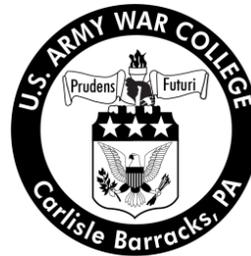


Strategy Research Project

Why Rush to Democracy?

by

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United States Air Force



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

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Abstract

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When liberating or conquering a country with a hostile population, it is contrary to US interest to immediately create a democratic government. A quick transition to an independent, democratic government requires a friendly population, a tradition or understanding of democratic principles, a stable security force, and a core of competent politicians. In the absence of these, a US military-led transitional governing authority should set conditions for a slow, deliberate move to a fully sovereign democracy. This paper will compare and contrast countries that the US has controlled and the transition of that control to an independent democracy. Specific emphasis will be placed on the examples of Germany, Japan, the Philippines, the American post-Civil War South and Iraq, and those lessons will be applied to Afghanistan.

Why Rush to Democracy?

When liberating or conquering a country with a hostile population, it is contrary to US interest to immediately create a democratic government. It is, and will most likely remain, US policy to establish a democracy whenever conquering or liberating a country. US public opinion and our democratic traditions require that we install and support a democracy whenever possible. However, rushing to a fully sovereign democracy yields too much power too quickly to the conquered country, causing a variety of problems during the transitional period. Instead, a US military-led transitional governing authority should set conditions for a slow, deliberate move to full democracy, while retaining the power to directly influence the actions of that government during the transition. This is the most reliable method to create a stable country with a lasting democratic government that is friendly to the United States.

In recent wars, the US has been too quick to create an independent democratic government, which has hindered our own efforts to provide security and establish effective political institutions. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the populations were not traditionally democratic. Both populations were fractured with deep internal ethnic conflicts. The US-led invasions changed the style of government in each nation, and disrupted distribution of power. Both countries experienced an abrupt shift in makeup of the ruling groups. Without adequate time to shape and influence the population, quickly instituted sovereign democracies can lead to an opposition government or, at best, a difficult partner. These newly elected governments frequently oppose US goals and interests within the country and undermine the desired US end-state. In future conflicts, the US should slow the democratic process to better shape the post-war country. This was the standard practice used before the turn-of-the-century. A deliberate march

towards democracy will ensure that the US has a free hand to stabilize the country and a strong partner in the effort. In addition, it will ensure that the follow-on government is elected from a pool of people that the US is able to mentor and that the population is able to evaluate before being rushed into nationwide elections.

The current US policy is to establish a democracy whenever possible. The foundation of this policy is derived from the Democratic Peace Theory. This theory states that democratic nations rarely, if ever, go to war against another democratic nation.¹ Democracies fight nations with other types of government and non-democracies fight each other, but historically, liberal democracies have never fought each other. Theoretically, as more countries convert to democracy, there will be fewer enemies to confront the US and more peaceful conditions will prevail globally. The Democratic Peace Theory, regardless of its validity, has traction within the US government, population, and academia. The popularity of this theory also flourishes within the ruling elites of many of our key allies. The political nature of conflict and our current commitment to coalition warfare will continue to require our support of democracy in conquered and liberated countries.

President Clinton's goal of promoting democracy was highlighted in his 1996 National Security Strategy. The report "elaborates a national security strategy that is tailored for this new era and builds upon America's unmatched strengths. Focusing on new threats and new opportunities, the strategy's central goals are: 1. To enhance our security with military forces that are ready to fight and with effective representation abroad. 2. To bolster America's economic revitalization. 3. To promote democracy abroad."² President Clinton further stated "I am committed to forging a new public

consensus to sustain our active engagement abroad in pursuit of our cherished goal -- a more secure world where democracy and free markets know no borders.”³ The strategy marked a shift in US policy. During the Cold War, we had supported many democratic rulers who were willing to side with the United States over the Soviet Union. The lack of a peer competitor gave the US government the opportunity to realign its philosophy to the more idealistic policy of spreading democracy throughout the world.

