



Democracy Promotion from 1989 to Vladimir Putin's 2015 UN Speech: The Interrelationship of Democracy and Democracy Promotion

by Dr. Daniel Warner

Abstract

Democracy is not a timeless absolute. Beginning with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States began an active period of promoting democratization especially in newly independent countries. "The End of History" and "The Democratic Peace Theory" are among several justifications for this promotion. Vladimir Putin's 2015 speech before the UN General Assembly brought a very different perspective on this period and may, along with the chaos in Libya, Syria and Iraq, mark the end of the idealization of democracy and its active promotion as the best manner in which societies should be organized.



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The concept of democracy, like all concepts, should be situated in time and place. Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy - "government of the people, by the people, for the people" - delivered at Gettysburg on June 1, 1865, was meant to heal the wounds of the Civil War. The Address was a call for the American people to honor the dead and to unite as one nation under democratic rule.

During his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 28, 2015,¹ Russian President Vladimir Putin did not give his definition of democracy. Rather he tried to give a history lesson about recent attempts at democracy promotion. Whereas Lincoln was rather humble about the importance of his speech - "the world will little note, nor long remember what we say here" - it is highly questionable whether Putin's speech will be long remembered.

Nonetheless, his speech was a fascinating presentation of Moscow's views about the post-1989 world. While not directly dealing with

democracy, President Putin placed in context his perspective of the wave of democracy promotion that followed the end of the Soviet Union. His General Assembly speech was a Russian history lesson delivered to an audience of global leaders in New York summarizing his perspective on the period after 1989. Our interest here is on his focus on Western democracy promotion following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In order to better understand his perspective, it is best first to refer back to the recent period of democracy promotion itself. For if the concept of democracy is relatively clear and does not need a specific definition, the idea of democracy promotion and how it has been used politically by the United States is important to understand in time and place. Whereas democracy and democracy promotion are not the same, democracy as a concept cannot be fully understood unless it is seen in an historical perspective that helps to elaborate their interrelationship.



I - Introduction

One of the most understudied events in recent history is the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989. It was not anticipated, and events such as September 11, 2001, the Arab Spring, and the rise of ISIS or ISIL have overtaken it with such rapidity that we have had difficulty assessing why it happened and its enormous implications.² Certainly politicians in the United States such as Ronald Reagan took enormous credit for forcing the collapse. But, more importantly, it was used as an ideological tool to justify the triumph of a liberal political and economic system over a state-controlled socialist system.

“The End of History?” by Francis Fukuyama, a short 10’000 word article in a relatively unknown journal, became a huge success as part of the post-1989 euphoria.³ In analyzing the end of the Cold War and the phenomenon that “‘peace’ seems to be breaking out in many regions of the world,” Fukuyama stated that: “...the century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an ‘end of ideology’ or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism...What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War...but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”⁴ We are not concerned here with his further development of the argument in a subsequent book or later corrections. We are merely pointing to the enormous hubris about democracy at a given moment in history which has not fundamentally subsided.

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Fukuyama’s declaration about democracy as “the final form of human government” had to some extent been anticipated by Michael Doyle some years before. In 1983 and 1984, Doyle published two influential articles on the democratic peace theory⁵ that became the cornerstone of a cottage academic industry as well as an important part of American foreign policy. Immanuel Kant at the end of the 18th century had suggested that not only is democracy the best form of government, but that States governed in a democratic manner are less bellicose than those under other forms of rule, an idea also expressed by Woodrow Wilson in his vision for the 20th century.⁶ As Doyle argued, “Even though liberal states have become involved in numerous wars with non-liberal states, constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another.”⁷

Democratic and Republican United States Presidents extolled the democratic peace theory. In his 1994 State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton said: “Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don't attack each other.” In a 2004 press conference, President Bush echoed many of the same sentiments: “And the reason why I'm so strong on democracy is democracies don't go to war with each other. And the reason why is the people of most societies don't like war, and they understand what war means.”⁸

Democracy promotion by the United States became an important arm of the American government with the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. Its funding comes from the Congress. Through “The Democracy Program,” the State Department and the United States Information Agency proposed the creation of such an organization which although non-governmental, receives its primary funding through Congress. NED acts mostly as a grant-making foundation giving funds to about 1,000 private non-governmental organizations throughout the world. Although supposedly independent and officially not an arm, of U.S. foreign policy, the NED was the first group to be banned in Russia under a law against “undesirable” international non-governmental organizations.⁹

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) went even further than the end of history, the democratic peace theory and democracy promotion by the U.S. by stating that not only was democracy essential to preventing wars, but that democracy was essential for development. Former UNDP Head Administrator James Speth said, "Good governance ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society and that the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable are heard in decision-making...We can take for granted that sustainable human development will not be realized without strong, effective and participatory – good –governance."¹⁰

Soon after academics and policy makers had had their day expounding the virtues of democracy, and as a follow-up to the implosion of the Soviet Union, Rainbow Revolutions took place in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and then the Arab Spring. It seems as if, to paraphrase a famous song, "Democracy is breaking out all over."

