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Home-made Adjustments? US Human Rights and Democracy Promotion

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This paper analyses US approach to human rights and democracy promotion to track the adjustments it has undergone in the last decade. In addition, by focusing on such landmark events as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, changes in the presidency and the Arab Spring, the paper aims to reveal possible patterns in these adjustments. Showing that discursive and practical adjustments to US approach to human rights and democracy promotion have followed from the 9/11 attacks and presidential changes, the paper argues that US policies are likely to be more susceptible to internal, rather than external, developments.

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United States Human rights Democracy promotion USAID

Introduction

The US has rarely faced the challenge of proving or even defining its actorness in international politics, and has been involved in democracy promotion for several decades. Although the degree of US influence on international affairs has varied over the course of time, its influence *per se* has never been questioned. Unlike the case of the EU, doubt over the role of the US has come from within, questioning whether the US should be involved in international affairs (Deudney and Meiser 2008). US foreign policy has been marked by "searching for purpose" (Dumbrell 2008:88). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal internationalism or democracy promotion by President Bill Clinton became the motto of US foreign policy. The election of George W. Bush reaffirmed the commitment to democracy promotion, coupled, however, with the fight against terrorism, which allowed for military intervention under the banner of democracy promotion.

This paper aims to understand: what triggers adjustments, if any, in the US approach to human rights and democracy promotion, and whether these adjustments have followed any pattern. Thus, this paper asks: have US policies of human rights and democracy promotion evolved as a result of internal developments or external pushes? The paper suggests that the adjustments have been more pronounced after internal developments, while the US has not been inclined to adjust its approach on the basis of external developments. This conclusion contrasts with the path followed by the EU, which has been more inclined to adjust following external pushes (Babayan and Viviani 2013).

Transworld hypothesises that the transatlantic relationship may either drift apart, transform into a functional partnership, or endure (Tocci and Alcaro 2012). Meanwhile, 34 percent of the surveyed public in the US would opt for a more independent approach, 30 percent for coming closer, and 20 percent for remaining about the same (GMF 2012). The opinion of US leaders is more favourable towards the EU, with 64 percent advocating closer relations, with Democrats in general being more EU-supportive than Republicans (GMF 2011). This

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paper sets the ground for further analysis of possible paths for the transatlantic relationship, since it examines whether the US has upheld its leadership in human rights and democracy promotion or whether it has initiated cooperation with the EU with the aim of filling some of the existing gaps.

Similarly to the paper on EU adjustments (Babayan and Viviani 2013), this paper considers adjustments to be discursive – changes in conceptualisations – or practical – modification, upgrade, or creation of a policy – and induced by either internal developments or external shocks. Internal developments are understood as, but not limited to, changes in presidency, financial crises, or terrorist attacks, while external shocks are constituted by external developments beyond the borders of the US. To understand the pattern of US policy adjustments, this paper views them through the lens of such events as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Arab Spring and changes in the presidency over the last decade. Though not claiming causality, these events are possible turning-points in the evolution of US democracy and human rights promotion which may have induced the US to adjust its policies for enhanced effectiveness. Treating adjustment as an actual policy change, modification, or upgrade, this paper starts with a brief overview of US strategies of human rights and democracy promotion. It then proceeds with the identification of discursive and practical adjustments, while outlining different policies within human rights and democracy promotion. The paper aims *inter alia* to demonstrate whether and how the US has adjusted its role as human rights and democracy promoter, and whether it has upheld its leadership role, especially given the toned-down democracy promotion of the Obama administration.

1. The US as Human Rights and Democracy Promoter

The end of the Cold War was interpreted by US policy-makers as the cry of civil society for democratic development and freedom. The US has been inclined "to see a stable democracy as the product of a healthy and vibrant civil society" (Kopstein 2006:89), with democracy being established as soon as the authoritarian leader is overthrown and elections are held. The overall institutional environment, however, does not seem to be so important (Kopstein 2006). Democracy-promoting organisations funded by the US Government have concentrated heavily on elections, political parties, and civil society organisations, in most cases preferring not to work with state-related organisations, but focusing on the opposition. The US has also generally invested in the development of political and civil societies by supporting local NGOs and monitoring elections (Marinov 2004).

