

Reevaluating Foreign-Imposed Regime Change

Author(s): William G. Nomikos, Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten

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# Correspondence

## Reevaluating Foreign-Imposed Regime Change

William G. Nomikos  
Alexander B. Downes  
and Jonathan Monten

*To the Editors (William G. Nomikos writes):*

Alexander Downes and Jonathan Monten's article "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization" offers important contributions to the study of foreign-imposed regime change (FIRC).<sup>1</sup> The authors should be commended for their use of advanced empirical methods to tackle such an important substantive question. According to Downes and Monten, past research on the democratizing effect of foreign-imposed regime change has overemphasized the characteristics of the intervener and underemphasized the existing preconditions for democracy in the state targeted for intervention. Rather than the FIRC itself, it is these preconditions, Downes and Monten suggest, that explain whether a given state will or will not democratize. That is, their argument posits that targets of FIRC that democratize would have done so independently of the foreign intervention.

Although Downes and Monten offer promising results in support of their hypotheses, two factors should make scholars skeptical of the conclusions drawn from their interpretation of the evidence. First, even though Downes and Monten duly explore the efficacy of varieties of FIRC, they omit the most critical analytical category related to the dependent variable. In evaluating the ability of FIRC to produce democracy, one should focus on cases of foreign-imposed democratization (FID) where the intervener intended to replace a nondemocratic regime with a democratic one. Second, the nature of FIRC operations has changed over time in ways unaccounted for by Downes and Monten. For historical and theoretical reasons outlined in this letter, FIRC carried out before World War I looks significantly different from FIRC carried out since 1918. A closer examination of the targets of FID after World War I reveals a fairly remarkable success rate: thirteen out of seventeen targets transitioned to consolidated democracies within ten years of the intervention (see table 1). Such a record should give us pause before concluding that FIRC has little or no independent effect on a state's democratization prospects.

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*William G. Nomikos is a doctoral student at Yale University. He thanks Allan Dafoe, Jason Lyall, Nuno Monteiro, and Nicholas Sambanis for their constructive comments and guidance. The data, code, and additional coding notes are available from the author upon request.*

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*Alexander B. Downes is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at George Washington University. Jonathan Monten is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Oklahoma. They would like to thank William Nomikos for sharing his list of foreign-imposed democratizations.*

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1. Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 90–131. Additional references to this article appear parenthetically in the text.

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Table 1. Total Number of FIRC, FIRC Successes (Polity score of the target is 17 or higher on a 21-point scale), and Rate of Success, by Type

Type	Consolidated Democracies	FIRCs	Rate
Nondemocracy-initiated	10	60	0.17
Democracy-initiated	16	38	0.42
Democracy-initiated institutional	4	10	0.40
Democracy-initiated pre-1918	1	9	0.11
Democracy-initiated post-WWI	15	28	0.54
Foreign-imposed democratization	14	23	0.61
Foreign-Imposed democratization post-WWI	13	17	0.76

NOTE: Low success of nondemocracy-initiated, foreign-imposed regime change (FIRC) suggests that democratization depends, in part, on the intentions of the intervener. This intuition is further affirmed by the high success rate of foreign-imposed democratization over time and, specifically, after World War I, especially as compared with all FIRCs carried out by democracies.

#### FOREIGN-IMPOSED DEMOCRATIZATION

To evaluate the ability of an intervening state to impose democracy in another state, one should look only at FIRCs in which the intervener intended to promote democracy. To this end, Downes and Montén offer two analytical categories—democracy-led FIRC and institutional FIRC—which are, respectively, too broad and too narrow.<sup>2</sup> Downes and Montén differentiate all FIRCs initiated by democracies from those initiated by nondemocracies (p. 111), but they also code a FIRC as institutional “if an intervener either assisted local authorities in organizing or conducting elections, or made holding elections a condition for recognizing a successor government” (p. 112). At one extreme, then, democracy-led FIRC includes all cases of FID as well as operations in which the intervener had no interest in promoting democracy. For example, Downes and Montén consider the U.S. interventions to overthrow the democratically elected governments of Salvador Allende in Chile and Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran to be democracy-led FIRCs. In both of these cases, however, the intervener aimed to overthrow, not to promote, democracy.

