

## Does Forced Democratization Work?

*Scott Walker*

### Abstract

Over the past seven decades, democratic powers, led by the United States, have attempted to bring about democracy through external military imposition. While research to date has generally pointed toward the conclusion that such efforts are often not successful in effecting full-fledged democracy, studies almost exclusively have focused on how interventions have affected institutional measures of democracy in target countries (as opposed to political rights or political competitiveness). In addition, such studies have not recognized that there is more than one way to denote a democratizing intervention. I find that, regardless of what measure of democracy one uses, attempts to force democracy are generally not successful. However, “success” also depends to a degree upon how one chooses to define attempts at forced democratization. This research reinforces existing research, indicating that democratizing interventions are rarely found to result in healthy consolidated democracies over the long term.

**Key words:** Democracy, intervention, foreign policy, military.

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With the advent of the Barack Obama administration and the exit from power of the Bush administration and its neoconservative foreign policy brain trust, it may have appeared at the beginning of 2009 that the era of powerful liberal states attempting to use military force to impose democracy in nondemocratic countries was over. Many believed that in its place a less aggressive, enlightened era of “smart power” would emerge. In the words of soon-to-be-confirmed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton:

We must use what has been called smart power—the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool,

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or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Since the rhetorical approach of candidate Obama supposedly leaned toward international diplomacy, restraint, dialogue, and inclusion, one might naturally assume that as president, his attitude toward intervention with the purpose of regime change would differ markedly from that of President George W. Bush. But has the Obama administration shown its willingness to move away from the idea of forced democratization as a policy option?

It does not appear that a fundamental policy shift was ever in the cards. On April 23, 2007, candidate Obama said that the United States should “lead the world in battling immediate evils and promoting the ultimate good.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, during his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech in Oslo in December 2009, the President made it very clear that there is evil in the world, and that it is the role of his country to counter these evil forces: “There will be times when nations—acting individually or in concert—will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.” This was followed, perhaps more to the point, by:

The world must remember that it was not simply international institutions—not just treaties and declarations—that brought stability to a post-World War II world. ...we have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest—because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if other people’s children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the language and rhetoric of the President of the United States is not one of a leader of a reticent power. Adventurous military interventions may not be planned for the moment, but the crusading American abroad is not yet dead and buried. Perhaps America is somewhat more chastened after Iraq and Afghanistan, but the age-old idea that democracies not only should lead by example, but also use might for right, is quite alive. While the only new ground intervention the Obama administration has undertaken is in Yemen (where the rationale is to support the existing government rather than to oppose it), it

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<sup>1</sup> Hillary Clinton, “Clinton: Use ‘Smart Power’ in Diplomacy,” *CBS News.com*, January 13, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/13/politics/main4718044.shtml> (accessed January 24, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Barack Obama, April 23, 2007, *Wikisource Speeches*, [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Remarks\\_of\\_Senator\\_Barack\\_Obama\\_to\\_the\\_Chicago\\_Council\\_on\\_Global\\_Affairs](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Remarks_of_Senator_Barack_Obama_to_the_Chicago_Council_on_Global_Affairs) (accessed January 8, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama, Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2009, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/obama-lecture\\_en.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2009/obama-lecture_en.html) (accessed January 8, 2011).

has not in any way dismissed the possibility of using military intervention to implement regime change.

It is important to note that the desire to spread liberal institutions to hostile locations is not limited to leaders of the United States. In a speech in 2008, David Miliband, British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, said “the goal of spreading democracy should be a great progressive project; the means need to combine soft and hard power...we should not let the genuine debate about the ‘how’ of foreign policy obscure the clarity about the ‘what’.”<sup>4</sup> In the speech, Miliband affirmed that the left needed to now match the desire to spread democracy with the same vigor with which neoconservatives had since the 1990s. This suggests that, regardless of whether a left- or right-of-center party is in power, aggressive democracy promotion is indeed very alive and well in Britain.

In short, there is no reason to believe that we have reached the end of the era of democratizing interventions. Recently, Stromseth et al. argued that “many of the same powerful western states that contritely rejected imperialism a few short decades ago are increasingly resorting to military force to intervene in the territories of other states and in many cases, they are remaining on as *de facto* governments years after the fighting ends.”<sup>5</sup> Not all observers of world politics would agree with Stromseth that former colonial powers are *more* prone to intervene than in previous decades, but a good many of them would probably agree that these countries are significantly *less* likely to do so.

While the Iraq invasion might not necessarily have happened under an Obama administration, an intervention similar to that in Afghanistan seems to be more within the realm of possibility. President Obama supported intervention in Afghanistan when he was a United States Senator, and stands by the intervention today. The context of the Afghanistan case was somewhat different from that in Iraq in that the intervention was significantly more multilateral by nature and arguably more based on humanitarian grounds. Thus, a similar intervention could conceivably happen in Somalia, Yemen, or Haiti, for instance, if the right combination of security and human rights concerns were to emerge in one of those troubled locales.

If one accepts that liberal powers (including not only the United States, but other powerful actors such as Britain, NATO, and perhaps even the United Nations) are likely to retain the policy option of forced democratization in the future, it follows that it is important to evaluate the policy’s merits more carefully. In this essay, I argue that, since there are different ways to define

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<sup>4</sup> “Miliband Justifies Military Intervention,” *politics.co.uk*, February 13, 2008, [http://www.politics.co.uk/news/opinion-former-index/foreign-policy/miliband-justifies-military-intervention-\\$1203347.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/news/opinion-former-index/foreign-policy/miliband-justifies-military-intervention-$1203347.htm) (accessed November 24, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Jane Stromseth, David Wippman, and Rosa Brooks, *Can Might Make Rights? Building the Rule of Law after Military Interventions* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2.

forced democratization, we should make an effort to assess each one separately. In addition, we should study not only the survival of democratic institutional structures (such as the presence of free and fair elections or openness of political institutions), but also respect for individual democratic rights.

