

Development Against Democracy

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Manipulating Political Change
in the Third World

NEW EDITION

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Introduction by Robert Vitalis
Foreword by Thomas Ferguson



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I

The “New Look” in Development Studies

The pages that follow constitute a guide to postwar studies of modernization and development. The times are different but the revival of programs dedicated to the export of democracy serve to remind us of the earlier approach and the urgency of examining its roots and legacy. At stake is understanding theories and policies based on elitist concepts of democracy with their profound suspicions of participatory democracy that were aimed at the global south but reflected the interests of ruling elites in the U.S.

According to a well-known typology of development studies, the field evolved in three stages: the first in the aftermath of World War II; the second following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War; and the third, inspired by the events of 9/11.¹

What of the present? Far from signaling continuity, the emergence of populist movements across Europe and the United States in 2016–2017 marks a phase of widespread contestation of the politics of globalization and immigration in a disordered world. Absent from the latest edition of development theories is consideration of the uneven consequences of unchecked neoliberal policies and the impact of technological change. Misinterpreting the roots of alienation of those excluded hardly dispels the problem. On the contrary, it promotes attempts to control the manifestation of discontent through pseudo-scientific programs that mask the objective of controlling dissent and assuring social control.

This too is reminiscent of the earlier, “classic” phase of modernization and development studies, further reinforcing the urgency of confronting its roots and legacy.

First published in 1985 under the title, *Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World*, the present work was originally destined to be a study of the impact of theories of modernization and development on the growing field of contemporary Middle East studies. That objective was soon overtaken by the study of its impact in the social sciences, and more particularly in political science, international relations, and Third World studies. The title of the second edition (1995) was changed to *Development Against Democracy: Manipulating Political Change in the Third World*, in

order to avoid the mistaken impression that the purpose of this study was to provide a manual for political manipulation. Aside from the change in title, however, its objective and underlying premises with respect to the limits of elitist views of democracy and their influence on modernization and development studies remained constant.

The New Look in Development Studies

Despite the underlying similarity that marks the old and the new views of development and modernization, some contemporary scholars maintain that there has been a significant change in the field. Joseph Morgan Hodge is among them, as his widely-recognized survey of development studies demonstrates.² According to Hodge, this is a product of increased emphasis on a comparative, interdisciplinary and global orientation that deepens our understanding of development, while additionally freeing it from the past focus on U.S. experience.³ While the emphasis on an internationalist approach is admirable, marginalizing U.S. experience is not, given its centrality in postwar experience.⁴ Its marginalization serves to divert attention from the role of development and modernization policies in the broader context of U.S. foreign policy in the global South.

According to Hodge's typology, Development studies evolved in three stages, the last of which resulted in,

a truly global and transnational history of development, one that brings together the literature on late colonialism and decolonization with the new international history of the Cold War, and that offers a more diverse, refined, and historically-informed reading of international development.⁵

Hodge interprets the first phase as “part of an internal disciplinary critique, written from the inside with the intent of reforming rather than radically overturning the structure.”⁶ His reference to *Managing Political Change* in this context is misplaced, as the intention of that work was—and remains—to expose the anti-democratic character of elitist democracy and the extent of academic collaboration in the manipulation of political change.

The second phase of Hodge's chronology follows the end of the Cold War. It was marked by the triumph of neoliberal reformers who saw “greater market integration as a development alternative.”⁷ The third phase represented an awakening of,

both policy makers and scholars to the realities and rising instabilities of the new, post-Cold War order which gave rise to the movement for the renewal of empire along with the ideology of American exceptionalism and its unique role in exporting democracy.⁸

Many policy analysts, Hodge writes, were persuaded that the events of September 11, 2001, “pointed logically toward a new U.S.-led imperialism designed to bring stability and democracy to the world’s insurgent zones.”⁹ The logic was used to justify the operations of British as well as French empires that envisioned their roles as part of a civilizing mission. Hodge relied on the writings of the neoconservative trio of Niall Ferguson, Michael Ignatieff and Francis Fukuyama, to bolster his arguments. Fukuyama, Hodge pointed out, not only emphasized the urgency of state building, but culture and “social trust” in economic change, themes that were dominant in Development studies of the 1960s.¹⁰

What was striking in Hodge’s account was the omission of critical analysis of neoliberal policies in generating poverty, inequality and the conditions conducive to dependency, as Frederick Cooper remarked in his comments on Hodge’s text.¹¹ Hodge’s omission was not a unique trait. With few exceptions, it was characteristic of conventional analyses of development. Cooper’s observations, on the other hand, were part of a broader critique that included the works of economists as well as members of the IMF who, in 2016, openly questioned whether “instead of delivering growth, some neoliberal policies have increased inequality, in turn jeopardizing durable expansion.”¹²

