

JANUARY 6, 2020 | NUMBER 883

The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

The Failure of Regime-Change Operations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States has, at various times in its history, used military force to promote regime change around the world in pursuit of its interests. In recent years, however, there has been a growing scholarly consensus that these foreign regime-change operations are often ineffective and produce deleterious side effects. Whether trying to achieve political, security, economic, or humanitarian goals, scholars have found that regime-change missions do not succeed as envisioned. Instead, they are likely to spark civil wars, lead to lower levels of democracy, increase repression, and in the end, draw the foreign intervener into lengthy nation-building projects.

Even after high-profile failures in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, some in the policy community still call for ousting illiberal regimes. Regime-change advocates claim that

this tool can achieve objectives more cheaply and quickly than sustained diplomatic pressure and engagement, and that such operations will not expand into broader military action. When presented with such claims, policymakers should consider the empirical record, which clearly reveals that a regime-change operation is more likely to fail than to succeed. Different polities around the world have different political priorities, and attempting to change these priorities by simply removing the regime is more difficult than typically imagined. Instead of promoting more democracy and advancing American security, the overuse of regime change undermines the effectiveness of other foreign policy tools that are more successful at enhancing freedom and improving human rights around the world, and therefore ultimately harms America's ability to achieve its policy goals.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, nearly every presidential administration has had a foreign policy largely premised on democratic enlargement and promotion.¹ Each of the post-Cold War presidents articulated this within their National Security Strategies, although most avoided explicit calls to use force. The Clinton administration argued, for example, “All of America’s strategic interests—from promoting prosperity at home to checking global threats abroad before they threaten our territory—are served by enlarging the community of democratic and free market nations.”² The George W. Bush administration continued along these lines, saying, “the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.”³ Obama’s National Security Strategy phrased it as “The United States supports the expansion of democracy and human rights abroad because governments that respect these values are more just, peaceful, and legitimate. We also do so because their success abroad fosters an environment that supports America’s national interests.”⁴

Key in these documents is the focus on the expansion of democracy as instrumental to increasing American security. These documents generally emphasize spreading democracy through international institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and diplomacy in a manner consistent with America’s stated commitment to liberal norms of non-intervention and nonaggression. In practice, however, the United States has shown it is willing to use force to impose new regimes in Panama, Haiti, Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and elsewhere.⁵ Advocates tout regime-change operations, including the use of armed force or the threat of force to attempt to overthrow domestic regimes and install new leaders, as a vital tool for promoting American security and foreign policy interests. Democratic regimes that are more

responsive to their people are purportedly less likely to harm American security.

And while President Trump has downgraded democracy promotion in his administration’s foreign policy, discussions within the Trump administration regarding regime change have continued. Throughout Trump’s time in office, members of his foreign policy team have considered targeting the regimes in Venezuela, Iran, and North Korea.⁶ Even though the Trump administration has not taken armed action to remove these governments, the mere fact that officials within the administration have held high-level policy discussions on the topic shows that it remains a viable policy option.

The conventional wisdom in Washington holds that a more democratic world makes America safer. Increasing the number of democratic regimes in the world by force, as occurred following the American operations in Grenada, Panama, and the post-World War II occupations of Germany and Japan, has proved beneficial for the United States. Using military force to remove odious regimes continues even after some notable failures.⁷ Leaders commonly blame the failures on botched execution rather than scrutinizing their own decisions to engage in regime change in the first place. When the regime-change mission encounters difficulty or does not result in the quick success initially envisioned, some leaders may fault the American people’s unwillingness to stay the course.⁸ They may also point to a faulty counterinsurgency strategy.⁹ In other cases, they blame weak post-war planning processes for suboptimal operational outcomes.¹⁰ However, regime-change advocates insist that properly executed operations can deliver success.

The fundamental problem with this conventional wisdom is the empirical record. Academic research shows the paucity of cases in which regime-change missions have succeeded as intended. This evidence does not support the view that regime change is a sound tool for supplanting odious regimes, enhancing American security, and promoting humanitarian interests. Instead, the historical record illustrates that

armed regime-change missions rarely succeed regardless of the strategy utilized and they often produce unintended consequences, such as humanitarian crises and weaker internal security within the targeted state. While it might be in the interest of American officials to promote democratic institutions around the world, using armed force to promote more favorable regimes is often detrimental to this end.

