Rein Müllerson

REGIME CHANGE

From Democratic Peace Theories to Forcible Regime Change

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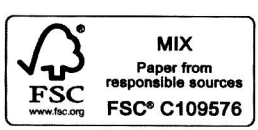

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To the memory of my mother Erna Müllerson and to the future of Irina, Jan and George

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The current series of regime changes in different parts of the world started with the transformation and collapse of the Soviet Union as the manifestation and guardian of communist ideology and totalitarian practices. This, in turn, released a chain of transformations in Eastern and Central Europe. These events and developments were seen as a triumph of liberal democracy over communist ideology and practices; and in a way it was exactly that, though the declarations concerning the 'end of history' or 'mission accomplished' were not only premature, but as it soon became clear, dead wrong. An aftershock, or rather series of after-tremors, to this epochal change, which can be justifiably defined as a world-wide social revolution, came slightly more than a decade later in several of the former Soviet republics (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) in the form of the so-called 'colour revolutions' that combined in different degrees, *depending on the specific country* (sic!), expressions of popular discontent, external meddling, and opportunistic struggle for power; these were rather *coup d'états* than social revolutions.

Then, less than a decade later, came the 'Arab Spring' or the 'Arab Awakening', as it is also called, whose directions and meaning for these countries as well as for the world at large is still difficult to gauge. While these events have some common roots and similar features, as well as significant differences, often the former are exaggerated, and sometimes ignored. On the one hand, these events are all entwined by a general context, which is that of a globalising world with an almost instant flow of information. They are also a part of the general tendencies of different peoples, ethnicities, religions and other groups, which had hitherto been marginalised and disenfranchised, now demanding their say in deciding how to live, with whom to live and even where to live. In the eyes of many in the West, this is an accelerating run towards the 'end of history', a realisation of the idea of universal history. At the same time, the developments in all these societies, notwithstanding their quite obvious (often obvious because they are on the surface, i.e. relatively superficial), similarities are also very different. Even if the discontent of the Arab peoples has some significant common causes (repressive regimes that were

mainly concerned with staying in power and enriching themselves, and more often than not serving the interests of foreign elites rather than their own people), their ethnic and religious compositions, demographic characteristics, levels of economic development, presence or absence of the 'oil curse', as well as their strategic alliances differ hugely. Equally, corruption, mismanagement and inter-ethnic tensions in the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan may have had many similar features and even causes, but there is no single uniform solution, their common history within the Czarist Empire and the Soviet Union notwithstanding. Happy countries, paraphrasing Tolstoy, may indeed look alike, but every unhappy country is unhappy very much in its own way. If this observation is correct, and below we will try to prove that it is, then countries that become happier, i.e. more prosperous, peaceful and free, will eventually indeed become in some important respects more similar to one another, though never, of course, becoming the same. However, as unhappy countries are all different, remedies that would make them happier are also different. Moreover, Tolstoy, though undoubtedly a brilliant writer, was not as great a philosopher as he wanted or even pretended to be, or as Isaiah Berlin put it, he was a fox who longed to be a hedgehog.[1] Today the world has too many aspiring hedgehogs in power, who – often sincerely – believe that the big picture of the world they hold is true for everybody. Foxes, in their view, are like those blind men who grope different parts of the elephant, and depending on the part they touch, imagine it either as a pillar or a tree or a rope. However, differently from the elephant – an organic integral system, where all parts are subordinated to and serve the system as a whole, the world is a much less integrated system and therefore foxes studying details, i.e. specific societies or issues, are after all not so blind. Even happy countries are not exactly the same, though there are some general features or principles, and ignoring them is problematic, if not impossible, in achieving happiness (peace, justice, prosperity and freedom). Yet, these are only the general features and principles that have to be adapted to cement conditions in any specific society. We, as individual human beings, are

[1] I. Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History*, Ivan R Dee, 1993.

indeed quite the same. Even families (at least within the same civilization and culture) are quite similar. However, the bigger a social group, the more they differ from each other. China will never resemble Nauru, Sweden Iraq and the United States and Estonia will never be the same. History, culture, religion, geography and size – all matter even if, say, Iraq's per capita GDP were one day to surpass that of Sweden. So, a certain homogenisation of the world, whose important, controversial and topical aspect is the heterogenisation of individual societies, is a long-term tendency (which, like parallels in non-Euclidian geometry meet only in abstract theory or in cosmic practice, but in the tangible stay quite separate).

