TRANSITIONS to Democracy

A Comparative Perspective

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CHAPTER ONE

Transitional Successes and Failures

The International-Domestic Nexus

KATHRYN STONER, LARRY DIAMOND, DESHA GIROD, AND MICHAEL MCFaul

This book seeks to discern the interaction between domestic forces and international influences in bringing about democratic transitions. In asking these questions in a variety of country contexts, this study of 15 transitional moments—successes, failures, and those in between—distinguishes itself from the existing, vast literature on “transitology”—the study of how autocratic regimes break down and transit to democracy.

Our understanding of the causal impact of international instruments on domestic outcomes is still evolving. In academia and the think tank world, our appreciation of the international dimensions of democratization has grown, to be sure. But most studies have explained transitions to democracy as a consequence of domestic factors alone, rather than also considering the independent or interactive effects of international factors. Such studies tend to fall into two categories, concentrating on either economic or political domestic variables.

In the first category, studies that emphasize socioeconomic conditions, analysts argue that citizens in wealthier countries are more likely to demand democratic governance and that their governments are more likely to respond positively to their demands. A transition to democracy is more likely when either the middle class or both middle and working classes become stronger. Studies emphasizing domestic socioeconomic variables argue that transition to democracy is more likely in countries with citizens who value freedom, tolerance, and democracy as goods in themselves—that is, in countries with a democratic culture. It is reason-
able to ask, however, from where such a democratic culture might come. Although it could come from within a particular country, the underemphasis of this group of authors on international influences on democratic transition overlooks the possibility that democratic values and attitudes might come from abroad.

The second category has framed the process of democratic transition as essentially an elite-led drama. After the authoritarian regime splits between hard-liners and soft-liners, according to the traditional view, elite actors strategically attempt to maximize their interests while operating under a great deal of uncertainty about the balance of power. Most of the leading accounts of elite-led democratic change, however, were written before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. These dramatic events introduced a wave of new country cases (democratic transitional successes and failures) into the potential pool of cases in which to test elite-led theories of successful transition. In light of these new cases, domestic, elite-centered accounts appear incomplete. While some post-Cold War transitions do seem to fit the elite-led model, others have forged a different pattern in which civil societies and mass movements played crucial roles in bringing about change. This pattern is not unique to the post-Cold War era, as careful scrutiny of many transitions during the late 1970s and 1980s in much of Latin America and in countries such as the Philippines and Korea reveals a prominent early role for mass mobilization, which often preceded and even helped to generate splits within the ruling elite.

The predominant explanatory models of democratic transition written from the 1960s to late 1980s, when we lived in a bipolar international system (which was considered a background variable at best), effectively screened out international factors. It is this oversight that we seek to remedy in this volume. As late as the early 1990s, the role of international actors was reasonably described as the “forgotten dimension” in the study of democratization. While some prominent political scientists continue this tradition, studies of democratic transition and consolidation have become more internationalized in the past decade.

DEPARTING FROM PAST ANALYSES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

In this volume, we seek to trace the interaction between domestic actors and international actors in bringing about transitional opportunities. Under what circumstances does democracy promotion or technical assistance actually help? When, or do, sanctions against autocracies help bring about transitional opportunities? In sum, what tools of international influence (if any) work and under what set of domestic circumstances? More generally, what other factors and conditions in the international environment may undermine authoritarian rule and help to tip transition dynamics in the direction of democracy?

Researching external dimensions of democratization must involve the insights of both academics and practitioners. Yet the separation between the two worlds remains profound. In attempting to explain exogenous influences on domestic political developments, academics have tended to gravitate toward history (often going back several centuries) rather than grappling with the messy “history of the present.” For their part, practitioners borrow few insights from academics, and the two groups are generally “engaged in dissimilar enterprises.” In this volume, we have endeavored to bring practitioners and academics together. In many of the country cases that follow, we have paired authors actively engaged in the process of democracy promotion with academics whose work focuses on the theory of democratic transition. We hope that what follows is of use to both communities.

We have also tried to remedy the tendency in the existing analyses to focus on the democracy promotion efforts of individual countries, notably the United States. Along with the unique American contribution, the roles of other plausible external actors should be considered. There was a time when the US government was the only major actor in the world promoting democracy, but that time has passed. Today, the European Union (EU), individual European governments and their democracy-promoting foundations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and hundreds if not thousands of transnational networks and private foundations also engage in efforts to foster or support democratic change. Where possible, we have paired authors from different countries to write the analysis of their particular country case.

In addition to country cases where successful transitional attempts ended in the fall of an autocracy and the establishment of an electoral democracy (even if only temporarily), we must also consider cases of transitional failure—instances of a possible democratic or liberal opening where the attempt was blocked by the existing or a new autocratic regime—in order to better isolate the causal factors of transitional success. Notably, some of our transitional “success” cases are failures when it comes to the consolidation of democracy—for example, the Soviet Union/Russia. Others persist and consolidate as so-called fragile democracies. In this volume, however, we do not concern ourselves with consolidation that may follow the transitional moment. The domestic and international causes of successful consolidation we believe are often different from those at the initial time of transition, and so we leave the issue of consolidation to a later study. Instead, we focus on the causal dynamics of transition and move between domestic and international levels of analysis.
DEFINING TRANSITION AND SELECTING COUNTRY CASES

In the tradition of the landmark study of democratic transition of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Regimes* (1986), we define a political transition as "the interval between one political regime and another." We define transitional "success" as a set of events that lead to the downfall of an autocracy and the establishment of at least minimal electoral democracy. We understand transitional "failure" to mean that the existing autocracy was challenged but remained in power or that, while the old autocrat or ruling party may have been ousted, a new autocracy rather than a democracy was installed.

The number of interesting and relevant cases is much greater than our capacities to analyze them. We sought variation in the types and modes of transition. For instance, the cases of South Africa and Poland were pacified transitions, the case of Russia did not involve pacifying, and the cases of Serbia and Ukraine saw rapid breakouts from semi-autocracy to democracy (via "color revolutions"). Geographically, our cases range from postcommunist Eastern Europe, to Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Finally, we aimed for temporal diversity, including cases from the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

To avoid selection bias, we include in our study several cases of failed transitions. Whenever possible, we compare two cases with many shared features (such as geographic location, gross domestic product [GDP] per capita, degree of ethnic homogeneity, moment in history when the "outcome" occurred) but with different outcomes to try to isolate a pivotal factor (international or domestic) that accounts for the divergent outcomes.

We commissioned detailed case studies of the successes and failures and asked our authors to analyze their country case within a carefully defined theoretical and methodological framework. We did this to avoid the tendency to employ a "supply-side" or "outside-in" perspective that would focus first on the external dimension (and usually just the US or the EU dimension) without developing a nuanced explanation of internal democratization in the country being studied. We wanted to capture any interactive effect between domestic and political variables or an independent effect of domestic or international factors contributing to regime change.

We required that authors follow a two-step process in their analysis. First, we asked that they provide a general description of transitional events (or liberal opening) looking only at domestic factors that might explain either the success or the failure of domestic political change in their respective country cases. These factors may include the rise of a reformist group within an otherwise nondemocratic government, the formation of a democratic leadership pact or mass movement outside government, economic or societal changes, changes in institutional makeup and capacity, and the role of "change agents" or "veto players." Importantly, at this stage of the analysis we identify domestic factors and define the interrelations between them, without reference to the possible role of international actors.

The next step in our analysis is to assess whether a given international actor, or set of actors, can be said to have played a tangible role in the factors identified as having caused the domestic change, and if so, how. This approach helps overcome the selection bias inherent in "outside-in" studies, and helps focus the research on understanding the role of international actors (both "positive" and "negative"). We also do not limit our analysis to the role of the United States, the European Union, or the United Nations but look at a panoply of potential international sources of internal change, including global economic influences, nongovernmental actors, and the more elusive and possibly indirect role of norms and ideas in the international system.

Because the list of potential external sources is extensive, we group possible variables into three categories. In the first category we examine the role of regional and international institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Union, NATO, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe, the G8, the Organization of American States (OAS), Organization of African Union (OAU), and the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). These organizations rely in the first instance on "transformative engagement" and integration as the mechanism to induce democratic change. The European Union is seen as especially effective in pulling democratizing countries into its orbit and then compelling them to consolidate many democratic practices, procedures, and institutions before being offered EU membership. Does it work? Does the absence of these multilateral institutions make it more difficult to build democracy?

Under this rubric of explanatory factors, we also explored the relationship between security and democratic development and the proposition that a country with secure borders has a better chance at developing a democracy. Because these multilateral institutions often help to reduce regional security risks between states, we should be able to identify a pattern of democracy development between states embedded in international security arrangements and states that are not.

Many of these international institutions also have democracy assistance programs, which we included as potential sources of external influence in our analysis. For instance, the European Union has the European Initiative on Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Stabilization and Association Process for the Balkan countries, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (with substantial funding, through the MEDA program for socioeconomic development and governance reform in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean), the European Neighborhood
Policy (which offers a stake in the Single Market and the prospect of enhanced contractual links with the European Union in return for progress on a range of domestic governance reforms), and political conditionality embedded in the Cotonou framework governing EU relations with the African and Pacific group of countries.

In our second general category, we include the impact of the foreign policies of individual states. As the instrument of the world's most powerful country, US foreign policy occupies the center of attention under this rubric, but foreign policies of other states promoting democracy, as well those trying to stifle it, must be included in the analysis. Russia, for example, is a regional hegemon with a lingering influence in nondemocracies such as Belarus and fragile transitional cases such as Georgia and Ukraine.

Finally, in the third category of international factors, we include ideas, scripts, and norms in the international system that can influence internal change. Democracy, both as a normative idea and as an effective method of rule, has appealing qualities. Since the collapse of communism, democracy has faced few if any ideological challengers. Autocratic rulers persist throughout the world, yet few dictators in power try to justify their positions using antidemocratic creeds or doctrines. Pockets of illiberal creeds, racist norms, patronial rituals, and antidemocratic ideologies exist throughout the world, but—with the possible newly emergent exception of the so-called China model—only the radical Islamist vision of Osama bin Laden and other forms of jihadist Islam constitute a serious transnational alternative to liberal democracy today. Yet, bin Laden's vision for governance is hardly a worldwide challenger to democracy as the most valued political system in the world.

To implement the research design, we devised criteria for conceptualizing the range and estimated impact of external sources of influence across our set of case studies by creating a comprehensive questionnaire or template for every author to follow. While the list of potential external sources of democracy is enormous, a clear advantage of our method lies in its sequencing—identifying internal causes of change first and only then considering any relevant external influence. As such, our study does not judge potential sources and paths of external influence.

Each chapter in parts I and II is organized similarly. In the first section of each chapter, the contributors define and describe the transitional moment (or potential opening) in the country about which they write—that is, when the old regime becomes vulnerable and, in successful cases, is replaced by a new regime. In the cases of transitional opportunities that fail, the moment of possibility is described.

In the second section, the chapter authors evaluate the domestic causes of transitions. At successive author meetings, we devised a range of possible causes using the older literature on democratic transitions according to which military coups, elite splits, and foundational pacts among elites led to democratic outcomes. In these accounts, though, civil society (i.e., the masses) was often overlooked (or was seemingly unimportant) as a significant factor in bringing about transitional moments. Our authors explored beyond the level of elites to assess the possibilities for independent civil society action rather than as just a by-product of elite manipulation. Our research attempted to be exhaustive in seeking evidence of societal involvement.

In the third section of each chapter, the authors evaluate the influence, if any, of external actors in promoting or impeding democratic transition in their respective country case.

In the fourth section of each chapter, the authors discuss the interactions (if any) between domestic and political variables and draw some generalizations regarding the outcome of their country cases and the relative weight of international versus domestic factors in bringing about either democratic transitional success or failure.

The consistent format of the chapters allows us to offer generalizations regarding what makes or breaks transitional opportunities.

**BOOK OVERVIEW**

We divided the volume into three parts. Part I presents cases with clear and unidirectional transitions to democracy. Part II presents four cases of incremental transition from failure to success. Part III considers four cases where there was a transitional possibility but failed democratic transitional outcomes.

In the first case study in part I (chapter 2), Kathryn Stoner and Michael McFaul give an account of a rapid revolution in the Soviet Union that leads to democracy in 1993. They find that international democracy promotion efforts were in a sense a necessary but insufficient factor in Russia's initial transition to electoral democracy in the early 1990s. The US government, including the nongovernmental organizations it financed and other Western organizations, influenced the outcome of the transition mainly by spreading Western ideas that democracy was the only viable alternative to communist rule. The United States also contributed to the transition by meeting with elites, pressuring them to avoid authoritarian moves, and financing NGO projects that offered technical assistance, such as on how to legalize and administer elections and on federalism, all of which influenced the content of Russia's new political institutions.

