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CAN DEMOCRACY BE EXPORTED? THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY IN UNITED STATES-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

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Can democracy be exported? Should the United States support democracy in Latin America (and presumably elsewhere) when it has the opportunity? Which are the democratic forces in Latin America, and could they be assisted by the United States? If so, how? What are the constraints and limits on United States assistance to democratic regimes and movements in Latin America? Is this a period of "opening" (apertura) for democracy in Latin America, and how might the United States assist that development? These are the questions explored in this essay.[1]

Let me state at the outset that I am very skeptical and pessimistic about such efforts. It is doubtful that United States-style democracy can be exported, or that Latin American wants it, at least all that much. It is uncertain that democratic forces in Latin America can more than marginally be helped by the United States. In addition, there are numerous constraints and limits on United States assistance to democratic regimes and democratic movements in Latin America. Not only is it unlikely that United States efforts in this area can be very successful, but there are also strong possibilities that Latin America might be harmed by such initiatives. Indeed, it is not clear that asking whether democracy can or should be exported is asking the right question about United States-Latin American relations. Such strong and provocative statements cry out for further explanation.[2]

The Democracy Agenda

The "realism versus idealism" debate in American foreign policy--of which the current discussion of United States efforts to promote human rights and democracy abroad is only the most recent manifestation--has been long and arduous. Realists argue that the United States must defend not principles but national interests, or that "We have no friends, only interests."[3] Idealists favor a policy that goes beyond mere national interest and incorporates as well a concern for international morality and ethics, including democracy and human rights.[4] In the debate, both sides have caricatured the arguments of the other.

In actual fact, American policy has been more complex, incorporating ingredients from both the "realist" and the "idealist" schools of thought,

and often denying a contradiction between them. George Kennan, long identified with the "realist" or "pragmatic" school, sees the support of democracy as part of a defense of a hard-headed American national interest.[5] And Henry Kissinger, a leading theorist and practitioner of realpolitik, has similarly come to view the defense of human rights as part of the United States national interest.[6] The real question is not the either/or one of national interest versus morality, but how to combine and reconcile the two so as to achieve a judicious balance.

The issue by now, however, is murkier and more complicated. The United States has had considerable experience--not all of its successful--with efforts to expand United States-style democracy and human rights abroad. There are strong interests, vested and otherwise, at stake. And the democracy and human rights agenda has expanded, under the impact of Cold War and other pressures, to encompass motives and objectives not contemplated in earlier discussions. Some of these agendas are apparent and/or acknowledged. Others are not. The question remains why a foreign policy favoring democracy--that is at best a combination of positive and negative considerations--evokes such strong (in some quarters, well-nigh universal) support and approval.

Some possible answers to this question include the following:

1. Cold War strategy: Political democracy (for example, elections) is the one dramatic, visible thing that the United States stands for that the Soviet Union and the so-called "peoples' democracies" do not. They may explain strong American commitment to elections in El Salvador and elsewhere.[7]

2. Foreign policy considerations: The promotion of democracy is often viewed not just as an end in itself, but as a means to secure even more basic United States interests, such as order and stability. In some instances, these core United States interests can best be served by promoting democracy; in other circumstances, the promotion of democracy may not be perceived as serving these more fundamental United States interests.[8]

3. Hegemonic considerations (or "democracy as a smokescreen"): On numerous occasions a policy of pursuing democracy has been used as a smokescreen for other, less glorious policy goals. In the name of pursuing democracy, the United States had frequently intervened in Latin America, exploited it, used it for self-serving purposes that have little or nothing to do with democracy, imposed our own preferred solutions upon it, and covered over United States economic penetration in the area under the guise of promoting democracy. In this way, "democracy" has served as a major means to increase United States hegemony over the area.[9]

4. Political factors: Promoting democracy abroad is often useful politically on the domestic front. Politicians from all parties can agree on it as a policy goal--if on little else. The public (or at least its opinion-leaders) supports such a policy, and, seemingly, there are no costs--at least electorally.

5. Democracy and human rights lobbies and constituencies: These include some research institutes, church groups, labor organizations, academic associations, and Latin American exiles. Many of these groups and lobbies genuinely favor democracy and human rights on the basis of principle. Some combine this interest with other agendas, including political goals, private ambitions, and power-mongering. Democracy and human rights are no longer (if they ever were) simply a matter of individual preference; they have become the raison d'être of larger-scale interest groups and professional lobbies, for both good and ill.

6. Ethnocentrism: United States notions of democracy reflect (North) American institutional arrangements and may not always be relevant to Latin America. Americans often depict the political process in Latin America as a dichotomous, either/or "struggle" between dictatorship and (United States-style) democracy. This is a biased, overly narrow, and ethnocentric formulation that distorts our understanding, closes off other possibilities, and blinds United States observers to Latin American realities. But it does orient much of North American political discourse.[10]

7. Latin America as an experimental laboratory: The United States does not follow a policy of promoting democracy in the Soviet Union, China, or Saudi Arabia. Why does it do so in Latin America? The United States willingness to experiment politically in the region is in part related to the fact that Latin America is a low foreign policy priority; the United States does not see it as of crucial value, it cannot retaliate against us, and therefore it is safe to use it as a guinea pig for policy experimentation.[11]

8. The missionary tradition: Americans really believe that democracy is good, and that it is good for all peoples--the Churchillian notion that democracy is the worst form of government except for all others. From this perspective, the United States has an obligation to export it--missionary-style--to less fortunate ("developing") peoples. The recent Carter human rights campaign was heir to this manifest destiny phenomenon--the idea of spreading our know-how and institutions to the rest of the world, the naive if idealistic Wilsonian view of "making the world safe for democracy."

