CDDRL
WORKING PAPERS

Number 58
May 2006

The Missing Variable: The "International System" as the Link between Third and Fourth Wave Models of Democratization

Michael McFaul

Center on Democracy, Development, and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

This working paper was produced as part of CDDRL's ongoing programming on economic and political development in transitional states. Additional working papers appear on CDDRL's website: http://cddrl.stanford.edu.

Center on Democracy, Development,
and The Rule of Law
Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies
Stanford University
Encina Hall
Stanford, CA 94305
Phone: 650-724-7197
Fax: 650-724-2996
http://cddrl.stanford.edu/

About the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL)

CDDRL was founded by a generous grant from the Bill and Flora Hewlett Foundation in October in 2002 as part of the Stanford Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. The Center supports analytic studies, policy relevant research, training and outreach activities to assist developing countries in the design and implementation of policies to foster growth, democracy, and the rule of law.

About the Author

Michael McFaul is the Director of the Center for Democracy, Development, and Rule of Law at Stanford University. He is also a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Stanford University, and a non-resident Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

draft/concept paper

The Missing Variable:

The "International System" as the Link between Third and Fourth Wave Models of Democratization

Michael McFaul

Presented at the conference
Waves and Troughs of Post Communist Transitions:
What Role for Domestic vs. External Variables?
Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University
28 and 29 April 2006

The "first" transitions from communist rule in Europe and Eurasia at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s did not resemble many of the transitions from authoritarian rule in the previous two decades.[1] Why? Some have suggested that countries in the communist world shared distinguishing historical legacies or particular institutional

[1] Here, I highlight the word, first, because some countries, such Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia have undergone more than one "transition" or "democratic breakthrough." Likewise, one could argue that other countries in the region such as Belarus and Russia, have undergone two "transitions," in the last twenty years, one that produced a more democratic regime, and another that produced a more autocratic regime.

configurations that made them different from the countries in Latin American and Southern Europe, which in turn had path-dependent consequences for the kind of transition they experienced.[2] These differences are most certainly a major part of the explanation. In addition, however, this paper argues that the configuration of the international system also played a causal role. The bipolar system of the Cold War constrained the kinds of transitions possible, both in the "East" and in the "West". By 1989, this international system no longer existed, but instead was in transition to a new global order anchored by one hegemon, the United States. This new system allowed for a wider range of transitions than the previous era. The "international system" is the missing independent variable that helps to unify theories about the "third wave" and the "fourth wave" and move us close towards a general theory of democratization.

To demonstrate the causal influences of the international system in regime transitions, the essay proceed as follows. Section one outlines the basic elements of the "third wave" literature and then contrasts this paradigm with the basic elements of the "fourth wave" model. Section two outlines how the Cold War bipolar international system defined one set of permissive conditions for regime change around the world. Section three outlines how the post-Cold War unipolar international system defined a different set of permissible conditions. Section four concludes. (Dear conference participants: For those pressed for time, please skip to page 21.)

[2] See Valerie Bunce, "Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations," *Comparative Political Studies*, Volume 33, No.6-7 (August-September 2000), pp. 703-734. See also Grzegorz Ekiert. *The State Against Society. Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996)

I. Comparing the "Third Wave" and the "Fourth Wave"

The "Third Wave"

There is no single theory of democratization. There also is no unified theory about "third wave" democratization, defined here as the wave of transitions from autocracy in the capitalist world beginning with Portugal in 1974. Most of the major theorists examining these transitions at the time explicitly rejected the idea that there could be a unified theory. Moreover, because these transitions were either just starting or still in motion at the time that this literature was being produced, analysts tended to emphasize contingency and uncertainty, concepts that are antithetical to the development of general theory or prediction.

And yet, there was a paradigm or analytical model that did emerge from this literature. First and foremost, the third wave literature rejected structural causes of democratization and instead focused on actors. They contended that individuals make history, not innate structural forces. Socio-economic, cultural, and historical structures shaped and constrained the menu of choices available to individuals, but ultimately these innate forces have causal significance only if translated into human action.[3] Cultural and modernization theories may provide important generalizations over time – in the long run

[3] Peter Ordeshook, "The emerging discipline of political economy," in James Alt and Kenneth Shepsle, eds., *Perspectives on Positive Political Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 13; Timur Kuran, "Surprise in the East European Revolutions," in Nancy Bermeo, ed., *Liberalization and Democratization: Change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University press, 1991) p. 22.

Lipset is always right[4] -- but they are inappropriate approaches for explaining variation in a short period of time.[5] Therefore, just as there are no uniform causes of democratization, there are no necessary preconditions for or determinants of democracy.[6]

Second, the principle theoretical contribution from the democratization literature on the third wave concerns the causal relationship assigned to the mode of transition in determining successful and unsuccessful transitions to democracy. The theory is based on temporal path dependence. Choices made at certain critical junctures influence the course of regime formation. The model identifies four choice-making actors in the transition drama: soft-liners and hard-liners within the ruling elite of the *ancien regime* emerge as do moderates and radicals among the challengers to the *ancien regime*. The cause of this split within the *ancien regime* varies from case to case, but the appearance of such a split really starts the process of regime change, even when the process of democratization is halted before a new polity emerges.

In some cases, moderates from the old order dominate the transition process and dictate the new rules of the game for a democratic polity. This mode of imposed transition occurred in Europe and Asia in earlier periods but was not prevalent in the third wave. During the third wave, a democratic outcome was most likely when soft-liners and

---

[4] Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy, *American Political Science Review*, 53 (March 1959): 69–105, 75.

[5] Even if only "temporary", the interregnums that interrupt the evolutionary march of economic and political modernization can be quite consequential for world history. On the fascist interlude in Germany, see Sheri Berman, "Modernization in Historical Perspective: The Case of Imperial Germany," *World Politics* Volume 53, Issue 3, April 2001. . Economic growth and then democracy also are not inevitable; countries on the path can diverge and take decades or centuries to get back on as the trajectories in North American versus South American over the last hundred years suggest. See Douglass C. North, William Summerhill, and Barry R. Weingast, "Order, Disorder, and Economic Change: Latin America vs. North America," in Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Hilton Root, eds., *Governing for Prosperity.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

[6] Terry Lynn Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, Volume 23, no. 1, (October 1990),p. 2.

moderates choose to negotiate, that is enter into pacts that navigate the transition from dictatorship to democracy.[7] Conversely, if the transition is not pacted, then the transition is more likely to fail. As defined by O'Donnell and Schmitter, pacts are interim arrangements between a "select set of actors" that seek to "(1) limit the agenda of policy choice, (2) share proportionately in the distribution of benefits, and (3) restrict the participation of outsiders in decision-making."[8] All three components are critical for success.

Agreements that limit the agenda reduce uncertainty about actors' ultimate intentions. A pact "lessens the fears of moderates that they will be overwhelmed by a triumphant, radical, majority which will implement drastic changes."[9] If property rights, the territorial integrity of the state, or international alliances are threatened by a revolutionary force from below, then the leaders of the *ancien regime* will roll back democratic gains.[10] During the wave of transitions to democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, the simultaneous negotiation of political and economic institutions rarely occurred. As O'Donnell and Schmitter concluded "...all previously known transitions to political democracy have observed one fundamental restriction: it is forbidden to take, or even to checkmate, the king of one of the players. In

---

[7] Terry Lynn Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 22 (1987), pp. 63-94; Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America,"; and O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*, chapter four. A pact is not a necessary condition for a successful democratic transition, but most certainly enhances the probability of success. See Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, "Democratization around the Globe: Opportunities and Risks," in Michael Klare and Daniel Thomas, *World Security*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994) pp. 43-62.

[8] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*, p. 41.

[9] Daniel Friedman, "Bringing Society Back into Democratic Transition Theory after 1989: Pact Making and Regime Collapse," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Fall 1993) p. 484.

[10] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions* p. 27.

other words, during the transition, the property rights of the bourgeoisie are inviolable."[11] More generally, negotiations over contested issues in which the stakes are indivisible or the outcomes irreversible, are more likely to generate irreconcilable preferences among actors than issues with divisible stakes and reversible outcomes.[12] Consequently, keeping such issues off the table was considered an important component of successful transitions. Limits on the agenda in question usually took place through the negotiation of pacts.

