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Introduction: The Reagan Administration and Democracy Promotion

Robert Pee and William Michael Schmidli

Something extraordinary occurred in American foreign policy during the 1980s: democracy promotion emerged as a defining feature of the US engagement with the global arena. At the outset of the decade, Ronald Reagan's sweeping victory over the incumbent Jimmy Carter administration sent a chill coursing through East-West relations. The Soviets were "monsters," Reagan repeatedly declared, dedicated to an implacable and unending crusade to spread "Godless communism" throughout the world. "Let us not delude ourselves," he told an interviewer in June 1980. "The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world."¹ Rejecting the Carter administration's emphasis on human rights,

¹Reagan, 'First Press Conference,' January 29, 1981, Transcript, <http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/speeches/speech-5853>.

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Reagan took office determined to regain the initiative in the global Cold War. Seeking to carve out leverage to engage the Soviets from a position of strength, the new administration embarked on a massive US military buildup. Correspondingly, in what would later become known as the “Reagan Doctrine,” Reagan aimed to raise the costs of perceived Soviet expansionism by aiding anti-communist militants in the Third World. Tension between the superpowers escalated; by the fall of 1983, both the US and the Soviet Union were engaged in bloody proxy wars in the developing world, while international incidents such as the tragic Soviet downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 threatened to touch off a nuclear war.

By the end of Reagan’s second term in office, however, the global landscape of the Cold War had changed dramatically. Relations between the two superpowers warmed, particularly following Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascension as Soviet premier, and increased dialogue between Washington and Moscow decreased the likelihood of war. Correspondingly, reversing its initial rejection of human rights as a US foreign policy priority, the Reagan administration embraced the rhetoric of human rights—which it defined as anti-communism, neoliberal economic policies, and democracy promotion—to describe and justify its policy initiatives.

More to the point, the Reagan administration presided over a watershed moment in the development of American democracy promotion. This volume deploys a definition of democracy promotion as *a direct attempt to alter the political system of a foreign state to bring it into accord with democratic institutional models*. According to political scientist Peter Burnell, democracy promotion is operationalized through the use of force, the support of democratic forces inside a state, and the use or threat of sanctions.² To this, we would add efforts to support the growth of democratic institutions and processes through material and technical aid and diplomatic initiatives to press authoritarian rulers to institute democratic reforms.³ Therefore, democracy promotion is concrete action aimed at altering the internal political system and institutions of a foreign state in accordance with democratic models.

²Peter Burnell, ‘Democracy Assistance: The State of the Discourse,’ in *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization*, edited by Peter Burnell (London and Portland, Or: Frank Cass & Co Ltd., 2000): 3–34.

³Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 16–18; David Adesnik and Michael McFaul, ‘Engaging Autocratic Allies to Promote Democracy,’ *The Washington Quarterly* 29 no. 2 (2006): 5–26.

“Democracy promotion” is a loaded term. As noted by Conry, democracy promotion can be a “nebulous objective” which is easily manipulated to achieve the interests of powerful groups.⁴ First, the language of democracy promotion can be used by policymakers to gain support for policies which lack a clearly democratic component, such as the overthrow of hostile regimes through military force without specific plans to institute democratic reforms in the aftermath. Second, “democracy promotion” can convey the impression of a policy driven primarily by normative factors. Yet, even when policy is aimed at creating democratic structures and systems, this may be a tool to achieve concrete geopolitical and economic interests, rather than purely normative aims. Third, the “democracy” element of “democracy promotion” is often presented by policymakers as an uncontested term. However, democratic systems vary even between Western states; the model of democracy followed by the US differs in important respects, for example, from Scandinavian models of social democracy. In addition, democratic theorists such as David Held have delineated a variety of elitist, deliberative, and direct models of democracy.⁵ Yet, Hobson argues that when Western states promote democracy, they typically promote a single liberal variant.⁶ A small number of critics of US policy have gone further, arguing that the US promotes a model of “low-intensity democracy” in which formal democratic institutions legitimize rulers but social and economic structures based on previous authoritarian models and influenced by global economic forces limit popular empowerment.⁷

Drawing from this body of scholarship, this volume does not take the Reagan administration’s democracy initiative at face value. Yet the limitations of language make it difficult to analyze concepts like “democracy

⁴Conry, Barbara, ‘Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing No. 27: Loose Cannon: The National Endowment for Democracy,’ (Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 1993).

⁵David Held, *Models of Democracy*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

⁶Christopher Hobson, ‘The Limits of Liberal-Democracy Promotion,’ *Alternatives* 34 (2009): 386.

⁷Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson, ‘Low Intensity Democracy,’ in *Low Intensity Democracy: Political Power in the New World Order*, eds. Barry Gills, Joel Rocamora and Richard Wilson, (London and Boulder, Colo: Pluto Press, 1993): 3–35; William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention and Hegemony*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Steve Smith, ‘U.S. Democracy Promotion: Critical Questions,’ in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies and Impacts*, eds. Michael Cox, John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000): 63–85.

promotion” without falling into a semantic trap: simply using the phrase “Reagan’s democracy initiative”—even critically—runs the risk of conveying the idea that Reagan actually *did* promote democracy. While we use the administration’s terminology of “democracy promotion” and “democracy initiative” as a convenient shorthand to discuss US policies aimed at instigating political change in other states, we recognize that they are not neutral concepts; the chapters in this volume work to both illuminate the extent to which US democracy promotion was rooted in political contestations—rather than moral sensibilities—and reveal its relationship to broader US foreign policy goals.

Bearing these considerations in mind, the 1980s witnessed a significant rise in the priority given to democracy promotion as a component of US foreign policy. Reagan’s foreign policy rhetoric included liberal reference to “foster[ing] the infrastructure of democracy,” “oppos[ing] tyranny in whatever form, whether of the left or the right,” and pursuing a “forward strategy of freedom.”⁸ To be sure, pro-democratic concepts had been a staple theme of US presidential rhetoric for decades. But the Reagan administration went beyond rhetoric to integrate efforts to promote democracy overseas into US foreign policy at the level of strategy, organization, and tactics.

In terms of strategy, the Reagan administration linked US pressure for political reforms in both the East and West into one overarching project. The administration steadily increased support for democracy movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and expanded US covert and overt security assistance to anti-communist insurgents in Central America, Southern Africa, and Afghanistan. More surprisingly, the Reagan administration encouraged transitions to democracy in anti-communist dictatorships in Latin America and Asia—erstwhile allies that had filled the ranks of the US global Cold War alliance over the previous quarter-century.