9. Soul-satisfaction: The United States promotes democracy abroad also because Americans feel good about it. To stand for democracy is soul-satisfying in a personal and collective sense. Democracy and human rights are almost a new form of religiosity and "true belief" around which Americans can rally in an age of secularity.

10. La moda: Aside from the intrinsic value of democracy, being in favor of its more advanced and esoteric forms is often thought to be--especially in some academic, church, exile, and literary circles--chic, stylish, and "with it." Without belittling what

> are in many cases sincere and well-meaning intentions, the current fashion in favor of more radical forms of democracy is in part a reflection, by some North and Latin American intellectuals, of the desire to be stylish and on the "cutting edge." The problem is that policymakers, politicans, the general public, or the countries to which the United States might seek to export such advanced views may not be receptive to them.

Of course, we are all, including the author of this paper, in favor of greater democracy, in both the United States and Latin America. The purpose of presenting the above list of motives is not to demean democracy or those struggling to achieve it. However, this examination does show that the issue is more complex than often thought: that it is not just a matter of moral good versus moral evil; and that a variety of political, Cold War, private, and other agendas and ambitions are also involved.

Is Latin America Democratic--and Does It Want to Be?

The popular image of Latin America held by many Americans is that it is a continent seething under the tyranny of many, seemingly endemic, mindless, military-repressive dictatorships. If only these dictatorships can be removed or overthrown, the argument runs, then Latin America's natural democratic inclinations that have been suppressed under right-wing and oligarchic rule may find fruition. That view is a happy, optimistic, and poetic one, but it does not reflect Latin American reality.

The fact that our focus in the United States is on democracy and the struggle for it does not necessarily mean that Latin Americans are similarly clamoring for democracy. Americans assume that they are, but few bother to examine the evidence. The evidence is decidedly mixed.

Four meansures will be used here to demonstrate this ambiguity: the constitutional and legal traditions of Latin America, survey research results, voting returns, and legitimacy patterns. The discussion must perforce be brief and somewhat incomplete.

With regard to constitutional and legal precepts, Latin America evidences two quite distinct traditions. There is no single liberal and democratic tradition as in the United States. Rather, two currents have consistently been present, existing side by side and often alternating in power. The first is liberal, democratic, and republican; it is enshrined in the laws and constitutions of the area. That tradition has been present since the Latin American countries achieved their independence early in the nineteenth century and, in many cases, simply translated the United States constitution into Spanish. The precepts inscribed in these Latin American constitutions, however, have always been viewed as ideals to strive for, not necessarily as operating realities.[12]

But there is another tradition inscribed both in these laws and constitutions and in actual practice. It is hierarchical, authoritarian, and nondemocratic, and its roots antedate the liberal tradition to the period of Spanish colonial rule. This tradition is reflected in the specially-privileged place afforded the Catholic Church in Latin American society; the extraordinary powers granted the executive, who can rule

almost as a de jure dictator; the special status given to land and wealth; and the position of the armed forces as virtually a fourth branch of government authorized constitutionally and legally--or by hallowed custom--to play a major, "moderating" political role. These hierarchical-authoritarian features frequently enjoy as much legitimacy as do the liberal-democratic ones. The two traditions coexist, with neither consistently dominant.[13]

Survey research results are a second indication of this mix of attitudes. If one asks Latin Americans which form of government and what kinds of institutions they prefer, the answer is, overwhelmingly, democratic ones. That is, they prefer checks and balances, an independent congress and judiciary, a free press, human rights, elections, an apolitical military, and so forth. These responses lend support to the thesis that democracy is not alien to Latin America, and that the form of political system Latin Americans prefer is much like that of the United States.[14]

If one probes deeper, however, the responses become less clear-cut. Latin Americans favor strong executive leadership, which may come at the expense of an independent congress or court system. There is sympathy, under crisis circumstances, for limiting freedom of the press and other basic political rights. Considerable skepticism exists as to whether democracy works very well in Latin America, or at least whether it works in its Anglo-American forms in the face of the endemic violence, conflict, "falta de civilizacion," weak institutions, and powerful centrifugal forces that from time to time tear Latin American nations apart. Considerable sympathy exists for authoritative if not authoritarian rule, particularly in periods of stress and so long as a mild authoritarianism does not degenerate into tyranny, such as in the regimes of Trujillo or the later Somoza.[15]

Voting returns provide a third illustration of this phenomenon. The analysis here must necessarily be incomplete, but several examples may be used to make the point. In the Dominican Republic in 1966, the conservative Joaquin Balaguer easily defeated socialist Juan Bosch, even after a United States military intervention the year before which, it was widely assumed, would provoke a nationalist, radical electoral response that would favor Bosch. In Chile before the 1973 military coup, voting returns rather consistently showed an electorate almost equally divided among rightist forces, centrist forces (chiefly the Christian Democrats) and the socialist-communist popular front. In Brazil in November 1982, the vote could be interpreted to show the country almost evenly divided between supporters of the existing conservative-authoritarian-military regime and those opposed to it. Even in beleaguered El Salvador in 1981, the United States-favored centrist Christian Democrats could manage only 40 percent of the vote, and they lost to a coalition of conservative and rightist forces.