Second, sharing in the benefits of change provides both sides with positive-sum outcomes. Tradeoffs -- even those, which may even include institutionalizing non-democratic practices -- are critical to making pacts work.[13] As Daniel Friedman writes, "Negotiated transitions increase democratic stability by encouraging important interests to compromise on such basic issues as to whether new democratic institutions should be parliamentary or presidential, when to schedule the first free elections, and whether to grant clemency to human rights abusers or attempt to 'even the score.' With compromises on such fundamental issues, powerful interest groups can have less incentive to cooperate with the new democratic regime."[14]

Finally, these theorists have placed special emphasis on limiting the role of radicals in the negotiation process. Pacted transitions are elite affairs; mobilized masses are

---

[11] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions,* p. 69. See also Adam Przeworski, "Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy," in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives,* Vol. 3 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 63.

[12] Elizabeth Jean Wood, *Forging Democracy from Below* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp 78-110; and Bunce, "Comparative Democratization."

[13] Karl has called these "birth defects." See , Karl,

[14] Daniel Friedman, "Bringing Society Back into Democratic Transition Theory after 1989: Pact Making and Regime Collapse," *European Politics and Societies* 7 (Fall 1993), p. 483.

considered dangerous.[15] The Jacobins must be sidelined to have success.[16] If the masses are part of the equation, then revolution, not democracy, results.[17] As Karl posits, "no stable political democracy has resulted from regime transitions in which mass actors have gained control even momentarily over traditional ruling classes."[18] Huntington agrees:

> Democratic regimes that last seldom if ever have been instituted by popular action. Almost always, democracy has come as much from the top down as from the bottom up; it is as likely to be the product of oligarchy as of protest against oligarchy. The passionate dissidents from authoritarian rule and the crusaders for democratic principles, the Tom Paines of this world, do not create democratic institutions; that requires James Madison. Those institutions come into existence through negotiations and compromises among political elites calculating their own interests and desires.[19]

In transitions from authoritarian rule in capitalist countries, trade unions, the left, and radicals more generally, must not play a major role in the transition process, and only a

---

[15] For an excellent and skeptical review of this argument, see Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during the Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (April 1997) pp. 305-322.

[16] Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[17] Important exceptions are Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation"; Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy;* and Ruth Collier, *Paths towards Democracy: The Working Class and Elites in Western Europe and Southern America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

[18] Terry Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23 (October 1990) p. 8.

[19] Samuel Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 99, No. 2 (Summer 1984) p. 6.

limited role in the new political system that eventually emerges. [20] As O'Donnell and Schmitter warn, "Put in a nutshell, parties of the Right-Center and Right must be 'helped' to do well, and parties of the Left-Center and Left should not win by an overwhelming majority."[21] Elites can guarantee such outcomes through the manipulation of electoral laws or other institutional tools.

But what causes pacts between moderate elites to materialize in the first place? Though often not explicitly stated, analysts of the third wave answer this question by examining the balance of power between the challenged and challengers. When the distribution of power is relatively equal, negotiated transitions are most likely. In summing up the results of their multi-volume study, O'Donnell and Schmitter asserted, "… political democracy is produced by stalemate and dissensus rather than by prior unity and consensus."[22] Roeder has made the same claim in his analysis of post-communist transitions; "The more heterogeneous in objectives and the more evenly balanced in relative leverage are the participants in the bargaining process of constitutional design, the more likely is the outcome to be a democratic constitution."[23] When both sides realize that they cannot prevail unilaterally, they agree to seek win-win solutions for both

---

[20] Myron Weiner, "Empirical Democratic Theory," in Myron Weiner and Ergun Ozbudin, eds., *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) p. 26. See also Przeworski, Some Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy"; and J. Samuel Valenzuela, "Labor Movements in Transitions to Democracy," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 21 (July 1989). Even a study devoted the role of the workers in democratization underscores the dangers of too mobilized society. See Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyne Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democratic Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 271.

[21] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule,* p. 62.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[23]Phillip Roeder, "Transitions from Communism: State-Centered Approaches," in Harry Eckstein, Frederic Fleron, Erik Hoffman, and William Reisinger, eds., *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia?* (Lantham, Md.: Roman and Littlefield, 1998), 209.

sides. Democratization requires a stalemate—"a prolonged and inconclusive struggle."[24]

Przeworski has extended this argument to posit that *uncertain* balances of power are most likely to lead to the most democratic arrangements; "If everyone is behind the Rawlsian veil, that is, if they know little about their political strength under the eventual democratic institutions, all opt for a maximizing solution: institutions that introduce checks and balances and maximize the political influence of minorities, or, equivalently, make policy highly insensitive to fluctuations in public opinion."[25] In other words, uncertainty enhances the probability of compromise, and relatively equal distributions of power create uncertainty.

This approach emphasizes the process itself, rather than the individual actors, as the primary casual variable producing successful transitions.[26] When the process is more important than the individuals or their ideas, it becomes possible to produce "democracy without democrats." As Roeder argues, "democracy emerges not because it is the object of the politicians' collective ambition but because it is a practical compromise among politicians blocked from achieving their particular objectives."[27] The dynamics of the strategic situation, not the actual actors or their preferences, produce or fail to produce democracy. As Dan Levine excellently summed up, "democracies emerge out of mutual

---

[24] Dankwart Rustow, "Transition to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2 (1970), p. 352. For an application to the Russian case in which he discusses "the (possible) virtues of deadlock," see Steven Fish, "Russia's Crisis and the Crisis of Russology," in Holloway and Naimark, eds., *Reexamining the Soviet Experience* (Westview Press, 1996), especially pp. 158-161. Waltz's celebration of bipolarity as a guarantor of peace is the rough equivalent in the sub-field of international relations. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1979)

[25] Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 87.

[26] Roeder, "Transitions from Communism," (fn23) p. 207.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

fear among opponents rather than as the deliberate outcome of concerted commitments to make democratic political arrangements work."[28] Moderate, evolutionary processes are considered good for democratic emergence; radical revolutionary processes are considered bad. Cooperative bargains produce democratic institutions; non-cooperative processes do not.[29] Similarly, Przeworski concludes, "Democracy cannot be dictated; it emerges from bargaining."[30]

Such processes work best when they are protracted, slow, and deliberate. Drawing on earlier experiences of democratization, Eckstein has asserted that post-communist "democratization should proceed gradually, incrementally, and by the use of syncretic devices. …. Social transformations is only likely to be accomplished, and to be accomplished without destructive disorders, if it spaced out over a good deal of time, if it is approached incrementally (i.e. sequentially), and if it builds syncretically upon the existing order rather than trying to eradicate it."[31] Advocates of this theoretical approach assert that "conservative transitions are more durable" than radical transformations.[32]

This set of arguments has a close affinity with positivist accounts of institutionalism that have emerged from the cooperative game theory. The crafting of new democratic institutions is framed as a positive sum game, in which both sides in the negotiation may not obtain their most preferred outcome, but settle for second-best

---

[28] Daniel Levine, "Paradigm Lost: Dependence to Democracy," *World Politics*, Vol. 40 (April 1988) p. 379.

[29] See Hardin's review and then rejection of this approach in Russell Hardin, *Liberalism, Constitutionalism, and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[30] Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, (fn 25) p. 90.

[31] Harry Ekstein, "Lessons for the 'Third Wave,'" in Eckstein, Fleron, Hoffman, and Reisinger, *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia?* p. 264.

[32] Levine, "Paradigm Lost," (fn 28) p. 392.

outcomes that nonetheless represent an improvement over the status quo.[33] Uncertainty during the crafting of rules plays a positive role in producing efficient and/or liberal institutions.[34] These approaches to institutional emergence also emphasize the importance of shared distributions that result from the new institutional arrangements. Above all else, the transition to democracy is a bargain from which everyone gains. In the metaphorical frame of a prisoner's dilemma, it is settling for the payoffs of cooperation, rather than gambling to obtain the higher gains from confrontation.