At the other extreme, the institutional FIRC designation misses a set of censored observations in which the intervener clearly intended to promote democratic change. As noted above, Downes and Montén include in this category all FIRCs in which “an intervener either assisted local authorities in organizing or conducting elections, or made holding elections a condition for recognizing a successor government” (ibid.). The category, however, excludes cases in which the intervener would have stayed to supervise the holding of free-and-fair elections but did not do so for reasons unrelated to the execution of the regime change operation. For example, consider Allied interventions in France and Germany after World War II. Both states constructed similar, democratic in-

2. The leadership FIRC category, which refers to FIRCs in which the democratic intervener removes a regime but does not construct institutions, has the same limitations that I attribute to the democracy-led category. Ibid., pp. 112–113.

stitutions with no institutional backsliding into dictatorship. The Allies retained a military presence in Germany but not in France. As such, Downes and Monten consider only the former an institutional FIRC. This does not mean, however, that the Allies would have permitted a return to autocratic governance in France or that they did not expend effort to promote democracy there. After all, the United States spent a tremendous amount of blood and treasure during and after the war to keep France free.<sup>3</sup> Germany became the final front of World War II and the first and primary front of the Cold War—and had housed a powerful, nondemocratic regime for more than a decade. Had France been in Germany's place, the Allies would likely have left behind a similar military presence.

A preferable alternative to either category is to classify FIRC according to the intentions of the intervening state. Specifically, did the intervener become involved explicitly to impose a democracy in the target state? I code a FIRC as foreign-imposed democratization if the leaders of the intervening state made a pro-democracy statement or if the intervener did not overthrow a democratically elected government and the intervener restored a previously democratically elected government to power.<sup>4</sup> Although leader proclamations are inadequate proxies for unknowable intentions, I use this operationalization because it includes in the set of FIDs cases of false positives (when interveners say they care about promoting democracy but actually do not), but excludes false negatives (when interveners do not say they care about promoting democracy but actually do). After all, talk is cheap. As a result, all of the estimates of the effectiveness of FID presented here underrepresent the true ability of FID to produce a consolidated democracy. Nonetheless, FID led to consolidated democracies in thirteen out of seventeen target states after World War I. In those seventeen cases, the average Polity score of the target state was just below 9 the year before the FID and just above 17 ten years after the FID, a significant jump compared to other types of FIRC (see figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