The establishment of democracy continued as a key national goal under President George W. Bush. In November of 2003, in a joint statement with Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, President Bush declared that the shared work to establish democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq is essential to the defeat of global terrorism. They specifically stated “We support the aspirations of all of Iraq’s people for a united, representative government that upholds human rights and the rule of law as cornerstones of democracy.”⁴ There was no question that the sovereignty of Iraq and Afghanistan would be turned over to democratically-elected governments. A key question was the timing of the transitions. In justifying the invasion of Iraq, President Bush has stated that the war would be over quickly and the Iraqi people would welcome the US intervention. By this logic, sovereign control of Iraq could be turned over to Iraqis shortly after Saddam Hussein was defeated. The Bush-Blair joint statement was clear on the timing of the transfer, proposing “The day when Iraqis govern themselves must come quickly. As early as possible...”⁵

It is clear that both US political parties, Republican and Democratic, firmly endorsed the Democratic Peace Theory and are committed to the concept of spreading democracy. The policy of creating democracies is likely to continue as an American

value and a national expectation. There are simply no alternatives that would satisfy the Western idealism ingrained within our own and our allies' populations. To ignore the profound American belief in the promotion of democracy as a fundamental goal of US foreign policy and national strategy would leave elected officials from either political party open to attack within the domestic political arena. We have learned from past experience that leaving a system other than democracy in place has very poor results. It has been proven time and again that even the most benevolent dictator, installed using American power and supported with American might, can turn into a despot. Even Saddam Hussein was once a US ally, receiving some US support during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.

The United States attacked the Taliban government of Afghanistan on October 7th, 2001, in reprisal for the September 11th Al Qaeda terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon. Within a few short weeks the US campaign in Afghanistan swept the Taliban regime from power and drove their Al Qaeda guests into the mountainous region bordering Pakistan. Afghanistan's democracy was established 3 years after the United States military destroyed the Taliban central government. In 2004, Afghan elections were held that covered government positions at the national level, granting them full authority and sovereignty over the country, but retaining a very large foreign military presence to support the new government. Afghan society had no previous experience with democracy. In general, the Afghan population is anti-US. This can be attributed to a historical dislike of outsiders and the Afghans' fundamental Muslim, anti-Western leanings. Because the population is anti-US and the United States retained very little control over who was permitted to run for office, some of the elected

officials were anti-US, former warlords, or criminals. The quick granting of sovereignty allowed enemies of the US to become established within the ministries and in the office of the presidency. Although it wasn't immediately clear to US officials overseeing the Afghan efforts, once these elected Afghan leaders realized that they were free from US control they were able to conduct criminal activity or strike out directly against the coalition with little fear of reprisal. The best example of this was in 2012 when US Ambassador Ryan Crocker stopped all US funding for the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture, calling its leadership agents of the Haqqani Network, a major insurgent group within the country. Although US funding stopped, Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture officials kept their jobs and continued their work, undermining the US-led coalition uninterrupted.

Another example is President Karzai's damning and unsupportive comments against the United States forces operating within Afghanistan. Karzai's frequent and public rants on night raids and civilian casualties were effective propaganda for the anti-coalition insurgents. President Karzai has criticized US behavior, saying that, "This has been going on for too long. It is by all means the end of the rope here. This form of activity, this behavior, cannot be tolerated. It's past, past, past the time."⁶ In another incident, he questioned the validity of a joint US-Afghan investigation and sided instead with villager eyewitness accounts, stating, "The [Afghan National] Army chief has just reported, I don't know if you read his report, that the Afghan investigation team did not receive the cooperation that they expected from the United States."⁷ Most recently President Karzai unilaterally banned US Special Forces from operating in Wardak Province over unsubstantiated rumors of extra-judiciary killings. Karzai publicly claimed

a student had been taken by US Special Forces and later found dead, mutilated and beheaded. US and Afghan security forces investigations later found that the man was a known member of the Hezb-i-Islami, a local insurgent group. The investigations show that the man was most likely captured and killed by a rival insurgent group led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.⁸ These statements by President Karzai severely damage US efforts in Afghanistan by degrading our trust with the Afghan population. If a slower process of granting sovereignty had been used, President Karzai could have been readily influenced or, if truly necessary, removed from office. It is yet to be seen if the Afghan democracy will survive the departure of the majority of the coalition troops in 2014.