US democracy promotion has been channelled through three main organisations: USAID, the Department of State and the non-profit National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Apart from these, the Ministry of Defense, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the Department of Justice conduct limited activities of democracy promotion, with however a much smaller budget and less programmatic variance. USAID spends approximately 1.5 billion dollars per year on democracy promotion, while the State Department spends approximately 500 million dollars, and the NED 100 million dollars.

Established by an executive order in 1961, USAID is the principal instrument of democracy promotion of the US Government with its distinct Democracy and Governance (DG) portfolio, which has focused on rule of law, elections and political processes, civil society, accountable governance, and independent media. USAID receives overall policy guidance from the US State Department. In addition, it has to respond to several committees of Congress, and during the Republican domination of Congress in 1995-2006 saw considerable cuts in its budget (Thiel 2004). Some Republicans even proposed the elimination of USAID as part of a drastic

reform of the State Department (Hook 2003). Nevertheless, USAID remains the main democracy promotion instrument of the US, with its missions having a wide geographic and thematic variety. US Government funding for democracy promotion has been primarily channelled through the State Department and its "Governing Justly and Democratically" objective, which includes the following four elements:

- rule of law and human rights: supports constitutions, laws and legal systems, justice systems, judicial independence, and human rights;
- good governance: supports legislative functions and processes, public sector executive functions, security sector governance, anti-corruption reforms, local governance, and decentralisation;
- political competition and consensus-building: supports elections and political processes, political parties, and consensus-building projects;
- civil society: supports media freedom, freedom of information, and civic participation (Epstein, Serafino and Miko 2007:19).

The current activities of USAID were launched after democratic transitions in Latin America and the former USSR in the mid-1980s (Epstein, Serafino and Miko 2007). Since then, USAID has initiated democracy promotion in more than 120 countries, regardless of whether they showed any signs of democratization or not, and regardless of whether external democratization efforts were welcome or not. Despite the publication of regular success stories and reports, USAID's efforts are not as widely publicised as those of the State Department or the NED (Carothers 2000c), although they are more publicised than the efforts of the EU. Although USAID has developed a democracy promotion program, in most cases implementation is carried out by an international or local partnering NGO, which has won the tender for the program. Being convinced that democracy should come from endogenous forces, USAID also partners local political forces aspiring to democratic reform (Nelson and Katulis 2005), which shows that USAID often uses a transnational channel of democracy promotion. However, the involvement of local actors is limited, as USAID mainly works with its implementing partners and contractors (Babayan 2012).

The end of the Cold War resulted in the addition of new departments and tasks to USAID to cover initiatives in post-communist satellites and later in post-Soviet countries. A New Independent States (NIS) Task Force was created in 1991, employing development professionals with little experience in the former Soviet Union (Pishchikova 2011). Later in 1993, the NIS Task Force and the Eastern Europe Task Force were merged into the Bureau for Europe and NIS. Having little experience in the region, the Bureau employed staff on the basis of Russian language skills, and "nobody quite knew what they were doing there in that bureau but it was said to be different from everything else" (Gary Hansen, Chief of the USAID Civil Society Division, in Pishchikova 2011:76). However, what the Bureau and USAID did know was that they needed to differentiate the new activities of democracy promotion from the previous aid framework (Pishchikova 2011) so as not to hurt the feelings of countries that were claiming to be European and did not want to be associated with the Third World, which was perceived negatively. This differentiation, however, did not take into account for differences between the NIS countries, treating them with the same simplistic uniformity as the EU.