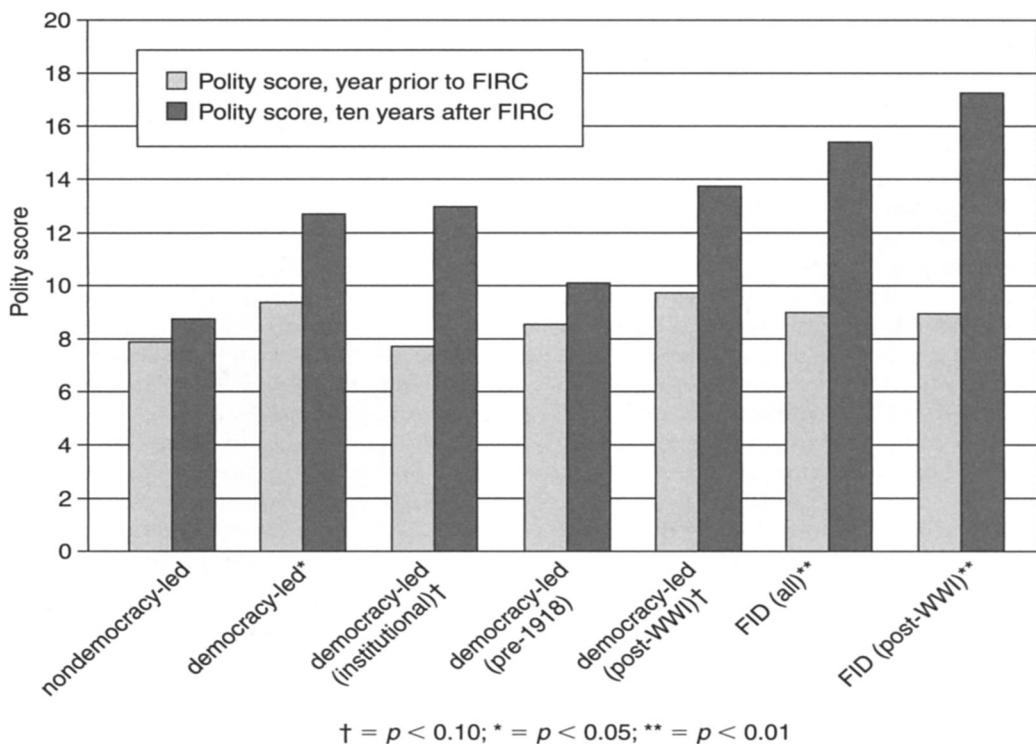
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3. Downes and Monten do not classify these postwar cases as institutional "because the Allies did nothing but restore previously democratic governments to power." *Ibid.*, p. 114. This is not entirely true. The same government rarely returned to power, and in many states (including France), domestic elites constructed entirely new sets of institutions (e.g., the Fourth Republic) under the watchful eye of the United States. Downes and Monten further note that "[t]hese countries surely would have remained democracies had they not been overrun by the Wehrmacht" (p. 114). Perhaps, but this is not the appropriate counterfactual for assessing the effectiveness of the regime change and democratization that came at the end of World War II. Rather, the question is whether these countries would have democratized without Allied intervention. Most likely, they would have remained autocratic for the foreseeable future. In addition, if such interventions involved the creation of new democratic institutions, then one should attribute the democratization of these countries at least in part to FIRC.

4. For further discussion on measuring intentions, see *ibid.*, p. 102; James Meernik, "United States Military Intervention and the Promotion of Democracy," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (November 1996), pp. 391–402; Mark Peceny, *Democracy at the Point of Bayonets* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999); and Mark Peceny, "Forcing Them to Be Free," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (September 1999), pp. 549–582.

5. Following Downes and Monten, I use a transformed version of the Polity2 variable from the Polity IV project, a leading dataset on democratization. For every year in the data, the Polity2 variable captures how democratic a state is, ranging from –10 (most autocratic) to 10 (most democratic). Downes and Monten add 11 to the Polity2 score so that the variable contains strictly positive values, ranging from 1 to 21. On this scale, 17 and higher scores indicate a consolidated

Figure 1. Comparison of Average Target State Polity Score, on a 21-Point Scale, of the Year prior to the Intervention with Ten years after the Intervention, by Type of FIRC Using Data from 1816 to 2000



#### DIFFERENCES OVER TIME: FIRC AFTER WORLD WAR I

FIRC varies across time as well as space. Downes and Montén's data go as far back as 1816.<sup>6</sup> The evolving nature of military power and the international system, however, has made FIRC a different enterprise in the twenty-first century from what it was in the past. Pinpointing the exact moment is difficult, but the historical record suggests that the end of World War I marks an important shift: FIRC initiated by democracies after the war produced fifteen consolidated democracies compared with only one be-

democracy. See Downes and Montén, "Forced to Be Free?" p. 107; and Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800–2010*, <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

6. I extend Downes and Montén's statistical analysis, which begins in 1900, back to 1816. Even though Downes and Montén consider only twentieth-century cases, it is still important to separate the dataset at 1918. Theoretically, the year 1918 demarcates more meaningfully two separate eras of FIRCs with separate causal logics than does the year 1900. Historically, the period from 1900 to the end of World War I includes fifteen FIRCs, or about a quarter of the cases examined by Downes

fore the war. Although more research is required to unearth the underlying causes of this shift, it is possible to identify two broad historical developments that began in earnest only after World War I and would positively affect the prospects of democratization after FIRC.

