Can Democracy be Exported? : Lessons from US Democracy Promotion Mission

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Abstract : The notion that democracy has a universal value has motivated some advanced democracies, particularly, the United States to take proactive measures to extend democracy to cover all nations through various means and even through military aggression. This paper argues that democracy is not a commodity to be exported militarily; as political, social, cultural and economic factors in the target state present substantial complexities and uncertainty to such medium. The traditional peaceful diplomatic means along with exposing citizens of the target state to unhindered trade is the most viable way to spread democracy. Such effort has the potential of transferring democratic values that could take root and sow the democratic seed which would then fulfil the objectives of the advanced democracy. All the antithetical contingencies subject this paper to conclude that exporting democracy by military intervention is not an option for democratization.

Key Words: Democracy, Democratization, Military Intervention, Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, Public Diplomacy, Free trade.

1. Introduction

Many scholars and leaders of advanced democracies have claimed the universality of democracy [1] with the argument that democracy today has reached an all-time high [2] with many countries making meaningful efforts to strengthen democratic virtues in their systems of government. This notion has motivated some advanced democracies, particularly, the United States to take proactive measures to extend democracy to cover all nations as was emphasised in President George W. Bush's 2005 inaugural speech. Besides the traditional diplomatic means of spreading democracy, military occupation has also become a key medium of exporting democracy. Throughout its history, the United States has made several attempts at militarily exporting democracy ending up with mixed results. Some of these efforts achieved the objective of implanting democracy in West Germany, Italy and Japan but failed miserably in Somalia, Vietnam, Haiti, Cuba, etc. These variations in results have left scholars and policymakers increasingly interested in the question of whether sustainable

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democratic institutions can be imposed through military intervention [3]. This paper argues that, although military occupation has made few successes in exporting democracy, comparatively, peaceful means such as diplomacy remain the most sustainable medium.

This paper will discuss the export of democracy within the context of the geographical expansion of democracy by the United States, across cultures, tradition, polity, economy, society and religion.

2. Methodology

The present article has followed qualitative method. All the data and information used here are from secondary sources which have been drawn from books, journal articles, international organization reports and documents.

3. Component

In this paper, the export of democracy will be dissected in four sections. The first section will highlight some of the successes and failures of military intervention as an important tool practiced by advanced democracies to exporting democracy. The second section will review literatures and studies on the export of democracy. The third section will analyse and argue why exporting democracy by military intervention is not a sustainable option. The final section will briefly review the traditional peaceful and diplomatic means of exporting democracy.

4. Military intervention as a tool to export democracy: successes & failures

The export of democracy by some western nations is obviously driven by claim that democracy is a universal value, although there are substantial disputes surrounding this claim. Amartya Sen [4] points out that it was only in the twentieth century, that the idea of democracy became established as the normal form of government to which any nation is entitled – whether in Europe, America, Asia, or Africa. He emphasised that the idea of democracy as a universal commitment is quite new and quintessentially a product of the twentieth century. Today Western conception of democracy is more or less accepted throughout the world. By 1974, more than 60 countries had made or nominally transitioned from authoritarian to democratic rule in a series of regime change worldwide [5]. McColm [6] (1993) observes that for the first time, more than half of the world's countries can be classified as democratic, although many of these emergent democracies are considered as "fragile democracies" with few indicators of "western liberal democracies".

In spite of these gains, military intervention has still been a key medium of attempting to export democracy. This mode of exporting democracy is not new in international intercourse. According to Hay [7] (2005), it has been a major imperative of the Unites States foreign policy since the days of Woodrow Wilson. Downes & Monten [8] (2010) claimed that there have been about one hundred instances of foreign-imposed regime changes which have already been taken place on the ensuing level of democracy in target countries between 1816 and 2008 [9]. Similarly, Goemans et al [10] (2009) have pointed out that since

1920, some 38 foreign imposed leadership changes have occurred over the period of 1816-1980. Meanwhile, Werner [11] (1996) specifically cited to 26 foreign imposed leadership changes that happened as outcomes of interstate wars.

