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American Efforts at Promoting Regime Change in the Soviet Union and then Russia: Lessons Learned

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About the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL)

CDDRL was founded by a generous grant from the Bill and Flora Hewlett Foundation in October in 2002 as part of the Stanford Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. The Center supports analytic studies, policy relevant research, training and outreach activities to assist developing countries in the design and implementation of policies to foster growth, democracy, and the rule of law.

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In this decade, fostering democratic regime change in Iraq is the great challenge (or folly) before American foreign policymakers. In the previous decade, fostering democratic regime change in Russia was the great challenge (or folly) before American foreign policymakers. For much longer and with much greater capacity than Saddam Hussein's regime, the Soviet regime threatened the United States. The destruction of the Soviet regime and the construction of a pro-Western, democratic regime in its place, therefore, was a major objective of America foreign policy. Some presidents pursued this goal more vigorously than others: Nixon cared less, Reagan more. Yet, even during the height of Nixonian realism, Senator Jackson and Congressman Vanik made sure that the human rights of Soviet citizens were not ignored. Containment of Soviet power always remained the primary objective of U.S. policy, but democratic change inside the USSR survived as a hope, if not a policy goal for most of this period. Some administrations even devoted real resources and strategic thinking to the issue. Perhaps most boldly, President Ronald Reagan launched his Strategic Defense Initiative in part to push the Soviet regime into bankruptcy.

Almost twenty years after Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and soon thereafter began the process of political change inside the USSR, it is still not clear what kind of regime will eventually consolidate in Russia. To date, however, the influence of the United States in fostering regime change inside the Soviet and then Russia has been limited. The United States played only an indirect role in facilitating the collapse of the Soviet ancien regime. In the final months right before Soviet dissolution, the George H.W. Bush Administration may

have done more to preserve the ancien regime than destroy it. During the transitional phase of the Soviet/Russian transition when the basic institutions of the new regime were created, Americans did provide information about the options, but offered only limited guidance about what choices to make about institutional design. Russians made these decisions based on immediate political interests, and not with reference to the long-term viability of Russian democratic consolidation. After the transitional phase of institutional design, American actors helped keep afloat important participants in the democratic process, such as political parties, trade unions, and civic groups. These efforts at fostering an organized and democratic society within Russia, however, have not been sufficient to withstand autocratic moves by state officials. Finally, when Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin and then especially Vladimir Putin initiated a series of political changes which limited the practice of democracy, the U.S. government has found few ways to impede or stop these autocratic moves.

At certain moments regarding specific issues, the United States government and various non-governmental American actors (many of which were and are funded by the American government) have been able to nudge the course of Soviet and Russian democratization in a positive way. At critical moments, senior American government officials were able to engage directly with Russian elites to help prevent autocratic moves or reverse authoritarian actions. At key moments in the design of Russia's political institutions, American organizations provided information about Western experiences with different electoral laws, legal practices or federalism, which provides Russian officials with ideas, templates, and confidence about their policy decisions. More generally, and though very difficult to quantify, America's greatest contribution to the

development of democracy inside Russia has occurred in the realm of ideas. It should not be surprising that one of the oldest democracies in the world would serve as an example for aspiring democrats. It should not also be surprising that the most powerful country in the world would have the greatest capacity to transmit (both literally and figuratively) these ideas into Russia.

Yet despite these episodic successes discussed in detail below, what is more striking are the setbacks. Although the United States is the most powerful hegemon in recent history and maybe ever, the U.S. government has seemed ineffective, weak, and unable to foster democratic development in Russia. This apparent impotence is especially striking when one remembers the strategic importance of democratic development in this country still armed with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. It was democratic regime change inside the Soviet Union that ended the Cold War and made the United States more secure. It will be autocratic regime change that will once again animate a more confrontational relationship between the United States and Russia. And yet, the United States government has not developed an effective strategy either to foster Russian democracy or to help it survive.

Why?

In combination, four factors comprise an explanation. First, democracy promotion in the Soviet Union and then Russia was always an objective of American foreign policy but never the primary objective. When the Soviet regime began to shake, George H.W. Bush and most (not all) of his senior foreign policy advisors placed territorial preservation

ahead of democratization as an American national interest. Bush also acquired tangible benefits for American national security from Gorbachev. Bush believed that helping Gorbachev stay in power, therefore, was more important than fostering regime change. For most of the Clinton era, fostering economic reform trumped supporting democratic change. Clinton's also was willing to sacrifice American influence over shaping Russia's internal developments in the pursuit of other foreign policy goals, be it NATO expansion or the war against Serbia. Since George W. Bush became president, the White House has placed the construction of national missile and then the 'global war on terrorism' as the main issues in U.S.-Russian relations. In all of these various lists of priorities, promoting democratization has not only ranked lower than other issues, but the pursuit of higher ranking issues has actually hindered the parallel pursuit of democracy promotion by American other actors and impeded the development of democratization inside Russia.

Second, even if American presidents had made democratic regime in the USSR and the Russia their number one priority, they and their governments lacked an coherent strategy for achieving this objective. There was no game plan, no set of priorities, no guidance about the sequence of political reforms or the relationship between reforms plans for fostering capitalism versus democracy.¹ Would or should the project of democracy building the largest country in the world cost \$50 million, \$1 billion or 100 billion? Everyone just guessed. Would it take 2 years, 10 or 20? No one knew. What should come first, founding elections or a constitution? Which is better for Russia, presidentialism or parliamentary system? What should be the strategy for dealing with communists and their ngos—engagement or destruction? Should the focus be on helping the state democratize, which in turn might reshape society. Or should the focus be

instead on empowering democratic civil society, which in turn might push pressure on the state to democratize? No senior U.S. government official tried to answer these questions. And how could they? After all, the Russian experts in governments were experts in arms control and communism, not democratization.

Third, American efforts to foster Russian democracy were limited by the strength of democratic allies inside Russia. Even the almighty America has enjoyed limited success in inventing democrats from scratch. Rather, democratic assistance is most effective when strengthening and empowering (through the transfer of skills, ideas, and money) democratic forces that form and take root from within. Russia of course had such an indigenous democratic movement, which surged to play a pivotal role in Soviet and Russian politics in 1990 and 1991. But as the power of this democratic movement waned, so too did American influence.

Fourth and related to the third factor, even with the good intent and the right game plan, the American effort at fostering democratization in Russia would have been limited still simply by the sheer size of Russia. American democratization efforts are most effective in small countries where the dollars stretch farther and engagement with the United States is considered necessary. In a country like Georgia with a population of five million, a very weak economy, located in the shadow of a former imperial superpower, American actors play a central role in internal political developments. In large, rich Russia, however, American influence is diffuse and limited.

To demonstrate the explanatory power of these four factors and the interplay between them, this paper proceeds chronologically and thematically through four phases/issues of

regime change in the Soviet Union and Russia—the collapse of the ancien regime, the transitional phase of institutional design, the development of societal actors –that is political, economic, and civil society, and finally the period of democratic defense or democratic rollback.

I. Undermining the Ancien Regime

The Bush Administration

To date, tracing a direct causal link between American foreign policy and Soviet regime change has eluded social scientists. The relative success of Western capitalism in producing higher standard of living compare to the Soviet economic model most certainly played a role in Mikhail Gorbachev’s decision to initiative economic reforms in the Soviet Union in the last 1980s. The American example of a more prosperous and efficient economy inspired anti-communist leaders to address the poor performance of the Soviet economy.² The democratic principles of the American system also played an inspirational role for Soviet dissidents and influenced the thinking of important reformers in Gorbachev’s Politburo such as Aleksandr Yakovlev.³ Anecdotal evidence even suggests that the American defense build-up and the initiation of the Strategic Defense Initiative in the early 1980s shaped Soviet calculations about reform. Later in the Soviet/Russian transition, external actors helped to shape the ideas and tactics of the central players involved in the Soviet and Russian drama. For instance, Yeltsin and his allies adopted more radically pro-

Western positions during their struggle against Gorbachev to help win recognition from the West. They also refrained from using violence to overthrow the Soviet regime or resisted punishing Gorbachev after they seized power (a popular figure in the West at the time) in part to win favor in the West.⁴ There should be no question that the distribution of ideologies in the international system at the time of Soviet internal change influenced the kind of regime change which unfolded in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Think of the counterfactual: If fascists ruled the United States at the time of Soviet collapse, it is unlikely that democracy would have emerged as the ideology of opposition for Boris Yeltsin and his allies.

