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The Outsider Strategy for Democracy Promotion^(*)

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) provides us with a recent example of military intervention intended to bring about regime change and promote democracy in a target state. As an experiment UNSMIL may actually hold brighter prospects for successful liberalization, even modest democratization, than other attempts at military-based democracy promotion. At the point of intervention in Libya there was a set of conditions to facilitate regime change in the first order and liberalization or democratization in the second order. There was a relatively unified revolutionary movement in place to serve as the core opposition to the established regime.

The military intervention enabled this opposition movement to advance over the entrenched political elite. In the Libyan case the military intervention was not the opposition movement, nor was it attempting to foster a rebellion, or mobilize rebel factions into action. Rather the military intervention assisted the revolutionary movement. It is too early to

determine the final fate of Libya. Nonetheless, Libya will serve as an opportunity to assess the conditions under which military intervention may result in democratic transition in a target state. Even if a new Libyan regime ends up distant from a consolidated democracy we will have learned something about the way in which outside actors can impact domestic regime change. The overriding question is whether or not an outsider strategy is a better option for democracy promotion in a target state?

Assessing Democratic Interventions

Foreign Imposed Regime Change (FIRC), with or without democracy promotion, is a common practice among major powers and international organizations like the United Nations¹. States engage in FIRC for reasons ranging from: a measure of ideological suc-

¹ J.M. OWEN, IV., *The Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions*, in «International Organization», vol. 56, no. 2, 2002, pp. 375-409

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Abstract

Regime change in a target country is one of the more common outcomes of a military intervention. Many states have assumed that they may be able to influence the direction of the regime change to conform to preferred outcomes, particularly in the direction of democratic shifts.

The record on militarily-based democracy promotion is not good. Rather than condemn the behaviour overall, it may serve us better to specify the conditions under which aggressive democracy promotion is more likely to succeed.

This paper suggests that when states employ an outsider strategy, support insurgent groups over the established government, an intervention is more likely to result in positive changes to the target state's polity (liberalization and/or democratization). Thus, weakening the established political elite, along with other measures to create the procedural infrastructure for democratic practices, may result in more positive outcomes when states endeavour to promote democracy in target states.

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cess, to reduce or eliminate direct threats to the imposing states interests and security, or in an effort to enhance global security via democratic peace². Simply put major states see value in imposing regimes in target countries. The question is do democratic interventions result in democratized regimes? The emerging consensus in the empirical research is a qualified no. There are numerous studies that suggest a positive relationship between military intervention and democratization in the target state. For instance, James Meernik finds that states targeted for military intervention are more likely to observe democratic growth³. Similarly, regimes toppled during a military intervention are likely to end up in a more liberalized position post-intervention than pre-intervention⁴. Other studies note that when military interventions are supplemented by

efforts to promote free and fair elections, or to build institutions affiliated with civil society (nongovernmental organizations), that democratization is more likely to occur⁵.

Studies that find success for democratic interventions note that the military intervention enables democratization by removing dictators and breaking up elite power structures⁶. The intervention creates a break from the previous regime. If the previous regime was oppressive enough, the imposed regime may benefit from the promise of a new elite power structure⁷. Taken together, the advantage of the intervention is to remove perceived as roadblocks to democratizing potential within the state. The assumption is that many states have the potential to democratize, and would likely prefer democracy over other forms of government. Democratic potential is blocked by entrenched dictators and their supporting elites. The entrenched politi-

cal class will not voluntarily transition to democracy as it threatens their position in society. The intervention becomes a tool to break the roadblock and unleash the latent democratizing potential within the state.

