

American Foreign Policy and Forced Regime
Change Since World War II

Scott Walker

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Regime Change Since
World War II

Forcing Freedom

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For Yeimy, Camilo, and Amara.

PREFACE

Why write a book about America's attempts to install democratic regimes by force? While a number of academic works have made notable contributions to this topic, they often focus on the *how* rather than the *why* aspects of such interventions. Moreover, while the topic of forced democratization is one that by necessity bridges the gap between comparative politics and international relations, most efforts lean too much toward one of these sub-fields or the other—and thus usually suffer either from a failure to focus on the specifics of each case or, alternatively, too narrow a focus on just one case. The result is that it is difficult for such research to allow us to make generalizable statements about such interventions.

One might ask how I became interested in this research topic. In 2003 Fred Pearson, a then-colleague in the Department of Political Science at Wayne State University, returned from a conference and expressed his exasperation over a panel that he had participated in. Fred was more or less alarmed by the idea that political scientists would even be mooting the *possibility* that military intervention might be a viable option for removing autocratic governments and replacing them with democratic ones. And from a statistical standpoint, Fred's concerns appeared to be justified. While it was too early to evaluate the invasion of Afghanistan, and the Iraq invasion would only occur during that year, very few American interventions of any type had led to successful democratization during the years since World War II—let alone in the years before that. And Fred was not alone in his skepticism. The conventional

wisdom among political scientists at that time was, and perhaps still is, that internal processes were the most likely pathways that countries could take from autocracy toward democracy. However, during the 1990s, scholars had begun to toy with the idea democratization might occur from the outside. And one potential possibility for how this might occur was through directly replacing autocratic governments with democratic ones.

I have found that studying attempts to bring about democracy by force is interesting because it involves approaching democratization from an international relations perspective as well as through the traditional lens of comparative politics. I maintain that the overall level of scholarship on research related to the forced democratization phenomenon has been of high quality. It has revealed a great deal about the success rates of such attempts and the conditions under which they were most likely to succeed.

What I have noticed, however, is that America is continually tempted to invade other countries in order to liberalize them *despite the low prospects of success*. Nearly all of the research I have reviewed points to the conclusion that this policy is unlikely to be successful, except perhaps under extremely limited conditions. Thus, it does not appear logical that the USA would continually resort to this policy option. Yet it does, again and again. I began to realize, gradually, that what was needed was an attempt to understand the question of *why*. Why does America continue to engage attempts to bring about democracy through intervention? And is it likely to be tempted to do so again in the future?

To be sure, we have seen a great number of academically sound attempts to understand the causes of American intervention behavior *in general*. Likewise, there is no shortage of effort to chronicle American military interventions in the postwar period—individually or collectively. And there has been a good deal of research on American democracy promotion efforts in general. However, only a few works have attempted to explain America's continued fascination with the idea of installing democracy by force, and most of these efforts advance only one argument for why this is the case. What was missing, in my opinion, was an effort to study several cases in some depth in an attempt to gain a greater appreciation for *why America attempts to force democracy despite this strategy's relatively low prospects for success*.

Thus, my investigation is designed to identify the salient American motivations behind post-World War II interventions that were ostensibly

focused on replacing autocratic governments with democratic ones. Although one cannot conclusively answer questions regarding motivations for political actions, I believe that this research effort is a credible attempt to explore the role that America's desire for a democratic outcome may have played in each of these interventions.

The book is organized as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the idea of Forced Democracy (FD) attempts. As is true of most attempts to define a social science phenomenon, my attempt is not foolproof, as it is subject to definitional challenges and a great deal of conceptual baggage. Nonetheless, I believe I arrive at a relatively non-controversial way to identify the phenomenon that is the topic of my book.

Chapters 2 through 6 focus on five cases of American intervention in the post-World War II period. The first case is the Johnson administration's 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic during the country's civil war. The second case is the Reagan administration's invasion of the small Caribbean nation of Grenada in reaction to the seizing of power on the island by the Marxist-Leninist New Jewel Movement. The third case is the George H.W. Bush administration's 1989 invasion of Panama in order to remove General Manuel Noriega from power. The fourth case is the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan by an American-led coalition during the George W. Bush administration, ostensibly to remove the Taliban from power. The final case is the 2003 invasion of Iraq by another American-led coalition that removed the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein from power.

The book concludes with Chapter 7, which digs deeply into America's rationale for attempting to force democracy abroad. It suggests that a mix of both normative and instrumental factors is likely to tempt the country to intervene under certain conditions. Moreover, it argues that the attractiveness of the FD option is likely to be enhanced by the fact that each of the alternative policy tools designed to promote democracy abroad—sanctions, aid, and democracy assistance—suffers from notable shortcomings.

Before I conclude, I think it is best to suggest what I believe that you, the reader, might expect to accomplish by reading the book. The answer is that you will gain a greater appreciation for why America is so often tempted to replace autocratic regimes with democratic ones despite the fact that such efforts are met with success. You may find it more useful to focus on one or more individual cases of FD intervention that interest you the most. Or you may choose to focus on identifying the root causes

of all FD interventions, in which case the last chapter will be the most interesting to you. Either way, reading the first chapter is essential, as it introduces the concept of FD interventions and grounds the research in this book in the existing academic literature on the subject.

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