

November 2014

Global Flow Security Working Papers

Chapter 12

Transnational Revolutionary Ideologies and Movements

*Mark N. Katz*¹

In his chapter for this volume, Tomas Ries identified transnational revolutionary networks as one of two “black” actors (the other being global organized crime) with an agenda “actively threatening the interests of the lead states and alpha actors.” In this chapter, I will discuss how transnational revolution can be understood as a flow, how the transnational revolution flow interacts with other flows, what sort of transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements are likely to be active between now and 2030, what challenges they will they pose for Europe and America, and how the European Union and the United States might respond to them. First, though, something first needs to be said about what transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements are as well as about their life spans.

Historical Background

Transnational revolutionary movements are political movements that arise in several countries either at the same time or in relatively close proximity to one another. They often gain strength through being motivated by a transnational revolutionary ideology: a set of ideas which gains transnational appeal through identifying a common set of problems, adversaries, and allies, and proposing a common solution to them which includes bringing about the downfall of incumbent regimes and their replacement by what the leaders of these movements promise will be better ones. When a movement advocating such an ideology gains power in one country, it often magnifies the appeal of the transnational revolutionary ideology and movement in others.

Transnational revolutionary movements that were powerful during the Cold War era included ones that espoused anti-European colonialism, Marxism-Leninism, Arab Nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and (toward the end of this period) democratization. (Some of these overlapped

¹ Professor of Government and Politics, School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs, George Mason University.

each other. For example, some anti-colonial revolutions were Marxist-Leninist, some were Arab Nationalist, and some were neither.) Since the end of the Cold War, transnational revolutionary movements that have been active include the continuation of the democratic revolutionary movement that arose at the end of the Cold War, the Bolivarian movement (essentially a Marxist revival in Latin America), the “color” revolutions (which sought to democratize former communist states where authoritarianism continued after the Cold War), and – most recently – the “Arab Spring” which has sought to wed democratization with an Islamic political orientation.

From just the above listing alone, it should be evident that some transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements have been more successful than others. For example, the anti-European colonial revolutionary wave not only achieved the goal of bringing about the independence of European colonies in Asia and Africa, but has also maintained this goal as well (i.e., the countries that gained independence have not been re-colonized). Others still – such as the Marxist-Leninist and the Arab Nationalist revolutionary waves – spread to several countries in a relatively short period of time, but most of the revolutionary regimes they brought to power sooner or later accommodated themselves to the world market economy and to the West, or were overthrown sometimes by another transnational revolutionary movement. Democratic revolutions succeeded in establishing democracy in some countries – but not in others. Other, especially more recent, revolutionary waves are still a work in progress whose final outcome is unclear.

In some cases, a transnational revolutionary ideology became popular with many people years or even decades before its adherents were able to seize power anywhere. This was true both of Marxism and of Arab nationalism. But with the extraordinary improvements in communications technology – especially in recent years with the penetration of mobile telephones and the internet (which together allow anyone with access to both to make videos and disseminate them instantly), transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements have been able not just to arise in an instant, but to lead to successful revolutions in a very short period of time as well.

Transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements are usually strongest from immediately before to immediately after they seize power somewhere. It is then that a state of euphoria emerges over the much anticipated and subsequently achieved downfall of the hated old regime and great optimism bursts forth about how better life now will surely be under the new regime. Such high expectations, however, usually cannot be met fully – or sometimes even partially – thus resulting in disillusionment with the new regime and perhaps even the revolutionary ideology it espouses. Of course, revolutionary regimes (like non-revolutionary ones) can remain in power for an extended period of time even without popular support. How they fare over the long-term, however, depends very much both on the success or failure of their domestic policies, the degree of support or opposition they receive from external powers (especially the great powers), and the degree of loyalty and cohesion they are able to maintain within the leadership ranks of the regime.

Transnational revolution possesses what Tomas Ries identified as the three essential characteristics of a flow: cyclicity (or circularity), transformation, and integration with other flows. In discussing the future of transnational revolution here, its integration with other flows

will be discussed first, then cycles of transnational revolution, and after that the transformation of transnational revolution.