One should not read too much into these examples. However, electoral returns do tend to show what to Americans is often a surprising fact--namely, the continued strength of the Latin American right even in an era which is always referred to as change-oriented and "revolutionary." Labeling such rightist sentiment "false consciousness" is too simple an explanation. The fact is that electorally--and in other ways, as well--

many Latin American societies are deeply riven between their historical authoritarian and conservative tradition, their liberal one, and their more recent socialist one. The clashes between these traditions--which are not just differences among rival party platforms, but wholly different ways of life--help explain the present instability in the area and the existence of what the longtime Latin Americanist Kalman Silvert called a "conflict society."[16] In any case, it is clear that electoral sentiment in Latin America is not unambiguously pro-liberal, pro-democratic, or pro-left. The situation is much more complex.

The fourth point to be made with regard to Latin America's alleged craving for democracy has to do with democratic legitimacy. In the United States we assume that elections are the only legitimate route to power. in Latin America, elections are but one route to power.[17] Other routes are also open. These may include a skillfully-executed coup d'etat, a heroic guerrilla movement that holds out against all odds and finally seizes powers, a well-planned protest movement, a general strike or street demonstration that succeeds in toppling a minister--or maybe even a government. Such macho actions are not only widely admired, but they also have the potential of helping a regime that comes to power through nonelectoral means to achieve the legitimacy it may initially lack. The "populist" regimes of Omar Torrijos in Panama or Rene Barrientos in Bolivia are cases in point. Democratic elections offer one route to power, but there are other means as well that are capable of achieving both legitimacy and democracy, Latin American-style.

These comments are not meant to imply that if they had their choice, Latin Americans would not choose democracy. In fact, democratic sentiment is vigorous throughout the area. But it is not the only sentiment, and in quite a few countries in the region it may not even be majoritarian sentiment. Especially as one probes beneath the surface, doubts and fears about democracy's viability or their own nation's capacity for it are strongly present.[18] Hence, the answer to the question "Is Latin America democratic and does it want to be?" is ambiguous: many Latin Americans want democracy, many do not, some (primarily in an older generation) want a democracy structured largely in terms of United States-style institutional arrangements, others (the rising younger generations) prefer their own indigenous ("populist" or other) forms. Any effort on the part of the United States, therefore, to export or encourage democracy in Latin America must come to grips with these differences.

Problems and Consequences of a Pro-Democratic Foreign Policy

The historical record offers little cause for optimism or enthusiasm for a renewed and vigorous United States effort to promote democracy in Latin America. Let us review that record briefly.

The Historical Record

Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, his agent, William Walker, and the latter's merry bunch of filibusterers, were no doubt sincere in believing that by taking over Nicaragua in the 1840s and holding elections in which United States citizen Walker was "elected" president, they were bringing the benefits of democratic civilization to that poor, benighted land.

Sam Houston and others were also probably genuinely convinced that depriving Mexico of half its national territory and ultimately absorbing it into the United States would be infinitely better even for the Mexicans than continued rule under the mercurial López de Santa Anna. The former slaveholders who sought to annex or control Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and other islands after the Civil War were also convinced that American-style "democracy" was good for our "little brown and black brothers" throughout the Caribbean.[19]

Similarly, the Spanish-American War was in part rationalized on the basis of the superiority of United States democratic institutions to the "Catholic-inquisitorial" Spanish ones. Under the same aegis, the United States acquired Puerto Rico as a protectorate and attached the Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution, giving it virtual carte blanche to intervene there at any time. When Woodrow Wilson dispatched United States occupation forces to Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Panama, one cannot doubt that these actions were also part of a larger mission to make the world safe for democracy. However brief and one-sided, this background survey provides ample reason to be skeptical regarding the presumed benefits to Latin American of United States efforts to encourage "democracy" there.[20]

Setting the Parameters of Permissible Behavior: The Post-World War II Period

At the end of World War II the United States, by displacing both Germany and Great Britain, achieved unquestioned hegemony in Latin America. Latin America was then viewed primarily by the United States as a vast preserve of untapped resources and potential markets. To gain access to those markets, however, required a diminution in Latin America's system of statism, cartels, monopolies, and economic controls. The United States therefore exerted pressures for economic liberalization (reduced state economic controls), which also carried with it the need for a certain degree of political liberalization. The United States insisted on new elections in several countries and exerted strong pressures on a number of populist leaders to resign. Among those forced from office or pressured into taking unwelcome actions were Vargas in Brazil, Morinigo in Paraguay, Perón in Argentina, and a number of others.[21]

The immediate postwar period in United States-Latin American relations was important beyond its specific time frame because it largely determined the parameters and range of permissible options for Latin American political behavior. Latin America was forced to choose between "dictatorship" (statism, neo-corporatism, neo-mercantilism, and so forth) which the United States would no longer countenance, and United States-style democracy, which was not entirely compatible with the area's history and traditions. Whatever the original intention, in the name of "democracy" Latin America was made an area of far greater United States economic penetration. And by forcing the area to choose a form of democracy for which it was ill-suited, the United States effectively ruled out both a Latin American form of democracy (for example, Vargas-style populism) and various intermediate political arrangements (for example, combined civil-military regimes), which Latin American politicans have always had a genius for improvising and which may have better enabled these

nations to manage the wrenching transition to modernity that they had recently begun. By insisting on democracy--and only its United States variant--the United States precipitated the wild swinging of the political pendulum in Latin America, leading to the kinds of imbroglios in which the United States now finds itself in Central America and elsewhere.[22]

Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress

John F. Kennedy and his Alliance for Progress are widely admired for supposedly ushering in a new era in United States-Latin American relations. There were changes in terms of the personal qualities by which the president was viewed in Latin America (youth, vigor, idealism, Catholicism, a beautiful and artistic wife), in terms of the means used to pursue basic United States interests (stability and anticommunism would be achieved by aid to liberal democrats rather than dictators), and in terms of appointments within the United States Department of State.[23] But there were important continuities as well, in that the basic elements of United States policy remained constant: stability, anticommunism, hegemony, and political-economic-military penetration.[24]

But it specifically is the democracy issues that concerns us here. Again, the record was mixed. Kennedy supported Latin America's democratic left during the first part of his presidency, but he cooled toward it considerably toward the end of his brief tenure. Although he favored democrats, he was also reluctant to undermine or get rid of dictators if he could not be assured a Castroite takeover would not occur. He was cool toward wobbly democrats like Bosch in the Dominican Republic, and he eventually opted for the lesser evil of military juntas in that country and Honduras over the possibility of weak, ineffectual democrats unable to deal with guerrilla uprisings.[25] The United States helped some of the democrats come to power, but it failed to come to their aid when they were threatened by military coups. Nor did the dramatic and highly-publicized United States efforts in Peru in 1962 to reverse a coup and ensure democratic rule succeed. If anything, they harmed United States-Peruvian relations in the long run and probably led directly to the confrontation between the two countries that occurred in the late 1960s. All in all, one would be hard-pressed to conclude that United States efforts to promote democracy under Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress were very successful. In fact, a strong case could be made that these efforts were counterproductive and helped precipitate a wave of anti-democratic takeovers that swept Latin America in the early and mid-1960s (Argentina, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Peru, Brazil).

Carter and Human Rights

The Carter human rights campaign produced decidedly mixed results. There is no doubt that as a result some people were not tortured, some liberties were preserved, some people were released from jail, and some greater restraints were placed on military repression. These are not small accomplishments, particularly from the point of view of the individuals and groups affected.

On the other hand, the costs incurred and the damage done were also considerable. Some of the human rights activists' actions were unrefined,

heavy-handed, and often counterproductive. By their wholesale condemnations of entire nations, regimes, and military establishments as human rights violators, they insulted national sensibilities and forced public opinion--which otherwise would have been opposed to these regimes--to rally behind them. These wholesale condemnations blurred the differences between repressive forces in the Latin American militaries and the more democratically-inclined ones, obliging the latter to defend the military institution as a whole. The differences between an honest and well-meaning government trying its best and its out-of-control security forces were also blurred, at the cost of antagonizing or undermining the former. The Carter human rights campaign needlessly alienated important countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, and it produced precious few changes in these nations' behavior. Nor was it evenhanded: right-wing dictatorships were condemned, but left-wing ones did not receive the same attention. And ethnocentrism was strong: the human rights campaign in Latin America was often viewed as an extention of the civil rights struggle in the American South in the 1960s, and the criteria for judging human rights violations are exclusively United States criteria, with little interest in or comprehension of Latin American differences.[26]

Even the greatest success story of the Carter campaign in favor of democracy--the United States political and diplomatic intervention in the 1978 Dominican presidential election--was not the unqualified success that the action's defenders claim. In the face of blatant military ballot tampering, the Carter administration stepped in to assure an honest count--thereby securing the victory of Antonio Guzman. Intervention of this kind may have produced a beneficial result, but it was intervention nonetheless, and not all that different from countries other American intrusions into Latin American internal affairs that many find objectionable. Furthermore, because of the United States actions, Guzman became known in the Dominican Republic as "Jimmy Carter's and Cyrus Vance's boy," dependent upon them and certain to fall when they left office. As it turned out, this did not happen. But there is no doubt the United States actions strongly reinforced the absolute dependence of the Dominican Republic and its government on the United States. Whether that is good or bad can be left to others to decide, but the point is that this most recent United States intervention in the Dominican Republic was not quite the shining, unambiguous achievement it is sometimes held to be.[27]

One need not exaggerate these failures, self-deceptions, hypocracies, and limited and ambiguous accomplishments in order to make the main point: past United States policies to promote democracy/human rights in Latin America have not been unqualified successes. For reasons to be explained in the next section, such efforts are likely to be even more problematic in the future. In fact, a close examination of the historical record would leave one skeptical that promoting democracy was <u>ever</u> a primary United States objective, or that it is soon likely to become one. If, as most analysts would agree, the major goals of United States policy in Latin America have been stability, anticommunism, and access to the region's markets and resources, promoting democracy has been chiefly a means to achieve those ends. Democracy has, of course, been valued for its own sake, although generally only marginally in United States relations with Latin America. Its greatest importance has been as an instrument to be employed under the right conditions and only in some

administrations to help secure higher-order goals of stability and anticommunism.[28]

However, the case cannot rest with the argument that United States efforts to promote democracy in Latin America were not very successful. In fact, it can also be argued that these initiatives were often actually harmful in the long run. The reasons for this negative assessment may be briefly summarized as follows:[29]

1. Immense amounts of money, time, and resources have been wasted. Taxpayer and congressional support for such activities has been squandered. The widespread popular notion is that in seeking to promote democracy abroad, the United States may be chasing chimeras.

2. The effort has produced a host of foreign policy backfires, unanticipated consequences, extravaganzas, and sheer disasters. Just the cataloging of these backfires in one country--for instance, the Dominican Republic--would more than fill the space for the rest of this essay.[30]

3. United States attempts to promote democracy abroad have helped perpetuate and reinforce condescending, superior, and patronizing attitudes toward Latin America. The notion is still widespread, in government circles as well as in popular opinion, that "we know best" for Latin America.