In terms of organization, US efforts to promote democracy were increasingly institutionalized in the US government bureaucracy over the course of the 1980s. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) set up an Office of Democratic Initiatives in 1984 and the State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs emerged

⁸ Reagan, ‘Address to the British Parliament,’ June 8, 1982, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library [RRPL], <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.htm>; Reagan, ‘Message to the Congress on Freedom, Regional Security and Global Peace,’ March 14, 1986, RRPL, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1986/31486d.htm>; Reagan, quoted in Andrew E. Busch, *Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Freedom* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 203.

as a vocal advocate of democracy promotion as the core of the administration's human rights policy.⁹ The 1980s also saw the emergence of an organizational alliance between the US state and American civil society groups interested in democracy promotion, symbolized by and organized around the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Created in 1983 by Congress with strong support from the Reagan administration, the NED emerged as a hub connecting individuals, organizations, and epistemic communities involved in democracy promotion, including think tanks and academics, funding organizations, and NGOs. In turn, the NED facilitated the transfer of democracy promotion training and material assistance to pro-US political organizations and projects overseas.

In terms of tactics, the administration came to focus on actions designed to directly impact political systems and processes overseas, rather than indirect initiatives such as the public diplomacy programs aimed at the projection of "freedom" as an ideological concept implemented under Truman and Eisenhower or the Kennedy administration's Alliance for Progress, which was based on the idea that foreign aid and technical assistance programs aimed at fostering economic growth would lead to democratic political change.¹⁰ Instead, the Reagan administration deployed state-to-state pressure and top-level negotiations to foster institutional change, combined with new activities to build political systems compatible with American interests such as technical elections assistance and aid to pro-US democratic political parties and civil society groups overseas. In extreme cases such as Nicaragua, the Reagan administration combined these tactics with direct US support for an insurgent army using terrorist tactics to destabilize the leftist government.¹¹

⁹ Neil A. Burron, *The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 29.

¹⁰ On Truman and Eisenhower, see Scott Lucas, 'Campaigns of Truth: The Psychological Strategy Board and American Ideology, 1951–1953,' *The International History Review* 18, no. 2 (1996): 279–302; Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On Kennedy, see David Schmitz, *The United States and Right-wing Dictatorships, 1965–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 237–244; Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation-Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*, Expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 214–236.

¹¹ Robinson, Promoting Polyarchy; Marilyn Anne Zak, 'Assisting Elections in the Third World,' *The Washington Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (1987): 175–193.

By the late 1980s, a distinctive form of US democracy promotion—pursued through civil society or “low-intensity” military interventions and closely connected to the neoliberalism underpinning US-led globalization—had emerged as a central pillar of US foreign policy. Indeed, the rising importance of democracy promotion under Reagan had significant implications for post-Cold War US foreign policy. Both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations accorded democracy promotion a key place in their national security strategies, expanded the US government infrastructure for democracy promotion, and increased funding for non-governmental actors such as the NED and for the US government’s own democracy promotion programs.¹² Put simply, Reagan’s democracy promotion initiative laid the foundation for a defining feature of US grand strategy in the post-Cold War era: while the merits of NED President Carl Gershman’s 1991 recommendation that democratic globalism replace the Cold War as the focus of American foreign policy were (and remain) debatable, his assertion that “the basic elements of such a policy are already in place, having been assembled in the course of more than a decade” was entirely accurate.¹³ The genesis of contemporary American democracy promotion, in other words, occurred in the decade preceding the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The chapters in this collection analyze democracy promotion under the Reagan administration at multiple levels—the conceptual, the strategic,

¹²On democracy promotion in the Clinton and Bush administration’s respective national security strategies, see Douglas Brinkley, ‘Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine,’ *Foreign Policy* 106 (1997): 110–127; White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Department of State, 2002) <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf>; White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Department of State, 2006) <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/64884.pdf>; Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, ‘Bill Clinton’s “Democratic Enlargement” and the Securitisation of Democracy Promotion,’ *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26, no. 3 (2015):534–551. On the expansion of US government infrastructure for democracy promotion, see James D. Boys, *Clinton’s Grand Strategy: US Foreign Policy in a Post-Cold War World* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 218–219; Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*, 100; Thomas O. Melia, ‘The Democracy Bureaucracy: The Infrastructure of American Democracy Promotion.’ *Princeton Project on National Security* (2005) https://www.princeton.edu/~ppns/papers/democracy_bureaucracy.pdf, 10. On increased funding, see Nicole Bibbins Sedaca and Nicolas Bouchet, ‘Holding Steady? US Democracy Promotion in a Changing World,’ *Chatham House: US and the Americas Program* (2014) <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/197475>, 15.

¹³Gershman, Carl, ‘Freedom remains the Touchstone,’ in *America’s Purpose: New Visions of US Foreign Policy* edited by Owen Harries (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1991): 40.

the organizational, and the tactical. Drawing on recently declassified US government documents, non-governmental human rights organizations' records, and increased access to archives overseas, the chapters in this volume turn on three interrelated questions: Why did democracy promotion emerge as a defining feature of US foreign policy during the 1980s? What was the relationship between the Reagan administration's democracy promotion initiative and neoconservative political ideas and neoliberal economic policies? And what was the significance of democracy promotion for the Reagan administration's approach to the global Cold War, including both US-Soviet relations and American policy toward the Third World?

THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE

The shift toward democracy promotion under Reagan and its impact on the policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations have been understudied in the existing scholarship. The historical literature on the Reagan administration is largely focused on the military, diplomatic, and covert aspects of US policy toward the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Whether focused on a triumphalist reading of administration policy emphasizing Reagan's confrontational policy toward the Soviets in his first term or his engagement and negotiations with Gorbachev after 1984, the lack of attention given to democracy promotion at the level of strategy and concrete programs is common to this scholarship.¹⁴ Scholarship linking administration policy and democracy promotion has largely focused on the Reagan Doctrine's arming of anti-communist guerrillas in Third World states such as Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Angola but does not reflect on the wider engagement of the US with non-communist regimes and its growing involvement in supporting electoral processes

¹⁴ For triumphalist accounts of Reagan's first term, see Peter Schweizer, *Victory: the Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy that Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press 1994); Paul Kengor, *The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the fall of Communism* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007). On Reagan's engagement with Gorbachev, see James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (London: Viking, 2009); James Wilson, *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

and democratic groups.¹⁵ Although in recent years a growing number of historians have turned their attention to democracy promotion in US foreign policy, the topic remains underexplored in the existing academic literature.¹⁶ Similarly, historical scholarship on the relationship between human rights and US foreign policy in the 1980s is also limited. Although scholarship on human rights in the 1970s is growing rapidly, only a handful of scholars have turned their attention to the 1980s.¹⁷

