David Adesnik and Michael McFaul

# Engaging Autocratic Allies to Promote Democracy

The democracy-promotion toolbox has been filled for more than two decades with various standard assistance programs, including technical support for reforming government agencies; training for lawyers, journalists, political party leaders, and trade unionists; direct financial aid for civil society organizations; and exchanges and scholarships for students. Today, the U.S. government, particularly the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and an army of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often funded by USAID, the National Endowment of Democracy, or the Asia and Eurasia Foundations, continue to use such nonmilitary methods to promote democracy in dozens of countries around the world.

In rare cases, democracy promotion has been the by-product of military intervention. The American public will support the decision to go to war only when persuaded that a direct threat to U.S. national security exists. Yet, once the opposing dictatorship has fallen, Washington is confronted with a moral obligation to replace it with a democratic government, as it did in Germany and Japan after World War II, attempted to do after interventions in the Dominican Republic and South Vietnam in the 1960s, and is presently trying to accomplish in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Yet, a third method for promoting democratic regime change receives little attention, if any, from the media or from scholars: diplomacy. Although NGOs and foundations are usually the primary actors engaged in democracy promotion in countries that have recently experienced the collapse of an autocratic regime, U.S. diplomats have a special role to play in

David Adesnik is a member of the research staff at the Institute for Defense Analyses. Michael McFaul is the Helen and Peter Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution; director of the Center for Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law at Stanford University; and a nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

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countries still ruled by dictatorships. Democratization involves not only building up the democratic opposition—a key ingredient for successful democratic breakthrough—but also weakening or dividing the autocrats in power.[1] NGOs, whose focus in these cases is usually and rightly to strengthen the opposition, lack the ability to confront the regime directly. In contrast, the U.S. government has the power and resources to challenge autocratic regimes, through what Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called "transformational diplomacy."[2]

Words matter, especially from the president when they enjoy bipartisan support.

Admittedly, there are valid reasons why the role of the diplomat does not figure prominently in the current analysis of U.S. democracy-promotion efforts. The vast majority of diplomats from the secretary of state to a consular officer working abroad spend little if any of their time promoting democracy. Indeed, throughout most of U.S. history, diplomats have not defined democratization as part of their job description. In the rare moments when they do engage in promoting democracy, diplomats often do so quietly behind the scenes, making it difficult for outside observers to study or analyze them. Yet, understanding the conditions under which diplomacy can be effective represents a critical step toward improving all U.S. efforts to promote democracy abroad. At key moments, U.S. diplomatic leverage has played a positive role in nudging a regime change in a democratic direction. Learning the lessons of how and why diplomats were able to make a difference in earlier, successful transitions to democracy can help guide today's foreign policy makers seeking to influence the course of political liberalization in autocratic regimes.

Democracy promotion through diplomacy demands a very delicate sort of engagement. In this context, it does not mean establishing cordial relations in the hope that perhaps someday friendship and prosperity will eventually result in democratization. The historical record contains only a few examples of this strategy's success.[3] Engagement instead refers to using close ties with a regime to exert effective pressure for political liberalization. Once in motion, liberalization can develop an unstoppable momentum. If used strategically, the power of the U.S. government is especially great in countries ruled by dictators who are friendly toward Washington. These regimes often rely on the United States for legitimacy, arms transfers, economic assistance, and even security guarantees. U.S. diplomats often underestimate their leverage vis-à-vis these regimes because their preference for stability blinds them to the regime's vulnerabilities.

Both pundits and policymakers often assume that total cooperation with friendly dictatorships is the only way to achieve our immediate security objectives. Thus, they fail even to ask whether there is a way to reconcile the tactical impulse to cooperate with the strategic goal of promoting democracy, which is integral to our long-term security. Although one cannot answer this query with much certainty, it is by no means a new question. During the Cold War, the United States faced a strikingly similar dilemma when engaging with friendly dictators in its battle against communism. By studying some of the successful examples of active diplomacy put into practice by President Ronald Reagan's administration during the twilight of the Cold War, it becomes possible to elaborate a set of practical guidelines for dealing with the strategic dilemma presented by friendly dictatorships.

## The Kirkpatrick Doctrine: Making Friends with Autocrats

Why did the United States fight the Cold War? Was it only to check Soviet power expansion, or was it to advance the cause of freedom around the world? At various times, different answers have prevailed.[4] In accordance with the precepts of realism, President Richard Nixon and his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, facilitated the overthrow of Salvador Allende, the elected Marxist president of Chile, as well as his replacement with a brutal military dictatorship that was friendly to the United States. Although President Jimmy Carter repudiated such behavior during his campaign for office, as president he hesitated to challenge the authority of pro-U.S. dictatorships in Chile as well as the Philippines and South Korea. Yet, just a few years after Carter left office and Reagan became president, the United States began lending its active support to democratic revolutions in those same three countries, as well as in other allied countries ruled by dictators.