The "Fourth Wave"

Actor-centric, cooperative approaches to democratization offer a useful starting point for explaining post-communist regimes transformations. This framework rightly focuses attention on actors, rather than structures, and offers an explanation for both democracy and dictatorship.[35] Many of the actors in the region even claimed that they were attempting to navigate a transition from communism to democracy; the transitions to democracy literature, therefore, offered appropriate metaphors and analogies to compare these post-communist transitions.

---

[33] di Palma, *To Craft Democracies* (fn 16)*;* Rustow, Transitions to Democracy (fn 24) , p. 357.

[34] Writers from the positivist tradition to institutional analysis make a similar argument regarding the positive relationship between ex-ante uncertainty and the emergence of efficient institutions. See Geoffrey Brennan and James Buchanan, *The Reason of Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 30; and George Tsebelis, *Nested Games: Rational Choice in Comparative Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 118.

[35] This said, most work in this tradition has focused on successful democratic transitions, and not on failed cases. Edited volumes on democratization rarely incorporate cases like Angola, Saudi Arabia, or Uzbekistan.

In applying the third wave hypotheses to the post-communist world, some stand the test of time and new cases. Rustow's observations about preconditions seem relevant to the post-communist transitions. Though consensus about borders was not necessary to begin political liberalization processes in the communist world and some transitions have continued along a democratic trajectory without firmly resolving borders issues, the resolution of major sovereignty contests was a precondition for new regime emergence for most of the region. Most importantly, three multi-ethnic states had to collapse before democratic or autocratic regimes could consolidate. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven states in the post-communist world did not exist before communism's collapse. Rather than an extension of the third wave of democratization first started in Portugal, this explosion of new states is more analogous to the wave of decolonization and regime emergence after World War II throughout the British, French, and Portuguese empires. And like this earlier wave of state emergence, the delineation of borders may have been a necessary condition but most certainly not a sufficient condition for democratization. Most of the new post-colonial states that formed after World War II claimed to be making a transition to democracy, but only a few succeeded in consolidating democratic systems. Dispute about the borders of the states Africa and Asia was a major impediment to democratic consolidation. Similarly, in the post-communist world, democratic emergence has been the exception, not the rule, and border disputes figures prominently in several (though not all) stalled transitions.

After Rustow's observation, further application of the transitions metaphor begins to distort rather than illuminate.[36] The central cause of political liberalization in the post-

[36] Bunce, "Comparative Democratization: Lessons from Russia and the Postcommunist World," in McFaul and Stoner Weiss, eds., *After the Collapse of Communism: Comparative Lessons of Transition* (Cambridge:

communist world was not elite division. In most cases, as discussed in greater detail below, it was the initiative of reforms by an outside agent—Mikhail Gorbachev. Even within the Soviet Union, Gorbachev as leader did not emerge as the result of elite divisions. On the contrary, he was the consensus candidate to assume dictatorial power as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985. For the first two years after becoming General Secretary, he consolidated political power to a greater extent than any Soviet leader since Stalin. It was his reforms that later spawned elite divisions as a response.[37] Explaining the original causes of liberalization, however, has never been a robust part of any transition theory and therefore does not deserve extensive scrutiny here.[38]

Explaining outcomes of transitions (rather than the causes of transitional moments themselves) has been the central project of transitology and positivist institutionalism. Upon closer examination, however, these analytical frames seem inappropriate for explaining post-communist regime change. Most importantly, the preponderance of dictatorships in the post-communist world and the lack of democracies raise real questions about why post-communist transitions should be subsumed within the third wave at all. In the long run, all countries may be in transition to democracy.[39] In the

---

Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 207-231

[37] McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[38] One could make the same claim about theories of revolution, especially those that introduce actors into the equation. So for instance, Timur Kuran's, "Now Out of Never," *World Politics*, **44** (1), Oct. 1991, pp. 7-48], which offers a compelling account of a revolutionary process without ever explicating how the process got underway in the first place. Likewise, Tilly has distinguished between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes as two independent outcomes that may have different causal variables producing them. Such distinctions allow research programs that focus on the latter while treating the former as a constant or an exogenous shock.

[39] Fukuyama, *The End of History* (New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1992).

short-run, however, the differences between the third wave and the post-communist fourth wave should be recognized and explained. Besides a somewhat loose temporal relationship, Portugal's coup in 1974 and Soviet collapse in 1991 have little in common.[40] By framing the question in terms of the democratization, the study of these regime changes in the post-communist world becomes a search for negative variables -- what factors *prevented* democracy from emerging -- which may not generate an effective research agenda for understanding these regime changes.[41]

Yet, even if one accepts that the post-communist transitions is somehow a subset of the more general phenomena of democratization – that is both successful and failed cases of democratization – the dynamics of transition in the fourth wave have many characteristics that are different, if not diametrically opposed to, the third wave transitions. Most importantly, regime change in the post-communist world only rarely resulted from negotiations between old elites and societal challengers. Instead, confrontation was much more prevalent. The rules of the game of the new regime were dictated by the most powerful – be they old elites or anti-regime social movements. In other words, pacts or the conditions that make them appear to be unimportant in determining the success or failure of democratic emergence in the post-communist world.

In the third wave literature, pacts were supposed the limit the scope of change, and in particular to prevent a renegotiation of the economic institutions governing

---

[40] On the comparison, see Valerie Bunce, "Regional Differences in Democratization: The East Versus the South," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1998) pp. 187-211; Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1995) pp. 111-127; Philippe Schmitter with Terry Karl, "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far East Should They Go?" *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring 1994) pp. 173-185.

[41] For most elites in the region, "state-building" -- not regime making, be it democracy or dictatorship -- is the central enterprise underway.

property rights. In looking at the post-communist transitions, therefore, third-wave analysts presupposed that economic and political reform could not be undertaken simultaneously.[42] The danger of multiple agendas of change frequently trumpeted in the earlier literature on democratization, has not seen a clear empirical confirmation in the post-communist world. Because communism bundled the political and the economic, and the challenge to communism occurred so rapidly, sequencing proved impossible and simultaneity had to occur. Generally, the reorganization of economic institutions did not undermine democratic transitions.[43] On the contrary, those countries that moved the fastest regarding economic transformation also have achieved the greatest success in consolidating democratic institutions.[44] Countries that did attempt to keep economic issues off the agenda or at least slowed the process of transformation, such as Belarus or Uzbekistan, have achieved the least amount of progress regarding democratic consolidation.[45]

Moreover, the most important condition for a successful pact -- a stalemated

---

[42] Przeworski, 1991.

[43] For a study confirming the dangers of simultaneity for democratic emergence, see McFaul, *Russia's Troubled Transition from Communism to Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ????.

[44] Joel S. Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions," *World Politics,* vol. 50 (January 1998), pp. 203--34; Valerie Bunce, "The Political Economy of Postsocialism," *Slavic Review,* vol. 58 (Winter 1999), pp. 756--93; Anders Åslund, *Building Capitalism: The Transformation of the Former Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), chapter 9. If the correlation between democracy and economic reform is positive, one cannot argue that economic reform *caused* democracy. Economic reform cannot be used as a predictor of successful democratic reform since both processes began simultaneously. In many of the countries that have experienced successful economic reform, the initial consequence of the reform package was economic downturn, not growth. Surveys suggest that these downturns did not make people more positive about democracy. Tracing the causal relationship between successful privatization and democracy has not been done, either deductively or empirically. Rather, what appears to occur in these "successful" countries is the reinforcement of democracy by successful economic growth. The original cause of a successful transition to democracy must come from somewhere else.

[45] Przeworski's *Democracy and the Market* predicted the exact opposite.

balance of power -- also does not figure prominently as a causal variable for producing post-communist democracies. In countries where pacts were important to starting a transition process such as Poland and Hungary, they did not result from protracted stalemates between relatively equal powers, unraveled quickly once the transitions gained steam, and did not lock into place permanent compromises. In the fourth wave, the mode of transition that most frequently produced democracy was an imbalance of power in favor of the democratic challengers to the *ancien regime*.

