

Introduction: Influencing Dictatorships to Become Democracies

This handbook is about the role of armed forces in the support and spread of democracy. Its purpose is to inspire and instruct the ministries of defense and armed forces of the established democracies to make the support of democracy a priority mission. They can and should help enable democratic transitions in countries still governed by authoritarian regimes as well as those that have already started on the road to representative government but have not reached a solid and resilient democratic destination. All the established democracies—in Asia, Europe, and North and South America—have hundreds of points of contact with other armed forces that can serve to strengthen various aspects of democratic development. The long-established democracies—the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada—have links from international activity stretching back many years. Many of the newer democracies—Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Poland, South Africa, and Spain—have recent experiences with their own transitions that are relevant and valuable to other countries starting to democratize. However, in the democratic countries, disparate programs and opportunities are not integrated under a firm policy of support for democratic development: they are not systematic, are generally reactive rather than proactive, do not take on the hard cases—the

strongest dictatorships—and are not coordinated internationally. By addressing these issues, this handbook shows how the established democracies can take advantage of all their points of contact and influence to move dictatorships toward democracy.

The approach described here is not about regime change by military means. It is not about supporting armed freedom fighters against dictatorships nor about invading authoritarian countries to establish democracy by force of arms. As explained in chapter 6, nonviolent democratic transformations in recent decades have proved far more durable than the armed overthrow of dictatorships. The objective of the recommendations in this handbook is rather to persuade the armed forces of authoritarian governments that they should not oppose, and should even favor, peaceful transitions to democratic governments in



Military personnel from the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, and the United States participate in a Remembrance Day ceremony November 11, 2009. (DoD photo by Staff Sgt. Robert Barney, U.S. Air Force/Released)

their own countries. They should do so both because it is best for their countries and in the self-interest of the armed forces in which they serve. What is best for a country is a government that enjoys the full support of its people, a representative government following the rule of law—in other words, a democracy. What is in the self-interest of any military force is a democratic system, in which a military officer can be confident that he or she will be defending the people rather than attacking them, be respected for service, have a fair chance of promotion, receive adequate compensation, and be able to retire with honor.

The Armed Forces Matter in Democratic Transitions

The armed forces are one of the most powerful institutions in any country. They have weapons and disciplined personnel, and are organized for taking action. To an extent that is hard for military officers and officials in mature democratic countries to understand, the military leaders of new countries and new governments believe they have both the right and the responsibility to play a decisive role in the political development of their countries. Their independence wars are more recent, military coups have been frequent and not long ago, and few other established institutions have their power and influence within the country. They will often assume or be thrust into a decisive role in a political crisis, and large sectors of society will look to them for leadership and action.

Rarely will a country's armed forces be in the vanguard of a popular movement for democratic reform. It is true that many military coups are proclaimed to have been made in the name of the people and that their leaders often announce that their goal is to restore or establish democracy. Once in power, however, they generally then announce that it will take a period of time to deal with the country's immediate problems before power can be turned over to a democratic government. As that period of time becomes longer and longer, the rulers may exchange their uniforms for business suits, but they generally convince themselves they do not need an election to confirm their own

conviction that they are the most qualified candidates to lead the country. This has been the pattern in many African countries when anticolonial military revolutionaries became long-serving dictators. Often it takes another coup or a political crisis to force them from power. However, power has not always corrupted absolutely, and there have been examples of military governments voluntarily relinquishing power: the military regimes in Chile and Brazil in the 1980s sensed growing popular demands for democracy and led the transition process themselves.¹ More recently, the Thai military government turned over power to the party led by the sister of the leader they had deposed months earlier.

The armed forces can suppress most revolts against authoritarian regimes if they decide to support the dictator or party in power. In 1989 the People's Liberation Army cleared Tiananmen Square. In 2009 armed forces of Iran obeyed orders to quell popular protests against the clerical regime, which continues in power to this day. At the time of this writing, the Syrian armed forces continue to follow orders from their dictator to suppress revolt, and President Assad remains in power.