First, scholars agree that World War I marks a significant turning point in the use of tactics and operations, introducing a type of modern force employment that spread across states and has remained in use for almost a century.<sup>7</sup> Modern-system force employment bestows particular benefits to interveners with superior military technology facing nonmodern system targets.<sup>8</sup> Thus, it is unsurprising that many modern FIRC operations—such as the U.S. interventions in Grenada, Panama, and Haiti—lasted weeks, not years.<sup>9</sup> When a modern-system intervener faces a nonmodern target state, as is the case in the vast majority of—but not all—post-World War I FIRCs, the probability of military success for the intervener increases exponentially compared to when both employed nonmodern tactics.<sup>10</sup> Although military success does not ensure successful democratization, quick and complete military victory does reduce the risk that the state will collapse into all-out civil war. Given that their militaries make quick work of their opponents on the battlefield, modern-system interveners can remove regimes while minimizing damage to target-state infrastructure and to relations between groups in the target state.<sup>11</sup> Although civil war may still break out, a modern-system intervener has a better chance than a nonmodern intervener to prevent its onset following a FIRC.

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and Monten. This is a large enough subset of cases to merit separate analysis, especially when added to the twenty-nine FIRCs from 1816 to 1900.

7. As Stephen Biddle puts it, the modern system's significance "lies in its stability over time and its transnational nature. Exposed to the same problem, radical firepower, each of the European great powers eventually arrived at essentially the same solution. This convergent evolution suggests that the pattern of force employment embodied in the modern system is not merely idiosyncratic or happenstantial but instead represents a fundamental property of modern warfare." See Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 31.

8. By the beginning of the twentieth century, weaponry had become so deadly that only modern system tactics could protect attackers from exposure to its lethality. At the same time, modern system operations allow attackers to quickly put an end to defenses. The greater the disparity in technologies between attacker and defender, the faster these offensives come to an end. See *ibid.*, pp. 73–76.

9. This assessment complements rather than contradicts Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III's finding that the success of counterinsurgency wars has decreased as armies have become more mechanized. Granted, some modern FIRCs result in occupation and protracted counterinsurgency campaigns, but the vast majority—fifty-seven out of sixty-three—do not. Modern interveners can more effectively carry out the military goals of FIRC than their nonmodern counterparts, preventing a civil war, an occupation, or both. See Lyall and Wilson, "Rage against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency War," *International Organization*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Winter 2009), pp. 67–106.

10. Ryan Grauer and Michael C. Horowitz, "What Determines Military Victory? Testing the Modern System," *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2012), pp. 83–111.

11. These are critical determinants of the prospects for civil war onset and democratization after a FIRC. Since 1944, civil wars have erupted after only ten out of thirty-nine FIRCs. See Downes and Monten, "Forced to Be Free?" pp. 105–106; Goran Peic and Dan Reiter, "Foreign-Imposed Regime Change, State Power, and Civil War Onset, 1920–2004," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 41,



Second, with the exception of the 1930s, the post-1918 international system has been significantly less hostile toward nascent democracies than any system that preceded it. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, regional powers such as France, Great Britain, and the United States caught in a “Wilsonian moment,” promoted democracy actively. In the second half of the twentieth century, these efforts were coupled with a bevy of international institutions—from election monitors to the European Union—built to support democratization.<sup>12</sup> Thus, a post-World War I target of regime change would find its efforts to construct democratic institutions heavily supported, not only by the intervener but other international actors as well.