Reagan did not begin his presidency with the aim of undermining the United States' autocratic allies. When he read Jeane J. Kirkpatrick's article "Dictatorships and Double Standards" in 1979,[5] he was enthralled with its hypothesis and, after his landslide victory in the 1980 presidential election, appointed Kirkpatrick, who at the time was a little known professor at Georgetown University with ties to the Democratic Party and no prior experience in government, ambassador to the United Nations with cabinet rank. In the article, she argued that withdrawing U.S. support for friendly dictatorships was not simply bad strategy, it was also morally wrong. Her detailed analysis of the revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua at the time concluded that their success not only deprived the United States of loyal allies but also resulted in the replacement of moderately repressive regimes with devastatingly abusive successors. Long resentful of the Carter administration's lack of

gratitude toward governments that were authoritarian but friendly to the United States, Reagan now had an intellectual framework within which to anchor his objections. It would serve as the foundation of his approach to the developing world during the first 18 months of his presidency.

After years of strained relations during the Carter years, Reagan initially welcomed his authoritarian counterparts back into the fold by inviting them to Washington for highly visible discussions at the White House. The first foreign head of state to visit the White House was Gen. Chun Doo-hwan of South Korea in February 1981, followed by Gen. Roberto Viola, the incoming president of Argentina, in March of that year. Yet, in the spring of 1982, the administration's strategy of restoring unity to the "free world" began to unravel when Argentina's desperate military regime launched a sudden invasion of the British-held Falkland Islands in the hope of restoring the regime's popularity at home. When Argentine intransigence prevented the United States from mediating the conflict, Reagan found himself with little choice but to support British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's expedition to retake the Falklands. Reagan's decision provoked an anti-U.S. backlash throughout Latin America, no less among anti-Communist dictatorships than among the other republics in the Western Hemisphere. This unexpected chain of events challenged Reagan's appraisal of anti-Communist authoritarians as dependable allies not just in Latin America but around the world. By the time Reagan welcomed Philippine strongman Ferdinand Marcos for a state visit in September 1982, the policy of engaging friendly autocrats was already in tatters.

It is imperative to signal support for democratic reform long before the terminal crisis.

Shortly before the crisis in the Falklands, events in El Salvador had begun to advertise the potential for free and fair elections to protect vulnerable nations from the spread of communism. During Reagan's first year in office, heightened exposure of the brutal human rights violations in which the Salvadoran armed forces indulged in the name of anticommunism put intense pressure on the U.S. administration to cut off all military aid to the Salvadoran junta. Refusing to admit either the extent or the brutality of such violations, Department of State officials instead pointed to the junta's commitment to hold elections in March 1982 as evidence of its goodwill. Salvadoran voters' stunning enthusiasm on election day altered the U.S. government's perceptions. Whenever confronted with demands to cut off aid to the Salvadoran armed forces, Washington could argue that El Salvador was a nascent democratic friend that the United States must not abandon.

## The Double-Edged Sword of Engagement

Reagan seized on the election in El Salvador as a personal vindication. During his first year in office, journalists, human rights activists, and Democratic legislators portrayed his support for the Salvadoran junta as a mindlessly brutal policy destined to fail. Profoundly resentful of such criticism, Reagan trumpeted the success of the Salvadoran elections not just as proof that his policy was working but that it was morally sound. Savoring this victory, Reagan recognized the potential, at least in terms of public relations, of declaring the United States to be a friend of democratic revolutions rather than of friendly dictatorships. Three months after Salvadorans went to the polls, Reagan delivered his most famous speech on democracy promotion to a joint session of the British Parliament at Westminster, in which he pointed to the lessons both of El Salvador and the Falklands to elaborate a new vision for winning the Cold War:

> We must be staunch in our conviction that freedom is not the sole prerogative of a lucky few, but the inalienable and universal right of all human beings. So states the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, among other things, guarantees free elections. … What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash-heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle the freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people. … Let us now begin a major effort to secure the best—a crusade for freedom that will engage the faith and fortitude of the next generation.[6]

Although the president's critics either ignored the Westminster speech and other similar statements or dismissed them as hollow and cynical, Reagan took his own "crusade for freedom" very seriously. Reagan's new secretary of state, George Shultz, who served from July 1982 until the end of Reagan's term in office, also took the president's words to heart.[7] Under Shultz's leadership, the State Department began to practice dual-track diplomacy: continuing to maintain state-to-state relations with U.S. allies ruled by either democratic or autocratic regimes, while in parallel pushing for democratic change when opportunities arose within the autocratic countries, whether they were Communist or anti-Communist.

For a handful of U.S. allies, including the Philippines, South Korea, and Chile, this new approach to diplomacy helped at the margins to produce rather unexpected, radical, and positive changes for those committed to democracy. Yet, despite their resounding success, these democratic revolutions were quickly forgotten with the dramatic end of the Cold War in 1989.[8] Revisiting these cases has the potential to demonstrate how U.S. policymakers

today can pursue immediate security objectives and democratization simultaneously. Although the enemy's identity has changed, Washington's fundamental dilemma is the same: How is it possible to promote change in friendly dictatorships without inviting a radical anti-U.S. opposition to take power?