The relationship between external and internal factors that contribute to democratization is a complex one. Part of the problem is that there is not just one measure of what constitutes a forced democracy attempt. However, I believe that it is possible to estimate the level of success of attempts at forced democracy by looking at how successful they have been according to different accepted definitions of both “democracy” and “success.”

In order to examine the relative success of different types of democratizing interventions, this essay is organized in the following manner. First, I discuss the meaning of the term “forced democratization,” because the way that we might view success may depend upon how we define a democratization attempt. Second, using two well-respected measures of democratic standing, I observe whether forced democratization has been a successful strategy over the long term. I conclude with a discussion of what these findings might mean for our understanding of forced democratization.

## **The Concept of Forced Democratization**

While the concept of “forcing democracy” appears to be relatively straightforward, it is important to discuss what this term means before attempting to evaluate how successful such attempts have been. The most fundamental characteristic of democratizing interventions is that they are *military operations by democratic countries into nondemocratic target countries that involve a push for democratization*.

In many cases, the central motives for democratizing interventions may appear to have more to do with national security or geopolitical factors (e.g., intervention on behalf of political allies, or interventions to protect strategic resources)—many of which seem to have little in common with the desire to bring about the democratization of an autocratic government. One might ask, for instance, whether the United States government deposed Manuel Noriega because it desired democracy, or because it believed that the Panamanian leader was a destabilizing force in the region that needed to be removed. While usually central to military interventions, *realpolitik*-related goals are not mutually exclusive to a desire for democracy. Democratizing interventions can be seen as a subset of all military interventions, but this does not mean that democracy needs to be the only purpose of such interventions, or even the single most important one. It is merely necessary that democracy is *one* intended goal of the operation.

Michael Sullivan III may not be far from the truth when he argues that the central strategic purpose of *all* interventions by the United States in the post-World War II era has been to “supplant the major imperial powers of the

pre-WWII era—the UK, France, Germany, and Japan—as the sole economic hegemon of the global system” and to make the world safe “not for democracy... but rather for capital.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, at a recent political science conference which I attended, a professor of international relations argued that it is axiomatic to say that all countries intervene out of geopolitical self-interest, and that it is therefore ludicrous to suggest that any intervention be classified as occurring for purposes of bringing about democratic regime change. Similar views appear to be widely held by a great number of international relations scholars.

Nonetheless, while such *realpolitik*-related motives likely will always be important (not only for the United States but for other powerful states as well), I believe that a push for a democratic outcome can be a greater strategic motive for some democratizing interventions than for others. Thus, I find Enterline and Greig’s recent definition of “forced democratic regimes” to be useful, as the authors distinguish between standard interventions and ones in which “democratic governments [have been] installed by a foreign power [and where] the foreign power plays an important role in the establishment, promotion, and maintenance of the institutions of government.”<sup>7</sup> The authors’ terminology concisely captures the idea that forced democratization can be an important factor in the intervention, without necessarily being the only reason for intervention.<sup>8</sup> In other words, this definition accounts for the fact that democracy is unlikely to be the sole, and perhaps even principal, reason for intervention, but, at the same time, leaves room for the fact that installation of democracy can be an important policy objective within the intervention strategy.

The decision to try to force democracy is not made casually and cannot be considered a standard policy option. Rather, it typically is part of a high-risk strategy that is more or less a last resort to bring about liberal regime change in places where domestic forces alone are very unlikely to achieve a democratic outcome.

A large majority of attempts to impose democracy have been either solely conducted or at least led by the United States in conjunction with allies. There are a few exceptions, such as the French intervention in the Comoros, a situation where a French mercenary took over the country for six days in October 1995.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Sullivan, *American Adventurism Abroad: Invasions, Interventions, and Regime Changes since World War II* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 4, no. 4 (2008): 323.

<sup>8</sup> The authors continue: “In this sense, the imposition of these democratic regimes represents a more significant and costly way of altering the policies of another state that involves more than merely encouraging or facilitating leadership change, but necessitates restructuring entirely the domestic political system of the target state.” They also suggest that their term, “forced democratic regimes,” is consistent with the terms “cultivated” and “stimulated” democracy.

While some day the United Nations or another multinational force may lead attempts to impose democracy, it is currently the United States that generally does so—alone, or in concert with allies.

Using the most common measure of democratic status, Polity IV, a final feature of democratizing interventions is that their potential to deliver long-term democracy appears to be rather limited. Several research efforts bear out the conclusion that, although some movement toward democracy is possible, the likelihood of democratic transformation to a stable, consolidated democracy is unlikely.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Pickering and Peceny argue that in the case of the three most powerful democratic interveners, only “one unambiguous example of the creation of a stable democracy” emerges—the case of Panama in 1989.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the relative consensus in the literature about the limited prospects for long-term success, I think it is important to take a closer look at the track record of democratizing interventions. The picture is incomplete for two reasons. First, most definitions of success focus only on the Polity IV measure, an indicator of democracy that is narrowly focused on democratic openness of a particular country’s governmental institutions. While useful for capturing this aspect of democracy, Polity IV may ignore other aspects of democracy, such as individual political rights and civil liberties.