More than half of all FIRC and more than three-quarters of all FIDs initiated by democracies after World War I have produced consolidated democracies in target states. Qualitative historical evidence supports the intuition suggested by these patterns. At an extreme, compare the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, which began as a small-scale operation in 1910 and lasted for more than two decades as a full occupation, to the U.S. intervention in Haiti in 1994. In Haiti, U.S. forces removed the military regime in power and quickly reinstated democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide with only one casualty. Afterward, United Nations peacekeepers oversaw the peaceful construction of democratic institutions. Although Nicaragua did not become fully democratic until the 1990s, Haiti held free-and-fair elections as soon as June 1995.<sup>13</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Downes and Montan ask an important question: “Is foreign-imposed regime change by democratic states an effective means of spreading democracy?” (p. 90). They also provide impressive empirical evidence to support their answer that “simply overthrowing foreign leaders is unlikely to enhance democracy” (p. 130). The authors, however, offer an analytical framework with two shortcomings that prevent them from presenting a complete answer. First, their conceptual categories do not capture cases of FIRC in which the intervener intended to promote democracy. Indeed, they either include irrelevant cases or omit critical ones. Second, they do not recognize that the prospects of success facing FIRC vary over time. After World War I, interveners, when facing nonmodern military opponents, could unseat regimes with greater speed and could construct democratic institutions in the target state with the assistance of other inter-

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No. 3 (July 2011), pp. 453–475; and Michael W. Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, *Making War and Building Peace: United Nations Peace Operations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

12. Susan D. Hyde, *The Pseudo-Democrat's Dilemma: Why Election Observation Became an International Norm* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011); Daniel Corstange and Nikolay Marinov, “Taking Sides in Other People’s Elections: The Polarizing Effect of Foreign Intervention,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July 2012), pp. 655–670; Milada Anna Vachudova, *Europe Undivided: Democracy, Leverage, and Integration after Communism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Van Coufodakis, “The European Economic Community and the ‘Freezing’ of the Greek Association, 1967–1974,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (December 1977), pp. 114–131.

13. Steven Greenhouse, “Allies of Aristide Appear Big Winners in the Haitian Elections,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1995; and Robert A. Pastor, “Report on the Elections in Haiti” (Atlanta: Carter Center, June 25, 1995).

national actors. As an alternative, scholars should look at foreign-imposed democratization, cases of FIRC in which the intervener promoted democracy. Afghanistan and Iraq loom large in the collective consciousness for obvious reasons. The reality, however, is that most interventions are far shorter affairs. Since 1918, all interveners, including the United States, have faced a full-fledged counterinsurgency following a FID in only Afghanistan and Iraq. Instead, the much more likely outcome has been the democratization of the target state.

—William G. Nomikos  
New Haven, Connecticut

*Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten Reply:*

We thank William Nomikos for his thoughtful response to our article, “Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization,” and we welcome the opportunity to reply to the points he raises.<sup>1</sup> In our article, we investigated the democratizing effects of foreign-imposed regime changes (FIRCs) carried out by democracies since 1900. We differentiated “leadership FIRCs,” in which interveners removed the leader of the target state but did not take actions to alter the state’s institutions, from “institutional FIRCs,” where interveners removed the leader but also took concrete actions to promote democracy in the target state, in particular holding free-and-fair elections. We found that democratization was more likely to occur where interveners promoted democratic institutions and where targets possessed characteristics that favored democracy, such as high levels of economic development, ethnically homogeneous populations, or previous experience with democratic rule. Where these domestic preconditions were absent, democratization was likely to fail, even when interveners took steps to promote it.

Nomikos criticizes two aspects of our analysis. First, he argues that our key independent variable, institutional FIRC, is operationalized too narrowly because it excludes cases “in which the intervener clearly intended to promote democratic change.” Nomikos contends that it should be replaced by “foreign-imposed democratization” (FID), cases “where the intervener intended to replace a nondemocratic regime with a democratic one” regardless of whether the intervener took any concrete action to promote democratic change.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Nomikos argues that the analysis of FID should begin in 1918 for two

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1. Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, “Forced to Be Free? Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization,” *International Security*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 90–131; and William G. Nomikos, “Correspondence: Reevaluating Foreign-Imposed Regime Change,” *International Security*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Winter 2013/14), pp. 184–195.