The Freedom for Russia and the Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act (FSA) of 1992 allowed for a total of approximately 30 billion dollars to be spent on assistance to 12 countries of the former Soviet Union, excluding the Baltics. USAID had to adapt to "new approaches, move quickly, and constantly adjust to changing circumstances" (USAID 2000:ii), and some of the projects were "literally written on the back of the napkin" (Corbin Lyday, USAID Senior Policy Analyst, in Pishchikova 2011:79). Rushing to have funds approved by Congress, USAID seemed to have overlooked the similarly urgent need to develop a clear

and tailored monitoring and evaluation system. After a decade of treating democracy promotion targets in the former Soviet Union as a region, an attempt was made in 2001 to diversify strategies based on country needs. However, this gradual change is still a work in progress (Melzig and Sprout 2007). The change in strategy mainly considers the proximity of the Central Asian and the South Caucasus countries to the strategically important region of the Middle East (Pishchikova 2011).

In its democracy promotion efforts, the US has rarely resorted to documented conditionality as the EU has. The MCC, created by the Bush administration in 2002 and authorised in 2004 as a poverty reduction tool, has become one of the rare examples of conditionality. Due to its focus on democracy as a prerequisite for economic development, it has been expected that the MCC will be more successful than other instruments of democracy promotion (Beard 2009). Although the MCC does provide an important insight into its recipients and creates a certain conditionality, its activities do not directly address democracy promotion.

2. Discursive Adjustments in US Policies

"The advancement of human rights and democracy is not just the policy of the United States; it is the epitome of who we are as a nation" declares the US Department of State (2010). Promotion of democracy and observance of human rights has become one of the core elements of US foreign policy at least rhetorically, even though it has often been argued that it has been sacrificed for other strategic interests. While the US has on various occasions, and especially from the time of the Clinton administration onwards, reiterated its commitment to democracy promotion, human rights promotion has occupied a more modest position than in EU policy. The demise of the Soviet Union and reduced ideological tensions have given the US an opportunity to promote democracy with an "explicit political purpose" (Carothers 2000c:184). The explicit purpose is articulated in the mission statement of the State Department, which is to

"advance freedom for the benefit of the American people and the international community by helping to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the needs of their people, reduce widespread poverty, and act responsibly within the international system" (US Department of State 2007).

The outlook on human rights has been more controversial, with the US often refusing to ratify international human rights treaties and accepting only a modest set of such treaties (Bradley 2010, Melish 2009). At times when the US has ratified a treaty it has attached a "'package' of reservations, understandings and declarations", rendering its adherence to international law "hypocritical" (Henkin 1995:341). The US is not party to the American Convention on Human Rights and has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). Reluctance to abide by binding international treaties may have influenced the legitimacy[1] of the US in actively promoting human rights or stressing human rights in its rhetoric. Thus, while still addressing human rights within its foreign policy, the US, unlike the EU, has heavily focused on the promotion of democracy.

Regardless of the rhetorical commitment, the formulation of democracy promotion policies has been sloppy due to the "lack of a clear definition of democracy and a comprehensive understanding of its basic elements" (Epstein, Serafino and Miko 2007:3). Without a clear definition of democracy it is nearly impossible to determine

1 For a more detailed discussion of legitimacy in norms promotion, see Schimmelfennig, Engert and Knobel 2006.

the success of democracy promotion and consequently the turning-point when the target requires no further assistance (Epstein, Serafino and Miko 2007). The lack of a definition was also acknowledged by Congress in 2005, when it stated its concern that "the State Department and USAID do not share a common definition of a 'democracy program'" (US Senate Appropriations Committee 2005:61). It went further in 2006 in order to "ensure a common understanding of democracy programs among United States Government agencies" by defining democracy promotion as "programs that support good governance, human rights, independent media, and the rule of law, and otherwise strengthen the capacity of democratic political parties, NGOs, and citizens to support the development of democratic states, institutions and practices that are responsible and accountable to citizens" (US Senate Appropriations Committee 2006:84). Based on this definition, democracy in the US' view can be conceptualised as an academic understanding of liberal democracy that requires contestation, participation, and respect for human rights. While the definition clearly identified the targets and sectors of democracy promotion, it left the strategies of implementation open (Babayan 2012).