Second, the various studies use several different definitions of what constitutes a democratizing intervention. Some define democratization attempts as those cases of hostile intervention where the intervening power has stated a preference for democracy. Another variant classifies democratizing interventions by whether the intervening power also introduces proliberalization measures. Finally, a third group of researchers simply equate a democracy attempt with any intervention that leads to a positive movement toward democracy on the aforementioned Polity IV democracy measure in the target country. Does democratic outcome vary according to the way that one measures a democracy attempt?

In order to obtain a clearer picture of the long-term success rate of intervention, I examine success rates for three different variants of intervention using two different indicators of democratic success.

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny, “Forging Democracy at Gunpoint,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 539-559; Nils Petter Gleditsch, Lene Siljeholm Christiansen, and Harvard Hegre, “Democratic Jihad? Military Intervention and Democracy,” World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 4242, 2007; Scott Walker and Frederic S. Pearson, “United States Intervention and Democratization: A Critique of the ‘Forcing Them to Be Free’ Argument,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 24, no. 1 (2007), 37-53; and Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” 321-347.

<sup>10</sup> Pickering and Peceny, “Forging Democracy at Gunpoint,” 554.

### Three Variants of Forced Democratization

In this section, I briefly discuss three conceptions of what constitutes an attempt to force democracy from the outside. It is interesting to note that one indicator is based on a country's stated attitudes *before* intervention, a second is based on actions by the intervening country *after* military intervention, and the third is related to a change that happens at the *same time* as the intervention.

#### *Intervention with Proliberalization Policies*

One definition of a forced democratization attempt relates to what the intervening power does after the intervention. Operating under the assumption that not all interventions by democracies are equal, Peceny classifies hostile interventions according to whether they include concrete steps to encourage democracy.<sup>11</sup> This is a useful distinction because it is designed to test the intuitive proposition that the odds of long-term democratization are much better in a situation where the intervening power actively works toward that goal.

Indeed, Peceny finds that the odds for success have been better in cases of intervention where the United States pushed for “free and fair” elections. He notes that about one-third of the ninety or so interventions by the United States from World War II through 1992 attempted to push proliberalization policies after the military action, and finds that the success rate of these interventions is significantly higher than for other interventions.

Peceny's approach is useful in that it employs a measuring stick for assessing whether a given democracy attempt was genuine. However, there are a few drawbacks to the approach. First, it is possible that measures for “free and fair” elections can be merely window dressing to justify the intervention rather than genuine attempts to bring about democracy in the post-intervention stage. In addition, the bar for what constitutes an attempt at “free and fair” elections is not particularly high—in fact, the standards are quite minimalistic. Finally, only one country, the United States, appears to meet the criteria for this form of democracy attempt.

#### *Interventions with Democratizing Intent*

A second way researchers identify forced democracy attempts is via statements of intent. Researchers can analyze speeches or public documents by government officials in the intervening country in order to ascertain whether democracy was an intended goal of the intervention.

Two studies, those of Meernik and Hermann and Kegley, have examined

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999), and id., “Forcing Them to Be Free” *Political Research Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1999): 549-582.

the role of democratic intent in military interventions.<sup>12</sup> Both find that, while hostile democratic interventions in general do not lead to democratization, the odds are improved in cases where the intervening power expresses a preference for a democratic outcome.

Meernik finds that, generally speaking, American military intervention is not likely to lead to short-term democratization. However, such interventions are more apt to result in a movement toward democracy when they are accompanied by official statements by the President of the United States expressing an interest in democratization in the target country.<sup>13</sup> Meernik's finding is important because it notes that a stated preference for democracy may make a difference in outcomes.

Herrmann and Kegley examine sixty-four proliberalization interventions by the United States between 1945 and 1992 that were "intended to protect or promote democracy in their targets." The authors conclude that, when regime change occurred after an American reform-oriented intervention, change was usually in a liberalizing direction. By contrast, they do not find a statistically significant effect for a control group of twenty-five interventions where reform of the target regime was not a goal.

While the study reveals a possible role of public statements in the likely success rates of short-term interventions, Herrmann and Kegley's results are limited to a study of American targets, and measure only short-term (one- and three-year post-intervention) change rather than long-term outcomes. Would the results be similar if we examined the effects of statements on long-term democratization? Furthermore, the only measure of democratic outcome that the authors use is the Polity democracy-autocracy indicator, and the analysis focuses on the immediate effect of the intervention rather than on its long-term effects.

### ***Intervention with Regime Change***

A third set of researchers, including Gleditsch et al. and Enterline and Greig, defines a democratizing intervention (what they call a "forced democratic regime") as a military intervention by a democracy that results in the transformation of the target country from an autocracy to a democracy, at

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<sup>12</sup> James Meernik, "United States Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy," *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 4 (1996): 391-402, and Margaret Herrmann and Charles Kegley, "Ballots: A Barrier against the Use of Bullets and Bombs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 3 (1996): 436-460.

<sup>13</sup> Meernik obtains official presidential statements of desire to create democratic governance from the *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States*. See Meernik, "United States Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy," 398. Presidential public papers are available on the U.S. Government Printing Office Web site at: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/pubpapers/index.html>.

least for a short time.<sup>14</sup> To be classified as a democracy attempt, targets of intervention move toward the direction of democracy for a minimum of one year on the Polity IV measure.