4. The focus on democracy has also perpetuated reliance on wrong or misleading conceptual models for understanding Latin America. By focusing attention on the supposed "struggle for democracy," Americans often fail to appreciate the complexity of events in the region. The emphasis on democracy has led to a lack of understanding of many developing nations and a miscomprehension of the real dynamics of change in Latin America.[31]

5. The stress on democracy tends to lead to United States interventionism and proconsularism. Although generally with the best of intentions, the United States sometimes attempts to run Latin America from its embassies. There is considerable reason to be suspicious of such American interventionism whether it comes from "bad" agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency or supposedly "good" agencies such as the Department of State or the Agency for International Development.

6. The democracy that the United States espouses always seems to conform to its own notions of democracy, not Latin America's. The United States stresses elections, political parties, apolitical trade unions, apolitical armed forces, and the like. Latin American forms of democracy--emphasizing populism, the accommodation of new "power contenders,"[32] corporate representation, or shared power--are seldom paid serious attention. This represents a form of cultural imperialism.

7. By emphasizing democracy so strongly in rhetoric and policy pronouncements, the United States has made the choice for Latin American nations to be either democracies or dictatorships. That is a false dichotomy. It rules out the various mixed solutions that Latin Americans themselves have historically demonstrated a flair for fashioning. It also means that that the United States has a certain responsibility for helping cause political instability in Latin America, the prevention of which is one of the pillars of United States policy toward the region. Rather than allowing these countries to settle more or less naturally and Latin American-style on the undramatic middle ground, the United States has imposed two extreme options on the region--neither one of which is appropriate or especially commodious.

8. Finally, the United States emphasis on democracy has undermined various traditional institutions--patronage networks, religious agencies, family and clan groups, and the like--that might have helped Latin America make the difficult transition to modernity while failing to create viable structures to replace them. In this way the United States has helped engender the very problems and institutional vacuums in the region that United States policies were ostensibly designed to prevent.[33]

On balance, the United States effort to promote democracy abroad has produced mixed results. There have been successes as well as failures. Neither ought to be emphasized at the expense of the other.

At the same time, the troubling questions raised here are seldom considered in policy discussions in the United States. The lessons of the past are forgotten or unlearned. Policy is often based on romantic hopes and wishful thinking, rather than on an examination of the historical record. Past experiences have had very little impact on United States perceptions of various campaigns to export democracy to Latin America. Yet Americans are so committed to the democracy agenda (albeit for diverse reasons and motives, as suggested earlier) that we would prefer not to deal with the more difficult questions of whether the United States should get involved at all, and who is helped or hurt by such actions. Inattention to the negative consequences of such policies is particularly poignant and troubling now, since the United States government seems to be poised on the threshhold of a new attempt to spread democracy overseas. Both President Reagan[34] and various Democratic Party presidential candidates have announced plans to this effect. It is time to interject some realism into this discussion based on the historical evidence--a perspective which is woefully lacking in all the current proposals--while simultaneously coming to grips with new realities in the United States, in Latin America, and in United States-Latin American relations.

New Realities and New Directions

Up to this point we have discussed both democracy in Latin America and the possibilities for United States assistance in developing it largely in abstract terms--whether it is desirable, what the motivations are for pursuing such a course, what prospects exist for achieving this

goal, what the historical record shows, and so forth. We turn now to some of the newer realities in Latin America, in the United States, and in United States-Latin American relations. Few of these new realities augur well for United States efforts to promote democracy in the hemisphere.

The first reality with which the United States must come to terms is that in recent years Latin America as a whole has become increasingly independent, nationalistic, and assertive. It is, therefore, less willing to listen to or follow United States advice, including advice on the issue of democracy. Some Latin American regimes may be willing to look to western Europe for advice and/or models to emulate, but they turn less and less to the United States. Latin America is seeking to reduce or at least modify its dependence on the United States, not increase it. This holds not just in the economic sphere, but in cultural and political spheres as well. It is not realistic to expect this thrust to be reversed and for Latin America suddenly (or even gradually) to look again to the United States political system as the model to follow. Too much has changed in Latin America in the last twenty years--as well as in the United States--for that to be possible.[35]

A second--and related--new reality is the situation in the United States itself. The United States is now a dominished, lessened presence in Latin America compared to what it was twenty years ago. This is not to say the United States is unimportant, or that it does not continue to have great influence in the region. But it is the case that United States foreign assistance levels have declined; there are far fewer United States diplomatic personnel in the field; and, except in the spcial case of Central America, United States military missions are greatly reduced. The hotels in Latin America are no longer filled with American businessmen, but with Germans, Japanese, French, Spaniards, Italians, Scandinavians, Eastern Europeans, Russians, Chinese. These are the countries which now win contracts for dams, highways, port facilities, and development projects, rather than the United States. These changes add up to a greatly reduced American presence in Latin America in a wide variety of spheres, with a concomitant lessening of United States influence.