It is not easy at this moment in history to step back to analyze if the end of history and democratic peace/development theories need validation, although Fukuyama himself has somewhat modified his position.¹¹ With the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Communism has been so soundly discredited and "the end of history" so loudly proclaimed that democracy, like apple pie and motherhood, seems beyond criticism.¹² At a meeting on democracy and development at Yale University, this author raised some fundamental questions about definitions and research methodology which were dismissed as counterfactual to irrefutable truths. Professor Massuh has written: "...democracy has ceased to be an ideology and has now become a universally recognized truth."¹³

What is important at this historical juncture, as many post-Communist countries are returning to some form of autocracy and the Arab Spring has not yet seen the type of democracies the West was hoping for, is to go back to the immediate post-Soviet era to analyze what democracy/democratization actually meant and why.

II – What do we mean by democracy and democratization?¹⁴

Beyond declarations of ideological certainty, there are central arguments to be made about democratization. For example, in *An Agenda for Democracy*, Boutros Boutros-Ghali says that "...democracy contributes to preserving peace and security, securing justice and human rights, and promoting economic and social development."¹⁵ Here, the supposedly obvious correlation between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights is made.¹⁶ But it is necessary to begin to unpack what democracy and democratization might mean in order to fully understand the implications behind the "universally recognized truth" and to place the euphoria in its proper perspective.

Recognizing that democracy has been trumpeted for political reasons following the famous phrase by Robert Cox that "theory is always for someone and for purpose,"¹⁷ it is helpful to break down democracy into two basic elements that are not necessarily related. The first is the objective one based on free and fair elections.¹⁸ The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and other multilateral organizations have become experts in helping and evaluating elections. All of these are part of a legal, electoral model of how countries should be run and are a natural follow-up to the inevitability of democratic rule.

Crudely, this is part of what I have referred to elsewhere as Liberal Mathematics.¹⁹ In this context, the Mathematics would look like this: Respecting codes of conduct for having elections = free and fair elections = neutral constitution writing or reform = democratic rule = domestic development = social justice = international peace and security. Thus, free and fair elections have become the mantra around which much contemporary politics has been played out, and around which organizations such as Freedom House can establish rankings of countries in their publication *Freedom in the World* and their Electoral democracy designation.²⁰

The relationship between the institutional democratic election and the political lives of the people remains unexplored, as does the complex relationship between democratization and economic justice. Boutros Boutros-Ghali glides over

these problems when he writes at the conclusion to An Agenda for Democratization, “The present paper has been motivated by the evident desire for democratization, not only within States, but also among them and throughout the international system. It has been rooted in the conviction that peace, development and democracy are inextricably linked.”²¹ Or, as James Speth wrote, “...we in the larger international assistance community have no choice but to support responsible democratization initiatives, not just because we have been asked, but because such initiatives align our work with one of the greatest human struggles of our time – the struggle for social justice...”²²

As part of this correlation between elections, the legalistic model and the deeper implications of democratic culture for peace and economic development, the term democracy has become part of not just the exuberant political triumphalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union but also the general quantification process of politics as part of the rationalization of the social sciences toward hard science. The Liberal Mathematical formula mentioned above simplifies the innumerable complexities of societal organization too easily captured by extolling democracy and democratization and equating both with peace, development and social justice. The very parsimonious vision entailed here is part of an attempt to promulgate a simplistic answer to how we should be governed as well as an illusion of mathematical neutrality.

The parsimonious vision and illusion of neutrality are part of an attempt to depoliticize. By saying that there is a correct formula for how to be governed – much like a mathematical formula for how economies should be organized – we are led to believe that a final vision of how to live is easily available and indisputable. This is not just the end of history; it is the end of politics as an arena for contestation. Much like the use of rational choice in political science, the blind acceptance of the ideology of democracy precludes serious political debate, or debate of any kind.

As William Connolly has perceptively summarized, this blind acceptance should not go uncontested:

“The urge to depoliticize emerges in theories about politics as well as in political life about which we theorize. It finds implicit expression, for instance, in the wish to construct

a neutral matrix for political discourse. While the sources of this urge are readily understandable, recurrent efforts to demonstrate that one particular scheme actually provides the neutral medium sought are constantly open to decomposition. Each attempt to provide a frame both rationally demonstrable and specific enough to guide practical judgement, opens itself to reasonable contestation.”²³

Thus, the administrative, legal basis of democracy is firmly situated within the historical context of the triumphalism at the end of the Cold War plus the modeling, mathematical mania within the social sciences, particularly prevalent in political science and rational choice international relations. Depoliticization is an integral part of Liberal Mathematics.