Democracy talk, even if mostly related to the missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, featured prominently in the post 9/11 rhetoric of George W. Bush. Promising to "finish the historic work of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq", where "democracy takes hold" (Bush 2004), Bush acknowledged the policy of the US to "seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture" (Bush 2005). The US' democratic mission was seen as "a prelude of our [the US'] enemies' defeat", and was used to underline the status of the US as an undisputed authority on democracy issues (Bush 2005). However, even if democracy was placed high on the list of priorities, democracy promotion was seen as second to counter-terrorism, and climbed higher on the priorities ladder only after additional justifications were required for the operation in Iraq (Hassan and Hammond 2011). Democracy is argued by some to have given license for the use of any method in fighting those opposed to democracy, and for circumventing international human rights law when sending suspected terrorists for interrogation in countries with dubious human rights records (Hassan and Ralph 2011). From the perspective of international law, the logic behind such an approach, i.e. the lawfulness of using unlawful practices beyond American soil without implicating Americans, is flawed (Boys 2011, Sanders 2011). In addition, the implications of such a lackadaisical approach to the notion of democracy can be serious. Democracy could lose its normative power, being perceived merely as a shield for shady dealings for the sake of other strategic interests.

The initial silence on democracy in President Obama's first inaugural speech (Obama 2009b), where the word was not pronounced even once, prompted analysts to conclude that the new President might distance himself not only from Bush-style democracy promotion, but from democracy promotion *per se*. Dropping democracy from his major speeches, Obama has signaled that he will not pursue a foreign policy based on confrontational democracy promotion. Similarly, the characterization of US power by Hillary Clinton as diplomacy, development and defense – the 3Ds – without any mention of democracy as an element in foreign affairs, prompted arguments that values had given way to the national interest, or that liberal internationalism is a disguise allowing for distance to be taken from the preceding administration (Nau 2010). Even if not as strong on democracy promotion as that of President Bush in 2005, President Obama's 2013 inauguration speech did not completely shy away from democracy. He in fact pledged to "support democracy from Asia to Africa; from the Americas to the Middle East" (Obama 2013).

3. Practical Adjustments in US Policies

While the main mission of the US during the Cold War was not democracy promotion per se but rather the containment of the Soviet Union (Cox, Ikenberry and Inoguchi 2000), democracy promotion neatly fit the "searching for purpose" task after the collapse of the grand rival (Dumbrell 2008:90). Some have argued that a change took place in US foreign policy from supporting autocracies to promoting democracy (Robinson 1996). However, the policy goal remained intact: "[t]he immediate purpose of US intervention in national democratization movements was to gain influence over and to try to shape their outcomes in such a way as to preempt more radical political change, to preserve the social order and international relations of asymmetry" (Robinson 1996:318-319). Being always not only an economic but also a military power, the US, unlike the EU, has not constrained itself to a normative power image.

Nevertheless, what has changed from administration to administration has been not the commitment to democracy promotion, but the commitment to a specific mode of promotion: by consent or openly by force (Babayan 2012). Democracy promotion under President Clinton was dubbed as a "grand vision" of his administration (David Yang, US Department of State Senior Coordinator for Democracy Promotion, in Carothers 2000b). Financial support for democracy promotion tangibly increased from the Reagan years to the end of the Clinton administration (Carothers 2000a). The Clinton administration pursued the "enlargement of the world's free community of market democracies" (Lake 1993) in the hope of replacing the previous grand strategy of containment (Poppe 2010). However, the "pragmatic crusader" (Poppe 2010:11) Clinton did not intend to place democracy promotion above other foreign policy or security issues, but rather to complement them with it. In addition, the Clinton administration's democracy promotion followed a non-interventionist character, and preferred to promote democracy in countries that had already showed signs of democratization. The policy towards states unwilling to reform would be "to isolate them diplomatically, militarily, economically, and technologically" (Lake 1993). Meanwhile, if the process of democratization stagnated, the US would renew it (Albright 2003). Thus, Clinton's peaceful promotion of democracy as a complement to US strategic interests followed "pragmatic realism first, [with] idealism always a close second" (Brinkley 1997:127).