The Afghan transition to democracy is not the first time the United States has controlled a country and changed its form of government to democracy. Relevant historical cases go back over 100 years ago, with Iraq being the most recent and the most closely related. A brief examination of several cases and an emphasis on Iraq shows that a transition to democracy should be a slow, deliberate process.

In the post-civil war South, US Federal (Northern) troops were used to dissolve, replace and oversee the transition of the state governments shortly after the war ended. New elections were held with the Federal troops ensuring their validity, mainly by making sure freed slaves were able to exercise their right to vote and anti-unionists were disqualified from running for office. In addition, for ten years after the war, Federal troops remained to ensure those elected local and state governments behaved within the norms established by the Federal government officials. There are examples of military commanders overruling legislative actions and overturning judicial verdicts

whenever they deemed them improper. Military governing officials frequently oversaw the process of registering voters, protecting African-Americans in the free exercise of their rights while preventing many former confederate government officials from voting. These actions ensured that the newly-freed slaves were not blatantly discriminated against and that southern states elected officials who were loyal to the union. After the withdrawal of federal troops, the southern states were given full sovereignty and although they later regressed in their institutional treatment of African-Americans, they remained loyal to the union.

As a colonial possession, the US transitioned the Philippines to democracy over the course of 30 years. The United States gained possession of the Philippine Islands as a result of the Spanish American War. In 1902, the Philippine rebellion against US colonial occupation was defeated by US military forces. Fourteen years later, US officials promised the Philippine population “some form” of self-government, which was finally granted in 1936. The transition period was interrupted by Japanese occupation during WWII. Full Philippine independence was not granted by the United States until 1946, but even then the US attached a few strings. The Philippine population was ready for independence and during the ten-year transition period, from 1936 to 1946, the Philippine population was not vehemently anti-US. The Philippine democracy has lasted for 66 years and, although it is not considered an advanced country, its democracy has been tested and it is considered by Western, liberal democratic standards to be successful.

In the case of Germany, the Western Allied countries transitioned control of the western portion of the country to its new government over the course of 10 years, from

1945 to 1955. At the end of WWII, the German economy was destroyed and the German population was war-weary and offered little resistance to Allied occupation. The population was educated, with some democratic experience. Initial control was held tightly by US, British, French, and Soviet military commanders. The French, British and US zones were merged before granting West Germany administrative independence. The Federal Republic of Germany, founded on 23 May 1949, was declared "fully sovereign" on 5 May 1955. Germany has flourished after the transition, remaining a strong and stable democracy, and regained a place among the most powerful nations in the world.

In another WWII example, Japan was transitioned to a westernized, independent democracy over a seven-year period. By the implementation of the Constitution of Japan, on 3 May 1947, the Empire of Japan was dissolved. Japan was occupied by the Allied Powers, with the US leading until 28 April 1952. During the period of the occupation, Japan was changed to a democratic state. Japan's traditional militaristic monarchy was replaced with a constitutional monarchy, where the emperor serves in only a ceremonial role. The new Japanese constitution was written by a small group of US military lawyers within the government section of General MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for Allied Powers. Japan had a progressive and educated population, though they had no history of democratic governance. Historian John Dower, in his book *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq* states "the existence of a stable, resilient, sophisticated civil society on the receiving end of occupation policies"⁹ helped make it possible to radically change Japan's form of governance. Although culturally very different from the US, Japan's transition to democracy was very

successful and the Japanese are firmly established as a leading economic power. In large part this was due to the occupying force's success in controlling every aspect of Japanese society, including religion, politics and the economy, throughout the democratic transition period.

