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### **WEIGHING THE BURDEN OF SECURITY: US DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Academic discussions on US democracy assistance reveal an underlying tension between commitment to democratic process and interest in desired political outcomes. This paper examines the case of Yeltsin's Russia in order to identify deficiencies of US democracy protection policy which is vulnerable to the impact of US short- and medium-term security interests. Both diplomatic and programmatic levels of US democracy protection policy are considered. As a result, an analytical model of 'security-burdened' democracy protection policy is developed. This paper argues that the model of 'security-burdened' democracy protection policy could be helpful in analyzing other cases of US democracy assistance efforts in the post-Soviet space, such as the cases of Saakashvili's Georgia and Yushchenko's Ukraine.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Democracy protection policy, national security interests, US foreign policy, Russia, post-Soviet space

**NOTE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The great excitement of the international democratic community sparked by the so-called color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine was followed by an equally great disappointment. Political scientists compared the pace of democratization of Central and Eastern European countries after the 1989-1990 velvet revolutions with that of some post-Soviet countries after the 2003-2004 color revolutions, and drew a conclusion which was not favorable to the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Why did a stage of democratic consolidation not follow the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine? Why did even some signs of democracy erosion appear in the two countries? Trying to address these questions, researchers studied not only internal factors but also the role of external actors. A major part of the research was devoted to the role of the European Union (EU), and the special emphasis was put on the EU's "expansion fatigue" and a consequent inefficiency of conditionality.<sup>2</sup> Other authors analyzed Russian foreign policy and its negative impact on the democratization of neighboring countries.<sup>3</sup> In addition, some political scientists pointed out the ongoing retreat of the US from the post-Soviet space as another possible reason of the less-than-satisfying outcomes of color revolutions. They stressed that due to America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq a large part of democratization-related US resources (both human and finance) were diverted from Eastern Europe to the Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

This paper was inspired by the hypothesis that American foreign policy could account for the relative failure of color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. However, my emphasis is put not on the US retreat from the region but on deficiencies of US democracy protection policy.<sup>5</sup> There is almost no previous

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<sup>1</sup> See Katya Kalandadze and Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Electoral Protests and Democratization: Beyond the Color Revolutions," *Comparative Political Studies* 42, no. 11 (November 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See Iryna Solonenko, "External democracy promotion in Ukraine: the role of the European Union," *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (August 2009); David R. Cameron, "Post-Communist Democracy: The Impact of the European Union," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, no. 3 (July-September 2007); Grigore Pop-Eleches, "Between Historical Legacies and the Promise of Western Integration: Democratic Conditionality after Communism," *East European Politics and Societies* 21, no. 1 (February 2007); Frank Schimmelfennig, "European Regional Organizations, Political Conditionality, and Democratic Transformation in Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 21, no. 1 (February 2007); Paul Kubicek, "The European Union and democratization in Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 2005).

<sup>3</sup> See Jakob Tolstrup, "Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the 'Near Abroad'," *Democratization* 16, no. 5 (October 2009); Thomas Ambrosio, "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (April 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Adrian A. Basora, "Must Democracy Continue to Retreat in Postcommunist Europe and Eurasia?" *Orbis* 52, no. 1 (winter 2008): 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Speaking of external impact on democratization I use two different terms. By *democracy promotion policy* I mean all activities implemented by public or private foreign actors explicitly designed to contribute to the political liberalization of autocratic regimes and the subsequent democratization of autocratic regimes in specific recipient countries. By *democracy protection policy* I mean all activities implemented by public or private foreign actors explicitly designed to contribute to consolidation of democracy in specific recipient countries. These definitions are taken from Philippe C. Schmitter and

research on US efforts to sustain democratic achievements in post-revolutionary Georgia and Ukraine. Probably the single exception is a study carried out by Mitchell, who criticized the US government's neglect of unveiling authoritarian trends in post-revolutionary Georgia.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the examination of US democracy protection policy pursued in the post-Soviet space should be started from scratch. Given the clear under-theorization of the subject, it is reasonable to take a step back in time and develop an analytical model with reference to a more examined case.

In the first – theoretical – part of my paper I try to establish what foreign policy dilemmas can be faced by democracy supporters due to their security interests. I also analyze possible solutions to those dilemmas and the impact of respective solutions on democracy protection policy. The second part deals with a particular case as I study US democracy protection policy pursued in Yeltsin's Russia. My goal is to describe how exactly the American security interests influenced (corrupted) the nature of US democracy protection policy. In the third part of my paper I develop a model which would make possible the examination of US democracy protection policy and its possible deficiencies in other post-Soviet countries.