However, the armed forces do not always support their authoritarian leaders when their power is challenged, even authoritarian leaders who appointed and courted them. When there is a political crisis, military leaders make decisions on what they feel is best for their country, their services, and their personal interests. It is not rare for the armed forces to play a positive role in allowing popular movements to overthrow dictators, even if the latter have been in power for a long time and have assiduously courted and controlled their military leaders. In the Philippines in 1983, Indonesia in 1998, Serbia in 2000, and the Ukraine in 2004, the armed forces refused to suppress protesters, in some cases cooperating with them, and allowed the dictators to be overthrown.² In 2011 the Tunisian and Egyptian army leaderships decided not to support the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes against popular protests, and those dictators fell.³

The armed forces play an absolutely key role in fostering, allowing, or suppressing democratic movements in authoritarian

states. Thus it is very much in the interests of the established democracies to help military leaders in authoritarian or transition countries make the right choices.

Characteristics of Armed Forces under Dictatorships

Dramatic events, like the decisions of military leaders during the Arab Awakening to support their leaders or to turn on them, are the culmination of long-term, complex sets of developments. Military leaders, even in isolated dictatorships, understand that over the long run, a government must have the support of its people. They also understand that military dictatorship—direct military rule of the country—is neither practical nor sustainable in today’s world: Myanmar/Burma is only the latest example of a long line of military dictatorships that have tried to turn power over to another, more representative form of government. The only pure military dictatorship today is Fiji, scarcely a trendsetter. Most military officers—though there are plenty of exceptions—believe that the armed forces should act as the defenders of their people, not as the instrument of their repression. The ethos of armed forces and the creed of most of those who serve is patriotic defense of the nation and its people. They are at their best in honing their skills to defend their country against its enemies. Turning weapons against their own people contradicts the fundamental professional convictions of military people. Participation in the brutal political struggle for self-preservation that is the preoccupation of dictatorships is neither the preference nor the skill set of military officers. Many military officers, even in autocratic regimes, often have a general sentiment that some kind of a representative government is ultimately best for their nations.

However, many other circumstances and beliefs cause military leaders and their troops to support autocratic governments as necessary for their countries for the time being—and “the time being” can stretch for decades. Some military leaders are simply thugs who joined for power. For others, self-interest, corruption, and fear play roles. Dictators take care of senior

military leaders, especially in poorer countries. At lower ranks, soldiers are rewarded with scarce food in North Korea, and receive regular pay or opportunities for extortion in other impoverished dictatorships. Despots also check their generals' loyalty through independent intelligence services and other informer networks, and they remove and punish harshly those considered unreliable. Even as the overwhelmingly powerful American-led international military coalition was gathering on Iraq's border in 2003, its generals were far more afraid of Saddam Hussein than they were of the military defeat they could see looming.

Beyond these human motivations, however, are other beliefs and convictions. When a country is threatened by social turmoil, especially when supported, or suspected to be supported, from outside the country, a military leader may believe that his first duty is to maintain law and order, fight against foreigners or their surrogates, and support the current government in order to maintain social stability. This was certainly the case for many Latin American military officers who fought against Cuban- and Soviet-supported insurgencies in the 1970s and 1980s. While many of their actions were reprehensible, their basic motivation was understandable.⁴ It is easy to believe that reform must be postponed until a more stable time. Military leaders also are influenced or can be manipulated by ethnic and tribal divisions in those countries where identity politics play a major role. It is a rare military officer who will support democratic reform if he believes his ethnic group or tribe will be oppressed or disadvantaged under an unproven democratic system. These considerations play a role in many African countries today.

There are sometimes other core beliefs that are dominant in the values of military leaders. Turkish military officers believe their duty is to safeguard the secular nature of their government. Thai officers believe the king must be respected.

Finally, many military officers honestly believe that their countries are not yet ready for democracy. They feel that the necessary institutions for democracy do not yet exist in their countries: an informed citizenry that will elect competent political

leaders, an honest and functional legal system that will protect minority rights and tame corruption, a capable civil service, and a responsible legislature. They believe that until these components of democracy are present, some form of authoritarian government that earns popular support is best for their countries.

The military leaders serving under dictatorships are not automatons programmed to give absolute fealty to despots whom they will defend to the death. They each have a set of beliefs, self-interest, and fears that form their overall attitude to their government and that will govern their actions during political changes. It is important to understand the motivations and interests of officers in autocratic regimes in order to persuade them to support democratic reform and transition.

Democratic Transitions

With all these circumstances and beliefs blocking democratic progress, how are advances made? The regional surveys and case studies in this handbook show that change comes through a combination of events and individuals.