The kinds of actors involved in making democracy in the fourth wave were also different than those postulated in the third wave. In some cases, similar players in the *ancien regime* – soft-liners and hard-liners – could be identified in these successful communist transitions to democracy, though the divide played a much less significant role. Instead, the degree of cooperation and mobilization within society was more salient. In some cases, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Georgia, and even to a lesser extent, Russia and Ukraine, mass movements played a much more prominent role in bringing about regime change. The mass actors so damaging to democratization in third wave analyses were instrumental to fourth wave successes. Revolutionary movements from below –not elites from above – toppled communist regimes and created new democratic institutions. The role of unit versus division among these actors also looked rather different when the two waves are compared. Consensus among these *ancien regime* challengers, not dissensus, aided the cause of democratic transition.[46]

[46] At first cut, the argument of this essay may sound similar to Burton and Higley who argue compellingly that elite consensus produces successful democratic transitions. As conceptualized in this article, however, this consensus need not emerge only among elites to be important. Communist elites, after all, did not agree on democracy until they were forced to do so. Michael Burton, Richard Gunther, and John Higley and Michael Burton, "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 54 (February 1989) pp. 17-32.

Finally, because this different kind of actor – a societal actor with power – was involved in the process, they often employed confrontational and uncooperative tactics to achieve democratic goals. This is a dynamic not highlighted in the third wave literature. When events such as elections or street demonstrations proved that the balance of power was in their favor, societal actors imposed their will on anti-democratic elites.[47] Bargaining was not conducive but not essential to democratic emergence. Alternatively, one can think of these transitions as situations in which the old communists "acquiesced" to the new democratic rules of the game. They acquiesced in large part because they had no real choice, no power to resist.[48] These were revolutionary transformations of the political system, not moderate evolutions from one system to the next.

The discussion here of the fourth wave so far has addressed only successful cases of democratic transition. The cases of unsuccessful transition – that is the transition from communist autocracy to capitalist autocracy – also were unpacted, confrontational processes, but with a different set of actors holding all the power and therefore dictating the rules. As is the case with the first path, the stronger side dictates the rules of the game to the weaker side. Only in this situation, the stronger embrace autocratic ideas and preserve or reconstitute authoritarian institutions. As with the first path, and in stark contrast to situations in which the distribution of power was relatively equal, these

[47] Of course, establishing an independent measure of the balance of power is critical to avoiding a tautological argument. Following Bunce and Fish, I use the results of first post-communist elections as an important measure, but then supplement this data point with elections just prior to collapse and definitive examples of popular mobilization. In particular, the March 1990 elections to the supreme soviets of the fifteen republics in the Soviet Union will be used to provide a balance-of-power measure (with variation) from these cases at the same time in history.

[48] On why acquiescence is more important for constitutions, while agreement is more important for contracts, see Russell Hardin, "Why a Constitution?" in Bernard Grofman and Donald Wittman, eds., *The Federalist Papers and the New Institutionalism*, (New York: Agathon Press, 1989), pp. 100-120.

imposed transitions from above reach a new equilibrium point rather quickly. In most cases, these regimes are just as consolidated as the liberal democracies

In a third situation, when the distribution of power is more equally divided, the range of outcomes is wide: pacted transitions leading to partial democracy, or protracted and oftentimes violent confrontations leading to either partial democracy or partial dictatorship. The logic of the pacted transition that resulted from a relatively equal distribution of power between the old and the new – that is, the third wave model – can be identified in at least one post-communist transition: Moldova. But other countries, such as Russian and Tajikistan, with similar power distributions did not produce pacts or liberal democracies. Instead, in both of these countries and several others, both sides fought to impose their will until one side won. The result of this 'mode of transition' was partial, unconsolidated democracy at best; civil war at worst. Significantly, no stalemated transition in the post-communist world produced liberal democracy in the first years after the collapse of communist.

That conflict can result from equal distributions of power should not be surprising. Analysts of the third wave focused only on successful cases of democracy that emerged from stalemate. If all countries undergoing stalemated transitions are brought into the analysis, then the causal influence of the mode of transition become less clear. Angola, for instance, experienced a stalemated transition between competing powers after decolonization, but a pacted transition to democracy did not result. Rather the country was suspended in stalemate for decades.

Why, in the fourth wave (and elsewhere), have relatively equal distributions of power between democrats and autocrats not always compelled both sides to negotiate a

pacted transition? The reason is that equal distributions can tempt both sides into believing that they can prevail over their opponents. Equal power distribution fuels uncertainty about the distribution, whereas, asymmetric distributions are much easier to identify. If both sides perceive that they have a chance of prevailing through the use of force, they might be tempted to fight.

The logic of this dynamic becomes clearer if an ideal case is constructed. In a world of complete information, perfect knowledge about the distribution of power could predict all outcomes. If the losers of a battle (be it in the boardroom or the battlefield) knew that they were going to lose beforehand, then they would not incur the costs of the fight.[49] Complete information about power would produce efficient solutions to conflicts. In the real world, however, information about power is always incomplete. The greater the uncertainty about the distribution of power, the more difficult it is for actors to make strategic calculations. In such situations, actors may to opt to 'hedge their bets' about the uncertain future by agreeing to new rules that constrain all. However, uncertainty about the future may also tempt actors to 'go for it all' because they think they have some chance of winning. Ambiguous calculations about power constitute a major cause of conflict. As Geoffrey Blaney concluded in his analysis of the precipitants of armed conflict, "War usually begins when two nations disagree on their relative strength and wars usually cease when the fighting nationals agree on their relative strength."[50] The same could be said about confrontation and reconciliation between competing forces within a domestic polity, especially during periods

[49] For elaboration on this point, see James Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War, *International Organization*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995) pp. 379-414. Geoffrey Blaney makes a related observation in *The Causes of War*, (New York: The Free Press, 1973) p. 26.

[50] Blaney, *The Causes of War*, p. 246. See also R. Harrison Wagner "Peace, War, and the Balance of Power," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994) pp. 596-597.

of revolutionary change when domestic anarchy begins to approximate the anarchy in the international system posited by international relations theories.

What is especially striking about this type of trajectory is the protracted nature of the transition. In many countries that experienced this 'mode of transition,' the outcome of regime change is still uncertain. Nor can the final outcome be predicted for countries exhibiting such a configuration of political forces.

In all three modes of transition in the fourth wave, the phenomenon to varying degrees resembles non-cooperative strategic situations that produce distributional institutions. The process is the opposite of the "democracy-without-democrats." Non-negotiated transitions are more prone to produce institutions, which skew the distributional benefits in favor of those dictating the rules. The logic is simple: If actors agree to a set of rules during a pact-making period, they share the distribution of benefits of the pact in a manner acceptable to all signatories. Actors agree to commit to a pact because they believe they will be better off in agreeing to the pact than in not agreeing.[51]

The logic of these arguments about the fourth wave bears a strong resemblance to realist accounts of institutional design.[52] The crafting of new institutions – democratic or otherwise – is framed as a zero-sum game, in which one side in the contest obtains its most preferred outcome, and the other side must settle for second- and third-best outcomes. In transitions to democracies, the losers usually obtain second-best outcomes;

[51] Aside from this general proposition, we still have very poorly developed ideas about what factors make pacts credible commitments. On this point, see Barry Weingast, "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (June 1997) pp. 245-263.

[52] Jack Knight, *Institutions and Social Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Tsebelis, *Nested Games*; and Stephen Krasner, "Global Communications and National Power: Life on the Pareto Frontier," *World Politics*, Vol. 43 (1991) pp. 336-366; Lloyd Gruber, *Ruling the World: Power Politics and the Rise of Supranational Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

that is, they too make relative gains over the status quo ante. In transitions to dictatorship, the losers' gains are much less substantial [WHAT'S A THIRD-BEST OUTCOME?]. This approach to institutional emergence emphasizes the importance of skewed distributions that result from the new institutional arrangements. Above all else, the transition is not a bargain, but a confrontation with winners and losers. This is the most common procedure by which institutions, especially political institutions, emerge.[53] Though the social contract metaphor is often employed to describe constitutional emergence and stability, these kinds of institutional arrangements that maximize everyone's utility are rare in the political world.