Much of the existing scholarship on US democracy promotion has been written by political scientists and international relations scholars. For the most part, however, these studies have examined the issue in the context of post-Cold War policy.¹⁸ The general argument put forward by this literature is that practical programs of democracy promotion only became a

¹⁵Mark Lagon, 'The International System and the Reagan Doctrine: Can Realism Explain Aid to 'Freedom Fighters?'' *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1992): 39–70; James M. Scott, *Deciding to Intervene: The Reagan Doctrine and American Foreign Policy* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996); Chester Pach, 'The Reagan Doctrine: Principle, Pragmatism, and Policy' *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36 no. 1 (2006): 5–88; Malcolm Byrne, *Iran-Contra: Reagan's Scandal and the Unchecked Abuse of Presidential Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

¹⁶Nicolas Bouchet *Democracy Promotion as U.S. Foreign Policy: Bill Clinton and Democratic Enlargement* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Hal Brands *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-war Cold War Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Robert Pee, *Democracy Promotion, National Security and Strategy: Foreign Policy Under the Reagan Administration* (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹⁷On human rights and US foreign policy, see, for example, Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (New York: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2012); William Michael Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere: Human Rights and U.S. Cold War Policy toward Argentina* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); Mark Philip Bradley, *The World Reimagined: Americans and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). On human rights and US foreign policy in the 1980s, see Kathryn Sikkink, *Mixed Signals: U.S. Human Rights Policy and Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Joe Renouard, *Human Rights in American Foreign Policy: From the 1960s to the Soviet Collapse* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹⁸Michael, G. Cox, John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, eds. *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Michael Mandelbaum, *Democracy's Good Name: the Rise and Risks of the World's Most Popular Form of Government* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007); Michael McFaul, *Advancing Democracy Abroad: Why We Should and How We Can* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

serious US priority after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is often stated that the end of the Cold War contest provided more opportunity for the US to promote democracy overseas without the fear that doing so would undermine its security by weakening existing governments and thus allowing local or Moscow-linked communists to seize control of Third World states. This situational explanation is often connected to the rise of ideological concepts which privileged democracy toward the end of the Cold War and after, notably the notion of a liberal democratic “End of History” posited in the wake of the fall of the USSR by Francis Fukuyama.¹⁹ Also influential was the Democratic Peace Theory proposed by Michael Doyle during the 1980s, which argued that democratic states were unlikely to go to war with each other.²⁰ While these factors clearly hold significant explanatory power, they obscure the impact of the policies pursued by the Reagan administration for the post-Cold War era.

Finally, it is worth noting that this volume takes a very different approach than political or democratic development literature. This scholarship—generated by an epistemic community that is itself a product of the expanded interest in democracy promotion during the 1980s—takes a problem-solving approach that aims to evaluate the effectiveness of tools such as support for parties and civil society groups overseas, electoral aid, and support for legislatures in building functioning democratic systems and institutions overseas.²¹ Engaging the issue as a value-free technical agenda, this literature tends to reify democracy promotion, obscuring embedded ideological assumptions and power relations. It generally does not interrogate how these programs interface with the specific national security or economic interests of the US and other Western states or the relationship between these interests and the levels of democracy aid and types of assistance that are provided in specific contexts.

¹⁹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

²⁰ Michael W. Doyle, ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs’ *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (July 1983):205–235; Doyle, ‘Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2,’ *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 4 (October 1983): 23–353; Piki Ish-Shalom, ‘The Civilization of Clashes: Misapplying Democratic Peace Theory in the Middle East.’ *Political Science Quarterly* 122, no. 4 (2008): 533–554.

²¹ Larry Jay Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008); Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000).

This volume seeks to make a significant contribution to the existing scholarship on democracy promotion and US foreign policy in the Reagan era. It owes a significant intellectual debt to pioneering scholars such as Thomas Carothers, whose early work examines Reagan administration diplomatic and political development initiatives to promote democracy in the context of Latin America, and Tony Smith, whose influential 1994 study *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* remains essential reading.²² This volume also hopes to build on important recent studies that have carved out a space for US democracy promotion within the existing scholarship.²³ Similarly, William I. Robinson's critical theorizing of democracy promotion is invaluable in illuminating the ideological underpinnings and power dynamics embedded in US democracy promotion.²⁴

This volume seeks to extend historical scholarship on the Reagan administration by highlighting democracy promotion as a defining aspect of US policy in the final phase of the Cold War. Building on the work of Robinson and other critical theorists, the chapters in this volume underscore the extent to which the initiative was embedded in an ideological agenda, advancing a specific kind of democracy that envisioned specific kinds of power relations between the economy and politics and between different groups in society.²⁵ It interfaces with the literature on American democracy promotion in political science and international relations by interrogating the origins and specific form of post-Cold War US democracy promotion in terms of previous policies and structures created before the end of the conflict and moves beyond thin ideological explanations for the increased prominence of democracy promotion in US post-Cold War foreign policy by considering how the democracy promotion initiative advanced concrete US interests in the Reagan era.

²² Thomas Carothers, *In the Name of Democracy: U.S. Policy Toward Latin America In the Reagan Years* (Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991); Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* Expanded ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1994] 2012).

²³ Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi, *American Democracy Promotion*; Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet, eds. *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion: From Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁴ Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy*.

²⁵ See, for example, Rita Abrahamsen, *Disciplining Democracy: Development Discourse and Good Governance in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2000); Milja Kurki, *Democratic Futures: Revisioning Democracy Promotion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

This volume also has much to offer historians of US foreign relations during the late Cold War. It adds to our understanding of the relationship between the emergence of human rights activism as a powerful political force in the 1970s and the Reagan administration's embrace of democracy promotion as the centerpiece of its human rights policy. Correspondingly, the volume illuminates the rising importance of democracy promotion in the Reagan administration's strategic approach to the superpower confrontation. The volume also showcases path-breaking research on case studies of American democracy promotion, ranging from Eastern Europe to Latin America to Asia. Drawing on multi-archival and multilingual research, the contributors balance US and non-US perspectives and integrate state and non-state actors, resulting in cutting-edge analyses that blend national, international, and transnational approaches to historical interpretation.