However, as stated above the findings that support democratic interventions are not the emerging consensus in the literature on this subject. Rather research findings on the opposite side of the ledger are accumulating more quickly to suggest that democratic intervention is not an efficient strategy for democracy promotion. For instance, imposed regimes are more likely to register no change to their polity post-intervention than positive change⁸. Newly democratizing countries are aggressive and more war prone than established political systems.⁹ We observe weak polities in recently democratized countries wherein nascent democratic politics coexists with authoritarian elite political practices¹⁰. Any observed transitions in the po-

² J.M. OWEN, *op. cit.*; N. LO - B. HASHIMOTO - D. REITER, *Ensuring Peace: Foreign Imposed Regime Change and Postwar Peace Duration, 1914-2001*, in «International Organization», vol. 62, no. 4, 2008, pp. 717-736; A.A. GOLDSMITH, *Making the World Safe for Partial Democracy: Questioning the Premises of Democracy Promotion*, in «International Security», vol. 33, no. 2, 2008, pp. 120-147.

³ J. MEERNIK, *United States Military Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy*, in «Journal of Peace Research», vol. 33, no. 4, 1996, pp. 391-402.

⁴ M. HERMANN - C.W. KEGLEY Jr., *The U.S. use of Military Intervention to Promote Democracy: Evaluating the Record*, in «International Interactions», vol. 24, no. 2, 1998, pp. 91-114.

⁵ M. PECENY, *Forcing them to be Free*, in «Political Research Quarterly», vol. 52, no. 3, 1999, pp. 549-582.; C. CAAN - B. COLE DEGRASSE, *Stabilization and Reconstruction*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace, 2007, <http://www.usip.org/programs/initiatives/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction-the-web-version> (accessed 20 September 2007).

⁶ S.P. HUNTINGTON, *Will More Countries Become Democratic?*, in «Political Science Quarterly», vol. 99, no. 2, 1994, pp. 193-218.

⁷ A.J. ENTERLINE - J.M. GREIG, *Perfect Storms? Political Instability in Imposed Polities and the Futures of Iraq and Afghanistan*, in «Journal of Conflict Resolution», vol. 52, no. 6, 2008, pp. 880-915.

⁸ L. WILLIAMS - D. MASTERS, *Assessing Military Intervention and Democratization: Supportive Versus Oppositional Military Interventions*, in «Democracy and Security», vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 18-37; A.A. GOLDSMITH, *op. cit.*

⁹ E.D. MANSFIELD - J. SNYDER, *Democratization and the Danger of War*, in «International Security», vol. 20, no. 1, 1995, pp. 5-38.

¹⁰ S. GATES *et al.*, *Institutional Inconsistency and Political Instability; Polity Duration, 1800-2000*, in «American Journal of Political Science», vol. 50, no. 4, 2006, pp. 893-908; A.J. ENTERLINE - J.M. GREIG, *op. cit.*

litical institutions and procedures of a country are not met with a corresponding transition to the observed political and civil freedoms of the people¹¹. Finally, foreign imposed regimes appear more likely to experience civil war in the aftermath of an intervention that likely damaged the state's capacity to manage conflict and respond to threats to its authority¹².

The interesting feature in the nullifying studies on democracy promotion is that the intervention breaks up the power structures to the detriment of the society. The weakened power structures leave society vulnerable to domestic challengers resulting in higher rates of civil war and unrest that can consume the state and undo and gains brought via the democratic intervention. Moreover, in order to solidify support around the imposed government, leaders may be inclined towards risky international relations behavior resulting in avoidable wars. Perhaps the more important outcome is that while states targeted for democratic intervention are less stable, and risk seeking, there is little evidence of

actual democratization to begin with. There is some evidence to suggest modest liberalization within the target state.¹³ However, liberalization is not necessarily democratic transition. Liberalization of a political regime means that we observe an increase in political competition, regulation of political competition. Democratization includes increased constraints on the chief executive, higher rates of political competition, and regulation of the party system to ensure free and fair competition. Finally, the target state rarely, if ever, emerges as a consolidated democracy. Overall, the research concludes that little is gained via democratic intervention.

The twin discussions on democratic intervention indicate that the virtue of democratic intervention for one side of the debate is the vice to the other side. Both sides acknowledge that the process of intervention weakens the institutions of the state. Weakening the institutions is believed to pave the way for regime change in the immediate phase and democratic transition in the long term. However, weakening the political institutions also opens society up to internal challenges at a moment when the imposed regime lacks the credibility a domestic regime would likely have.