### The Philippines

By the time Reagan delivered his historic speech at Westminster in June 1982, Marcos's trip to the United States was already planned.[9] The Reagans had become close to Marcos and his wife, Imelda, in the late 1960s after visiting Manila on behalf of the Nixon administration. Consequently, Reagan was extremely hesitant to confront Marcos about his execrable record on human rights and the indefinite suspension of democracy. Nonetheless, Reagan's powerful rhetoric about democracy set the tone for his administration and facilitated the efforts of influential but lesser-known officials such as Michael Armacost, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Armitage to begin an ambitious effort to help change autocratic allies of the United States.[10] As a result, Marcos would become the first to learn that the United States expected more of its allies than simply anticommunism.

In August 1983, Filipino opposition leader Benigno Aquino returned to Manila from exile in the United States, only to be gunned down at the airport by government security forces. Embarrassed by the incident, Reagan cancelled his trip to Manila, which had been planned for later that fall. Severing ties completely with the Marcos dictatorship was not an option, however, because the Philippines was home to the most important U.S. military installations in the Pacific theater, assets that both Democrats and Republicans acknowledged were integral to defending Asia from Communist expansion. Nonetheless, the mass protests that coincided with Aquino's death and funeral aroused concern that the people of the Philippines might remove Marcos from power and punish the United States for supporting him by revoking its right to occupy the bases.

According to the logic of the Kirkpatrick doctrine, the United States had to continue supporting Marcos to ensure that a radical regime would not take power in Manila. With a growing Maoist guerrilla force in the Filipino countryside, the prospect of a Communist takeover was much more than hypothetical. It had happened before, in Nicaragua in 1979. After opposition leader Pedro Joaquín Chamorro was assassinated, relatively moderate protesters flooded the streets of the capital, later aligning with Communist guerrillas waiting in the countryside. Yet, certain officials in the Reagan administration read the history of Nicaragua very differently. The Carter administration's great failure, they claimed, was not its hesitation to support the crumbling Somoza regime but rather its hesitation to come to the aid of

the moderate, pro-democratic opposition. As Carter wavered, Somoza stood fast, forcing the moderates into the radicals' arms and ensuring a Communist takeover after Somoza's inevitable departure.

Wolfowitz, then the assistant secretary of state for East Asia, argued that continued access to U.S. military bases depended on establishing a strong relationship with the people of the Philippines, rather than with the government they despised. Governments may fall, he argued, but the people endure. Armacost, the U.S. ambassador to Manila, was committed to the same approach and helped implement Wolfowitz's strategy on the ground. The Pentagon's support was essential, and Armitage, then the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, also endorsed this new approach. Although Reagan himself never displayed an interest in Filipino reform, his public support for the idea of democracy promotion provided his subordinates with a rhetorical umbrella.

> The U.S. can afford to be patient as long as incremental reforms take place.

The greater challenge was getting Marcos to go along with the U.S. strategy. After all, why would a dictator be complicit in the destruction of his regime? Marcos had no choice but to allow some measure of liberalization in order to assuage the millions outraged by Aquino's murder. In addition, Marcos, similar to Reagan, constantly referred to the importance of democracy and freedom. The trick, then, was to keep pushing Marcos just slightly further than he wanted to go so that the process of reform would gain a momentum that Marcos could not stop once the immediate threat had passed.

The first major step was the 1984 parliamentary election. The election did not threaten Marcos's hold on power because the legislature had no control over the executive branch. Moreover, Marcos knew that his political machine could stuff every ballot box in the numerous outlying regions of the Philippine archipelago. Not surprisingly, some members of the opposition wondered why it was worth competing in an election they were destined to lose. This approach was shortsighted, however, because it underestimated the importance of establishing incontrovertible evidence of just how popular the opposition was, even if that popularity would not translate immediately into the power to govern. Holding an election, regardless of the outcome, also provided opposition activists, who numbered more than 100,000, the opportunity to learn the art of independent election-monitoring.[11] Despite their inexperience, poll watchers played an important role in the opposition's urban strongholds. With Marcos unwilling to use violence in the closely watched urban precincts, the simple presence of opposition monitors dra-

matically reduced the opportunities for fraud. As a result, the opposition claimed no less than one-third of the seats in the new legislature and an even greater percentage of the overall vote, embarrassing the regime while also helping to marginalize the Maoist guerrillas and demonstrate the viability of nonviolent resistance.

In late 1985, in a nationally televised interview, Marcos announced that the next presidential election would be held earlier, just a few weeks into 1986, than the scheduled election in mid-1987. Caught off-guard, the opposition's internal divisions began to reveal themselves. With the strong support of the U.S. embassy, however, they soon rallied behind Corazon "Cory" Aquino, widow of the slain opposition leader. Although she was not an impressive public speaker, Aquino's pious humility inspired wild enthusiasm among the country's voters. Marcos had to face down an army of election monitors numbering almost 500,000. By the time the polls closed, observers had flooded Manila with reports of massive fraud by the government. Among the observers was a U.S. delegation led by Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Richard Lugar (R-Ind.). U.S. journalists also arrived by the dozens to report on the election. The presence of so many Americans played a critical role in shaping perceptions in the United States, where reports of massive fraud might otherwise have been discounted. As expected, Marcos declared himself the winner by a landslide.