The approach is useful in that it leaves no ambiguity in its definition of a democracy attempt. Intent or subsequent actions do not matter. The only important factor is whether a country at least temporarily moves in the direction of democracy after intervention. While the definitional clarity is nice, this approach runs the risk of “throwing out the baby with the bath water.” Interventions in which there was no short-term regime change (i.e., a change of less than one year), or cases where interventions were made but no subsequent movement to democracy occurred, are not included—even those that may have involved a very earnest attempt at bringing about democracy on the part of intervening powers. The loss of these failed cases would likely seem to bias this measure toward success.

In summary, each of these ways of identifying forced democratization attempts isolates some salient aspects of this somewhat elusive phenomenon, and thus no one of them is clearly superior to the others. Therefore, I believe that it does not make sense to adopt just one definition. However, are some variants of forced democracy more likely to be successful than others? In the next section, I test the thesis that forced democratization is successful over the long term, using both multiple concepts of what forced intervention is as well as what constitutes “long-term democracy.”

## **Research Design**

In order to identify the success rate of democratizing interventions, I assess the relative success rates of the three types of interventions. Due to the fact that they are defined differently, each type has a unique set of cases of intervention attempts. Therefore, their respective success rates are not directly comparable. However, examining success rates can provide powerful evidence of how useful a strategy forced democratization might be as a foreign policy tool for powerful democratic governments that wish to bring about change in illiberal states. I study the success rates of each of the three variants of intervention, using two well-respected measures of democracy.

### ***The Dataset***

The dataset consists of every country that experienced *at least one* democratizing intervention attempt in the post-World War II era. I observe whether each country in the dataset is democratic at two different points, 1989

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<sup>14</sup> Gleditsch, Christiansen, and Hegre, “Democratic Jihad? Military Intervention and Democracy,” and Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” 321-347.

and 2009. This approach is similar to Peceny's finish-line type of analysis for assessing interventions by the United States. One strength of this approach is that it provides a uniform cut-off date by which success must have been achieved. It also allows for an easy comparison of targets of intervention to other countries that were not targets. This approach assumes that what we really should be interested in is long-term democratization—not whether a country experiences a short-term movement toward democracy. Another positive feature of such an analysis is that it manages to avoid the problem of how to code multiple interventions. Conversely, the weakness of this type of approach is that it does not consider the duration of time that a country has been democratic. In addition, a single cut-off date may consider a few cases to be long-term successes, even though they have recently become democracies (or vice versa). Also, not treating individual episodes of intervention as cases means that this approach does not examine the success or failure of individual interventions.

I choose the years 1989 and 2009 as the two cut-off points to examine the success rates of forced democratization attempts. Using the first time point, 1989, allows us to assess Cold War-era interventions separately from later ones. This cut-off makes sense for two reasons. First, it helps us to observe whether there is a difference in the rates of democratization between earlier targets and later ones. Second, 1989 marks the advent of a new system change. Perhaps powerful democracies (primarily the United States) became more likely to pursue humanitarian and democratic goals after they were no longer engaged in a tense struggle with their rival in a bipolar international system.

The second cut-off point, 2009, is the last year for which all information is available. This second time point allows us to observe whether success rates of forced democratization attempts can be judged to be more or less successful in light of twenty years of post-Cold War global politics.

Before observing the success rates of the different variants of democratizing intervention, it is necessary to operationalize two concepts: what constitutes a democracy attempt and what constitutes a successful case of democratization.

### ***What Is a Forced Democratization Attempt?***

Below, I operationalize the three variants of attempts at “forced democratization” which are discussed in the previous section:

#### Variant #1: Intervention and Proliberalization Policies

As mentioned above, this approach involves testing the assumption that interventions that involve post-intervention measures push for democracy. The primary example of this approach is Peceny's study of military interventions by the United States into autocratic states. The author looks at proliberalization policies adopted by the intervening actor (in this case, the United States). He defines democratizing interventions as the subset of interventions that includes at least one of the following three actions by the intervening country after the

military action:

1. “Active mediation with contending parties in the target state in setting the ground rules of an electoral contest”;
2. “The provision of financial and technical assistance in the voting process” *and/or* “official participation in election observer missions”; and
3. Official participation in election observer missions to certify whether contests have been conducted in a free and fair manner.<sup>15</sup>

To create cases of democratizing intervention, Peceny selects direct military interventions by the United States from 1945 to 1992 as coded by the Tilemma, Meernik, and Pearson and Baumann conflict datasets. I use Peceny’s methodology to identify cases of forced democratization attempts. It must be remembered that Peceny’s work applied only to United States interventions, so this measure includes only American cases.

In the years since Peceny’s 1997 article, only Afghanistan and Iraq have met the author’s criteria for constituting new targets of democratizing interventions. Therefore, the list of Variant 1 interventions consists of his list of cases plus these two new ones.

#### Variant #2: Intervention and Democratizing Intent

This measure denotes cases where democracy was mentioned as a policy goal before intervention. In an example of this type of measure, Meernik codes presidential speeches for whether a desire for democracy was expressed prior to an intervention.<sup>16</sup>

Using the International Military Intervention dataset, I create this variable by first identifying interventions into developing countries by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom from 1950 until 2000.<sup>17</sup> Next, I delete those interventions that were supportive of the regime, leaving only hostile and nonsupportive interventions. I then classify countries in the dataset according to whether they have been targets of hostile intervention by a major democratic power, and whether these interventions were accompanied by statements of democratic intent.

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<sup>15</sup> Peceny, “Forcing Them to Be Free,” 553.

<sup>16</sup> Meernik, “United States Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy,” 391-402.

<sup>17</sup> For a description of the updated IMI dataset (2009), see Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, “Political, Economic, and Social Consequences of Foreign Military Intervention,” *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no.3 (2006): 363-376.