Years before the appearance of the widely heralded work of Thomas Piketty, *The Economics of Inequality*,¹³ economists including Joseph Stiglitz argued in favor of replacing the “Washington Consensus” with one embracing “a focus on the living standards of people and the promotion of equitable, sustainable and democratic development.”¹⁴

The World That Was

The world in which modernization and development studies arose was marked by the graveyards of World War II and the collapse of European colonial powers, the Cold War and in 1949, the Chinese Revolution. The U.S. emerged in this global arena as an icon of political and economic stability bent on assuring its hegemony. The environment it faced was one of disastrous postwar economic conditions across the European continent and the adverse conditions facing newly independent states of the Third

World. The combination aroused deep concern among Washington policymakers who feared the risks of economic collapse and its potentially destabilizing effects.

Washington's preoccupation with the fate of recently decolonized states and those struggling for independence was inseparable from the protection and projection of U.S. interests across Middle East, Latin America, Southeast Asia and Africa. U.S. officials responded to movements for reform and revolution in these regions with counterinsurgency policies designed to neutralize and undermine radical activists.

Michael Klare reminds us that "between 1960 and 1970, the United States spent \$1 billion to overcome insurgent threats to the existing order."¹⁵

Rooted in the "visionary globalism" that characterized postwar American ideology, modernization and development policies assumed the U.S. capable of restructuring both "the United States and the globe in ways that would ensure American centrality in world affairs."¹⁶ In the postwar framework, James Peck observed, "modernization offered a compelling internationalist vision, a bold globalism promising not only freedom but also development and well-being for the poorest nations."¹⁷

In his remarks on the "Foundations of Social Change," Kees Van Der Pijl observed that early versions of modernization and development policies could be traced to the post-World War I period when international studies "were recast as a direct extension of Anglo-American open nation-state building, a process in which client governing classes are given the keys of a state on the condition they leave the door open."¹⁸ The works of major contributors to Development studies such as Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, Lucian Pye, Samuel P. Huntington, Edward A. Shils, Daniel Lerner, and W. W. Rostow, among others, confirmed Van Der Pijl's interpretation.

Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* alone warrants recognition as a work that influenced the dominant approach to political development, including its vision of political participation as a threat to the existing social and political order. "The need for elite power," they wrote, "requires that the ordinary citizen be relatively passive, uninvolved, and deferential to elites."¹⁹ Their analysis applied to the examples of Western European states, the U.S. and Mexico, but it was applicable to other constituencies, according to Huntington, Crozier, and Watanuki, in their work on, *The Crisis of Democracy*.²⁰

W. W. Rostow achieved prominence with his publication of the

"Non-Communist Manifesto" [that] envisaged the "developing" nations as passing through similar stages of development, out of tradition-bound

poverty, through an industrialized modernization overseen by the US, the World Bank and the IMF, to mass-consumer prosperity.²¹

Vivek Chibber later observed that Rostow's Manifesto addressed "capital's universalizing mission," according to which "Europe showed the developing world a rough picture of its own future."²² The prosperity that Rostow's Manifesto promised was unequally shared in the Third World as in the First, where the inequality reproduced through the institutionalized racism against Afro-Americans made a mockery of the claims of development. Institutionalized racism was not foreign to domestic politics or to the foundations of international relations as a discipline, as the recent work by Robert Vitalis has starkly demonstrated.²³

Major foundations played a critical role in funding and propagating Development and Modernization studies. By 1952,

the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation had contributed several million dollars to the creation of international studies centers throughout the country. As early as 1948, one of the most influential of such institutions from the point of view of Development studies, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), turned to area studies considered to be "vital to national interests and to intercultural understanding."²⁴

Those focusing on the Middle East were among them. It is useful to recall that "from the early 1950s into the 1970s, modernization theory was the dominant paradigm in U.S. area studies in general and Middle East studies in particular, informing a mass of research and writing on political change, economic development and social transformation, and interacting with Orientalism in complex ways."²⁵ However widely its influence on different disciplines varied, "overall it certainly functioned as the 'big idea' underpinning a good chunk of US social science research about the world in this period."²⁶

The "dominant paradigm" fueled interpretations that served as apologies for intervention and the politics of repression aimed at intellectuals and political activists committed to movements of secularism and democracy. Daniel Lerner's study, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East*, a work which was considered by social scientists as an effective response to Edward Said's influential study, *Orientalism*, provided the template for the reductionist interpretation of Middle Eastern states and societies. It contributed to promoting a monolithic view of contemporary

Arab states as stuck on sectarianism and unprepared to jettison traditional habits in favor of modernity.²⁷