In contrast, in chapter 3, Gregory F. Domber describes the pacting that transitioned Poland to a democracy in 1991. Domber reveals that Western assistance helped when Soviet influence waned in the late 1980s. Because Poland faced eco-
nomic stagnation, the West had leverage over the government and pressured it to negotiate with the resistance movement, Solidarity. Solidarity, however, owed its creation to domestic factors, including an economic crisis that reduced regime legitimacy as well as a "culture of opposition."

Chapters 4 and 5 consider the "mass" revolutions in Serbia and Ukraine, respectively, each of which occurred more than a decade after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. In chapter 4, Ray Salvatore Jennings analyzes the revolution in Serbia, where students led mass mobilization after President Slobodan Milošević declared victory in fraudulent elections. Years of steady Western support for civil society infrastructure, political party development, and independent media preceded the mass mobilization. By the time the election occurred, civic groups already knew how to monitor the election with exit polls and parallel vote tabulation and how to organize protests if the regime cheated.

Next, in chapter 5, Michael McFaul and Richard Youngs analyze the successful transition to democracy in Ukraine in 2004, the Orange Revolution, named for the color associated with the opposition to the regime. Here again, the masses, led by students, organized against the regime after it committed electoral fraud. While the mass mobilization required indigenous networks and legitimacy, McFaul and Youngs demonstrate that the West played an important role by spending years training civil society organizations in exit polling, parallel vote tabulation, and demonstrating: by training independent media; and by offering an "aspirational reference point."

In chapter 6, Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner turn to Indonesia's successful transition to democracy in 1998. They find that the international environment affected democratization in unintended ways: Indonesia suffered an economic decline as a result of integration into the world economy and the "bungled" bailout by the International Monetary Fund. The crisis reduced the legitimacy of the regime, and this propelled mass protests, forcing Indonesia's longtime president Soeharto to resign and his successor to embrace democratic reform. Similar to the situation in the Soviet Union, Poland, Ukraine, and Serbia, indigenous civil society in Indonesia received long-standing technical support from Western donors for a long period preceding the transition moment. Aspinall and Mietzner found that this movement, even if only marginally influencing the emergence of the transition, generated a significant expectation within Indonesia regarding what the country should "transition to" after Soeharto's resignation.

Timothy D. Sisk analyzes, in chapter 7, the transition in South Africa, where apartheid ended with a power-sharing agreement between the white minority and the majority. Domestic pressures to end apartheid and to transition South Africa to democracy included the protest and civic mobilization initiated by the African National Congress, strong leadership of the movement, and a robust civil society that involved the masses in elite decisions. International pressure strengthened the indigenous movement through declarations that apartheid was immoral and sanctions against the regime. External actors also helped by mediating between the two parties. After the transition in 1994, the international community continued to support the new government by strengthening the capacity of the state, bolstering political parties, and training civil society to oversee elections.

In chapter 8, David Altman concludes part I with a study of successful transition in Chile in the late 1980s. Opposition to Augusto Pinochet united in 1988 to defeat a plebiscite in which Pinochet asked to stay in office for eight more years. This victory led to democratic elections. Altman's study reveals how international organizations offered financial and technical aid to bolster indigenous institutions meant to parallel those shut down by Pinochet.

Part II includes four cases of incremental transition. The first of these is Ghana's transition in chapter 9, by Antoinette Handley. Handley separates Ghana's transition into two phases: from 1988 to 1992 and then from 1992 to 2000. Both democratization phases were driven by decisions made by President Jerry Rawlings in response to donor demands. During the second phase, however, indigenous mobilization by opposition parties—with civil society support from international donors—grew, and the ruling party became less popular. In 2000 Rawlings lost the election and peacefully stepped aside to allow the opposition to take control.

In chapter 10, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros and Beatriz Magaloní present the incremental transition in Mexico. They found that the transition occurred mainly as a result of changes in domestic politics. International actors increased the pre-eminence of democratic ideals, offered international electoral observers, and provided start-up money for indigenous civil society groups. But Díaz-Cayeros and Magaloní found that, while this help was probably necessary, it was insufficient to promote democracy. The fraudulent elections of 1988 occurred while these international factors were not present. However, they were present during the clean but unfair elections of 1994, when the regime had imbalanced access to campaign funds and the media. These problems were solved with indigenous institutions, such as the Instituto Federal Electoral, by the 1997 congressional elections. When the ruling party stepped down after losing the 2000 presidential election, Mexico was perceived widely to be democratic.

A. David Adesnik and Sunhuyuk Kim, in chapter 11, analyze the incremental democratic transition in South Korea. A first attempt occurred in October 1979—at a time when labor unions and students, churches, and the opposition within parliament united to protest dictator Park Chung Hee—but this initial transition attempt failed. At that time, the United States under President Jimmy Carter asked
for improvements in human rights but did not call for a regime change. In June 1987 dictator Chun Doo Hwan also faced similar protests. With a growing economy, the government should have been able to resist the opposition, but Adesnik and Kim suggest that international factors played an important role in halting any suppression. Because the South Korean government valued US opinion so much, and because the government did not want to imperil its prestige at the upcoming 1988 Summer Olympics, it complied with US president Ronald Reagan’s demands not to violently repress the protests. The government instead responded by offering free and fair elections and protecting basic rights.

In the final chapter on incremental transitions, chapter 12, Senem Aygün-Düzgit and Yaprak Gürsoy, describe how the Turkish military, which overthrew a democratic government that suffered from instability and economic collapse in the late 1970s, returned the government to civilian rule. Although the United States offered aid for strategic purposes, the Turkish military seemed to understand that the United States wanted to see democracy take hold in Turkey. In the 1983 elections, although the victorious candidate was not preferred by the military, the military returned to the barracks.

In part III of the volume, we present four cases of near transition—that is, four openings of authoritarian regimes with similar socioeconomic conditions as other cases—but with failed democratic outcomes. First, in chapter 13, Kristina Kausch and Richard Youngs detail the transition that failed in Algeria in the early 1990s. Preceding the transition, Algeria’s long-standing one-party state was losing legitimacy fast because an economic crisis had befallen the country since the mid-1980s. The crisis led to riots and repression, but when repression failed to stop protests, it prompted the regime to democratize. When the Islamist party outperformed the government’s National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale) in local elections, the military feared losing power and overthrew the government. It also canceled upcoming national elections. External actors offered no support for Algeria’s attempted democratic transition because they were interested in maintaining current oil contracts with the regime. They seemed to prefer the stability offered by the existing military government to a potentially adversarial Islamist government, even if the Islamists were elected democratically.

In chapter 14, Abbas Milani analyzes the downfall of the shah’s regime in Iran and the failure of that transition dynamic in 1978-79 to result in a democratic regime. As Milani explains, the transition attempt failed not for lack of significant societal pressure for democracy. Neither was there an absence of US pressure for democratic reform over time. In fact, Milani reveals, through significant new historical research, the lengthy but fitful and episodic nature of American efforts to press the shah to engage in democratic reform. However, because of the incon-
sistent nature of American foreign policy toward Iran, and because inflows of oil kept relieving the shah of an immediate need to democratize, when the transition moment came it was too late. By 1978, domestic (liberal) democratic forces were too weak and naive relative to their exceptionally well-organized and effectively conspiratorial Islamist allies in the movement to bring down the shah. And the United States was too reviled for its past support of the shah to be able to help tip the dynamics of transition toward Iranian democrats. Rather, liberal and secular forces in Iran were outmaneuvered, marginalized, and ultimately destroyed by Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamist followers, much as Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks outmaneuvered and consumed the liberals during the Russian Revolution. The outcome of the Iranian transition—a theocratic dictatorship rather than a democracy—underscores not only the limits of international influence but also the importance of timing and classic factors in political history, such as organization and leadership.

Minxin Pei details, in chapter 15, the failed opportunity for transition in China in 1989 after millions protested against the regime throughout most major cities in the country. Pei found that external influences probably facilitated the outbreak of protest: there had been cultural and intellectual exchanges between China and the West, and China belonged to a “democratizing neighborhood”—close to the Philippines, Taiwan, and the Soviet Union, for example. But these factors did not influence the government significantly. Moreover, the West did little to promote democratization after regime hard-liners violently repressed the protesters. The United States sanctioned China, but the sanctions lacked teeth.

Finally, Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, in chapter 16, offer a similar account of Azerbaijan’s failed transitional opportunity during the 2005 parliamentary elections, when opposition parties ran against the incumbent New Azerbaijan Party and its associates. Candidates from the incumbent party decisively defeated the opposition in elections perceived to be fraudulent by domestic and international electoral monitors. Bunce and Wolchik found that external actors interested in oil, including the United States, offered little criticism of these elections and did not give much support to civil society in the country. According to Bunce and Wolchik, civil society could not bring about a successful transition to democracy because the regime dominated the opposition with its patronage and ability to intimidate. GENERAL FINDINGS

Because we are able to include cases from a broader geographic area than older studies that were focused mainly on Europe and Latin America and new cases arising from the demise of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,
the conclusions from our 15 country cases are more comprehensive than the older transitiology literature. We also are able to make generalizations about why transitions fail and how (or whether) international actors are able to influence these processes. In many cases, democracy promotion by external actors was necessary but insufficient to bring about successful transition. Successful cases usually occurred after indigenous pro-democracy actors rallied the masses against the regime and after indigenous civil society institutions and independent media broadcasted the regime’s oppression. These critical changes in domestic politics were often influenced by external actors who trained these pro-democracy actors and supported their infrastructure so they could rally the masses, monitor the regime, and use the independent domestic media. In most failed transitions, these indigenous pro-democracy actors and institutions either failed to emerge or did not receive the same degree of attention from external actors as in successful cases.

**Domestic Influences on Successful Transition**

Our cases depart from a dominant theme of the transitiology literature—that democracy emerges typically when elites negotiate pacts that include democratic institutions. We are skeptical about preconditions and the ability of economic development to deliver democracy. Per capita income, for example, does not predict success across our case studies. Turkey and Azerbaijan had nearly identical per capita incomes in the year of their transitions, but Turkey succeeded at democratizing, whereas Azerbaijan failed. Poland, Chile, Ukraine, and Iran had similar levels of income in the year of transition, but Iran failed at democratizing, whereas the others succeeded. Economic development is not irrelevant in these cases, but we see evidence of a political process with strategic calculations, and these strategies matter more than socioeconomic conditions.

Individual agents mattered in the transitions. For example, what if there was no Gorbachev, no perestroika, no attempt to resuscitate the Soviet Union? What if the presidents of Mexico and Ghana had not allowed free and fair elections in 2000 or had refused to step down after losing them? What if the shah had recognized more resolutely a decade before his fall the political implications of rapid social change and the need for democratic reform? What if the democrats in Iran had been led by a political figure as savvy and charismatic as Khomeini? In China, the government did not respond to the protests at first because it could not come to agreement between hard-liners and soft-liners. When Deng Xiaoping, leader of the Chinese government, switched sides to support the hard-liners, he tipped the balance of power. What if Deng Xiaoping had sided with the soft-liners?

The pacing model of the early transitiology school, though important, is not applicable in several respects. First, pacts were not as pervasive in our case studies as they were to this school—perhaps because this school focused on the particular dynamics of transitions in the two regions that had experienced them at the time: Southern Europe and Latin America. Among our successful cases, pacts figured prominently in only two: Poland’s Round Table talks, where elites agreed to a democratic organization of the Polish government, and South Africa’s interim constitution of 1993, where the elites agreed to share power with the opposition.

In addition, the military, a key player negotiating pacts in Latin America, was not involved in most of the successful transitions studied here. The only successful transition in which the military played a major role was in Turkey in 1983. Again, the preeminence of the military in the transitiology literature may have resulted from selection bias of studying particular regions and time periods.

Nevertheless, the role of the military was not insignificant. One of the more striking features of our success cases was that the military opted not to open fire on protesters, whereas it did in transitions that failed. In Russia, Boris Yeltsin specifically talked to the troops to prevent shooting. In South Korea, diplomatic pressure restrained the government. In Ukraine, neither the state nor the opposition used violence.

We found three domestic factors that were underemphasized by the transitiology school. First, whereas O’Donnell and Schmitter noted an elite dominance of the transition process, we see more of a mass element, even if they did acknowledge the resurgence of civil society in driving transitions forward. We find in most cases of success an important role for mass mobilization at varying stages of the process, not simply toward the end. In South Africa, Indonesia, South Korea, Chile, Serbia, Ukraine, and Poland, a well-coordinated opposition exposed failings of the authoritarian regime, encouraged defections from it, and pressured it to change. In other words, mass mobilization, rather than following and interacting with elite divisions, often preceded and provoked them. On the other hand, failed transitions were generally elite led. In Algeria, it was the governing party that decided to open the government to multiparty elections in 1989. The government itself issued a new constitution that eliminated one-party rule, legalized multipartyism, and promised elections. In Azerbaijan, the government decided to allow multiparty parliamentary elections in 2005.