Moreover, this decline in United States hegemony and influence is unlikely to be reversed soon. Public opinion polls show that Americans are overwhelmingly opposed to foreign aid,[36] a sentiment which is certain eventually to be translated into congressional vote--and which has been already, if the fate of even the modest Caribbean Basin Initiative provides any gauge. Those who would promote a stronger United States role in support of democracy in Latin America must ultimately ask themselves whether the means are available to implement such a strategy. Where are the foreign assistance funds comparable to those available under the Alliance for Progress to give the United States the leverage it needs to carry out a democratic foreign policy; where is the commitment on the part of the public, the Congress, or the presidency; where is the Peace Corps-like enthusiasm for this cause--the willingness to go "any length," as John F. Kennedy described it; and where are the possibilities of asking Americans to suffer further unemployment for the sake of giving Latin American products freer access to United States markets? The fact is, sad or not, that the domestic infrastructure simply does not exist for

a major new United States initiative to assist Latin American democracy. The resources, the aid levers, the commitment, and the public and official support are simply not present in the United States today.

A third new reality, related to the first, involves Latin America's increasing assertion of its own, indigenous models of development and democracy.[37] Latin American nations more and more wish to develop autonomously in the political arena as well as in the economic sphere, independent of United States wishes and preferences. Hence Americans must face the unsettling reality that democratic forces in Latin America may not want United States assistance even if it is proffered, and are ever less willing to accept it. Whether the United States is capable of dealing with the reality of these new givens is questionable.

The problem is complicated by the fact that many Latin Americans--especially an older generation that is now fading away--still look to the United States, including the United States political model, for guidance and direction. They believe as well in the institutional paraphernalia which go with United States-state democracy: political parties, separation of powers, regular elections, and so on. Given their choice, and all other things being equal, it is probably true that these Latin Americans would in fact prefer to have regular elections and a United States-style democracy.

But all other things are not equal. First, as previously noted, there are alternative legitimate routes to power in Latin American besides elections, and democracy itself is often of tenuous legitimacy. Second, Latin Americans have traditionally meant something different by "democracy" than Americans do. Whereas Americans emphasize the mechanical processes of democracy (elections and the like), Latin Americans are more inclined to judge a regime "democratic"--regardless of its route to power--that governs for and in the name of the common good, that is broadly representative of society's major interests, that evidences a degree of populism and nationalism, that provides for economic and social development, that is not brutal or oppressive, and so forth. In short, the meaning of "democracy" may differ considerably in the two parts of the hemisphere, with Latin America following a tradition that is closer to the French and Italian models than to the Anglo-Saxon one.

Furthermore, the United States must--although this is so far largely unacknowledged at the official level--come to terms with newer democratic forms and impulses in Latin America that have experienced notable growth in the last decade. This includes the proliferation of self-help community groups, consciously nonpartisan movements for political reform, neighborhood base and/or popular organizations, and nascent human rights and reform groups seeking to encourage more indepdendent judiciaries which will strengthen the rule of law.[39] In all the discussion emanating from the United States concerning the need to strengthen democracy in Latin America, almost nothing has been said about any of these Latin American forms of democracy which exist outside the usual United States terms of reference and the customary framework of United States-style institutions.

A fourth new reality concerns prevailing economic conditions and their implications for the democracy, both in Latin America and in United

States foreign policy initiatives toward the region. This issue can be approached in terms of the United States economy, worldwide economic conditions, or the depressed Latin American economies. From whatever vantage point, the prospects for democracy could hardly be thought of as encouraging.

The facts are quite obvious. The global economy is now in the midst of the worst depression since the 1930s. Oil prices have fallen at least temporarily, but the impact of the earlier price increases on Latin America was devastating. The United States economy is also in major trouble, and even with hopes high for recovery it is not certain the United States can serve as a locomotive to pull the Latin American economies to new heights. Protectionist sentiment in the United States is also strong, which is not propitious either for Latin American export possibilities or for necessary foreign assistance programs such as the Caribbean Basin Initiative. None of these economic conditions is encouraging to the cause of Latin American democracy, or encourages the democracies that do exist to survive.

Within Latin America itself economic conditions are terribly depressed. The boom years of the 1960s and 1970s are over. With stagnant or contracting economies, the traditional Latin American way--which is more or less democratic--of responding to change by accommodating new power contenders which agree to abide by the established rules of the game[40] cannot work. In prevailing economic circumstances there are no new resources to distribute to rising groups. Competition for control of the fewer resources that do exist, in a situation of rising expectations, becomes more intense, polarized, and violent. American political society is no longer unacquainted with these conditions. It does not require a major leap of imagination to understand why in Latin America, where economic conditions are even more depressed than in the United States, political challenges to the status quo have also been more intense. Liberal-pluralist democracy is difficult to sustain under such conditions, and even more difficult to renew or create anew. The major victim of the worldwide economic downturn, in both the United States and in Latin America, may be the very democracy one would hope to stimulate.

Fifth, the United States must consider why some Latin American regimes have in fact chosen democracy. The motives are complex, and not all of them have to do with a love of, or strong commitment to, democracy per se. For example, it is clear that for some regimes a new "opening" to democracy was dictated not so much by a firm or enduring commitment to democracy, but by a discrediting of the older bureaucratic-authoritarian system and model. Rather than having all the discredit for economic and other policy failures fall upon the shoulders of the ruling military or military-cum-civilian groups, the reasoning went, why not step aside for a time and allow eager civilian groups and political parties to receive a share of the blame? That was clearly the motivation behind the so-called democratic aperturas in Honduras, Peru, and Bolivia, where the military had been thoroughly discredited by charges of graft, inefficiency, and repression, and where continued military rule would only rebound to the further embarrassment and debasement of the armed services. In Argentina and Uruguay, military mismanagement and brutality have been sufficiently exposed so that it may no longer be advantageous for the armed forces to

stay in power. In Brazil, too, the generals only opted for a democratic opening after the glory of the vaunted "economic miracle" began to fade and new challenges appeared to continued military rule.[41]

Of course, these and other cases of political transition require more detailed analysis than is possible in this essay, and the factors involved are not so simple as indicated here. But enough has been said already to indicate that in many cases the motives were not love of democracy, but rather fear of greater discredit being cast upon the governing military institution. This also implies that the commitment to democracy in these countries may not be all that strong, and may well be reversible in Bolivia and other countries where recently-established democracies are already in trouble. It is hard to believe that the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Latin America--the recent subject of many conferences and much wishful thinking--is really firm, unilinear, and irreversible.