## 1. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS AND DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

Established democracies that belong to democratic international organizations sometimes behave in a seemingly inconsistent manner. In certain cases they do not contribute to the democracy protection or even hinder such efforts. For example, Pevehouse studied the influence of regional international organizations on democratic consolidation and revealed an ambiguity of the role played by the US.<sup>7</sup>

Pevehouse considered Turkey a deviant case because close association with or even membership in democratic international organizations did not help this country to become a consolidated democracy. Searching for possible explanation Pevehouse drew attention to the US role. Following the 1960, 1971 and 1980 military coups in Turkey, Americans pressured the European Community, the Council of Europe and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) not to punish generals' takeovers. Thus the US effectively eliminated the influence of regional international organizations that could have been conducive to democratic

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Imco Brouwer, "Conceptualizing, Researching and Evaluating Democracy Promotion and Protection," *EUI Working Paper* 9 (1999) //

[http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/bitstream/1814/309/1/sps99\\_9.pdf](http://cadmus.iue.it/dspace/bitstream/1814/309/1/sps99_9.pdf) (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> See Lincoln A. Mitchell, "Democracy in Georgia since the Rose Revolution," *Orbis* 50, no. 4 (2006). Later the author published his research as a book: Lincoln A. Mitchell, *Uncertain Democracy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Georgia's Rose Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Jon C. Pevehouse, *Democracy from Above: Regional Organizations and Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

consolidation in Turkey. According to Pevehouse, such US actions can be best explained by their national security interests, namely the fear of losing a strategically important ally.<sup>8</sup>

If US security interests can distort democracy protection policy implemented by international organizations, the negative impact of these very interests on democracy protection policy implemented by the US government is even more likely. This hypothesis is derived from academic research but some public statements of US foreign policy makers also lend support to it. For example, former high-ranking US Department of State official Barry Lowenkron admitted that “[d]emocracy promotion can never be the sole driving force of our foreign policy”. According to him, democracy promotion “will always coexist with other objectives and interests: curbing the spread of weapons of mass destruction, combating terrorism, dampening regional rivalries, developing better economic relations”.<sup>9</sup> The hypothesis is further legitimated by the practice of US foreign policy. Regardless of declared interest in spreading democracy throughout the world, the US annually allocates huge sums of money to support non-democratic regimes. What is more, the US aid to non-democratic states is as generous as the US aid allocated to democratic countries.<sup>10</sup>

Does all this reveal the hypocrisy of US presidents who used to emphasize the importance of democracy assistance in their State of the Union addresses? Not necessarily. Spreading democracy throughout the world can really be regarded as a long-term objective of US foreign policy. There are some researchers who view seemingly contradictory decisions of US foreign policy makers as an implementation of a fairly consistent strategy. For example, Ikenberry argues that since the end of World War II the US government has pursued an American liberal grand strategy. According to Ikenberry, this grand strategy is based on the idea that US security and material interests could be best attained if other states – particularly the major great powers – were democracies rather than non-democracies.<sup>11</sup> Such insights presented by political scientists are sustained by the official rhetoric of the US

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138–145.

<sup>9</sup> Barry F. Lowenkron, “Realism: Why Democracy Promotion Matters,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 29, no. 3 (2007): 202.

<sup>10</sup> In 1991–1996 the distribution of US aid to recipients classified by Freedom House as “not free” increased to an average of 30 percent, and was equal to the proportion of US aid to recipients rated as “free”; see Steven W. Hook, “Inconsistent U.S. Efforts to Promote Democracy Abroad”: 119; in: Peter J. Schraeder, ed., *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs. Reality* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002).

<sup>11</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Liberal Grand Strategy: Democracy and National Security in the Post-War Era”: 275; in: G. John Ikenberry, ed., *American Foreign Policy: Theoretical Essays*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2002).

government which stresses that "democracy is the one national interest that helps to secure all the others".<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, it is safe to assume that at a strategic level the US is interested in democracy promotion and protection in foreign countries. At the same time, it is evident that day-to-day decisions of foreign policy makers do not always reflect this priority. What are the main factors that prevent the US government from focusing on its priority, i.e. democracy assistance? One of the obstacles is the ambivalence of American public and elites. Public interest in foreign affairs and support for American international engagement has never been high. In addition, inevitable foreign policy failures cause public discontent and US politicians, especially members of the Congress, react to changes in public opinion. The Congress can use its "power of the purse" and constrain the US government's ability to pursue policies of democracy promotion and protection abroad.<sup>13</sup> Conflicting US foreign policy objectives that have already been mentioned above constitute another obstacle to consistent implementation of democracy assistance strategy. The long-term objective of democratization of foreign countries is often sacrificed for short-term objectives such as promoting US economic competitiveness and advancing regional security.<sup>14</sup>

Most of the situations, when the objective of democracy assistance conflicts with other foreign policy objectives, can be described as one of the two interrelated dilemmas. Donor countries face the first dilemma when their efforts to democratize a foreign state can eventually lead to the destabilization of that state. In this case, donor countries have to decide between more democratic and more efficient governance.<sup>15</sup> Speaking more specifically, Americans might be tempted to partly abandon their democracy protection goals in a fledgling democracy by means of tolerating the ever stronger executive. The US foreign policy makers might hope that a strong president would ensure the efficient implementation of government's decisions, though he would not abuse his powers. Governance efficiency and internal stability of a particular country might appear important in attaining US security interests, such as liberalization of that state's economy, and preventing it from escalating conflicts with its neighbors or becoming a safe haven for international terrorists.

