

## Ely Ratner: Dissertation Narrative

### *Reaping What You Sow: Democratic Transitions and Foreign Policy Realignment*

The end of the Cold War inspired scholars of international relations to begin searching for alternative conceptual frameworks to understand the nature of international politics. With America triumphantly atop the hierarchy of global power, much of this debate has revolved around the reasons why states were aligning their foreign policies either with or against the United States. In turn, a wide array of theories emerged to explain the causes of foreign policy realignment in the post-Cold War era, emphasizing such factors as the increasing predominance of democratic liberalism,<sup>1</sup> the unleashing of cultural identity,<sup>2</sup> the deleterious effects of American unilateralism,<sup>3</sup> and the relative decline of American power.<sup>4</sup>

Though these arguments help to illuminate particular phenomena, they too quickly assume that the end of the Cold War, the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, or the US invasion of Iraq fundamentally altered the dynamics that govern international relations. Together, these approaches overestimate the stability of the Cold War, and fail to explain the causal factors that have been systematically driving foreign policy realignment for decades. In contrast, I offer a more general theory of foreign policy realignment that is not confined to the post-Cold War era.

I argue that democratic transitions are an important cause of foreign policy realignment with the United States, and furthermore, that the nature of that realignment is conditioned by whether or not the United States supported the previous non-democratic regime. American support, or lack thereof, for the *ancien regime* influences the domestic politics of democratic transitions by shaping the foreign policy preferences of the opposition, determining the nature of the nationalist claims that emerge, and affecting the domestic political strategies that ensue. Regardless of the mode of transition—whether the opening is controlled and elite-led, bottom-up and mass-led, or the result of elite competition—the effects of democratic transitions on foreign policy realignment with the United States converge based upon the politics of previous American support.

When the United States supports non-democratic regimes, oppositions use anti-American strategies of “externalization” and “diversion” during democratic transitions to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the ruling government. Incumbents, who are vulnerable to accusations of American puppetry, respond by distancing themselves from their pro-American policies of the past, hoping to parry the political challenge. The result

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 7-45.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The Lonely Superpower,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (March/April 1999), pp. 35-49.

is that, in the wake of US support, democratic transitions rarely lead to positive foreign policy realignment towards the United States.

In contrast, when previous US support is absent, it is politically viable to seek the substantial benefits that often accompany positive realignment towards the United States, what I call the ‘realignment bonus.’ Without previous US support, regimes can embrace pro-American foreign policies without the heightened domestic political risks that otherwise exist when democratic transitions occur in the context of previous US support. As a result, when democratic transitions are not bound by the legacy of US support, it is far more likely that democratization will lead to positive foreign policy realignment towards the United States.

To empirically test the effects of previous US support, I use an original data set of country-year dyads with the United States from 1950 to 2000. Employing Markov transition regression models, I find that the interaction of democratic transition and previous US support is a powerful determinant of foreign policy realignment. Under most circumstances, the effects of democratization on foreign policy realignment are often *positive* and *statistically significant* when US support was absent. This indicates that the probability of a positive realignment towards the United States increases substantially when there is no previous US support. In sharp contrast, when the US did support the previous regime, the effects of democratization on foreign policy realignment are *negative* and often *statistically significant*.

This research has important implications for international relations theory and American foreign policy. From a theoretical perspective, this research outlines a specific mechanism through which domestic politics affects international relations, and further suggests that the effects of democratization are not homogenous. From a policy perspective, this research indicates that the United States faces very serious trade-offs when deciding to support non-democratic regimes. Though it may at times be a necessity, doing so often incurs considerable costs and lost opportunities.

Having completed the theoretical and large-N statistical portion of my research, I will spend the 2008-2009 performing a series of case studies and completing my dissertation. My case studies will illuminate the processes outlined in my theoretical framework, and will also examine the conditions under which those processes are unlikely to occur. I will be on the academic job market in the fall of 2008 and plan to graduate in the spring of 2009.