I obtain the measure of democratic intent from Williams and Masters's Military Intervention and Democratization dataset.<sup>18</sup> The authors first identify all of the hostile interventions by democracies into nondemocratic targets in the Pearson and Baumann IMI dataset. Regarding the intervention in question, they subsequently code newspaper reports to determine whether officials from the intervening country made public statements, official speeches, or foreign policy proclamations of democratic intent. The statements were scanned for content that specifically indicates the intent to use military force with democratization as a goal of the intervention.<sup>19</sup> The authors accept a statement of democratizing intent as sufficient to qualify the intervention as either a democratic intervention, or an intervention for purposes other than democratization. Statements are accepted at face value, as the coders do not attempt to judge the real purpose of the intervention or whether pronouncements about the desirability of democracy are likely to be genuine.

Following the Williams-Masters dataset, the values are:

0=Country experienced no intervention;

1=Country experienced one or more hostile interventions by a democratic power, but there was no statement of democratic intent associated with any intervention;

2=Country experienced one or more interventions by a democratic power, and there was a corresponding statement of democratic intent with regard to at least one of the interventions.

Countries coded with a score of "2" are classified as forced democratization attempts.

### Variant # 3: Intervention and Regime Change (Imposed Democracy)

Several notable studies use this approach, which treats intervention and regime change as constituting an attempt at democracy. Following Pickering and Peceny, I use the Pearson and Baumann International Military Intervention dataset to identify countries that at least once crossed the threshold from autocracy to democracy, following a move into the target country's territory

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<sup>18</sup> Lethia Williams and Daniel Masters, "Assessing Aggressive Democracy Promotion: Military Intervention and Democracy in the Post-World War II Era," *Democracy and Security* 7, no. 1 (2010): 18-37. Data and documentation are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>19</sup> This approach to coding intervention based on democratic intent is consistent with Meernik, who codes interventions based on whether the president "made a public statement to the effect that the United States sought to preserve or create democratic governance in a target nation." See Meernik, "United States Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy," 398.

by a democratic force (in this case, either the United States, Britain, France, or the United Nations) “to pursue political, economic, or strategic objectives.”<sup>20</sup> Enterline and Greig use a similar definition in their study of imposed polities.<sup>21</sup>

Again, it is important to note that, because the three variants are operationalized differently, targets of intervention are different for each variant. It is thus possible that the success rate of a forced democracy strategy may depend partly upon one’s definition of what constitutes an attempt to force democracy.

### ***Democratic Outcome***

The outcome of interest (the “dependent variable”) is the level of democracy during the “finish line” years, 1989 and 2009. For my analysis of long-term democratization, to measure democratic outcome, I use two separate indicators: the Polity IV twenty-one-point democracy-autocracy scale, and the Freedom House measure, which is the average of the seven-point Political Rights and Civil Liberties Scales. While both indicators are intended to measure democracy, they focus on different aspects of this complex phenomenon.

#### The Polity IV Measure

The Polity IV indicator notes the degree of openness of political institutions, and consists of “six component measures that record key qualities of executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority, and political competition.”<sup>22</sup> The twenty-one point “Polity Score” ranges from -10 (a fully institutionalized autocracy) to +10 (a fully institutionalized democracy). Between democracies and autocracies are what Polity terms “anocracies,” which are “mixed, or incoherent authority regimes.” In line with the Polity code book, I categorize regimes in the following manner: autocracies (-10 to -6), anocracies (-5 to +5), and democracies (+6 to +10).

#### The Freedom House Measure

The Freedom House indicator is intended to capture the “real world rights and social freedoms enjoyed by individuals” in a given country, in a given year. The Freedom House survey is conducted by a group of international scholars who rank countries according to how well their governments respect individual rights.

To measure democratic outcome, I use an average of the political rights

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<sup>20</sup> Pickering and Peceny, “Forging Democracy at Gunpoint,” 545.

<sup>21</sup> Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” 321-347.

<sup>22</sup> Monty G. Marshall, Ted Robert Gurr, and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV Dataset Users’ Manual*, April 30, 2010, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/p4manualv2009.pdf> (accessed June 14, 2011).

and civil liberties measures, the construction of which is described below:

The survey measures freedom according to two broad categories that are derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: political rights and civil liberties. Each country and territory covered in the survey is assigned two numerical ratings—one for political rights and one for civil liberties—on a scale of 1 to 7; a rating of 1 indicates the highest degree of freedom and 7 the least amount of freedom... These political rights and civil liberties ratings are combined and averaged to determine an overall “freedom status” for each country and territory. Countries and territories with a combined average rating of 1.0 to 2.5 are considered “Free”; 3.0 to 5.0, “Partly Free”; and 5.5 to 7.0 “Not Free.”<sup>23</sup>

Freedom House offers two measures: political rights and civil liberties. I take the average of the two.

I code countries in the dataset with a score of “0” (nondemocracies) if they are classified as an autocracy by Polity IV or as “not free” by Freedom House. Likewise, countries are coded as “1” (partial democracies) when they are classified as “anocracies” by Polity or “partly free” by Freedom House. Finally, I code countries that are classified as democracies by Freedom House and “free” by Freedom House with a score of “3” (democracy). Thus, both measures are made comparable by being on a three-point ordinal scale.