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<sup>12</sup> The official website of the US Department of State reads as follows: "Democratically governed nations are more likely to secure the peace, deter aggression, expand open markets, promote economic development, protect American citizens, combat international terrorism and crime, uphold human and worker rights, avoid humanitarian crises and refugee flows, improve the global environment, and protect human health"; see U.S. Department of State, "Democracy" // <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/democ> (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Steven W. Hook, *supra* note 10: 119–121.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 121–124.

<sup>15</sup> Hans-Joachim Spanger and Jonas Wolff, "Complementary Objectives, Conflicting Actions? Democracy Promotion as Risk Management," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii (March 5, 2005).

Donor countries face the second dilemma when their efforts to democratize a foreign country can bring to power unfriendly political forces. In this case, donor countries have to decide between a more democratic, but unfriendly regime and a less democratic, but friendly regime. Speaking of possible choices of the US government, Americans might be tempted to abandon democracy protection goals entirely in those fledgling democracies where political leaders pursue pro-American foreign policies. It goes without saying that the friendliness of leaders of a particular foreign country might facilitate the attainment of various US security interests.

Depending on how a donor country solves the above-mentioned dilemmas, its democracy protection policy can assume very different forms. If a donor country prioritizes long-term objectives and consolidation of a fledgling democracy, it will implement a process-based policy of democracy protection. If a donor country regards efficient governance and internal stability of a fledgling democracy, and friendly attitudes of its leadership as more urgent goals, it will decide in favor of an outcome-based policy of democracy protection. The difference between these two approaches has been highlighted by Boudreau. According to him, process-based democracy assistance is depicted as providing support for a process in which citizens broadly participate in the selection of their leaders, and then develop institutions and practices to keep those leaders accountable to the public will. The content of that public will, however, is less intrinsic to this approach to democracy.<sup>16</sup> The outcome-based approach to democracy assistance, by contrast, regards democratic processes as those that produce democratic leaders. Therefore, it treats intervention to assist particular democratic forces into office, or to inhibit the ascent of those regarded as democracy's enemies, as legitimate.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent Boudreau, "Security and Democracy: Process and Outcome in a New Policy Context," *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (April 2007): 314.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

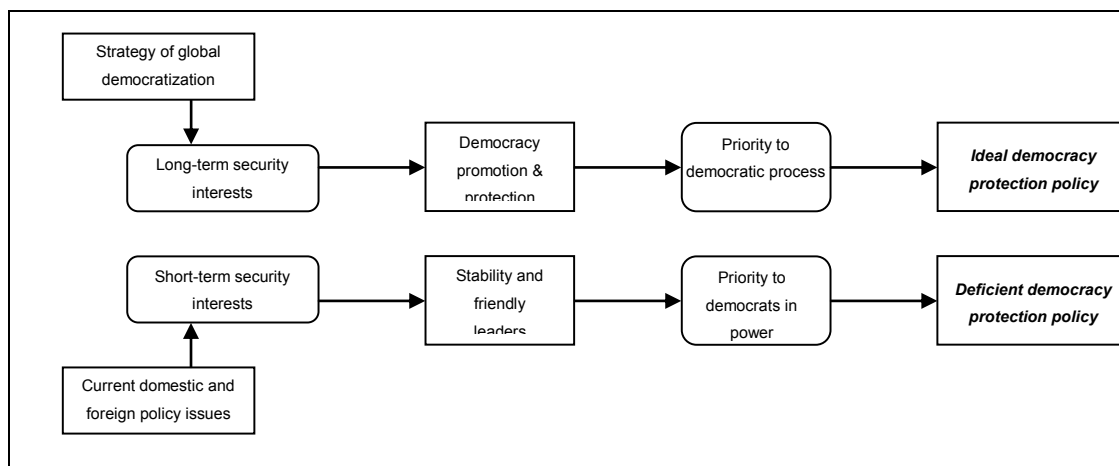


Fig. 1. Impact of security interests on democracy protection policy  
(compiled by the author)

Given the findings of other researchers, process-based policy of democracy protection should be regarded as an ideal model.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, democracy protection policy, which is determined by short-term security interests and is orientated towards the outcome, should be viewed as deficient. The *figure 1* summarizes a theoretical part of this paper by linking possible solutions of foreign policy dilemmas to the particular types of democracy protection policy. In what follows, I undertake an empirical research in order to analyze practical manifestations of a theorized deficiency of democracy protection policy.