The second element in democracy beyond the legal, administrative would be a democratic culture. This is much more difficult to define measure and quantify into clear typologies as Doyle did in his analysis. Several years ago, in a newly independent country in the former Soviet Union, an important political figure said to me; “Dr. Warner, you in the West are too impatient with us. The United States has over 200 years of democracy. Switzerland has over 700 years. We may be able to have elections, but a democratic culture will take more time.” Here, clearly was an astute separation of the objective, legalistic aspect of democracy and the more subjective cultural.²⁴

“A democratic culture cannot survive by merely defending individual rights.”

The legalistic and to some extent the cultural components of democracy both agree on the importance of the individual. However, with the fall of Communism, democratic theories have consciously prioritized the role of the individual above society. This was one of the radical differences between Communism and democracy and an important consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The democratic state has come to be seen as primarily protecting the individual. However, ever since the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, there has been a tension between the individual as a legal, individual entity and the individual as a social

member of society within a democratic culture. A democratic culture cannot survive by merely defending individual rights. Communitarian writers such as Michael Sandel have argued against the unsituated, liberal individual cut off from society.²⁵ Charles Taylor has also examined the consequences of liberalism's ignoring social and cultural contexts.²⁶ The Canadian Will Kymlicka has focused on the implications of society guaranteeing minority rights.²⁷ All three authors have recognized the inadequacies of liberal democratic cultures excluding the importance of something beyond the individual.

Indeed, the debate between liberals and communitarians²⁸ has many of the elements of the split between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, between the rights of an isolated citizen and those of an individual firmly embedded in society. Individual, opposition leaders such as the blind Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng are lionized in the West as examples of the importance of one person's freedom²⁹ as opposed to a large percentage of a society's rising unemployment or poverty. The front page headlines about Chen's odyssey before arriving in New York are part of the triumphalism of democracy and its prioritizing individual liberty.

The questions surrounding democratic culture are directly related to the relationship between democracy and democratization. For it is one thing to write a constitution and have free and fair elections, it is quite another to have a functioning democracy within a democratic culture. The relationship between the legal, administrative element of democracy and democratic culture is not at all evident within democracy and democratization; the inherent tensions between the individual and society have become obfuscated post 1989.

III - How democracies come about

How do democracies come about? In order to understand democratization, there are, logically, two obvious responses.³⁰ The first is that democracies evolve over time domestically. That is, within a limited space and national entity, a country decides and reforms itself towards a democratic system. Whether the democratic culture comes first

or the legal, administrative model comes first is not important here, although comparisons between nationalism and statehood in this sense are not without interest.³¹ Rather, what is important is that a country can develop its political system by itself with no outside interference such as the historical developments in Switzerland and the United States.³² In today's interdependent world, this would seem minimally possible.

What we are left to examine, therefore, is the relationship between democracy as an independent political system within a country and external forces affecting that system. In other words, if we begin by assuming an interdependent world, then we must look at how countries become democratic in terms of the influence of outside forces. For even if we accept Michael Doyle's democratic peace theory, the relationship between liberal democratic states and non-liberal states is not evident. As Doyle prudently perceives and warns, "In relations with weak states of a non-liberal character, liberal policy has succumbed to imperial interventions that it has been unable to sustain or profit from. Its interventions, designed to create liberal societies by promoting the economic development and political stability of nonliberal societies, have frequently failed to achieve their objectives."³³ Nonetheless, Doyle, like Fukuyama, believes that "The pacific union of liberal states has widened."³⁴

Specifically, if we are looking at the world today, we must examine how the democratic world sees the non-democratic and the politics of democratization. And perhaps the best way to do that would be to examine Samuel Huntington's major thesis on democratic waves of transition to democracy.

Huntington begins by observing that "Between 1974 and 1990 at least 30 countries made transitions to democracy, just about doubling the number of democratic governments in the world."³⁵ According to Huntington, the first wave was in the 1820's and the second between 1945 and 1962. Interestingly, he notes that after each of the first two waves there were reverse waves. What is relevant to our discussion here is Huntington's analysis of what gave rise to the third wave. He does this in order to try to predict the expansion or contraction of the third wave.

Huntington identifies five major factors in the transitions to democracy between 1974 and 1990 which can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Legitimacy problems of authoritarian regimes “in a world where democratic values were widely accepted...,”³⁶
- 2) Global economic growth and the expansion of the urban middle class;
- 3) The role of the Catholic Church as opponents of authoritarianism;
- 4) The policies of the European Community, the U.S. and the Soviet Union;
- 5) ‘Snowballing’ effect of early transitions that stimulated and provided models.

Without going into an exegesis of Huntington’s text, it is important to note two aspects of his argument: 1) the role of external forces, 2) the forces that might reverse the third wave.