### **The Scorecard of Forced Democratization**

As mentioned above, the consensus in the scholarly literature to date is that attempts to force democracy via military interventions have not enjoyed much success over the long term. But can a refined look at the question reveal more about which type of interventions might be deemed to be successful or which elements of democracy are best served by such actions? To answer these questions, I examine the democratic status of targets of these interventions in 1989 and 2009. For the earlier year, a country is treated as a target of a forced democracy attempt only if the intervention occurred between 1950 and 1989. When analyzing democratization in 2009, I count all countries that were targets at any time between 1950 and 2009.

An inspection of table 1 underscores the idea that, despite the fact that forced democratization is a seemingly simple notion, there is a relatively wide

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<sup>23</sup> Freedom House, “Freedom in the World Frequently Asked Questions,” <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=277> (accessed June 21, 2011).

Table 1. Target Countries for Democratizing Interventions, 1950-2009

Country	Variant 1		Variant 2		Variant 3		Polity IV		Freedom House	
	Pre-1989	All	Pre-1989	All	Pre-1989	All	1989	2009	1989	2009
Afghanistan	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cambodia	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chad	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
China*	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Congo, D.R.	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Dominican Rep.	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
El Salvador	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	2
Grenada	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Guatemala	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	1
Haiti	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
Honduras	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Iraq	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Jordan	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
Laos	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lebanon	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	2
Libya	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nicaragua	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	2	1	1
Panama	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	0	2
Philippines	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1
Rwanda	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Somalia	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
Sudan	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Uganda	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
Vietnam	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total/Average	12	14	11	19	8	9	0.58	1.13	0.54	0.71

\* See footnote 25.

Variant 1 Average	0.86	1.29	0.71	1.07
Variant 2 Average	0.56	1.11	0.56	0.67
Variant 3 Average	1.56	1.89	1.33	1.33

Note on Democracy Scores:

“0” = Autocracy (Polity IV); Not Free (Freedom House)

“1” = Anocracy (Polity IV); Partly Free (Freedom House)

“2” = Democracy (Polity IV); Free (Freedom House)

discrepancy among the three variants of forced democratization regarding which countries have been targets of such interventions. Possibly the most interesting finding to emerge from an inspection of the countries in table 1 is that only the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, and the Philippines are considered to be targets of democratizing interventions by each of the three measures. Beyond this, the degree of overlap is rather moderate. There are ten shared cases between Variants 1 and 2, five shared cases between Variants 2 and 3, and seven shared cases between Variants 1 and 3. With such a small common set of shared cases, it becomes apparent that what constitutes a forced democratization attempt is highly contextual. Moreover, it follows that, if previous research on the question of forced democratization by and large has not focused on the same cases of intervention, it is very unlikely that much cumulative knowledge has emerged on this topic. This leads to an important question: Does each type of intervention have a similar outcome?

### ***Variant 1 Interventions***

First, I turn to the success rate of hostile American military interventions that are combined with a post-intervention push for democracy (recall the discussion of Peceny's 1999 article above). It is important to note that United States military interventions that do not feature a subsequent push for "free and fair" elections (i.e., that do not include technical assistance with elections, mediation among contending parties, or official participation of the United States as an election observer) are not considered to be attempts to democratize the target country. Only those cases where proliberalization policies were introduced after intervention qualify as democratization attempts.

Table 1 reveals that only fourteen cases since 1950 meet the criteria of what might be called FTBF (from Peceny's "Forcing Them to Be Free") interventions. Only two cases, Afghanistan and Iraq, have been added since 1989. Currently, eight of the fourteen targets of Variant 1 interventions meet the threshold for being called "democracies," according to the Polity measure. The success rate overall is thus over 50 percent.<sup>24</sup> If we are to consider Afghanistan and Iraq to be "works in progress" among current interventions by major liberal powers, then this rate of success might even climb, if those two cases turn out to be democracies over the long run.

However, the democratic outcome of Variant 1 intervention targets is not as promising when considering the Freedom House measure. Only five of the fourteen cases (the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Lebanon, and Panama) were fully democratic in 2009, when one applies this measure (admittedly, the global percentage of countries that Freedom House determines

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<sup>24</sup> When one considers, however, that Afghanistan and Iraq are not included in the analysis because they are currently experiencing civil war, it is possible to see that even this modest rate of success is somewhat misleading.

to be democratic is slightly lower than for Polity). Meanwhile, difficult cases (larger, more distant from powerful liberal countries, and without much of a democratic history of any type) such as Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are considered to be autocracies according to Freedom House. Disappointingly, one target of a Variant 1 intervention (the Philippines) has fallen from “free” to “partly free” status, and one (Jordan) has fallen from “partly free” to “not free.” Table 1 also reveals that the average target of a Variant 1 intervention has moved from being directly on the border between not free and partially democratic into the lower end of the partially democratic range, according to the Polity IV measure. Likewise, according to the Freedom House measure, the average Variant 1 target lies near the very bottom end of the partial democracy category.

### ***Variant 2 Interventions***

Hostile military interventions by democracies into autocracies have been even less successful in ensuring long-term democratization—even when accompanied by statements of democratizing intent. Of the eleven cases of Variant 2 interventions between 1950 and 1989, three were considered to be democratic by Polity IV at the end of that time period, a success rate of just over one-quarter. In the subsequent twenty years, an additional eight Variant 2 interventions took place (Cambodia, Chad, Grenada, Honduras, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda). Only the two Western Hemisphere cases, Grenada and Honduras, were considered to be successful democracies in 2009 (one pre-1989 Variant 2 intervention, Lebanon, also became democratic between 1989 and 2009). According to Polity IV, the overall success rate for Variant 2 interventions for 2009 is therefore now six of nineteen, or less than one-third.