A second factor present in most successful transitions and missing in most failures is the role of indigenous civil society organizations. While not ignored by the original transitions literature, indigenous civil society organizations take on a more substantial and richly textured role in our case studies, not only by mobilizing mass protest but in performing other critical functions that challenged the legitimacy of the regime (such as in exposing corruption) or that unraveled the
regime's hegemony. The most vivid example of the latter function is the role that indigenous civil society organizations played in Ukraine and Serbia (and in the Philippines in 1986, if it had been one of our case studies) to monitor elections and publicize fraud. In Mexico, by the 1997 congressional elections, novel indigenous institutions—national electoral observers, the local media, and local NGOs—threatened to expose foul play.

Third, independent media and communications technology were important domestic factors present in many successful transitions and absent in the failed ones. For example, the independent media in Ukraine and Indonesia exposed governmental corruption. In Poland, opposition underground papers facilitated coordination for Solidarity. In Azerbaijan, Algeria, and China, for example, the state controlled the media, and few alternative outlets were available to citizens. In addition, where citizens had mobile phones, text messaging, and the Internet, the masses seemed to mobilize faster, as we saw in Serbia and Ukraine, than in countries with little Internet or mobile phone coverage, including China, where organizers relied on their own underground networks. Better communications technologies might not have democratized China in 1989, but if the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square had been equipped with these technologies, they might have been able to warn each other about the crackdown and avoid the bloody massacre. Yet widespread if still partially suppressed societal access to mobile phones, the Internet, and social media was not sufficient to bring down the Iranian theocratic autocracy in the Green Revolution movement of 2009, whereas the much simpler communication technology of circulating cassette tapes of Khomeini's speeches and messages made a potent contribution to the revolution that brought down the Shah three decades earlier.

These three domestic factors—mass mobilization, indigenous civil society organizations, and independent media and communications technology—emerge as more important in our explanations of transitions than in the earlier literature. While failed transitions lacked these factors, they generally preceded successful transitions. External influences were also important, and our cases reveal how they interacted with these domestic factors.

External Influences on Successful Transition

First, in nearly every successful transition, indigenous groups received some training from external actors for many years before the transition. We see it in Poland, Ukraine, Serbia, Chile, and Ghana but not in China, Algeria, and Iran. External actors did not directly organize and support mass mobilization in these countries; rather, they provided leaders of the protests with technical support to establish their own opposition organizations and to monitor government and electoral activities. The training and relationships offered by Western NGOs and the diplomatic relationships offered by Western governments also contributed to the content of post-transition institutions. In Chile, for example, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) had been holding seminars and conferences and funding consultants on free and fair elections since the mid-1980s. In Russia, the United States offered technical assistance to manage elections and also pressured Yeltsin to avoid autocratic moves. In South Africa, while Western governments offered diplomatic support for the negotiations between the white ruling minority and the black majority, international NGOs assisted civil society organizations in the negotiations that undid apartheid, training them in techniques such as civic education and election monitoring. In Poland, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supported Solidarity's organizational capacity, while Western governments in general offered aid in exchange for democratic reform.

Second, ideas about democracy advanced by Western countries and their organizations also contributed to the content of the new democratic institutions. What external actors said was sometimes more important than what they paid for democracy promotion. As Stoner claims with regard to Russia, if the United States had been fascist in 1991, it is hard to imagine that Russia would have transitioned to democracy. The same might be said of many of our cases, such as Ghana, where, Handle demonstrates, Rawlings opened up the country in response to Western demands. Ideas also mattered after Soeharto resigned as leader of Indonesia. According to Aspinall and Mietzner, the new president, Jusuf Habibie, was aware of Western expectations and had personal experience living in the West. Aydın-Düzgit and Güroğlu argue that in Turkey the military government understood Western preferences and felt compelled to take them into account. In South Korea, according to Aodesnik and Kim, the military dictator Chun Doo Hwan sought international prestige for his country, especially among Western states, and looked forward to hosting the Summer Olympics and to facilitating the first peaceful transition of power. As South Korea was seeking acceptance into the club of advanced industrial countries, it could not afford to be in open defiance of the norms that defined that club.

Third, external actors helped break citizens' dependence on state-controlled media and offered support for independent media. For example, in the Soviet Union, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, and Voice of America, offered critical information to the public about social and economic affairs. According to Stoner, by some estimates half of Soviet citizens listened to Western media at least once a
week in 1988. This level of media penetration not only offered information about
the country but also helped mobilize citizens against the coup attempt initiated
by radical communists against Gorbachev in 1991. The United States also sup-
ported Radio Free Europe in Poland, which helped broadcast information about
upcoming protests and strikes. In Ukraine, journalists from Internews, who were
trained by the US Agency for International Development, financed public-service
announcements, local campaign coverage, and talk shows.

Thus, external actors boosted the work of indigenous organizations in cases
that succeeded and were little involved in cases that failed. Why did they give less
to the transitions that ultimately failed? All of the failures presented here except
China were dependent on oil revenues during their transition moments, and the
presence of oil may have altered the willingness of external actors to promote
democracy. For example, in Algeria and Azerbaijan, external actors did not want to
risk the stability of their oil contracts and therefore did little to encourage democ-
ratization with diplomacy or to encourage civil society, although the democratic West
also greatly feared the consequences of an Islamist electoral victory in Algeria.
Oil also constantly lurked in the backdrop of US and other Western calculations
in Iran. However, even if external actors had promoted democracy in these cases,
it may have had little effect. Because resource-rich governments are usually not
financially dependent, external actors have little leverage over these states. As Lev-
itsky and Way have shown elsewhere for competitive authoritarian regimes, West-
ern democratic states are unlikely to exercise effective pressure for democratic
change unless they enjoy a reasonably dense set of social and economic linkages
with the potential transitional country as well as significant forms of leverage (e.g.,
in military or economic aid).38

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our case studies suggest several actionable foreign policies that can trigger dem-
ocratic change and are not costly. External actors alone cannot undo an authori-
tarian regime and support the rise of a new democratic one, but working at the
margins, they can expose the failings of the current regime and boost the capacity
of actors pushing for change, and both of these factors seem necessary to bringing
about democracy. At the very least, they seem likely to accelerate it.

First, when a transition is emerging, external actors can help plant the seeds of
eventual democratic change by supporting (financially and technically) the orga-
nizational capacity of civil society. The prospects for democratization may not always
look promising, especially after years of giving support. In Poland, South Africa,
Chile, and South Korea, there was a decade-long flow of aid, and at times the effort
must have appeared to be failing because it was not producing immediate effects.
But we find that continuing to support these civil society actors strengthens their
capacity to be serious players who can mobilize when the opportunity presents
itself. Predicting very far in advance when political circumstances inside a country
will generate propitious circumstances for democratization is difficult, because it
takes a long time for civil society to build up the norms, skills, and resources that
enable democratic change. If the West had waited until just six months before the
elections in South Africa, Poland, Serbia, or Ukraine, those civil societies would
not have had enough time to build the societal and civic infrastructure, and the
capacity and readiness to support an opposition that can tip political dynamics
toward real democratic change. Once the transition moment emerges, it is gener-
ally too late to do much to assist parties or social movements. When elections are
called, there needs to be an existing capacity that can take advantage of the mo-
moment. Parallel vote tabulation, as was used in Ukraine, cannot be taught in one
day. In the cases of failed transition, a longer period of commitment to civil society
assistance might have helped during the transition moment.

Moreover, by supporting the indigenous civil society early on, external actors
can promote an opposition that is more democratic in its orientation. In South
Africa, Chile, Poland, and Serbia, frustration that might have been channeled into
more violent antiestablishment forms took a more incremental, electoral, civic,
peaceful approach. In Iran, the failure of the United States to do much to assist
opposition forces left the field open for the Islamists to dominate organizational
space.

External actors must be prepared to support democratic actors in civil society
for a long period of time, even in the absence of any clear prospect of democratic
transition, because donors can never know when the power structure will change.
By patiently providing financial and technical assistance as well as moral and nor-
mative encouragement, the international community empowers indigenous dem-
ocratic forces. Such aid may help to tip the balance within the political opposition
to the authoritarian regime toward a genuine preference for democracy and away
from a new authoritarian option. And it may also help to accelerate the resistance to
that regime and the erosion of its base of support. Thus, our case studies give sup-
port to a policy not only of increasing and intensifying democracy assistance when
the transitional moment seems to be emerging but also of initiating and sustain-
ning various forms of democratic assistance even when the prospects for democracy
do not appear promising.

Second, when institutions emerge in authoritarian contexts that have the poten-
tial to deliver democratic outcomes, donors should support and encourage them.
Habibie and Yeltsin merited support and engagement to push forward toward
democracy. In Ukraine, the Rada, or parliament, owed some of its strength to Western aid aimed specifically at strengthening the parliament. The Rada was a critical player in revealing electoral fraud. Democratic donors were also right to bet on the emerging transitional dynamics in South Africa after the release of Nelson Mandela, and on the electoral process in Ghana in 2000, even though a long-serving autocrat of uncertain intent, Jerry Rawlings, still stood atop the system.

A third lesson from the case studies is that supporting media and technology development is something external actors can do early on to create an environment that is more conducive to transition. While independent media, including Radio Free Europe and Internexx, have encouraged the transitions to democracy in our study, we also believe that new information and communication technologies—such as mobile phones, the Internet, YouTube, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter—can be important networking and organizational tools to facilitate future transitions to democracy (as they evidently did, for example, in Egypt in the spring of 2011). They made a difference in Serbia and Ukraine, and probably the repression of democratic movements would have been much bloodier in Burma in 2007 and in Iran in 2009 had not the visual images of the repression been leaking out rapidly to the international community (and, in Iran, to the domestic population). While it is important to avoid technological determinism—and to be sensitive to the ways that authoritarian regimes like those in China, Iran, and Russia are controlling these technologies and turning them around to sustain their regimes—the media playing field can often be leveled and the organizational and coordinating capacity of civil society empowered by the diffusion and enhancement of these technologies.

Finally, we learn several lessons from the failures. First, in the context of a decaying authoritarian regime such as Iran, if democratic countries wait too long to get involved, the outcome can veer toward a new form of authoritarianism. The Iranian case suggests that the West should have engaged on behalf of democratic principles and actors much earlier and especially much more consistently. A similar conclusion might be drawn in the case of China, where there was practically no external involvement; however, in China the West did not have nearly as much leverage as it did with the shah. In China, there was no democratic opposition organization with much coherence or capacity before the student-led movement of 1989.

In addition, however, our collection of country studies indicates that timing does matter. Many of our successful cases of democratic transition—including Chile, Mexico, Ghana, Serbia, and Ukraine—were forged in the crucible of an electoral process. That is, competitive elections provided a focal point for opposition mobilization and coalescence. Even in Korea, the anticipation of an election that would be unfair in its structure triggered the mass mobilization that helped—in the context of a critical American diplomatic intervention—to bring down the authoritarian regime. And in Indonesia and South Africa, elections that could have ushered in a new or renewed autocracy instead gave birth to democracy because of domestic mobilization and international engagement. Algeria and Azerbaijan each had the elections as focal points, but other favorable factors were absent or insufficient. Notably, China and Iran lacked any imminent competitive election around which democrats could rally and coalesce to bring down the authoritarian regime.

Without effective domestic or “home grown” organizations and a democratic focus leading to a more favorable balance of power, it is hard to imagine how any amount of external assistance at the transition moment will make much difference. In the transitional situation in Azerbaijan, Western engagement might tip the balance because some indigenous civil society organization already existed. Although Azerbaijan’s oil-related corruption insulated it from democratic impulses following the electoral fraud in a way that was different from Russia’s and Ukraine’s situation, the West lacked the political will to press Azerbaijan to hold free and fair elections or to help hold the regime accountable when it did not. In Algeria we learn that Western democracies should not push for democracy if they are not prepared to live with the outcome. The mild push for democratization by the West led to an election that brought victory to the well-organized Islamist, who threatened Western interests in the country. International actors thus need a sober and comprehensive assessment of the actors and the balance of power among them before pressing for democratic changes that they are not willing to affirm and sustain down the road.

Finally, our study suggests the need not only for continued engagement and patience but also for humility. If we (in the established democracies) are poor at predicting when a country will be ripe for democratic change, we are also hardly infallible in identifying who “the democrats” are. How many times in history have naïve international actors taken the professions of democratic faith by revolutionaries like Khomeini at face value, or seen the promise of a democratic revolution like Russia’s go sour in the post-transition struggle for power and wealth? Yet if Western democrats had cynically concluded that Jerry Rawlings in Ghana or Ernesto Zedillo in Mexico would never allow their dominant party to lose an election, democratic change might not have occurred in either case when it did. If we are unable to identify in advance who the agents of democratization will be and when the times will be ripe for them, then a better approach is to promote democratic principles and process over the long run. Of course, international democrats must be ready to respond with energy, alacrity, and diplomatic pressure and encouragement when electoral moments approach as they did in Chile, Serbia, Ghana, and
Ukraine, or when historical tides suddenly shift as they did in Poland, South Korea, South Africa, and Indonesia. But an important lesson of our studies is the value of patient and persistent international support for domestic civil society. In the end, domestic actors really make (or break) a transition to democracy.