Despite this poor track record, many policymakers continue to favor forcible regime change. Cognitive biases contribute to a focus on the desirability of the goals and a tendency to avoid thinking about the full resources required to make the policy succeed. Instead, these officials should acknowledge that this uncertainty about what is required for a successful regime change means that they cannot avoid lengthy institution-building missions. Only after confronting the fact that regime change is likely to spiral into a costly and extended military operation can decision-makers accurately assess whether the purported benefits will be worth the costs.

In the following sections, this paper examines the academic literature to illustrate that the continued confidence in regime change is misguided. Exposing the contingent nature of regime-change missions, including the high likelihood of failure, should be the focus of any discussion going forward. If U.S. leaders are committed to enhancing humanitarianism and liberal democracy abroad, they should find ways to achieve these objectives without resorting to regime change by force.

CAN REGIME CHANGE WORK?

If regime change is a valuable tool in the American foreign policy toolkit, there should be more evidence that such missions can achieve specific, positive goals. Unfortunately, a review of the academic literature shows that this is rarely the case.¹¹ For example, one goal that officials attempt to achieve through regime change is better interstate relations. However, as political scientists Alexander Downes and Lindsey O'Rourke show, there is rarely a

meaningful reduction in future conflicts between the intervener and the targeted country—or even improved relations—following a regime-change operation. Instead, interstate relations are often made worse due to principal-agent dynamics. The newly installed regime feels compelled to placate local concerns over the intervener's interests in order to prove that their government is legitimate and not merely a foreign puppet.¹² New leaders must serve their own domestic political audiences; these polities often possess political preferences that diverge from those of the foreign intervener. If the newly installed leader is overly deferential to the intervener's preferred policies, domestic supporters may turn against the new regime. Downes and O'Rourke cite the case of Guatemalan leader Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, who was installed in a U.S.-sponsored coup in 1954. Fuentes later "permitted the United States to train Cuban exiles in Guatemala to overthrow Fidel Castro," which "alienated members of the Guatemalan officer corps . . . resulting in a thirty-year civil war."¹³ Needless to say, this did not lead to better interstate relations between the two countries.

Foreign interveners might engage in regime change to enhance the economic relationship with the target state and produce benefits for the foreign intervener's firms and businesses, especially at the expense of its foreign adversaries. However, rather than improving bilateral trade flows, foreign-imposed regime change often leads to stagnation or worsening trade relations between the intervener and the local territory.¹⁴ The instability created by the regime-change mission itself makes firms unlikely to invest in the territory, causing a decrease in trade.¹⁵ The U.S. regime change in the Dominican Republic in 1916, for example, resulted in an insurgency in the sugar-producing region of the country, causing foreign firms to curtail their sugar-producing operations in the region and, in some cases, to cease operations completely.¹⁶ Similar fears of instability following the 1994 regime-change mission in Haiti resulted in no American firms investing in the country for eight years following the crisis.¹⁷

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These cases are hardly atypical. Even when trade flows do appear to increase following regime change, this might be misleading. For example, there is some evidence that CIA covert regime-change operations during the Cold War caused an increase in American imports to the local territory in industries where the United States had a comparative disadvantage.¹⁸ This indicates that American firms used this new influence to sell noncompetitive goods in the market. On balance, this did not aid in achieving sustainable growth or an improved standard of living under the new regime.