The critical literature on contemporary North Africa and the Middle East offers a very different body of evidence, whether on the modern history of Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Gaza, Palestine, Lebanon, or Saudi Arabia.²⁸ Primary sources of U.S. foreign policy are similarly at odds with the outlook expressed in Lerner's *Traditional Society*, insofar as they disclose extensive political and economic interests guiding U.S. policy.²⁹ Those records, however, also serve to confirm how U.S. officials viewed the relationship between development and foreign policy.³⁰

Exporting Democracy: True Believers and Cautious Realists

The end of the Soviet regime and the accompanying Cold War undermined the ideological justification of development and modernization policies that had long been publicly rationalized in terms of containing the USSR. Neither the policies nor the studies that legitimized them, disappeared. They were reincarnated in the form of democracy promotion, which some advocates claimed had been their original intent in the postwar period, as did Sean M. Lynn-Jones, editor of *International Security* and Harvard University's Belfer Center Studies in International Security. In his view, following World War II, promoting democracy was "America's next mission."³¹ It was an approach that captured the "idea of divine chosenness, and the political conviction that the new republic of liberty was decisive for world history."³² Reminiscent of Henry B. Luce's vision of "The American Century," it was adopted by supporters of the "Project for a New American Century" in the 1990s.³³

The campaign to promote democracy rapidly gained the support of U.S. academics who were "quick to pick up the scent of democracy promotion as a vector of bringing open nation-states under Western global governance."³⁴ By 2004, "approximately \$2 billion per year (roughly half from public and private sources in North America and half from largely public sources in Europe)" was devoted to projects related to democracy assistance.³⁵ "By 2005, it had reached the level of ritual," as Chomsky wrote in *Failed States* (2006).³⁶

Writing in 2012, Thomas Carothers, head of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and its Democracy and the Rule of Law Program, and a prolific and critical writer on the subject, similarly held the view that democracy promotion had long been part of U.S. foreign policy. It was

further encouraged in an international environment where, according to Carothers, the U.S. and its allies faced no serious rivals.³⁷

In 1983, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), "was instituted as the 'overt', public arm of Project Democracy, in which the CIA and the NSC handled the 'covert' arm."³⁸ The *Journal of Democracy*, edited by Larry Diamond of the Hoover Institution, became a recognized resource for the democracy export agenda. According to Diamond's position, "democracies possess unique virtues. They do not indulge in politics of ethnic cleansing or use weapons of mass destruction against their own populations or those of allied democracies. In addition, they offer favorable investment climates and honor international treaties."³⁹

Diamond conceded that the U.S. and other democracies were in need of reform, but he had little to say about the history of ethnic cleansing conducted by the U.S. against its own indigenous population; or the history of supporting terrorist groups to undermine left-wing movements, including democratically elected regimes, as in Latin America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia; or the sale of weapons of mass destruction, as in the case of the U.S. to Iraq, prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion.

In a rejoinder to David Forsythe's criticism of the "democratic-peace proposition", Sean Lynn-Jones, derided the claim that "democracies sometimes have sponsored covert action or 'state terrorism' against other democracies."⁴⁰ Ignoring the impact of "US actions in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954 and Chile in 1973," Lynn-Jones claimed that since the states targeted had "dubious democratic credentials," the U.S. could not be accused of intervening against democracies.

In 2000, Thomas Risse, professor and chair of international politics in the Department of Political and Social Science at the Free University of Berlin, offered another defense of the export of democracy along the lines of Diamond's work. As Risse argued, "liberal democracies not only rarely fight each other, as the 'democratic peace' argument correctly claims, they form security communities that effectively reduce the security dilemma to insignificant levels and exclude the possibility of great-power war among them."⁴¹

Thomas Carothers, who had served in programs of "democracy enhancement" in the State Department under President Reagan, eventually became director of the ambitious and well-funded Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and its Democracy and the Rule of Law Program. In that capacity, he offered an approach that endorsed a cautious realism that did not eschew the contradictions of U.S. foreign policy, observing

that the U.S. benefited by operating in an international environment where it had few serious rivals.

In many respects, Carothers' prolific output on democracy promotion is unique, in that it has been accompanied by a critical strain against the hypocrisies of U.S. policy. He has not been reluctant to point to the conflict between the formal objectives of U.S. policies that claim to promote democracy and the priorities of U.S. policy that undermine them. But he has also consistently stopped short of confronting the significance of the contradictions involved.

Carothers situated the prodemocracy movement in U.S. policy in the context of the dramatic changes affecting Eastern Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia and the USSR from the mid-1970s to the 1990s. While the political trends in these regions differed, Carothers discerned a dominant trend "towards more liberal and often more democratic governance," which rendered their transformation part of a global phenomenon. Carothers found S. P. Huntington's description of the "third wave" of democracy, particularly apt.⁴² But he appeared to find some deeper solace in other connections between current developments and the modernization and development policies of the past.