NOTES

Michael McFaul served as senior director and special advisor to the president for Russia and Eurasia in the National Security Council of the United States of America under President Barack Obama in 2009–10. In 2012, he was appointed US ambassador to the Russian Federation. He completed his contribution to this chapter and to this study as a whole before he entered US government service. Views expressed here are his own and do not reflect US policy.


9. In the seminal study Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe, for example, Philippe Schmitter asserted that "one of the firmest conclusions that emerged . . . was that transitions from authoritarian rule and immediate prospects for political democracy were largely to be explained in terms of national forces and calculations. External actors tended to play an indirect and usually marginal role." Schmitter "An Introduction to Southern European Transitions," in Guillermo O'Donnell et al., eds., Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 5.


11. See, for example, Jon Elster et al., Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democracy after Twenty Years?" Annual Review of Political Science 2 (1999): 115–44.


Twenty-five years after Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and quickly began the process of political change within the USSR, consolidated democracy in Russia is more elusive than ever. Russia did, however, successfully transit from Soviet-style autocracy, and so we count it among the transitional "success" cases for the purposes of this volume. We argue that the influence of the United States, Europe, or other countries in fostering regime change inside the Soviet Union and then Russia has been relatively limited. The United States played at best only an indirect role in facilitating the collapse of the Soviet system. Indeed, in the final months immediately before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, President George H. W. Bush may have actually done more to preserve the old system than to destroy it.

During the second phase of the Soviet-Russian transition between 1991 and 1993, when the basic institutional framework of the new political system was created, Americans did provide information about the various options available to Russian policy makers but offered only limited guidance about what choices to make regarding institutional design. Russians made these decisions on the basis of immediate political interests and not with reference to the long-term viability of Russian democratic consolidation. After the transitional phase of institutional design, American actors helped keep afloat important participants in the democratic process, such as political parties, trade unions, and civic groups, but these efforts at fostering an organized and democratic society within Russia likewise were not sufficient to withstand or impede autocratic rollbacks by both President Yeltsin and later President Putin.
Moreover, at certain moments regarding specific issues, the US government and various American nongovernmental actors were able to affect the course of Soviet and later Russian liberalization in a positive way. Yet, despite some episodic successes, what is more striking are the setbacks or missed opportunities. As we explain in this chapter, the primary sources of transition from communism came from within the Soviet Union, not from without.

Defining the Point of Transitional "Success"

Whether December 25, 1991, the date the Soviet Union collapsed, is the date on which to mark the end of Russia's successful transition to a modest form of democracy is contested. Despite the unequivocal demise of the Soviet state in December 1991 and the formal emergence of Russia as a separate state internationally, the transitional struggle did not end quickly or definitively at this point. A debate over the nature of the political system continued between the president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, elected to this newly created position in June 1991, and the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, which had been elected in 1990. This debate erupted into violence in October 1993 when Yeltsin used force to evict renegade parliamentarians who had refused to follow his decree to disband so that new elections and a referendum for a new constitution to redefine executive-legislative relations could be conducted.

Russia's successful transition thus occurred in two steps. The first step ended on December 25, 1991, with the lowering of the Soviet hammer and sickle flag over the Kremlin and its immediate replacement with the Russian tricolor flag. The second, more definitive step, however, took place after the acceptance of the constitution of 1993 that established completely new democratic political institutions for the country. Although under President Putin the parliament—renamed the Duma—became largely a rubber stamp and he took full advantage of the considerable powers granted to the president in the 1993 constitution, until December 2008 no significant changes were made to Russia's basic formal institutional framework.

That Russia, following its transition from communism, has thus far failed to consolidate its democracy (and, indeed, under Vladimir Putin's leadership has reverted to a new form of autocracy) is clear, but an issue beyond the scope of this chapter or volume. We focus here only on the internal and external factors by which the initial transition occurred in December 1991 and then the second stage in December 1993.

The "gang of eight," or State Committee on the State of Emergency (the Russian acronym was GKChP), attempted to take control of the Soviet Union at four o'clock on the morning of August 19, 1991. A statement was released in the Soviet media that the reformist general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail S. Gorbachev was ill, and that the GKChP would be assuming control of the country. The members of the GKChP included the vice-president of the USSR, the prime minister, the head of the KGB, the minister of defense, the minister of internal affairs, the chairman of the Union of Peasants, the first deputy chairman of the USSR defense council, and the president of the Association of USSR State Industries.

Despite the powerful offices the coup leaders represented, the entire attempted coup of August 19–21, 1991, had a Keystone Kops element to it. The plotters miscalculated the amount of support and mobilization they would actually receive from Soviet citizenry—especially outside Moscow. They also did not anticipate the determination or importance of Boris Yeltsin in the process of change that had already taken place. Inexplicably, they allowed him to slip out of his dacha outside Moscow on August 19. He eventually made his way to the Russian White House, then the seat of the Congress of People's Deputies, of which Yeltsin had served as chairman, before being elected president of Russia in June 1991. He managed to convince the Soviet military to side with him and Russia and not fire on Soviet citizens. The coup attempt unraveled on August 21, 1991. Gorbachev, who had been held (ostensibly) against his will at his southern dacha, returned to Moscow broken politically.

Through the fall of 1991, Yeltsin and his government methodically took over Soviet ministries and other political institutions, moving them under Russian control. Gorbachev, still under the illusion that he could save the Union, continued to try to rally republican leaders around the idea of a loose confederation that he would lead. But the writing on the wall was clear by December 1, as Ukrainians voted in a popular referendum to secede from the Union. The signing of an agreement days later by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus to create a new Commonwealth of Independent States put the final nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union.

Unlike transitions from authoritarian rule in Latin America, there was no pact between Gorbachev and other members of the old regime that peacefully ended the Soviet Union. There was no deadlock or negotiated outcome that produced democratic breakthrough. The military was not a major player in producing a regime change. There was also remarkably little blood spilled in this first phase of the Russian transition from communism (three people died in central Moscow during the coup attempt). The democratic opposition, led by President Yeltsin, decisively took over the reins of the Russian state through 1991.

The second phase of Russia's democratic breakthrough began in January 1992 and continued to December 1993, when the new (and current) Russian constitu-
tion was adopted. This came on the heels of the violent dissolution of the old Russian Congress of People's Deputies by Yeltsin. The coalition of Russian political actors that had come together to declare Russian sovereignty from the Soviet Union in 1990 and the creation of a Russian presidency in 1991 came apart violently in the fall of 1993 after a prolonged and fractious debate over the shape of a new Russian democracy and its institutional underpinnings.

DOMESTIC CAUSES OF TRANSITIONAL BREAKTHROUGH IN 1991
Long-Term Structural Causes

Retrospectively, the internal causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the initial breakthrough of democracy were in a sense overdetermined yet paradoxically far from inevitable. The most significant long-term structural factors that created the opportunity for liberalizing reform, although not alone sufficient to cause the collapse of communism in Russia, included the internal incoherence of the institutional structures of the communist system itself; economic decline, partly as a result of the system's institutional failures; societal changes, which led to increased demand for liberalization; negative demographic trends; and ethnic tensions within the 15 republics that composed the Soviet state.

First, although the sophisticated planning mechanism that was able to modernize a predominantly peasant agricultural economy in the 1920s and 1930s was well suited to huge developmental projects, the communist system proved unreliable and unwieldy by the 1980s. The power of ideology also waned in the declining years of the Soviet system. In addition, the Communist Party itself had become a bloated bureaucracy by the mid-1980s following Leonid Brezhnev's death in 1982. The fallacy of the constitutional position of the party as "the leading and guiding force of Soviet life and the nucleus of its political system, of all state organs and public organs," was increasingly questioned by the time Gorbachev acceded to power as general secretary in 1985. Indeed, his original plan under perestroika was to reconstruct the party and the Soviet political system around it.

Successive leaders tried to make changes to the system before Gorbachev initiated perestroika. Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's immediate successor, was the first in a line of Soviet reformers. His bifurcation of the Communist Party, sovarkhoz, and his limited attempts at political and cultural reform were undone, however, by Brezhnev when he assumed leadership after Khrushchev's ouster in the early 1960s. Under Brezhnev's long reign, the system stagnated. The large developmental projects that had benefited from the extreme centralization of the party and command economy were largely completed under Stalin. A backward,

agrarian country had been rapidly industrialized (even overindustrialized); adult literacy was raised to 98 percent; and the Soviet Union was challenging American hegemony not just on earth but in space by the 1960s.

In contrast, by the 1970s and early 1980s, the system began to decline. There was a growing crisis of regime legitimacy within Soviet society. As Moshe Lewin has argued, "The country went through a social revolution as Brezhnev slept." With rapid rises in education levels came increased undermining of the ideology of high mobilization that the system required. The Soviet "social contract"—whereby the state provided cradle to grave services and guaranteed employment—was gradually failing. The adage among Soviet citizens, "we pretend to work, while you pretend to pay us," gained currency through the 1970s. Increasingly, a chasm opened between the promises the regime made in its propagandistic claims regarding the superiority of the socialist way of life and the regime's growing inability to deliver.

Second, as Gorbachev assumed the office of general secretary in March 1985, the Soviet economic system was badly in need of reform. Despite Khrushchev's boasts in 1961 that the Soviet economy would surpass the gross national product (GNP) per capita of the United States within 20 years, by 1980 it had attained only about one-third of the US rate. In the 1970s annual growth dipped to less than about 3 percent on average and by 1985 had declined further to 1.6 percent. This steady decline in growth rates was driven by declines in production outputs in previously stellar industries such as coal and steel. Further, oil production was also sliding by the mid-1980s, and agricultural production was "anemic" by 1982, purportedly dipping below plan levels.

Beyond this, an aging capital stock and low investment rates also proved problematic in boosting Soviet production. Soviet firms were not required to live within their means or to adjust production in response to demand for their products. They faced no hard budget constraint. Bureaucrats in Soviet ministries found inputs for production and markets for finished goods. If a manager needed more money to stay apace of the plan, the central government could print it. Money had little meaning or value in the system anyway. By the time of the Soviet collapse, inflation rates approached 100 percent.

The Soviet Union also was not immune to some of the problems that affected the broader world economy—particularly in the 1970s, when world oil prices declined. This economic slowdown, combined with the relentless pressure to fulfill ever-rising production plans, led to further economic inefficiencies. Enterprise managers would pad their reporting of production outputs. This type of behavior, often with the overt (for a fee) or at least tacit acceptance of bureaucrats who were supposed to oversee and stop this activity, helped to fuel the growth of the black
market (or shadow) economy and official corruption, further dragging down economic performance.

Third, social changes as well as negative demographic trends fueled economic problems. Soviet population growth dropped about 50 percent between 1960 and 1980, causing a decline in the size of the work force and an increase in pensioners in need of state support. Death rates for both men and women were on the increase by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Overall standards of living were rapidly declining from the 1970s onward in comparison to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, especially in areas like housing (in chronic short supply) and education.10

These disturbing statistics may have in some ways contributed to a fourth long-term structural cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union: there was growing restiveness among the many diverse nationalities throughout the USSR's 15 republics. The annexation of the Baltics, for example, in the 1939 Soviet-Nazi pact had always been viewed as illegitimate by Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, despite regime attempts to assimilate the native populations into Soviet society and the resettlement of ethnic Russians in these republics. Public demonstrations against Soviet language policy occurred in Lithuania in 1972 and Georgia in 1978. In 1977 an Armenian secessionist group set off a bomb on the Moscow subway. Ethnic friction was also fueled by perceived preferences in appointments to plum jobs, whether for Russians over other ethnicities or for indigenous candidates over Russians. All of this occurred at a time when non-Russian, non-European birthrates within the Soviet Union were increasing four times faster than those of the ethnic Russian majority.11

Gorbachev had to deal with these long-term structural problems when he announced his plan of reconstruction or perestroika in 1985. They were not, however, alone determinative causes of the ultimate collapse of the Soviet regime in December 1991. The system could have limped forward for an indefinite period had these factors not combined with short-term precipitating factors that contributed to the ultimate downfall of the Soviet regime.

Short-Term Precipitating Factors

Although the Soviet system had been in structural decline for perhaps two decades, its collapse in December 1991 was far from inevitable. Indeed, one leader in the field of Soviet studies wrote confidently in 1986 that, despite all that was wrong in the post-Brezhnev era, "the survival of the Soviet system is not in question, but the utility of many of its policies is."12 Only five years later, the Soviet Union collapsed spectacularly. While some Soviet specialists, including Timothy Colton and Alexander Dallin, accurately diagnosed what ailed the Soviet system by the mid-1980s, few predicted the timing or the exact mix of problems that would bring about the system's ultimate downfall.13

Despite the structural weaknesses that had developed over time as the Soviet system matured, short-term factors—and the role of agency in particular—tipped the system toward collapse between 1985 and the first stage of transition in December 1991.