In this book it is argued that regime changes, which mark the turn of both the century and the millennium, take place in the general context of a globalising world that is characterised by a transformation of the balance of power and a crisis of dominant political and economic institutions. The still dominant West tries to channel justified popular discontent in many non-Western societies toward Western political and economic models that, however, are themselves in a state of crisis and in need of serious reforms. An ironic feature of the collapse of the communist system and the triumph of the West is the conclusion that these epochal events also revealed, though not immediately, the internal as well as external contradictions of the dominant and triumphant social, economic and political system, i.e. capitalist liberal democracy. It turned out to be only relatively triumphant, i.e. *vis-à-vis* its nemesis – the Soviet style communist system.

In the effort to channel the current social and political processes that are taking place in many countries towards one definitive model there are at least two dangers. First, most of these non-Western societies are not able to successfully and sustainably transform themselves into societies resembling Western models. In any case, even if they were to succeed, it would be in the long run and at the end of the day. Immediately, instead of democracy, there is a realistic potential of the emergence of anarchy *à la* Kyrgyzstan, of which more later, and instead of a market economy based on the rule of law, there would be a wild winner-takes-all type of capitalism *à la* Yeltsin's Russia, not to mention Afghanistan and Iraq which do not even remotely resemble the blueprints that were drawn up for these

societies in Washington or Brussels. Secondly, even if some societies for various reasons may be able to implement Western models, this does not necessarily mean that they are following models that are the most appropriate for today's or even more appropriately for tomorrow's world. Current transformations concern not only societies that indeed were, so to say, on the 'wrong side of history', i.e. the former communist bloc countries. Their failure unleashed processes that revealed fundamental shortcomings in the triumphant – the Western liberal democracy – system. Today the whole world is groping the elephant in an attempt to make sense of a runaway world.

Regimes, whose changes we will analyse in this book, are of course political regimes. In following chapters (especially in the Chapter *Current Regime Changes: Socioeconomic and Political Problems*) we will discuss in detail different political regimes and, in particular, their interactions with other layers of society. We do not think that for our purposes it is necessary to go into the analysis of different definitions of the concept of 'political regime'. Nevertheless, it is preferable to have a working definition of the concept from the onset. There are some rather good ones, which we may, in principle, agree to accept. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, for example, write that by political regime they 'mean the ensemble of patterns, explicit or not, that determines the forms and channels of access to principal governmental positions, the characteristics of the actors who are admitted and excluded from such access, and the resources or strategies that they can use to gain access. This necessarily involves institutionalization, i.e., to be relevant, the patterns defining a given regime must be habitually known, practiced, and accepted.'[2] A shorter, and therefore more analogous to the law of parsimony or Occam's razor was given by Laurence Whitehead: 'The term "political regime" denotes a defined set of institutions and "rules of the game" that regulate access to, and the uses of, positions of public authority in a given society.'[3] For the purposes of this book,

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[2] G. O'Donnell, P. Schmitter. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies,* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 73.

[3] L. Whitehead, 'Prospects for a 'Transition' from Authoritarian Rule in Mexico' in *The Politics of Economic Restructuring in Mexico: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico* (Maria Lorena Cook, Kevin Middlebrook, and Juan

using the wisdom of Plato, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Robert Dahl and many others, to whom references are made in appropriate places, we use the term political regime as a combination of rules, means, methods, techniques and forms of exercising political power in a given society. It obviously includes, and even starts from, formal constitutional institutional and territorial arrangements, but goes beyond them to include political ideology and most importantly practical, often informal and nowhere legally fixed, means and methods of the exercise of political power. As current regime changes take place in a world that is in the process of radical transformations and changing balances of power, it is necessary to analyse these regime changes in the context of these transformations, characterised by reflexivity and uncertainty.