The export of democracy is often provoked by different dynamics. Sometimes, it happens as an end result of war between nations as in the cases of Germany, Italy and Japan. In other instances, democracy may be imposed by violence or other forms of pressure short of war between states, such as covert action or the lesser use of force, can result in the export of democracy. The respective invasions of Grenada and Panama in 1983 and 1989 are examples of such operation, as was carried out by the Americans [12]. The export of democracy by military occupation has presented variant outcomes which have subjected its merits to academic and policy scrutiny. Over two decades after the United States finally failed to militarily export democracy to Cuba at the close of the Second World War, it took up in the most ambitious initiative in its history of democratizing war-torn countries with the military occupation of West Germany, Italy and Japan. The outcome in these cases was sharply different from that in Cuba (Coyne 2006 [13], Peic & Reiter 2010 [14]). The occupiers were successful in transforming Germany and Japan, both war-torn countries, into liberal democracies that have survived till today. Coyne [15] (2006) emphasises that these successes don't only exist in adverse to the defects in Cuba and other places, these cases laid the basis for the belief that the United States was capacitated to export liberal democracy successfully at gunpoint.

5. Critical review of existing studies on export of democracy

Numerous studies have been conducted on the merit of militarily exporting democracy. Despite few isolated support, the results have overwhelmingly pointed to the potential problems involved with using this means for democratization. But some scholars such as Meernik 1996 [16] and Peceny 1999 [17] recalling earlier studies argue that they were more hopeful about spreading democracy through military occupation. Correlatively, Hermann and Kegley [18] (2010), looking at American interventions since 1945, also found evidence that interventions intended to promote democracy led to an improvement in the target country's polity score, whereas "American interventions that were not focused on governmental reform…resulted in the target state becoming more autocratic"

Nonetheless, more recent studies by many scholars such as Enterline & Greig [19], Bueno de Mesquita & Downs [20] and Easterly et al [21] are cynical that democratization through force can yield intended results .These scholars highlight the rarity of success, and argue not only that intervention is unlikely to result in democratic improvement, but that it might be counterproductive as well. A third group of analysts argues that the leading explanation for variation in the success or failure of interventions is determined by the level of effort put forward by the exporting state(s). This argument has emerged most prominently from the recent literature on nation-building, typically defined as "a deliberate process of democratization administered through foreign intervention, in a study

of U.S. nation building" [22]. Meanwhile, from a different dimension of the debate, another group argues that conditions in the target state are key variables influencing the success or failure of military interventions in producing democratic change. They identify factors associated with democratic transition, consolidation, and breakdown, such as a state's level of wealth, the extent of ethnic or social divisions in a society, whether a state has any prior experience with democracy, or a state's level of external and internal security threat. An examination by Andrew Enterline and Michael Greig [23] (2005) of the survival of imposed democracies found that several variables influence the length of time that "forced democracies" survive in those countries. They claim that after a rocky first decade, "strong" democracies with a combined Polity score greater than 6 tend to be more durable than "weak" democracies (which score between 0 and 6).

Most of these studies overwhelmingly point to the complexities and uncertainties associated with exporting democracy by military intervention. Hay [24](2005) contends that democracy cannot be exported as a parcel, because it is developed naturally as part of a political culture that is sustained by society. Thus, forcing the pace of democratization risks potential unrest, especially within societies where deep fault lines exist. Drawing from these critical factors that influence the result of exporting democracy, this paper argues that the United States key successes in Germany and Japan cannot be generalized, as it has failed in many attempts to impose democracy militarily. According to Archibugi [25] (2007), between the first fifty years of the 1900s, the failures of the United States efforts to forcefully export democracy was concerned with neighbouring, and obviously, non-hostile countries such as Cuba (1898-1902, 1906-1909, and 1917-1922), Panama (1903-1936), Nicaragua (1909-1933), Haiti (1915-1934), the Dominican Republic (1916-1924), and similar failures were recorded in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, a huge US military presence in South Korea could not produce democracy until after three decades. Recalling the study of the Carnegie Empowerment of International Peace which points to the huge failures of the export of democracy, Archibugi concludes that American obsession with exporting democracy via its army has brought about more failures than successes.