A related question concerns who in these several Latin American countries initiated efforts at democratization. The sources are sometimes difficult to isolate, but in general it is fair to say that these processes were initiated as an elite response to changed circumstances--not as a result of much popular clamor or grass-roots pressures from below. Of course, these two dimensions are often interrelated, and one could argue that elites act only when they are pushed or threatened from below. But this does not appear to be so in these cases. Instead, there is strong evidence for the "change from above" as distinct from the "challenge from below" thesis.[42] Although this matter cannot be finally resolved here, considerable doubt must be raised regarding both the degree of elite commitment to democracy and the depth of this commitment in society at large.

The question why national elites want "democratization" is also important. Although they are accomplished in expressing the slogans of representative government. Many civilian politicians of different political persuasions from military-dominated regions nevertheless leave the strong impression of having other agendas in mind besides democracy. What often comes through most clearly in conversations with these politicans is not so much a firm commitment to a democracy that serves the public purpose, but rather a democracy that serves the private weal. Civilian politicians in these countries are united on few issues, but the one goal they do seem to have in common is a desire to reoccupy the ministry, subministry, government corporation, director, and autonomous agency posts--and the opportunities that go with these positions--from which military rule has long deprived them. If this impression is well-founded, it is the basis for some considerable skepticism regarding the underlying motives for some efforts at democratization.

Another aspect of the democratization campaign as it operates in Latin America also merits close examination: the political and partisan use of that campaign by some groups. For example, some Latin American opposition groups have used the "democratization" issue both to strengthen their position and to undermine their own government. This result may be well and good in some cases, but not necessarily in all. Why should one opposition movement become the recipient of United States funds and favors and not others? Does a particular opposition group really have the popular

support it claims, and therefore does it deserve the support that outside groups may give it? Is the opposition's claim to democratic righteousness really deserved? And does the opposition's claim to democratic legitimacy necessarily outweigh that of the government it seeks to replace? These are complex questions which can only be answered in individual circumstances. But they do serve to indicate that the issues are not always clear-cut, and that on numerous occasions partisan priorities have been served rather than broader public interests.

Overall, in examining why Latin American regimes choose democracy, what is striking is the degree to which these have been autonomous Latin American decisions, not American ones. There may be some congruence of interests on the democracy agenda, and in some cases a push and nudge, deftly-administered United States aid, or some other policy has been important. But the real story, even with all the qualifications and reservations outlined here, has been one of Latin American efforts, not so much American ones. In fact, United States commitment and assistance to emerging Latin American democracy--if it is emerging--has been quite limited. Therefore, some modesty is required in an assessment of United States influence, capacities, and accomplishments in promoting Latin American democracy.[43]

The sixth and last "new reality" concerns United States domestic politics and the ways in which it impinges on American efforts to promote democracy in Latin America. Observing recent United States efforts to export democracy does not leave one overly confident of success in this area. For one thing, one would have to be convinced that the United States is really interested in democracy in Latin America. United States foreign policy goals in the region have traditionally included stability, markets, anticommunism--and democracy insofar as it serves these other goals, which have often been considered more important. But democracy as an ideal is pursued only up to a point.[44] Moreover, the democracy the United States envisages and will accept is one which looks remarkably like our own. Ethnocentrism is still alive and well within the United States government despite protestations from some AID and other officials that this has changed, that "they know how."[45] To the extent to which Americans favor democracy at all, the emphasis tends to be on United States-style political institutions: political parties, elections, and the like. The 1981 El Salvadorean election provided a major illustration of this phenomenon. But democracy on Latin America's own terms--in terms of populism and power-sharing, new community base organizations and such groups, and institutional arrangements other than those familiar to the United States--has not yet been considered let alone countenanced.[46]

Moreover, the kind of democracy that the United States can and will officially support will almost certainly be a reflection of American pluralism and "corporate" interest group politics. Business groups will insist that the private sector be given a major role; the AFL-CIO will "hive off" the labor relations part; the Democratic and Republican parties will each want to create and assist like-minded groups abroad; church and human rights groups will exercise veto power on human rights policy; the Cuban exile community will have veto power over United States relations with Cuba; and so forth. Every special interest will seek a role, and no administration will be able to resist these pressures because that is how

policy is made in the United States. Although one may lament or even rale against this system, one must recognize that this is how it works in practice. Observers who search for a coherent, sustained, integrated, nonfragmented definition of the kind of democracy the United States will export, as well as some recognition of Latin America's own peculiar needs, definitions, and preferences in these matters, are certain to be disappointed.[47]

Finally, one must recognize that any United States undertaking to promote democracy abroad is certain to be partisan. The plan announced by Mr. Reagan in early 1983 has already been strongly criticized because it channels aid and contracts chiefly to groups thought of as conservative: the Claremont Institute, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and others.[48] Although these actions may demonstrate a certain bias, it would be hard to believe that a Democratic administration would not also--and equally lamentably--award those same contracts to its friends and supporters: the Institute for Policy Studies, the Council of Hemispheric Affairs, the Washington Office on Latin America, and others. In either case, partisan rather than public purposes will be served. Latin American democracy will once again be a kind of accidental by-product of, or perhaps victimized by, these overweening domestic United States political considerations.