In this book it is argued that notwithstanding globalisation and certain homogenisations within the world, the future of the humankind will be multipolar and diverse. The bigger a social system, the less uniform and more diverse it is. International society or the international system, encompassing all societies, is the widest possible social system and therefore it is, by definition, the most heterogeneous social system. Large empires, differently from so-called nation-states, as a rule let different parts of imperial space live their own lives, provided they comply with certain key requirements from the imperial centre – usually serving the security interests of the empire or paying tribute to it. Empires would not have survived had they tried to homogenize all of whole imperial space culturally, religiously or otherwise. These have been nation-states that have strived for ethnic, cultural or religious uniformity and homogenisation. It seems to us that one of the accelerators of the dissolution of some empires, e.g., of the Russian Empire, was their desire and attempts at the age of the formation of nation-states to become more like the nation-state. The policies of so-called 'Russification' within the Czarist Empire at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, not only did not prevent the dissolution of the Empire (though in a way, it continued in the form of the Soviet

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Molinar Horcasitas, eds.), La Jolla, CA: Center for US-Mexican Studies/University of California, San Diego, 1994, p. 327.

Union; however, the latter could be called an empire, if the term is used in a rather loose way) but contributed to its demise. Once an empire, one cannot develop into a nation-state without losing or shedding off its imperial possessions.

Two chapters in the book are devoted to the processes of radical social, political and economic transformations in the two former communist giants – the People's Republic of China, the former USSR and the latter's continuation in today's Russia. We compare the reforms unleashed by Deng Xiaoping in China and by Michael Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, and their implications for these countries as well as for the world as a whole. More than thirty years after the initiation of reforms by Deng Xiaoping, and twenty five years since the start of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* policies, we may definitely conclude that China is doing much better than the USSR, which has ceased to exist, or its successor in the form of the Russian Federation. In these chapters we will try to give some answers to the question of why these two radical reform processes have led to such different outcomes. Even more importantly, we will try to discover whether there are any lessons to be learnt by others from the comparison of these two far-reaching transformations. We will also try to show that though Gorbachev's reforms, as they were intended to unfold (there really were not any thoroughly thought through blueprints of these reforms besides 'it is impossible to go on like that anymore') failed, Deng's version of the reforms that have succeeded in China and that have made of it the second biggest economy in the world, would not have worked in the case of the Soviet Union, though with hindsight we may conclude that Gorbachev could have done many things differently.[4] This comparison, among other things, shows that what may well work in one case,

[4] For example, Gorbachev and his advisers, and the author of this book among them, greatly underestimated and completely neglected the potential for inter-ethnic tension and the rise of suppressed nationalistic sentiments; erroneously believed that Swedish style socialism was closer to the Soviet style communism than wild west capitalism and naively thought that the short phase of the *Gorbymania* in the West would transform into a sustained era of the West, led by Washington, helping its former nemesis rise like Germany and Japan after the Second World War.

does not do so well, or is simply impossible, in a different situation. Often it may even lead to serious disasters.

Today, the liberal West, like the former communist giant – the Soviet Union, which believed in its mission to eventually make the whole world communist, is not content with non-western states simply following the Western lead – they have to also adopt the only correct way of doing things. Non-western societies have to become similar to Western societies, i.e. they have to become politically liberal democracies with a society-dominant free market economy. This is an expression of the Enlightenment's methodological legacy, common to both Marxism and liberal democracy, the expression of the idea of universal history working its way towards some specific end. In this book we will try to show that such a deterministic reading of history combined with voluntaristic attempts to accelerate historical processes towards certain goals determined either by 'laws of history', as Marxists used to put it, or by 'being on the right side of history', as liberal imperialists put it, not only causes conflicts and increases human suffering, but may also serve as an impediment for achieving progress in a gradual increase in global justice, freedom, democracy and prosperity. It is also contrary to the liberal principle of 'live and let live' in international relations.

In this book we will analyse the correlation between three layers of different societies – the economic system, the political system and civil society in the widest sense, including the history, traditions, religions and other societal institutions. We intend to show not only that they are interrelated and interdependent but also that the sequencing of the evolution of these layers and their institutions in Western Europe was unique and very different from the processes today taking place in many parts of the non-western world. Ignoring the interdependence between different societal layers as well as the experience of historical sequencing of reforms in the West that were quite unique, is not helpful when some non-western societies, either on their own volition and initiative or being prompted by external advisers, take up reforms.