And yet, the direct role of American foreign policy (as opposed to “democratic ideas” or “transnational scripts”) in undermining the Soviet communist regime is difficult to isolate.⁵ American efforts most certainly did not compel the Soviet leadership to experiment with political reform. Gorbachev made that decision by himself. Once the process of political reform gained some momentum as a result of Gorbachev’s initiatives, the dynamic of change – radical, transformative change – was driven almost entirely by internal factors. Gorbachev initially drove the process, introducing a series of reforms that allowed for a more independent press, civil society organization, and eventually in 1989 semi-competitive elections to the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies and followed by more free elections for legislatures at the republic, oblast (region), and city level during the spring of 1990. At first, these triggered greater support for Gorbachev as a national leader. Over time, however, these same reforms created the permissive conditions for outright opposition to organize, first against Gorbachev and later against the Soviet Union itself. Nationalist movements in the non-Russian republics emerged first to challenge Soviet autocratic

authority, but the central challenge to Gorbachev hold on power came from Russia itself, in the form of Russian leader Boris Yeltsin and his allies in Democratic Russia.

The emergence of nationalist movements in the republics and Yeltsin and his allies in Russia created a real dilemma for George H.W. Bush and his administration.

Though initially skeptical of Gorbachev's true intentions, Bush eventually embraced Gorbachev as a Soviet leader ready to deliver on foreign policy outcomes that the United States desired, be it the fall of the Berlin Wall, German unification, or Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. The Bush administration did not want to do anything that might weaken or undermine America's trusted friend in the Kremlin. Moreover, for many in the Bush administration, the alternative, Boris Yeltsin, did not look appealing. At a White House visit in 1989, Yeltsin allegedly arrived drunk and acted boorishly, creating the strong impression at the White House that he was a man who could not be trusted. Yeltsin's call for Russian sovereignty, declared in 1990 with the support of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, made him particularly radioactive for many Bush administration officials, since the call breached one of the principal rules of the game of the international system in which states recognize one another's right to exist.

Consequently, even as Yeltsin grew in strength, President Bush maintained a firm policy of noninterference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union. Regarding the battle between the Soviet Union and Russia and the very personalized contests between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the White House firmly sided with the internationally recognized leader of the USSR. For President George H. W. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, the paramount importance of stability in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and the sense that Gorbachev could deliver for them on matters of importance to the

United States led them to stand by their man and not actively promote regime change. Scowcroft recommended that the United States “avoid involvement in Soviet domestic political wars.”⁶ Others in the Bush team, including Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, deputy undersecretary of defense Lewis “Scooter” Libby, assistant secretary of defense for international security policy, Stephen J. Hadley, and senior CIA analysts wanted the U.S. to do more to aid Yeltsin and the democrats, but on this issue Scowcroft prevailed. As Bush wrote in his diary in March 1991, “My view is, you dance with who is on the dance floor---you don’t try to influence this succession, and you especially don’t do something that would [give the] blatant appearance [of encouraging] destabilization.”⁷

In fact, Bush went out of his way to aid the Soviet Union’s survival, including most famously in a speech in Kiev in August 1991, when he warned of the dangers of ethnic conflict fueled by state collapse. Bush did proclaim, “We support the struggle in this great country for democracy and economic reform.” At the same time, he warned advocates of Ukrainian independence, “freedom cannot survive if we let despots flourish or permit seemingly minor restrictions to multiply until they form chains, until they form shackles. . . . Yet freedom is not the same as independence. America will not support those who seek independence in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred. We will support those who want to build democracy.”⁸

Later that month, after a three day stand off, Yeltsin and his allies defeated a coup attempt by right-wing members of Gorbachev’s government. Only on the second day of the coup did Bush forcefully denounce the coup plotters.⁹ But Bush’s views did not matter; the coup was an “internal matter” with which Russian democrats dealt without

real external assistance. Just a few months later, the Soviet Union disappeared, and despite Bush's warning, Ukraine and the other fourteen republics became independent countries.

American Nongovernmental Actors

If Bush and the top officials in his administration did not speak about or actively promote democracy in the Soviet Union, other U.S. actors did. Less constrained by the international regime respecting state sovereignty, American nongovernmental organizations were more aggressive in recognizing and supporting Russia's opposition movement. For instance, American groups such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the AFL-CIO established working relationships with and provided limited financial assistance to leaders and organizations of Russia's opposition well before international recognition of Russia. The AFL-CIO gave assistance to striking coal miners in 1989 and again in 1991 and later helped to establish the Independent Miners Union in Russia.¹⁰ During the same period, grants from the NED provided fax machines, computers, and advisers to the Russian Constitutional Commission. And while President Bush issued warnings about the dangers of nationalism, the NED was offering assistance to national democratic movements in the Baltics, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia.¹¹ In 1991, the NED approved a major grant to fund a printing press for the Democratic Russia movement. Similarly, the NDI initially directed "its efforts towards the institutions which are spearheading democratic reform---the city

soviets and the republics of Russia and Ukraine.”¹² This focus was directly counter to the Bush administration’s policy of supporting the center and the Union. (Vladimir Putin was a participant in and organizer of one of NDI’s events in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1991). The NDI avoided direct financial transfers to Russian organizations at the time but did provide technical assistance, training, and limited equipment to Democratic Russia during this period. NDI also provided recognition to Russia’s democrats by working closely with Russia’s foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, and by giving its prestigious international democracy award to St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak in 1991. The International Republican Institute---called the National Republican Institute at the time-- became deeply engaged in party building programs with Russian counterparts well before the Soviet Union collapsed.

At the time, all of these nongovernmental organizations received the bulk of their funding from government sources.¹³ Indirectly, therefore, one could argue that the U. S. government was using a dual-track strategy to promote democratization within the Soviet Union and Russia indirectly. At times, however, officials representing the U.S. government and representatives from the non-governmental organizations clashed regarding appropriate engagement with Russia’s “revolutionaries.” These American ngos vigorously defended their independence from the U.S. government and occasionally engaged in domestic “meddling” inside the U.S.S.R. that contradicted Bush’s pledge of noninterference. Most of the time, under the steady stewardship of Ambassador Matlock, these nongovernmental actors worked closely with local U.S. officials. Matlock himself was an active promoter of engagement with Russia’s revolutionaries.¹⁴ He hosted dinners and discussion groups with these anti-Soviet leaders and groups at Spaso House, the ambassador’s residence in

Moscow, including a luncheon with human rights activists with Ronald Reagan in May 1988.¹⁵ These events gave symbolic but important recognition to these new political leaders.

The degree of engagement or level of resources devoted to aiding the democrats was miniscule, compared to the efforts launched to aid the anti-regime forces in Serbia in 2000 or even Georgia in 2003. And this assistance came only a few years and sometimes just a few months before the Soviet collapse and the perceived (at the time) victory of the “democrats.” Democratic mobilization against the autocratic regime did not last for decades, as in other cases of external assistance. On the contrary, the old regime fell much faster than any of the external providers of democratic assistance expected, thereby relegating these outside actors only a marginal role in the drama.

II. Influencing the Design of Democratic Institutions

Presidentialism

In contrast to pacted transitions, soft-liners from the old regime and moderates from the democratic opposition did not negotiate a set of rules of the game to guide the process of change from one political system to another. Instead, institutional change occurred as a result of protracted, confrontational struggles between various political groups in different parts and at different levels of the state. The emergence of new institutions that constituted Soviet and Russian executive power resulted as the consequence of very specific political battles. They had little to do with any thinking about what was best for Russian democracy. And because these institutional decisions about presidentialism

occurred in response to very specific domestic power struggles, American actors played only the most marginal role in influencing the process.

In 1989, Gorbachev allowed for semi-competitive elections to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies. When this body first convened, the Congress elected Gorbachev as its chairman. The General Secretary now had a new state position to accompany his party job. Soon after becoming chairman, however, Gorbachev decided that he was too constrained by the Congress to govern. So his advisors recommended the creation of the office of a Soviet presidency which would have more authority to execute policies autonomously from the Congress. Importantly, Gorbachev decided that the Congress again, and not the people directly, was select the president. Not surprisingly, The Soviet Congress elected Gorbachev the Soviet Union first (and last) president

Neither U.S. government officials nor NGOs had anything to do with this institutional innovation. To be sure, some of Gorbachev's advisors, including Georgy Shakhnazarov, were familiar with and admired the American presidential system. But George H.W. Bush and his senior staff was not encouraging or discouraging Gorbachev to create the office of the presidency (in contrast to the direct role that American advisors played in creating the presidency in Afghanistan or the three-headed executive in Iraq).

When the Soviet Union disappeared, so too did the importance of the Soviet presidency. However, the decision to create a Russian presidency has had the most consequential implications for Russian democracy of any decision made in the last twenty years. And the consequences have been extremely negative. The series of decisions behind the creation of the Russian presidency helped to produce the polarized standoff between political forces in Russia in the fall of 1993, which ended in bloodshed,

created the enabling institutional framework for the wars in Chechnya, and most importantly, accorded Putin the power to rollback checks on presidential power over the last four years. The idea to create this office, therefore, was the most pivotal act in Russia's transition from communist rule.