PART I: IDEOLOGY, STRATEGY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE SHIFT TOWARD DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Examining the formulation and implementation of the democracy promotion initiative, the chapters in Part I illuminate the special emphasis that the Reagan administration placed on democracy promotion. In Chap. 2, Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard examines the Reagan administration's shift from an initial rejection of human rights to a reshaping of this agenda into a concept of democracy promotion. Foregrounding the role of Elliott Abrams and the State Department Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, Søndergaard argues that Abrams narrowed the human rights agenda around political rights while jettisoning economic and social rights. Second, Abrams' reformulation included a "positive track" of promoting the growth of democratic forms of government. This re-articulation of human rights into democracy promotion produced a concept that was far more compatible with the Reagan administration's early focus on the Soviet Union and the Cold War confrontation.

In Chap. 3, Robert Pee focuses on the interconnections between the US state and US civil society groups in the creation and subsequent operations of the National Endowment for Democracy. Pee shows that it was intervention by private US democracy promoters and Congress, particularly Democratic legislators, which pushed the Reagan administration beyond an initial concept of deploying democracy as an abstract ideology

to counter the spread of communist ideas through public diplomacy programs to support for the NED's more sophisticated political aid programs. These programs were first lodged in a legally private, albeit US government-funded, organization to manage the immediate disjuncture between the Endowment's mission of supporting pro-US dissident groups in the East and the West and the Reagan administration's need to maintain relations with dictatorships. Although the priorities of the Reagan administration and the NED were not identical, Pee demonstrates that shared visions of how the spread of democracy could promote US security led to cooperation in cases such as Poland and Chile.

In Chap. 4, William Michael Schmidli argues that by 1986 the Reagan administration's emphasis on democracy promotion, as the core of its human rights policy, had made significant steps toward recreating the bipartisan Cold War consensus between the executive and legislative branches that had foundered in the late 1960s on the shoals of the Vietnam War. Yet Schmidli argues that the democracy promotion initiative was closely tied to the Reagan Doctrine's emphasis on rolling back communist gains in the developing world. Reagan's intervention in Central America, in particular, was undertaken in the spirit of a human rights policy that defined communism as the ultimate violation, and justified US efforts to facilitate the ouster of the leftist government of Nicaragua—even if it meant supporting an insurgent army that systematically utilized terrorist tactics against civilian targets. The illegalities illuminated by the Iran-Contra Scandal, Schmidli concludes, demonstrated the interventionism at the heart of the democracy promotion initiative and, in the process, nearly destroyed the Reagan presidency.

PART II: US DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND THE SOVIET EMPIRE

The chapters in Part II focus on US democracy promotion and the Soviet bloc. Christian Peterson's chapter on US policy toward the Soviet Union and Gregory Domber's study of US support for the Polish *Solidarność* trade union draw on fresh archival research to analyze the Reagan team's use of democracy promotion as a vehicle to increase covert support for democracy movements behind the Iron Curtain. Echoing Søndergaard's identification of democracy promotion as the "positive track" of the administration's human rights policy, Peterson applies it to US policy toward the Soviet Union. The Reagan administration's most important contributions

to transforming Soviet internal behavior, he contends, involved holding the Soviets accountable for their violations of the Helsinki Final Act, supporting private citizens in their efforts to challenge Soviet human rights abuses through the “Helsinki process” and organizations funded by the NED, and participating in conferences and workshops with Soviet leaders designed to build liberal democratic institutions in the USSR.

Shifting the focus to Poland, Gregory Domber examines the special status of *Solidarność* in debates about democracy promotion in the 1980s. Drawing on Polish and American state and non-state archives, Domber shows that a broad, bipartisan US political consensus considered *Solidarność* worthy of American support. As a result, the trade union benefited from an exceptional level of autonomy during the 1980s, in which Americans provided resources to the Polish opposition but maintained little oversight of how those funds were utilized. This autonomy extended into the highest levels of the American government with both Reagan and George H. W. Bush actively soliciting advice from opposition leaders before making changes in policy. *Solidarność*'s autonomy, Domber concludes, was an essential piece of the overall success of American democracy promotion efforts at the end of the Cold War.

If Peterson and Domber's chapters widen historical conceptions of the end of the Cold War to focus on the actions of US democracy promoters and their links to dissident groups behind the Iron Curtain, Kate Geoghegan's chapter illuminates how neoliberal economic ideas were inextricably linked to US democracy promotion in Eastern Europe. In an innovative study of the encounter between the Global South and the socialist “second world” in the critical years surrounding the collapse of communism, Geoghegan examines how Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto's interpretation of underdevelopment was heralded by high-level US policymakers as validating the imperative of US neoliberal economic reforms. Officials at USAID and the US Chamber of Commerce-affiliated Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) distilled from de Soto two concepts whose relevance seemed to be reinforced in the post-communist context: that good, democratic governance was necessary for economic growth and that independent, informal sector organizations had an essential role to play in promoting and sustaining good governance. Despite the inconclusive results of de Soto's prescriptions, Geoghegan shows how his ideas retained a powerful appeal for US policymakers seeking free market solutions to development and democracy.

PART III: DEMOCRACY PROMOTION AND THE THIRD WORLD

While the support of anti-government forces in states such as Poland clearly reinforced US Cold War objectives, in the Third World US policy-makers faced decisions on whether US national security objectives could be most effectively achieved by continued support for reliably anti-communist dictatorial leaders and ruling groups or by promoting democratic reform to reduce local grievances which might explode into anti-American political movements or insurgencies. In Chap. 8, Evan D. McCormick examines the impact of US policy in El Salvador on Salvadorans' political culture. As McCormick points out, the administration's decision to support electoral processes in El Salvador is often cited by historians as a key moment in the President's commitment to democracy promotion. McCormick shifts the focus from ideological reconceptualizations in Washington to the impact of the technical elections assistance supplied by USAID for the 1982 and 1984 elections on Salvadorans and how they experienced democracy. He argues that this assistance shifted the "culture of politics" in the nation by building legitimacy for Salvadoran electoral processes and thus convinced Salvadoran elites to support the process of democratic transition. Despite difficulties with the management of these elections and wider questions regarding whether periodic elections were sufficient to build political legitimacy in a sharply divided nation, they provided a template for USAID election assistance programs in Central America and beyond.

In Chap. 9, Debbie Sharnak examines the extent to which democracy promotion, human rights, and US national security intertwined in the US' diplomatic involvement in Uruguay's transition to democracy during Reagan's first term. Sharnak argues that the administration's approach to reinforcing democratization in Uruguay emphasized procedurally clean elections but downgraded human rights issues such as torture and political incarceration. Her analysis raises difficult questions regarding the administration's commitment to the substance of democracy and how far it perceived democratic processes as tools to create (the appearance of) legitimacy.