The Integration of Transnational Revolution with Other Flows

In her seminal book *States and Social Revolutions*, Theda Skocpol argued that social revolution occurs not so much as a result of the actions of revolutionaries but as a result of state breakdown, which creates opportunity for revolutionaries to seize power which they otherwise would not have. And state breakdown is the result of forces that are far more powerful than revolutionary movements which neither states nor their revolutionary opponents create or control, but which strongly affect the balance of power between them.² Her insight is critically important for understanding how the transnational revolution flow is integrated with other flows.

Elsewhere in this volume, six global trends likely to impact global flows to 2030 are identified. These trends are 1) “G-Zero World” (changing distribution of global power); 2) “Liquid World” (diffusion of state power to transnational actors); 3) “More Human Power” (global technological diffusion); 4) “Shrinking World” (growing population and resource scarcity); 5) “Global Awakening” (empowerment of individuals and social vulnerabilities); and 6) “Extreme World” (climate change and environmental degradation). Each of these will be (all too) briefly discussed here in terms of their likelihood on the prospects for revolution between now and 2030.

Changing distribution of global power has been identified by several leading scholars as giving rise to revolution. Theda Skocpol saw defeat in war as contributing to state breakdown in the losing country,³ while Fred Halliday theorized that war among the major powers (such as World War I and World War II) led to a weakening of their control over the international system and hence to revolution.⁴ John Foran did not see war as being necessary for this, but a more broadly defined “world systemic opening” (which could occur through the great power patron of the regime in a particular country simply not paying sufficient attention to events there) as an essential ingredient for successful revolution.⁵ Certainly since the beginning of the Cold War, waves of revolution have occurred in several countries when great powers became unwilling, for whatever reason, to continue costly efforts to maintain influence there. Thus, the withdrawal of European colonial powers weakened by World War II from the developing world led to revolution in many countries. Similarly, the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina in 1973 led to an upsurge of Marxist revolution in what was then known as the Third World during the 1970s. When Gorbachev signaled Moscow’s unwillingness to remain militarily engaged in Afghanistan or back up hard-line communist regimes in Eastern Europe, a wave of democratic revolution swept through the latter. It would not be surprising, then, that the American withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan could lead to another revolutionary upsurge. Indeed, the fact that “Arab Spring” revolutions overthrew governments long allied to Washington in Tunisia, Egypt, and

² Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵ John Foran, *Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Yemen in the same year that the U.S. was completing its withdrawal from Iraq may be an indication that this process has begun. The impending American withdrawal from Afghanistan combined with American and European reluctance to undertake major military interventions could lead to another upsurge of revolutionary activity lasting for several years.

Diffusion of state power to transnational actors may contribute to the perception that states are becoming weaker, and thus more susceptible to revolution. On the other hand, it may not make sense to overthrow the state if doing so will not lead to a decline in the power of transnational actors. Still, some revolutionary movements may simply aspire to free one or more countries they are concerned with from the influence of transnational actors they object to by replacing existing governments that cooperate with them with ones that will not. It is also possible that the growing influence of transnational actors may result in new types of revolutionary movements that focus their efforts not on overthrowing the state, but damaging or destroying the transnational actors that they find particularly objectionable.

Global technological diffusion, especially in the realms of communications technology and social media, has already provided revolutionary movements with highly important advantages. Through the use of mobile phones, Facebook, Twitter, and similar tools, revolutionary movements have been able to gather enormous crowds as well as publicize their actions to the rest of the world in an extremely short period of time. The rapidity of the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in particular are examples of this trend—which is only likely to grow stronger in the coming years. Still, the ability of technically-capable counter-revolutionary regimes such as China to limit or deny their opponents access to these new technologies while at the same time taking advantage of them should not be underestimated.