Regarding the transfer of sovereignty to post WWII governments in Japan and Germany, David Edelstein, Chair of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, offers an opinion in his article "Occupational Hazards." He states, "A strategy of contingent withdrawal requires a balance between returning sovereignty to the occupied population and retaining sufficient control over the direction of the occupied territory. Thus, in Japan, the United States retained the emperor and established a new constitution shortly after the occupation began as a way of communicating its intent to withdraw and return control to an independent Japanese government; in Germany, the United States credibly signaled its intention to permit self-government by allowing the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, six years before the occupation formally ended. At the same time, the United States also insisted on maintaining significant control over the emerging Japanese and German states, and particularly their military and foreign policies"¹⁰

During the transition period, the US maintained tight control over Japan's post-war government, and took many actions by decree from US military commanders. For example, many senior Japanese officials were tried for war crimes and sentenced to death; however, General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in post-war Japan, personally exempted all members of the Japanese imperial family from prosecution. By exempting the imperial family and other key senior Japanese officials,

he ensured their endorsement of US policies during the post-war transition. By tightly controlling the functions of the government, rebuilding the country over time, and gradually transferring sovereignty, the US was able to successfully implement democracy in Japan. Japanese democratic government has, for many decades, been among the most stable and powerful countries in the world.

The United States invaded Iraq on March 19th, 2003, with the purpose of removing the Ba'athist government led by President Saddam Hussein. Victory was quickly claimed by the United States on May 4th, 2003 when President Bush declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Iraq's democracy was established about one year later. On 8 June 2004, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546 was adopted unanimously, calling for "the end of the occupation and the assumption of full responsibility and authority by a fully sovereign and independent Interim Government of Iraq by 30 June 2004" and on 28 June 2004, the occupation was nominally ended by the US led Coalition Provisional Authority. Shortly afterwards, segments of the Iraqi population lashed out violently against continued US presence. The Iraqi population was reasonably educated but had little experience with democracy. They were not pro-US, but have a large, functioning middle class. Marine General Anthony Zinni (retired), head of US Central Command from 1997 to 2000, 10 October 2002, stated "If we think there is a fast solution to changing the governance of Iraq, then we don't understand history, the nature of the country, the divisions, or the underneath suppressed passions that could rise up. God help us if we think this transition will occur easily. The attempts I've seen to install democracy in short periods of time where there is no history and no roots have failed." In fact in June of 1999, US Central Command sponsored a seminar

to identify interagency issues and insights on how to manage a post-Saddam Iraq. The recently declassified report from that seminar states, "A number of the participants were concerned...that no Arab government would welcome the lengthy US presence that would be required to install and sustain a democratic government and might openly object to the idea of democratic government itself."¹¹ It was just after Iraq was granted national sovereignty that violence returned to many areas. There are many issues that contributed to the renewed violence in Iraq, but one definite factor was the rushed democratic process. The quick elections, covering all levels of governance, divided the population along ethnic, tribal and religious lines. Groups traditionally in power suddenly found themselves on the outside looking in. Minority groups in most areas were immediately alienated. Because they had no confidence that their interests would be protected, some turned to violence to change the dynamics. The lack of experience with democracy caused the knee-jerk reaction. Iraq's independent government lacked politicians seasoned enough to solve the underlying problems, and Iraq's newly-rebuilt security forces were unable to stop the cycle of violence. Despite these early signs of trouble President Bush stated his attitude, and perhaps reflected the American attitude, towards democracy in Iraq when he said "There was a time when many said the cultures of Japan and Germany were incapable of sustaining democratic values. Well, they were wrong. Some say the same of Iraq today. They are mistaken."¹² The democratic government of Iraq has survived the withdrawal of coalition forces. The government is slowly working through many difficult issues and at times seems on the verge of collapse. It is not yet known whether the democratic system established after the US-led invasion will survive in Iraq.