6. Military intervention : not a viable method

In light of the corroborating evidence as presented in these studies, this paper argues that the export of democracy through military invasion generates radical change. Because democracy challenge the established system of power in many societies, whether they are based on tradition or compulsion. The struggle for political power among different power groups may exacerbate pre-existing ethnic tension. Forcing democracy, Hay [26] (2005) argues, can unleash these forces, defeating its own aims and risking repercussion that could make the world less secure as is the situation in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Insurgent groups in these countries, despite of the United States military presence, are thus increasingly expanding their networks and achieving more targeted strikes compared to ten years ago before the U S intervention. The lessons that

instability and resistance might be features of democratization can be drawn from the tangled political history of the United States and other Western nations. Moreover, there is nothing automatic about the capacity of elections to create stable outcomes. In some already divided societies, elections-even free and fair, can deepen polarization. The elections may lead to increasing pressure for a division of societies along religious or ethnic lines. Thus elections can result in translating social cleavages into institutional deadlock by encouraging demagogues and violence which eventually may lead to genocide. Thus in important respects, democracy requires a pre-electoral consensus about how conflicts are to be managed.

The US invasion of Iraq has brought many of the foreign policy issues surrounding democracy promotion into sharp focus, intensifying suspicions that the pursuit of democracy elsewhere is a cover or rationalization for other foreign policy objectives. The question is whether 'democracy promotion' can be a reason enough to invade another country. The international law suggests that it is not. Second, the US pursuit of 'regime change' in Iraq has led it down a path of infringing upon the principles that it purports to uphold (e.g. promotion and protection of international human rights and humanitarian laws). The adventure in Iraq has also promoted a tendency in US foreign policy that favours unilateral action. Such unilateralism diverts attention from the usual conduct of inter-state relations via diplomacy.

Besides, the notion that democracy is a universal value does not convince those who see it rather as a cultural threat. In the 1990s, the culture debate centred on the identification and defence of 'Asian Values' was led by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia's Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad. This was formalized in the 1993 'Bangkok Declaration'. In 1993, an Arab scholar namely, Rashid al-Ghannushi,, pointed that, "...wholesale exportation of democracy entails imposing a whole host of values and practices that could endanger indigenous values." [27].

7. Diplomacy as a tool to export democracy: a way forward?

The peaceful means has already been proven to be an effective medium for successfully exporting liberal democracy. Notably, most of the credible gains made in the expansion of democracy were achieved through bilateral assistance agencies of established democracies that mounted programs to promote democratic transitions, respect for human rights, the establishment of the rule of law, vibrant civil society, free press, and increased transparency and accountability of government, etc [28]. Promoting democracy as a foreign policy objective is not new. What is different today is the scale and explicitness of these initiatives, and the progress requirement of recipient states towards democratization and good governance as a condition for aid. The rapid spread of democracy can be attributed to the, compact of changing international environment as a result of the end of the Cold War coupled with the willingness of the United States and other donors to withhold foreign assistance from authoritarian regimes that do not democratize [29]. Democratization on this front

has made clear and significant gains in terms of an initial transition to democratic governance. The donor community can justifiably claim some credit in facilitating these transitions in Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, possibly in Tanzania and Uganda, etc. [30] Many scholars are thus convinced that diplomacy rather than military intervention could bring more fruitful results.

