interventions also interrupted transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. Although few of these interventions produced threats to American national security, nearly all of them damaged America’s image abroad as a defender of democracy. American support for the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973 is the most glaring example. The United States never faced a real military threat from Chile either during or after Augusto Pinochet’s rule, but supporting the coup exacted enormous costs to America’s reputation.

In the case of Iran, however, America’s involvement in disrupting democratic change generated more direct threats to its national security, albeit delayed. In August 1953, a CIA covert operation codenamed Ajax helped to topple Prime Minister Mossadeq from power and replaced him with the Shah. Not all of Mossadeq’s methods of wielding power were democratic, but his ouster in a coup orchestrated by the United States and Great Britain sealed his legacy as a democrat and nationalist toppled by “anti-democratic” imperial powers. After the removal of Mossadeq, the Shah of Iran remained a reliable U.S. ally for nearly four decades. But his eventual fall from power ushered in one of the most anti-American regimes in the world. During the Iranian revolution in 1979, U.S. support for the 1953 coup against Mossadeq served as a rallying cry for anti-American forces in Iran among both leftist leaders and the clergy.

In Afghanistan, as already discussed, the collapse of communist dictatorship from 1989 to 1992 did not lead to a democratic or stable form of government, which eventually allowed the Taliban to seize power by 1996. Whether or not democracy had any chance of taking hold in Afghanistan after the fall of communism is difficult to know. What is clear is that the United States dramatically reduced support to and engagement with the new Afghan government once it came to power in 1992. Before the war against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, according to Ahmed Rashid, “Islamists barely had a base in Afghan society.” They gained a foothold only because Pakistan channeled American funds to the most extremist parties in the anti-Soviet coalition. The Pashtun-based Taliban came to power not because all of Afghanistan embraced their totalitarian interpretation of Islam, but because they offered a Pashtun alternative both to the Tajik-Uzbek dominated government that controlled Kabul after the fall of the communist regime in 1992, and the anarchic warlords who prevailed under the Rabbani government between 1992 and 1996. The negative consequences for U.S. national security of this failed democratic transition were profound.

Democracy’s failure to take hold in Iraq also resulted in direct threats to American security interests. Again, as in Afghanistan, it is not clear that democracy ever had a chance in the wake of the American-led military invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein’s regime. Democracy’s failure in Iraq stimulated civil war between Sunni and Shia groups, which, in turn, pulled American forces back into combat within the country. The absence of a legitimate democratic regime also helped to compel disaffected Iraqi Sunnis to ally with Al Qaeda and other anti-American, anti-democratic transnational movements. Beginning in 2005, new participation in a political process—the so-called Sunni Awakening—helped to quell violence in the Sunni regions of Iraq. In combination with an American spike in military forces in 2007, the Awakening helped to reduce threats to Americans based in Iraq and to weaken transnational movements like Al Qaeda that also threatened Americans in Iraq and around the world.

In the post-Cold War era, the negative security implications of failed democratic transitions in Afghanistan and Iraq dwarf all other threats to the U.S. caused by democratic breakdown.
However, a few other prominent democratic erosions have produced lesser, but direct and negative consequences for U.S. national security.

In Russia, democracy emerged but never consolidated in the 1990s. When Vladimir Putin became president in 2000, Russia’s democratic institutions were still weak and vulnerable. Putin weakened them further by undermining the power of Russia’s regional leaders, the independent media, both houses of parliament, independent political parties, and genuine civil society. According to Freedom House, the Russian regime slipped from “partially free” in 2000 to “not free” in 2005. In parallel and not coincidentally, Russia’s relations with the West and the United States in particular have become increasingly belligerent, culminating in Russia’s invasion and subsequent dismemberment of Georgia in August 2008. Along the way, Putin has blamed the United States for terrorist attacks inside Russia and accused the U.S. of fomenting “color” revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine and of crafting a similar plan for Russia. He even compared the United States to Nazi Germany. In a speech on the 62nd anniversary of the end of World War II, Putin said,

In our days, these threats [to Russian security] are not diminished. They are only transformed. And in these new threats, like in the time of the ‘Third Reich’ there is the same disdain to human life, the same claim for the world supremacy.  

Putin has not championed an alternative economic model to capitalism or even an alternative political model to democracy, but he does see great power competition in international affairs in zero-sum terms. What is good for the U.S. is bad for Russia, and vice versa.