There are many justifications for speeding the transition of a conquered country to a sovereign democracy. US domestic politics can play a large role in whether a war is labeled a conquest or a liberation. If it is a war of liberation, then logic calls for quick elections and the rapid transfer of sovereign powers to what the US population assumes will be our newly chosen, grateful, and loyal partners. A quick and successful transition saves the United States money that would otherwise be spent running the country while overseeing the creation of the new government. It also proves to our new partners, especially those in an Islamic country, that we are not crusaders on a campaign of conquest. In addition, this course of action assumes a similarly quick handover of security responsibility to the new government, allowing US military forces to withdraw. However, a quick transition to democracy requires several factors to be successful. It needs a friendly population, a population that understands and wants a democratic government, a stable security force, and a core of competent politicians who can not only run a country, but also run a successful election campaign. Without these conditions, while a quick transition is theoretically possible, it is very difficult to achieve. Time is necessary to either change society or, at the very least, set it on a clear path towards meeting these conditions.

The American policy to install a democracy after conquering or liberating a country will continue to be implemented. The desire of the United States will always be to transition governance and sovereignty as quickly as possible. But if we value the stability of the new democracy, the timing of the transition will need to be derived from consideration of the previously mentioned factors. One of the most important of these factors is the level of hostility that the population has towards the United States or

western democracy in general. If confronted by a hostile population, moving quickly to sovereign democracy will hinder US control over the newly elected government. This will most likely degrade our ability to establish a lasting democracy, and will limit our ability to maintain security within the country. It is especially difficult to cede control to an unreliable partner while maintaining a large military force within the country. Combat operations can be very frustrating when the military commander finds himself at odds with the sovereign government of the nation he is operating within. Some degree of control must be maintained over the new government until it has proven to be a reliable partner.

When building a democracy, Dankwart Rustow proposed in his book *Transitions to Democracy*¹³ that time is a critical factor. He states that time must be allowed for the ruling elite to work out how the democratic system of government will be set up and how power will be shared. He proposes that this aspect is much more important than actually gaining the consent of the population. Through agreement with and among the country's power brokers, national consensus can be reached and propagated throughout the population. Under this theory it would be much more important to coopt the existing power brokers and empower them than it would be to use Strategic Communications to influence the population directly. Rustow's theory on the ruling elites' power sharing supports the conclusion that a transition period of only a few years is not enough time to resolve the internal differences of a country, especially for a country as fractured as Iraq or Afghanistan. In addition, granting administrative control to the newly sovereign nation may skew the internal dynamics and make it much more difficult for the ruling elite to agree on a power sharing system. Some may make unreasonable demands or hold out

for more power in the belief that either the United States is on their side or that their position will be greatly improved once the United States leaves.

In their Christian Science article, *Democracy in Afghanistan is Wishful Thinking*¹⁴, Thomas Johnson and M. Chris Mason also criticize the speed and process used in creating the new Afghan government. They focus on the three sources from which a government derives legitimacy: tradition, religion and rule of law. When a country's system of government transitions from one form to another, the new system should derive its legitimacy from one or more of these three sources. If it does not, the system of government being imposed upon the nation needs some degree of coercion and a significant period of time in order to allow the new system to take root. Giving power to the new government early cedes some of the ability to coerce it and rushes the immature government. Johnson and Mason state that, "A feudal society...does not magically shortcut 400 years of political development and morph into a democracy in a decade." When looking at the timing of the transition, I believe the US expected that just a few years would magically shortcut the necessary process and result in an Afghan democracy.