The same cannot be said of the following George W. Bush administration and its "democracy promotion on steroids" (Carothers 2007a:11). The first months of Bush's presidency implied the possibility of axing democracy promotion (Carothers 2007a and 2007b) and focusing more on traditional interests by cutting foreign policy commitments (Poppe 2010). Pursuing a modest foreign policy as a presidential candidate, Bush tied democracy promotion to national security, and elevated the former to the top of his foreign policy priorities after the 9/11 attacks (Fukuyama and McFaul 2008). Bush opted for a hard approach of military intervention and reinforcement by punishment whenever the target country did not show readiness for democratic change and posed a threat to US national security. The Bush doctrine was in sharp contrast to Clinton's more diplomatic and peaceful vision of world affairs. Thus, democracy promotion under Bush was combined with the fight against terrorism, presenting democracy promotion as inherent to US national security. After the overwhelming operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, it may have seemed that the US would abandon its march for democracy and turn inward. In the early stages, those operations were presented as a long-awaited turn by the US towards democracy promotion, instead of pursuing "stability at the expense of democracy" in the Middle East (Rice 2005). Nevertheless, what President Bush did was to codify democracy promotion even further through *Institutionalizing the Freedom Agenda* (US Department of State 2008) and by signing the ADVANCE Democracy Act in 2007 (US House of Representatives 2007).

Thus, the first Obama administration was left by President Bush with a global US pledge to democracy promotion without any perceived limits on implementation, as well as with antagonised relationships. Taking a different course from a Bush-style labeling of its international counterparts as friends or foes, Obama advocated reinvigorating US relationships with those states that had been deemed hostile by the Bush administration. Thus, instead of scolding a non-democratic regime, Obama initiated a more strategic outlook, attempting to proceed with a dialogue that may later lead to democratization. Even if recently marred by Russia's position on the conflict in Syria, the expulsion of USAID from Russia (Rosenberg 2012), the Magnitsky bill adopted by Congress (US House of Representatives 2012, Russian Presidency 2012b) and the law banning US adoptions of Russian children (Russian Presidency 2012a, Penny 2012), the highest profile re-engagement had been that with Russia. The "Asian pivot" was criticised as "unnecessary" by some (Ross 2012) and lauded by others (Brimley and Ratner 2013, Rudd 2013). However, while Putin (2012) has grown more sceptical towards the reset, the pivot may face an uncertain future after the appointment of John Kerry as Secretary of State (Auslin 2013). Other attempts at re-engagement have included those with Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Burma, and Syria. President Obama's foreign policy that includes talking to adversaries has faced strong disapproval from the Republicans (Luo 2008); however, Obama has defended his diplomacy by saying that the way of getting out of the Bush-Cheney trap is to rally for international support for America's leadership (Leonard 2008). Even if not exactly achieving democratization, this approach seems to have been effective in rehabilitating the reputation of democracy promotion. Some have claimed that "this American administration has put democracy and rights back in front" (Pavilionis in US Embassy Vilnius 2009), with others hoping that peaceful instruments would not reinforce pragmatism over the commitment to promote democracy and human rights (Sikorski in US Embassy Warsaw 2009).

President Obama (2007) has called for "visionary leadership", urging the US to seize its new moment and to fight any challenges that shake the international foundation of liberal democracy. The Obama administration has distanced itself from its predecessor, but, contrary to criticisms of the "abandonment of democracy" (Muravchik 2009), Obama has preferred to assert that "no system of government can or should be imposed" on one nation by another (Obama 2009c). Thus, President Obama has reiterated the importance of promoting democracy by consent and looking at it "through a lens that is actually delivering a better life for people on the ground and less obsessed with form, more concerned with substance" (Obama 2009a). Nevertheless, Obama's approach to democracy promotion has diverged depending on the context: while intervening in Libya and imposing sanctions on Syria, the US did not react to the protests in its ally Bahrain.