In classical terms, diplomacy has been defined as the conduct of relations between states by peaceful means [31] or as the use of language and other signals by one state in attempt to convey information to another [32] and also as the means for conducting relations between sovereign states [33]. Even though there is not an exact definition of conventional diplomacy, it is mainly understood as a well-resourced and skilful political activity which chief purpose is to enable states to secure the objectives of their foreign policies without resort to force, propaganda, or law but by using communication, representation and negotiation [34]. However the globalisation era, which commenced in late 20th century, brought the increasing number of international interactions and global problems such as human rights, terrorism, climate change, nuclear development in the international stage and made states to adapt their foreign policy namely diplomatic activities to the new environment. In other words, old diplomacy which revolved around security and war issues gave it place to new diplomacy which includes fields such as democratization, cultural relations, foreign aid, safeguarding of human rights, international terrorism, human rights, rule of law, good governance, free trade and so on . It appears that all the necessary norms for establishing democratic cultures in developing countries have been drawn on the contemporary diplomatic agenda [35]. Thus, in the twenty first century, Diplomacy appears to be more durable in the project of "democracy promotion" than military invasion. The expanding scope and content of new diplomacy such as Track II diplomacy, NGO diplomacy, Crisis diplomacy, UN diplomacy, Guerrilla diplomacy, Polylateral diplomacy, Cultural or Public diplomacy now encompasses numerous fields and areas of world politics and has institutionalized and integrated democratic values and democratic cultures in various parts of the world. Now "public diplomacy" has become the dominating feature in the expanding area of diplomatic activities.

Public diplomacy has become a political instrument with expansive boundaries and distinguishing features. It is a term that explains ways and means and by which states, association of states and non-state actors understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviours; build and manage relationships; and influence options and actions to advance their interests and values. It is used by political actors to understand the consequences of policy choices, set public agendas, influence discourse in civil society, and build consent for strategies that require trade-offs among costs, risks and benefits. It is therefore less about authority, telling others what to do rather it is more about showing others what is desirable, in the hope that it will be emulated. Public diplomacy links people and cultures that do not have a common language, common symbols, or the shared history [36]. With the changing geopolitical landscapes in the 21st century, practitioners are thus increasingly emphasizing the public diplomacy efforts to provide these missing

linkages. Thus all the western nations and the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India & China) countries have incorporated the public diplomacy component in their foreign policy strategy [37]. Furthermore, development in technology, media and especially high speed internet also made public diplomacy the easiest way to spread democratic norms. In this respect, Leonard and Alakeson argue in their study Going Public (2000) [38]that, "our ability to win over other governments will depend in part on how we are perceived by the populations they serve."

Although this medium of public diplomacy seems quite promising, still there are other peaceful options available to countries wanting to export democracy. Free trade or unhindered access to markets in advanced democracies will provide an opportunity for cultural exchange. When people trade it exposes them to the beliefs, values and other cultural practices of their trading partners. If the US and its allies are really determined to exporting Western style democratic institutions and values of liberty, access should be granted to the trading partners from the target countries so that they see and experience how free societies operate. Free movement of people can be a good start in this respect. Besides, the western democracies should be encouraged to continue to strengthen training of political leaders and youths of target states, networking among political entrepreneurs and human rights activists; technical training for government and political parties, etc. These kinds of engagements would provide the necessary space for democracy to take root from within; as argued by Barken [39] (1997), that "democratization is fundamentally a process of institution building and political socialization, and not the occurrence or non-occurrence of single events".

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, using the claims of the universality of democracy as a backing, the United States and some western allies have put the export of democracy a most important integral component on their foreign policy objectives. There is no convergence or prescription among these nations limiting the means of spreading democracy. They take arbitrary and diverse measures, mostly with underlying self-interest, at pursuing this objective. The most controversial of these methods has been military intervention. Although peaceful means have been found more effective; nonetheless, the success achieved by the United States in imposing democracy in Italy, Germany and Japan stimulated the perception that military occupation was a viable instrument. Several studies show that numerous attempt to militarily export democracy since 1816-2008 were met with woeful failure. This paper argues that democracy is not a commodity to be exported militarily, as political, social, culture and economic factors in the target state present substantial complexities and uncertainty to such medium. However, the traditional peaceful diplomatic means such as public diplomacy along with exposing citizens of the target state to unhindered trade can strengthen and enhance engagement. Such efforts have the more potential for transferring democratic values that could take root and sow the democratic seed which would then fulfil the objectives of the advance democracy. All these antithetical contingencies subject this paper to conclude that exporting democracy by military intervention is not a viable option for democratization.

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