There is no question for Huntington that external forces played a key role in consolidating democracy during the third wave. From the role of the European Community (EC) in southern Europe (Greece, Spain and Portugal) to Eastern Europe and eventually Turkey, Huntington sees membership and eventual membership in the EC as important stabilizing forces for democracy. As an addendum to this observation, he notes that the withdrawal of Soviet influence was a major factor in democratization in Eastern Europe.

But, more importantly, he states that “During the 1970s and 1980s, the United States was a major promoter of democratization.”³⁷ What is noteworthy here is that at the same time Huntington talks of the general global acceptance of democratic values, he warns about the limitations of that influence because of different geographic factors. In addition, and here we will quote at length to show the contradiction between his contention of the global acceptance of democratic values and the political role of the United States, because if there was general acceptance of democracy, then the eventual decline of the United States and that influence would not be crucial. In other words, Huntington is arguing that the global

acceptance of democratic values was directly related to American influence by example as well as power and not the values themselves:

“The U.S. contribution to democratization in the 1980s involved more than conscious and direct exercise of American power and influence. Democratic movements around the world have been inspired by and have borrowed from the American example. What might happen, however, if the American model ceases to embody strength and success, no longer seems to be the winning model? At the end of the 1980s, many were arguing that ‘American decline’ was the true reality. If people around the world come to see the United States as a failing power beset by political stagnation, economic inefficiency, and social chaos, its perceived failures will inevitably be seen as the failures of democracy, and the worldwide appeal of democracy will diminish.”³⁸

We have previously talked of democracy either being home grown or influenced by exogenous forces. Here Huntington cites the example of the United States as a major force for democratization. But, he is realistic to admit that if the situation within the United States degenerates, then the value of the example would diminish as well. In other words, efforts by the United States to foster democratization around the globe will to a large extent depend on the success of democracy within the United States. This observation clearly weakens his argument that democratic values were widely accepted as such. According to his observation about the United States, we should say that democratic values were widely accepted when the example of the United States was valid. And, we could follow this by saying that if the United States was no longer a valid example, then democratic values would no longer be widely accepted.

This needs further explanation following September 11, 2001.³⁹ Traditionally, according to Huntington, democracy was appealing with the example of the United States in the forefront in terms of freedom, rights and justice. However, we surmise, following September 11, the appeal of democracy, again with the United States as the model, is based more on institutional stability. It is easy to trumpet the unique fact that the U.S. has had presidential elections every 4 years since 1792 in a world of instability.⁴⁰ The paradox here is that the traditional appeal of democracy via the United States is potentially being eroded in the name of stability and security with the war on terror being the most obvious example. At what point will the popular notion of democracy and the U.S. as the model

clash with reductions in individual liberty as well as economic and financial difficulties? There is no question that the war on terror and its follow-ups such as Guantanamo prison, rendition and drones have cast an uneven image of the American projection of the democratic example. High unemployment rates and grossly unequal wealth distribution are also calling into question several aspects of the simplistic Liberal Mathematics model.

Indeed, Huntington's cautious analysis of the potential for democratization is far from Fukuyama's end of history and the euphoria of the democratic/development peace theory. To his credit, Huntington is honest enough to outline several obstacles to democratization as well as the possibility for regression, further underlining his understanding of democracy's lack of inevitability. He notes that as of 1990 more than 100 countries lack democratic regimes.⁴¹ Most important in these countries and their regions are the political, cultural and economic aspects, what we have previously said were the subjective, non-legalistic factors.

Huntington is particularly sensitive and helpful on the relationship between democratization and culture.⁴² He cites George Kennan on this subject:

"(Democracy...was a form of government) 'which evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in northwestern Europe, primarily among those countries that border on the English Channel and the North Sea...and which was then carried into other parts of the world.' Hence democracy has a 'relatively narrow base both in time and in space; and the evidence has yet to be produced that it is the natural form of rule for peoples outside those narrow perimeters.'⁴³

In anticipation of his Clash of Civilizations lecture and follow-up article and book,⁴⁴ he goes on to question certain non-Western Confucian and Islamic values hostile to democracy, in many ways anticipating the difficulties countries are encountering following the Rainbow Revolutions and the Arab Spring.

Huntington concludes by asserting that economic development and democratic politics are interconnected, similar to arguments that civil and political rights are interconnected to economic, social and cultural rights. "Most wealthy countries are democratic,"⁴⁵ he asserts re-inforcing the Liberal

Mathematical equation that economic development can be equated to democracy.