In the initial decision to create a Russian presidency, American actors played no role. When the presidency was challenged in the early 1990s, American policy helped to preserve and then strengthen the office.

The idea for the creation of a Russian presidential office emerged among democratic circles soon after the first session of the *Russian* Congress of People's Deputies in the spring of 1990. At this first meeting of this newly-elected body, it became obvious to Democratic Russia leaders -- the leading anti-communist, reformist coalition in Russia at the time -- that they controlled a minority of seats in the new parliament. In its first consequential act in May 1990, the new Russian Congress of People's Deputies did elect Boris Yeltsin as Chairman, but only by a paltry victory margin of four votes after several ballots.

The vote reflected the precarious balance of power within the Congress. "Democrats" were a minority in this body. Boris Yeltsin pieced together his slight majority to become chairman only by emphasizing his support for Russian sovereignty, a stance that appealed to Russian democrats, who saw the declaration as a peaceful way to dissolve the Soviet empire, to Russian nationalists who embraced the idea for ethnic reasons, and to mid-level communists who saw sovereignty as a way for them to gain independence from their CPSU bosses in Moscow. Over time, as other issues became more salient, Yeltsin's majority withered. By the opening session of the Third Congress in March 1991, a petition had circulated to remove him as chairman. This could be done by a simple majority vote.

Threatened by such a vote, Yeltsin and his allies saw the creation of a Russian presidential office as a way to insulate Yeltsin from the increasingly conservative Congress. Polls indicated that Yeltsin was tremendously popular at the time-- much more popular with the people than with the deputies. If he could secure a direct electoral mandate, he would be in a much stronger political position vis-a-vis his opponents in both the Russian Congress and the Soviet government. The push to create a Russian presidency was in response to a concrete political situation and was not the result of a carefully-plotted strategy or philosophy about the need for a separation of powers or checks and balances. In fact, the referendum on the Russian presidency went forward before the actual powers of the president had been spelled out and incorporated into the constitution.

If the balance of power within the Russian Congress was roughly equal between friends and foes of this institutional innovation, the majority of elites within the Soviet polity as a whole was firmly against the idea. Yet, through a compromise reached about the March 1991 referendum on the future of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin managed to get on the ballot a question about creating the Russian presidency. The referendum passed overwhelmingly, and three months later, Yeltsin became Russia's first elected president.

After the June 1991 presidential vote, the Russian Congress -- a body in which support for Yeltsin was not as strong as in the electorate -- had six months to clarify and codify the constitutional division of powers between the president and the parliament. Had events unfolded in an orderly fashion, this Congress might have been able to turn Yeltsin and his presidential office into a weak executive just as they had planned before the June 1991 election.

In the interim, however, a dramatic series of unexpected events radically altered the balance of political power in Russia. In August 1991, a group of Soviet government leaders attempted a putsch, which Yeltsin and his allies thwarted. By the end of the year, Yeltsin and his allies had taken advantage of the August 1991 victory to dissolve the Soviet Union. In this interim period, as Russia began gearing up for independence and the introduction of market reforms scheduled for the beginning of 1992, President Yeltsin played the pivotal role. In this crisis period, Yeltsin and his presidential office -- not the Russian Congress of People's Deputies -- assumed primary responsibility for all major institutional innovations and policy initiatives. The institution of the presidency began building up organizational capacity and power to deal with these crises, a shift in resources that included new staff, new bureaucracies, and greater executive control over the state budget.

Initially, this blooming of the presidential branch of government met little resistance. After price liberalization and the beginning of radical economic reform in January 1992, however, the Russian Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies began a campaign to reassert its superiority over the president. The sources of polarization between the Congress and the president eventually grew beyond disputes over economic issues. The more salient issue became political power. Which political institution was supreme, the Congress or the Presidency ? With no formal or even informal institutions to structure relations between the president and the Congress, political polarization crystallized between these two state institutions. It only ended when one side, Yeltsin's side, presided over the other through the use of military force.

After dissolving the Congress in the fall of 1993, Yeltsin called for a referendum to be held in December 1993 to ratify his new constitution. Having defeated his enemies,

Yeltsin did not need to negotiate or compromise over the new constitutional draft. Not surprisingly, therefore, the new Russian constitution provided the legal basis for a very strong presidential system. When compared to Western constitutions, Russia's new basic law granted inordinate power to the executive branch of government, and institutional design that has empowered Putin to weaken the power of other political actors and institutions in the Russian polity.

In the initial drama that produced the idea of the Russian presidency, American actors played only a marginal role. At the highest levels, no senior Bush administration tried to sway Yeltsin for or against presidentialism, since they had only episodic contact with the Russian leader at the time. During this period, Western law professors and specialists were interacting with the secretary of the Constitutional Commission, Oleg Rummyantsev, and his staff. Some of Rummyantsev's interlocutors did advocate the creation of a Russian presidency. At some most abstract level, these words of advice may have emboldened Yeltsin and his aides in the pursuit of this institutional change. Tracing the transnational travels of these ideas, however, is very difficult to map.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's independence, the beginning of market reforms inside Russia, external actors, including some within the United States government, did become defenders of the presidential system as the best institutional arrangement for carrying out painful economic reforms. In 1993, when president Yeltsin became embroiled in a constitutional crisis with the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, President Clinton and his administration firmly supported Yeltsin and his office of the presidency, not the opposition and the parliament.

At the Vancouver summit, Clinton went out of his way to praise Yeltsin as Russia's democratic leader and used the meeting to announce the \$1.6 billion bilateral aid program as well as the \$43 billion multilateral program slated for approval by the G-7 in Tokyo that summer. Yeltsin welcomed the pledges but stressed that "it would be good if we could receive \$500 million before April 25," the date of the national referendum on Yeltsin and his reforms.¹⁶ During his first meeting with Yeltsin as president in Vancouver, Clinton not only pledged financial support for Yeltsin government but openly endorsed the Russian president as America's horse in the showdown between the president and parliament, saying to Yeltsin in front of the press, "Mr. President, our nation will not stand on the sidelines when it comes to democracy in Russia. We know where we stand... We actively support reform and reformers and you in Russia."¹⁷ When the conflict escalated into violence in the October 1993, Clinton yet again defended Yeltsin's use of military force and demonized the parliament as anti-reformist communists. In his first public reaction to Yeltsin's dissolution of the parliament, Clinton affirmed, "I support him fully,"¹⁸ Clinton explained to the American people that "there is no question that President Yeltsin acted in response to a constitutional crisis that had reached a critical impasse and had paralyzed the political process." Vice President Al Gore echoed that Yeltsin was still "the best hope for democracy in Russia" and pledged that the administration would "continue to urge the international community to be supportive of the reform efforts that are under way." Clinton officials said Yeltsin's precarious hold on power was a reason for the U.S. Congress to support with even greater speed the administration's \$2.5 billion aid package for the region.¹⁹ Clinton's support was aimed at Yeltsin the man, but it also translated into support for the institution of

presidency. U.S. officials subsequently praised the new constitution ratified by popular referendum in December 1993.

Electoral Systems

In contrast to the marginal role that external actors played in design decision regarding the balance of power between president and parliament, Westerners did play a more direct role in providing information about electoral systems at the moment when Russian parliamentarians and then Yeltsin himself were making decisions about how to elect a parliament. Officials in the White House or State Department played no role, nor did diplomats in the American embassy. But NGOs did help introduce Russian politicians to the effects of different types of voting systems. For instance, in 1992, NDI convened a series of working group meetings on the relationship between electoral systems and parties, which included electoral experts on the American single-mandate system as well as the Portuguese, German, and Hungarian electoral regimes.²⁰ NDI also translated into Russian electoral laws from several countries. All of Russia's key decisionmakers on the electoral law at the time participated in these meetings, including People's Deputies Viktor Balala and Viktor Sheinis---the two leading authors of competing electoral law drafts at the time---and senior officials from the presidential administration. Of course, Russian politicians had other sources of information about electoral systems, but most of the sources drew on the Western experience.

In these design decisions, American organizations claimed to have no design preference. In fact, however, groups like NDI did have an implicit preference for proportional representation (PR), since they believed that PR would help stimulate the development of political parties, which was their primary mission.²¹ It is no accident, therefore, that NDI invited experts from Germany and Portugal instead of the United States. NDI also has an ally in this cause in Viktor Sheinis, who as a founding member of the Social Democratic party of Russia, was also interested in promoting party development.