A signal from the U.S. might provide the necessary tipping point for democratic change.

Reagan's reaction was of paramount concern to Filipinos because Marcos often dismissed pressure from midlevel U.S. officials as nothing more than a State Department conspiracy. To ensure that Reagan came down on the right side, Lugar personally briefed the president on the extent of Marcos's cheating. Yet, to the shock and dismay both of Aquino's supporters and her friends in the United States, Reagan incorrectly claimed at a press conference that both sides may have been responsible for the fraud. The backlash was intense and immediate, and within four days, Reagan retracted his statement, admitting that Marcos alone was responsible for the fraud. Ironically, Reagan's own inspirational speeches about freedom were partially responsible for the widespread insistence that the United States had a moral obligation to support Aquino and resist Marcos. Reagan was held accountable to his own rhetoric. The damage had been done, however, and Marcos interpreted Reagan's wavering stance as an indication that the White House would not shift its support to the opposition.

The streets of Manila filled with hundreds of thousands and then millions of protesters demanding that Marcos step down. This popular but nonviolent uprising became known as "People Power," a phrase invoked most recently to describe peaceful mass protests that brought democratic movements to power in Ukraine and Lebanon. The Philippine government had already begun to splinter, with Marcos's defense minister and chief of staff defecting to the opposition. The dictator considered crushing the protests with loyal military units and even dispatched an armored force to the scene of the largest protests but recoiled from the mass slaughter that would be necessary to restore his authority. With hundreds of U.S. journalists now reporting daily from Manila, the murder of innocents might have cost Marcos his U.S. support once and for all. Nonetheless, Marcos held on until Reagan's closest advisers finally decided that he had to go. Because Reagan refused to give the order himself, his close friend, Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), telephoned Marcos to render the verdict. Shortly thereafter, U.S. military helicopters evacuated Marcos from the presidential palace; later, a U.S. Air Force jet took him into exile in Hawaii.

Across the political spectrum, the American public was elated by Aquino's triumph. Just as its advocates had predicted, democracy promotion both preserved U.S. access to its military bases and banished the Maoist guerrillas to the political wilderness. Once unsure of whether the United States could afford to abandon allied dictators, conservatives embraced the idea that national security went hand in hand with democracy promotion. Once reluctant to infringe in any way on the sovereign rights of foreign governments, liberals now recognized that intervention could be bloodless and noble, in contrast to Reagan's support for the anti-Communist guerrillas' actions in Nicaragua and Angola, which they denounced as immorally violent. In the spring of 1986, a surprising bipartisan consensus emerged on the importance of democracy promotion both as an end in itself and as a weapon in the war against communism.

## South Korea

During this same time period, the political situation in South Korea bore a striking resemblance to the Philippines. Reagan was on excellent terms with South Korea's head of state, Gen. Chun,[12] ensuring that tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers remained welcome in South Korea, where they served as an indispensable deterrent to a North Korean invasion. The South Korean opposition, however, especially the radical student movement, profoundly resented the United States for supporting both Chun and his predecessors and felt ambivalent about the presence of U.S. troops on their country's soil. Once again, the White House faced a situation in which its original strategy,

inspired by the Kirkpatrick doctrine, suggested unstinting support for the *ancien régime*. In contrast, Reagan's Westminster remarks had illustrated how U.S. national security might best be served by an approach consistent with U.S. democratic values.

As in the Philippines, the initial breakthrough for democratic reform in South Korea resulted from elections to a powerless legislature, this time in February 1985. Rather than orchestrate extensive fraud, however, Chun simply altered the formula for the distribution of seats to guarantee his supporters a majority. Although Chun's party won a plurality of the vote, the fact that almost two-thirds of the electorate voted for a wide array of opposition parties shocked and embarrassed the government. The government's legitimacy now paled in comparison to that of the pro-democracy movement led by dissidents Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam.

**Diplomats can provide assistance to reward governments making democratic progress.**

Not long after Marcos fell from power in the Philippines, South Korea's more emboldened democratic opposition hoped to participate in the 1987 presidential election. Any chance of winning would require a constitutional amendment that mandated the direct election of the president, instead of relying on a so-called electoral college handpicked by the sitting president. Chun insisted that the system in place was fair, but he consented to negotiations in the hope of exhausting the opposition and dividing its ranks. Talks dragged on from the fall of 1986 through the following spring, when Chun suspended the process after recognizing that Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam would not abandon their insistence on a direct election for the chief executive.