Role of Agency: Gorbachev

Would the Soviet Union have survived indefinitely, despite all of its problems, if not for the fateful decisions of Mikhail S. Gorbachev? Although Gorbachev cannot bear sole responsibility, his halting economic and social reforms contributed to the timing and peaceful nature of collapse of the system.

Gorbachev was himself a product of the Soviet system. Born in the Stavropol region of Russia in 1931, he advanced through the Komsomol (Communist Youth League) and then the party apparatus to become a provincial party secretary by the late 1970s. In his own autobiography and the various biographies and accounts of his life, we know that he was greatly influenced while a student in Moscow in the 1960s by Krushchev's troubled but at times innovative rule.14

He became a political client of Brezhnev's immediate successor as general secretary, Yuri Andropov, and it was Andropov who first brought Gorbachev from Stavropol to Moscow to work on the enduring problem of Soviet agriculture. Like Andropov, Gorbachev was aware of the failings of the Soviet planning system and the need for rejuvenation. He did not, however, intend to bring the Soviet system down. Indeed, by his own admission, he was a committed communist, proclaiming proudly in 1989, even as he pursued modes of democratization through the partially competitive election of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, that "I am a Communist, a convinced Communist! For some that may be a fantasy, but for me, it is my main goal."15

Although perhaps best remembered for his attempts to democratize the Soviet system through the introduction of partially free and fair parliamentary elections in 1989 and for his policy of glasnost or openness that revolutionized the previously closed Soviet media, Gorbachev actually began perestroika by attacking the troubled Soviet economy. But his first foray into economic reform—the antialcohol campaign of 1985–86—proved to have disastrous social effects from which his reputation within the Soviet Union never fully recovered. Gorbachev's other tentative economic reforms included the partial trade liberalization of 1986, the 1988 Law on Enterprises, and the 1988 Law on Cooperatives. Again, as with the antialcohol campaign, these were well-intentioned policies but with evidently unintended and unanticipated negative outcomes.
When he inherited the system in 1985, the Soviet Union was an autarkic state with little external trade beyond other communist countries. By partially liberalizing trade in 1986, Gorbachev enabled a select number of enterprises to engage in private foreign trade. Although this was intended to boost the level of Soviet exports and increase revenue, the result of this incomplete reform was to encourage favoritism and corruption of the process of selecting the enterprises that could participate in the program. Because it was also a relatively limited opportunity to open trade ties, it did little to boost the country’s quickly declining GDP. Similarly, the policies on private property embodied in the laws on enterprises and cooperatives had other unintended consequences. While they did little to create private property, they further disrupted the already faltering planning system. The result was that as regulations of enterprise directors were loosened, the availability of certain goods declined rapidly (or at least the legal sale of these goods declined) as some managers resold their products on the black market.16

Gorbachev also severely weakened the Communist Party’s grip on the economic and political system. His decision to allow limited competition for elected positions to a new super parliament, the Congress of People’s Deputies, for example, caused communist candidates to lose seats in open competition with either former party members or new challengers rather than reestablishing the communist power as the intellectual and political guiding force of the system.

In another fateful decision, Gorbachev opted not to stand for popular direct election to the new post of Soviet president that he had created for himself, nor did he participate in open competition for his own seat in the Congress of People’s Deputies. Instead, he ran and was “elected” as a representative of the Communist Party in the portion of the CPD seats reserved for members of social organizations. When faced with a strong political challenger in the form of Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev retreated to the right in the summer and fall of 1990 and then attempted to retreat to the left by the summer of 1991 just as the ill-fated coup attempt by the GKChP took place on August 19 of that year.

Although the decisions that Gorbachev made played a key role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the actions of Boris Yeltsin, whom Gorbachev brought into the Politburo as first party secretary of the city of Moscow, were also crucial. Yeltsin grew increasingly impatient with the unsteady nature of Gorbachev’s perestroika program between 1985 and 1987. He formally broke with Gorbachev in his own “secret speech” in October 1987 at a party plenum, where he criticized what he deemed to be the slow pace of perestroika and what he saw as a growing cult of personality around Gorbachev himself.17 Although Gorbachev then tried to end Yeltsin’s political career, dismissing him from his posts in Moscow and the Politburo, he clearly underestimated his rival. Yeltsin reemerged in 1989 to win a seat in the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union and then in 1990 as leader of a democratic (noncommunist) faction in the newly created and competitively elected Russian Congress of People’s Deputies. At about the same time, Gorbachev’s foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, and longtime Politburo colleague Aleksandr Yakovlev both formally broke with Gorbachev, warning in December 1990 of the possibility of a coup attempt against him.

Having lost the support of the democratic faction in the Politburo, and surrounded by more conservative forces, Gorbachev proved indecisive. He backed toward the conservatives and by January 1991 used mild force in quelling the increasingly restive republics of the Soviet Union. In an incident known as Black Sunday, Gorbachev ordered or at least presided over the attack on unarmed protesters at a television station in Vilnius, Lithuania, during which 14 protesters were killed and another 500 wounded.18 But by the summer of 1991, Gorbachev appeared more reformist.

Yeltsin capitalized on unrest in the Baltics and led a movement within Russia to declare itself sovereign from the Soviet Union in June 1990. By June 1991 he created distinct Russian political institutions, including a presidency to which he was directly elected in a free and fair competition in June of that year. This was a further challenge to the territorial and political survival of the Soviet Union, for without Russia, how could the Soviet Union survive? Gorbachev again tacked to the left and desperately renegotiated a much looser confederation of republics through the summer of 1991. This, coupled with Yeltsin’s immediate ban of the Communist Party on Russian soil, proved to be the main precipitant of the August 19–21 coup attempt against Gorbachev.

The short-term causes of the second phase of breakthrough (December 1991–December 1993) were institutional weakness inherited from the patchwork constitution of 1978, fundamental disagreements over the nature of economic reform, and the choices of individual actors in positions of power.

Institutional Weakness Inherited from an Old Constitution

Boris Yeltsin, although emerging clearly and unequivocally as the leader of the new Russia after the August 1991 coup attempt, was left with a parliament elected in 1990 before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This legislature was large and unwieldy and proved internally factionalized as well as at odds with Yeltsin over economic policy in particular. The creation of the Russian presidency in 1991 strengthened executive power in Russia, but parliamentary power was not correspondingly decreased.

Debate over a new constitutional framework ensued in 1992 and 1993, with disagreement focused on the relative powers of the legislature and executive. Yelt-
Yeltsin was certainly partly to blame for the ongoing disputes with the Congress of People's Deputies. He had shown an inability to build coalitions for his policies with the legislature. Yeltsin also failed to build support among the group of democratic reformers that had helped him win power first as speaker of the Congress of People's Deputies in 1990 and then as president in 1991. Indeed, he even had difficulty convincing his own vice-president, Aleksandr Rutskoi, of the value of his economic reforms. Rutskoi took to the side of parliament in this debate and soon became a political encumbrance to Yeltsin in his struggle with Khasbulatov and the Congress of People's Deputies.

**Fundamental Debates about the Role of the State in the Economy**

The sharp political disagreement over the power of the president versus the legislature took place against the backdrop of a crowded economic agenda. In January 1992 Yeltsin's reformist prime minister, Yegor Gaidar, initiated a bold neoliberal economic reform program. On January 2, 1992, prices were liberalized across Russia, causing average price increases of 245 percent throughout the country. Although prices stabilized within a few months, inflation remained high throughout 1992, and there was heavy criticism within the Congress of People's Deputies of this and other aspects of the reform program. These included the initial restriction on credits to failing state enterprises (a policy that was reversed by mid-1993 in response to lobbying by enterprise directors), as well as the speed and nature of the massive privatization program that began in July 1992.

These divisions split relatively neatly such that the Congress under Khasbulatov, himself an economist, and a faction of communists and fascists (the red-brown coalition) opposed the neoliberal agenda, while Yeltsin supported Gaidar and an aggressive neoliberal menu of reforms. The Congress, therefore, was slow in passing laws on privatization, landownership, and bankruptcy, for example. By the winter of 1992, as Yeltsin's temporary decree-making powers were set to expire, he was forced by the Congress to sacrifice Gaidar, his acting prime minister, and to replace him with the more conservative Viktor Chernomyrdin, former Soviet minister of Gas.

**Individual Agency in Interaction with Structural Weaknesses:**

**Yeltsin (The Executive) versus Khasbulatov (The Parliament)**

The conflict between president and parliament in this period was not only structurally produced and sharpened by the gravity of the economic choices made during this period but also exacerbated by personalities. Ruslan Khasbulatov used his authority within the Congress as an independent base of power. He replaced Yeltsin as speaker in October 1991, after the attempted coup against Gorbachev.
EXTERNAL CAUSES OF TRANSITIONAL BREAKTHROUGH

To date, tracing a direct causal link between American foreign policy and Soviet regime change has eluded social scientists, though some indirect influences seem important.39

First, compelling evidence exists that the American defense buildup and the initiation of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the early 1980s shaped Soviet calculations about reform. Relatedly, the quagmire the Soviet military faced by a mujahideen force funded partly by the United States in Afghanistan made a bad economic and social situation worse for Gorbachev. Second, the collapse of the international oil market in the 1970s clearly played a crucial role in exposing the weaknesses of the Soviet economic system. Third, foreign broadcasting played a surprisingly crucial role in the battle for hearts and minds within Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Fourth, the diffusion of ideas from West to East clearly mattered. The democratic principles of the American system also played an inspirational role for Soviet dissidents and influenced the thinking of important reformers in Gorbachev’s politburo; Aleksandr Yakovlev, for example, spent time in the 1960s studying as an exchange student at Columbia University. Had Poland not moved steadily toward democracy in the late 1980s or had the United States been a fascist rather than democratic state, it is highly unlikely that democracy would have emerged as the ideology of opposition for Boris Yeltsin and his allies.

Of less importance, and even sometimes to the detriment of transitional success, were trade sanctions against the Soviet Union, halting diplomacy and normative pressure, and financial and technical assistance in the early 1990s.

Moreover, American efforts most certainly did not compel the Soviet leadership to experiment with political reform. Gorbachev made that decision alone. Once the process of political reform gained some momentum as a result of Gorbachev’s initiatives, the dynamic of change was driven almost entirely by internal factors. Still, at certain key points external factors (actors, conditions, and policies) provided an incentive for the change that occurred in the Soviet Union between 1985 and 1991 and in Russia between 1991 and 1993.

The Influence of SDI and the Soviet War in Afghanistan on Gorbachev’s Decisions

Although much has been made of the influence of President Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—a missile defense program that was designed to intercept Soviet missiles in midair before they reached the United States—
Andrew Busch sees SDI as possibly the single biggest factor in the ending of the Cold War. 

Though it did not produce a functioning ballistic defense during the 1980’s, SDI fundamentally altered the strategic context in favor of the United States. ... SDI quickly became an obsession of the Soviet leadership. ... Having failed to win elimination of the program, the Soviets were prodded by SDI into seeking greater modernization of their own society—which could only be achieved by liberalization. The threat of having to compete with SDI led to greater toleration of reform by the military. Indeed, former Soviet officials have indicated that in many respects, perestroika was a military initiative, aimed at redressing the military implications of Soviet technological weakness.10

Busch, Duric, and Schweitzer make the strongest arguments for the role played by SDI and the arms race, but others see a more indirect role in Soviet decision making regarding reform.11 William Wohlforth presents a realistic explanation for the fall of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War. Though he does not specifically mention the arms buildup in the United States under Ronald Reagan, Wohlforth contends that changing perceptions of relative military power had an important role in ending Cold War competition: “Gorbachev may have had numerous reasons for seeking to withdraw from the rivalry with the United States, but a necessary precondition was the perception of reduced capability to compete.”12

In separate analyses, Celeste Wallander, Raymond Garthoff, and Sarah Mendelson see Western pressure on the Soviet collapse only as a contributing factor and not the primary element within the overall context of economic decline. Wallander points to evidence showing that Gorbachev’s decision to embark on a path of economic reform between 1985 and 1987 was little influenced by the American military buildup. Though Gorbachev did look to pursue arms control agreements, which would decrease the needed defense spending, cuts in defense spending through 1987 were not required for reform at home.13 Garthoff’s study provides further support for this perspective on the role of SDI. He stresses the importance of Gorbachev’s agency in wanting to change the relationship between the Soviet Union and the world.14

The West did not, as is widely believed, win the Cold War through geopolitical containment and military deterrence. Still less was the Cold War won by the Reagan military buildup and the Reagan Doctrine, as some have suggested. Instead, “victory” came when a new generation of Soviet leaders recognized how badly their system at home and their policies abroad had failed.15

Even more skeptical of the role of SDI, Sarah Mendelson argues that its impact was at best minimal and possibly even strengthened the hands of the hard-liners by reinforcing their self-image as a nation under siege.16

In response, as US defense procurement allocations increased, so too did Soviet defense budgeting. Under Reagan, US defense spending increased from $34 billion in 1980 to $253 billion in 1985, with an emphasis on strategic modernization.18 Leading Soviet military analysts argued that, even with a projected rise of 45 percent between 1981 and 1985, they could not compete with the US buildup: “It was a shift that further weighed on the already sickly Soviet economy.”19

Bringing down the Soviet Union, analysts disagree on the true effect of the program on Gorbachev’s decisions to reform the Soviet Union and also to participate in disarmament talks with the United States in the latter 1980s. Within the spectrum of opinions on the importance of the arms race, however, there is a general consensus that SDI and the US arms buildup in the 1980s did not on their own bring down the Soviet Union.

