The Clash of Ideas in World Politics

Transnational Networks, States, and Regime Change, 1510-2010

KULTUR-TERROR

John M. Owen IV

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IN WORLD POLITICS

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FOR TRISH

Le Coeur se sature d'amour
comme d'un sel divin qui le conserve . . .

Illustrations and Tables

Figures

Maps

Tables

A Note about the Cover Image

A 1944 Nazi propaganda poster by artist Leest Storm, intended to convince Europeans that the coming American troops were not liberators but decadent and barbarous destroyers of European culture. The text at the bottom, in Danish and Norwegian, is translated: "USA wants to save Europe's culture from going under. With what right?"

Credits: Peter Paret, Beth Irwin Lewis, and Paul Paret, *Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 173; Hilde Restad, for English translation.

Acknowledgments

THE NOTION OF WRITING a book on the tendency of states to spread their ideologies first occurred to me some years ago. I was converting my doctoral dissertation into a book. The topic was the liberal peace, the proposition that liberal democracies do not fight one another. I noticed that, time and again in the nineteenth century, liberal elites saw themselves as playing a part in a historical drama about the spread of liberty and wanted their country to propel that spread. I noticed also that nonliberal elites—absolute monarchists, for example—saw themselves in similar terms, and felt bound to promote monarchy abroad. Sometimes these drives resulted in the forcible promotion of domestic regimes. I began reading about other times and places and finding similar processes at work. Regime promotion was everywhere. Or actually not everywhere, which made it even more interesting.

This book took far too long to write, in part because I had to sort out what was happening in all of this history, and in part because I found I needed a great deal of help. Much of that help came from the kindness and generosity of many who will go unnamed here. But I must mention a few. The book would still lie in unconnected bits on my hard drive if not for the generous support of Earhart Foundation of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the shepherding of Montgomery Brown; and of the Sesquicentennial Fund at the University of Virginia. I also thank the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at Virginia for support. Brian Job and the Centre of International Relations at the University of British Columbia have given me an intellectual home away from home each summer. Nuffield College and the Rothermere American Institute in Oxford hosted me for a highly productive half-year. I thank Andrew Hurrell for his sponsorship.

My colleagues at Virginia, in particular Dale Copeland, Herman Schwartz, David Jordan, Leonard Schoppa, and especially Jeffrey Legro, were interested in the project from early days and showed it by reading drafts and entertaining my often entangled ideas over lunch or impromptu chats. These, along with my colleague Gerard Alexander, kindly read an entire draft of the manuscript and, less kindly, subjected it to a three-hour scouring. In all sincerity I say that I look forward to returning the favor with each of them.

Other colleagues who have read all or part of previous drafts include Elizabeth Saunders, Todd Sechser (another Virginia colleague), Daniel Philpott, Mark Haas, Colin Dueck, Stephen Walt, Judd Owen, Stephen Krasner, Philip Potter, David Welch, Kenneth Schultz, Mira Sucharov,

Charles Doran, Jorge Benitez, Randall Schweller, and David Dessler. I presented portions of the book in various stages at colloquia at the Center for International Studies at Princeton; the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard; the Mershon Center at Ohio State University; the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at Stanford; and the Program on International Security Policy at the University of Chicago. I am grateful to the colleagues and graduate students at each of these places for their trenchant critiques.

I had research help from Rachel Vanderhill and David Kearn. Without Chris Gist of the Scholar's Lab at the University of Virginia Library, there would be no map 7.1. For advice along the way—often disruptive, always productive—I thank Peter Katzenstein, Josef Joffe, Minxin Pei, Gregory Gause, Kenneth Schultz, Audrey Kurth Cronin, Joseph Nye, Alexander Wendt, Ted Hopf, Desmond King, James Davison Hunter, Andrew Hurrell, Charles Lipson, John Ikenberry, John Mearsheimer, Robert Pape, Charles Glaser, and Robert Keohane.

Portions of chapter 1 and the appendix appeared in "The Foreign Imposition of Domestic Institutions," *International Organization* 56 (2002), 375–409. I thank MIT Press for permission to re-use those portions. Preparing that paper for publication was crucial to the development of this book, and I thank the journal's editors at the time, Peter Gourevitch and David Lake, for combining relentless rigor with confidence in the project. Michael Barnett published in *Foreign Policy* a helpful commentary on that article. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for Princeton University Press, one of whom has revealed himself to be Daniel Nexon. Dan brought to bear his formidable learning in social theory and history to make the book better. Chuck Myers at the Press has been endlessly patient and encouraging, and copyeditor Karen Verde provided superb editorial guidance. Needless to say, none of the aforementioned bear any responsibility for any errors of fact or reasoning in the book.