## 2. US DEMOCRACY PROTECTION POLICY IN YELTSIN'S RUSSIA

In the beginning of my paper I mentioned that my interest in US democracy protection policy in the post-Soviet space originated from monitoring the development of democracy in Georgia and Ukraine after the color revolutions. However, I chose the more chronologically distant case of Russia in order to develop a model which would be suitable to analyze cases of Georgia and Ukraine. The period of my inquiry coincides with a first presidential term of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin. There are several important similarities between the 1991–1996 Russia on the one hand, and the 2004–2009 Georgia and Ukraine on the other: they both had just experienced democratic breakthroughs, both were front-

<sup>18</sup> Some findings that speak most strongly for a process-based approach to democracy assistance can be found in a special issue "Democracy and Security: Process versus Outcome in Assistance Policy?" of *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (April 2007).

runners in the region as regards democratic progress<sup>19</sup>, and both were ruled by a popular pro-Western leader.

Given a stated US interest in democratization of major world powers, it is reasonable to assume that Americans should have made all efforts to assist democratic consolidation in Yeltsin's Russia. This case is more distant in time than cases of Georgia and Ukraine, and, therefore, it is particularly eligible for an in-depth examination of US democracy protection measures applied. At the same time, it enables to study possible deficiencies of US democracy protection policy and their links with US short-term security interests.

Generally speaking, there are two ways that deficiencies of democracy protection policy can manifest themselves. First, the concern of a donor country for internal stability of a fledgling democracy and keeping the "right people" in power can prevent the donor from efficient application of a democratic conditionality in bilateral relations. A donor country may tend to forgive leaders of a fledgling democracy their non-democratic actions and refrain from public criticism or diplomatic pressure, let alone any sanctions. Second, security interests of a donor country and a related bias can have a negative (corrupting) impact on democracy assistance programs implemented by the donor in a fledgling democracy. In this paper I analyze the following types of democracy aid: electoral aid, political party building, constitutional assistance, legislative strengthening, NGO building, and media strengthening.<sup>20</sup> My study of the case of Yeltsin's Russia is based on secondary sources.

## 2.1. CONDITIONALITY IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

It would be an unsound exaggeration to assert that diplomatic pressure exerted by external actors can determine the course of democratization in a particular country. Especially in the case of such large countries as Russia, external actors simply do not have enough leverage to make a determinant difference. However, diplomatic pressure is not entirely useless. In fact, international legitimation or delegitimation of a particular regime often influences choices made by internal actors. For this reason, at a diplomatic level an ideal policy of democracy protection should be based on the principle of conditionality.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Freedom House, in 1991-1996 Russia (together with Ukraine) rated as the freest post-Soviet state except for the Baltic States. In 2004-2009 the freest states were Georgia and Ukraine (as well as Moldova); see Freedom in the World rating at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>.

<sup>20</sup> In his most comprehensive review of the practice of US democracy assistance Carothers has singled out eleven programs; see Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), p. 88. I chose to examine only six of them, namely those which I found the most vulnerable to political bias.

In this regard, US democracy protection policy towards Yeltsin's Russia was far from ideal, and many political scientists who have studied US–Russian relations share this opinion. The main obstacle to the efficient application of conditionality was the belief held by then US President Bill Clinton (and most of his advisers) that "President Yeltsin is by far the best exponent of democracy and progress and hence the path to stability".<sup>21</sup> It was the Clinton's unconditional support to all Yeltsin's actions which eventually compromised US democracy protection efforts in Russia.

Now it is a matter of common knowledge that Clinton was personally committed to Yeltsin. The purpose of this paper, however, requires the mention of at least several instances when the US failed to criticize non-democratic or even unconstitutional actions of the Russian leader. Surely, the most notorious instance was that of the so-called "mini-civil war" which took place in Russia in September–October 1993. After a protracted conflict with the Supreme Council over the draft constitution President Yeltsin issued Presidential Decree 1400, calling for the dissolution of the Parliament. This decree was declared unconstitutional by the Russian Constitutional Court, and the Supreme Council declared Yeltsin no longer fit to govern. The political standoff soon evolved into violence on the streets of Moscow. Finally, Yeltsin used the armed forces and put an end to the conflict by taking the Parliament building and disbanding the Parliament. He also dismissed the vice-president, judges of the Constitutional Court and declared a state of emergency. In the course of the crisis the Clinton administration expressed continuous support for Yeltsin. As then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher later explained, the US supported Yeltsin because the Russian "parliament and constitution were vestiges of the Soviet communist past, blocking movement to democratic reform".<sup>22</sup>

Actually, there was a shadow of conditionality in Clinton's words when he spoke right after the Yeltsin's assault on the Parliament building. US President pointed out that Yeltsin's actions would remain acceptable as long as he went forward with the new constitution and genuinely democratic elections both for parliament and president.<sup>23</sup> Soon, however, signs of conditionality faded away. After the 1993 referendum on the new constitution and parliamentary election Yeltsin did not keep his word and did not call for early presidential election. In spite of this, his relations with the Clinton administration did not suffer.