Shifting to Reagan's second administration, Mattias Fibiger and Clint Work focus on East Asia. In Chap. 10, Fibiger argues that the administration's policy toward the Philippines constituted a turning point in the development of US democracy promotion. The US decision to withdraw

support from authoritarian President Ferdinand Marcos represented the first time Reagan had abandoned a reliable anti-communist dictatorial ally. Fibiger documents a progressive withdrawal of US support for Marcos from 1983 onward, based primarily on the calculation that rising popular discontent in the Philippines was increasing the power of a Marxist insurgency in the islands and thus threatening US national security interests. Supporting Philippine democratic reform, top US policymakers came to believe, even in the face of opposition from an unwilling dictatorial ally, would best safeguard US national security. Central to this process was in the attitude of American neoconservatives toward democracy promotion. Through his examination of the role of then-Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific Paul Wolfowitz and other key neoconservatives, Fibiger traces a shift from the belief that defeating the Soviet Union required US support for anti-communist dictatorships to an embrace of democratic transitions, even in friendly authoritarian states.

In Chap. 11, Clint Work traces a similar shift in US policy toward South Korea. In its first term, the Reagan administration forged a strong relationship with South Korean dictator Chun Doo Hwan to protect US national security interests in Northeast Asia while downgrading human rights concerns. However, by 1986 middle-class South Koreans were pressing Chun to initiate a substantive change to democracy. While US policy was not as decisive to the outcome as in the Philippines, Work demonstrates that the efforts of State Department officials were important in enabling a transition to democracy. Significantly, in both cases the transition did not threaten existing US interests—indeed, it may have put them on a more secure footing. In both the Philippines and South Korea, in other words, the US promoted democracy as a more legitimate form of rule when authoritarian allies were perceived to be losing control. In these cases, the US supported democracy as a vehicle to safeguard a long-term security relationship.

PART IV: LEGACY

In the final section, Joe Renouard analyzes the legacy of the Reagan administration's democracy promotion initiative. Renouard takes a wide-lens approach to the struggle between the Reagan administration, Congress, and human rights activists over the direction of US foreign policy in the 1980s. Given the Reagan administration's tendency to equate political democracy—emphasizing elections—with human rights,

Renouard asks whether the administration hijacked human rights language in pursuit of Cold War aims. Although recognizing that the US role in bloody Cold War flashpoints like Central America contributed to widespread violence, Renouard concludes that the policy struggles within the Washington Beltway over the course of the decade ultimately resulted in increased US support for activists fighting for democratic reforms overseas.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD: US NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION BEFORE THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

The Reagan administration's democracy promotion initiative had roots stretching back to US foreign policy in early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1940s, having experienced both the Great Depression and the Second World War, American policymakers recognized the need for the US to take a global leadership role in the postwar era. Both the administrations of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman embraced the project of creating a world order consistent with American interests.

It was a project built on Woodrow Wilson's largely unsuccessful efforts to create a framework for international stability and security in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Like Wilson, American policymakers in the 1940s envisioned a robust blend of capitalism, democracy, and collective security as the lifeblood of a peaceful, prosperous postwar world.²⁶ Wilson's efforts, however, had foundered on the shoals of European nationalism, his own intemperate leadership, and intractable resistance in the US Senate. By contrast, the exigencies of the Depression and the Second World War combined with Roosevelt's deft cultivation of support among Republicans on Capitol Hill created a window of opportunity to fashion Wilsonian ideas into concrete policy initiatives.

The liberal internationalist impulse defined US foreign policy in the early postwar era. The US took a lead role in the creation of the Bretton Woods system, the United Nations, and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More concretely, support for democratic institutions was a core component of the American effort to mold Germany and Japan into peaceful players on the postwar world stage. Significantly, this approach carried over into the early Cold War; the key features of the containment strat-

²⁶Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); John A. Thompson, *Woodrow Wilson: Profiles in Power* (New York: Longman, 2002); Smith, *America's Mission*.

egy in Europe—the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—were largely consonant with the liberal internationalist goal of fostering open markets and democratic political systems.²⁷

The globalization of the Cold War in the 1950s, however, gave the containment strategy added weight and reduced American support for democracy overseas. To be sure, even at the high-water mark of US support for Western European democracies in the late 1940s, American policymakers defined democracy in decidedly narrow terms, eschewing more participatory forms of democracy in favor of the perceived stability of a republican political structure. “The New England town meeting is the idea of democracy, and all they do is talk,” Harry S. Truman asserted with characteristic bluntness. By contrast, he continued, “... a republic is one that has checks and balances in it, as ours is set up for that purpose ... there can be a continuing form of government carried out by men who are responsible to the people and yet who can’t be thrown out every fifteen minutes if something goes wrong.”²⁸

More to the point, US support for democracy in Western Europe envisioned elections dominated by political elites from the pro-capitalist center-right of the political spectrum. Indeed, in the early Cold War, American policymakers worked assiduously to use economic aid, covert operations, and political pressure to exclude Western European left-wing political parties from gaining power through the ballot box. The US intervention in the 1948 Italian general election offered a case in point; fearing a victory of the left-wing coalition of the Popular Democratic Front (FDP), in the lead-up to the election the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) blanketed the Italian peninsula with anti-communist propaganda to discredit the FDP, while top US policymakers threatened to deny Marshall Plan aid in the event of an FDP victory. Although the sweeping victory by the Christian Democrats was heralded by the Truman Administration as a triumph for the free world, the election illuminated distinctly *undemocratic* characteristics of a foreign policy ostensibly aimed at promoting democracy abroad.²⁹

²⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

²⁸ Quoted in Martin H. Folly, ‘Harry S. Truman,’ in Cox, Lynch, and Bouchet, eds., *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion*, 96.

²⁹ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Kaeten Mistry, ‘The Case for Political Warfare: Strategy, Organization and US Involvement in the 1948 Italian Election,’ *Cold War History*, 3, no. 6 (2006): 301–329.