The Missing Variable Uniting Third and Fourth Wave Theories: The International System

The sketches above of the third wave model and the fourth wave model are oversimplified and unduly dichotomous. For instance, without question, some third wave transitions included mass movements and economic reform agendas, while some fourth wave transitions included element of pacting. At the same time, the differences between the two theories describing/explaining the two sets of cases are more striking than their similarities. Robust general theories, however, should not be limited by geography or time.[54] The quest for a general theory of democratization must seek to identify new or hidden variables that, if introduced into the analysis, would help to explain both third and

[53] Political institutions are particularly prone to inefficiency and distributive functions. In recognizing this fundamental distinction between economic and political institutions, Terry Moe has questioned the theoretical utility of comparing the two. See Moe, "The Politics of Structural Choice: Toward a Theory of Public Bureaucracy," in Oliver Williamson, *Organization Theory: From Chester Barnard to the Present and Beyond*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 116-153.

[54] Is this true? I hope we can debate this a bit at our meeting.

fourth wave transitions (or the lack thereof). One such variable is the international system. This variable changed from a bipolar, ideologically divided system in the third wave, to a unipolar, ideologically united system during the fourth wave. This change had profound causal consequences for the mode of transitions permissible in the third versus fourth waves that have been under appreciated by scholars of democratization.

In his seminal article published nearly thirty years ago cleverly called, "Second Image Reversed," Peter Gourevitch outlined a set of arguments for why and how to study the international causes of domestic outcomes. This framework had a profound effect on several literatures, but only a minor ripple in the study of regime change.[55] The third wave transitologists gave only passing attention to the international dimensions of democratization. Laurence Whitehead did write an important chapter in the four-volume study on transitions from autocratic rule edited by O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead. Yet, in one of the introductory essays in this study, Schmitter wrote that one "of the firmest conclusions that emerged…was that transitions from authoritarian rule and immediate prospects for political democracy were largely to be explained in terms of national forces and calculations. External actors tended to play an indirect and usually marginal role…"[56]

Scholars writing about democratization after the end of the Cold War have devoted more attention to international factors. Yet, those that do focus on international dimensions of democratization focus predominantly on democratic consolidation, not democratic

---

[55] See John Owen, "The Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions," International Organization 56, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 375-410 ; Jon C. Pevehouse, "Democracy from the Outside In? International Organizations and Democratization." *International Organization*. Summer 2002, and Luarence Whitehead, ``International Aspects of Democratization," in eds. Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 3-46.

[56] Schmitter, "An Introduction to Southern European Transitions," in O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Southern Europe*, *Ibid,* p. 5.

transition. And in these analyses, it is not the structure of the international system as a whole that is the focus of inquiry, but rather international institutions that offer incentives for states to deepen democracy.[57] There is also a growing literature on the role of individual states and NGOs in promoting democracy, but again the focus in predominantly on democratic consolidation (or the lack thereof), and not transition or regime change.[58] Still, as one study recently concluded, "The international dimension of democracy promotion nonetheless remains at best understudied and poorly understood…"[59] Moreover, this literature also has remained largely descriptive with few testable hypotheses or aggregating theoretical statements. And even with the development of this new and growing literature on international sources of democracy, its impact on "transitologists" or comparativists studying democratization or regime change has been rather minimal. The massive new literature on post-communist transitions has devoted only a fraction of attention to international factors.[60] To date (to the best of my knowledge!), no one has tried to systematically compare the international effects on democratization in the third wave to the international effects on democratization in the third wave.

---

[57] Peceny, Vacudova, Senem Aydin and Fuat Keyman: *European Integration and the Transformation of Turkish Democracy* EU-Turkey Working Papers No. 2 (August 2004); Richard Youngs, The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy (2001); Paul Kubicek (ed.), The European Union and Democratization (2003); Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier (eds.), The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe (2005); Michael Emerson (ed.), Democratization in the European Neighbourhood (2005); Geoffrey Pridham, Designing Democracy (2005).

[58] Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); and Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives*, (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995); Peter Burnell, "Democracy Assistance: The State of the Art." in Peter Burnell, ed. *Democracy Assistance: International Cooperation for Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

[59] Peter Schraeder, The State of the Art in International Democracy Promotion: Results of a Joint European-North American Research Network, 10/2 Democratization (Summer 2003), 21-44 at 22.

[60] McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (January 2002) pp. 212-244.; Fish, Bunce, Elster,

II. The Bipolar International System and the Third Wave

Bipolarity defined the international system that structured politics between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War. But the two superpowers that anchored this system—the United States and the Soviet Union—were not only the countries with the greatest military and economic power in the world. These two states also anchored two "world systems" (as the Soviets used to call them), with states and economies organized in fundamentally different ways. The capitalist world system was comprised of states, whose economies had some element of markets and private property. Within the bloc, the polities were organized very differently—some democracies, some autocracies, and some colonies. Yet, even the autocracies were set up in ways that looked qualitatively different from the one-party, totalitarian regimes in the communist world. In the communist world, there was also variation both in the composition of the economy and polity; Poland had some private property and some markets not controlled by the state; the Soviet Union had very little. Likewise, the totalitarian-ness of the Hungarian regime was much less so than the Romanian regime. Compared to the world capitalism system, however, countries in the communist bloc shared certain distinctive features, including one-party regimes and command economies in which the state owned (most) property and also managed transactions and set prices. Both world systems also had international institutions such as NATO, the IMF, and World Bank in the West or the Warsaw Pact and COMECON in the East, which served to preserve the cohesion of the each system while also helping to insulate each system from the other.

Given the antagonistic, antithetical nature of these two systems, competition between them was not limited simply to balancing between the two superpowers and other significant powers in the international system. Instead the ideological dimension or competing models for organizing the polity and economy extended the zero-sum competition between "capitalism" and "communism" to encompass the entire world.[61] Leaders in Washington and Moscow both held the view that victory for the enemy, even in a periphery country such as Vietnam or Mozambique, could trigger a domino effect in other countries within their blocs. Given the rigidity of division in Europe, the arena of competition between the capitalist and communist systems also shifted to the periphery of the international system.

Regime Change within the Capitalist World

This unique international system had a particular limiting effect on democratic regime change, as well as other types of regime change. As the anchor of the world capitalist system (or what others would call the "free world", even though many countries within this free world were governed by dictatorships), the United States' central foreign policy objective was to contain communism. This grand strategy transformed the United States from a weak supporter of democratic regime change and national self-determination to a strong supporter of the status quo within its bloc. To be sure, American leaders did support decolonization and transitions from authoritarian rule during the Cold War. But the parameters of the possible modes of transitions were severely constricted.

[61] Fred Halliday, "The Sixth Great Power: On the Study of Revolution in the International System," Review of International Studies, Vol. 16 (1990) pp. 217-219.

Most importantly, it was American power, in alliance with local elites in power, which limited the agenda of change during transitional moments in autocracies within the capitalism world system. In particular, it was the United States—not only local actors—that made sure that "during the transition, the property rights of the bourgeoisie are inviolable."[62] This defining feature of successful transition to democracy came directly from the international system. When American officials perceived that this precondition for transition was being violated, the United States often tried to intervene—either directly or through proxies—to stop or roll back the transition process.[63] American officials wielded American power to impede simultaneous transformation of political and economics institutions in the capitalism world. Redefining the borders of the state was also strongly discouraged. The presence of the United States as the anchor of the world capitalist system also meant that security institutions were also inviolable. Any challenge to alliance relationships or bilateral security agreements with the United States immediately triggered deep involvement of Washington officials in a regime transition process.[64]

Within the world capitalism system, it was also the United States that played a central role in the limiting kinds of actors allowed to participate in transitional negotiations. Mass actors scared Washington officials, as did socialists, since they were perceived to (and sometimes did) have links to the Soviet Union and the communist world movement. The

---

[62] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions,* p. 69. See also Adam Przeworski, "Problems in the Study of Transition to Democracy," in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives,* Vol. 3 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) p. 63.

[63] Richard Barnett, *Intervention and Revolution: American Confrontation with Insurgent Movements around the World* (1968)

[64] David Adesnik and Michael McFaul, "Engaging Autocratic Allies to Promote Democracy," The Washington Quarterly, Spring 2006, pp. 7-26

United States developed close relationships with right-of-center elites in Western Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Africa to shift the local balance of power in favor of so-called anti-communist forces. All successful transitions from autocracy to democracy during the Cold War, therefore, were either imposed by these pro-American elites or pacted transitions that did not involve actors interested in more radical transformations of economic institutions and rarely involved mass mobilization from below.