The most common justification for modern regime-change missions is democracy promotion, which purportedly leads to more peaceful bilateral relations and regional stability.¹⁹ Members of the George W. Bush administration touted this logic to justify the decision to engage in regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq, prompting scholars to assess whether foreign-imposed regime change can produce democratic states.²⁰ The preponderance of these studies find that imposing democracy “at gunpoint” is ineffective.²¹ In fact, the most common outcome of a foreign regime-change operation is democracy *reduction* in the territory.²² As scholars Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George Downs note, interveners prefer pliant leaders even when greater democracy is the stated goal.²³ Democratic leaders are more responsive to local supporters than to the foreign powers that installed them, making it less likely that the foreign-installed leaders will carry out the intervener’s wishes. The disconnect between American policymakers and Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan was emblematic of this dynamic. After the Bush administration helped to install him as the leader of Afghanistan, the tension between Karzai and the United States grew so strained over policy disagreements that Karzai stated, “To the American people, give them my best wishes and my gratitude. To the U.S. government, give them my anger, my extreme anger.”²⁴

The difficulty of imposing democracy by force should not come as a surprise: as the goals of those supporting armed intervention

become more politically complex, the likelihood of the mission’s success declines. To the extent that regime-change missions or armed interventions ever succeed, it is usually when there are narrow goals set out for the mission.²⁵ For example, out of 28 cases of American regime change identified by political scientists Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten, only 3 cases proved successful in building a lasting democracy.²⁶ To the extent that democracy prevailed, it required distinct economic and political preconditions to succeed. In particular, the cases of successful regime change after World War II occurred in places such as Germany and Japan, where the economic and institutional preconditions were favorable for consolidated democratic rule.²⁷ These included a previous experience with democracy in Germany, and higher pre-war levels of economic modernization and robust government bureaucracies and state institutions in both Germany and Japan. In short, these states were “likely to democratize owing to other factors.”²⁸ Today, by contrast, most potential regime-change cases are targeted at weak states or states that are unsuited for a quick transition to democracy because they lack robust economic development, capable local bureaucracies, or previous experience with representative government.²⁹

Alternative Means for Regime Change

The RAND Corporation’s James Dobbins and others contend that the successful imposition of democracy following World War II was not the result of preexisting local conditions. Rather, as Dobbins and his colleagues write, “the most important determinant seems to be the level of effort—measured in time, manpower, and money.”³⁰ Substantial sustained effort and massive economic investment, as they argue was the case with the Marshall Plan, for example, may be a necessary condition for regime-change missions to succeed.³¹ However, even among these expansive types of regime change—state-building—the evidence suggests that these missions are “difficult, demanding, dangerous, and unfortunately, prone to failure.”³²

In particular, as noted above, there is an inherent tension between the legitimacy of the imposed regime and how responsive the new regime will be to American goals and interests.³³ Expansive missions are often only able to resolve this legitimacy and effectiveness tradeoff when external threats exist that make the local population appreciate the intervener's support for their security. As Georgetown University's David Edelstein explains, when local populations perceive that another country poses a threat to their security, they are more willing to welcome an occupying power to protect them. At the same time, "an external threat also persuades an occupying power to maintain its commitment."³⁴ As such, during the early Cold War period, American efforts at building democratic institutions in Japan and Germany were aided by the threat the Soviet Union posed to both. This gave the United States more time than normal to build effective institutions before the legitimacy tradeoff emerged. Armed state-building can succeed with the proper strategy, and when local populations do not see the new leaders as beholden to American interests—in other words, and paradoxically, only when regime change is not the primary goal of the intervention.³⁵ In general, merely investing more resources into these missions does not overcome the structural challenges they confront.

Covert versus Overt

It could be the case that less heavy-handed approaches to regime change might succeed better than the resource-intensive options described above. Covert attempts at regime change through intelligence operations and election interference, for example, might be more effective than overt armed interventions. Unfortunately, recent research finds the opposite to be true. Lindsey O'Rourke, the author of *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*, demonstrates that, while they are sometimes preferred by policymakers for domestic political reasons or to maintain plausible deniability, covert regime-change actions are, in fact, less likely to achieve their goals. Covert regime

change succeeded in replacing the leader in power only 39 percent of the time during the Cold War, whereas overt regime change was able to change the leader of the country, at least for a short period, 66 percent of the time.³⁶ An American covert operation to help overthrow the Enver Hoxha regime in Albania beginning in 1949, for example, failed to achieve its objectives or to remain covert.³⁷ As the CIA's Office of Policy Coordination director Frank Wisner noted, "An operation that was supposed to be kept under the wraps of secrecy was known in all relevant details by anyone in the region that had an interest in Albania."³⁸