When the Freedom House measure is used as a measuring stick for democratic success, the rate drops to just over 25 percent, as just four targets of Variant 2 interventions are deemed to be fully democratic in 2009: the Dominican Republic, Granada, Lebanon, and Panama.

However, there is a sign that Variant 1 interventions have resulted in several countries moving out of the nondemocratic category to become partial democracies—at least according to the Polity IV measure. Only five target countries (Cambodia, China,<sup>25</sup> Laos, Libya, and Vietnam) are considered to be nondemocracies by Polity. Thus, the average score of a Variant 2 target rose

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<sup>25</sup> The inclusion of China in the dataset is due to events involving the taking of small islands in the Taiwan Strait during encounters between China and the United States during the 1950s. The Pearson and Baumann IMI dataset codes China as a target of hostile action by the United States, despite the fact that at no time during the course of these events did American troops set foot on the Chinese mainland. Note that this dataset relates only to military actions; it does not include such factors as whether the military action by the intervening country was primarily defensive or a response to provocation by the target country.

from .56 in 1989 to 1.11 in 2009, resulting in the mean country falling slightly in the partially democratic category.

Things do not look as promising when one considers the average Freedom House score of Variant 2 interventions. While the average score has gone up slightly, the median target of a hostile intervention with an accompanying statement of democratic intent is still well in the nondemocratic category.

What are the implications for statements of intent? The results above suggest that affirmations of a desire for democracy prior to interventions have little to do with long-term democratization in targets of intervention. Whatever other purpose such pronouncements serve, they do not appear to be closely related to democratic outcomes, particularly with regard to political rights and civil liberties.

### ***Variant 3 Interventions***

Finally, I observe the cases of imposed polities as defined by Enterline and Greig (i.e., a military intervention followed by a regime change and a positive movement on the Polity democracy scale).<sup>26</sup> Since a short-term movement toward democracy occurs by definition in *all* cases of Variant 3 intervention in the subsequent year, one would expect that, due to inertia, the results over the long-term might also be relatively good in comparison with the other two variants.

The fact that seven of the nine cases of imposed democracy since 1950 are currently democracies, according to the Polity IV measure (the other two, Haiti and Somalia, are partial democracies according to Polity), appears to bear out this expectation.

However, when one turns to the Freedom House classification for 2009, only three of the nine cases (the Dominican Republic, Grenada, and Panama) are categorized as “free.” The majority of the other cases falls into the semi-democratic (“partly free”) category of the Freedom House measure, suggesting that something less than full democratization has occurred in most target countries of Variant 3 interventions. The fact that the Freedom House measure focuses more on individual freedoms and liberties than on institutional openness and political participation suggests that the apparent success of some countries in the Polity “democracy” category is rather shallow. Moreover, according to Freedom House, only a third of these imposed polities were considered “free” in 2009. This means that countries that are subject to Variant 3 interventions are no more likely to be democracies than other countries in the developing world. I base this argument on the fact that thirty-four of the 104 developing countries that have not been targets of imposed democracy (Variant 3 interventions) are “free,” according to Freedom House (almost a third of the total).

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<sup>26</sup> Enterline and Greig, “Against All Odds? The History of Imposed Democracy and the Future of Iraq and Afghanistan,” 321-347.

Table 2. Successful Cases, 2009 (By Variant)

Variant 1 (Intervention + Proliberalization Policies)

<i>Polity</i>	<i>Freedom House</i>
Dominican Rep.	Dominican Rep.
El Salvador	El Salvador
Grenada	Grenada
Honduras	Lebanon
Lebanon	Panama
Nicaragua	
Panama	
Philippines	

Variant 2 (Intervention + Democratizing Intent)

<i>Polity</i>	<i>Freedom House</i>
Dominican Rep.	Dominican Rep.
Grenada	Grenada
Honduras	Lebanon
Lebanon	Panama
Panama	
Philippines	

Variant 3 (Intervention + Regime Change)

<i>Polity</i>	<i>Freedom House</i>
Dominican Rep.	Dominican Rep.
Grenada	Grenada
Guatemala	Panama
Honduras	
Nicaragua	
Panama	
Philippines	

One might make a counter-argument that being partly free is better than not being free at all. In fact, only one of the nine imposed democracy targets, Somalia, is currently nondemocratic, according to Freedom House. This suggests that attempts to force democracy help to at least nudge countries part of the way toward full democratic status. An argument in favor of imposed democratic attempts, then, might be that a shallow or somewhat hollow form of democracy is better than being a full-fledged autocracy.

In summary, considering that Variant 3 cases are all countries in which democracy has nominally been established through intervention, the long-term

results do not suggest that long-term democratization is a likely outcome.

It is clear from observing the outcomes that, although it is possible to nudge some countries *toward* full democratic status via democratizing interventions, many of the “hard” cases remain autocratic. Moreover, while many countries achieve some level of democratic standing when one employs the Polity measure as a benchmark, fewer do so when one uses Freedom House categorizations, which are more focused on individual rights and liberties. This finding is consistent with the argument that, although some democratization is likely after an attempt to impose democratic institutions from the outside, consolidation seems to be no more likely.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Can hostile interventions by powerful liberal states transform autocracies into democracies? Particularly when one moves beyond Polity as a measure of long-term success, this research shows that there are relatively few cases of full democratization after such attempts—particularly when one uses a definition of democracy that focuses on individual rights, participation, and competitiveness. This finding reinforces the existing research regarding the long-term prospects for success of hostile democratizing interventions. However, one still must exercise caution with regard to the conclusions one can draw about the results. First, my study deals with a relatively small number of cases (twenty-one or fewer). It is hard to generalize about any phenomenon with such a small number of cases. Second, while the scoreboard seems to favor one side of the forced democratization debate over the other, we have yet to really isolate the factors that lead to successful interventions.