My long-suffering family members deserve my greatest thanks. My dear mother Pat Owen would be justified in thinking my laptop computer a strange bodily appendage. Tricia and Mark Palardy, Judd and Marion Owen, and Phil Hill and the Vancouver clan are doubtless relieved that now, when they ask me about what I am working on, I am able to talk about something other than this book. My children, Malloy, Frances, and Alice, have extended me the singular privilege of watching and helping them grow during the years of this project's gestation. A book may be an author's child, but this book is nothing beside these three living, running, talking, brilliant marvels who bring me such joy. My largest debt, and the one I feel most keenly, is to my wife Trish, to whom I dedicate this book. She is both anchor and breeze, a woman better than I deserve, lovely, amazing, and essential.

The Clash of Ideas in World Politics

Contents

Forcible Regime Promotion, Then and Now

> We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion:
> The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on
> the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace
> in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.
> America's vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.
> —George W. Bush, *January 2005*

"REGIME CHANGE": THE UNGAINLY PHRASE was once a technical neologism used by social scientists to signify the alteration of a country's fundamental political institutions. Now, around the world, it is a political term, and a polarizing one. For the verb "change" has come to imply the coercion of outside powers.[1] Regime change requires a regime changer, and in Afghanistan and Iraq the changer-in-chief has been the United States.

America's costly efforts to democratize these countries have continued under the presidency of Barack Obama, but President George W. Bush's Second Inaugural Address remains the most striking effort to frame and justify America as regime changer. Bush's critics, of course, were not impressed by the speech. The Iraq regime change in particular was not going well and seemed destined to end badly. The critics were legion, but they were not united. Some, the realists, thought Bush's policy of promoting democracy by force to be radical and moralistic, innocent of the essential nature of international relations, bound to bring on disaster. It can never be the case that America's "deepest beliefs" and "vital interests" are the same. A fundamental realist tenet is that states must always trade off some measure of their values for the sake of the national interest. Bush was departing dangerously from established prudent statecraft. He not only talked in idealistic language, he believed and acted upon it.

Setting aside, for the moment, the merits of these U.S.-led wars—and there is much to criticize about each—are the realists correct? Are these wars really so extraordinary? Do states only rarely use force to try replace other states' domestic regimes? Figure 1.1 suggests otherwise.[2]

The figure depicts the frequency by decade of uses of force by one state to alter or preserve the domestic regime of another state over the past
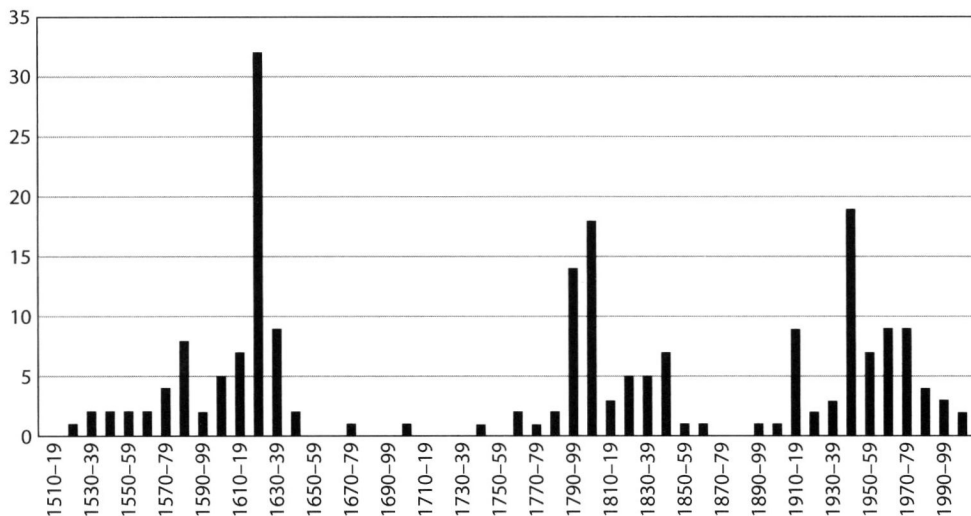
Figure 1.1 Foreign impositions of domestic institutions, 1510–2010

five hundred years. By regime I mean not simply a state's government or rulers but, following David Easton and his colleagues, its "institutions, operational rules of the game, and ideologies (goals, preferred rules, and preferred arrangements among political institutions)."[3] Some of these were what I call ex ante promotions, in which the chief object was regime promotion. Others were what I call ex post promotions, in which the initial attack was for other reasons—typically to gain strategic assets in wartime—and then, following conquest, the occupying military imposed a regime on the occupied state. Some cases are difficult to classify as exclusively ex ante or ex post. The total number of cases is 209; tables listing each promotion are below. Figure 1.1 represents raw numbers and does not control for the number of states in the international system. It also treats the estates of the Holy Roman Empire as states (see chapter 4), which affects the numbers prior to the empire's abolition in 1806. It tallies only uses of force for the purpose of altering or preserving a domestic regime; it ignores other means of promotion such as economic inducements, threats, covert action, and diplomacy. The target of regime promotion must be allowed to remain (nominally) a state; I do not include conquests that incorporate targets into empires.