However, going back to the question of whether the legal model or democratic culture comes first, he says; "The future of democracy depends on the future of economic development. Obstacles to economic development are obstacles to the expansion of democracy."⁴⁶ He prioritizes the economic before the political, "Economic development makes democracy possible; political leadership makes it real,"⁴⁷ whereas most contemporary democratic theorists would put the political before the economic, as does our version of Liberal Mathematics.⁴⁸

IV - Perspectives on Democratization

Are we entering a fourth wave of democracy? Towards the end of the twentieth century, Larry Diamond predicted that "At some point in the first two decades of the twenty-first century – as economic development transforms the societies of East Asia in particular – the world will then be poised for a 'fourth wave' of democratization, and quite possibly a boon to international peace and security far more profound and enduring than we have seen with the end of the Cold War."⁴⁹ Diamond later updated this prediction by asking whether the Arab Spring was a fourth wave or a false start.⁵⁰ And, to his credit, Diamond recognized in March 2011 the difficulties of transformation in the Arab World as well as the former Soviet Union: "...a late spring freeze has seemingly hit some areas of the region. And it could be a protracted one. Certainly, each previous regional wave of democratic change had to contend with authoritarian hard-liners, opposition divisions, and divergent national trends. But most of the Arab political openings are closing faster and more harshly than happened in other regions – save for the former Soviet Union, where most new democratic regimes quickly drifted back toward autocracy."⁵¹

More important than answering whether or not we are seeing a fourth wave, it is necessary to return to the entire democratic/democratization discussion. We have tried to show that historically it is based at

a given moment in a given space. Just as Kennan had properly situated the growth of democratic countries in time and place, the euphoria of the democratic/democratization movement should also be situated in time and place. Like so many pronouncements about scientific truths that have been proven untrue throughout history, the role of democracy as a universal organizing system may be premature as well, and for many reasons.

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Indeed, it may be possible in the context of a geographically and historically situated idea of democracy to examine not just democracy, but pre-democratic, democratic and post-democratic countries and to further examine the relationship between political and economic systems. After all, in a world of quantum physics, we should not be satisfied with first-degree algebraic equations. Part of Fukuyama’s argument about the end of history involved the triumph of democracy and free-market capitalism. Following the crash of 2008, capitalism should be deconstructed as well as democracy, but I leave the former to the economists.

What has concerned us here, and will continue to concern us, is how the idea of democracy has been flouted politically. To return to Robert Cox, “Theory is always for someone and for some purpose;” democracy is certainly a theory. What we have begun to examine here is the situation of that theory at the end of the Cold War. We have focused on the triumphalism, leaving aside the simplistic mania for scientific truths as well as the scientific turn of the social sciences.⁵² The politics of the historical attempt to render a political system an absolute Truth remains a fascinating part of the understudied period at the end of the Soviet Union.

Following the end of World War I, there was an outbreak of enthusiasm for democracy.⁵³ Following World War II, there was another period of

democratic idealism.⁵⁴ The end of the Cold War saw another outbreak of democratic euphoria, part of Huntington’s wave theory. The Arab Spring might be considered another wave, although a very short one. However, waves are caused by forces, and it is as important to study the forces behind the waves.

V - Putin’s History Lesson

Vladimir Putin is an enigma. He is often thought of trying to restore not just the Soviet Union but to recreate the Russian Empire. Moscow’s annexation of Crimea, its support of rebels in eastern Ukraine and its sending military equipment to Syria are used as examples of the swashbuckling style of the ex-KGB agent. He is pictured as the evil ringmaster awakening a sleeping bear that is ready to roar, as it has done in history.

Those sympathetic to Putin and to the new Russian Federation blame the West for its humiliating containment policy through the eastern expansion of NATO and the European Union. Putin, according to this perspective, is merely trying to establish the Russian Federation as a major power after the fall of the Berlin Wall. A member of the UN Security Council, a major global source of gas and oil reserves, an important military power, Russia should have a first place seat in the international community. Following the end of the Soviet Union, in other words, Putin is merely trying to re-establish Russia’s proper place.

But here we are more interested in Vladimir Putin as a history teacher, as one who has watched democracy promotion from Moscow. To put his United Nations speech in context: Historically, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West entered a short period of euphoria with “the end of history” and “bound to lead” among unilateral pronouncements, as described above.

Vladimir Putin’s history lesson before the General Assembly took the West to task for its pompous proselytizing following 1989. “No one has to conform to a single development model that someone has once and for all recognized as the only right one,” he said. Looking at the results of democracy promotion during the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa, he reflected that: “Rather than bringing about reforms, an aggressive

foreign interference has resulted in a brazen destruction of national institutions and the lifestyle itself. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, we get violence, poverty and social disaster.”

This is a direct challenge to the West, a direct challenge to those who thought democracy and free markets were universally applicable, a direct challenge to American unilateralism. It is also a challenge coming from someone who recognized the errors of the universal pretensions of Marxist/Leninist ideology – “We also remember certain episodes from the history of the Soviet Union. Social experiments for export, attempts to push for changes within other countries based on ideological preferences, often led to tragic consequences and to degradation rather than progress.”