Gaston Sigur, the new assistant secretary of state for East Asia, hoped to apply the same strategy in South Korea as Wolfowitz had used in the Philippines. He had the support of James Lilley, the new U.S. ambassador to South Korea. Whereas Lilley's predecessor was extraordinarily close to Chun and made a point of avoiding any contact with the opposition, Lilley sought to enhance the stature of the two Kims and their allies by making it known that they were friends of the embassy. With Shultz's active support, Sigur sought to pressure Chun to allow the direct election of his successor, but the general resisted, perhaps because Reagan himself remained conspicuously silent.

In June 1987, Chun announced that Gen. Roh Tae-woo, one of his closest confidants, would be his party's nominee for president. In the absence of a direct vote, Roh's nomination amounted to a coronation. Within hours, ri-

ots broke out across South Korea. At the high point of the riots, Chun considered mobilizing the armed forces to crush dissent, a decision that almost surely would have led to hundreds of deaths. Chun pulled back at the last moment, however, partly because of a visit from Lilley, during which the envoy presented Chun with a personal letter from Reagan calling for restraint. Reagan, it seemed, had learned from the experience in the Philippines a year earlier when he had sought to protect Marcos from a similar pro-democracy movement. In the intervening year and a half, Reagan had often pointed to the democratization of the Philippines as a signature achievement of his democracy-promotion agenda. Reagan's affinity with the democratic breakthrough in the Philippines made it difficult for him to take sides against a popular movement in South Korea that was pro-democratic and anti-Communist.

Unable to depend on force, both because the younger colonels and generals were hesitant and because extended violence might have forced South Korea to surrender the 1988 Olympics—another external restraint on repressive behavior—Chun and Roh instead relied on a political solution. After 18 days of rioting, Roh suddenly announced that he also was in favor of direct elections as well as almost all of the opposition's other demands, bringing the rioting to an end. He hoped that this gallant concession would help differentiate him from the widely resented Chun and calculated that the opposition would break down into factions once its demands were met. He was right. Both Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam insisted on running for president, allowing Roh to win the election with only a plurality of the vote. Although some feared that having another military president for a seven-year term would prevent the consolidation of democracy, this did not occur. Subsequent elections resulted in Kim Young-sam (1993–1998) and Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) both serving a term as a president. The citizens of South Korea also began to enjoy unprecedented civil rights and liberties. Today, South Korea remains a stable democracy.

### Chile

By the mid-1980s, Chile's Gen. Augusto Pinochet was one of only a handful of dictators to have survived the democratic tidal wave transforming Latin America. Initially, the Reagan administration had done its best to strengthen Pinochet's hold on power. In August 1981, Kirkpatrick visited Santiago and called for the full normalization of U.S.-Chilean relations. Along with other administration officials from the National Security Council, she lobbied Congress to lift the restrictions on military and economic aid to Chile that had been imposed during the Carter era. This vote of confidence was not enough, however, to insulate Pinochet from the pressure to reform. Many

Chileans had never forgiven him for destroying Chile's proud heritage of liberal democracy; others resented the economic hardship they had to endure as a result of Pinochet's aggressive pro-market agenda. By the middle of the decade, the opposition had reorganized and begun to call for democratic reforms.

The U.S. government's position on Chile began to change at the same time. As Shultz recalls in his memoirs, "By the start of the second Reagan term, however, I was convinced that the U.S. approach [supporting Pinochet without qualification] was not working. We understood Pinochet; he was not changing. But he did not understand us; we wanted a more open government, rule of law, and a government headed by elected officials."[13] Fully aware that presidents rarely make radical policy changes in their second term, Shultz, working closely with his assistant secretary of state for Latin America, Elliot Abrams, and his assistant secretary of state for human rights, Richard Shifter, first had to win the battle for a policy change toward Chile within the Reagan administration. To press the case for change, they forged an unusual alliance with several liberal Democrats in the Senate and House who shared with Shultz and Abrams a real contempt for right-wing dictators in the Western Hemisphere. This improbable alliance reflected democracy promotion's surprising ability to bridge the greatest of partisan divides and inspire both liberals and conservatives to work together for a common cause.[14] From 1986 through 1988, the Reagan administration endorsed five UN resolutions critical of Pinochet's record on human rights, although it also abstained on three and voted against one.[15]

**U.S. diplomats can provide legitimacy to democratic challengers.**

With the internal battle won, at least temporarily, Shultz persuaded Reagan to send a new ambassador to Chile to signal this change in U.S. policy. The task fell to Harry Barnes, who arrived in Santiago with the explicit mission to press for democratic change. Barnes continued to praise Chile's economic reforms but also went out of his way to meet with representatives of opposition political parties and promote the State Department's insistence on free and fair elections. In response, Pinochet reminded his U.S. allies that we are all "in a war between democracy and Marxism, between chaos and democracy,"[16] a familiar refrain heard throughout the Middle East today if the term "terrorism" is exchanged for "Marxism." Pinochet also lambasted the United States for interfering in Chile's domestic affairs and equated advocacy of human rights with terrorism; the media portrayed Barnes as a terrorist sympathizer.