The peaceful and evolutionary nature of democratic transitions in the world capitalism system was also the direct consequence of American hegemony. Again, in Washington, violent, revolutionary change was associated with the Soviet Union. Movements, which espoused these tactics, such as the national liberation movements in southern Africa, were quickly cast as anti-democratic, anti-capitalist, and anti-Western, an approach that often became a self fulfilling prophecy since these groups then turned to the communist world when they did not receive assistance from the West.[65]

Some countries in the capitalist world system did experience regime change, which diverted from these internationally defined constraints. None of these regime transitions, however, produced democracy, while all of them became enemies of the United States.

Regime Change within the Communist World

Limits on internal change were even more severe within the communist world. Soviet officials not only would not tolerate transformation of economic institutions, but they also tried to block even incremental changes of political institutions within the world

[65] Michael McFaul, *Southern African Liberation and Great Power Intervention: Towards a Theoryof Revolution in an International Context*. unpublished, 1991, Ph.D. dissertation

communist system. In other words, transitions of any type were simply thwarted, either through changing the balance of power in favor of ruling communist elites in Eastern Europe, or when that failed, through direct military intervention.

As transitions of any sort were discouraged, Soviet officials usually worked to limit the emergence of either soft-lines within the ancient regime or moderate forces within the society, i.e. the kinds of actors that helped to produce democratic transitions in the world capitalist system. After Stalin's death in 1953 and Khrushchev's deliberate efforts to thaw communism, soft-liners within communist Eastern Europe did take advantage of the apparent new policy from Moscow to press for incremental changes in the rules of the game for governing their countries. In all cases, however —East Germany in 1953, Poland 1956, and Hungary 1956—the reform trajectory went beyond what Moscow had intended, a situation which triggered internal crackdowns in East Germany and Poland and Soviet military intervention in Hungary 1956. Twelve years later, in 1968, the same occurred in Czechoslovakia. Soviet power simply did not allow regime change in its bloc.[66]

The Solidarity movement in Poland in 1980-81 represented a new kind of "mode of transition" in the communist world in that the impetus for change came from a mass based societal movement outside of the regime. The scale and success of Solidarity created real dilemmas for Soviet officials and their allies in Warsaw, since a Soviet military intervention against a movement 10 million strong would be much more costly and destabilizing than previous Soviet invasions in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968. The specter of repression hung in the air throughout Solidarity's ascendancy. Solidarity leaders deliberately tried to limit the scope of their agenda of change; the term "self limiting

[66] Discuss Yugoslav and Chinese exceptions.

revolution" was coined to signal their understanding of the parameters of the possible.[67] Eventually, however, even a self-limiting revolution could not be tolerated; in December 1981, General Jaruzelski declared martial law, arrested Solidarity leaders, and squashed this transition.

The structure of this international system also played a major role in organizing the "ideologies of opposition" among social movements seeking regime change around the world. Albeit with lots of variation and nuance, those in pursuit of regime change in the world capitalist system gravitated towards communist ideologies, driven by the logic that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Those in pursuit of regime change in the world communist system gravitated towards capitalist and democratic ideologies, driven by the same logic. This polarization produced some peculiar paradoxes. For instance the trade union movements in Poland and South Africa in the 1980s had many similar demands and were comprised of rather similar kinds of activists. But because Solidarity opposed the communist regime in Poland, it gravitated towards pro-capitalist, pro-democratic ideas (at least before the transition), while COSATU in South Africa—being in opposition to a regime allied with the West—gravitated towards pro-socialist ideas (again, at least before the transition).

Iran 1953, Hungary 1956, Chile 1973, or Poland in 1980 (which occurred after the third wave had begun in 1974) are rarely treated in the democratization literature as cases of transition. Had these failed cases of transition or regime change been included into the analysis, the overwhelming role in the bipolar international system in shape regime change outcomes might have been more apparent.

---

[67] Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution*, (Princeton, 1984).

III. The Unipolar International System and the Fourth Wave

The bipolar international system described above disappeared at the end of the 1980s. In its place emerged a unipolar system anchored by the United States.[68] This new international system, at least in its first decade of existence, also contained a great deal of consensus about how economies and polities should be organized and how states should interact with each other.[69] Market capitalism became the only legitimate form of economic organization in this new international system. Democracy became the most legitimate form of political organization in this new world. New variants of autocracy have rooted in several states that emerged from the USSR's dissolution, while autocrats still calling their regimes communist remain in China, Cuba, and Vietnam. Yet, in all of these dictatorships, those in power no longer champion an *alternative* form of government to democracy. Rather, they either claim that their regimes are already democratic even if they are not (Russia), or that

[68] William Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 5-41. Some, though, think that this system will not last long. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Incredibly Shrinking Eagle: The End of Pax Americana," *Foreign Policy*, (July/August 2002) pp. 60-69; and Charles Kupchan, *The End of the American Era* (2003).

[69] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). This is not the only international system, however, that has exhibited a high level of agreement about international and domestic norms. For instance, the period in European history immediately preceding the French Revolution offers a case of "high" homogeneity concerning principles of international relations in sharp contrast to the U.S.-Soviet relationship from 1947 to 1990. (See, Rosecrance, *Action and Reaction in World Politics,* chapter two.) The European Concert is also frequently cited as a more homogeneous world, if not a return to the pre-1789 system. See, for instance, Edward Gulik, *Europe's Classical Balance of Power*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955); Kissinger, *A World Restored* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957)

their political leaders are moving their countries "step-by-step" toward democracy (China).[70] For the vast majority of the world, then, democracy is either the practice or the stated goal. Pockets of illiberal creeds, racist norms, patrimonial rituals, and anti-democratic ideologies exist throughout the world, but only Osama bin Ladenism and its variants constitute a serious *transnational* alternative to liberal democracy today, and this alternative is neither one with mass appeal or one with a powerful state or set of states behind it.[71]

For regime change around the world, but especially in the post-communist world, this new international system had profound consequences for the mode of transition. First and most obviously, when the Soviet Union disappeared both as a state and as a great power, there was no longer and external actor capable of skewing the balance of power in favor of the ruling regimes within Eastern Europe and the newly independent states to emerge fro the USSR. When this exogenous supplier of power for the status quo in the communist world weakened and then vanished, the distribution of power between supporters of democratic change and supporters of a new kind of autocracy became the central, if not only, determinant of regime change outcomes in the Eurasian communist

[70] In his visit to the United States in April 2006, Chinese leader Hu Jintao used the phrase "democratic management", while Putin's public relations specialists coined the term "managed democracy" and then "sovereign democracy.

[71] Bin Laden and the more serious thinkers who preceded him (if bin Laden is the Lenin of this anti-systematic movement, Qutb is the Marx) have developed a comprehensive set of beliefs that claim to explain everything in the world. According to their worldview, the central drama in international affairs is not between states, but a normative, Manichean struggle between the forces of good and evil. This ideological movement not only rejects democracy as the best system of government, but offers an alternative values-based polity, which they submit, is both better than any Western model and also essential for living a proper Muslim life. After decades of decline, Osama bin Ladenism and its ideological soul mates gained new vibrancy after September 11th and the American-led invasion of Iraq. Yet, this ideological alternative is hardly a worldwide challenger to democracy as the most valued political system in the world. Adherents to bin Ladenism have not (yet) seized control of a major state. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is now gone. The ideological energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also extinguished even if the mullah's dictatorship lingers on. And even in Iran, officials from the government claim to be practicing democracy, or more minimally, introducing changes to make the regime more democratic.

world.[72] Whether democracy emerged or not, however, was a function of the local balance of power at the time of transition, and not the result of American or European attempts to try to reconfigure the internal balances of powers in the former communist world.[73] Incentives to join Western multilateral institutions such as NATO or the European Union only have a causal effect on the period *after* transition, or in other words, during the consolidation phase. And it was not stalemated, relatively equal balances of power between the old regime and societal challengers, which produced democratic transitions. Rather, with specter of Soviet intervention removed, democracy emerged in those countries where the internal distribution of power strongly favored the challengers to the *ancien regime*. This mode of transition—very different from the mode of transition in the third wave—was a direct result of changes in the external environment.