Peter Schweitzer argues that the military buildup and increasing pressure of the Reagan years were crucial factors precipitating the Soviet collapse: “As the Soviets faced this catastrophic drop in their income, they also faced the prospect of spending more of their dwindling resources on an arms race. U.S. defense procurement budgets rose by 25 per cent in each of the early Reagan years. By the mid-1980’s, U.S. military expenditures were exceeding those of the Soviet Union for the first time since the late 1960’s.”24

Similarly, Mira Duric points to the Soviet Union’s contradictory statements as evidence that it was concealing its fear of an operational SDI, while Soviet officials publicly declared the SDI to be technologically unfeasible, Soviet leaders also repeatedly criticized the program as a dangerous threat to world peace and stability. They also claimed to have their own missile-defense program, which would be wasteful if the program were actually impossible.25 Competing views within the Soviet Union partially explain the situation according to Duric, who cites Soviet deputy foreign minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh’s comment that “different people in the government felt differently about the SDI. Those in the foreign ministry including Bessmertnykh, Eduard Shevardnadze and Gorbachev himself, believed that because of the SDI there was ‘a good opportunity to work with the military and with the defense sectors of the economy to go further with arms control.’ In contrast, the military [defense] part of the government wanted ‘to increase the production of their offensive weapons to counter SDI.’”26

The Soviets could not keep up with US spending. Schweitzer reports that “by 1984 General Secretary Konstantin Chernenko declared that ‘the complex international situation has forced us to divert a great deal of resources to strengthening the security of our country.’ In 1985 General Secretary Gorbachev pushed for an 8 per cent per year jump in defense spending.”27

In contrast, the Soviet Union was unable to keep up with US defense spending increases, leading to a significant decline in its military capability. Under Reagan, US defense spending increased from $34 billion in 1980 to $253 billion in 1985, with an emphasis on strategic modernization.18 Leading Soviet military analysts argued that, even with a projected rise of 45 percent between 1981 and 1985, they could not compete with the US buildup: “It was a shift that further weighed on the already sickly Soviet economy.”19
Another external conflict that may have hastened domestic reform in the Soviet Union was the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. By December of that year, the Soviet army quickly became bogged down in a bloody, disastrous conflict. The United States in 1980 worked with the mujahidin resistance fighters to harass Soviet soldiers. Saudi Arabia agreed to contribute matching funds, and China also aided the guerrilla operation. The United States funneled more than $2 billion to the mujahidin during the 1980s. By 1985 the United States established National Security Directive 166, shifting the policy goal for Afghanistan from mere harassment to forcing a Soviet withdrawal. From this point, US involvement and funding in Afghanistan escalated. One anonymous Western official described the escalation as “directed at killing Russian military officers,” and beginning in 1985, the CIA also started providing the mujahidin with satellite reconnaissance data of Soviet targets, intercepts of Soviet communications, and high-technology weaponry. By 1987, Gorbachev announced a decision to withdraw from Afghanistan and the withdrawal was completed by February 1989.

Wallander examines the US role in Afghanistan in light of American aid to guerrillas in other Third World conflicts:

In Afghanistan... the United States provided (along with China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia) huge amounts of weaponry assistance to guerrillas fighting the Soviet Army. Even so, at the height of the Soviet troop presence in Afghanistan only about 1% of Soviet forces were deployed. Soviet casualty rates and losses actually declined after the United States supplied Stinger missiles, which were first deployed in 1986 and became effective in 1987, and Moscow continued to supply the Kabul government $300 million a month even after Soviet troops had withdrawn in 1989. U.S. support for the Afghan rebels certainly made life more difficult for the Soviet Army, and this in turn affected Soviet society’s view of the strength of the state and the military forces that sustained it. Afghanistan also helped spur the rise of social movements and organized protest in the Soviet Union, notably the condemnations of the war by mothers of soldiers who were fighting in Afghanistan.

While Wallander does not claim a direct relationship between US pressure on the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Soviet withdrawal, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet state, she notes that Soviet military commitments abroad, including the war in Afghanistan, "were economically costly, but not on a scale that undermined the Soviet economy or that would have saved the economy had the resources been freed."

Sarah Mendelson agrees that the impact of US intervention in Afghanistan was negligible. Instead, the withdrawal of Soviet troops was caused by the rise of reformist leadership within the Soviet Union; troops would have remained in Afghanistan past 1988 had Gorbachev not come to power.

The International Oil Market

Beyond the pressures of the Cold War and the arms race and the difficulties of the conflict in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union by the mid-1980s was suffering economically. This was in part due to the general inefficiencies of the planning system, and Brezhnev’s failures to undertake major reform to address the shortcomings of the overall economy. It was, however, also due to the fall in oil prices that occurred between 1982 and 1986. The Afghan war had been costly in terms not only of the lives of Soviet servicemen but also of Soviet oil revenues, which accounted for a majority share of all domestic revenues.

This fact had not gone unnoticed in the West. According to Yegor Gaidar, Yeltsin’s reformist prime minister, Richard Pipes pointed out the vulnerability of the Soviet state in this regard and even recommended using the Soviet dependence on oil prices to destabilize the regime. More explicit are Gaidar’s comments regarding the effect of oil on Russian internal politics:

The timeline of the collapse of the Soviet Union can be traced to September 13, 1985. On this date, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the minister of oil of Saudi Arabia, declared that the monarchy had decided to alter its oil policy radically. The Saudis stopped protecting oil prices, and Saudi Arabia regained its share in the world market. During the next six months, oil production in Saudi Arabia increased fourfold while oil prices collapsed by approximately the same amount in real terms. As a result, the Soviet Union lost approximately $20 billion per year, money without which the country simply could not survive.

World oil prices collapsed from $37 per barrel in 1982 to $20 a barrel in 1986. Desperate for hard currency and pressured to cover its growing trade deficit, the Soviet Union increased its debt burden considerably. The country finally ran out of loan prospects from commercial banks abroad. The head of the State Planning Committee, Yuri Maslyukov, warned that the situation would lead the system to collapse.

Gaidar argues that the financial and hard currency situation in the country by 1989 largely explains Gorbachev’s subsequent policy decisions. The desperately needed foreign loans would come only from foreign governments at this point, and if the Soviet military crushed Solidarity Party demonstrations in Warsaw, the Soviet Union would not have received the desperately needed $100 billion from
The Influence of Foreign Broadcasting into the Soviet Union

Perhaps the best investment the US government made in its efforts to destabilize the Soviet Union was in Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. These radio channels were effective tools in promoting US "psychological warfare" against the USSR. The State Department's Voice of America provided a third branch of attack. Founded in the 1950s and originally funded by the Defense Department, the Voice of America began broadcasting during World War II, with a mission to provide accurate news about America and the war.

After the war, VOA went in decline until its revival during the Cold War. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty began operating in 1949 and 1951 respectively. They were privately operated but covertly funded by the CIA. In 1971 the CIA's role was revealed, so Congress began overt funding. Incredibly, Voice of America claimed to reach 127 million listeners in 1988, defined as those who tuned in at least once a week, in more than 160 countries. The reach of RFE/RL was less extensive, although estimated that at about the same time it reached 55 to 60 million listeners at least once a week. Within the Soviet Union, "popular surveys showed that nearly 50 percent of the populace in the Soviet Union listened to Western broadcasts at least once a week, 28 percent to VOA and 15 percent each to RL and to the BBC." 49

Significantly, former KGB agent, Oleg Kalugin testified that "of all the Soviet groups it was the political elite that Radio Liberty most influenced. After years of listening to RL's programming without interference (and in the case of the Party elite, reading the daily transcriptions of broadcasts prepared by the KGB), these Party members understood that the Soviet Union needed fundamental change. This realization laid the groundwork for the reform process that ultimately spelled the end of the USSR." 50

Voice of America was designed to provide accurate news from the American perspective, while RFE and RL were "supposed to represent the voice of the opposition forces from the countries to which they broadcast." 51 International radio broadcasts quickly became important sources of information in the Soviet bloc. There were several key moments when RFE/RL and VOA proved invaluable in getting around Soviet media controls. One of these was the revelation of Khurschchev's secret speech in February 1956, where he denounced Stalin's crimes. This was followed by his initiation of significant reform. It shocked the Soviet system and perhaps gave disgruntled or disillusioned Soviet citizens hope that things might change.

Foreign media broadcasts also provided Soviet leaders with important information about their own populations and internal challenges to the regime. For example, in the 1950s, "analyses of Soviet youth demonstrated that many were indifferent to the political changes occurring; some students could not even name the First Secretary of the Party, Krushchchev." 52

The amount of effort and money that the Soviet state spent on jamming the RL and VOA indicated the extent of the Kremlin's concern over the impact of foreign media on the population. 53 In the 1970s, Radio Liberty devoted substantial airtime to reading samizdat, eventually establishing a special program specifically for that purpose and allowing the opinions of dissenters to reach millions. 54 Eugene Parta confirms that "the samizdat phenomenon and the related human rights movement in the USSR were a major topic of broadcasting. There is a strong correlation between listening to Radio Liberty and approval of this form of dissident activity, decreed by a majority of the Soviet population." 55

The Carter administration expanded radio broadcasting, and total RFE/RL funding rose from $54 million in 1978 to almost $100 million in 1981. The administration also made an effort to reach listeners in the satellite republics by increasing broadcasts in seven languages. 56 "Yet this does not tell the whole story, as the data indicate that information from Western broadcasts was often spread by 'word of mouth,' which served to amplify broadcast impact to a much larger part of Soviet society," 57

Yeltsin too should have sent foreign broadcasters a note of thanks during the August 1991 coup attempt against Gorbachev. In Moscow, many citizens gained information from fuzzy images of CNN that they were able to pick up through the microwave relay running through Moscow to the Kremlin:

"The morning of August 19, at about 8 a.m., when they cut off Ekho Moskvy, the situation [of those trying to follow events] seemed almost hopeless," wrote Moscow media critic Lyudmila Polyakova. "You couldn't listen endlessly to the 'appeal' of Yandye! But at about 10 a.m., without any hope, I pushed the button for the fourth channel, where I can get CNN, and I was stunned: there were Americans working as if nothing had happened. ... That's how I survived for three days, knowing for certain what was happening not far from my home." 58

In his comprehensive study of Radio Liberty and Western broadcasting into the Soviet Union, Parta reports on a Vox Populi survey indicating that as many as 30 percent of Muscovites may have heard Radio Liberty broadcasts between August 19 and
and that this accounted for thousands making their way to the streets to join Boris Yeltsin at the White House. Further testimony to the importance of the outside press during the attempted coup comes from Leonid Ionin in Nezavisima Gazeta:

Radio Liberty and the BBC defeated the KGB and the CPSU... If the high-level plotters had followed the tested recipe of General Yanuszkiewicz [in declaring martial law in Poland]—seizcd the newspapers, radio stations, television, cut off telephones and isolated the White House from Moscow and Moscow from the rest of the Soviet Union and the world—they most likely would have succeeded. Any other way, they were doomed.50

The influence of the media on Soviet citizens had an intangible effect on their attitudes toward the regime and may have contributed to the cognitive divide that developed under Brezhnev in the 1970s. It also exposed Soviet leaders to the truth of the regime's failings. The information it provided helped defeat the coup plotters in 1991, which contributed to the Soviet collapse.

Trade Sanctions and Conditionality

After World War II, the United States came to believe that American "security interests would be served best if the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and People's Republic of China were isolated from, rather than integrated into, the liberal world economy." For a policy of economic denial to be effective, however, the United States needed the cooperation of other Western governments. Western European countries were reluctant to cut important trade ties to the East and impede postwar economic recovery. Even so, by 1948 the West European states, led by Britain and France, had initiated their own selective export bans on strategic goods; in 1949 they coordinated their efforts and compiled the Anglo-French list of prohibited items. Under US pressure, Italy and West Germany agreed to abide by the more restrictive American list.