Over the centuries, states have forcibly promoted domestic regimes in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Depending upon time and place, they have promoted established Catholicism, Lutheranism, and

Calvinism; absolute monarchy, constitutional monarchy, and republicanism; communism, fascism, and liberal democracy; and secularism and Islamism. As I discuss below and throughout this book, cases of forcible regime promotion tend to cluster in time and space. The temporal and spatial patterns in the data tell us much about why states practice this particular policy. But the initial point is simply that forcible regime promotion is common enough that we can call it a normal tool of statecraft. Tables 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3, which appear later in this chapter, list each case.

President Bush faced a second set of critics, who took a less tragic view of world politics. His more liberal or idealist opponents insisted that Bush was in fact a cold and disingenuous realist. The rhetoric about freedom and tyranny masked the familiar self-aggrandizement of the American empire. The United States was replaying the old Anglo-Russian Great Game in Afghanistan and making a play in Iraq for Persian Gulf oil and the subordination of Iran. Democratization was a cover for domination.

But even if it is the case that the administration was acting out of pure self-interest in Iraq or Afghanistan, does it follow that Bush and his advisers did not care whether these countries ended up with democratic or constitutional regimes? If not, they certainly went to great lengths to continue the charade. It would have been much more efficient to set up new, more pliable dictators in place of the old ones. Figure 1.1 suggests that there have been scores of cases in which governments made calculations similar to those of Bush, spending dear resources to change a target state's regime and not simply its leadership. In fact, as I make clear in the chapters that follow, governments or rulers who use force to promote an ideology abroad nearly always believe it is in their interests to do so. They believe that they are shaping their foreign or domestic environment, or both, in their favor. Furthermore, although it is an open question whether the Bush administration was correct regarding Iraq, history shows that governments who try to impose regimes on other countries are usually right, at least in the short term. Conditions sometimes arise under which it is rational for a government to use force to change or preserve another country's domestic regime; when an intervention succeeds, the government that did the promotion is better off, the country it governs more secure.

We have here, then, something much larger than the Bush Doctrine or the war on terror or an attempt to democratize the Muslim world. We have regularity, a historically common state practice, which is surprisingly under-studied. It is a highly consequential practice, for it involves the use of force. It entails violations of sovereignty, a building block of the modern international system.[4] It is not a trivial practice or an afterthought, but a costly policy—costly not simply in its use of the promoting state's resources but in the way it can exacerbate international conflicts.

Indeed, as will become evident, forcible regime promotion can be a self-multiplying phenomenon, making great-power relations more violent and dangerous. A Habsburg invasion of Bohemia in 1618 to suppress a Protestant uprising spiraled into the Thirty Years' War. In 1830, an Anglo-French intervention on behalf of the liberal Belgian revolt alienated Prussia, Austria, and Russia, and raised the prospect of great-power war. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 to shore up a communist regime caused the thawing Cold War to return to a deep freeze. Forcible regime promotion can create all manner of problems in world politics even as it mitigates short-term difficulties. On the other hand, foreign regime imposition can yield benefits to the states that practice it by helping them entrench their hegemony.[5] It can also produce periods of stable relations among great powers, as in the decades following 1648, 1815, and 1945.[6] So how do we explain this regularity? What causes forcible regime promotion?

Governments tend to impose regimes in regions of the world where there is already deep disagreement as to the best form of government. They also tend to do it in moments when elites across societies in the target's region are sharply dividing along ideological lines, a condition I call *transnational ideological polarization*. Ideological polarization means that elites temporarily have unusually strong preferences for either ideology A or competing ideology B and strong preferences for aligning with states that exemplify their favored ideology. Such polarization can present governments with either or both of two incentives to use force to promote regimes. The first is what I call *external security* or a government's desire to alter or maintain the international balance of power in its favor. When elites across states are highly polarized by ideology, a government of a great power can make a target state into an ally, or keep it as one, by promoting the right ideology. The great-power ruler may also have a rival that exemplifies the competing ideology and has a parallel incentive to promote that ideology in the target; in such cases, each great power has an incentive to pre-empt the other by promoting its ideology.