Second and related, the unipolar international system no longer placed strict limits on the kinds of actors that could participate in transition processes. Remember, in the third wave, "no stable political democracy has resulted from regimes transitions in which mass actors have gained control even momentarily over traditional ruling classes"[74] because the United States or Soviet Union would intervene to shore up these ruling classes when challenged by mass actors. When mass actors began to assert themselves into the transition

---

[72] Some communist regimes, such as Yugoslavia, China, or Vietnam, did not rely on Soviet support and therefore endured because of domestic distributions of powers well before Soviet decline. However, some peripheral communist regimes, such as Mozambique, Angola, and Cuba, did rely on Soviet support and therefore experienced different kinds of regime change trajectories in the new international system. Some, such as the regime in Mozambique, collapsed, while others, such as the Fidel Castro's dictatorship had enough domestic power to survive without Moscow's support.

[73] On the limited role of the United States in changing internal balance of power in favor of democrats, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," *Journal of Democracy* 16, 3 (July 2005), 20-34

[74] Terry Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 23 (October 1990) p. 8.

process in places like Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia in 1989, the world's last standing hegemon did little to discourage them. On the contrary, prior to this transition moment, American governments and non-governmental organizations actively sought to strengthen these mass-based actors. For instance, "In the end," according to Arch Puddington, "the AFL-CIO was responsible for channeling over $4 million to Solidarity" in Poland during the 1980s. [75]

Third, this new hegemon—the United States— also did not see the need to press for pacts, negotiation, and evolutionary change in the communist world. In its own neighborhood, the United States abhorred rapid, violent regime change, since it was both unpredictable and usually empowered anti-American forces. Americans did not have such fears about opposition forces in communist Europe or the former Soviet Union, since these radicals were also pro-American. President George H.W. Bush did fear state dissolution in the Soviet Union, after witnessing the violent collapse of Yugoslavia. But never did the United States press opposition movements to negotiate with elites from the old order. And when opposition movements violated pacted arrangements, such as in Poland after the first election, Americans only applauded. The earlier priority placed on cooperation and negotiation as the method for transitions weakened.

Fourth, regarding the agenda of change, the new international system, i.e. the homogenous hegemonic system dominated by the United States, allowed the agenda of change on the table during transition to widen—first to include full scale political change, but also to include fundamental reorganization of economic institutions and even a redrawing of state borders. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union allowed no agenda of

[75] Arch Puddington, *Lane Kirkland: Champion of American Labor* (New York: Wiley, 2005) p. 189.

change at all. With the Soviet Union gone, the United States actively expanded the agenda of change to include economic institutions even when some transitologists were writing about the deleterious consequences of simultaneous change of political and economic institutions.[76] As the anchor of the international system, the United States did not actively promote the expansion of the agenda of change during transitions to include the redrawing of state borders (though Germany, when it recognized Slovenia, did) except in the case of German unification. On the contrary, President George H.W. Bush actively tried to keep this issue off the agenda during the transition period in the Soviet Union. As he stated in his famous chicken Kiev speech in the summer of 1991, "...freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based on ethnic hatred."[77] When several republics of the Soviet Union declared their independence, including the Russian Federation, the United States did not formally recognize any of the aspiring states.[78] Yet, the United States also did not support those who tried to impede state disintegration (in contrast, for instance, to American support for the Nigerian federal government when it launched a brutal war against the Ibos in 1967 to prevent the breakup of the Nigerian state), and only welcomed the new states into the international community once local independent movements leaders had created irreversible facts on the ground securing statehood.

Fifth, the unipolar international system became so much more permissive regarding

[76] Przeworski, 1991.

[77] George Bush, Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Kiev, Ukraine, August 1, 1991, in *US Department of State Dispatch*, August 12, 1991, pp. 596-598.

[78] Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), chapter two, pp. 18-40.

regime change at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s because the number of legitimate regime alternatives had narrowed to one – democracy. Earlier in the century, both superpowers feared that a process of political liberalization might lead unintentionally to regime change of the "wrong" kind. American leaderships' worries about such outcomes diminished in the 1990s, while Soviet leaders simply did not exist to resist the "horrific" kinds of regime outcomes that occurred in places like Poland and Hungary, and the Czech Republic.[79] Fifteen years later, American officials would begin to worry again about the kind of regimes that might emerge from transitions in the Middle East. Likewise, a new autocratic regime in Moscow under Vladimir Putin wielded Russian power yet again to support anti-democratic regimes and political groups throughout the former Soviet space.[80] But for the first transitions in the fourth wave, the emergence of anti-democratic, anti-Western regimes was not a major concern. [81]

The unipolar international system had it most profound effects on transitions in the former communist world, but not only in this region. For instance in South Africa, mass actors and even radical mass actors such as the South African Communist Party played a central role in the successful transition to democracy in this hitherto polarized society. It is difficult to imagine that the United States would have withdrawn support from the apartheid regime and acquiesced to African National Congress (ANC) ANC or SACP during the

[79] The specter of a fascist regime did emerge in the early 1990s in Russia, but never crystallized. See Michael McFaul, "Thwarting the Specter of Russian Fascism," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1993), pp. 1-19.

[80] Michael Allen and Carl Gershman, "The Assault on Democracy Assistance," *Journal of Democracy*, April 2006; Ivan Krastev, "Russia's Post-Orange Empire, OpenDemocracy.net, October 20, 2005; http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-europe_constitution/postorange_2947.jsp.

[81] The specter of a fascist regime did emerge in the early 1990s in Russia, but never crystallized. See Michael McFaul, "Thwarting the Specter of Russian Fascism," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1993), pp. 1-19.

heyday of Soviet expansion into Africa in the 1970s.[82] Even in more recent transitions from autocratic rule that have empowered terrorist organizations, such as the election in the Palestinian Authority that brought Hamas to power, it is difficult to imagine the United States acquiescing to such an outcome if Hamas enjoyed a direct alliance with major, anti-American revisionist superpower in the international system. American nervous acceptance of the rise of Islamic parties through electoral processes in Egypt and Morocco is also a consequence, in part, of a new international system still dominated by the United States. During the Cold War, a victory for an anti-American political group in a country as remote as Angola was interpreted in Washington as another data point in calculating the "correlation of forces" between capitalism and communism. In this new international system, victories for anti-American political movements in peripheral countries are still a concern for Washington leaders, but less of concern because of the absence of menacing, ideologically motivated hegemon supporting these newly victorious forces. American and other Western leaders are more willing to try to co-opt these challengers to the status quo through the democratic process to a degree that they were not willing to try to co-opt communist challengers when they threatened to assume power in peripheral countries during the Cold War.

Finally, though beyond the scope of this paper, the effects of this new international system were greatest regarding democratic consolidation.[83] Most strikingly, as already mentioned, the EU conditionality played a central role in pulling new, fragile democracies in

[82] This said, George Shultz did agree to meet with ANC officials in 1986, well before the Soviet Union had showed signs of weakness. (Author's conversations with Shultz, October 2005).

[83] Lewitsky and Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," *Journal of Democracy*, 2005

Europe toward liberal democracy.[84] Other international institutions, such as the OAS and NATO, also have played positive democracy enhancing roles in their regions.