Despite these measures, Western Europe still faced a coordination problem; each country expressed a reluctance to ban export of an item unless all other countries did the same. Moreover, they were wary that the appearance of economic warfare would provoke a military confrontation with the Soviet Union. After a series of negotiations, in November 1949 the United States and West European allies agreed to form the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Bans (CoCom). CoCom was to be an independent association, disassociated from NATO, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), and other transatlantic institutions. In the following years, the list of prohibited exports continued to expand under US pressure and growing European fear of invasion in the aftermath of the Korean War.

By the mid-1950s, however, European support for CoCom was waning; Britain proposed a 50 percent cut in items on the control list and called for greater economic integration with the East. In a new set of negotiations, the list was cut in half, and the allies agreed to focus attention on items of industrial and military significance. Despite the revisions to CoCom policy, the United States continued its stricter unilateral embargo. Although the embargo was largely ineffective as an economic weapon without European cooperation, continued economic warfare "demonstrated, to the Soviets and the rest of the international community, the profound discontent of the United States with Soviet foreign and domestic policies and the willingness of the United States to stand in opposition to them."50

But by the mid-1960s, pragmatic considerations led American leaders to reconsider the efficacy of continued unilateral economic warfare. A 1963 Policy Planning Council report showed that the Soviet bloc was generally self-sufficient, and that the US embargo had only a minimal effect on Soviet military capacity. Trade liberalization would have no appreciable effect but could carry significant political benefits as a bargaining chip. Evaluations of CoCom's effectiveness in the 1960s vary, largely due to a lack of clarity about its mission. Though the Soviet Union did increase its military power during the period, the controls do appear to have delayed "Soviet acquisition of military relevant Western technology," helping the West maintain its lead in the arms race.

In 1952 the United States started negotiations in full to normalize trade relations with the East. The Nixon administration used Most Favored Nation (MFN) status and the relaxation of export controls to leverage political concessions from the Soviets. At the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I treaty was signed and Brezhnev promised to pressure the North Vietnamese to negotiate a political settlement. In return, the Nixon administration agreed to triple bilateral trade and relax the unilateral export controls.

Nixon's MFN initiative though was defeated when seventy-two senators cosponsored the Jackson Amendment to the Trade Reform Act of 1974, which "prohibited the extension of credits or MFN to nonmarket economies that restricted or taxed emigration by their citizens." The Soviets responded by relaxing emigration restrictions (particularly on Russian Jews) but made clear that the amendment's passage would be met with Soviet displeasure. Despite Nixon's pleading, the amended act passed in 1975 and was signed by President Ford. In response, the Soviets abrogated the entire trade agreement of 1972, contending that the emigration amendment went beyond the act's provisions. In the following years, popular and congressional sentiment in the United States grew suspicious of détente and wary of increasing trade links. As a result, in the absence of MFN status or other credits from the United States, the Soviet government had little economic reason to change its foreign policies.
President Carter came to power promising to abandon tactical linkage, but his administration quickly reversed itself, deciding to pursue economic diplomacy. When Congress still would not grant MFN status, the administration believed that it could influence Soviet behavior with other economic instruments. In response to Soviet human rights abuse and intervention in Somalia, the United States placed critical energy extraction technology on the embargo list. The United States also retroactively retracted a license for a US company to export a computer for a Soviet press agency during the 1980 Moscow Olympics. However, Western allies refused to cooperate, and West Europeans stepped in to supply the Soviets both the computer and the needed energy technology. "Because the Soviets experienced little difficulty in acquiring Western computing systems or energy technology, the Carter administration's 1978 foreign policy controls did not provide leverage." 71

During this period of general trade liberalization, CoCom continued to exist but experienced a decrease in effectiveness. Lax enforcement, confusion in interpretation of the control list, rapidly changing technology, and an increase in requested exceptions undermined its effectiveness and legitimacy. The United States had ceased to serve as an effective leader for the organization as its behavior appeared inconsistent and undisciplined; by the 1970s, it alone requested a majority of all control list exceptions, sparking copycat behavior from other member states. 72

After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States showed a renewed interest in economic warfare. In January 1980 the Carter administration announced a grain embargo, a potentially devastating move in a poor harvest year that was "intended to punish the Soviets for their foreign policy and, more important, to send a signal of U.S. resolve regarding future Soviet aggression." 73 In cutting agricultural exports, the United States hoped to inflict economic damage on the Soviet Union. However, the move backfired when other countries failed to follow suit. As a result, the United States simply lost a significant share of exports to the USSR as Argentina, Australia, and Canada took America's place. "American trade pressure on the Soviet Union was with regard to agricultural products, unsuccessful." 74

Also early in 1980 the administration decided additionally to boycott the upcoming Moscow Olympics and to embargo fertilizer shipments. The measures were seen as conditional, with the administration prepared to lift them in exchange for Soviet good behavior. By March, the United States had prepared a new export control list that prohibited all exceptions on exports to the Soviet Union and further restricted technology transfer to lower-grade technologies and "process know-how" of militarily significant sectors. 75

The Reagan administration placed an even greater emphasis on strengthening the strategic embargo, especially by placing greater limits on the transfer of Western technology and know-how. 76 The Western European allies, always lukewarm at best on economic embargoes involving the Soviet Union, predictably were less enthusiastic. At a January 1982 meeting, CoCom member states reaffirmed the strategic embargo but resisted Reagan's efforts to tighten restrictions. 77 Conflict between the United States and Europe escalated when Poland imposed martial law and cracked down on Solidarity. 78 In 1981 further conflict arose regarding a proposed natural gas pipeline from Siberia to Western Europe, which the Reagan administration opposed. In June 1982, after the Europeans refused to suspend activity on the pipeline, Reagan extended American pipeline sanctions to cover the activities of US firms acting in Europe, effectively halting construction. Western European governments pledged to proceed regardless, forcing companies to defy the United States. In response, the United States imposed retaliatory sanctions. 79

Though most observers deem the set of sanctions between 1980 and 1982 a clear failure, some argue that the pipeline sanctions had a marginally negative effect on the Soviet economy. For instance, Peter Schweitzer argues that despite the eventual construction of the pipeline, sanctions were somewhat effective within the greater context of Reagan's offensive posture:

In tandem with the geopolitical counteroffensive in Eastern Europe, the Administration fired the first volleys of what would become a secret economic war against the Kremlin. Using Poland as a justification, the Administration in 1982 imposed sanctions on Moscow, intended to cut off most of the technologies needed for a massive new natural-gas pipeline from Siberia, and for an energy program on the Sakhalin Islands being co-developed with Japan. The sanctions went to the heart of Soviet income: energy exports, which accounted for 80 per cent of Soviet hard-currency earnings. U.S. sanctions, which Western Europe resisted, did not stop construction of the pipeline, but delayed it two years, and cut it back in size. The Kremlin was out $15 to $20 billion. 80

Trade sanctions did have some effect on Gorbachev's thinking, as he indicates in his memoirs:

It was—and still is—my conviction that there can be no fruitful cooperation between two nations without economic ties. Apart from our grain imports, there were practically no such ties between the United States and the Soviet Union. We were isolated from each other by political decision and restrictions aimed at preventing the transfer of new technologies. The notorious CoCom lists impeded not only the United States but also many other countries from co-operating with us on a modern technological and economic level. Linking trade to human rights caused many difficulties for those who genuinely wanted to do business with us. 81
security from Gorbachev. He believed that helping Gorbachev stay in power, therefore, was more important than fostering regime change.

For most of the Clinton era, though, fostering economic reform trumped supporting democratic change. Clinton was also willing to sacrifice American influence over shaping Russia’s internal developments in the pursuit of the foreign policy goals, be it NATO expansion or the war against Serbia. In these various lists of priorities, promoting democratization has not only ranked lower than other issues, but the pursuit of higher-ranking issues actually hindered the parallel pursuit of democracy promotion by US and other actors and later may even have impeded the development of democratization inside Russia after 1999.

But even if American presidents had made democratic regime change in the USSR and Russia their priority, they lacked any coherent strategy for achieving this goal. No grand plan, no set of priorities, and no guidance existed about the sequence of political reforms or the relationship between reform plans for fostering capitalism and democracy. Would or should the project of democracy building in the largest country in the world cost $50 million, $1 billion, or $100 billion? Would it take 1, 10, or 20 years? No senior US official tried to answer these questions, nor could they. After all, the Russian experts in government at this time were experts in arms control and communism, not democratization.

Though initially skeptical of Gorbachev’s true intentions, George H. W. Bush eventually embraced Gorbachev as a Soviet leader ready to deliver on foreign policy outcomes that the United States desired, be it the fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification, or Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Bush administration did not want to weaken or undermine the present leadership in the Kremlin. Besides, Gorbachev’s political alternative, Boris Yeltsin, did not look appealing. At a White House visit in 1989, Yeltsin allegedly arrived drunk and acted boorishly, creating the impression that he was untrustworthy and unstable. Yeltsin’s call for Russian sovereignty in 1990 made him particularly suspect for many Bush administration officials, since this move breached one of the principal rules of the game of the international system in which states recognize one another’s right to exist.

Consequently, even as Yeltsin grew in strength, President Bush maintained a firm policy of noninterference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. Regarding the battle between the Soviet Union and Russia and the very personalized contests between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the White House firmly sided with the internationally recognized leader of the USSR, Gorbachev. For Bush and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, the paramount importance of stability in the US-Soviet relationship and the sense that Gorbachev could deliver for them on matters of importance to the United States led them to stand by their man and not actively promote regime change. Scowcroft recommended that the United States “avoid involvement
in Soviet domestic political wars.

Others in the Bush team, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Lewis “Scooter” Libby, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Stephen J. Hadley, and some senior CIA analysts, wanted the United States to do more to aid Yeltsin and the democrats, but on this issue Scowcroft evidently prevailed. As Bush wrote in his diary in March 1991, “My view is, you dance with who is on the dance floor—you don’t try to influence this succession, and you especially don’t do something that would give the blatant appearance of [encouraging] destabilization.”

In fact, Bush went out of his way to aid the Soviet Union’s survival, including most famously in a speech in Kiev in August 1991 when he warned that if the conference on the dangers of ethnic conflict within the Soviet Union (including conflict with Russia) could lead to state collapse. Bush clearly proclaimed, “We support the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform.” But he also warned advocates of Ukrainian independence that

freedom cannot survive if we let despotism flourish or permit seemingly minor restrictions to multiply until they form chains, until they form shackles. Yet freedom is not the same as independence. America will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. We will support those who want to build a democracy.

Later the same month, Yeltsin and his democratic allies defeated a coup attempt against right-wing members of Gorbachev’s government. On the second day of the coup did Bush forcefully denounce the coup plotters, though in truth the coup was an internal matter in which Russian democrats acted without external assistance. Just a few months later, the Soviet Union disappeared, and, despite Bush’s warning, Ukraine and the fourteen other republics became independent countries.

Although Bush did not develop a close relationship with Yeltsin, his successor as president of the United States, Bill Clinton did. Wilsonian ideals infused President Clinton’s thinking about Russia. In an address devoted to US-Russia relations on the eve of his first trip abroad as president to meet Yeltsin in Vancouver in April 1993, Clinton argued:

Think of it—land wars in Europe cost hundreds of thousands of American lives in the twentieth century. The rise of a democratic Russia, satisfied within its own boundaries, bordered by other peaceful democracies, could ensure that our nation never needs to pay that kind of price again. I know and you know that, ultimately, the history of Russia will be written by Russians and the future of Russia must be charted by Russians. But I would argue that we must do what we can and we must act now. Not out of charity but because it is a wise investment. While our efforts will entail new costs, we can reap even larger dividends for our safety and our prosperity if we act now.

During his first meeting with Yeltsin as president at the Vancouver summit, Clinton not only pledged financial support for the Yeltsin government in Russia but openly endorsed the Russian president as America’s horse in the showdown between the president and parliament, saying to Yeltsin in front of the press, “Mr. President, our nation will not stand on the sidelines when it comes to democracy in Russia. We know where we stand. . . . We actively support reformers and the parliament in Russia. We know where we stand.”

When the conflict with parliament escalated into violence in October 1993, Clinton yet again defended Yeltsin’s use of military force and demonized the parliament as antireformist communists. In his first public reaction to Yeltsin’s dissolution of parliament, Clinton affirmed, “I support him fully.” Clinton officials said Yeltsin’s precarious hold on power was a reason for the US Congress to support with even greater speed the administration’s $2.5 billion aid package for the region. US officials subsequently praised the new constitution ratified by popular referendum in December 1993.

### Democracy, Financial and Technical Assistance

The rhetorical devotion to democracy’s advance especially during the Clinton administration was not matched by actual deeds, however. Facilitating economic reform, not democratic transition, became the real focus of Clinton’s aid to Russia after the Soviet collapse. Beginning with a first meeting on February 6, 1993, a senior group in the new administration met for three months to devise an overall strategy toward Russia and the other newly independent states.