Conclusions and Implications

To the somewhat rhetorical question posed in the title of this essay, "Can democracy be exported?" the answer must be: no. It does not seem possible for the United States to export democracy, to Latin America or to other areas. The United States can hardly shape--much less determine--the political preferences and institutional arrangements of other nations.

But perhaps the title asks the wrong question. Perhaps the issue is not whether democracy is exportable, but whether this is one of those times in Latin American history when democracy could grow and develop. Are we at the end of a bureaucratic-authoritarian epoch and on the threshhold of a democratic one? Are the forces and currents now present in Latin America propitious for democracy? Is this democracy's historical moment in Latin America? And what should and can the United States do to assist and encourage this presumed transition to democracy? Are there elements of congruence between United States foreign policy and Latin America's recent movements toward democracy? Should we support democracy in Latin America when we have the opportunity?[49] How?

A personal bias must be introduced: contrary to what a large part of the foregoing analysis may seem to imply, I tend to favor democratic regimes (although from the analysis, it is also clear that I am not certain that democracy is the best form of government in all times and all places). Furthermore, given the American "missionary tradition" in foreign policy and the weight of domestic public opinion, it is certain that United States government policy will continue to favor democratic regimes. One should not be wholly pessimistic about the possibilities.

It is therefore necessary to strike a balance between observers who are entirely cynical about democracy's future in Latin America, and those who have an excess of enthusiasm for that cause. There are new democratic

trends in Latin America. With great care, empathy, prudence, and a sustained, coherent policy, these might be encouraged and developed. With sensitive foreign policy officials, the judicious use of assistance funds, and a sense of restraint and modesty as to what the United States can accomplish, there are things the United States can and should do to aid Latin American democracy. Some of these can be accomplished unilaterally, some multilaterally; there are a variety of levers and techniques available.

On the other hand, one should oppose a loud new official campaign in favor of democracy, or one that is carried out with the verve and missionary spirit that is characteristic of the fanatic.[50] Hopes and expectations should not be raised too high. One should still be skeptical as to whether this is democracy's "moment" in Latin America, or whether that moment may not already have come and gone in some countries at least. One must warn against the belief that Latin America is clamoring for democracy (especially United States-style democracy), or that Latin American countries cannot resolve their own problems in their own murky, often a-democratic or partly-democratic ways. One must also recognize the yellow (if not red) lights that flash warnings that American domestic opinion and the United States Congress are not enthusiastic about new aid programs, that the worldwide economic depression augurs ill for new democratic openings, that protectionist pressures are strong and will further hurt Latin America's prospects, that special interests will pervert or capture parts of any such democracy program, that diverse motives and ambitions are at work in this area, that much of Latin America may reject United States initiatives, or that the United States really understands and cares about Latin American sufficiently to help fashion an indigenous democracy for the area rather than one based patronizingly and condescendingly on its own preferred political arrangements. The "new realities" of Latin America, the United States, and inter-American relations make a United States-sponsored effort to promote democracy in the hemisphere problematic at best.

In conclusion, a series of dilemmas represent the problems of reconciliation among the contending issues and currents on the democracy theme. First, the question of idealism vs. realpolitik in United States foreign policy is still a concern. Is the United States really trying (in El Salvador and elsewhere) to promote democracy, or is it less gloriously simply protecting its own interest? Second, are the differences between American and Latin American preferences for--and understandings of--democracy reconcilable? In ostensibly promoting democracy abroad, does the United States really know what it is doing? Third, there is a need to recognize limits and constraints on United States actions in this area. The United States needs to know what it can and cannot do in Latin America, as well as the difference between good intentions and hard reality. Fourth, there is the haunting problem of consistency and double standards, of reconciling democracy and human rights concerns with other United States interests, and of whether to treat all countries equally in this regard--whether to be as concerned with democracy in Cuba or Nicaragua as in Chile.

A fifth dilemma is how to balance United States desires for democracy with the limitations and self-defeating prospects of blatant

interference in what other nations think of as their own internal political affairs. Sixth, there is the problem of reconciling United States domestic political considerations with the realities of other nations--the fact that what is advantageous in the former may not work in the latter, and that Latin America has long been an often-unfortunate guinea pig for United States social and political experimentation that frequently produces unforeseen consequences. And seventh, there is the problem of taking United States efforts to promote democracy so literally, and insisting on such pristine forms, that Americans are blind to the nuances, mixes, and crazy-quilt patterns that are the real world of Latin American politics.

If pressed to respond to the question of whether it is possible for United States policy to reconcile all these dilemmas and to carry out a strategy that is rational, coherent, and sustained over a longer (twenty-year) term, the answer would probably have to be negative. Hence we are left, on the democracy issue and others, with the need to recognize severe limits on the possibilities for United States policy, considerable modesty in one's expectations, and strong restraints on what the United States can and cannot accomplish. At best one can hope for a policy that is realistic, prudent, enlightened, pragmatic, and based on some understanding of and empathy for Latin America[51]--a policy that does not go overboard on any one of dozens of fronts, including the democracy one. This agenda would seem to be appropriately modest. Given the international conditions in which United States foreign policy now operates, and the special conditions of United States-Latin American relations within that broader picture, this may be all that one can reasonably hope or expect.[52]

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