The desire to take distance from Bush-era policies has inadvertently also distanced Obama from democracy promotion rhetoric, creating a perception of a setback on democracy promotion even if there have not been any significant budget cuts. Although "quantifying spending on democracy promotion is notoriously tricky" (Magen and McFaul 2009:2), since Obama took office in 2009 budget requests to Congress for democracy promotion have steadily increased, meaning that cuts have been balanced by increases. However, a cut of funding to non-registered Egyptian NGOs in 2009 (McInerney 2010) was met with harsh and often exaggerated criticism (Carothers 2012b). Even if a marginal part of total funding to Egypt, the 70 percent cut to independent democracy groups (Wall Street Journal 2009) may have seemed like a substantial reduction. However, judging from the uprising itself, this did not seem to undermine the willingness of society to protest against an authoritarian regime, no matter how dubious the results were. Although some in Egypt claimed that US funding to unregistered NGOs through the Middle East Partnership Initiative encouraged NGOs to disregard registration rules (Meleka in US Embassy Cairo 2010), the cut in funding received negative feedback. Nevertheless, some of the Arab Spring activists gave credit to US-funded organizations for civil society training and financing, which apparently enhanced their knowledge of "how to organize and build coalitions" (Nixon 2011).

Not only Republicans have voiced criticism of minimized democracy promotion rhetoric, but Democrats have also occasionally felt as if the Obama administration prefers improving relations with authoritarian governments to democracy promotion (Hiatt 2010, Packer 2010). However, the initial cool-off in democracy promotion was followed by boosted rhetoric, as well as Obama's speeches in Cairo and Accra and Secretary Clinton's speeches on human rights. In addition, when the engagement policy bore no fruit, as happened especially with Iran and China, Obama and Clinton stepped up their rhetoric on human rights (Carothers 2012b). A renewed approach to democracy and human rights dubbed "the long game" has included encouraging awakening democracies to support democracy promotion and human rights, transnational work on anticorruption, engaging civil society abroad, and linking development and democracy promotion. Meanwhile, understanding that it cannot always deliver on its initial noble statements in support of democracy (Echagüe 2013), the US has opted for a cooperative rather than confrontational approach with Middle Eastern autocrats. To "strengthen the close ties" (US Department of State 2012) between the US and Gulf states, the US-Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Cooperation Forum was established in March 2012, a year after the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the reluctance of the Obama administration to launch a military intervention in Syria has brought criticism from the Republicans (Landler 2012). However, while Obama has been wary to start a new war, another slight shift in strategy may be approaching with Secretary Kerry's promise to provide non-lethal aid to Syrian rebels (Kerry 2013). The lack of clear options within Syria's rebellious ranks and the increasing importance of radical Islamists (Clinton 2013) may have contributed to Washington's reluctance.

The differentiated approach to democracy promotion and the virtual absence of any policy adjustments are also visible from the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the US responses to it. Much like the EU, the US neither expected nor supported the ousting of the partner Mubarak regime in Egypt. In January 2011 Secretary Clinton called for "orderly transition" to democracy, asserting that the "stable" Mubarak government "is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people" (Clinton 2011). The Obama administration might have overestimated the stability of Mubarak's regime, but it seems that the supporters of the Arab Spring have overestimated its chances of bringing about democratization. Nevertheless, the Arab Spring has succeeded in having President Obama acknowledge that US support for democracy should also "extend to nations where transitions have yet to take place" (Obama 2011). The main problem of the region was defined by President Obama as closed economies, which should be overcome by relieved debt and Enterprise funds modelled on those set up for Eastern Europe (Gaouette 2012, Gray 2012).