American Influence on the Soviet "Transition"

Conceptually, of course, it is rather awkward to discuss a change in the value of the independent variable labeled in this essay, "international system", when the change in the value of this variable is brought about by a regime change in one of the countries being discussed. It is perhaps more accurate to cast this international unipolar system as a causal structural variable influencing the fourth wave transitions only after the Soviet/Russian transition had unfolded far enough along so that the system had only one power, not two. Pinpointing precisely when this occurred is difficult, especially because ideational shift from two competing systems to one occurred much earlier that the change in the power shift from bipolarity to unipolarity. In 1989, the Soviet Union had the military resources to *try* to rollback the regime change underway in Poland (though whether such actions would have been successful is another matter). But when it became clear that the roundtable negotiations underway in Poland that year might lead to a fundamental reorganization of the political institutions governing Poland, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made the decision not to intervene. It was not power but preferences, informed by a new set of ideas about how to organize states internally and how to organize interaction between states, that shaped Soviet actions at the time. Obviously, this Soviet signal about acceptance of regime change in other parts of the communist world had a profound effect on democratization throughout

[84] Milada Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage and Integration After Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

the region. Soviet "new thinking" was a necessary condition for regime change in the region. In fact, it may not be an overstatement that the entire process of democratization in the western part of the communist world and autocratization in the eastern part of the communist world started in Moscow, not Warsaw or Prague.[85]

This interpretation of external sources of domestic change in the "fourth wave" screams for an answer to the question of what role external forces played in the Soviet/Russian transition itself? The withdrawal of Soviet support for communist regimes in the Warsaw Pact was an obvious external trigger for regime change in these countries, but Soviet weakness obviously cannot be the *external* cause for Soviet/Russian regime change. A comprehensive discussion of all external factors on Soviet/Russian political change is beyond the scope of this essay, but several telegraphic points must be made.

First, compared to transitions in smaller countries in both the third and fourth waves, the regime change that started from Moscow was more insulated from international forces. Generally, the larger the country, the less impact the outside world has on the development of revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes.[86] In contrast to East Central Europe, Russia's enormity and longer experiences with autarky made the collapse of old institutions and the rise of new institutions more of a domestic affair.

Second, Soviet relative weakness compared to American strength did not compel regime change. Some, for instance, have suggested that the American military buildup and the initiation of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the 1980s forced Soviet leaders to increase

[85] Of course, this is a contentious assertion, but not an outlandishly contentious assertion. For an alternative view, see Daniel Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)

[86] This is the argument in Michael McFaul, "Southern African Liberation and Great Power Intervention: Towards a Theory of Revolution in an International Context," (Oxford, D.Phil dissertation, 1991).

military spending, which in turn bankrupt the Soviet economy. The evidence for this hypothesis, however, is extremely thin.[87] Soviet military spending did not rise in proportion to American military spending during the first term of the Reagan Administration. Nor was the Soviet reaction to SDI fear or capitulation, but rather emulation. For good technological reasons (which still hold true twenty years later), Soviet leaders were also confident that they could overwhelm any new anti-ballistic defense system with new offensive weapons. Some have also posited that imperial overreach throughout the world, exacerbated by American support for anti-communist guerilla movements in Nicaragua, Angola, Cambodia, and Afghanistan, brought down the Soviet system. While Soviet foreign polities elites most certainly rethought the virtues of propping up these satellites, the economic and military costs of these adventures, including even the Afghanistan war, were not sufficient to cripple the Soviet economy.[88] Nor, more generally, was the Soviet economy on the verge of collapse when Gorbachev began to implement economic and political changes.[89] The Soviet command economy could have survived for decades, especially with recent spikes in energy prices, before collapsing from Western pressure.

Third, direct American engagement of moderate reformers within the old regime, including first and foremost Mikhail Gorbachev, was real.[90] Improved Soviet-American relations created a permissive environment for internal change within the USSR. Likewise, American non-governmental organizations did provide a modicum of technical and financial

---

[87] Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transitional Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[88] On rethinking see Sarah Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998)

[89] Alexander Dallin, "Causes of the Collapse of the USSR," Post-Soviet Affairs, 1992, pp. 279-302

[90] Shultz,; Gorbachev.

assistance to democratic opposition groups in Russian society during the period of transition.[91] Direct American efforts to shape the transition, however, were very limited. The one major intervention by the United States in the Gorbachev era regarding these fundamental debates was George Bush's infamous speech in Kiev, Ukraine in June 1991 in which he urged caution and patience regarding the redrawing of the borders of the Soviet Union: an intervention that obviously had little impact on the outcome of this debate.

Ultimately, the Soviet transition began because Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev decided to begin it. It was his preferences for change, not innate forces from inside or out, that started the process of regime change in the Soviet Union and then Russia.[92] Without question, the West helped to shape Gorbachev's preferences for change. He was well aware that the standard of living in his country was well below that of Europe and he wanted to close the gap.[93] In other words, the West and the United States in particular provided examples of a more prosperous and efficient economy. It was this pull of the Western example, not the threat of American military power, which shaped Gorbachev's particular response to the economic and moral malaise that he perceived in the Soviet Union when he took power.[94] The democratic principles of the American system also played an inspirational role for Soviet dissidents and influenced the thinking of important reformers in

[91] For details, see Goldgeier and McFaul, 2006.

[92] The totalitarian structure of the Soviet regime meant that change *had* to begin with the General Secretary. Or elaboration, see McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution*, chapter two.

[93] Gorbachev, Memoirs, ???

[94] Gorbachev or another leader in his place could have selected an alternative strategy for responding to this same situation. Instead of emulating the West or reaching out to the West, the Soviet leader could have responded instead with more restrictive economic policies at home or more imperial, diversionary policies abroad. See Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, "The International Sources of Soviet Change," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Winter 1991-1992) pp. 74-118.

Gorbachev's Politburo such as Aleksandr Yakovlev.[95] Once he initiated the process of reform, however, the West did not play a direct causal role in influencing outcomes regarding the major debates about institutional change underway at the time. Gorbachev eventually lost control of the process, but when he did, the United States and other Western countries played only a marginal role in steering the chaotic transformation.

Later in the Soviet/Russian transition, external actors helped to shape the ideas and tactics of the opposition (in the language of third wave transitologists, the "moderates" from civil society) involved in the Soviet and Russian drama. For instance, Yeltsin and his allies adopted more radically pro-Western positions during their struggle against Gorbachev to help win recognition from the West. They also refrained from using violence to overthrow the Soviet regime and resisted punishing Gorbachev after they seized power (a popular figure in the West at the time) in part to win favor in the West.[96] After victory and the thwarting of the coup attempt in August 1991, Russian institutional designers mimicked Western institutional arrangements, in part as a strategy for obtaining Western financial assistance. International intervention in Russian domestic debates about the design of new institutions was much more aggressive after the Soviet collapse, especially regarding the design of economic institutions. At the same time, Western governmental leaders mostly refrained from trying to influence domestic debates about political institutions. Strikingly, neither the United States not any European

[95] Yakovlev studied as an exchange student in the United States and then spent a decade living in Canada as the Soviet ambassador. See Leon Aron, "The 'Mystery' of the Soviet Collapse," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 2006) pp. 21-35.

[96] See Michael McFaul, "The Sovereignty Script: Red Book for Russian Revolutionaries," in Stephen Krasner, ed., *Problematic Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 194-223.

power punished the Yeltsin Administration for dissolving the Congress of People's Deputies in 1993 or invading Chechnya in 1994, the two most egregious violations of democratic principles of this transition period. The Clinton Administration helped to bolster Yeltsin's reelection efforts in 1996 by providing a timely, new IMF package three months before the election. Privately, the Clinton Administration did send signals about the negative consequences of postponing the 1996 elections. Yet, these kinds of interventions only influenced Russian politics on the margins. In the two biggest battles regarding the design of political institutions that culminated in armed conflict in 1991, and again in 1993, external actors played almost no role at all.[97]

Western NGOs also spent much greater resources after collapse in an effort to consolidate Russian democracy, but these efforts focused on consolidation not regime change.[98] Moreover, since Russia's regime has become more autocratic in recent years, especially under Putin, these efforts appeared to have produced little impact.[99]

IV. Conclusion

When examined from a comparative perspective, the third wave transitions look different from the fourth wave transitions. From this same comparative lens, the

[97] For elaboration, see Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*.

[98] Thomas Carothers, Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995); Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, "The Rise of "Political Aid'," in Larry Diamond, Marc Plattner, Yun-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien, eds, *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Regional Challenges* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) pp. 295-324.

[99] Goldgeier and McFaul, 2006.

explanation for these differences seems related to historical and cultural differences, including the experience with democracy in earlier period or divergent starting points (i.e. communist dictatorship compared to non-communist dictatorship). Yet, domestic levels explanations are not sufficient to explain the differences between third wave and fourth wave theories of democratization (or the lack thereof). A missing and changing variable—the international system—must be brought into the analysis if we are ever going to have a unified theory of democratization.