2. Nomikos also criticizes one of our other variables—a dummy variable for all FIRCs carried out by democracies—as too broad (because it includes cases where democratic states intervened to promote democracy and cases where they undermined democracy), but this criticism ignores our differentiation between leadership and institutional FIRCs. We thus do not address this point further.



reasons. For one, the invention of the modern system of force employment during World War I enables interveners to overthrow foreign governments quickly with little “damage to target-state infrastructure and to relations between groups in the target state.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, the “Wilsonian moment” of democracy promotion after 1918 gave rise to a “bevy of international institutions” that further enhances the prospects for democratization.

Analyzing FIDs in the post-1918 period, Nomikos finds that thirteen of seventeen target countries (76 percent) successfully democratized, apparently contradicting our more pessimistic analysis, which found that democratization occurred in only four out of ten cases of institutional FIRC in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

We are not persuaded that FID is a superior category to institutional FIRC, because it contains two types of false positives: cases where interveners declare their pro-democratic intentions but instead install dictators and cases where targets successfully democratize without help from the intervener. Even if we accept Nomikos’s reconceptualization, however, our results are actually strengthened, because almost all of the successful cases of FID that are omitted from our coding of institutional FIRC occurred in wealthy, previously democratic, and largely homogeneous states. Moreover, Nomikos’s case for dividing the universe of cases into pre- and post-1918 periods is not persuasive: although the modern system came into being around this time, its use in regime change operations is unrelated to successful democratization. Further, the Wilsonian moment began before 1918 but ended quickly: democracies did little to promote democracy with military force until the end of the Cold War. We therefore stand by our independent variable and universe of cases, and retain confidence in our findings.

#### INSTITUTIONAL FIRC OR FOREIGN-IMPOSED DEMOCRATIZATION?

Nomikos argues that democratic interveners should be judged by their words rather than their deeds. Specifically, Nomikos defines FID as instances of FIRC in which “the leaders of the intervening state made a pro-democracy statement or if the intervener did not overthrow a democratically elected government and the intervener restored a previously democratically elected government to power.”

We are dubious of this definition, because it contains two kinds of false positives. First, Nomikos’s emphasis on pro-democracy statements results in the inclusion of cases where interveners say they are promoting democracy but actually promote autocracy. For example, when plotting the overthrow of Emperor Jean-Bedel Bokassa in the Central African Republic in 1979—a case coded as a FID by Nomikos—French leaders carefully considered how to replace him. According to one account, “Getting rid of the emperor was only part of the task; it was equally important to choose his successor

3. On the modern system, see Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

4. See Downes and Montén, “Forced to Be Free,” p. 123. This count does not include Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), which have not yet transitioned to consolidated democracy, or Grenada, which did become a democracy but was excluded from our analysis owing to its small population. Haiti (1994) is coded as a success, but reverted to autocracy in 1999.

carefully. Such a critical detail could not be left to chance—or to democracy. The French were going to hand-pick the president of the restored republic and install him in power.<sup>5</sup> Nomikos contends that including such cases yields conservative estimates of the democratizing effect of FID because it includes false positives and excludes “false negatives,” cases where “interveners do not say they care about promoting democracy but actually do.” Nomikos provides no examples of false negatives, however, and it is difficult to think of cases where democracies have engaged in forcible democratization but failed to advertise it. Rather than knowingly include false positives such as the Central African Republic in our analysis, we code such cases as leadership FIRCs and measure their effect on democratization separately.