Nonetheless, Pinochet eventually consented to holding a plebiscite on his rule in 1988 in large measure because he grossly miscalculated his popularity. Chileans were given the chance to vote for or against extending Pinochet's rule for another eight years. If the no votes prevailed, a multicandidate election would be held the following year. Despite Pinochet's unpopularity, the dictator was aided by the opposition's fragmentation, the campaign's short duration, and the government's superior resources. In an attempt to compensate for such disadvantages, U.S. officials such as Abrams and Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) personally pushed to unify the opposition, which in February 1988 eventually came together as a 16-party alliance called the Coalition of Parties for the No Vote. The United States also provided financial assistance both to Chilean and U.S. NGOs for election-monitoring training to ensure against fraud. To Pinochet's surprise, as well as that of most Chileans, the plebiscite made it clear that the people had had enough of the dictator, with 54.5 percent voting for his ouster and just 43 percent asking him to stay. The next year, after a series of negotiations between Pinochet and the opposition to craft a transition, Chileans elected a Christian Democrat, Patricio Alywin, to serve as their next president, completing Chile's return to democratic rule.

## Learning Lessons

Today, as the United States once again faces the challenge of demonstrating its commitment to principle by holding both its allies and its adversaries to a single democratic standard, it has become imperative to learn from the Cold War's forgotten democratic breakthroughs. Revisiting these three success stories is not meant to imply that the Reagan administration somehow avoided the dilemmas of hypocrisy that the Bush administration faces. On the contrary, Reagan and his foreign policy team were focused on promoting democracy more in some friendly dictatorships than in others. Despite public demands to get tough with the apartheid regime in South Africa, Reagan did little more than restate his objections to racism. The authoritarian regime in Taiwan did not become the target of his official criticism. Moreover, Reagan's record in promoting democracy in hostile autocratic regimes was also mixed; his efforts toward Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union eventually paid tremendous dividends for democracy, yet his strategy in Angola and Afghanistan produced disastrous results for democracy's advance and U.S. security interests, although admittedly well after the Reagan administration was out of power.[17]

Even in the successful cases in the Philippines, South Korea, and Chile, the central driver of democratic change was the growing strength of local

democratic movements, not U.S. diplomats. Without organized opposition to autocracy, democratization would not have taken hold in any of these countries. At the same time, in all three cases, by constraining the unacceptable behavior of incumbent autocrats, encouraging emerging democratic forces, and recognizing the positive relationship between democracy promotion and national security, U.S. government officials helped to push the process of democratization forward. Although these countries' democratic consolidations have not ameliorated all of their social and economic problems, their transitions did not bring Marxist radicals to power, make them more bellicose toward their neighbors, or produce any disruptions in their relations with the United States.[18] Several lessons emerge from these U.S. efforts to engage but reform allied dictatorships in the late 1980s.

Political change need not be feared or prevented.

First and foremost, democracy promotion was not just a moral objective but also resulted in clear, tangible gains for U.S. national security. The remarkable success of the pro-democracy movements in the Philippines, South Korea, and Chile showed that enduring alliances rest on the consent of the people rather than on the complicity of unpopular governments. By demonstrating its support for legitimate, popular governments, the United States won a lasting measure of respect from local populations; helped manage a difficult transition away from autocracies that did not result in chaos, war, or radical rule; and cemented important alliances in a way not possible to achieve through the support of anti-Communist dictatorships.

Second, words mattered, especially when they were the president's and even more so when they enjoy bipartisan support. A consistent message coming out of the White House and echoed throughout the offices of the executive branch as well as on Capitol Hill is the best way to convince friendly dictators that the United States is serious about democracy promotion. Even while acknowledging a general U.S. commitment to democracy, dictators still bend over backward to find evidence that the United States is willing to tolerate their regime. Well aware of the U.S. government's penchant for alliances with friendly dictatorships, political leaders will look for any indication that either the U.S. president or some of his most influential advisers are not serious about reform. To be credible and effective, the message must be communicated by all U.S. government officials and sustained over a period of years. The worst scenario is when one cabinet official gives a speech categorizing democracy promotion as a U.S. priority while another downplays the significance of this mission. Such mixed messages in the early

years of the Reagan administration, especially when the message of support for anti-Communist autocratic regimes came out of the White House, encouraged autocrats that they were too vital to U.S. security interests to be challenged to change. All too frequently, when dealing directly with their counterparts from other countries, diplomats working in-country or closely with a specific country over time tend to soften the message of democracy sent by higher ranks in the government. These lower-level officials believe that they need good contacts in foreign governments to get "more important" business done. Their winks and nods about democracy promotion lead to the unintended consequence of undermining their superiors' credibility, including that of the president.

By sending a consistent message, the United States can avoid the crisis scenario that everyone fears, one in which the only choice is between radicals opposed to the United States and a reactionary dictatorship. Presidential statements in support of democracy promotion empower lower-level officials also committed to democracy promotion and undermine their opponents within the bureaucracy. In the Reagan era, speeches such as the 1982 Westminster address emboldened assistant secretaries in the State and Defense Departments to press an agenda of change in their regional jurisdictions.