The second incentive I call *internal security*, or a government's desire to strengthen its power at home. Internal security is at play when transnational ideological polarization reaches into the great power itself and jeopardizes the government's hold on power by rousing opposition to its regime. Precisely because the threat is transnational, the government can degrade it by attacking it abroad as well as at home. By suppressing an enemy ideology abroad, it can remove a source of moral and perhaps material support for enemy ideologues at home. It can make domestic ideological foes look disloyal or unpatriotic if they oppose this use of force. It can halt or reverse any impression elites may have that the enemy ideology has transnational momentum.

By no means has transnational ideological polarization been a constant feature of the past half-millennium; at many times elites cared relatively little about regime loyalties or ideologies. What triggers polarization, and hence forcible regime promotions, is either of two types of event. The first is *regime instability* in one or more states in the region. By regime instability I mean a sharp increase in the probability that one regime will be replaced by another via revolution, coup d'état, legitimate government succession, or other means; or a fresh regime change that has yet to be consolidated. Regime instability triggers transnational ideological polarization via demonstration effects, or the increasing plausibility among elites that other countries could follow suit by likewise undergoing regime instability. The second type of triggering event is a *great-power war*. A great-power war may have little to do initially with ideology, but if the belligerents exemplify competing regime types then their fighting will be seen by elites across societies as implicating the larger ideological struggle, and those elites will tend to polarize over ideology. Many of the promotions in figure 1.1 were triggered by regime instability; many others, mostly captured by the tall bars, tend to come during and after great-power wars.

The transnational nature of ideological polarization is crucial: elites across countries segregate simultaneously, and in reaction to one another, over ideology. Furthermore, they tend to polarize over a set of two or three ideologies that is fixed for many decades. Indeed, figure 1.1 depicts three long waves of forcible regime promotion, and these roughly correspond to three long transnational contests over the best regime. The first wave took place in Central and Western Europe between the 1520s and early eighteenth century, and pitted established Catholicism against various forms of established Protestantism. The second took place in Europe and the Americas between the 1770s and late nineteenth century; the regimes in question were republicanism, constitutional monarchy, and absolute monarchy. The third took place over most of the world between the late 1910s and 1980s, and the antagonists were communism, liberalism, and (until 1945) fascism. Today, a fourth struggle runs through the Muslim world, a struggle pitting secularism against various forms of Islamism. It is that struggle that helped pull the Bush administration into using force in Iraq and Afghanistan. But figure 1.1 also shows historical gaps, when no such contest over the best regime cut across states. During those gaps states used force regularly, but not to impose regimes on other states.

That forcible regime promotion occurs in such patterns—long waves over many decades, followed by long gaps—and that within each long wave the regimes being promoted are within the same fixed set, requires that we push the explanation further, to a macro-level of analysis. What explains these long waves of promotion? I argue that during each of these

long waves a social structure was in place in the regions in question that heavily conditioned the preferences and actions of elites, including rulers of states. That structure was the transnational regime contest itself. Elites held a general understanding that there was such a contest stretching across their region, that it was consequential, and that at some point they might have to choose sides. It was not simply that some states had one regime and others had another, for that is typical in world politics. What made a contest was the existence across states of networks of elites who wanted to spread one regime and roll others back. These I call *transnational ideological networks* or TINs, and they were one type of agent who perpetuated the structure. Another type of agent was the rulers who ordered forcible regime promotion, because such promotion continued to energize the TINs and keep alive the general notion that there was an ongoing contest across the region over the best regime. Structure and agents were endogenous: the structure helped cause the agents to bring about forcible regime promotion, and promotion by those agents helped perpetuate the structure.

If these social structures are so consequential, but come and go (however slowly), then we must push the explanation even further: Why do these transnational regime contests arise when and where they do? Why do they persist as long as they do? Why do they fade away when they do? To complete my arguments I offer an evolutionary model analogous to Thomas Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions. A transnational contest over the best regime emerges in a region when the region's predominant regime type is beset with an accumulation of serious anomalies, but sufficient numbers of elites still adhere to it. Reformers and status quo advocates spiral into hostility and a state adopts a new regime. Over the course of a contest still other new regime types may emerge and capture states. The contest endures as long as no one regime is manifestly superior to its competitors. When one or more contending regimes encounters sufficient serious anomalies, however, elites will abandon it and affiliate with the surviving regime. This model is "ecological," appealing to the social and material environments of governments and other agents. Although ideologies can go on for some time shaping the environment, eventually exogenous material and social factors push back.

In sum, I advance arguments on a micro-level of analysis, concerning individual regime promotions, and a macro-level, concerning the transnational social structure that makes those promotions more likely. As I discuss in chapters 7 and 8, my arguments have a great deal to say about ongoing American promotions of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq. Since the 1920s, the Muslim world—particularly in Southwest Asia and North Africa—has been going through a transnational struggle over the best regime. The antagonists are various forms of Islamism, which insists that positive law derive directly from divine law or *Shariah*, and vari-