Before the dissolution of the Russian Congress in September 1993, a vigorous competition between competing draft laws on elections was unfolding in the parliament. Sheinis and PR were losing the debate; advocates of single-members districts were winning. Once Yeltsin closed down the Congress with armed force in October, he needed to hold a new election for a new parliament, to be called the State Duma, immediately, and an election required an electoral system. In the chaos of this period, Sheinis secured an audience with Yeltsin and convinced him that a mixed electoral system served Yeltsin's political interests most directly. PR, Sheinis argued, would help the pro-Yeltsin liberal parties and hurt the communists. Yeltsin was convinced and adopted by decree Sheinis' electoral law for the December 1993 parliamentary vote.

The 1993 election did not go as planned by the script writers. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's neo-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia won almost a quarter of the popular vote on the PR-ballot. At the same time, the liberal Russia's Choice secured a paltry fifteen percent, less than half of what was expected, while the other "democratic" parties all won less than ten percent of the popular vote. The Russian Communist Party and

their rural comrades, the agrarians combined for less than twenty percent of the vote, while new "centrist" groups combined for nearly a quarter of the vote. As expected, the PR vote had stimulated the formation of a party system at the national level in Russia. Quite unexpectedly, however, the arrival of multi-party politics in Russia was initially dominated by an extreme nationalist party.

Despite Zhirinovsky's splash, the new electoral law did help to stimulate the development of liberal parties, including two—Russia's Choice and Yabloko – that would remain partner's of NDI and IRI for another decade. Facilitated by Western actors, the Western idea of PR came to Russia, was incorporated into the electoral law, and then in turn helped to stimulate party development.

II. Fostering Democratic "Consolidation"

By the time William Clinton became president, the Soviet ancient regime had fallen and most of the important design decisions about the new political system had been made. Clinton nonetheless made the promotion of democratic consolidation inside Russia a priority, at least rhetorically. In contrast to Bush 41, President Clinton stated boldly that the United States had a national interest in promoting democracy. The ultimate aim was to enlarge the community of democracies in Europe. Clinton and his administration made the democratic peace thesis a mantra of U.S. foreign policy pronouncements in the 1990s.²² In a spring 1996 address, Talbott paraphrased philosopher Isaiah Berlin to remind his listeners that the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog

knows just one big thing, and in American foreign policy that one big thing was democracy promotion. "There is still place for the hedgehog in the terrain of U.S. foreign policy. We will advance all the objectives I just enumerated, and others as well, if we also strengthen associations among established democracies and support the transition to democracy in states that are emerging from dictatorship or civil strife. Democracy, in short, is the one big thing that we must defend, sustain, and promote wherever possible, even as we deal with the many other tasks that face us."²³

Wilsonian ideals infused President Clinton's thinking about Russia. In an address devoted to U.S.-Russia relations on the eve of his first trip abroad as president to meet Russian president Boris Yeltsin in Vancouver in April 1993, Clinton argued, "Think of it--- land wars in Europe cost hundreds of thousands of American lives in the twentieth century. The rise of a democratic Russia, satisfied within its own boundaries, bordered by other peaceful democracies, could ensure that our nation never needs to pay that kind of price again. I know and you know that, ultimately, the history of Russia will be written by Russians and the future of Russia must be charted by Russians. But I would argue that we must do what we can and we must act now. Not out of charity but because it is a wise investment. . . . While our efforts will entail new costs, we can reap even larger dividends for our safety and our prosperity if we act now."²⁴

The rhetorical attention devoted to democracy's advance, however, was not matched by actual deeds. Facilitating economic reform became the real focus of Clinton's aid to Russia. Political reform was a much smaller priority.

Beginning with a first meeting on February 6, 1993, a senior group in the new administration met for three months to devise an overall strategy toward Russian and the

other newly independent states (NIS). Participants included Clinton; National Security Adviser Anthony Lake and his deputy, Samuel Berger; Vice President Gore and his national security adviser, Leon Fuerth; senior NSC staffers for this region, Toby Gati and Nicholas Burns; Ambassador-at-Large for the NIS Strobe Talbott; and presidential adviser, George Stephanopoulos.²⁵

At this early stage, officials at the Treasury Department and on the NSC staff had different priorities, and despite Talbott's overall status, the State Department was relatively less important in this area, primarily because Talbott by all accounts (including his own) had little expertise in economic matters. During his tenure, he focused primarily on traditionally defined strategic issues in the U.S.-Russian relationship, which had been the subject of many of the books he had written earlier in his career. Many former Clinton officials reported that Talbott was not engaged in the technical issues of privatization, stabilization, or social policy reform. As Brian Atwood reflected, "He was bored by that kind of thing. He's a brilliant analyst, reporter and writer. I've seen some private things after returning from trips and he was so clear. But on the economic side, very weak. [Secretary of State Warren] Christopher, [UN Ambassador and later Secretary of State] Madeleine [Albright], Strobe really didn't pay attention to the economic side."²⁶

Is the design of aid programs a technical issue best handled by specialists, not senior policymakers? Recall that the last great assistance program to Europe was not named after an undersecretary or an assistant secretary but still is remembered as the Marshall Plan, after the secretary of state who announced the program and oversaw its implementation. In retrospect, former acting prime minister Yegor Gaidar believed that

the absence of a major political figure behind the aid effort had negative consequences. “I don’t think that the leaders of the major Western powers were unaware of the magnitude of the choices they faced. The trouble, in my view, was that there was no leader capable of filling the sort of organizing and coordinating role that Harry Truman and George C. Marshall played in the postwar restoration of Europe.”²⁷

Instead of a Christopher plan or a Clinton plan, Russia got a Summers-Lipton plan. In the early years, Summers and Lipton provided the guiding intellectual principles for assistance to Russia in the Clinton administration. The prevailed in large part because they had a plan for reform, a theory behind it, and clear idea of the tools needed to be used to implement their blueprint, in contrast to others with different concerns (such as democratization), but with no coherent game plans or tools to pursue them. These two new Treasury officials believed in the imperative of economic reform that would create a better setting for political reform. As Lipton recalls, “Our view was that America should make clear its support for reform in Russia. We thought that U.S. support for reform in Russia with Yeltsin, with the elites, with the public would be helpful to people who wanted to carry out reform.”²⁸ If Russia could not stabilize its economy, then democracy would have no chance. Summers and Lipton outlined a comprehensive approach for achieving stabilization that would then establish the permissive context for other kinds of microeconomic reforms and political change.

Although many in the administration may not have understood the technical details of stabilization or privatization assistance, the more general idea of economic reforms first, other reforms later, did have wide appeal. Academic theories about modernization informed this strategy. Forty years ago, distinguished scholar Seymour Martin Lipset wrote that “the

more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy."²⁹ Many in the administration took this hypothesis to be a statement of fact, citing the pattern of economic development and then pressure for democracy in such successful countries as South Korea and Taiwan as recent evidence for why Russia should follow the same sequence.³⁰ Even China's delays in adopting democratic reforms to pursue economic reform seemed a more desirable transition model to many than the mess of simultaneity initiated by President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Russia's underdeveloped civil society offered another reason for sequencing. From this perspective, Russia had to develop a middle class before it would be ready for democracy.³¹ At the time of transition, some argued, Russia had no well-defined social groups favoring capitalism. Voters needed to develop interests---interests redefined in the context of a new capitalist system---before they made meaningful votes. The analysis ironically echoed Marxist theory---Russians needed class consciousness before they could act politically.³²

A third argument for sequencing and the primacy of economic assistance had to do with the dangers of simultaneity. In the short run, most economists argued that the majority of society would have to endure economic dislocation associated with costs of economic transition. If, however, this majority controlled the government as majorities are supposed to do in democracies, then they would be tempted to vote the reformers out of office before reforms had produced new growth.³³ In the transition period, therefore, proponents of this logic suggested that reformers had to be insulated from populist pressures. Some even advocated an interim dictatorship until the process of economic transformation was complete.

Fourth, U.S. advocates of delaying democratic reform in the name of economic reform had another convincing argument, and their counterparts in Russia shared this view. Russian reformers also believed that economic and political reform had to be sequenced, with economic reform coming first.³⁴ After the failed putsch in August 1991 and the subsequent dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, there was a consensus within the Russian government that Yeltsin had a popular mandate to initiate radical economic reform. Yeltsin told the Congress of People's Deputies in October 1991, "We fought for political freedom, now we must provide for economic [freedom]."³⁵ Russia's reformers also endorsed this new focus on economics. As Vladimir Mau, an adviser to Gaidar at the time, recalled, "At this moment [the end of 1991]-- whether consciously or subconsciously---there is a principal decision made---the reforms of the political system are halted. If in 1988--89 political reform was a first priority for Gorbachev and his close associates, now Yeltsin decides to freeze the situation, to preserve the status quo regarding the organization of state power."³⁶ Even those who later criticized the pace and scope of Yeltsin's economic reform efforts agreed on the sequencing strategy. Organizations like Democratic Russia, which previously had been devoted to promoting political reform, now accepted the primacy of economic reform.³⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that their supporters in the United States endorsed this idea as well.