As not all regime changes occur peacefully, and conceding that in many of them external factors play significant roles, we will analyse the respective roles of internal and external factors in social change, issues concerning the use of force for humanitarian purposes, and

different forms of intervention in internal conflicts either on the side of the government or opposition. Of course, we analyse these phenomena only to the extent that they are related to problems of regime change. In this context we also critically analyse the so-called theories of democratic peace (DPT), not rejecting them entirely but showing their limits, contingencies and even the dangers stemming from unconditional reliance on them, or rather from their abuse. DPT may be considered as a part or aspect of a worldview that sees the world moving towards a certain uniform – liberal democratic and peaceful – end. These theories, even if academically quite rigorous, are open to doubt as to what extent they correspond to and reflect the complexities of the real world.

In comparing these theories, for example, with Realist theories of IR (international relations), it is possible to conclude that no internally coherent and non-controversial theory can comprehensively explain controversial and incoherent phenomena of international politics. As Bertrand Russell insightfully observed, 'No one has yet succeeded in inventing a philosophy at once credible and self-consistent. Locke aimed at credibility, and achieved it at the expense of consistency. Most of the great philosophers have done the opposite. A philosophy that is not self-consistent cannot be wholly true, but a philosophy, which is self-consistent, can very well be wholly false. The most fruitful philosophies have contained glaring inconsistencies, but for that very reason have been partially true'.[5] The same is true for the theories of international relations and law. That is why the study of international law and politics needs various theories, and there can hardly be a single grand theory attempting to explain equally well all the aspects of the phenomena under study. Rather, like a world-class tennis player, who combines a strong serve with excellent returns and uses, depending on circumstances, with equal skill both backhand and forehand, an international lawyer or a IR specialist (both as a practitioner and academic) ideally has to be ready to use, depending on the subject-matter and concrete tasks,

[5] B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1946, p. 637.

different intellectual tools, that is to say, different theories and theoretical approaches. This, however, is rarely the case.

Inis Claude has aptly, albeit somewhat exaggeratedly, observed that 'most people are addicted to the overstatement of their favourite propositions, the exaggeration of the scope of their generalisations. We say "always" when we mean "sometimes", and "certainly" when we mean "perhaps"; we tend to convert conditional thoughts into absolute standards'.[6] Profound theorists are often men or women who passionately believe in the truthfulness of one big idea (they are hedgehogs, to use the famous comparison by Isaiah Berlin of hedgehogs and foxes). Such a passionate belief helps them to deepen their theories, to make them as detailed and rigorous as possible. Doubts in the truthfulness of one's views would hardly stimulate further development of these views. Without the belief (usually a passionate one) that their theory is not only the best theory but also the only true one, it would be difficult to develop profound and detailed theories. That is why theories that concentrate on only one aspect of a phenomenon under study (from the point of view of such a theorist, this may not be an aspect at all but the very essence of the phenomenon) are often more parsimonious, rigorous and logically less controversial than more comprehensive theories. Howard Williams, David Sullivan and Gwynn Matthews have observed that

> [I]n their view of history Marx and Engels are both monists and dogmatists. They are monists in that they believe that one principle can be seen as underlying human history, namely, material production, and they are dogmatists in believing that they solely give the correct outline of that principle. Marx's genius led him to an intellectual arrogance, an arrogance that he shared with Hegel. Neither is prepared to see their point of view as one possible interpretation of the world.[7]

John Ruggie has incisively observed that 'the strength of each approach is also the source of its major weakness'.[8] However, the converse may often also be true. Without some one-sidedness a

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[6] I. Claude, 'The Tension between Principle and Pragmatism', 19 *Review of International Studies* (1993), p. 219.

[7] H. Williams, D. Sullivan, G. Matthews, *Francis Fukuyama and the End of History*, University of Wales Press, 1997, p. 55.

[8] J. Ruggie, *Construing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization*, Routledge, 1998, p. 36.