As the Cold War globalized at the tail end of the 1940s, the balance between liberal internationalism and containment tilted in favor of the latter. The shift was first felt in Latin America. In the mid-1940s, a democratic tide had swept across the region, supported by American diplomats during the war years in local contexts as varied as Guatemala, Paraguay, and Argentina. By the end of the decade, however, the rising influence of containment led to an overriding US emphasis on anti-communism in inter-American affairs. This shift resulted in deepening US ties to Latin American militaries and conservative political and economic elites.³⁰

By the mid-1950s, the overriding emphasis on global containment in US foreign policy was evident throughout the developing world. Viewing nationalist and anti-colonialist political movements with suspicion, the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration feared that local communists might play upon deep-seated grievances to create inroads for advancing Soviet influence. In 1953, the administration successfully dispatched the CIA to foment a military coup against Iranian leader Mohammad Mosaddeq, whose nationalization of British oil holdings and ties to the communist Tudeh party had raised warning flags in Washington and London. A similar enterprise the following year led to the overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz, a progressive reformist with members of Guatemala's communist party in his advisory circle. Hailed by the Eisenhower administration as cost-effective Cold War victories for the West, the operations closed off avenues of reformist politics and propelled both nations down a path to decades of state-sanctioned repression, political violence, and eventual revolutionary upheaval.³¹

Less spectacularly, Eisenhower quietly solidified US support for friendly authoritarians. In Latin America, US support for conservative military and political leaders contributed to a resurgence of authoritarianism: by mid-decade more than half of the nations of Latin America had returned to

³⁰ Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough, 'Latin America Between the Second World War and the Cold War: Some Reflections on the 1945–8 Conjunction,' *Journal of Latin American Studies* 20, no. 1 (1988): 167–189; Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

³¹ Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952–1954*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2004).

dictatorial rule.³² In Asia, the administration ramped up support for the autocratic Chiang Kai-shek, backed the French effort to retain control of Indochina, and committed the US to supporting South Vietnam under the repressive leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem.³³ In the Middle East, the US worked to offset the regional influence of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's pan-Arab nationalism by strengthening ties to conservative monarchies in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iran.³⁴ In the effort to create a web of security alliances in the developing world, the Eisenhower administration paid scant attention to democratic institutions. Historian Odd Arne Westad writes: "Only regimes that accepted the American hegemony in foreign policy and in development strategy were seen as viable, and some of the "unviable" states were condemned for voluntarily or involuntarily opening up for Communism, and thereby provoking a U.S. intervention."³⁵

Fearing the possibility of communist influence in the developing world and willing to use American political, economic, and military power to shape events overseas, successive US administrations supported repressive allies at the expense of democracy. Although American assistance earmarked for political development abroad increased substantially during the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' overriding emphasis on preventing communist subversion also led to a surge in US counterinsurgency training and aid programs in the developing world. Particularly in Latin America, despite the lofty rhetoric surrounding Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, Washington's fear of communist insurgencies tempered support for regional democratic reforms and ultimately strengthened local conservatives and military leaders at the expense of moderate democrats. "The Alliance for Progress" writes historian Stephen G. Rabe, "proved a notable policy failure of the 1960s, superseded only by the U.S. debacle in Vietnam."³⁶

³² Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³³ David Schmitz, *Thank God They're on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

³⁴ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁵ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 130.

³⁶ Steven G. Rabe, *The Most Dangerous Area in the World: John F. Kennedy Confronts Communist Revolution in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 148.

Support for democratic institutions abroad declined still further as a US policy priority during the Nixon-Ford era. The Nixon administration's strategic pursuit of détente, a relaxation of tension between the US and the Soviet Union, aimed at moderating Soviet behavior in the international arena, slowing the arms race, and ending US' costly military intervention in Vietnam. In this realpolitik framework, there was no place for the promotion of democracy; as the administration worked to establish areas of cooperation with the Soviets, the "Nixon Doctrine" aimed to lower the cost of global containment by deepening ties with authoritarian allies in the developing world. "U.S. style democracy won't work here," Nixon speciously claimed during a tour of South America in 1967. "I wish it would."³⁷ Détente's relaxation of Cold War tension rarely extended to the developing world—as the administration's covert efforts to destabilize Chile, resulting in the brutal 1973 military overthrow of democratically elected socialist President Salvador Allende, made starkly evident.³⁸

If support for democracy reached its nadir during the Nixon-Ford era, the collapse of the Cold War consensus among American policymakers in the 1970s led to rising domestic criticism of the administrations' realist approach to foreign policy. During the 1960s, the rise of New Left activism associated with the anti-Vietnam War movement, counterculture, and a range of progressive rights-based movements pushed the Democratic Party to the left. Channeled into the mainstream as "New Politics Liberalism" and often referred to as the McGovernite wing of the Democratic Party following the failed 1972 presidential bid of Sen. George McGovern (D-SD), this new generation of liberal internationalists denounced US Cold War support for repressive allies in the developing world. Significantly, these liberals increasingly articulated their opposition in the language of human rights, resulting in more than a dozen of pieces of congressional legislation binding US foreign policy to human rights considerations. For their part, hard-line cold warriors on both sides of the aisle denounced détente as failing to recognize the national security threat posed by Soviet totalitarianism. They too adopted human rights as a framework, criticizing détente as a betrayal of the moral imperatives underpinning the American experience, and as a callous acquiescence of Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.

³⁷ Quoted in Schmidli, *The Fate of Freedom Elsewhere*, 43.

³⁸ Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

Appealing to a broad-based constituency, the human rights issue played a signal role in Jimmy Carter's narrow victory over Gerald Ford in the 1976 presidential election. Over the next four years, the Carter administration's focus on "first-generation rights" including state-sanctioned torture and political imprisonment succeeded in weaving human rights more fully into the fabric of US foreign policy. The administration failed, however, to create a domestic political consensus around its foreign policy priorities. Restive New Politics liberals protested that Carter's lofty human rights rhetoric failed to translate into across-the-board policy changes. Liberal cold warriors, on the other hand, joined conservative internationalists in criticizing Carter's emphasis on human rights as unrealistic and dangerously short-sighted.³⁹

With Cold War tension deepening in the months leading up to the 1980 presidential election, Carter's foreign policy approach was assailed by a resurgent right wing, with Republican presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan leading the attack. "Mr. Carter has failed in his most fundamental duty as President," Reagan asserted on the campaign trail in late January 1980. "His continual failure to give the Soviet Union clear and unmistakable signals concerning our vital strategic interests is driving the country closer to military confrontation and the risk of nuclear war."⁴⁰ More broadly, Reagan portrayed the Carter administration as demonstrating the defeatism, isolationism, and self-abasement characteristic of New Politics Liberalism. Significantly, by 1979 liberal cold warriors were sounding a similar theme. Jeane Kirkpatrick's seminal *Commentary* article "Dictatorships and Double Standards" was a particularly influential example of liberal hawks' frustration with the Carter administration.⁴¹ A lifelong Democrat, Kirkpatrick had gained a reputation over the course of the 1970s as fierce opponent of the McGovern wing of the Democratic Party.