Growing population and resource scarcity, where these occur, are highly likely to contribute to the occurrence of revolution. Indeed, Jack Goldstone has argued that rapid prolonged demographic growth combined with fiscal incompetence has been the foremost cause of state breakdown leading to revolution in Europe and Asia since the 17th century.⁶ This combination of factors is strongly present today in many Muslim countries in particular, and so Goldstone's theory would indicate that the Muslim world in particular is likely to experience revolutionary activity over the next several years. Still, the fact that democratic revolutionary movements have risen up in countries with low growing or even declining populations such as Eastern Europe in 1989 and Ukraine in both 2004 and 2013 shows that revolutionary activity in them cannot be ruled out (and also that it might be time for a new theory to explain this phenomenon). Resource scarcity may contribute to the fiscal problems which both beleaguer existing regimes and provide impetus for revolutionary movements. But while successful revolutions lead to a change in government, they cannot alter the fact of resource scarcity. Although they can (and usually do) drastically reduce the preferential access of groups favored by the ousted regime to these resources, all too often new (especially authoritarian) revolutionary regimes do not distribute these scarce resources equitably either—thus sowing the seeds of future discontent.

⁶ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Jack A. Goldstone, "Population Growth and Revolutionary Crises," in John Foran (ed.), *Theorizing Revolutions* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 102-120.

Empowerment of individuals can be expected to contribute to revolution while **social vulnerabilities** may both contribute to as well as result from revolution. Over four decades ago, political scientist Ted Robert Gurr observed that revolution does not occur either in the richest or the poorest countries, but in ones in between where conditions may actually be improving—but not fast enough to satisfy the growing expectations of the population.⁷ Increased levels of education, connection to the outside world, and even affluence, then, may not contribute to stability, but to a heightened awareness of what one lacks compared both to elites at home and to people generally in other countries, and to a keener sense of the unfairness of this state of affairs. Increased education, connectedness, and/or affluence may not only increase the demand for democratization (a positive trend), but can also intensify feelings of nationalist, ethnic, and/or sectarian solidarity as well as conflict among different such groups (a negative trend). The growth in nationalist, ethnic, and sectarian awareness as well as large numbers of conflicts in which they are an important factor in recent years combined with the lack of countervailing forces seeking to mitigate them suggest that they will play an important role in the unfolding of revolutionary conflict going forward. Further, prolonged violent revolutionary conflicts (such as is taking place in Syria) give rise to massive refugee flows that can destabilize neighboring countries and contribute to the growth in intolerant, anti-immigrant nationalist movements both in them and in Western countries.

Climate change and environmental degradation have not been at the forefront of causes that revolutionary movements espouse. However, climate change and environmental degradation that cannot be ameliorated by incumbent governments can contribute to state breakdown by demonstrating state incapacity and undermining incumbent government legitimacy, thus contributing to revolution against it. Of course, revolutionary movements that succeed in seizing power may have no more capacity to ameliorate the problems for their country caused by climate change and environmental degradation than the regimes which they have ousted. Climate change and environmental degradation may then work to demonstrate their incapacity.

With this discussion of larger global trends at work and how they might integrate with transnational revolution between now and 2030 in mind, we turn now to a discussion of the cycles of transnational revolution likely to be active during this period.

Transnational Revolutionary Cycles

The cyclicity of transnational revolution can be seen in the periodic rise, fall, and re-emergence of transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements. Those transnational revolutionary ideologies and movements that have shown a proclivity to re-emerge even after seeming to fail or dissipate in the past, then, may be ones that are likely to persist at least until 2030. These include persistent cycles of transnational revolution include authoritarian Marxist, Islamist, democratic, and nationalist ones.

Authoritarian Marxist revolutionaries who first came to power in Russia were disappointed that their movement was unable to quickly seize power in other countries. But in the wake of World War II, authoritarian Marxism did spread—and not just via the Red Army—to parts of Eastern

⁷ Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

Europe and East Asia. Primarily indigenous forces brought authoritarian Marxism to power in Yugoslavia, Albania, China, and North Vietnam during these years. Interestingly, it was indigenous communist parties in three of these countries (Yugoslavia, Albania, and China) that would break with the Soviet Union. Another wave of authoritarian Marxism arose in many developing countries including Cuba in 1959, South Yemen in 1967, and several others in the 1970s. This revolutionary wave, though, experienced a collapse in the late 1980s and early 1990s when authoritarian Marxist regimes fell in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and the developing world. Authoritarian Marxist regimes in China and Vietnam survived and even prospered, but did so through adapting to the global economy. Only North Korea and Cuba survived as authoritarian Marxist regimes that adhered largely (if not completely) to autarchic communist economic models.