On a superficial level, Putin the history teacher said that the United States and the Soviet Union cooperated to stop Hitler. The mutual enemy brought the two contrasting ideologies together. Ideologies were put aside for pragmatic solutions to the threat of fascism. Before the General Assembly, Putin called for a similar coalition against the Islamic State, a coalition based on mutual interests, not mutual values. Democracy or socialism were not called into question.

More profoundly, Putin said that the era of ideology and ideological exceptionalism is over. When he said, “Indeed, policies based on self-conceit and belief in one’s exceptionality and impunity have never been abandoned,” he was criticizing the West and American triumphalism as exemplified by Fukuyama’s declaration of the end of history and Joseph Nye’s bound to lead. The Soviet Union and communism collapsed, he admitted. But most importantly for us here, he was explicitly stating, based on his own admission of the Soviet failure that the United States democracy promotion had failed following the implosion of the Soviet Union. Both ideologies had failed, but, according to Putin, only the Russians had recognized their failure.

“Do you realize what you have done?” he questioned those who have insisted on the inevitability of democracy and therefore the justification for intervention in the name of democracy promotion. Looking at Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussain, looking at Libya after the fall of

Mohammed Kaddafi, looking at the civil war raging in Syria and the instability in many of the countries after the Arab Spring, looking at the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the return of dictators in many countries in the former Soviet Union, Putin questioned not only the exceptionalism of the United States, but its belief that democracy is the best system for all countries, an exceptional political system.

“Instead of one exceptional political system, Putin called for plural political systems based on cooperation, recognizing national interests with no overarching ideology.”

Instead of one exceptional political system, Putin called for plural political systems based on cooperation, recognizing national interests with no overarching ideology. The first half 20th century was marked by ideological wars including the Russian revolution and fascism. The second half of the century, the Cold War, was as much about how to organize society as it was about control of territory. The end of the Cold War has seen the end of one universalizing ideology. President Putin asked the other major ideology to admit its failures, as he did, and to enter an era of pragmatic pluralism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the end of Marxist/Leninism. Will failures in North Africa and the Middle East lead to the end of democracy promotion? Will another major stock market crash or rising inequality lead to a serious questioning of liberalism and American exceptionalism?

What makes Putin’s speech so noteworthy is the combination of his admission that his own country’s ideology had failed, his call for a similar admission from the Americans and the West, and his call for cooperation based not on ideology but on a common enemy, the Islamic State.

VI – Conclusion

“Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time,” Winston Churchill said in the House of Commons in November 1947. The date and place are important; England after World War II and the defeat of Hitler, and just after his Iron Curtain speech in Missouri in March 1946. The end of World War II was a moment of democratic victory, but not yet the unipolar moment following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the euphoric triumphalism. That followed the end of the Soviet Union and communism.

The period 1989-2001 is a truly unique moment in history. The United States was at its zenith with no enemy such as the Soviet Union and certainly no competing ideology such as fascism or communism. In certain ways, the attacks of September 11, 2001 ended that euphoric moment. But, they did not end the democracy promotion. On the contrary, in the face of a growing Islamic threat and a resurgent Russian Federation, democracy promotion became all the more fashionable.

It is in this context of time and place that President Putin’s speech is important. He was trying to burst the bubble of the myth of democracy based on its failures and to show that pragmatic cooperation between the U.S. and Russia against the Islamic threat would be based on no ideology, certainly not democracy.



The relationship between democracy and democracy promotion is not evident. What is clear, however, is that following the end of the Soviet Union, Western countries, particularly the United States, began an aggressive campaign of democracy promotion based on several ideological as well as geopolitical considerations. President Putin’s speech to the General Assembly is not a eulogy to that period. Rather, it represents a different perspective and one that has generally been ignored. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the many failures of the Arab Spring – the horrific events of November 13 in Paris are but one example – it is not without importance to review the euphoric period of 1989-2001 to try to understand what drove the democracy promotion in order to better understand the relationship between democracy and democracy promotion.

Endnotes

¹ "Read Putin's U.N. General Assembly speech." [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28_viewed/September 29, 2015](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/28_viewed/September%2029%2C2015).

² Indeed, it is easy to forget that the major debate in the United States before the collapse of the Soviet Union was the decline of the U.S. as a superpower. However, soon after 1989 the U.S. was being touted as a hyperpower and the unchallenged leader in a unipolar world. For more on decline, see Kennedy, Paul (1989): The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000. New York: Vintage Books. For an analysis of the U.S. reaction to the question of decline and the implosion of the Soviet Union, see Warner, Daniel (1996): "US Foreign Policy After the End of the Cold War." PSIS Occasional Paper Number 3. Geneva: PSIS Graduate Institute. Part of the triumphalism post-1989 was directly related to answering the decline debate. If the Soviet Union collapsed, how could the United States be in decline?

³ Fukuyama, Francis (1989): "The End of History?" The National Interest, Vol. 16, pp. 3-18.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 3.