The ultimate defection of Cold War liberals from the Democratic Party and into the Reagan camp underscored how far the American political terrain had shifted during the 1970s. More to the point, erstwhile liberals such as Kirkpatrick and Elliott Abrams—increasingly referred to as

³⁹ Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁴⁰ Reagan, Untitled, 'Statement by Ronald Reagan' January 31, 1980, Richard V. Allen Papers, Box 30, Folder: 'RR: Selected Foreign Policy and Defense Statements,' Hoover Institution Archives.

⁴¹ Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards,' *Commentary* 68, no. 5 (1979): 34–45.

neoconservatives—would play a key role in distancing the Reagan administration from the perceived failures of the Carter administration’s human rights policy. The debates which had emerged during the 1970s over the proper use of American power and the role of human rights in US foreign policy toward dictatorships within the Soviet Empire and outside it would have an impact on the evolution of US democracy promotion after Reagan defeated Carter in the 1980 election.

THE RISE OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION UNDER THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

Reagan did not enter office with a clear strategy incorporating democracy promotion. Instead, his key priority was to renovate US power—thought to have declined under Nixon, Ford, and Carter—vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Yet democracy promotion rose as a US priority during the 1980s due to a combination of internal and external factors. Ronald Reagan’s initial foreign policy framework harked back to the Cold War policies of the late 1940s and the 1950s more than it promised innovation. Reagan’s emphasis on increasing US military capabilities and placing strains on the Soviet system recalled elements of the containment strategy laid out in NSC-68 and was followed by the Truman administration after 1950.⁴² The President’s rhetoric counter-posed the US as a democratic “city on a hill” confronting an immoral or amoral USSR, but this did not immediately translate into strategies or programs to foster the emergence of democratic systems overseas. In US policy toward the Third World, Reagan championed the Kirkpatrick Doctrine, which asserted that US support for anti-communist authoritarian regimes was both moral and in the strategic interest of the US as, by supporting these regimes against the USSR or pro-Soviet totalitarian movements, the US was defending itself from Soviet expansionism and defending spaces in which liberty might one day emerge.⁴³ As the historian David Schmitz has pointed out, there was little that was new about Kirkpatrick’s ideas; similar ideas had been articulated in the 1950s under Eisenhower.⁴⁴ What, then, accounts for the development of a policy aimed at promoting democratic transformation?

⁴² John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* revised and expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, [1982] 2005), 353.

⁴³ Kirkpatrick, ‘Dictators and Double Standards.’

⁴⁴ Schmitz, *Thank God They’re on Our Side*, 199; Schmitz, *The United States and Right-wing Dictatorships*, 180–182.

First, the Reagan administration was seeking to respond to changes in the internal politics of the US which had occurred over the 1970s. Internally, the post-Vietnam period saw the collapse of the bipartisan US foreign policy consensus organized around anti-communism and containment. Politically, the pro-containment “Establishment” split into factions as advocates of détente searched for accommodation with the USSR, conservative and neoconservative hardliners sought confrontation with the Soviets, and liberal internationalists decried American support for repressive allies in the Third World. Institutionally, bipartisanship declined as Congress grew at once more fragmented and more willing to challenge the President on foreign policy.⁴⁵ The rise of human rights as a defining issue in the 1970s further fueled congressional activism and heightened tension between the White House and Capitol Hill.⁴⁶ “We are living in a nihilistic nightmare,” Secretary of State Henry Kissinger complained at mid-decade, capturing the mood in the Oval Office.⁴⁷

Second, the global geopolitical and geo-economic order was also in a state of flux in ways that reduced the stability of both the US’ authoritarian allies and its communist bloc adversaries. The “Nixon Shock” of 1971—when the US unilaterally left the Gold Standard and suspended the convertibility of the dollar—and the “Oil Shock” of 1973 created economic dislocation which affected authoritarian states in Southern Europe and the Third World.⁴⁸ These developments impacted authoritarian regimes significantly because their stability rested on factors such as their ability to assure economic growth, rather than on a claim to represent the will of the people as expressed in free elections, or to represent the future of mankind on the basis of scientific social and economic analysis.⁴⁹

The Third Wave of Democracy represented one outcome of this crisis. Beginning with the 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, when military units coordinated by officers disillusioned with the Cactano dictator-

⁴⁵ Richard A. Melanson, *American foreign policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush*. 4th ed. (Abingdon, Oxon, and New York: Routledge, 2015), 18–22.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Cmiel, ‘The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States,’ *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1233–1235.

⁴⁷ Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 263.

⁴⁸ Richard Saull, *The Cold War and After: Capitalism, Revolution and Superpower Politics*, (London: Pluto, 2007), 136–137.

⁴⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

ship and its military failures in Angola and Mozambique removed the government, the wave then spread to authoritarian governments in Spain and Greece. Reaching Latin America in the late 1970s, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Peru held elections in 1978 and 1979.⁵⁰ In this sense, there was a “global democratic revolution” in train before Reagan came to office.

The crisis of authoritarianism did not lead inevitably to democracy, however. At the same time as the democratic tide was sending generals back to the barracks from Lisbon to Lima, a third wave of communism/revolutionary nationalism convulsed Asia, Africa, and Latin America as former Portuguese colonies such as Angola and Mozambique, Southeast Asian states such as Laos and Cambodia, and Latin American states such as Nicaragua experienced the victory of armed revolutionary forces hostile to the US. Frequently backed by the USSR—albeit often in only the final stages of violent struggle—in each case, these new revolutionary regimes displaced anti-communist authoritarian leaders.

Third, despite a surge of Soviet support for revolutionary struggles abroad, a final key geopolitical change in the 1970s was the decline of the Soviet Union. A combination of the impact of the 1973 oil shock, successive poor harvests, and declining industrial production weakened Soviet power and presented Soviet leaders with tough choices over how to allocate dwindling resources.⁵¹ The Soviet Union’s autarchic economy proved incapable of benefiting from the economic globalization and information technology revolutions which had begun in the 1970s.⁵² Thus, while the US and its allies were forging ahead in key sectors with military applications such as aerospace and computing, due to the development of inter-firm alliances and the dispersal of production chains which globalization made possible, the Soviet Union lagged behind. The wave of Third World Marxist takeovers placed extra strain on the USSR,

⁵⁰ Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy*; Howard J. Wiarda, *The Democratic Revolution in Latin America: History, Politics and U.S. Policy* (London: Holmes & Meier, 1990), 72–83.