Indeed, Huntington's book by the same name furthers Carothers that the dynamism of this wave had effectively buried "deterministic, and often culturally noxious assumptions about democracy, such as that only countries with an American-style middle class or a heritage of Protestant individualism could become democratic."

Carothers was convinced that the bipartisan appeal of rule of law programs was enhanced by recognition of their "reassuring roots in the formative 'modernization' period of political and economic development work of the 1960s."⁴³ The reassurance offered by such roots was that the stabilization of sociopolitical systems which was an inevitable feature of modernization, would not lead to increased popular participation. Instead, in accord with the "formative 'modernization' period" of the 1960s, there would be support for "limited, top-down forms of democratic change [that] did not risk upsetting the traditional structures of power with which the United States has long been allied."⁴⁴

In a volume co-authored with Marina Ottaway that dealt with the Middle East, Carothers admitted that "the new democracy imperative for the Middle East," was "driven not by a trend toward reform in the region, but by the West's own security concerns."⁴⁵ Washington's so-called "soft diplomacy," as distinct from its militarization of policy, meant that the

U.S. was soft on dictators when such policies coincided with U.S. interests irrespective of its impact on the society and state concerned.

Hence,

as urgent and serious as the prodemocracy imperative appears to many in the US policy community, the stubborn reality remains that the United States has other important security-related and economic interests, such as cooperation on antiterrorism enforcement actions and ensuring secure access to oil. Such interests impel it to maintain close ties with many of the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and to be wary of the possibility of rapid or unpredictable political change. Given the strength and persistence of these other interests, it is not clear whether the new prodemocracy impulse will result in a fundamental change of the long-standing US support for authoritarian and semi-authoritarian friends in the region or simply end up as an attractive wrapping around a largely unchanged core.⁴⁶

In so far as Iraq is concerned, Carothers’ candid assessment of the G. W. Bush administration’s fraudulent claims demonstrated that “the notion that democracy promotion plays a dominant role in Bush policy is a myth” devised after the invasion to cover for the justifications for the invasion.⁴⁷ Carothers did not fail to admit that for many U.S. policy appeared to be “self-serving and profoundly hypocritical. America’s own recent violations of the rule of law and human rights only complete this picture.”⁴⁸

Washington faced a choice and a risk, he concluded, in “expending real political capital that up to now has been used in the service of economic and security interests. This is the key choice facing the United States with respect to promoting democracy in the Middle East.”⁴⁹ For the U.S. to implement the policies of democratic reform it claims to favor, a “significant change of course—away from decades of support for political stasis and from deep attachments to particular rulers,” would be necessary.⁵⁰

Carothers continued to insist that “democracy promotion” was at the core of U.S. foreign policy although he conceded the difficulties it faced. He was no less straightforward in debunking the “fads” of democracy campaigns, including those involving the “civil society craze in the 1990s,” or those focused on the rule of law.⁵¹ The civil society concept was misused, he argued, with unrealistic expectations in addition. As for the rule of law, Carothers admitted that “despite the many rule-of-law programs now under way, we actually know troublingly little about what we are doing in this domain.”⁵²

In 2002 Carothers was prepared to admit that the so-called “transition paradigm” to democracy had failed. The key elements that had come to play a central role, such as,

political party development, civil society strengthening, judicial reform, and media development almost never conform to the technocratic ideal of rational sequences on which the indicator frameworks and strategic objectives of democracy promoters are built. Instead they are chaotic processes of change that go backwards and sideways as much as forward, and do not do so in any regular manner.⁵³

Without hesitation Carothers thus demolished the underlying framework of development programs. In the process, he called attention to the criteria according to which democracy promotion operated, which was based on the calculation of U.S. interests. Erasing the pretense of significant differences on this score between the administrations of George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, Carothers underlined their common exploitation of the democracy paradigm.

All of these administrations ended up making democracy promotion the rhetorical framework of their foreign policy. Yet, at the same time, all three pursued what might be described as a semi-realist policy in practice: Where supporting democracy in another country or region was consistent with U.S. economic and security interests, the United States stood up for democracy; but where policy makers saw strong economic or security reasons for staying on friendly terms with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, Washington almost always downplayed its democracy concerns.⁵⁴

Unlike Hodge’s survey of the third phase of development studies, with its apology for the renewal of American empire, Carothers offered a blunt description of U.S. foreign policy following September 2001, in which he exposed Washington’s ties with repressive regimes, observing its justification in the wake of the terrorist attacks. In the process, he confronted G. W. Bush’s Undersecretary of State, Paula Dobriansky, who claimed that the Bush administration “always strikes the right balance between democracy and security,” pointing out that