Beyond covert regime change, scholar Dov Levin illustrates that electoral intervention—where outside powers help one side in a democratic election—does, in fact, make it more likely that the preferred party or leader will win.³⁹ However, as Levin further shows, such election interference serves to decrease the level of democracy over time and does not produce the preferred outcomes by the intervening power, such as closer interstate relations, reduced conflict, and greater economic benefits.⁴⁰ Instead of more democracy and greater transparency, the foreign-supported regime employs the same covert tools to ensure its success in future corrupt elections. This is exactly what occurred in Guyana, for example, where the People's National Congress and Prime Minister Forbes Burnham "used the voting fraud techniques they learned from the CIA in order to 'win' the subsequent elections, eventually turning Guyana into a dictatorship."⁴¹

EFFECTS OF REGIME CHANGE

Regime-change operations might still be worthwhile if they afford a low-cost, high-reward opportunity to bring about political change. Unfortunately, the effects of regime-change operations often leave the targets worse off and more likely to face future political, economic, and military problems that raise the costs for both the intervener and the local territory.

The most consistent finding on the effects

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of foreign-imposed regime change is the increased likelihood for civil war. Civil wars often ensue because regime-change missions weaken existing state institutions and create a power vacuum, thus allowing resistance and rebel movements to grow.⁴² The imposition of new leaders by a foreign power also creates grievances against the regime and reduces regime legitimacy, prompting civil conflict.⁴³ Indeed, in military occupations where interveners change political institutions, local populations are likely to resist the new leadership precisely because it was installed by a foreign power.⁴⁴ This destabilization persists: in roughly 40 percent of the cases of covert regime change undertaken during the Cold War, a civil war occurred within 10 years of the operation.⁴⁵ Emblematic of this process was the American regime-change mission in Congo-Léopoldville in 1960 to oust Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba.⁴⁶ Following the overthrow, the resulting crisis spiraled into an extensive civil war that resulted in more than 100,000 deaths.⁴⁷

The probability of rebellion and civil conflict also contributes to a deterioration of the human-rights situation in the territory following armed regime change. Interveners often rationalize human rights abuses and civilian deaths as a byproduct of the power shift in the government, where repression is needed to crush resistance movements.⁴⁸ O'Rourke finds that in more than 55 percent of the cases of covert regime-change missions undertaken during the Cold War, the targeted states experienced a government-sponsored mass killing episode within 10 years of the regime-change attempt.⁴⁹ On the nongovernment side, opposition groups also perpetrate human-rights abuses and killings. The willingness to revolt after an intervener replaces local leaders can also produce higher levels of domestic terrorism against the perceived illegitimate regime.⁵⁰

Policymakers often overlook the chances that state-building missions will devolve into even more costly wars.⁵¹ As a result of the dire domestic situation that often results from a regime-change mission, the intervener finds it challenging to disengage from the region

and instead feels compelled to embark upon lengthy state-building projects, even when this was not the initial intention.⁵² For instance, when the United States green-lighted the covert regime-change mission in South Vietnam to oust Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963, officials justified it as necessary to ensure the South Vietnamese regime remained stable in light of the Buddhist Crisis that was roiling the country.⁵³ However, after Diem's assassination and the resulting destruction of the Diem bureaucracy, U.S. leaders ended up spending far more resources and expanding the mission, eventually launching a state-building mission and Americanizing the war in South Vietnam.⁵⁴

The consequences noted above are simply the short-term effects of regime-change operations. The possible long-term effects on foreign policy goals might be even more consequential. Evidence suggests that the American propensity for regime-change operations affects how other countries, such as North Korea, Iran, China, and Russia, view American foreign policy. North Korean nuclear decisionmaking after the American regime-change mission in Libya is particularly instructive. The North Koreans concluded that only nuclear weapons can prevent regime change, which made the choice to continue their nuclear program easier. Referencing the 2011 intervention that ousted Muammar el-Qaddafi, North Korea's state news agency noted that "History proves that powerful nuclear deterrence serves as the strongest treasured sword for frustrating outsiders' aggression."⁵⁵ This is just one example, but with the increased use of regime change, the costs of each mission might aggregate to produce even more far-reaching, and potentially harmful, international effects.