At this early stage, officials at the Treasury Department (including Larry Summers and David Lipton) and on the National Security Council (NSC) staff had different priorities, and despite the lead of Clinton’s special ambassador at large to the former Soviet states Strobe Talbott in these talks, the State Department was relatively less important in this area, primarily because Talbott by all accounts (including his own) had little expertise in economic matters. During his tenure, he focused primarily on traditionally defined strategic issues in the US-Russian relationship, which had been the subject of many of the books he had written earlier in his career. Many former Clinton officials reported that Talbott was not engaged in the technical issues of privatization, stabilization, or social policy reform.

In retrospect, the former acting prime minister of Russia in 1992, Yegor Gaidar, believed that the absence of a major political figure behind the aid effort had negative consequences. “I don’t think that the leaders of the major Western pow-
ers were unaware of the magnitude of the choices they faced. The trouble, in my
view, was that there was no leader capable of filling the sort of organizing and
coordinating role that Harry Truman and George C. Marshall played in the post
war restoration of Europe.  

In the early years, Summers and Lipton provided the intellectual guiding
principles for assistance to Russia in the Clinton administration. They prevailed in
large part because they had a plan for reform, a theory behind it, and a clear idea
of the tools needed to implement it. These two Treasury officials believed in the
imperative of sequencing economic reform ahead of political reform. As Lipton re-
calls, "Our view was that America should make clear its support for reform in
Russia. We thought that U.S. support for reform in Russia with Yeltsin, with the elites,
with the public would be helpful to people who wanted to carry out reform." The
thinking was that if Russia could not stabilize its economy, then democracy would
have no chance.

After the failed putsch in August 1991 and the dissolution of the USSR in De-
cember of that year, there was a consensus within the Russian government that
Yeltsin had a popular mandate to initiate radical economic reform. It is not sur-
prising that Yeltsin's supporters within the United States endorsed this idea as well.
Finally, Russian economic reformers believed that they had a finite reserve of time
before trust in Yeltsin and support for reform would wane. Driven by this perceived
time constraint, Russia's reformers wanted to transform the economy as fast as pos-
able to make reforms irreversible before they were forced out of office. Their Ameri-
can counterparts, particularly in the Treasury Department, shared their view.

The budgets to support economic versus political reform reflected these priori-
ties. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), which focused almost exclusively
on economic reform, played the central role in aiding Russia in the beginning of
the 1990s and throughout the decade.  

US bilateral assistance—the package of aid handled directly by the US government and not by the multilateral financial
institutions—also reflected the "economics first" strategy. Of the $5.45 billion in
direct US assistance to Russia between 1992 and 1998, only $170 million or 2.3
percent was devoted to programs involved directly in democratic reform.  

When US government expenditures channeled through the Department of Commerce,
the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the US Export-Import Bank, and
the US Trade and Development Agency are added to the equation, the primacy
of economic reform becomes even more clear.

There were no officials working on democratization to serve as counterparts to
the Clinton officials in the Treasury engaged in assisting with Russian economic
reform. Instead, the job of promoting democracy was delegated to lower-level offi-
cials working primarily at the US Agency for International Development (USAID).
Clinton never made democracy a top issue in US-Russian relations. The United
States and Russia had established joint commissions on defense conversion, the
environment, and trade at the 1993 Vancouver summit but did not create a similar
working group for political reform.

Given the strong rhetoric from senior US officials about the importance of
Russian democracy, the relatively small amount of aid for democracy and rule of
law assistance is curious. It may be that democracy promotion was deemed too
politically sensitive and might imperil progress in the area of economic reform.
Another argument is that democracy assistance did not need as much money be-
cause this kind of aid was cheaper to provide than economic assistance. As Brian
Aitwood explains, "Democracy programs don't cost that much money. Even if it's a
case of running a successful election, you may spend 15-20 million dollars on the
mechanical equipment and ballots: that's not a lot of money."  

USAID did join with the National Endowment for Democracy to fund the oper-
ations of the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute,
and the Free Trade Union Institute (funded by the AFL-CIO) in Russia. USAID also
supported democratic assistance programs run by ABA-CEELI, ARDO-Checchi,
the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Internews, the Eurasia
Foundation, and a host of other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These
groups focused on fostering the development of political parties, business associa-
tions, trade unions, and civic organizations, as well as promoting electoral reform,
the rule of law, and an independent press. Their budgets were only shadows of the
amounts spent on economic and technical assistance. NGOs, though, did help
introduce Russian politicians to the effects of different types of voting systems. For
instance, in 1992 NDI convened a series of working group meetings on the rela-
tionship between electoral systems and parties, which included electoral experts
on the American single-mandate system as well as the Portuguese, German, and
Hungarian electoral regimes.  

NDI also translated into Russian electoral laws from several countries. All of Russia's key decision makers on the electoral law at
the time and senior officials from Yeltsin's presidential administration participated in
these meetings. Facilitated by Western actors, the Western idea of proportional
representation was brought to Russia and incorporated into law.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FACTORS IN BRINGING
ABOUT DEMOCRATIC BREAKTHROUGH IN THE
SOVIET UNION AND THEN RUSSIA

Although the West provided invaluable assistance at important junctures, this as-
sistance did not cause the collapse of the Soviet Union or the democratic break-
through of 1993. Ultimately, Russians brought the Soviet Union down and provided a democratic opening, although perhaps a short-lived one. This is despite the fact that US officials truly did seem to want this second Russian revolution to succeed.

More than two decades later, it is striking just how little real power the United States exercised over democratic change in the Soviet Union and then Russia. The United States emerged from the Cold War as the world’s only superpower and has often been described as the most powerful country in history. Dramatic change in the Soviet Union and Russia occurred, to be sure. But the US role in facilitating this revolution has been much less than advertised. US policy did help Russia integrate with the West, and some American interventions (in particular the media) did prod domestic transformation in the intended direction, but there was no Marshall Plan; the United States did not provide Russia with a blueprint on how to build democracy from scratch. It can be neither blamed nor credited for the demise of the Soviet Union and Russia’s initial transition to a fragile democracy in 1993.

Why and what lessons can we draw from this case about the interaction between democratic and international factors in bringing about regime collapse and democratic transition?

Ultimately, transition came from within, not from external factors. Still, at crucial junctures, external policies and decisions clearly influenced internal decision making. The sustained American efforts to encourage economic distress within the Soviet Union by driving up the cost of the arms race and by pursuing SDI clearly had an indirect effect on Gorbachev’s decision making in the mid-1980s. But by this point the Soviet system was already in deep decline largely because communism had exhausted itself as an economic model. The ill-fated attempt to take over Afghanistan hastened the system’s demise, and the US support of the mujahideen created an additional obstacle for the Soviet military, but the United States had little influence over the dramatic decline in world oil prices and expanding Soviet debt. These factors had a much greater impact on decisions Gorbachev made to reform the system.

There was an important transfer of ideas over constitutions and the distribution of authority between the president and parliament, electoral systems, and economic reform. But the United States was limited in its efforts to promote democracy by the strength of internal political actors with whom it chose to partner. When their influence on the process declined again, so did that of the United States. Further, while American NGOs may have been helpful in designing institutions associated with democratic states, to date they have done little to affect how these institutions actually function.

The Soviet empire is gone and will never be reconstituted. The market in Russia is also now permanent. Doubt, however, still remains about the future of democratic institutions. The US role in the overall drama was relatively limited. At the end of the day, when we finally are able to determine whether Russia’s democracy has succeeded or failed, it will be Russians who should be blamed or praised.

NOTES
1. Two minor changes were made to the constitution of 1993 in 2008. These amendments extended the term of the Duma to five years from four, and the term of the president of Russia from four to six years.
3. Dunlop (ibid., 202–3) provides some evidence that Gorbachev may have been able to act more freely when he was supposedly in custody in Crimea than he did. He allegedly had his communications system intact and could have contacted Yeltsin and Moscow, but may have been adopting a wait-and-see posture before declaring himself a prisoner of the GKChP.
6. Ibid., 35.
7. For an explanation of hard versus soft budget constraints, see, for example, Anders Aslund, How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15.
8. Ibid., 19.
9. Colton, Dilemma of Reform, 52.
10. Ibid., 36.
11. Ibid., 45.
12. Ibid., 32.
21. Ibid.
22. While it seems that a majority of voters did support the constitution, it is not clear
that 50 percent of eligible voters participated in the referendum, the required minimum
to make the election valid. Some electoral observers amassed serious evidence suggesting
that the turnout numbers had been falsified (A. E. Sobyanin and V. Sakhnovsky, *Democracy
Restricted by Falsifications*, unpublished manuscript, Moscow, 1995).
23. We are particularly grateful to Rachel Silverman for her able research assistance in
helping us to complete this section of the report.
26. Ibid., 44.
Studies Quarterly 27, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 452.
31. Archie Brown presents the strongest argument against the idea that SDI played an
important role in ending the Cold War, instead arguing that new leadership and new ideas
played the decisive role in the change. He also rejects realist explanations for the end of
the Cold War, as articulated by William Wohlforth and others. Given that even a successful SDI
would not change the balance of power for at least 20 years, Brown maintains that it did not
necessitate immediate changes in Soviet policy. Brown argues, “The Soviet Union’s existing
force of inter-continental ballistic missiles with multiple warheads was more than ample to
make any potential American reliance on SDI catastrophically risky.” Archie Brown, *Seven
Years That Changed the World: Perestroika in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
interplay of individual agency with SDI, specifically with regard to Gorbachev’s role. He
argues that while SDI may have slightly influenced Gorbachev’s thinking, it would not have
had a similar effect on other leaders had Gorbachev specifically not been in power in the
late 1980s.
19, no. 3 (1994): 96.
35. Ibid., 753.
37. Ibid., 68–69.
38. Steve Coll, “Anatomy of a Victory: CIA’s Covert Afghan War; $2 Billion Program
39. Ibid., 3.
41. By 1986, the United States sought to undermine Soviet reliance on air power in
Afghanistan and shipped Stinger antiaircraft missiles to the mujahideen. Blowpipe missiles,
the British equivalent, were also provided. Between September 1986 and August 1987, 1,150
missiles were shipped to Pakistan and 863 were received in Afghanistan. However, accounts
of their effectiveness are mixed, and Soviet casualty rates did not increase after the missiles’
43. Ibid., 167.
45. Yegor Gaidar, *Collapse of an Empire: Lessons for Modern Russia* (Washington, D.C.:
46. Ibid., 4–5.
47. Ibid., 5–6.
48. Ibid., 6.
49. Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy: Fulfilling America’s Democracy Abroad*
50. “Cold War Broadcasting Impact,” report on a conference organized by the Hoover
Institution and the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson
International Center for Scholars at Stanford University, October 13–16, 2004, 37.
Free Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145.
55. Eugene Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener: An Empirical Assessment of Radio
Liberty and Western Broadcasting to the USSR during the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover
Institute Press, 2007), 53.
56. Western broadcasters and listeners within the Soviet bloc were ingenious in discov-
ering methods by which they could avoid jamming. In a 2004 report, it was estimated
that between 1978 and 1990, these forms of Western media reached as many as 25 million
listeners inside the Soviet Union every day and over twice that many in an average week.
VOA purportedly had the largest audience during this time frame, apparently reaching 15
percent of the adult population of the Soviet Union per week. See Fogleston, *The American
58. Scott Shane, *Dismantling Utopia: How Information Ended the Soviet Union* (Chicago:
Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 264.
59. Parta, *Discovering the Hidden Listener*, 55.
60. Shane, *Dismantling Utopia*, 266.
Trade* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 64.
62. Ibid., 75–77.
63. Ibid., 78–80.
64. Ibid., 81–93.
65. Ibid., 93–94.
66. Ibid., 97.
78. Gorbachev, Memoirs, 448.
79. Ibid., 622.
81. Ibid., 123.
82. Ibid., 128.
83. Ibid., 131.
84. Colton, The Dilemma of Reform in the Soviet Union, 220.
85. Ibid., 222. See also Philip Hanson, Western Economic Statecraft in East-West Relations (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1988).
90. Ibid., 500.
92. On the first day of the coup, Bush stressed, "There's very little we can do right now. We're not going to overreact the American people or the world. And so, we will conduct our diplomacy in a prudent fashion, not driven by excess, not driven by extreme." August 19, 1991, pp. 5–7, http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91080102.html.
96. Participants included President Clinton, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and his deputy, Samuel Berger; Vice President Gore and his national security adviser, Leon Panetta; senior NSC staffers for this region Toby Gati and Nicholas Burns; Ambassador-at-Large for the NIS Strobe Talbott; and presidential adviser George Stephanopoulos. See Jeremy D. Rosner, The New Tug of War (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 49–50.