Second, Nomikos’s definition includes another kind of false positive—cases where targets of democratic intervention successfully democratized but not because of anything the intervener did. Indeed, seven of the eleven cases that Nomikos adds to our list of institutional FIRCs are European states that Germany occupied during the two world wars. We discussed these cases in our article; we excluded them from our coding of institutional FIRC because the Allies did not help these countries democratize, mainly because democratic governments ousted by the Nazis were waiting in the wings.<sup>6</sup> In five of the seven cases—Belgium (1918, 1944), the Netherlands (1944), Luxembourg (1944), and Norway (1945)—democratic governments-in-exile simply returned home and took power.<sup>7</sup> In the two remaining cases—France (1944) and Denmark (1945)—the extent of Allied involvement in restoring democracy was recognizing the Provisional Government of the French Republic headed by Charles de Gaulle in October 1944.<sup>8</sup>

As we pointed out in our article, “Intervention to restore democracy in countries that have reverted to autocracy . . . can succeed.”<sup>9</sup> The key intellectual challenge for scholars, however, and the key practical challenge for policymakers, is to discover how military intervention can bring democracy to countries that are not already democratic. These seven postwar cases—where a former democracy suffered a nondemocratic interregnum under foreign occupation—are fundamentally different from cases such as Afghanistan, Iraq, or Libya, states that were ruled for decades by indigenous dictators and where interveners must try to build democracy from the ground

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5. Brian Tittle, *Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), p. 126.

6. Downes and Montan, “Forced to Be Free,” p. 114. We coded these cases as leadership FIRCs.

7. Indeed, in Belgium, Luxembourg, and Norway, the same individuals who were overthrown in 1940 returned to lead these countries’ postwar governments.

8. Even this step was taken reluctantly, as the United States courted several officials of Vichy France as alternatives to de Gaulle during the war. See Annie Lacroix-Riz, “When the U.S. Wanted to Take Over France,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2003, <http://?mondediplo.com/?2003/?05/05lacroix>. In Denmark, which retained its own government until the Germans ousted it in August 1943, a former prime minister, Vilhelm Buhl, formed a unity government after liberation in May 1945.

9. Downes and Montan, “Forced to Be Free,” p. 130. Two other cases Nomikos codes as successful FIDs—Costa Rica (1919) and Lesotho (1994)—also consist of reversals of temporary autocratic interruptions in democratic states.

up. We thus believe there are solid grounds for not coding these seven cases as institutional FIRCs.

Counting these seven Western European cases as institutional FIRCs, however, would only strengthen our argument that democratization is more likely to succeed where there are strong preconditions for democracy, such as high levels of economic development, low levels of ethnic heterogeneity, and previous experience with democratic rule. As we showed in our article, countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Luxembourg, Germany, and Japan are precisely the places where institutional FIRC is likely to result in democratization owing to favorable preexisting conditions. Only in the latter two cases, however, did a democracy overthrow a non-democratic regime that did not have a democratic government-in-waiting, and took actual steps to build new democratic institutions.

#### WHY 1918?

Nomikos argues that the democratization outcomes of FIDs improved after 1918, and hypothesizes that this trend is explained by interveners' adoption of the modern system of force employment supplemented by a supportive international environment for democracies. Both parts of this argument are unconvincing.

Nomikos argues that the modern system allows interveners to win quick and decisive victories, which facilitates the democratization process by minimizing damage to infrastructure and reducing the risk of post-FIRC civil war. Yet advantages in modern system force employment cannot explain the six successful post-World War II FIDs in Europe because the Allies did not hold an advantage in force employment over the German military.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Allies inflicted massive damage to German and Japanese infrastructure and industrial power, yet successfully converted both Germany and Japan into stable democracies. In Iraq and Afghanistan, by contrast, the modern system enabled U.S. forces to defeat the Iraqi army and the Taliban quickly and overthrow both regimes in a matter of weeks, but rapid military victory did not facilitate democratization in either country, instead triggering protracted insurgencies.<sup>11</sup>

The cases cited by Nomikos also show that there is no relationship between employing the modern system and democratization. Nomikos attributes the lengthy U.S. occupation of Nicaragua (1909–33) to the absence of modern system force employment. This is curious, given that U.S. troops did not engage in combat in the FID/institutional FIRC of 1910; their presence was sufficient to convince Liberal President José Madriz to surrender to Conservative rebels. Victory was thus cheap and easy even without the modern system, but this did not help democracy take root in Nicaragua.<sup>12</sup> Nomikos ar-

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10. According to a sample of World War II battles examined by Ryan Grauer and Michael C. Horowitz, both the Allied and German militaries employed the modern system, and thus neither held an advantage in force employment. See Grauer and Horowitz, "What Determines Military Victory? Testing the Modern System," *Security Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 83–112.