Time and again, democratic transitions have been moved forward by the decisions of individual military officers who understood that it was right for their countries and their military services. In the early years of the United States, George Washington declined to be a proconsul and supported a constitutional democratic form of government. A century and a half later in Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk used his enormous prestige as the military victor in a war of independence to support the establishment of a democratic form of government for his country.⁵ As described later in this handbook, other military leaders have played similar important roles in more recent years. In Senegal General Jean Alfred Diallo in the 1960s established a positive role for the armed forces in his newly independent country that has continued to the present. In Spain in the 1970s, General Gutierrez Mellado was the “irreplaceable initiator of reform” in Spain’s transition from the Franco dictatorship. In the 1980s, General Prem Tinsulanonda, as prime minister

of Thailand, moved his country toward democracy and voluntarily left the premiership for an elected successor. General Fidel Ramos stepped down after a constitutionally mandated single term as president of the Philippines, declining to support an initiative to change the constitution or to declare martial law. In the 1990s, Staff General Ferenc Vegh, the Hungarian chief of defense, led the reform of the armed forces toward a new democratic role. General Juan Emilio Cheyre, one of the coauthors of the second volume of this handbook, brought the Pinochet era to a close in Chile in 2004 by promulgating a public manifesto committing the Chilean armed forces to service in a democratic society. In Tunisia in 2011, General Rachid Ammar refused orders to use military force to suppress peaceful protests, leading to the end of President Ben Ali's dictatorship.

These individual acts of courage and leadership do not occur in a vacuum. They are based on the education, training, and experiences of individual officers. The generals and admirals in the top leadership positions both influence and are influenced by networks of other officers and military officials, some of whom are dedicated to positive change both in their military services and for their countries. As the case histories in this handbook demonstrate, these reform networks within military services come together and take action primarily based on internal factors. Officers serving authoritarian regimes are often dissatisfied with conditions within their military services—cronyism, corruption, slow promotions, military defeat, and low professionalism—and within the country—corruption, economic adversity, deteriorating security conditions, and succession crises. However, outside influences also play a role: it can be negative if democratic reform is not encouraged or positive if it promotes reform. The policies of outside countries and international organizations and the words and actions of individual foreigners count. Officers and defense officials from the mature democracies can make a difference when they encourage their counterparts to support transitions toward more representative government and assume a role for their forces that is less political and more professional.

Persuading the Guys with the Guns

The armed forces of almost all countries around the world—those of democracies, dictatorships, and transitional states—are in constant contact. A few countries, such as North Korea and Iran, effectively isolate their military officers from outside contact, but they are the exception.⁶ Military officers from both democracies and dictatorships participate in exchange programs, and military delegations visit other countries regularly and attend international conferences together. Military units from one country provide training to other countries, and military units train and work together in coalitions in disaster relief and peacekeeping operations around the world.

These military points of contact offer to the armed forces of developed democracies opportunities to influence their

Outside Influences on Democratic Development: Today's Academic Consensus

Rather than assert the primacy of either international or domestic factors, we argue that their relative causal weight varies across countries and regions. External forces reshape domestic incentives and power distributions, often in ways that are decisive to regime outcomes. However, they do so to varying degrees across cases. In regions with extensive ties to the West (particularly Central Europe and the Americas), international influences were so intense that they contributed to democratization even where domestic conditions were highly unfavorable. In these cases, we concur with those who posit the primacy of international variables. However, where ties to the West were less extensive, post-Cold War international democratizing pressure was weaker, and consequently, domestic factors weighed more heavily. In these cases, regime outcomes are explained primarily by domestic structural variables, particularly the strength of state and governing party organizations.

Quoted from Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 2.

counterparts in authoritarian countries. During education and training courses, through rewards and sanctions, and in professional and personal discussions, the military forces of democratic countries can convey by both example and persuasion the advantages that the armed forces of democracies enjoy and encourage their peers to support democratic transitions in their countries.