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<sup>21</sup> These words of the then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher are quoted in Dimitri Simes, "The Return of Russian History," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 72.

<sup>22</sup> Lee Marsden, *Lessons from Russia: Clinton and US Democracy Promotion* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), p. 129.

Some members of the Clinton administration later assured that they had been putting pressure on Yeltsin to obey the democratic procedures. In the beginning of 1996, when Yeltsin was considering a possible postponement of a presidential election, the US President sent his Russian counterpart a private message that registered his "strongest disapproval of any violation of the constitution".<sup>24</sup> However, it is hardly feasible that this kind of pressure would have evolved into a public condemnation or any sanctions if Yeltsin had really postponed the 1996 election. The point is that the most popular presidential candidate at that time was the leader of the Communist Party Gennady Zyuganov. For the US, his victory would have been a worse outcome than a possible postponement of the election. Therefore, the Clinton administration opted to refrain from making any public threats about sanctions should the election be postponed.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the unconditional support of the Clinton administration for the Russian President and belief in Yeltsin as "the Father of Russian democracy"<sup>26</sup> not only prevented Washington from applying conditionality in its bilateral relations with Moscow, but also limited the US contacts with parts of Russian political elite. In the eyes of the US government, only those political forces that supported Yeltsin were considered to be the real democrats. The then Chief Political Analyst at the US Embassy in Moscow Wayne Merry later confessed that they "were unwilling to acknowledge any democratic forces not loyal to the Kremlin".<sup>27</sup> Most of US economic aid was directed exclusively to a single clan of so-called St. Petersburg "reformers". An anthropologist Wedel compared this clan to "a communist-style group that created and shared profits". She believed that by siding with St. Petersburg "reformers" the US government undermined the importance of its own ostensible objectives and might have inadvertently encouraged skepticism about capitalism, reform, privatization and the West among Russian population.<sup>28</sup> Some other researchers share this opinion, and argue that the US unconditional support for Yeltsin and his entourage hindered the development of nascent democratic institutions and processes. What is more, Russians believe that during the years of Yeltsin's rule they have experienced the true Western democracy assistance.<sup>29</sup> Thus a deficient US democracy protection policy lacking any conditionality has strengthened an already negative Russians' attitude to Western democracy.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> These words of President Clinton are quoted in Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> Wayne Merry, "Russian Aspirations Meet American Ambitions," *Problems of Post-Communism* 48, no. 3 (May/June 2001): 16.

<sup>28</sup> Janine R. Wedel, "U.S. Assistance for Market Reforms: Foreign Aid Failures in Russia and the Former Soviet Bloc," *Cato Policy Analysis* 338 (March 1999): 11 // <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa338.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Celeste A. Wallander, "The Russian Political System and U.S. National Interests": 104; in: Esther Brimmer, ed., *Defending the Gains? Transatlantic Responses when Democracy Is under Threat* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2007).

## 2.2. ELECTORAL AID

Elections assistance is one of the most important types of US democracy aid, which aims at helping to carry out free and fair elections in fledgling democracies. Similarly, the election assistance constituted a major part of US activities in Yeltsin's Russia. Starting from the 1995 parliamentary election, Washington-based International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) closely cooperated with the Russian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) providing advice and technical assistance. There was, however, the other side of US electoral aid, namely politically biased actions of the Clinton administration that orientated towards particular electoral outcomes.

Students of US-Russian relations often mention the 1993 April referendum as the first instance of US intervention. Essentially, that referendum was a vote of confidence in the Russian President and his policies.<sup>30</sup> The referendum was designed to solve the protracted standoff between Yeltsin and the Supreme Council. Being interested in Yeltsin's victory, the US government assisted the Russian President in his campaign. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) tacitly allowed an American public relations firm, Sawyer Miller, working at the time for the Russian State Property Committee, to assist Yeltsin by scripting a television jingle.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the 1993 December referendum on the new Russian constitution the US government stopped short of intervening in the campaign. It did, however, support Yeltsin indirectly by neglecting the discussion on the legitimacy of referendum results. Under previous rulings from the Russian Constitutional Court any changes in the constitution required the support of at least 50 percent of the total electorate. In the plebiscite official figures revealed that around 58 percent of the vote was in favor of the new constitution, but this represented only around 30 percent of the total electorate. Nevertheless, the Clinton administration did not question the results that were favorable to Yeltsin.<sup>32</sup>

There are also different assessments concerning the US role in the 1995 election of the Russian Parliament. According to some research, the US government actually frustrated the plans of US nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that were to train Russian political parties to monitor the election process. On the eve of the 1995 election, Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI) decided to invite an American expert who would meet Russian party activists and teach

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<sup>30</sup> In the 1993 referendum voters had to answer the following four questions: 1) Do you trust Russian president Yeltsin? 2) Do you approve of the socioeconomic policy conducted by the Russian president and by the Russian government since 1992? 3) Should the new presidential election be conducted ahead of time? 4) Should the new parliamentary election be conducted ahead of time?