Yet despite the apparent collapse of communism in 1989-91, semi-authoritarian Marxism experienced a revival in the early 21st century in four Latin American countries: Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. “Maoist” movements have been active both in India and Nepal, and have even played a role in governance in the latter. This Marxist revolutionary inclination appears likely to persist in Latin America and South Asia and may even arise elsewhere between now and 2030. On the other hand, this inclination does not appear any more likely than in the past to extract Marxist-ruled countries from the international market economy or construct a more successful Marxist economic model in them (much less the rest of the world). The best they may hope for is to replicate what China and Vietnam have done: increase domestic prosperity through embracing the world market under the rule of ostensibly Marxist parties.

The modern *Islamic* revolutionary wave began with the Iranian revolution of 1979. Historian Nikki Keddie, though, traced the Islamic revolutionary movement back to 1700 since when it has repeatedly risen and fallen.⁸ The modern Islamic revolutionary movement is not monolithic, but is divided between Sunni and Shi’a branches, and among authoritarian tendencies (including al-Qaeda and its affiliates), more democratically-oriented ones (including some Islamist elements within the “Arab Spring”), and hybrids such as the Islamic Republic of Iran which combines authoritarian and democratic features. Before the Arab Spring, the modern Islamic revolutionary movement came to rule over three countries: Iran beginning in 1979, Sudan beginning in 1989, and Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

Islamists have played a role in all of the Arab Spring revolutions (whether successful or not). Islamist revolutionary activity, though, is widespread. With the withdrawal of American and allied military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, it is possible that such groups might gain influence in all or part of these two countries. Far more than the Marxist one, the Islamist transnational revolutionary movement is highly likely to be active through 2030 and beyond. On the other hand, it seems doubtful that this movement will be able to overcome sectarian differences between Sunni and Shi’a, resolve differences within it between authoritarian and

⁸ Nikki R. Keddie, “The Revolt of Islam 1700-1993,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36:3 (1994), pp. 463-487.

democratic leanings, and succeed in persuading powerful non-adherents (such as secular Arab military establishments) to coexist with it.⁹

Democratization has sometimes occurred via *democratic revolution* and sometimes via other means, including more evolutionary ones. Samuel Huntington argued that democratization occurred in waves, but that these democracy waves were followed by reverse waves in which many of those that attempted democratization reverted to authoritarianism.¹⁰ Non-violent democratic revolutionary movements burst forth in a number of countries since the latter part of the Cold War – most notably in 1989-91. But true to Huntington’s warning, only some of these succeeded in instituting democracy (most notably in Eastern Europe) while others either failed to come to power (China 1989) or appeared to do so but then reverted to authoritarianism under elected leaders (Russia under Yeltsin and Putin).

The “Color Revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) again showed that the seeming triumph of democracy could prove short-lived. The hopes for democratization that the Arab Spring gave rise to have also been largely disappointed. But as the recent resurgence of the Ukrainian democratic movement after then-President Yanukovich reneged on his decision to sign an association agreement with the EU demonstrated, attempts at democratic revolution in response to popular disappointment can burst forth quite suddenly. Whether as a result of unpopular decisions or contested election results, authoritarian regimes can be counted upon to supply numerous such opportunities for democratic revolutionary movements to arise. It is highly likely, then, that more democratic revolutionary efforts will occur between now and 2030 (and beyond). Some will succeed and some will fail—but even the failure of a democratic revolution or experiment does not preclude a successful effort from being made later.

The cycle of *nationalist movements* (both revolutionary and non-revolutionary) seeking independence for the colonies of West European countries in the developing world came to an end in 1975 when the Portuguese colonial empire collapsed. At the end of the Cold War, though, another cycle of nationalist movements (again, both revolutionary and non-revolutionary) aimed at the secession of regions from already independent states became strong. There were, of course, many secessionist movements during the Cold War era, but very few of them actually achieved independence. (The one major exception was Bangladesh’s secession from Pakistan.) In the post-Cold War era, however, there has been a considerable amount of secession. It began with the breakup of the USSR into fifteen independent states. This was followed shortly thereafter by the breakup of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Ethiopia. Kosovo became independent from Serbia, and, more recently, South Sudan seceded from Sudan. In addition to all these cases of generally recognized independence, there have also been other cases where de facto independence has been achieved despite not being officially recognized by many – or any – governments. Examples of this include the Somaliland Republic (which has effectively seceded from Somalia), Kurdistan (from Iraq), and – with Russian help – Abkhazia and South Ossetia

⁹ For an elaboration of this argument, see Mark N. Katz, *Leaving without Losing: The War on Terror after Iraq and Afghanistan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1991).