WHY REGIME CHANGE?

Given the low probability of success and the academic research demonstrating the costly side effects that can accompany regime-change missions, why might some policymakers think regime change is a sound policy option to begin with? There is a growing

scholarly consensus, highlighted below, that certain officials think regime change will be cheap and easy due to various psychological biases. In addition, leaders of foreign opposition movements are motivated to make the mission seem more straightforward than it would be.⁵⁶ Indeed, the apparent ease of regime change may explain its appeal. As O'Rourke explains, regime change is most salient as a political tool when officials view changing the regime as easier than trying to negotiate the settlement of various contentious issues.

Policymakers often rely on mental models that lead them to dismiss the potential downsides of regime change and focus only on the potential benefits, regardless of how unlikely a successful regime change would be. Author Aaron Rapport, in particular, showed how those who are most inclined to pursue regime change focus on the desirability of the goal rather than on the steps required to achieve it.⁵⁷ Further, scholars find that overconfidence in the ability to achieve quick success is a psychological necessity before policymakers will sign off on regime change.⁵⁸ Once the decision to engage in regime change has been made, explain scholars Dominic D. P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, officials "will be less receptive to new information about the likely costs, benefits, and outcomes . . . especially information that contradicts or endangers the chosen (or imposed) course of action."⁵⁹ Once officials make the decision to engage in regime change, their psychological beliefs are often updated to reflect a sense that regime change is necessary. The problem, as this research shows, is that this leads to overly optimistic assumptions about the short duration and simplicity of regime change. The psychological need for certainty overrides any subsequent evidence that it will not be as easy as envisioned.⁶⁰ Former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld was a shining example of this view when he stated that the Iraq War would end quickly: "Five days or five weeks or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that."⁶¹

Other scholars have shown how unrepresentative opposition movements contend that

placing them in power will make it possible to achieve the intervener's preferred goals. In *Toppling Foreign Governments: The Logic of Regime Change*, author Melissa Willard-Foster explains how these local leaders have incentives to misrepresent the actual state of play in the territory in order to entice a great-power patron to help them: "As long as a foreign power can locate strong and marginally sympathetic opposition groups, it is more likely to estimate the costs of regime change as low."⁶² Indeed, O'Rourke has noted that the need to identify a "plausible political alternative to the government" that the intervener is trying to overthrow is a necessary condition for states to undertake regime change.⁶³ This, in turn, can bias decisionmakers into thinking these opposition leaders or expatriates possess adequate knowledge of what would be required on the ground. Often, however, these people considerably overstate their abilities and tell policymakers what they want to hear. According to the U.S. Army's official history of the Iraq war, Ahmed Chalabi, the leader of the Iraqi National Congress and a key intelligence source in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War, helped convince U.S. officials that Iraqi civilians "would welcome U.S. and allied forces with parades, flag waving, and an eagerness for democratic government." Such assurances presented Bush administration officials with a simple—but fatally flawed—post-invasion mission, one that supposedly would not entail a lengthy U.S. military occupation.⁶⁴

American officials typically look to opposition leaders because of the vast uncertainty about what the local landscape will look like after the regime-change mission takes place. Focusing on the desirability of installing a new government, policymakers tend to believe local leaders will unflinchingly support America's political goals, even when there is not much evidence to suggest a viable alternative to the existing government. Without fully recognizing that these outcomes are inherently uncertain, policymakers often put faith over reason; however, they should instead recognize that success is not merely a function of finding

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the right local actor to partner with and ensuring that the military uses the proper strategy. Officials often embark down this road believing that regime change will be cheap and easy; that is the precondition for authorizing the mission and all subsequent decisions are made to fit. A more realistic understanding of the low chances of success would advise against these missions being undertaken in the first place. Without such an appreciation, these missions are, at best, a roll of the dice. Unfortunately, the dice rarely produce a winner.