11. On the role of the modern system in the military campaign against the Taliban, see Biddle, *Military Power*, pp. 199–201; and Grauer and Horowitz, "What Determines Military Victory?"

12. See Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: An Inner History of American Empire, 1900–1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983), chap. 6; and Yann P. Kerevel, "Re-examining the

gues that the U.S. use of the modern system explains the successful democratization of Haiti in 1994, but again, force was not used in the Haiti operation; Haitian junta leaders succumbed to the threat of a U.S. invasion. American troops that came ashore in September 1994 faced no resistance. It is thus hard to argue that force employment explains success in Haiti but not in the Nicaragua.

The causal logic underlying Nomikos's force employment argument is also flawed. Rather than allowing interveners to minimize damage to "relations among groups in the target state," the explicit goal of FIRC is frequently to alter or reverse the balance of power among domestic groups; the modern system merely allows interveners such as the United States to accomplish this objective more efficiently. The key obstacle to forcible democratization for the United States is rarely defeating the enemy regime, but rather what happens after the regime is overthrown. We argue that democratic interveners face systematically greater difficulties building new democratic institutions in poor, diverse countries with few existing institutions.

Nomikos's contention that the international political environment was more supportive of democratization after World War I than before is also overstated. The "Wilsonian moment" began before 1918 with U.S. interventions in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. Aside from the disputed post-World War II cases and Nicaragua in 1926, however, there were no successful FIDs or institutional FIRCs until the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989. During that time, the world's leading democracies refused to come to the defense of democracies under threat in Spain (1936-39) and Czechoslovakia (1938-39); the United States in particular rescued nondemocracies in South Korea (1950-53) and South Vietnam (1965-73); allied with dictators the world over, including in Congo, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Brazil, the Philippines, and the Dominican Republic; and overthrew elected governments in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile. Democracy may have become more accepted after 1918, but democracies put little emphasis on spreading democracy, at least at the point of bayonets, until after the Cold War.

In short, 1918 is not a watershed moment in the history of FIRC, because the modern system is uncorrelated with democratization success and democracies did little until relatively recently to promote democracy by force.

#### CONCLUSION

Nomikos's letter highlights two important aspects of the policy and scholarly debate over FIRC and democratization. First, when assessing the effect of regime change operations, what is the appropriate unit of analysis? Nomikos argues for expanding the universe of cases to include instances in which interveners identified democratization as one of their goals, regardless of whether they took concrete actions to achieve this objective. In the additional cases included by these criteria—primarily Western European states liberated from Germany during World War II, however—military intervention

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did not transform nondemocratic states into democracies; rather, legitimate and long-standing regimes were restored to power after a wartime interruption. These cases therefore tell us little about the ability of outsiders to engineer durable democratic institutions where they did not previously exist. Even if they did, they would only reinforce our argument that democratization at the point of bayonets is more likely to succeed where preconditions for democracy exist.

Second, Nomikos raises the question of whether the modern system of force employment has increased the effectiveness of regime change operations in promoting democracy. Yet the notion that U.S. conventional military superiority—whether arising from material preponderance, technology, or force employment—better enables the United States to impose democracy surgically, at low cost, and with minimal damage to the states and societies targeted for intervention is an illusion. The historical evidence instead suggests that rapid military victories do not allow the United States to bypass the messiness of domestic politics in target states where the barriers to democratization are high. While mastery of the modern system has expanded the United States' opportunities for forcible regime change, the conditions for success remain the same.

—*Alexander B. Downes*  
Washington, D.C.

—*Jonathan Monten*  
Norman, Oklahoma