What is clear, however, is that smaller countries, and in particular Latin American and Caribbean countries (such as Honduras, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama) regularly seem to top the list. This suggests that we need to more closely assess the role of country characteristics in determining overall odds of successful democratization. A closer analysis of the prospects for intervention success in individual cases using hazard models, which build on the work of Enterline and Greig, is necessary.<sup>27</sup> Through such an analysis, it may be possible to refine our understanding of the conditions under which democracy is more likely to be realized through hostile intervention. For instance, the authors examine democratic history and ethnic diversity as two factors that influence whether imposed democratic polities are likely to survive.

Finally, cross-national findings always need more thorough backing from research on individual case studies before they can be verified. There may be some factors that emerge in these cases that will shed some light on the large-n

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

work.

In conclusion, it must be recognized that the type of intervention we observed in the postwar states (Germany, Italy, Japan, and Austria) is not likely to happen in the future. These cases of imposed democratization are held up as paradigmatic evidence that such interventions can be successful, and although they occurred seven decades ago, they still influence current foreign policy thought. While often used as paradigmatic examples of how forced democratization can be successful over the long run, these successful cases of Axis occupation and reform share many characteristics that are not likely to all be present at any one time in the future. First, they were seen as totalizing, reeducative efforts. The military occupier itself directly controlled the political transformation in the early stages after occupation. Second, the interventions were long—considered to be permanent until the transition was complete. Finally, the amount of aid in today’s dollars was staggering. For example, the annual amount of American aid to Austria alone in the four years for which it received Marshall Plan money was perhaps eight times (in constant dollars) as much as what the United States sent to Haiti in the four years after the 1994 American intervention. And this, despite the fact that Austria had a relatively high preexisting level of economic development and a smaller population than Haiti.<sup>28</sup>

As regards the post-World War II interventions, Von Hippel argues, “Success...was achieved by policies that focused on sweeping economic, political, and education reforms that affected the entire population for several decades.”<sup>29</sup> The author argues that current politicians would have no stomach for this type of mundane reconstruction work. It must be said, then, that there is almost no likelihood that intervening countries will be willing to place the same level of resources and effort into transforming illiberal regimes into liberal ones as was accomplished after World War II. In short, we are in a Brave New World in which it will be virtually impossible to reprogram illiberal polities in the way that Axis Powers were following the war.

If powerful democracies want to be in the business of replicating themselves

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<sup>28</sup> The United States spent around four billion dollars in today’s terms in Austria, 1949-1952, while it spent only about 400 million dollars in Haiti during the four years after the 1994 intervention. For information on Haiti, see Terry F. Buss with Adam Gardner, *Haiti in the Balance: Why Foreign Aid Has Failed and What We Can Do about It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2008), 7. For the estimate on Austrian postwar population, see *Tacitus Historical Atlas*, Austria page, updated August 2009, <http://www.tacitus.nu/historical-atlas/austria.htm> (accessed June 21, 2011). For figures on aid to Austria, see Martin Shain, “The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After,” [http://www.dieaktuellezahl.oenb.at/en/img/mop\\_2007\\_2\\_tcm16-59015.pdf#page=126](http://www.dieaktuellezahl.oenb.at/en/img/mop_2007_2_tcm16-59015.pdf#page=126) (accessed June 21, 2011). Also see, Joseph Haas, “60 Years of Marshall Plan Aid—A Critical Appraisal from an Austrian Perspective,” *Monetary Policy and the Economy* [A publication of the Oesterreiche Nationalbank, Vienna] (February 2007): 128 (also accessed June 21, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Karin Von Hippel, “Democracy by Force: A Renewed Commitment to Nation Building,” *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2000): 104.

by force, there will be few short cuts or easy routes to success. The countries on the table at the moment—Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia (not technically a country, but many of the lessons still hold)—all can best be described as works in progress. One cannot realistically expect that future targets of democratizing intervention will be easier cases, unless we have some strong theoretically grounded reasons for expecting this to be true.

While certain factors may affect the prospects for success, the reality is that there is a very strong consensus in the literature (as in the works of those who have researched the subject in recent years, such as Gleditsch et al., Pickering and Peceny, and Walker and Pearson) that interventions which attempt to force democracy are not likely to lead to long-term, full democratization with all of the accompanying features one would expect, such as strong rule of law and high respect for basic human rights.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while some factors may increase the likelihood of successful intervention, at this point, there is nothing resembling a formula for success. If anything, a review of the factors presented here should have the primary effect of illustrating the many pitfalls of forced democratization strategy.

Policies do not often die forever. Economic nationalism and protectionism have reared their ugly heads again as the current (though possibly subsiding) crisis indicates—just a reminder that states will always resort to old policies when they meet their needs. It is not likely that forced democratization will be permanently consigned to the scrap heap of discarded policy options. However, if leaders do consider such an option, they should be properly apprised of the intricate set of factors that affect the long-term democratizing prospects of military intervention.

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<sup>30</sup> Gleditsch, Christiansen, and Hegre, “Democratic Jihad? Military Intervention and Democracy”; Pickering and Peceny, “Forging Democracy at Gunpoint,” 545; and Walker and Pearson, “United States Intervention and Democratization: A Critique of the ‘Forcing Them to Be Free’ Argument,” 37-53.