An autocrat's words should also matter. In contrast to the situation in the world just a few decades ago, very few autocrats today trumpet alternative regime types as a legitimate way to govern. Democracy as a goal or an ideal type of government faces few serious competitors.[19] Instead, dictators either call their own autocratic regimes democracies or claim that their country is on the slow road to becoming a democracy. When they do commit to such a goal, no matter how insincere the original pledge, U.S. officials can work with democratic opposition movements to hold autocrats accountable to their words.

Third, to encourage peaceful, nonrevolutionary transitions, it was imperative to signal support for democratic reform long before the terminal crisis of an *ancien régime*. Early intervention, well before the regime in question is in a free fall, prevented the sort of political polarization that had presented prior administrations with an ugly choice between standing by an unstable dictatorship and allowing a radical and often violent anti-U.S. regime to take power. Early intervention also helped limit the agenda of change to political institutions and kept off the table the more expansive agenda of radical economic transformation advocated by some Socialist and Communist opposition movements; encouraged and protected the moderates capable of ensuring a successful transition to democracy; and guided the transition to a peaceful outcome. In all three cases, U.S. diplomats signaled their lack of support for autocrats in power well before the regimes be-

gan to falter. Such preemptive actions stood in sharp contrast to late U.S. reactions to the fall of the shah in Iran or Somoza in Nicaragua. In the Philippines, Armacost attended Aquino's funeral in September 1983 even though Marcos specifically instructed him not to go. In South Korea, Reagan raised the issue of a peaceful succession as early as 1983 in a summit meeting with Chun. With regard to Chile, Abrams stated unequivocally as early as 1985 that "U.S. [g]overnment policy toward Chile is straightforward and unequivocal: we support a transition to democracy."[20]

Moreover, if change is initiated early enough, U.S. diplomats were able to encourage interim settlements between the incumbent autocrats and the democratic challengers to help guide the transition.[21] In particular, pacts have often been crafted to limit the agenda of change to political institutions and prevent infringement on the property rights of existing economic actors tied to the *ancien régime*. Successful pacts often include highly undemocratic features, which serve to bridge the gap from one type of regime to the next. As a condition for democratic transition in Chile, for example, Pinochet was allowed to stay on as the commander of the military. Pacts also can be used to ensure the safety of leaders of the *ancien régime*. Helping to manufacture pacted transitions, however, requires diplomacy that is not just highly energetic but also extraordinarily consistent in its pro-democratic tenor. In crafting these delicate and unjust pacts, external actors can play pivotal roles as advocates for change and as guarantors that the terms of the pacts are followed. U.S. officials can offer ousted autocrats a safe exit out of their country and a safe haven in which to enjoy their retirement from politics, such as Marcos's exile in Hawaii. However unjust, their removal in this manner can be a necessary condition for peaceful regime change.

Fourth, the United States could afford to be patient as long as incremental reforms were taking place. In the 1980s, Washington supported gradual reforms that established the viability of the nonviolent, democratic opposition without prematurely threatening the dictatorship's grasp on the reins of power or allowing the crisis to progress so far that fundamental changes to economic and social institutions came into play. Preemptive action allowed U.S. diplomats to help steer these transitions away from revolutionary outcomes and toward evolutionary, peaceful conclusions. Dictators did not suddenly step aside. Yet, in response to concerted, consistent pressure from the United States and domestic opposition, they often granted enough concessions to allow a viable democracy movement to begin building momentum. Only after a gradual process of decompression did it become possible for Marcos to accept the verdict of the People Power revolution, for Chun to accept the direct election of his successor, and for Pinochet to accept the outcome of the 1988 plebiscite.

Fifth, when a democratic breakthrough appears imminent and the opposition forces appear to be mobilized and almost strong enough to remove a dictator from power or when an autocrat simply goes too far in abusing human rights or rolling back previous democratic practices, a signal from the United States might provide the necessary tipping point for democratic change. Laxalt's call to Marcos, for example, made clear that the United States would no longer support its former ally; silence at this stage might have encouraged Marcos to try to hold on. In these crucial moments, U.S. diplomats can warn of their intent to withdraw support from autocratic incumbents. Furthermore, U.S. diplomats, as well as their counterparts from other democratic states, can serve as intermediaries or channels of communication between the *ancien régime* and the democratic opposition, especially during moments of transition.

U.S. officials should push allies for evolutionary change to avoid revolutionary change.

Sixth, diplomats can also provide economic and security assistance to reward the government that makes progress toward democracy. After democratic transitions, the Philippines, South Korea, and Chile all enjoyed close bilateral relations with the United States, which included varying packages of economic and security assistance. Offering these kinds of positive inducements can help leaders make the difficult decision to liberalize their political systems. These potential rewards can also constrain incoming democratic regimes from pursuing radical policies.