⁵ Doyle, Michael (1983): "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs," Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 12, no. 3. Doyle, Michael (1984): "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2," Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 12, no. 4. Without going into all the literature, see Chan, Steven (1984): "Mirror, Mirror on the War...Are Democratic States more Pacific?" Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 617-648; Russett, Bruce (1993): Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World, Princeton: Princeton University Press. For critiques of the theory, see Cohen, Raymond (1994): "Pacific Unions: A reappraisal of the Theory that 'Democracies Do Not Go to War With Each Other,'" Review of International Studies, Vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 207-223 and Rosato, Sebastian (2003): "The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory," American Political Science Review Vol. 97, no. 4, pp. 585-602.

⁶ See Warner, Daniel (1998): "Democracy, Elections and the End of History," International Journal of Refugee Law, Vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 593-598. Some of the arguments in this article are taken from that source.

⁷ Doyle, Michael (1983): "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs," Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 12, no. 3, p. 213. Italics in the original.

⁸ President Clinton's 1994 State of the Union Address, cited in Owen, John M. (1994): "How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace," International Security, Vol. 19, no. 2, p. 87; President George W. Bush press conference: (November 12, 2004, accessed July 23, 2012) "Bush and Blair Discuss Mideast," New York Times.

⁹ See Alec Luhn, "National Endowment for Democracy is first 'undesirable' NGO banned in Russia." The Guardian.com/world2015/jul/28 viewed on Nov. 13, 2015.

¹⁰ Speth, James, (April 15, 1997): "Challenges for Sustainable Human Development: Good Governance and Democratization." Paper presented at the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue, Vienna, Austria.

¹¹ Fukuyama, Francis: "The End of History Revisited" in DVD form as well as several seminars.

¹² Notice that the recent proposal by President Obama to guarantee health care for all citizens has been labeled Obamacare and has been roundly ridiculed in the United States as being associated with failed socialism/communism. Although the financial crash of 2008 has called into question part of Fukuyama's utopia, i.e., capitalism, rarely have questions been raised about his other answer to the end of history, i.e. democracy.

¹³ Massuh, Victor (1998): "Democracy: A Delicate Balance and Universality," Democracy: Its Principles and Achievements, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, p. 69.

¹⁴ Note that we will make no effort here to define democracy since we are more interested in how it has been used politically and the implications for democratization. Larry Diamond notes, "David Collier and Steven Levitsky have identified more than 550 'subtypes' of democracy." Diamond, Larry (1996): "Is the Third Wave Over?" Journal of Democracy, Vol. 7, no. 3, p. 20 referring to Collier, David and Levitsky, Steve (April 8, 1996): "Democracy: 'With Adjectives': Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," unpublished manuscript, Department of Political Science, University of California at Berkeley.

¹⁵ Boutros-Ghali, Boutros (1996): An Agenda for Democratization, New York: United Nations, p. 6.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the relationship between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, see Warner, Daniel (1996): "An Ethics of Human Rights: Two Interrelated Misunderstandings." Denver Journal of International Law and Policy. Vol. 24, no. 2/3, pp. 395-415.

¹⁷ Cox, Robert (1996): "Theory is always for someone and for some purpose." "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory." Cox, Robert and with Sinclair, Timothy (eds.) (1996): Approaches to World Order, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 87.

¹⁸ See for example Goodwin-Gill, Guy, (1994): Free and Fair Elections: International Law and Practice, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, ; Codes of Conduct for Elections, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1998. An updated version of this and part of the formula would be Brandt, Michele, Cottrell, Jill, Ghai, Yash, Reagan, Anthony (2011): Constitution-making and Reform: Options for the Process. Geneva, Interpeace. The authors admit that there is no quick fix or one formula, and the book is certainly better than finding amateurs like me writing constitutions in the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union. However, the book nevertheless is an integral part of a liberal, legalist model that fits into the first degree equation of Liberal Mathematics.

¹⁹ Warner, Daniel (1994): "Voluntary Repatriation and the Meaning of Return to Home: A Critique of Liberal Mathematics." Journal of Refugee Studies, pp. 160-174.

²⁰ See Bosin, Yury V (2009): "Measuring Democracy: Approaches and Challenges Associated With Developing Democratic Indices," Washington: International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

²¹ Boutros. An Agenda... op. cit., p. 52.

²² Speth op. cit., p. 4.

²³ Connolly, William (1993): The Terms of Political Discourse, 3rd ed., Preface to 2nd edition, Oxford: Blackwell, p. xix.

²⁴ See for example Lapid and Kratochwil's attempt to reintroduce culture beyond the objective, mathematical in International Relations in Lapid, Yosef and Kratochwil, Friedrich (eds.) (1995): The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory, Denver: Lynne Rienner,

²⁵ Sandel, Michael (1998): Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁶ Taylor, Charles (1989) Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

²⁷ Kymlicka, Will (1989): Liberalism Community and Culture, Clarendon Press: Oxford.