(from Georgia). Although many other secessionist movements have not achieved independence even after years of trying, neither have they been eliminated by governments which have earnestly sought to do so—as in the North Caucasus, East Turkestan (Xinjiang), Tibet, Kashmir, Mindanao, and many other instances in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. Strong secessionist movements are also active inside some of the former imperial states of Western Europe, including ones in Scotland, Catalonia, and Northern Italy.

As noted earlier, many of the post-Cold War instances of successful secession – such as the breakup of the USSR – were not the result of revolutionary movements. Indeed, secessionist movements in the West (such as those in Western Europe and Canada) have sought to achieve their goals largely through legally-sanctioned elections. Others instances of secessionist nationalism, though, can be considered revolutionary (whether operating peacefully or violently). Secessionist nationalists have not acted under the influence of a transnational revolutionary ideology seeking secession generally. Instead, secessionists almost always justify their claim to independence as an exception needed for their specific nation. But the more that secession occurs or even seems likely to occur, the more that secessionists elsewhere are likely to believe that they too can achieve it. In other words, despite the disparities in the manner in which it is sought and achieved, increased instances of successful secession could give rise to new international norms more approving of secession and disapproving of violent efforts to suppress it.

We turn now to a discussion of how these cycles of transnational revolution might be transformed between now and 2030.

Transformation of Transnational Revolution

Tomas Ries notes that flows evolve dynamically. Revolution is a phenomenon that has evolved, and which can be expected to continue doing so. Three potential transformations in particular need to be discussed: 1) transformation in how revolution occurs; 2) transformation in the relationship between democracy and revolution; and 3) the evolution of revolutionary regimes.

There has long been variation in how revolution occurs. The “great revolutions” of the past—such as the French revolution in the 18th century and the Russian and Chinese revolutions in the 20th century – were prolonged, violent, and included significant peasant involvement. Especially since the fourth quarter of the 20th century, though, numerous revolutions (including the East European revolutions of 1989, the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003-04, and the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011) were short, non-violent, and predominantly urban-based. These quick, non-violent revolutions were democratic in aspiration, if not always in achievement. It would not be surprising if more such revolutions occurred between now and 2030. As the Arab Spring of 2011 showed, they can both arise quite unexpectedly and topple incumbent regimes very quickly. But as Syria has shown, prolonged, violent attempts at revolution may also occur. The case of Syria suggests that the more prolonged and violent an attempt at revolution becomes, the more likely it is that authoritarian forces will dominate the revolutionary opposition.

The relationship between democracy and revolution is not just affected by whether revolution is short and non-violent or prolonged and violent. Even authoritarian revolutionary movements

have long claimed to be democratic or reflecting the “will of the people.” In recent years, though, there has been a degree of genuine ambivalence about whether transnational revolutionary movements are democratic or authoritarian. While Marxist revolutions during the Cold War gave rise to highly authoritarian regimes, the Bolivarian revolutions of the post-Cold War era have combined elements of authoritarianism with elements of democracy. The elected leaders of the self-declared revolutionary governments of Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have all acted to limit the ability of their opponents to contest their rule, but have also allowed some space for their political opponents as well as private enterprise to operate in. While these regimes might evolve in more authoritarian directions, they could also evolve in more democratic ones. Similarly, just as the Iranian revolution of 1979 resulted in a regime combining both authoritarian and democratic elements, the 2011 Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen have combined both authoritarian and democratic elements. Their final outcome is still not clear. While the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989 all resulted in democratization (albeit more rapidly in some countries than in others), the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan resulted in partially democratic, partially authoritarian regimes. Finally, the desire for democracy combined with the desire for nationalist secession can (and has) led to democratically-elected but intolerantly nationalist leaders both favoring and opposing secession. The continuation of this trend suggests that even though revolutions themselves may be occurring increasingly quickly and peacefully, there may well be prolonged ambiguity about their outcomes.