It has been argued that, given the contemporary complexity of international affairs, the US has to "acknowledge its rivals and project a different message about democracy promotion" (Carothers 2012a). Even if it has continued an uneven approach towards non-democratic countries, the Obama administration has paid greater attention to the legitimization of US actions than its predecessor also in terms of democracy promotion and protection of human rights. Waiting for UN Security Council approval and the support of the Arab League before intervening in Libya provided the operation with increased international approval (Diamond 2011). With his low-key democracy promotion, the "open door" approach, and without boisterous statements, Obama has brought US democracy promotion approach closer to that of the EU (Poppe 2010). However, even if the EU and the US handle noticeably similar issues, they typically do so "in isolation from one another" (Magen and McFaul 2009:5). The establishment of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED), following in the footsteps of the US NED, may lead the policies of the two actors to converge more. But what needs to follow is not simple convergence of technical approaches, but substantial cooperation that would help to fill the gaps in democracy promotion.

Conclusion

Does the argument that "American foreign policy swings like a pendulum" (Nau 2010:27) correspond to reality? Partly, it does. At the same time, despite visible shifts in policy, the US continues to claim international leadership, even if within democracy promotion the type of leadership is constantly being reinvented. Whether pursuing hard or soft approaches, the rhetoric of global US leadership has not died down, but rather follows its internal politics and interests.

While EU democracy promotion has been more susceptible to external pushes (Babayan and Viviani 2013), practical adjustments to US promotion of human rights and democracy have been made mostly after internal developments. Change in presidencies[2] and internal developments or even shocks which constituted a threat to national security have been followed by discursive and practical adjustments to democracy promotion policy. The 2001 terrorist attacks led the first Bush administration to adjust US policy on human rights and democracy promotion and to resort to military force, while the preceding Clinton administration had adhered to peaceful promotion. The US public's support for helping to establish democracy abroad fell after lengthy and largely fruitless operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, falling from 52 percent in 2005 to 37 percent in 2007, and staying at the same level through to 2011 (GMF 2011). External developments such as the Arab Spring have had little to do with practical adjustments to US human rights and democracy promotion policies. As if suffering from democracy promotion fatigue, the Obama administration caught the mood of the US public and its international counterparts, and initiated several foreign policy adjustments. However, his low-profile approach and the insistence on promoting democracy only with local consent have drawn the criticism that US leadership and power are in decline and that "U.S. support for civil society ends when repressive governments apply pressure" (Freedom House 2012).

Unlike the US, the EU does not seem to suffer from democracy promotion fatigue, even if its strategies still require improvement (Babayan and Viviani 2013). Regular review of its policies and the establishment of the EED may indicate that the EU is ready to boost its leadership within democracy promotion. However, given its internal disputes, it is unlikely to enhance the effectiveness of democracy promotion on its own. The appointment of Philip Gordon in a senior position to oversee Middle East policies may further US-EU convergence, and at the same time provide the EU with a greater role in its neighbourhood (Echagüe 2013). In its own turn, the EU has been moving towards greater engagement with civil society (Babayan and Viviani 2013), stepping into the established domain of the US. Whether this exchange of strategies will go beyond convergence and result in greater cooperation and enhanced effectiveness, or even a clash of interests, remains to be seen.

2 However, it is not claimed here that, if a candidate from the same party as the incumbent president wins the election, the policy approach would necessarily change.

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The Project

In an era of global flux, emerging powers and growing interconnectedness, transatlantic relations appear to have lost their bearings. As the international system fragments into different constellations of state and non-state powers across different policy domains, the US and the EU can no longer claim exclusive leadership in global governance. Traditional paradigms to understand the transatlantic relationship are thus wanting. A new approach is needed to pinpoint the direction transatlantic relations are taking. TRANSWORLD provides such an approach by a) ascertaining, differentiating among four policy domains (economic, security, environment, and human rights/democracy), whether transatlantic relations are drifting apart, adapting along an ad hoc cooperation-based pattern, or evolving into a different but resilient special partnership; b) assessing the role of a re-defined transatlantic relationship in the global governance architecture; c) providing tested policy recommendations on how the US and the EU could best cooperate to enhance the viability, effectiveness, and accountability of governance structures.

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