<sup>31</sup> James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *supra* note 23, p. 125.

<sup>32</sup> Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 83.

them the method of parallel vote tabulation. However, IFES and USAID objected. The Russian CEC put pressure on IFES to stifle NDI's discussions with party activists, and the US Embassy warned the USAID staff in Moscow to keep their distance from monitoring efforts. Unofficially, they were told that independent election monitoring might uncover fraud benefiting Yeltsin.<sup>33</sup> It is clearly seen from the above evidence that the US administration and the Russian government were both set against monitoring efforts. It can be assumed that the Kremlin aimed at removing any obstacles that could prevent the newly established party Our Home is Russia<sup>34</sup> from winning the parliamentary election, and it had a tacit approval of the US on that.

There is more evidence revealing that the US was interested not only in a democratic election process but also in "democratic" electoral outcomes. On the eve of the 1996 presidential election in Russia Clinton took sides very clearly. Speaking to his advisers, Clinton assured he realized that the US has to "stop short of giving the nominating speech for the guy", but he also added that the US must "go all the way in helping [Yeltsin] in every other respect".<sup>35</sup> The US accomplished this mission by not voicing criticism due to Russia's actions in Chechnya and postponing NATO enlargement into Central Europe.<sup>36</sup> Besides, the US helped Russia to secure new loans from International Monetary Fund and World Bank to cover Yeltsin's election promises to pensioners, students and workers.<sup>37</sup> According to Clinton's former advisers, the US President was constantly talking to his Russian counterpart and giving him over the phone advice on how to win the election.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Yeltsin's campaign was advised by Americans. For example, on the eve of the second round of the 1996 election, at the request of the Yeltsin campaign, experts from Harvard University offered some advice on how to increase voter turnout.<sup>39</sup>

To be sure, the Clinton administration had some strong reasons to prefer Yeltsin to all other Russian leaders of the time. First of all, Americans had been invested in relations with Yeltsin too much politically. Because of this, they couldn't stop short of assisting Yeltsin's re-election in 1996. Moreover, the main competitor of the incumbent president was a communist and, therefore, ideologically unacceptable to the US government. Americans encouraged all Russian democrats and reformers to unite around Yeltsin. For example, the then US ambassador is

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<sup>33</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson, "Democracy Assistance and Political Transition in Russia," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 86.

<sup>34</sup> Our Home is Russia was established by the then Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in 1995. The new party declared its support for President Yeltsin and his policies.

<sup>35</sup> James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *supra* note 23, p. 149.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>37</sup> Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup> James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *supra* note 23, p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew Lantz, "The Democratic Presumption: An Assessment of Democratization in Russia 1994–1998," *BCSIA Occasional Paper* (September 1998).

believed to have attempted to pressure Grigory Yavlinsky to withdraw from the first round of voting in favor of Yeltsin.<sup>40</sup> Eventually, the Clinton administration achieved its goal. Yeltsin was re-elected for second term, although the impact of the US support on this result generally was rather marginal. As concerns democracy protection, the US policy should be assessed as deficient because it has hindered a so-called "double turnover" in Russia. As it was indicated by the later experience of some other post-communist countries, voters' return to reformed communist parties might serve to strengthen democratic process.

### 2.3. POLITICAL PARTY BUILDING

Assisting political parties that are to compete for power in a fledgling democracy is yet another type of democracy aid. Foreign aid providers usually organize training and instruct party activists how to campaign and maintain contact with their electorate. This kind of assistance can affect electoral results, thereby being vulnerable to political bias. It is likely to be orientated to an outcome rather than a process.

In the case of Yeltsin's Russia, several authors claimed to have revealed instances of partisanship. A very small number of recipients of US aid among Russian political parties seemed to justify such claims. Two institutes established by main US political parties – NDI and International Republican Institute (IRI) – were the most visible actors assisting Russian political parties. Both of them worked with three parties only. The Russian activists who had been trained by NDI and IRI came primarily from two small pro-Western parties, namely Russia's Choice (later a part of the Union of Right Forces) and Yabloko. Besides, NDI and IRI also had contact, although much less, with a government party Our Home is Russia.<sup>41</sup> Actually, IRI has pursued a distinctly partisan line in all post-communist countries, seeking to strengthen parties that oppose former communists. By contrast, NDI has adopted a multipartisan approach for its party work in many countries, so its activity in Russia should be regarded as an exception.<sup>42</sup> It is likely that Russia-related US security interests account for this deviance.