Finally, Russian economic reformers believed that they had a finite reserve of time before trust in Yeltsin and support for reform would wane. Gaidar, after all, was already out of power by the end of 1992. Driven by this perceived time constraint, Russia's reformers wanted to transform the economy as fast as possible and make their reforms irreversible before leaving office. Anything that detracted from this overriding objective of "locking in"

market reform was considered superfluous. Their American counterparts, especially at the Treasury Department, shared their view. When Yeltsin's commitment to democratic practices came under question during the October 1993 shelling of the parliament and especially after the invasion of Chechnya in December 1994, advocates of economic reform in the U.S. government could still persuasively argue for continued support of Yeltsin and his government because there was a limited amount of time before the Russian public would turn against the reform agenda.³⁸

The budgets reflected these priorities. The IMF, which focused almost exclusively on economic reform, played the central role in aiding Russia in the beginning of the 1990s and throughout the decade.³⁹ U.S. bilateral assistance---the package of aid handled directly by the U.S. government and not by the multilateral financial institutions---also reflected the "economics first" strategy. Especially in the early years of aid to Russia, the lion's share of Western assistance was devoted not to political reform but to economic reform. Of the \$5.45 billion in direct U.S. assistance to Russia between 1992 and 1998, only \$130 million or 2.3 percent was devoted to programs involved directly in democratic reform.⁴⁰ When U.S. government expenditures channeled through the Department of Commerce, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the U.S. Export-Import Bank, and the U.S. Trade and Development Agency are added to the equation, the primacy of economic reform becomes even clearer.

In contrast to economic reform, senior Clinton administration officials also did not engage in strategic thinking about to best promote democracy inside Russia. Beyond some loose ideas about modernization, they had no theory about democratization that guided policy. Whereas Clinton officials in Treasury had a coherent plan for

transforming Russia's communist economy into a capitalism system and then wielded real tools to help the effort (whether it was the "correct" plan is another question), their counterparts responsible for democratic reform did not. In fact, they had no counterparts. Instead, the job of promoting democracy was delegated to lower levels officials working primarily at AID. Clinton never made democracy a top issue in U.S.-Russian relations. For instance, the United States and Russia established joint commissions on defense conversion, the environment, and trade at the 1993 Vancouver summit but did not create a similar working group for political reform.

AID did join with the National Endowment for Democracy to fund the operations of the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and the Free Trade Union Institute (AFL-CIO) in Russia. AID also supported democratic assistance programs run by ABA-CEELI, ARD-Checchi, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Internews, the Eurasia Foundation, and a host of other nongovernmental organizations.⁴¹ These groups focused on fostering the development of political parties, business associations, trade unions, civic organizations, as well as promoting electoral reform, the rule of law, and an independent press. Their budgets were only shadows of the amounts spent on economic technical assistance. In fiscal year 1994---the peak year of assistance when Russia received \$1.6 billion from the Freedom Support Act---support for political freedom was only \$99.5 million. By the time of the last Clinton aid budget for Russia, democracy assistance had increased as a percentage of Freedom Support Act funds, but the budget was only a paltry \$16.1 million. This figure was less than 2 percent of all U.S. assistance to Russia in 2001.⁴² George W. Bush has continued to cut democratic assistance and exchange budgets.

Given the strong rhetoric from senior U.S. officials about the importance of Russian democracy, the relatively small amount of aid for democracy and rule of law assistance is curious. Promoting democratic reform is a difficult and poorly understood undertaking, compelling some to argue that the United States should not be involved in such endeavors. Even if senior Clinton officials had wanted to make democracy promotion, they would not have been able to find clear blueprints for how to do it.⁴³ Others have cautioned that democracy promotion was politically too sensitive, though one wonders why advocating free elections would be more controversial than providing advice about how to distribute property. A third and perhaps most compelling argument relates to the already discussed primacy of economic reform. If U.S. officials pushed too aggressively for democratic reforms, they might undermine their objectives for the transformation of Russia's economy. A fourth argument frequently championed by Clinton officials was that democracy assistance did not need as much money because this kind of aid was cheaper to provide than economic assistance. As Brian Atwood explains, "Democracy programs don't cost that much money. Even if it's a case of running a successful election, you may spend 15-20 million dollars on the mechanical equipment and ballots; that's not a lot of money."⁴⁴

Just as the United States devoted few funds to democratic assistance, the reform of the Russian state also has received little attention. Markets need market-preserving states to thrive, and yet American assistance for reconstructing Russian state institutions was minimal. AID did fund rule of law technical assistance projects, but these programs were largely ineffective in the early 1990s.⁴⁵ Programs designed to decrease the size of the state--a priority emphasized by many outside analysts---did not exist.⁴⁶ Small projects provided technical assistance for reforms of local self-government, but again these programs

represented only a fraction of the total aid package. For instance, the Eurasia Foundation has provided some assistance in this area, but off the foundation's \$20 million annual budget in 1996, only 23 percent was devoted to public administration and local government reform.⁴⁷

IV. Protecting Threatened Democratic Institutions and Actors

Russia has not consolidated a democratic system. On the contrary, Russia's new democracy faced real threats almost immediately after Soviet collapse. Most dramatically, as mentioned above, Yeltsin used force to shut down the Congress of People's Deputies in the fall of 1993. A year later, he invaded Chechnya. During the 1996 presidential election, Yeltsin flirted with canceling the vote. In 1999, he invaded Chechnya a second time, brutally abusing the human rights of Russians citizens living there for a second time in one decade.

His successor, Vladimir Putin, has continued the war in Chechnya, but also waged a systematic campaign to weaken even further Russia's fragile democratic institutions. Putin has seized control of all national television networks, emasculated the power of the Federation Council, tamed regional barons who once served as a powerful balance to Yeltsin's presidential rule, arbitrarily used the law to jail or chase away political foes, removed candidates from electoral ballots, harassed and arrested NGO leaders, and weakened Russia's independent political parties. Western NGO's are not immune for Russian state harassment. Putin's government has tossed out the Peace Corps, closed down the office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Chechnya,

declared *persona non grata* the AFL-CIO's field representative in Moscow, and raided the offices of the Open Society Institute. In the wake of the horrific terrorist attack in Beslan, Russia in September 2004, Putin announced plans for further centralizing his political power, floating the idea that governors should be appointed, rather than elected, and that all, not just half, of Duma members should be chosen through proportional representation. Both reforms move Russia even closer to autocracy, strengthening the power of the president and weakening even further the power of the parliament and the governors.

Freedom House scores reflect these trends. In 1997, Russia had an overall Freedom House rating of 3.8. In 2004, that rating had dropped to 5.25.⁴⁸

American efforts to impede or slow these democratic rollbacks have been limited. And when attempted, the efforts have produced few results.

In response to the first serious blow to democratic development—Yeltsin forced closure of the parliament—the Clinton administration, as already discussed, supported Yeltsin. For most Clinton officials, the standoff between Yeltsin and the parliamentarians was a Manichean struggle between democrats and communists. The American ally, therefore, was clear.

The first invasion of Chechnya in December 1994 presented a more difficult challenge to American officials. Some within the Clinton administration expressed real fear that the war could spark real political instability in the region. Despite the horrific war, Clinton and his top advisor on Russia, Strobe Talbott, still believed that Yeltsin was Russia's best bet for political and economic reform. All major branches of the U.S. government had other issues to pursue with the Russian government that they

did not want interrupted because of Chechnya. For Treasury, it was economic reform. For the Pentagon, it was Cooperative Threat Reduction. For the State Department, it was European security. As White House spokesperson Michael McCurry said, “I again stress it [Chechnya] by no means defines this very important bilateral relationship. It is a broad expansive relationship that has many elements on the agenda, of which this is no doubt one but is by no means the most significant.”⁴⁹ The Clinton team remained determined to not let Chechnya define their Russia policy or derail the linchpin to their Russian policy in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. Chechnya in their view was a hiccup in a difficult and long transition, but the transition was still moving---and had to be moved---in the right direction. Consequently, Yeltsin got a free pass on Chechnya.