We are left with a conundrum. The same immediate outcome of democratic intervention is seen as leading to potentially positive or negative results in the target state.

It is not uncommon that scholars positioned on different sides of a debate to hold different interpretations on the value the same phenomenon. The record of empirical research will sort out the debate and eventually inform us on which interpretation is more accurate. The problem within the debate on forced regime change is that while the evidence currently suggests interventions weaken states to their detriment, and that democratic shifts are rare outcomes, some interventions are successful. The examples of successful interventions leave us to ponder why we observe success in these cases? The answer lies in the direction of the intervention. In other words is the intervention an insider strategy or an outsider strategy for democracy promotion.

The Outsider Strategy

Scholarship often defines a democratic intervention on the basis of stated, or revealed, interests of the intervening state¹⁴. That is to say, did the state intervene in order to promote democracy in the target state? Little attention has been paid to how the intervention is applied in the target state. The

¹¹ S. WALKER - F.D. PEARSON, *Should We Really 'Force Them to be Free?: An Empirical Examination of Peceny's Liberalizing Intervention Thesis*, in «Conflict management and Peace Science» vol. 24, no. 1, 2007, pp. 37-53.

¹² G. PEIC - D. REITER, *Foreign-Imposed Regime Change, State Power, and Civil War Onset, 1920-2004*, in «British Journal of Political Science», vol. 41, no. 3, 2010, pp. 453-475.

¹³ J. PICKERING - E.F. KISANGANI, *Political, Economic, and Social Consequences of Foreign Military Intervention*, in «Political Research Quarterly» vol. 59, no. 3, 2006, pp. 363-376.

¹⁴ J. MEERNIK, *op. cit.*; L. WILLIAMS - D. MASTERS, *op. cit.*; M. PECENY, *op. cit.*

application of the intervention refers most directly to the direction of the intervention or the target of the intervention: the sitting regime or rival factions.

The outsider strategy of democratic intervention is a military intervention hostile to the sitting regime and/or in support of rival factions. The assertion is that hostile interventions have the greatest chance of producing liberalization and democratization in the target state. To date there is some evidence to support the outsider strategy¹⁵. For instance, a study by Pickering and Kisangani (2006) finds that hostile interventions have an immediate democratizing impact on the target state, and the impact is traceable over ten years out from the point of the intervention¹⁶.

It is natural to assume that a democratic intervention would be hostile to the sitting government. However, democratic interventions are not necessarily the same as hostile interventions. We are likely to observe three different types of democratic interventions. First is the insider strategy for democracy promotion, which includes a supportive intervention to prop up a sitting government (and/or oppose rival factions). The next two interventions are outsider strategies for democratic intervention and are similar as forms of

hostile interventions: a hostile-only intervention where the target is the sitting government, and a hostile/rival intervention, where the intervention targets the sitting government and supports rebel factions against the sitting government. It is the latter two types of intervention that show the greatest potential to democratize the target state. The former type of intervention, supportive interventions, usually results in a regime that is more autocratic post-intervention.

Accounting for why hostile interventions more likely produce a democratic result is challenging. There is little direct research on the issue of *directionality* of an intervention and its impact on the domestic political regime. There are two main points we can draw from within the literature: the broadly negative impact of military interventions, and the importance or regime change, and support for rival factions.

On the first point, interventions from the outside increase insecurity in the target state, which may justify more authoritarian responses to deal with the threat¹⁷. Research shows that states with capable rivals score lower on their overall democracy score and show significant decreases in their democracy

level¹⁸. We could assume that if an intervention is supportive of the existing government, the perception of threat is lower. However, an intervention to support the government suggests, at a minimum, some internal threat to the sitting government. Similarly, an external threat could prompt a supportive intervention to stabilize country seen as an ally to the intervening state. When a democratic intervening state props up a government against internal rebels or external rivals it may pressure the government to adopt liberal reforms. Usually the intervening state will back off liberalization before the process is complete and the regime backslides. But do not assume that a supportive intervention would be interpreted as a less threatening to the supported government. The conditions surrounding the intervention are the source of the threat.