Past patterns in the long-term evolution of revolutionary regimes, though, suggest that even highly expansionist authoritarian transnational movements that come to power violently can evolve into non-revolutionary, status quo powers. This is because, once in power, the main goal of these revolutionary leaders tends to focus on remaining in power. Attempting to spread revolution, they find, is either a costly failure – or worse – a pyrrhic victory because it leads to the installation either of weak revolutionary regimes elsewhere that are much costlier to defend than to bring to power or to strong revolutionary regimes that become their rivals. By contrast, remaining in power, revolutionary leaders often conclude, is much easier to do through cooperation with the West rather than continued hostility toward it. A recent example of this occurring is Iran, where President Ahmadinejad’s belligerence only served to isolate and impoverish that country while the moderation of his successor, President Rouhani, has brought forth the prospect of easing sanctions and improving relations with the West. Further such transformations hold out the prospect that other anti-Western transnational revolutionary movements that have come to power more recently –or may yet come to power – will also become less revolutionary and more willing (even if just for the sake of their own self-preservation) to cooperate with the West in the long-run.

Challenges for Europe and America in 2030

Just as in the past, transnational revolution is highly likely to be something that occurs and thus poses a challenge to Europe and America between now and 2030 (and beyond). The discussion above about the integration of transnational revolution with other flows suggests that 1) as a group, these other flows work to encourage revolution; 2) advances in communications technology and social networking in particular increase the prospects for revolutionary movements to arise suddenly and surprisingly; and 3) the flows encouraging transnational

revolution are so strong that Europe and America probably have little capacity to restrain them even if they tried to do so. The discussion of transnational revolutionary cycles suggests that Islamic, democratic, nationalist secessionist, and even authoritarian Marxist revolutions are the most likely varieties of revolution to occur between now and 2030, though the possibility of other types cannot be ruled out. And the discussion of the transformation of transnational revolution suggests that even though revolution may arise and topple regimes quickly, 1) their outcomes may take a considerable period of time to unfold, and 2) even initially anti-Western revolutionary regimes may eventually come to regard cooperation with the West as being in their interests.

Recognizing that their ability to do so is limited, what can Europe and America do to meet the challenges to them from transnational revolutionary movements that they will undoubtedly confront?

Europe and America are fortunate that since the latter part of the Cold War, democratic revolutionary movements that seek cooperation – or even integration– with the West have been especially active. This was in contrast to most of the Cold War era when so much revolutionary activity was led by non-democratic movements that were hostile to the West.

Even pro-Western, democratic revolutionary movements, though, can pose serious challenges for Europe and America. It is wonderful when such movements come to power quickly and peacefully. Often, however, the authoritarian regimes they seek to overthrow act to suppress them violently. What should Europe and America do in such cases? Intervention, or even lesser forms of active assistance, can be costly and frustrating – especially when the democratic revolutionary movement proves to be poorly organized and divided. Yet doing little or nothing risks the defeat of democratic opposition movements by authoritarian regimes that might have been more restrained if the democratic opposition they faced was receiving serious Western support and protection. A longer term risk is that people disappointed by not receiving Western support for a democratic revolution against an authoritarian regime may turn to some form of non-democratic revolutionary ideology as the “only way” to get rid of a dictator whom they have come to believe that the West actually supports. Western indifference to the democratic aspirations of religiously-minded Arabs, for example, could result in the latter turning to the anti-democratic jihadists whom they previously rejected.

Of course, it is not always clear how democratic a revolutionary movement actually is before it comes to power, or even afterward. Transnational revolutionary movements and ideologies, as was noted earlier, usually claim to be democratic and to represent “the will of the people.” But the definition of democracy is often contested. Should it be secular liberal as in the West, or should it be informed by religious values in societies (such as Muslim ones) where these are especially strong? To what extent should the new democratic regime embrace majority rule, and to what extent should the rights of minorities (however defined) be protected from the majority? These are questions that are currently affecting those countries where Arab Spring revolutions have either taken place or are being attempted. Part of the problem is that while different political groupings may genuinely see themselves as committed to democracy, they often do not see their rivals as being so. As the situation in Egypt is demonstrating now, such situations pose serious challenges for Europe and America.