Yeltsin’s threats to cancel the 1996 presidential vote did invoke a response from Washington. Without question, Clinton wanted Yeltsin to win this election. As Clinton remarked, “I know the Russian people have to pick a president, and I know that means we’ve got to stop short of giving a nominating speech for the guy. But we’ve got to go all the way in helping in every other respect.”⁵⁰ Clinton committed to several policy positions that were undertaken chiefly as a strategy for helping to keep the communists from coming back to power, including muted criticism of the Chechen war, pressure for new IMF funding in the spring of 1996, and delaying NATO expansion until after the Russian vote.⁵¹ In a major sin of silence, U.S. officials also refrained from criticizing the massive insider sell-off of valuable state properties to friends of the Kremlin. At the same time, Clinton did not want to face the difficult decision of how to respond to the cancellation of a presidential election. When U.S. officials learned of the plan, they urged Yeltsin to reconsider. They opted to refrain from making any public threats about

sanctions should the election be postponed. Instead, they used quiet but urgent diplomacy. Clinton sent Yeltsin a private message that registered his “strongest disapproval of any violation of the constitution.” As Talbott explains, “He [Clinton] felt we had no choice. He’d backed Yeltsin through thick and thin, always on the grounds that the U.S. was supporting not just the man but the principle, that Russia would work its way out of its crisis through elections referendums and constitutional rule.”⁵²

Did Clinton’s note and phone requests to Yeltsin help dissuade the Russian president from postponing the election? The intervention is difficult to judge. In his final memoir, Yeltsin recalls his flirtation with postponement, but he gives his daughter, Tatyana Dyachenko and Chubais, not Clinton, the credit for dissuading him from executing the antidemocratic plan.⁵³ At the same time, Yeltsin strongly valued his relationship with Clinton. Clinton officials believe that losing face with his buddies in the West played a role in Yeltsin’s thinking.

The 1996 intervention may have been the last time that American officials successfully wielded influence of democratic developments inside Russia. When Yeltsin invaded Chechnya again in 1999, the Clinton foreign policy team in place at the time was much more critical than they and their predecessors were in 1994. U.S. officials no longer felt compelled to call the war an “internal matter” as they did in 1994. Rather than minimize debate as they did in 1994, Clinton officials also sought to raise the Chechen issue at international forums such as the OSCE meeting in Istanbul, November 1999.⁵⁴

The Clinton administration refrained once again from cutting bilateral assistance programs to Russia during the second war, but two programs did suffer -- IMF assistance to Russia and Ex-IM Bank projects with Russian companies. Treasury officials opposed

any public linkage between Chechnya and IMF programs, as formal and public linkage would set a dangerous precedent and destroy the integrity of the IMF, but Clinton officials made it known to the Fund that they wanted to see the IMF's program with Russia receive much closer scrutiny after Russia invaded Chechnya.⁵⁵ The postponement of Ex-IM loans was overtly linked to Chechnya.⁵⁶ The United States also provided \$10 million to help address the needs of displaced persons, and increased its assistance program to Georgia aimed at beefing up security at the Georgian-Russian border in order to not give Russia an excuse to intervene into Georgia in 'hot pursuit of terrorists.' When all these policies are added up, the effort was still a minimal one. The rhetorical rebukes were sharper and IMF and Ex-Im loans were delayed, but little else changed. Clinton did not postpone planned bilateral meetings with his Russian counterpart, Russia was not kicked out of any major international club, and business in other arenas continued with no interruption. Like the first war, Clinton administration officials felt helpless, believing that they lacked the tools to influence positive change.

President George W. Bush has done even less to criticize Putin's antidemocratic policies or encourage democratic development inside Russia. As a presidential candidate, Bush criticized Putin's war in Chechnya and threatened to cut off assistance if elected. Once in power, however, Bush has a higher priority—the abrogation of the ABM treaty the construction of national missile defense. He wanted Putin's acquiescence and therefore began to court his Russian counterpart during their first meeting in June 2001. After September 11th, Bush has considered Putin an ally in the global war on terror, who should not be criticized for what he does internally. At a time when Putin was rolling back democratic practices, President Bush declared in September 2003, "I

respect President Putin's vision for Russia: a country at peace within its borders, with its neighbors, and with the world, a country in which democracy and freedom and rule of law thrive.” At times, mid-level officials within the U.S. government have spoken out publicly about the dangerous, anti-democratic trends inside Russia. Secretary of State Colin Powell even published an op ed piece in a Russian newspaper in the winter of 2004 warning about the deleterious consequences of further democratic rollback. Bush, however, has not weighed in.

Against the backdrop of democratic rollbacks in Russia, Bush administration officials began discussions about the timetable for Russia’s “graduation” from American-funded democracy programs. The Bush administration originally pushed to cut funds for Russia under the Freedom Support Act from \$148 million in 2003 to \$73 million in 2004. (Only wiser congressional leadership added money to the Administration’s requests.) The Bush administration also has gutted funding for exchanges – one of our most effective and least expensive tools for fostering democratic development.

V. Conclusion

In contrast to America’s response to other major social revolutions of the twentieth century---those in Russia in 1917, China in 1949, Iran in 1979---American officials wanted this second Russian revolution to succeed. George H.W. Bush expressed his desire to see democratic and market institutions take hold in the Soviet Union and then Russia, even if he was skeptical of the West’s role in facilitating these transformations and reluctant to commit scarce (in his view) American resources to the

project. The Clinton administration demonstrated the greatest commitment to assisting the emergence of market and democratic institutions in Russia, because the Clinton team believed both that a democratic and market-oriented Russia integrated in the West would no longer constitute a threat to American national security and that the United States could play a role in this transformation. At the grandest levels of rhetoric, George W. Bush has endorsed this Wilsonian vision, even if not in specific reference to Russia.

Almost two decades later, it is striking how little power the United States exercised over democratic change in Russia. The United States emerged from the cold war as the world's only superpower and has often been described as the most powerful country in history relative to the other countries in the world. Yet, this super-superpower proved unable, inept, or unwilling to influence domestic change in Russia. Dramatic change in Russia has occurred, but the U.S. role in facilitating this revolution has been much less important than advertised. U.S. policy did help nudge Russia toward integration with the West and some American interventions did prod domestic transformation in the intended direction – that is, toward democracy and capitalism. But there was no Marshall Plan to help rebuild Russia's economy. Nor did the United States provide Russia with a blueprint for how to build democracy from scratch.

The question is whether a much greater U.S. effort would have helped Russia create a firmer basis for the development and consolidation of democratic institutions. How much of America's marginal influence stemmed from a lack of ideas, effort and resources, and how much stemmed from the United States' inability to bring about internal change in a country the size and complexity of Russia, no matter how much money was spent or how much attention devoted to the it?

It is still too early to declare that democratic institutions will permanently replace the old order, or be completely undermined by Putin. Nonetheless, it is not too early to say that the autocratic institutions of the Soviet *ancien regime* did collapse, and some new partial democratic regime did emerge in the 1990s. The American role in facilitating this outcome of partial democracy in Russia is even more difficult to measure than American efforts to promote market institutions, in part because this policy objective received continued rhetorical affirmation but was supported by very few diplomatic initiatives, financial resources, and concrete ideas. Different from the promotion of market reform promotion, American policymakers have underdeveloped theories about how the transition from dictatorship to democracy takes place and a shallow toolbox for promoting such transitions from without. Without qualification, all three post--cold war American presidents have pledged rhetorically their commitment to facilitating the emergence of democracy in the Soviet Union and Russia. How democracy promotion is defined and how much attention and resources are given to the problem has varied considerably.

President George H.W. Bush embraced a very cautious approach to democracy promotion. He pledged his desire to see the Soviet Union and then Russia governed by a democratic political system but saw little that the United States could do to facilitate this outcome. During the last part of the Soviet era, when many in the Soviet Union believed independence was the first step toward democratization, Bush's policies actually served to impede liberalization. He did not encourage the breakup of the Soviet Union. He did little to reach out to leaders of the anti-Soviet opposition. Instead, he steadfastly supported , Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet

Union. In 1991, Gorbachev was still the *unelected* leader of the USSR, whereas most leaders of the democratic opposition, including Boris Yeltsin in Russia, had already secured electoral mandates more than once.

Would a more aggressive policy of encouraging democratization undertaken by the White House have helped Russia's democratic consolidation in 1991--92? If Bush could have developed earlier a direct relationship with Yeltsin, would this relationship have helped the transition from communism? Hypothetically, one can wonder if Bush could have persuaded Gorbachev to get rid of the nasty characters in his government that carried out military operations in Latvia and Lithuania in January 1991. If they would have been removed from government in January 1991, then perhaps the coup attempt in August 1991 would not have occurred. Yet, had the coup not been attempted and failed so miserably, the Soviet Union might not have collapsed. Or perhaps Bush could have developed earlier a direct relationship with Yeltsin. But could this relationship have helped the transition from communism? In the first months of Russia's independence, many believed that Yeltsin should have initiated a series of political reforms that could have important path-dependent consequences for the future consolidation of Russian democracy. Hypothetically, one could imagine that Bush personally could have encouraged Yeltsin to undertake these reforms. In reality, however, both Bush and Yeltsin were focused on so many other issues of seemingly greater priority – such the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet empire and the control of the strategic nuclear weapons scattered between four newly independent states – that conversations about founding elections and new constitutions seemed premature.