When confronted by a hostile population, US policy should be one of slow, deliberate transition to self-governance. To implement this, the US Department of State should lead our efforts, focused mainly on improving the government at the national capital. The political and institutional environments within the capital require the guidance of experienced diplomats and technocrats. The safety and security inherent in the national capital will also give US Department of State and US Agency for International Development (USAID) employees the freedom of movement they require

to travel to each element of national governance that they mentor. US military forces also need to be very engaged and visible, but not as the lead for training and mentoring political institutions within the national governing structure. US government civilians are much more experienced at dealing with the strategic and political skills that national politicians and technocrats need to develop, and a large US civilian presence within the ministries is not as disruptive as a military one would be.

If US efforts focus on governance at the national level using US government civilians, then US military advisors and mentors should be left to oversee the details of governance at the provincial and local levels. Within a typical country, there are thousands of government offices and organizations at the provincial, district and municipal levels. While the Department of State and USAID would have a difficult time travelling to these locations, US military forces would already be in most of these areas. The US military has developed considerable local and provincial governance expertise and is able to effectively operate in a hostile environment. The military also has an overwhelming number of personnel available for the mission. This capability is needed since the relatively small number of seasoned Department of State officers who are experienced in nation-building, are language-qualified, and have in-country or regional experience would barely scratch the surface of the numberless provincial and local government offices. USAID is even more limited in the number of personnel it has available to send outside of the national capital. However, USAID procedures and processes lend themselves to implementing projects in a remote manner using local representatives. USAID should tie itself to the military commanders throughout the country to ensure the project reports that they receive from their local implementing

partners are indeed correct. A firm USAID connection to local US military commanders can ensure that corruption on US projects is kept to a minimum. US Department of State should focus its efforts on the national capital region, USAID should work throughout the country but from offices within the national capital, and the US military should focus their work at the provincial and district levels. While it is important to divide the work as outlined, it is imperative that these three entities closely coordinate their efforts.

Whatever method and tools are used, the implementation of a democratic government must be more deliberate. Implementation must begin with local elections. Based on the success of those elections, and the performance of newly elected local governments, the speed of provincial, and then subsequently national, elections, can be determined. This also allows the US to identify or create a cadre of national governance technocrats and oversee their establishment and training, while giving them time to develop the necessary skills to perform independently. Maintaining control allows the US to retain the ability to remove anyone within a ministry who is incompetent or working to undermine the US presence. It also gives new politicians the opportunity to start at local and provincial levels, gain experience, establish a record of success, and build governing coalitions before competing in national elections.

The difference between advising an independent government agency and overseeing one may seem subtle, but it is actually stark. When the leadership of an agency is being advised, they have the ability to say “no” to their US counterpart, not only on specific issues, but on the entire direction the organization takes. This can at times work directly against US interests. This danger was highlighted in the Afghan

Ministry of Information example discussed earlier in this paper. Once these agencies are granted “independence,” it is very difficult for the US to overrule them or to remove a Minister from his position. Overseeing a new government for an extended period benefits both the United States and the host nation. It gives the US advisor the power to direct change when an action is against US interest or when it is a bad governing practice. It also gives the local national officials some degree of protection while they are becoming accustomed to their new responsibilities.

Conclusion

Rushing to a sovereign, democratic government quickly after seizing a country is not in the best interest of the United States. This is especially true when confronted with a hostile population. Historical examples consistently show that a slow, deliberate transition provides the best opportunity for lasting success. Stable, prosperous, and friendly governments are created after taking the time to influence the population and organize the ruling elite. Conversely, our haste in Iraq and Afghanistan may leave behind dysfunctional governments in control of unstable countries which may quickly become enemies of the United States, effectively wasting more than ten years of the blood and treasure that we have poured into these countries. In the future, new governments should be created in a deliberate, tightly-controlled manner, and given sovereignty only if conditions are favorable. As favorable conditions develop, sovereignty should be transferred to the newly created democracy beginning at the local level and working up to a fully independent national government. Espousing democracy will remain a basic tenet of US foreign policy and the US military must be prepared to meet this expectation whenever embarking on a campaign to overthrow a foreign government. This decade-long process must be planned in an adaptive manner in order

to adjust to the constantly changing political and military environments within the conquered land.

Endnotes

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