⁵¹ Stephen Kotkin, ‘The Kiss of Debt: The East Bloc Goes Borrowing,’ in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, eds. Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela and Daniel J. Sargent (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010), 80–97.

⁵² Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, ‘Economic Constraints and the Turn towards Superpower Cooperation in the 1980s’ in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. by Olav Njolstad (London and New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2004), 91.

as the Soviets struggled to provide the aid necessary to support Third World allies such as Ethiopia, Angola, and Vietnam. At the same time, the Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe, confronting increasingly dire economic problems exacerbated by reduced Soviet support in critical areas such as oil deliveries, increasingly turned to the West for hard currency loans to provide consumer goods to restive populations. Eastern European states became increasingly dependent on the West, increasing Western leverage behind the Iron Curtain.⁵³

The Reagan administration thus confronted a fluid world. In the Third World, contradictory trends pointed to a surge of Marxist or democratic transitions, both of which could threaten the authoritarian allies the administration wanted to support to maintain containment. At the same time, US policymakers were aware of deepening Soviet economic difficulties: CIA analyses produced in the late 1970s and 1980 reported on growing economic problems, material frustration, and unrest in the USSR and predicted continuing stagnation in the 1980s.⁵⁴ Ronald Reagan also perceived Soviet weakness as opening up new opportunities for the US to press the advantage in the Cold War conflict.⁵⁵

Capitalizing on these trends would require a firmer bipartisan consensus around foreign policy in the US and more effective methods of engaging with geopolitical shifts. However, these developments alone did not determine the rise of democracy promotion as a US foreign policy priority. Neither is this change reducible to President Reagan's ideological commitment to democracy, although this surely played an enabling role. Instead, the transition needs to be understood more broadly as a negotiation and interaction of different groups impelled by geopolitical objectives, domestic politics, and ideological constructions. The administration's initial rejection of human rights as an unwanted holdover from the Carter era, combined with its embrace of right-wing allies with questionable rights records, elicited fierce criticism from US civil society actors and liberals in Congress. As Søndergaard's chapter in this volume makes clear, influential Reagan officials responded by working to re-conceptualize human rights into a concept of democracy promotion which focused on

⁵³ Ibid, 83–91.

⁵⁴ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 173.

⁵⁵ James Wilson, 'How Grand was Reagan's Strategy, 1976–1984?' *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 18 no. 4 (2007), 778.

guaranteeing political and civil rights through the construction of democratic structures overseas. As the democracy initiative gained momentum, administration hardliners came to believe that US programs focused on democracy and political rights could reduce the cohesiveness of the Soviet Union's alliances and internal system. In turn, private sector democracy promoters and State Department officials went beyond disagreements on where human rights projection would be morally applicable by linking the creation of democratic structures in both the East and West to US national security interests, positing that such transformations would serve to defuse radical insurgencies threatening authoritarian allies and de-escalate Soviet aggression. These actors, along with USAID experts working on the ground in Central America, provided a blueprint for assistance to local democratic forces globally. The contours of the administration's democracy initiative, therefore, did not emerge fully formed at one point in time and from one group of actors. Neither was it a simple translation of ideological imperatives into US foreign policy practice. Rather, it evolved through the interplay of these groups, sparked by grand strategic debates and contention over specific cases.

The program of democracy promotion that evolved under Reagan from the interaction of these different forces and agendas represented an attempt to resolve the administration's domestic political challenges and to shape American foreign policy to fit new geopolitical realities. The democracy promotion initiative that emerged sought to achieve US Cold War priorities. In 1983, administration policymakers set two defining goals: promoting a pluralistic governing structure in the USSR and supporting anti-communist guerrillas fighting Marxist governments in the Third World.⁵⁶ The White House thus incorporated democratic transformation into US strategy toward the Soviet Union itself and as part of the effort to rollback Soviet influence on the periphery. Efforts to promote the democratization of allied authoritarian regimes in Latin America and Asia were undertaken to strengthen containment, as US officials increasingly came to believe that democratic transitions in faltering dictatorships would create lasting political stability, pre-empting seizures of power by pro-Soviet revolutionary movements.

⁵⁶White House, 'National Security Decision Directive 75: US Relations with the USSR,' 1983, *Federation of American Scientists*, National Security Decision Directives—Reagan Administration, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf>.

The democracy promotion initiative also dovetailed with the Reagan administration's support for neoliberal economic policies. As Reagan declared in 1987, "The democratic and free-market revolutions are really the same revolution."⁵⁷ The Reagan administration's free market fundamentalism contributed to the emergence of a neoliberal orthodoxy among the Washington, D.C.-based institutions that played an outsized role in shaping the international economic landscape—the so-called Washington Consensus, consisting of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the US Department of the Treasury. The Latin American debt crisis of 1981–1982 provided the Reagan administration with an opportunity to dramatically put neoliberal ideas into practice on an unprecedented scale. In exchange for debt rescheduling, indebted nations were required to undertake rapid structural adjustment policies aimed at fiscal austerity, privatization, and market liberalization. Correspondingly, a wave of democratic transitions swept Latin America over the course of the decade. The effects of structural adjustment were wrenching: an explosion of financial speculation accompanied by rising inflation, deepening unemployment and cutbacks to social services, and a growing gap between social classes.⁵⁸ Yet the promise of prosperity for developing nations through greater access to global markets, combined with the US ability to use structural adjustment as leverage to construct political and economic consent, resulted in new forms of US hegemony. Although in the 1970s and early 1980s Reagan was a staunch supporter of the pro-market policies of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, the Reagan administration increasingly recognized that neoliberal democracies served US interests better than even neoliberal dictatorships.⁵⁹

The Reagan administration's democracy promotion initiative had important consequences. The integration of political reform campaigns in the East and the West under the banner of democracy promotion provided the basis of a bipartisan foreign policy consensus to replace the pre-1970s framework. The goals of stabilizing states with authoritarian regimes to

⁵⁷ Quoted in Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment*, 179.

⁵⁸ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003); Duncan Green, *Silent Revolution: The Rise and Crisis of Market Economics in Latin America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ Kurt Gerhard Weyland, 'Neoliberalism and Democracy in Latin America,' *Latin American Politics & Society*. 46, no. 1 (2004): 135–157; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

contain Soviet power and destabilizing the governing structures of the Soviet Empire were subsumed into a project which aimed to midwife, through democracy promotion, a form of stability across the globe conducive to US interests. The democracy campaigns of the 1980s also generated concepts, structures, and tactics which provided the basis for subsequent presidential administrations to shape the post-Cold War order.