So do nationalist secessionist movements. What these are often about is competing images of democracy. Is the existing state the most desirable locus of democracy, or would its division be preferable? If a referendum on the matter were held, the majority in an existing state might well vote to keep it intact, while a minority that is a majority in a region of it might instead vote for secession. How should such a situation be decided? When the government of the existing state is authoritarian and the movement seeking secession is (or claims to be) democratic, then the latter often succeeds in attracting sympathy and support from Europe and America—as occurred with Kosovo and South Sudan. But is the best solution to these situations allowing the region seeking independence to secede, or the democratization of the existing state? And if secession occurs without the consent of the state that loses a region, what impact will this have on the prospects for democratization in the remaining “rump” state? There are no easy answers to these questions. Something that Europe and America do need to understand, though, is that every time they support secession out of exceptional and/or humanitarian considerations, they fuel the demand for secession elsewhere by others who see their cause as being at least as equally deserving.

In addition, just as Europe and America need to be alive to the possibility that democratic revolution can yield an authoritarian outcome, they also need to be alert to the possibility that authoritarian revolutionary regimes can democratize. This may especially be true in cases where the revolutionary regime already allows some degree of electoral contestation (as in Iran, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua), and where popular disillusionment with them has grown (ditto).

Europe and America may not be able to do much of anything to spark democratization, democratic revolution, or political change of any kind in the two authoritarian great powers, Russia and China. Should political change occur in either or both of them, however, Europe and America should act to encourage it in a democratic direction as well as to prevent change in Russia and/or China from disrupting their neighbors’ security.

Policy Recommendations

As discussed here, transnational revolutionary movements and ideologies are highly varied phenomena. They will require varied policies on the part of Europe and America in order to deal with them effectively. Here are several suggestions:

Toward anti-democratic movements: Do not just focus exclusively on defeating them militarily, but also on discrediting them. While authoritarian movements have shown that they can survive the former, their own bad behavior makes them unwitting allies in the latter.

Toward democratic revolutionary movements: There are actions short of costly intervention that Europe and America can undertake to help them, including:

- Proclaim Western support for resolving confrontations between democratic opposition and authoritarian regime through free, internationally-monitored elections;
- Impose European and American sanctions on regimes that resist doing so (i.e., don’t wait for authoritarian Russia and China to approve Security Council sanctions, or use their unwillingness to do so as an excuse not to impose Western ones);

- Encourage authoritarian leaders to surrender power through arranging for their safe flight into exile (while many of their democratic opponents will demand that they be tried and punished, arranging for their exile can lead to a speedier end to the crisis and fewer casualties);
- Facilitate discussions between the regime's security force commanders and the democratic opposition leadership with a view to bringing about defections from the former to the latter.

Toward democratic revolutions with ambiguous results:

- Proclaim Western support for democratic processes as preferable to the use of force;
- Be willing to work with whatever politicians and parties are elected, but urge them to compromise with their opponents;
- If the military ends up ousting an elected leader and even if such a move is broadly popular (as in Egypt in 2013), call upon the military to hold free and fair elections that are open to those whom it ousted as soon as possible, and urge the ousted party to participate in them.

Toward old and tired authoritarian revolutionary regimes:

- Recognize that the prospects for democratization in these countries could be improved when their relations with Europe and America are improving;
- Seek to alter their behavior not just through applying sticks, but also through offering carrots.

Toward nationalist secessionism:

- Seek to reduce the demand for what can be the highly disruptive process of breaking up a country through democratic and federal solutions;
- When this clearly won't work, help negotiate a peaceful divorce, and work to integrate both governments into Western-backed economic and security architectures in order to give them both a powerful incentive not to engage in hostilities with each other;
- Anticipate that their new common border and other issues might still divide them. Work pro-actively to prevent these differences from degenerating into conflict, and move quickly to resolve them if and when they do.