²⁸ See Mulhall, Stephen and Swift, Adam (1992): Liberals and Communitarians, Oxford: Blackwell.

²⁹ "Chen Guangcheng, the blind legal advocate who recently sought refuge in the American Embassy in Beijing, arrived in the heart of Greenwich Village on Saturday, holding the kind of open-air news conference that he could never have imagined while under virtual house arrest in China." Kaplan, Thomas, Jacobs, Andrew, and Myers, Steven Lee (May 19, 2012, accessed July 30, 2012): "Dissident From China Arrives in U.S., Ending an Ordeal," New York Times.

³⁰ Stephen Rosow made the point to me in private communication that "...historically, the alternative that internal political development can actually be separated from external forces is mistaken (even Athenian democracy was formed in relation to external forces, most notably war and political 'meddling' of Sparta and other aristocratic cities in Athenian political affairs). It seems to me a democratic polity has always been both 'home grown' and 'influenced by exogenous forces.'"

My point was rather a logical point, but a further development of the relationship between "homegrown democracy" and "influenced by exogenous forces" is beyond the scope of this paper. We do note, however, the American movement from trying to democratize Afghanistan to merely leaving when the situation is "good enough" shows that democratization itself may not be the United States' true objective during interventions for regime change. The New York Times ran this story before a NATO conference to wind down the war in Afghanistan: "But even as American officials prepare a list of benchmarks they can cite as achieved in the war effort...they acknowledge privately that the bar has been significantly lowered on how success in Afghanistan is defined after 11 years of combat.

'Look, this is Afghanistan,' one administration official said in an interview. 'Is it going to be Switzerland? No. But is good enough for Afghanistan? That's where we need to get to.'" Cooper, Helene and Shanker, Thom (May 17, 2012 accessed July 30, 2012): "U.S. Redefines Afghan Success Before Conference," New York Times.

³¹ It could be argued, for example, that in Western Europe States came first and then nations, while in Eastern Europe it was the opposite. See Liebich, André (2004): "European Integration and the Nationalities Question," Politics & Society, Vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 367-380.

³² With full knowledge of the fact that soon after the American Revolution, the independent Americans offered to George Washington to be King of the newly independent country. Democracy was not one of the rallying cries of the Revolution.

³³ Doyle, Michael (1984): "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs, Part 2," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, no. 4, p. 324.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 349.

³⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. (1991): "Democracy's Third Wave," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 2, no. 2, p.12. It is not without interest to note the relation of the *Journal* to the U.S. Congress. According to its website, the *Journal of Democracy* started in 1990, is part of the International Forum for Democratic Studies housed within the National Endowment for Democracy. According to its website, "*The National Endowment for Democracy (NED)* is a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world. Each year, with funding from the US Congress, NED supports more than 1,000 projects of non-governmental groups abroad who are working for democratic goals in more than 90 countries."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 15-16.

³⁹ Many thanks to Stephen Rosow for his suggestion on this point.

⁴⁰ In another context, the incredible nostalgia during the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's Jubilee is most relevant here.

⁴¹ Without being overly technical, in the above mentioned Doyle articles there are lists of wars and democratic and non-democratic countries. The noted historian A.G Hopkins pointed out to the author that several of the divisions between democratic and non-democratic countries during the times of the conflicts were highly debatable.

⁴² Note that the theory of the clash of civilizations by Huntington was originally formulated in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute after the appearance of the third wave article.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 23. Quotes are from Kennan, George (1977): *The Cloud of Danger*, Boston : Little Brown, pp 41-43.

⁴⁴ Huntington, Samuel P. (1996): *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁴⁵ Huntington, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p.31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁴⁸ In terms of counterfactuals, one might argue here about the economic success of the Asian Tigers and their lack of democracy or the number of elections held in poor countries like Haiti.

⁴⁹ Diamond, Larry, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵⁰ Diamond, Larry (May 22, 2011. Accessed July 26, 2012.): "A Fourth Wave or False Start," *Foreign Affairs*. It should be noted that Diamond is co-editor of the *Journal of Democracy*.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 1.

⁵² See the excellent critique of rational choice theory in Green, Donald P. and Shapiro, Ian (1994): *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁵³ The King – Crane Commission was an American government investigation during the summer of 1919 under the initiative of President Woodrow Wilson. It was designed to see if non-Turkish areas within the former Ottoman Empire were ready for self-determination. The members visited areas of Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Armenia to test public opinion concerning democracy. The final report was controversial, delayed by Wilson's death, and ultimately suppressed with little or no effect on policy.

⁵⁴ The first "Great Debate" between Realists and Idealists centered on U.S. foreign policy after World War II. For relevant articles and articles relating to the debate, see Knorr, Klaus and Rosenau, James (eds.) (1969): *Contending Approaches to International Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.