CONCLUSION

Given this scholarly consensus regarding the problems that regime-change operations usually foster, it is crucial that policymakers better understand what regime change will actually look like and the difficulties these kinds of missions will face. Digesting these studies, or even an overview of the prevailing literature, will provide a clearer picture of the typical regime-change operation. This has clear implications for those in the policy community and will better prepare them to avoid the pitfalls traditionally associated with removing foreign governments by force.

American officials need to shift two common mindsets in order to achieve better policy outcomes. Initially, regime change is politically viable because advocates sell it as a quick and easy fix that can create substantial change with minimal resources and effort. Instead, as shown above, regime-change missions often spiral into lengthy state-building projects or fail to achieve predetermined goals. Therefore, policymakers and the military officials advising them should not advocate for regime-change missions without being ready, willing, and able to commit to a decades-long institution-building mission following the initial overthrow of the regime. Approaching all such operations from the premise that they might lead to lengthy and costly military deployments is the best way for leaders to determine whether the end goal is essential to America's national interest or whether they are

embarking on a quixotic bid for an easy win. If the policy is not worth the sustained blood and treasure required for a lengthy military deployment, then the policy should be reconsidered.

Similarly, U.S. officials should embrace the reality that foreign polities have different priorities than America, and changing the existing leadership is unlikely to alter these priorities to favor those of the United States. Instead, policymakers need to ascertain whether the cost of the regime-change mission would be worthwhile if meaningful policy change under the new regime does not occur.

While democracy and human rights are important, leaders who remain interested in promoting these values around the world should focus on investing in nonmilitary means to bring about policy change. It could be the case that it is in America's interest to support political liberalization and the promotion of human rights abroad, but through peaceful means and support for civil society as opposed to the use of force.⁶⁵ Using noncoercive foreign policy tools in concert with covert and overt attempts to overthrow foreign regimes has reduced the legitimacy of these programs and made many other countries skeptical of American intentions. Increasingly, these tools are merely seen as the first step toward eventual armed intervention. Policymakers who are interested in maintaining a robust American capability to support democracy and human rights abroad must, therefore, find a way to unlink these policies from prospective forcible regime change. A concerted effort to commit to ending militarized regime-change missions, including ending threats against foreign regimes directly and embracing an incremental agenda to help spread political rights, will best serve long-term American interests. However, in some cases, it will not be possible to influence the domestic politics of foreign states and U.S. officials will be best served by embracing noninterference. In those cases, they should focus on finding ways to change behaviors instead of regimes.

While regime-change operations might seem like a feasible policy solution to bring more favorable governments to power and

create stronger democratic institutions and better humanitarian conditions around the globe, using armed force to achieve these goals often makes things worse. The unique conditions that allowed for the few successful cases—as in Germany or Japan, for example—are unlikely to present themselves again. Instead, a broader historical and social scientific lens reveals a clear pattern: foreign-imposed regime-change operations produce insecurity,

undermine democracy, and often have tragic humanitarian outcomes. Employing nonmilitary means to push for democracy and humanitarian goals, as well as unlinking humanitarian aid from regime-change operations, is necessary to promote greater political freedom. The continued use of force to overthrow foreign governments, by contrast, is likely to engender backlash against the United States and create more setbacks for American interests.

NOTES

1. Patrick Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment,” *International Security* 42, no. 4 (2018): 9–46.

2. William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington: White House, 1994), pp. 18–19, <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1994.pdf>.

3. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: White House, 2002), <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2002.pdf>.

4. Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington: White House, 2010), <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf>.

5. Michael C. Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (2007): 7–43.

6. For instance, see Jessica Donati, Vivian Salama, and Ian Talley, “U.S. Push to Oust Venezuela’s Maduro Marks First Shot in Plan to Reshape Latin America,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 30, 2019; Jason Rezaian, “Call Your Iran Policy by Its True Name,” *Washington Post*, July 30, 2019; and Megan Specia and David E. Sanger, “How the ‘Libya Model’ Became a Sticking Point in North Korea Nuclear Talks,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2018.