In Venezuela, the correlation between democratic erosion under President Hugo Chavez and greater tensions with the United States is also more than a coincidence. American covert efforts to overthrow Chavez in 2002 not only exacerbated bilateral tensions but also provided an excuse for Chavez to implement even deeper autocratic changes. As Chavez has consolidated his autocratic grip on the country, Venezuela has become a more active participant in many anti-American causes, including increases in aid for autocratic Cuba, economic support in the form of contracts for the purchase of military equipment from Belarus, and greater economic, military, and political ties with Iran. Chavez even has threatened to disrupt oil exports to the United States.

In all of these cases, the erosion of democracy inside the country eventually has produced greater hostility toward the United States. The correlation is more than coincidence.

**Economic Benefits of Democratic Expansion**

In addition to making Americans more secure, the expansion of democracy abroad also has made Americans richer. Most obviously, the transformation of autocratic foes into democratic allies has reduced the need for military spending—the famous “guns and butter” trade-off. As John Owen IV has observed, “The near absence of wars among mature liberal democracies... means that democratic states need not prepare for war against one another. This allows them to invest in resources elsewhere that might have been used on such preparations.” Although some economists argue that defense expenditures stimulate growth, most conclude that the levels of taxation required to maintain large military budgets impede investment in more productive sectors of the economy. For instance, the spike in mil-
itary spending at the beginning of World War II helped to pull the United States out of the Great Depression. By the end of the war, economists estimate that roughly 40 percent of America’s GDP was tied to the war effort. Maintaining such a ratio for decades, however, would have retarded growth in civilian sectors of the economy. The end of World War II and subsequent decreases in government spending on the military freed up resources that sustained an amazing growth period in the United States in the post-war era. By one account, the post World War II demobilization infused $68 billion into the post-war economy. Military spending reductions after the Cold War’s end had a similar positive impact on the U.S. economy in the 1990s. By some estimates, the “peace dividend” from the end of the Cold War resulted in more than a 20 percent decrease in military spending between 1986 and 2004. Companies dependent on Pentagon contracts suffered as they tried to navigate the difficult and usually unsuccessful path of defense conversion, while many communities also suffered as military bases important to the local economy closed. However, the overall economic benefits of defense expenditure reductions were enormous. They helped to produce balanced budgets and sound fiscal policy and fueled one of the greatest periods of economic growth in American history. Economist Anders Åslund has calculated the American peace dividend resulting from the Cold War’s end to be more than $1.3 trillion. A study conducted for the International Monetary Fund found more broadly that a sizable “peace dividend” resulted for all countries that cut military spending since 1985. Conversely, increased military expenditures to finance American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq contributed to major budget deficits and financial imprudence during the Bush administration. Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes have calculated that the range of the total cost of the Iraq war will be anywhere from $3 trillion to $5 trillion. Yet as Stiglitz explains, the negative impact of this war does not end with the direct costs:

To the extent that the war caused the price of oil to go up, and the fact that the war expenditures don’t stimulate the economy as much as domestic expenditures would have, the economy is weaker. . . . So, we have more of a mountain of debt in order to offset the negative effects of war spending, and that mountain of debt is now the problem we’re dealing with. There is a clear connection between the two. We’re spending money abroad that we could have spent at home.

In addition to reducing the pressure on government spending for defense purposes, the transformation of former foes into new allies opens new markets for trade and investment for American firms. Democratic states trade more openly and to a greater extent than non-democracies. New democracies tend to reduce trade barriers, especially in developing countries endowed with cheap labor, as the majorities in these countries seek the benefits of trade with the developed world. As Helen Milner and Keiko Kubota concluded in explaining the correlation between democratic regime change and reduced trade barriers in the developing world since 1990,

Democratization opened up new avenues of support for freer trade. Leaders recognized that previously disenfranchised groups had become part of the voting public; . . . these groups benefited more from trade liberalization than continued protectionism. . . . Democratic leaders in a number of developing countries chose trade liberalization a means for gaining broader political support.
American trade with and investment in Germany, Japan, and Italy expanded exponentially after World War II. When democratic regimes first replaced communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, analysts predicted that the masses now in control over the government would resist liberalizing economic reforms. Yet the exact opposite happened: the fastest democratizers were also the most aggressive economic reformers, whose actions in turn created tremendous trade and investment opportunities for the United States and other European democracies. And even with the more closed and less developed economies of the former Soviet Union, U.S. exports to these states increased 18-fold from 1989 to 2007. Democratization in the developing world contributed directly to the spike in international trade flows in the developing world since 1990.