The Clinton team came into office determined to make promoting democracy a bigger part of American foreign policy. They embraced the “democratic peace” dictum that democracies do not go to war with each other. Promoting democracy in a strategic country like Russia, therefore, was in the U.S. national interest. Yet, even when the more Wilsonian Clinton administration was in office, a truism of American foreign policy generally held: when the choice had to be made whether to push democracy over some other traditional security issue in U.S.-Russia relations security ---traditionally defined---always took precedence.⁵⁷ Because Clinton saw Yeltsin’s hold on power as a necessary condition for market and democratic reforms in Russia, the American president was willing to give his Russian counterpart the benefit of the doubt when Yeltsin seemed to be undermining democracy. Clinton and his team failed to condemn Yeltsin’s antidemocratic acts, such as his attack on the parliament in October 1993 and his two invasions of Chechnya in 1994 and again in 1999. During the 1996 Russian presidential election when Yeltsin was flirting with the idea of canceling the vote, Clinton did urge his Russian counterpart to stay the course of electoral democracy. This signal from Washington – different from the signals sent just a few years earlier during the October 1993 showdown or after the 1994 invasion of Chechnya – must have played a role in Yeltsin’s calculations, though to what extent we do not know. In response to each of these democratic crises in Russia, Clinton and his team never had good policy options. By the time Clinton became president in January 1993, Yeltsin was already battling the Russian Congress just to stay in office. Throughout 1993, the pace of constitutional reform by the Russian parliament did not serve democratization, and this was a constitution first drafted under General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. An American policy

that supported the actions of Russia's Congress would have been no more democratic than a policy that unequivocally supported Yeltsin as the embodiment of Russian democracy. Between Congress and Yeltsin, Yeltsin had the better credentials as a reformer and as a friend of American interests.

American responses to the first Chechen invasion lacked moral clarity in the Clinton administration, and human rights abuses were ignored to an even greater extent in the Bush administration, particularly after September 11. But again, there was little the United States could do to affect events on the ground. Everyone in the Clinton administration and the entire international community---including many in the Muslim world---recognized Russian sovereignty over the Chechen Republic. Particularly after the Chechen rebel invasion of Dagestan in 1999, these same international observers believed that Russia had a right to ensure not only that Chechnya remained part of the Russian Federation but that Russia could defend its territory. At the same time, Clinton could have expressed more outrage at the conduct of the wars and emphasized that members in the club of democratic states do not carry out such campaigns in total disregard for human rights.

In any of these most extreme cases of democratic backsliding by Yeltsin, would a more passionate denunciation by Clinton or Bush have made a difference? Would economic sanctions against Russia for the Chechen invasions have altered the course of the wars? Probably not. U.S. foreign policymakers, when trying to prevent or stop negative internal development through sanctions, have little leverage in a country as large and complex as Russia.

Nonetheless, words do matter. It is naïve to believe that the United States could have prevented the bombardment of parliament in October 1993 or the invasion of Chechnya in 1994 and 1999, but American impotence is no excuse for the abandonment of U.S. ideals. Especially for the Wilsonians in the Clinton administration, their failure to at least preserve rhetorical consistency about the importance of democratization undermined their moral authority, especially among the democratic activists in Russia.

President George W. Bush has followed a policy of indifference about the Kremlin's antidemocratic policies, which have expanded dramatically since Vladimir Putin became president. After September 11, 2001, and the elevation of Putin as trusted friend and ally in the war against terrorism, Bush became even more reluctant to discuss Russian political reform. Bush's silence in turn has weakened democratic forces in Russia.

Words still matter. As Putin continued his crackdown on freedom at home, Bush should not remain indifferent. The Wilsonian ideals that Bush embraced in dealing with other parts of the world should have entered his Russia policy. Condemnation of Russia's antidemocratic policies will not end the war in Chechnya or restore pluralism on Russia's television airwaves. However, American words in support of democracy would make Bush's grand strategy for foreign policy sound more consistent. More important, a Bush stance on Russian democratic backsliding would embolden those reformers inside Russia still fighting for democracy. Over the long run, strengthening these forces will help to democratize Russia.

The Grassroots Export of Democratic Ideas

Presidential summits are not the only means available for promoting democratization. Throughout the 1990s, the United States has funded hundreds of other programs in the name of promoting democracy. Through exchanges, technical assistance, and financial aid, U.S. programs have facilitated the transfer of democratic ideas into Russia. Given the limited funds for these programs, tracing the flow of these democratic norms from the United States to Russia is even more difficult than following the transfer of ideas about capitalism. For most of the 1990s, economic assistance and denuclearization programs received the lion's share of U.S. assistance budgets. This imbalance was a mistake. The lesson of the 1990s in Russia is that democracy and market promotion assistance must be coordinated and given equal attention. The data on the positive correlation between democracy and economic development in the postcommunist world are now clear.⁵⁸ Aid to stimulate market reforms without accompanying resources to foster democratic development is simply money wasted.

To its credit, AID changed the balance over time between economic and democracy assistance. As budgets declined, AID leaders allowed the economic assistance programs to decline at a faster rate than the democratization programs. The agency also moved more and more money away from the state and into programs that engaged Russian society directly. Over the years, AID also earmarked a greater percentage of resources to those programs outside of Moscow. And yet, it is difficult to claim the direct causal impact of democratic ideas from the outside when the practice of democracy inside Russia is so deeply flawed.

Nonetheless, survey data suggest that Russians have embraced philosophically democratic ideals, even if they are dissatisfied with the practice of democracy in Russia.⁵⁹ Although Russian democratic institutions still do not meet the standards of liberal democracies in the West, they are much more democratic today than they were two decades ago (even if they are less democratic than they were a few years ago). In the margins, American influences have helped to contribute to these achievements.

Much of the work done in this sphere came not from the top levels of the U.S. government but from American nongovernmental organizations. At crucial moments in the construction of Russian political institutions -- be it the drafting of the constitution, the crafting of parliamentary electoral laws, or the introduction of jury trials into the Russian legal system -- American agents provided their Russian counterparts with valuable knowledge about models and experiences in other countries, including of course the United States. More abstractly, all of the institutions of democracy came from Russia's West. After seventy years of Soviet communism, the ideas of competitive elections, a multi-party system, or civil society had to be imported into Russia.

But while American NGOs may have been helpful in *designing* institutions associated with democratic states, to date they have done little to affect how these institutions *function*. Formally, Russian political rules resemble democratic institutions, but informally, nondemocratic procedures still permeate Russian politics. For instance, elections in Russia occur and do have consequences, but they are not free and fair. U.S. programs to promote the rule of law by working with Russian state agencies have demonstrated little tangible success in making the legal system function better. Finally, ideas about checks and balances and the importance of the separation of powers have

been pumped into Russia through a myriad of channels, but the executive at both the national and local level still dominates.

Overestimating American Power in Internal Russian Affairs

The outcome of Russia's revolution so far has been mixed but not disastrous. A decade ago, few predicted that Russia's reformers would be successful in implementing their agenda of *triple* transformation---decolonization, marketization, and democratization. A decade later, one has to be impressed with the scale of change already achieved. The Soviet empire is gone and will never be reconstituted. The market in Russia is there to stay. Only doubts remains about the future of Russian democratic institutions. The American role in this drama, however, was very limited. At the end of the day when we can finally determine whether Russia's democracy has succeeded or failed, it will be Russians who should be blamed or praised, not Americans.

Does this assessment suggest that it was wrong for U.S. foreign policy officials to try to influence the course of change inside the Soviet Union and Russia in both the political and economic spheres? No. Although one must recognize the limits to America's capacity to influence internal developments in a place like Russia, it is still in the American national interest to try to push Russia's revolution in a pro-democratic, pro-market, and pro-Western direction. In some areas like the promotion of small business development or civil society at the grassroots level, American leaders should have done more and tried harder. Perhaps the greatest sin of the decade was to fuel expectations in Russia about the size and impact of American economic assistance. U.S. officials, especially early in the 1990s, promised far

more than they were prepared to deliver. As Anthony Lake wrote in 1984, “By promising less, Washington can accomplish more. U.S. influence is diminished only when results fall short of rhetoric.”⁶⁰

At the same time, contrary to other analysts who deride the U.S. assistance strategies of the 1990s, American assistance efforts did not harm the consolidation of democratic institutions in Russia. Nor did these efforts, contrary to conventional wisdom, fundamentally damage the bilateral relationship during this period. The United States was right to try to assist domestic transformation in Russia, but U.S. officials should have done more, promised less, and realized humbly that even their best efforts would not lead to immediate or easily measurable payoffs.