7. In other words, forceful democracy promotion’s goal is “to make the world safe for democracy.” See Tony Smith, *America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 3. As political scientist Jonathan Monten explains it, “Democracy

promotion is not just another foreign policy instrument or idealist diversion; it is central to U.S. political identity and sense of national purpose.” Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy,” *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 112–56.

8. Examples of this argument related to Vietnam include Mark Moyar, “Was Vietnam Winnable?,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2017; and Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (Orlando: Harvest, 1999).

9. Max Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2018); and Seth G. Jones, “Averting Failure in Afghanistan,” *Survival* 48, no. 1 (2006): 111–28.

10. Larry Diamond, “What Went Wrong in Iraq,” *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 5 (2004): 34–56; and Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Iraq Without a Plan,” *Policy Review* no. 128 (December 2004): 33–45.

11. To the extent that missions ever succeed, it often occurs when they aim for less expansive goals. Patricia L. Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 3 (2007): 496–524.

12. Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O’Rourke, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations,” *International Security* 41, no. 2 (2016): 43–89.

13. Downes and O’Rourke, “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” p. 56. See also Stephen M. Streater, *Managing the*

Counterrevolution: The United States and Guatemala, 1954–1961 (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000), pp. 223–24.

14. Paul Zachary, Kathleen Deloughery, and Alexander B. Downes, “No Business Like FIRC Business: Foreign-Imposed Regime Change and Bilateral Trade,” *British Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (2017): 749–82.

15. Zachary, Deloughery, and Downes, “No Business Like FIRC Business,” p. 778.

16. Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the U.S. Occupation of 1916–1924* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), pp. 165–70.

17. Zachary, Deloughery, and Downes, “No Business Like FIRC Business,” pp. 757–59.

18. Daniel Berger, William Easterly, Nathan Nunn, and Shanker Satyanath, “Commercial Imperialism? Political Influence and Trade During the Cold War,” *American Economic Review* 103, no. 2 (2013): 863–96.

19. As Bush articulated it, “Freedom’s advance in the Middle East will have another very practical effect . . . The success of free and stable governments in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere will shatter the myth and discredit the radicals.” George W. Bush, “Remarks by the President at the United States Air Force Academy Graduation Ceremony,” June 2, 2004.

20. For an explanation of this logic, see Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 3 (2003): 365–88.

21. Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, “Perfect Storms? Political Instability in Imposed Polities and the Futures of Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 52, no. 6 (2008): 880–915; Andrew J. Enterline and J. Michael Greig, “Beacons of Hope? The Impact of Imposed Democracy on Regional Peace, Democracy, and Prosperity,” *Journal of Politics* 67, no. 4 (2005): 1075–98; Jeffrey Pickering and Mark Peceny, “Forging Democracy at Gunpoint,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (2006): 539–60; and Christopher J. Coyne, *After War: The Political Economy of Exporting Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

22. Daniel Berger, Alejandro Corvalan, William Easterly, and

Shanker Satyanath, “Do Superpower Interventions Have Short and Long Term Consequences for Democracy?,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 41, no. 1 (2013): 22–34.

23. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs, “Intervention and Democracy,” *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006): 627–49.

24. Kevin Sieff, “Interview: Karzai Says 12-year Afghanistan War Has Left Him Angry at U.S. Government,” *Washington Post*, March 2, 2014.

25. Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes”; and Jennifer Kavanagh, Bryan Frederick, Alexandra Stark, Nathan Chandler, Meagan L. Smith, Matthew Povlock, Lynn E. Davis, and Edward Geist, *Characteristics of Successful US Military Interventions* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019).

26. Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, “Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 129. Similarly, for other democracies engaging in regime change, they only succeeded between 5 and 15 percent of the time out of the 20 foreign-imposed regime change operations they undertook.

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CITATION

Denison, Benjamin. “The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same: The Failure of Regime Change.” Policy Analysis No. 883, Cato Institute, Washington, DC, January 6, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.36009/PA.883>.



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