Influence is most effectively exerted over time through a sustained program of conveying the essential elements and advantages of a democratic system to counterparts in autocratic regimes. Interactions with autocratic regimes—China, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe—will differ from those with countries in transition—Cambodia,



U.S. Navy and Indonesian Navy junior officers conferring during bilateral exercises. (DoD photo by Lt. Fernando Rivero, U.S. Navy/Released)

Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Serbia, Sri Lanka. The way in which messages are delivered is crucial, according to several of the coauthors of the second volume of this handbook who have been on the receiving end of efforts to convince them to promote democracy in their countries. If messages are delivered in an arrogant, condescending, insensitive

The Democracy “Elevator Speech”

The following is a list of points that an officer from a democratic country can convey in a short conversation with a counterpart from an autocratic country:

- Democracy is spreading throughout the world. We are in the midst of the fourth wave of democratic transitions.
- Democracy in different forms is the aspiration of people on all continents: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and South America.
- No regime can remain in power if it is not supported by its people.
- Dictatorships will one day call on their armed forces to betray their oaths and will order them to use force against their own citizens.
- The loyalty of the armed forces should be to the people and their chosen representatives, not some self-chosen person or party.
- Armed forces in democracies serve only to defend their people and will never be required to use force against them.
- Service members in democracies are respected, adequately compensated, fairly promoted, and retire with honor.
- Democracies field the most capable armed forces in the world.
- The military heroes that history remembers have acted not to oppress their people but to defend them.

manner, they will be counterproductive. If they are delivered in a way that is sensitive to the history, conditions, and aspirations of the officer serving in an autocratic or transitional country, then they can have impact.

When political crises occur, advanced democracies must exert influence in a more intense and coordinated fashion. Different countries will have different types and degrees of influence. Personal contacts among military officials and officers in democratic countries and military leaders in the autocratic and transitional countries will be important. The officer or official in the democracy with the most knowledge, friendships, and influence within the country in transition may have to be called from another assignment to work on the transition. Timing will be crucial, as will be up-to-date knowledge about the situation within the country in transition, quick decisions within the democratic countries about their policies toward transitions, and a rapid exchange of information among the democracies so that all their efforts are mutually reinforcing.

Influencing Armed Forces in Dictatorships and Helping Armed Forces in Transition

This handbook provides practical recommendations for using military relations to promote democratic development. Most of its analysis and recommendations are aimed at influencing countries with autocratic governments. In the latest survey by

The Democracy Mission

- Persuade the armed forces of autocratic countries to support, or at least not to oppose, democratic transitions in their country.
- Work with the armed forces of countries transitioning to democracy to establish the policies, authorities, and practices of the military services in a democratic system of government.

Freedom House, 47 of the world's 194 countries were dictatorships, governing 34 percent of the world's population.⁷ The "worst of the worst" are Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, closely followed by Belarus, Chad, China, Cuba, and Laos. These countries make no pretensions of a commitment to democracy and expect their armed forces to control their populations as much as to defend them. Yet the armed forces of many of these countries have contact with the armed forces of democratic countries. These contacts offer opportunities to plant and nurture the idea that their countries would be better if they were democratic and that their military services would be more honored, better remembered, and better aligned with their ethos if their governments made the transition to democracy. Political crises will come to these countries, and during those crises, military influences can be used to support democratic outcomes.

In addition to putting dictatorships on the path toward democracy, the established democracies must also help other countries that have already begun reform programs. There are fifty-eight countries that Freedom House classifies as "Partly Free."⁸ These countries, and several others that are classified "Free," have governments that are democratic in their form and aspirations but are not fully established democracies. They generally welcome contact with the armed forces of the mature democracies to strengthen their own armed forces, including their commitment to democracy. NATO, for example, has an extensive program of country partnerships and regularly conducts exercises with the military forces of a number of these countries; invites them to meetings, seminars, and educational institutions in NATO countries; and sends training teams to assist them in areas such as military education and defense budgeting. An informal network of mature democracies, led by the United Kingdom and France, and with many other participating countries and nongovernmental organizations, such as the Swiss-sponsored Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, assists many African countries in transition through a process

called Security System Reform. Expert advisers provide knowledge and training across the full range of military functions needed for democratic governance. Although these programs are not the primary focus of this handbook—there are other excellent resource materials available—they are very important, ensuring that countries that have started the move toward democratic governance do not lose ground because their armed forces have not developed the characteristics congruent with a democratic system.

In summary, the militaries of democracies around the world have literally hundreds of opportunities to influence counterparts in autocratic or transitioning countries. Taking advantage of these opportunities to persuade their peers of the national, military, and personal advantages of democratic governance is one of the most important contributions that democratic armed forces can make to the security of their own countries and to a peaceful future world.