Democracy in Germany, Italy, or Japan was not a necessary condition for this expansion of economic activity. In South Korea, U.S. trade and investment skyrocketed well before democratization, which did not occur until 1987. A similar sequence occurred with the Philippines and Indonesia. However, the data demonstrate that democratization, when it did occur in these countries, did not hinder U.S. trade and investment, and in fact in some instances increased it. In the former communist world, American firms are just as involved in new autocracies such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Russia as they are in democratic Poland, Estonia, or Ukraine. Most obviously, American companies trade and invest heavily in autocracies around the world, including most importantly, China. Nonetheless, in all of these countries, including those still considered autocratic, a more open political system started economic liberalization. Azerbaijan’s political regime today is much more open than it was 30 years ago. The same is true in China.

Finally, as discussed before, democratization often facilitates the strengthening of checks on executive power, more transparent government, and in the long run, stronger legal institutions. All of these components of a liberal democracy in turn create positive conditions for foreign investment and trade, including American trade and investment in new democracies. Autocrats can nationalize foreign companies, demand bribes from foreign investors, and treat domestic economic actors more favorably than foreign entities to a much greater extent than can democratic leaders.

The Benefits of a Moral Foreign Policy

American support for democratic change abroad aligns the United States with the preferences of the vast majority of people around the world. As discussed in the previous chapter, public opinion surveys of people throughout the world show that solid majorities in every country support democracy. When Americans argue instead that the U.S. should support autocrats in the name of “stability,” whose preferences does that serve? Whose stability? It is obviously not the preferences or stability of a majority of people living under these autocracies. And that raises the question of which policy is more imperial: one that supports the aspirations of a people, or one that shores up the power of a dictator who is willing to serve the interests of the global hegemon in return for the survival of his autocracy? As we have seen, democracies do not commit genocide, do not generate refugees, and do not permit wide-scale famines, so by supporting democratic change abroad, the United States also will be supporting a more ethical and just foreign policy.

The direct security and economic benefits of such a moral foreign policy are hard to measure. Famines, genocide, and state collapse often end up costing the United States financially, and have even pulled the U.S. into conflict, as in Somalia and Haiti in
the 1990s. Investing in democratic government in other countries today can be thought of as helping to prevent more costly interventions in the future.

Less directly but more importantly over the long haul, a more moral U.S. foreign policy increases America's standing in the world, which in turn increases American leverage on all issues of international politics, including those with more direct consequences for U.S. national security and prosperity. Especially after the United States emerged as a world power, other countries were willing to accept American leadership because of a genuine belief in the American commitment to "doing good" in the world. American leaders were allowed to take the lead in building international institutions that benefited American security and prosperity in part because the United States was the most powerful country in the free world, but also because other leaders trusted the United States as a moral force for good. Conversely, U.S. foreign policies that have undermined American commitment to democracy—by supporting autocrats, undermining democratically-elected leaders, or ignoring international human rights norms—have weakened American influence and standing more generally regarding international affairs.¹⁴⁰

Finally, Americans—foreign policymakers and citizens alike—may gain some sense of satisfaction by seeing their country do the right thing, or stand on the right side of history. Although impossible to measure, the feeling of pride or contentment with one's country's international standing must register as a benefit to the American people.

Is More Democratization Good for the U.S.?

The historical relationship between the expansion of democracy and the enhancement of American security should encourage cautious optimism about the future benefits for the United States of democracy's advance worldwide. But that optimism is based on an analogy drawn mostly from the European experience, and analogies do not always travel well between different regions or historical eras. At the same time, to state with certainty that future democratization is impossible and will not bring security and economic benefits to the United States is to be unduly pessimistic about the current state of affairs in the world and unduly romantic about the European experience. The process of making Europe free and whole took centuries, involved dreadful wars, and required overcoming deep ethnic and religious divides. The same may be true in the Middle East and Asia. Yet, just as Europe eventually succeeded, so too can these more autocratic and more unstable regions change, and in turn enhance U.S. security.