The second point is that hostile interventions produce deeper transformations in the target state's polity that more likely result in liberalization and democratization. The outsider strategy has the established goal of regime change. The intervention seeks to eliminate a current leadership structure and allow a new governing regime to emerge. The intervening state's actions result in weak political institutions in the target state. In the face of weak political institutions mobilized and aggrieved political groups be-

¹⁵ J. PICKERING - E.F. KISANGANI, *op. cit.*; L. WILLIAMS - D. MASTERS, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ J. PICKERING - E.F. KISANGANI, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

¹⁷ M. COLARESI - W.R. THOMPSON, *The Economic Development-Democratization Relationship: Does the Outside World Matter?* in «Comparative Political Studies» vol. 36, no. 4, 2003, pp. 381-403.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 394.

gin to act and challenge in order to advance their interests. As new political institutions emerge, there is an opportunity for a redistribution of political power. Groups will mobilize in order to influence the shape of the new institutions and access to those institutions relative to their interests¹⁹.

These two points echo the arguments above to say that democratic interventions weaken the political institutions. But there are more subtle and fine grained differences between the two types of intervention. On the surface, the insider (supportive) and outsider (hostile) interventions represent an external threat to the state. But, the supportive intervention leaves the political leaders/ institutions in place. The supported regime may receive some subtle pressure to liberalize, but otherwise the regime is left intact. Meanwhile, the hostile intervention removes the existing regime to allow a new one to take shape. From these competing conditions we observe:

1. Supportive and hostile interventions alike weaken the political institutions in the target state;
2. the supportive intervention results in a less democratic regime;
3. the hostile intervention results in a liberalized state, possibly even a nascent democratic state.

Moving deeper into the argument, the leadership in the supported regime is likely to emerge from the intervention in a threatened position. The intervention likely stabilized the leadership's hold on power. However, let's assume the threat that prompted the intervention was an internal revolt. The intervention will leave those leaders feeling vulnerable and in need to take action to ensure the threats that prompted the intervention are dealt with. The likely response from the supported state is to clamp down, backtrack from liberalization, in order to stifle the capabilities of the rebels. The intervening state may indicate the purpose of the intervention is to democratize the target state. There may be sincere efforts to promote democratic reforms to integrate rebel factions into the normal political process and prevent the need for future interventions. However, the interest of the intervening state is in stabilizing the current regime. Liberalization and democratization may be a solution to internal instability, but it is likely a secondary interest to keeping the regime in place.

The hostile intervention eliminates the current regime, and may provide support to rival rebel factions seeking to take control of the state. The key is the two parts to the intervention. First is the elimination of the previous regime. Second is enabling the revolutionary contenders to assume power. Why does

this form of intervention more likely result in liberalization, event nascent democratization? By eliminating the existing regime, the possibility of autocratic backsliding is reduced. This is not to say that a new regime cannot be authoritarian. But that the potential for democratic shift is greater than under a supportive intervention. As the new regime comes together, challenger groups will act in ways that distribute power and expand access as they seek to advance their interests. The activity of the challenger groups is liberalization of the regime. A new regime is going to be less capable to resist these activities in the short-term resulting in short-term liberalization.

Moreover, the new regime, if derived from internal revolutionary contenders, starts with more legitimacy to initiate the post-revolutionary transition. The grace period may be very limited. Legitimacy allows the regime to begin a process of putting new policies in place. The process outlined here does not preclude that as the new regime consolidates that authoritarian backsliding is impossible. In the longer term the regime may construct choke points to demobilize challenger groups resulting in autocratic shifts. However, in the short-term liberalizing shifts are more likely, and the potential for consolidation of liberalized gains is greater than under a supportive intervention.