The sole American organization maintaining contacts with Russian parties that were regarded as unfriendly to the US was Harvard University which implemented Strengthening Democratic Institutions (SDI) Project in Russia. In contrast to government funded NDI and IRI, the privately funded SDI provided advice to

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<sup>40</sup> Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 89.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson, *supra* note 33: 76–77.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Carothers, *supra* note 20, p. 144–145.

Zyuganov's Communist Party and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party.<sup>43</sup> This fact refutes the argument that NDI and IRI did not work with Russian communists or liberal democrats because those parties were not interested in cooperation with Americans. Furthermore, the exception of SDI allows to assume that the type of funding (government versus private donors) may be an important factor affecting the selection of aid recipients.

By teaching Russian pro-Western parties to conduct electoral campaign, Americans expected to improve their electoral performance. For example, NDI arranged some conferences for activists of Russia's Choice and Yabloko to explain the perils of like-minded candidates competing in one district.<sup>44</sup> So, the activities of US organizations operating in Russia were obviously orientated to the electoral outcome. Not surprisingly, the State Duma amended the election laws in 1999, and NDI and IRI were prohibited from working with Russian parties on campaigns.

## 2.4. CONSTITUTIONAL ASSISTANCE

Usually, drafting a new constitution or amending an old one is one of the most urgent tasks of the political elite in countries that have just undergone a democratic breakthrough. Of course, internal factors have the biggest impact on the drafting process. The contents of the constitution tend to reflect a balance of power among the main internal political forces, while the role of external actors is very limited. Nevertheless, constitutional assistance is regarded as an important part of US democracy aid. Constitutional assistance is believed to be tremendously appealing to US aid providers because, in theory, a single short visit by an American constitutional expert could steer a draft constitution in a particular direction and thereby profoundly affect a country's political direction.<sup>45</sup>

In the case of Yeltsin's Russia, the US also tried to influence the process of constitution writing. In 1990–1993 various US organizations provided computer equipment and other technical assistance to the Russian Constitutional Commission which drafted the new constitution for the Russian Federation. US lawyers, judges and scholars offered suggestions on draft provisions at videoconferences, as well as during their visits to Moscow.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that members of the Constitutional Commission welcomed foreign advice. Merry who worked at the US Embassy in Moscow at the time later recalled drafts of the constitution being

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<sup>43</sup> Mathew Lantz, *supra* note 39.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, "Democracy Assistance and NGO Strategies in Post-Communist Societies," *Carnegie Endowment Working Paper* 8 (February 2000): 23 // <http://carnegieendowment.org/files/final.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Carothers, *supra* note 20, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup> Victoria Schwartz, "The Influences of the West on the 1993 Russian Constitution," *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 116–121.

received by the Embassy as soon as they were available.<sup>47</sup> The American contribution was recognized by the Russian constitutional fathers themselves. Namely, the original Constitutional Commission's draft contained the acknowledgment to two US experts.<sup>48</sup>

There are some indications in academic literature that US constitutional assistance in Russia could be deficient. It is argued that at the start of market reforms in Russia some officials within the US government became defenders of the presidential system as the best institutional arrangement for carrying out painful economic reforms.<sup>49</sup> However, a closer examination of the process of Russian constitution writing and the US role revealed that Americans provided contradictory pieces of advice. US constitutional law scholars did not advise the creation of a strong presidency in Russia, and US economic advisers, on the contrary, advocated conferring vast powers on a president to enable him to carry out necessary reforms.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand Russians received advice based on sound judgment about Russian conditions, but on the other hand they were offered advice aimed at satisfying US interests. The constitution, which was approved by the 1993 referendum, corresponded to US needs because it enabled the US supported President Yeltsin to change a cabinet at will and rule by decree.

## 2.5. LEGISLATIVE STRENGTHENING

By supporting Yeltsin's effort to establish the presidential system in Russia, the US government undermined another type of democracy aid, namely legislative strengthening. Merry's successor as Chief Political Analyst at the US Embassy Tom Graham considered that the 1993 constitution enabled the US to focus on the executive branch of the Russian Federation. If the Parliament resisted the legislation Yeltsin could simply sign a decree and it would be enacted.<sup>51</sup>

Such a way of enacting reforms not only diminished the popular support for liberal reforms in Russia but also marginalized the role of the Russian Federal Assembly in country's political life. Despite this fact, US organizations often opted for the easier way. It should be noted that there were widely divergent opinions within USAID concerning the use of decrees. Some of USAID officials explicitly promoted market reforms through presidential decree.<sup>52</sup> But some other voices within USAID opposed using decrees because they believed decrees did not support

<sup>47</sup> Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 82.

<sup>48</sup> Victoria Schwartz, *supra* note 46: 117.

<sup>49</sup> Michael McFaul, "American Efforts at Promoting Regime Change in the Soviet Union and then Russia: Lessons Learned," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington D.C. (September 2-4, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Victoria Schwartz, *supra* note 46: 123-124.