Seventh, in countries ruled by severe regimes, U.S. diplomats can provide legitimacy to democratic challengers by meeting with them, appearing in public with them, inviting them to Washington, and generally affirming their importance. Such was the case when Reagan cancelled his trip to the Philippines after Aquino's murder, made positive statements about the Kims in South Korea, and appointed a new ambassador to Chile tasked with reaching out to democratic leaders. Engagement with societal leaders can help protect them from harassment and imprisonment. They can also help to get democratic leaders released from prison in authoritarian regimes that have friendly relations with the West.

Finally, even when a transition brought unexpected forces into the arena of legitimate politics, change need not have been feared or prevented. In these three cases, U.S. government officials genuinely feared the consequences of radical takeovers. In Chile, this inflated fear helped to produce a U.S.-backed coup in 1973 against Allende, an elected president, as well as

his subsequent murder, arguably one of the lowest moments in U.S. diplomacy during the Cold War. The leftist, radical threat in all three countries turned out to be much less significant than originally imagined, in no small part because U.S. support for reform deprived the radical left of mainstream support. As democracy took root, the threat continued to fade. Although it cannot be known with certainty if a similar process would unfold after political liberalization in the Middle East, defenders of the status quo fail to recognize that the popularity of Islamic fundamentalists depends on their ability to portray the United States as the enemy of freedom. Just as today there are those who fear that forcing reform on Arab dictatorships will accomplish nothing more than opening the floodgates of radical fundamentalism, 20 years ago there were those who insisted that the reform of anti-Communist dictatorships would simply allow Communists to seize power. Ironically, this fear of a backlash, whether Communist or radical fundamentalist, increases the odds that just such a backlash will occur.

Democracy promotion is not just a moral objective; it also improves U.S. national security.

The lessons of the Cold War suggest that avoiding change forever, even for U.S. allies, is simply not an option. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the United States sought to protect its interests in the Middle East by aligning with the region's authoritarian regimes as a strategy to maintain its status quo balance of power. The negative consequences of this strategy included the Iranian revolution and the taking of U.S. hostages in Tehran; a protracted war between Iraq and Iran in which Saddam Hussein, a former U.S. ally who murdered tens of thousands of his own citizens, used weapons of mass destruction; the slaughter of French and U.S. soldiers in Beirut; the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; and the gradual, almost imperceptible growth of Al Qaeda. Today, the question for regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, and Pakistan is not whether they will change but how they will change. Leaders in these countries have been important allies of the United States in the past but are unlikely to remain strategic partners of the West if they resist political liberalization and thereby increase the likelihood of radical regime change. Will those now in power initiate gradual political reforms and begin an evolutionary transition from autocracy to democracy, or will they continue to delay reforms and thereby increase the likelihood of revolutionary change leading to unpredictable outcomes? The experience of democratization in anti-Communist autocracies during the Cold War suggests that U.S. officials can and should engage these autocratic

allies while pushing for evolutionary change as a preemptive strategy to avoid revolutionary change.

## Notes

1. On the central role of a nonviolent opposition for democratic transitions, see Peter Ackerman and Adrian Karatnycky, *How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy* (New York: Freedom House, 2005).
2. See Condoleezza Rice, opening statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., January 18, 2005 (confirmation hearing); Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting Democracy Through Diplomacy," testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Washington, D.C., May 5, 2005; Mark Palmer, *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
3. See Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Yi Feng, *Democracy, Governance, and Economic Performance: Theory and Evidence* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003); Morton Halperin, Joseph Siegle, and Michael Weinstein, *The Democracy Advantage: How Democracies Promote Prosperity and Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
4. For opposing perspectives on this issue, see Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the 20th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
5. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (November 1979): 34–45. See Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, *Dictatorship and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).
6. Ronald Reagan, "Address to the British Parliament, June 8, 1982," http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.htm.
7. For development of this theme, see George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: Diplomacy, Power, and the Victory of the American Ideal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).
8. See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); Michael McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola," *International Security* 14, no. 3 (Winter 1989–90): 99–135.
9. For a well-researched and well-written account of U.S.-Filipino relations and the Filipino democratic revolution, see Sandra Burton, *Impossible Dream: The Marcoses, the Aquinos, and the Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Warner, 1989).
10. On ideas as focal points, see Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework," in *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, eds. Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 3–30.
11. Eric Bjornlund, *Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), chap. 10.
12. For an excellent account of the politics in South Korea and U.S.–South Korean relations, see Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997).
13. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, p. 970.

14. For the best account of the U.S. effort, see Paul Sigmund, *The United States and Democracy in Chile* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
15. Smith, *America's Mission*, pp. 289–290, 293–294.
16. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, pp. 971–972.
17. See Coll, *Ghost Wars*; McFaul, "Rethinking the 'Reagan Doctrine' in Angola."
18. For the argument that democratizing countries are more likely to fight wars, see Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, *Electing to Fight: Why Emerging Democracies Go to War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).
19. Michael McFaul, "Democracy Promotion as a World Value," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2004–05): 147–163.
20. Quoted in Smith, *America's Mission*, pp. 293–294.
21. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), chap. 4; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, "Democratization Around the Globe: Opportunities and Risks," in *World Security*, eds. Michael Klare and Daniel Thomas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 43–62.