¹⁹ G. PEIC D. REITER, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

There is one additional layer to this discussion that requires some attention. At present we do not know if there is any observable difference in the outcome of a democratic intervention, employing the outsider strategy, when the direction of the intervention is hostile-only versus hostile/rival. The type of interventions we are speaking to are the ones that have dominated the landscape over the previous decade, including the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the intervention in Libya. The hostile-only intervention is defined by the intervening state forcing an existing regime out absent support for any unified contender ready to assume control of the state. An example of this type of intervention includes Iraq. In this condition, the replacement regime must be constructed from various groups. The rise of the new regime is likely to be seen as an imprint that reflects the interests of the intervening state and lacks credibility within the broader population.

The hostile/rival intervention is when the intervening state/organization forces an existing regime from power in support of a unified revolutionary contender. This is the type of intervention observed in Libya and Afghanistan. The presence of the revolutionary contender provides the intervening state with a popularly supported group that can take the reins of power during the transition phase in order to con-

solidate the regime change. The emerging regime exists separate from the intervening actor, and likely possesses more credibility and legitimacy in the early transition phase. As such, liberalization and democratization should be more likely post-intervention.

It would be naive to assume that the post-intervention government is certain to emerge as a consolidated democracy. Post-revolutionary governments face tremendous challenges as they consolidate power. The certain fractionalization of unified revolutionary fronts provides ample alternative contenders seeking opportunities to displace the leadership that emerges during the revolution. This condition is evident in both Afghanistan and Libya. Thus, we cannot assume that hostile/rival interventions are absolutely more likely to result in liberalized, even democratized, regimes over hostile-only interventions. But distinction between hostile-only and hostile/rival interventions is an even more fine grained than the difference between the insider and outsider strategies for democracy promotion. It is worthwhile to investigate whether or not there is an optimal form of the outsider strategy.

Policy Options for Democracy Promotion

Over the past two decades research has been accumulating on the value of military-based democratic intervention. We know that major

states and international organizations routinely engage in foreign imposed regime change. The pattern of behaviour suggests those involved in FIRC see value in the practice. Empirical evidence challenges the notion that FIRC is an efficient strategy for spreading democracy. There are two ways to follow up on this finding. First, declare military-based democracy promotion a failure and encourage states to adopt alternative strategies to promote democracy in the world. Second, accept that foreign imposed regime change is a normal practice in the international system and is likely to continue into the foreseeable future.

If we concede to the latter, then our job is to lay out the conditions that are most likely to yield success. There are two policy positions intervening states should adopt in order to increase the potential for successful democratization in a target state. First, engage in hostile interventions. Second, understand where the intervention leaves off and a separate process of democratization begins. That is to say, understand that democratic transition is a related outcome of military intervention, but never a direct outcome of the intervention.

States that engage in democratic interventions are most likely to succeed when the direction of the intervention is hostile, *not* supportive. The hostile intervention removes entrenched political

structures that inhibit democratic potential. That is the virtue of the hostile intervention.

However, it is in the post intervention phase that liberalization begins and democratization potential emerges. After the intervention mobilized political groups start to sort out the processes of political access, decision-making, and how to advance their interests within a more open political system. As mobilized political groups engage with an emerging leadership, the state experiences a window of opportunity to advance democratic political procedures (competitive elections, negotiate constraints on the executive branch, establish the role of legislature in the rule making process). An intervening state can assist in this process. We should note that during the post-intervention state-building phase the activities become a non-military exercise in democracy promotion involving other strategies like foreign aid to assist in the development of nongovernmental organizations and political parties, or conferences dedicated to the construction of a viable constitution

The window of opportunity for democratization may close quickly resulting in a political regime with mixed characteristics where authoritarian political traditions continue to define the regime. However, the fact remains that there is a point of opportunity created via the

hostile military intervention that otherwise may not exist.

At the same time, we can assert that any democratic intervention that is directed in support of the sitting regime will almost certainly fail to move the state in either a liberal direction or a democratic transition. The supported regime is likely to react based on the perception of threat, and adopt more authoritarian tactics to secure itself. The intervening state may push for democratic reforms, but the maintenance of the established regime will militate against the democratic reforms. The intervention does not create an opportunity for liberalization or democratization.

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