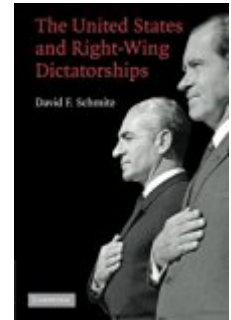


David F. Schmitz. *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965-1989.*
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Since the end of the Cold War, democracy promotion has been (re)discovered as one of the main tenets of US foreign policy in the 20th century. Smith, Tony, *America's Mission. The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton (NJ) 1994; Cox, Michael; Ikenberry, G. John; Inoguchi, Takashi (Eds.), *American Democracy Promotion. Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, Oxford 2000; Monten, Jonathan, *The Roots of the Bush Doctrine. Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy*, in: *International Security* 29 (2005)4, p. 112-156; Hils, Jochen; Wilzewski, Jürgen (Eds.), *Defekte Demokratie – Crusader State? Die Weltpolitik der USA in der Ära Bush*, Trier 2006. As Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi put it: »There are studies galore of American foreign policy in the modern epoch, but until Tony Smith's challenging volume on democracy promotion (published in 1994) there had been no serious academic study of the subject.« According to the authors, there are at least three reasons why scholars neglected the subject in the past. First, intellectual prejudices – realists and radicals (in terms of International Relations theory) alike

refused to take claims about American democracy promotion seriously –, second, the Cold War, and, third, the political worldviews of leading U.S. policy-makers in that era. »Though fought under the banner of democracy«, Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi make clear, »after 1947 America's principal objective was not to promote political freedom but to contain the Soviet Union, and in the rough and tough world of the cold war policymakers tended to judge their friends not by their liberal credentials but by their loyalty to the larger cause of anti-communism.« Cox, Michael; Ikenberry, G. John; Inoguchi, Takashi, Introduction, in: Cox; Ikenberry; Inoguchi, *American Democracy Promotion*, p. 1-17 (4). In an intriguing way, David Schmitz's meticulously researched book on the United States' policy toward right-wing dictatorships from 1965 to 1989 sheds light on this dark chapter of American foreign policy. It shows how the United States, with the rise and fall of the so-called Imperial Presidency and the National Security State, first lost its moral compass in foreign affairs and then struggled to regain and maintain it. Schmitz criticizes Smith's pioneering volume on democracy promotion for what he calls »a tri-

umphalist interpretation of American foreign policy«, which, according to Schmitz, has emerged since the end of the Cold War and »claims that the United States won the contest with the Soviet Union because of its values and its promotion of liberalism and democracy«. But, as Schmitz makes clear, this is at best a one-sided view. As he puts it: »American support for right-wing dictatorships demonstrates that the promotion of democracy was not a consistent, central goal of the United States, and the history of supporting authoritarian regimes cannot be dismissed or ignored in evaluating American foreign policy since 1965.« (p. 5)

There seems to be two main reasons why the United States applied a double standard in its relations with foreign nations during the Cold War. First, »racist assumptions« (p. 241) on the part of U.S. decision-makers, who considered the peoples of the so-called Third World as too immature to govern themselves and, more gravely, prone to communist seduction. Furthermore, according to an evolutionary modernization theory, which was predominant in several administrations, right-wing dictatorships were seen as part of the transition to democracy. Totalitarian (e.g. communist) states, in contrast, were considered to be immune to this kind of gradual and inevitable political change. So when he was asked why he was pushing for human rights in the Soviet Union but not in South Africa, President Ronald Reagan asserted »that change was inevitable in an authoritarian state, but not in a totalitarian one« (p. 226). Schmitz's book is most at odds with Smith's pioneering volume on democracy promotion when it comes to the Reagan presidency. While Smith concedes that democracy promotion as a foreign policy goal »was notably absent in the Johnson, Nixon, and Ford years«, he also concludes that »no administration since Wilson's has been as vigorous or as consistent in its dedication to the promotion of democracy abroad as that of Ronald Reagan« (Smith, *America's Mission*, p. 9, 304). Schmitz's view is more sophisticated. He sides with George Shultz, secretary of state to Reagan

from 1982 to 1989, who he quotes as saying that the President, while a proponent of democracy, was always »disposed to give the benefit of the doubt to an anti-Communist leader, even if authoritarian and dictatorial« (p. 222). Second, these views only became U.S. policy because the confrontation with the Soviet Union had nurtured the rise of an unchecked presidency in America, which was the by-product of a Cold War consensus. In the heyday of the Cold War neither Congress nor the American people were willing to challenge the policy of containment and its lacking moral foundation. Against this background, it was even possible to topple elected governments, like that of Salvadore Allende in Chile – a case which figures prominently in Schmitz's book (it also deals with Angola, Congo, El Salvador, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and South Africa). It was only in the wake of the Vietnam War that the Cold War consensus was beginning to crumble. The American public and Congress started to realize »that the United States had completely lost its moral compass« (p. 129). As Schmitz outlines, Jimmy Carter was the first president who sought »to create a post-Cold War foreign policy that placed American ideals first« (p. 143). During the presidency of Ronald Reagan it then became clear that a return to a policy of double standard wasn't a viable option. As Schmitz recapitulates his chapter on the »Great Communicator«: »When the policy of supporting authoritarian regimes led to a series of crises and became a political issue at home, much of Congress and the public opposed Reagan's efforts and forced the president to alter his policy.« (p. 240)

Schmitz rightly concludes that prior to the publication of his book there was »no comprehensive study of how the American policy toward right wing dictatorships changed in the wake of the Vietnam War« (p. 4). The book is also an important and necessary (and highly readable) contribution to the study of contemporary American foreign policy. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of the domestic dimension of foreign

policy. On the other hand, it reminds us not to mistake presidential rhetoric for presidential action and to be suspicious of those moral justifications every U.S. president since Richard Nixon has been forced to provide. As Schmitz outlines, President George W. Bush, though he, too, has cast his war on terrorism »in terms of promoting freedom«, »has relied on and provided support to nations, such as Pakistan and Saudia Arabia, that are ruled by autocratic leaders«. Schmitz, therefore, concludes »that the ideological, economic, and racial arguments used to rationalize American support for authoritarian regimes continue to have influence and shape policy toward some nations« (p. 243).

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