¹ The same appears to have been true in Iraq after the collapse of autocracy there. See Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005).

² Of course, West European democracies and economies also played this role, but the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War focused particular attention on the comparison between these two countries.

³ Yakovlev studied as an exchange student in the United States and then spent a decade living in Canada as the Soviet ambassador.

⁴ See Michael McFaul, “The Sovereignty Script: Red Book for Russian Revolutionaries,” in Stephen Krasner, ed., *Problematic Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

⁵ I wrote an entire book on the topic without ever mentioning international factors. Ronald Reagan and Strategic Defense Initiative are not even entries in the index of this book. See Michael McFaul *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁶ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 499.

⁷ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p. 500.

⁸ President George H.W. Bush, “Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of the Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union, August 1, 1991, available at <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91080102.html>.

⁹ On the first day of the coup, Bush stressed, “There’s very little we can do right now ...We’re not going to overexcite the American people or the world. And so, we will conduct our diplomacy in a prudent fashion, not driven by excess, not driven by extreme.” Bush, “Remarks and an Exchange with Reporters in Kennebunkport, Maine, on the Attempted Coup in the Soviet Union, August 19, 1991,” <http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/papers/1991/91081901.html>, pp. 5--7.

¹⁰ For an overview, see Linda Cook, *Labor and Liberalization: Trade Unions in the New Russia* (Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1997), chap. 5.

¹¹ At its May 1988 meeting, the NED board adopted a resolution that considered support to national democratic movements crucial for promoting democracy within the Soviet Union. The NED board member, Zbigniew Brzezinski –elected to the board in 1987 – played a central role in pushing NED in this direction. (Interview and e-mail exchange with Nadia Diuk, NED program officer for this region since 1987, March 4, 2003).

¹² NDI, *Report of the Survey Mission to the Soviet Union: July 29-August 3, 1990* (Washington, 1990) p. 22. For a description of NDI programs in the Soviet Union, see NDI, *The Commonwealth of Independent States: Democratic Developments Issues and Options* (Washington, January 1992).

¹³ Since its inception in 1984, NED has received money directly from the U.S. Congress. In parallel to its own grants programs, NED also gives grants to NDI, IRI, the AFL-CIO and others. As these nongovernmental (NGOs) expanded their programs in the former Soviet Union, they began to receive the greater share of the funds for the region from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

¹⁴ His engagement is chronicled in Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire*.

¹⁵ On this luncheon with Reagan, see George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: Diplomacy, Power, and the Victory of the American Ideal* (Simon and Shuster, 1993), pp. 1102--03.

¹⁶ Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (Random House, 2002), p. 68.

¹⁷ Serge Schmemmann, "Summit in Vancouver: The Overview," *New York Times*, April 5, 1993, p. A1.

¹⁸ "Clinton Sends Yeltsin His Full Support," *Associated Press*, September 23, 1993.

¹⁹ Fred Kaplan, "Yeltsin Suspends Legislature, Faces Impeachment Bid," *Boston Globe*, September 22, 1993, p. 1.

²⁰ Other experts from around the world provided written commentaries on the different drafts of the Russian electoral law. The NDI never advocated a particular system and actually provided contradictory recommendations from Western experts. Michael McFaul participated in these interactions.

²¹ I was heading the NDI office in Moscow at the time.

²² Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4 (September 27, 1993) pp. 658—64.

²³ Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, "Support for Democracy and the U.S. National Interest," remarks before the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, March 1, 1996.

²⁴ President Bill Clinton, "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform," April 1, 1993, in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, vol. 4, no. 13, April 5, 1993, pp. 189-94.

²⁵ Rosner, *The New Tug-of-War*, pp. 49--50.

²⁶ Interview with Atwood, January 19, 2001. Talbott's lack of involvement in their issues was also a theme of interviews with David Lipton (April 6, 2001) and Richard Morningstar (March 20, 2001).

²⁷ Yegor Gaidar, *Days of Victory and Defeat* (University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 152.

²⁸ Interview with Lipton.

²⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 53, no. 1 (1959), pp. 69--105. See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Doubleday, 1960); and more recently, Adam Przeworski, Michael Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁰ This observation is based on McFaul's interactions with dozens of AID and State Department officials during this period.

³¹ Discussions with senior officials in AID, the Eurasia Foundation, and others in Washington and Moscow. This idea also came from one of the classic texts of social science widely popular when most senior Clinton officials were students. The phrase, "no middle class, no democracy" comes from Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Beacon Press, 1966).

³² Yevgeny Yasin, "A Normal Economy Is the Main Condition for Democracy," *Izvestiya*, August 27, 1991, reprinted in *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. 43 (October 9, 1991), p. 15.

³³ Ibid. For the analytical underpinnings of this fear, see Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economics Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁴ On these debates, see Vladimir Mau, *Ekonomiki i Vlast'* (Moskva: Delo, 1995).

³⁵ Yeltsin's address to the Fifth Congress, October 28, 1991, in *Yeltsin-Khasbulatov*, p. 96.

³⁶ Mau, *Ekonomika i Vlast'*, p. 43.

³⁷ See McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution*, chap. 4.

³⁸ Interview with Jeanne Bourgault, at the time, director of the Office of Democratic Initiatives and Human Resources (DIHR), August 19, 2002.

³⁹ Between 1992 and 1999, the IMF loaned \$22 billion to Russia, which was roughly three-quarters of all multilateral lending to Russia in the 1990s. See Augusto Lopez-Claros, "The Role of International Financial Institutions During the Transition in Russia," unpublished manuscript, September 2002.

⁴⁰ Authors' calculations based on analyses of budgets described in the annual reports of the aid compiled by the Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to the NIS, called *U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union* (Department of State, various years).

⁴¹ Regrettably, no comprehensive history or assessment of these programs in Russia has been written. On some individual sectors, see James Richter, "Evaluating Western Assistance to Russian Women's Organizations," and Leslie Powell, "Western and Russian Environmental NGOs: A Greener Russia?" in Sarah Mendelson and John Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (Columbia University Press, 2003); Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom, "Strength from Without? Transnational

Influences on NGO Development in Russia, Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, December 2001; and Sarah Mendelson, "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia: Between Success and Failure, *International Security*, vol. 25 (Spring 2001), pp. 68--106; and Laura Henry, "The Greening of Grassroots Democracy? The Russian Environmental Movement, Foreign Aid, and Democratization" BPS Working Paper Series (Berkeley, Calif.: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, 2001).

⁴² See Office of the Coordinator of the U.S. Assistance to the NIS, *U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with Eurasia, Fiscal Year 2001* (Department of State, March 2002), p. 153.

⁴³ On the difficulties, see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); and Larry Diamond, *Promoting Democracy in the 1990s: Actors and Instruments, Issues and Imperatives* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, December 1995).

⁴⁴ Interview with Atwood.

⁴⁵ Interview with Bourgault.

⁴⁶ On why smaller states are usually more effective than larger ones, see Moises Naim, "Latin America: The Second Stage of Reform," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5 (October 1994), pp. 32--48.

⁴⁷ *The Eurasia Foundation: 1996-1997 Report* (Washington, 1997), p. 9.

⁴⁸ Alexander Motyl and Amanda Schnitzer, eds., *Nations in Transit: Democratization in East Central Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Roman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 462.

⁴⁹ Mike McCurry, State Department briefing, January 3, 1995.

⁵⁰ Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 195.

⁵¹ On the NATO issue, James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Brookings, 1999)

⁵² Interviews with Talbott, Blacker, and Berger; and Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 195.

⁵³ Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, p. 25.

⁵⁴ Stephen Sestanovich, "Where Does Russia Belong?" *The National Interest* (Winter 2000/2001) p. 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ David Briscoe, "US Gov't Bank to Nix Russia Loans," *Associated Press*, December 21, 1999.

⁵⁷ We emphasize "traditional" security issue to suggest that democracy promotion could also be considered a security interest of the United States. .

⁵⁸ See Joel Hellman, "Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Post-communist Transitions," *World Politics*, 50, no. 1 (1998); Jean-Jacques Dethier, Hafez Ghanem, and Edda Zoli, "Does Democracy Facilitate the Economic Transition? An Empirical Study of Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union," unpublished manuscript, World Bank (June 1999); *Transition Report 1999: Ten Years of Transition* (London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1999), chapter five; and Anders Aslund, *Building Capitalism: The Transformation of the Former Soviet Bloc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The causal relationship between democracy and economic growth is less well understood.

⁵⁹ Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul, "Are Russians Undemocratic?" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (April-June 2002), pp. 91-121.

⁶⁰ Anthony Lake, "Do the Doable," *Foreign Policy*, no. 54 (Spring 1984), p. 121.