<sup>51</sup> Lee Marsden, *supra* note 22, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> Janine R. Wedel, *supra* note 28: 7-8.

the democratic processes.<sup>53</sup> Anyway, USAID failed to discourage US organizations receiving its grants from seeking reforms to the detriment of parliamentary authority in Russia.

Only minor attention paid to bilateral relations between the US and Russian legislatures serves as another indirect proof of the deficiency of US legislative strengthening program. During Yeltsin's first term, the US implemented only three programs aimed at exchanging experience and opinions with members of the Russian State Duma. Harvard University organized a series of training courses for Duma members and staff in Cambridge and Moscow, and the Aspen Institute held a number of retreats for Duma members in Washington where they discussed important issues affecting US-Russian relations with members of the US Congress. It should be noted that both of those programs were sponsored by private donors.<sup>54</sup>

The sole initiative of the US authorities aimed at building ties with the Russian Parliament was the Duma-Congress Study Group established in 1996. The Group organized regular meetings of US and Russian lawmakers to discuss topical security and foreign policy issues. However, this initiative can be treated as official only with some reservation. The co-founder of the Duma-Congress Study Group Congressman Curt Weldon complained that he never felt support from the US administration. According to him, the Clinton administration constantly sent a message that America's policy was based on a strong President, and not an equally strong Duma. In Weldon's opinion, the US government made a mistake when it reinforced Yeltsin's notion that the Russian Parliament was not an institution to be taken seriously.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, from the point of view of US security interests, the Clinton administration solved the dilemma in the right way. It did not try to strengthen the Russian Parliament which was dominated by unfriendly parties, namely Zyuganov's communists and Zhirinovsky's nationalists.

## 2.6. NGO BUILDING AND MEDIA STRENGTHENING

Two other types of US democracy aid are NGO building and strengthening of independent media. In theory, the efficiency of these two programs can be also harmed by US security interests. However, no previous research on US democracy assistance in Russia has established any instances of the deficient democracy protection policy in the NGO and media sectors.

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<sup>53</sup> U. S. General Accounting Office, "Foreign Assistance: Harvard Institute for International Development's Work in Russia and Ukraine," report to the Chairman, Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives (November 1996): 50-51 // <http://www.gao.gov/archive/1997/ns97027.pdf> (accessed May 11, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Mathew Lantz, *supra* note 39.

<sup>55</sup> Curt Weldon, "A New Vision for Russia," *International Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2000): 23-24.

To be sure, US programs aimed at NGO building are also vulnerable to possible distortion. US organizations that funded NGO projects in Russia were not free agents, their attentions were divided between Russian needs and the politics of pleasing home offices.<sup>56</sup> There were some instances when USAID interfered in the selection of grant recipients in Russia and added bad projects because it chose Russian NGOs that were already well connected with USAID. In some other cases USAID used its "power of purse" to affect which topics should be addressed by Russian NGOs and confined the area of their activity to particular cities.<sup>57</sup> Although there were some preconditions for the deficient democracy protection to prevail, no direct link between US security interests and US aid to Russian NGOs could be established.

The same goes for US programs of media strengthening. Some authors have noticed that the US assistance to Russian independent media might encounter the perils of partisanship, namely to be orientated solely towards media run by the democratic opposition.<sup>58</sup> However, no published research contains evidence which would reveal the US exclusive focus on television channels, radio stations, magazines or newspapers pursuing pro-American editorial policy.

### 3. MODEL OF SECURITY-BURDENED DEMOCRACY PROTECTION POLICY

In 1991-1996 the US government pursued a fairly rational Russia policy which helped to achieve a number of short- and medium-term security goals.<sup>59</sup> In spite of this, the Clinton administration failed to achieve its original objective, namely to transform Russia into a strategic partner and a functioning market democracy. For this reason, at the end of a Clinton's second term the US foreign policy community started to discuss on the question "Who lost Russia?"<sup>60</sup> Americans realized that they had made some mistakes.

As was pointed out earlier, US security interests had a negative impact on US democracy protection policy in Russia. I described this policy as deficient because it partly contributed to the "loss" of Russia. The unconditional support of the Clinton administration for Russian President Yeltsin and politically biased programs of

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<sup>56</sup> Sarah L. Henderson, "Selling Civil Society: Western Aid to Nongovernmental Organization Sector in Russia," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 2 (March 2002): 146.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: 152.

<sup>58</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, *supra* note 44: 36-37.

<sup>59</sup> Russian troops were removed from Eastern Europe and the Baltic States; Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan surrendered their nuclear weapons which were decommissioned; Russia reduced its nuclear arsenal; Russia signed up to the Partnership for Peace with NATO and joined in peacekeeping duties in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina; see Marsden, 196.

<sup>60</sup> In August 1999 the influential *New York Times Magazine* published an article named „Who Lost Russia?“ Later this question was posed by numerous US politicians, political scientists and journalists.

democracy aid did not really assist the consolidation of nascent democracy in Russia.

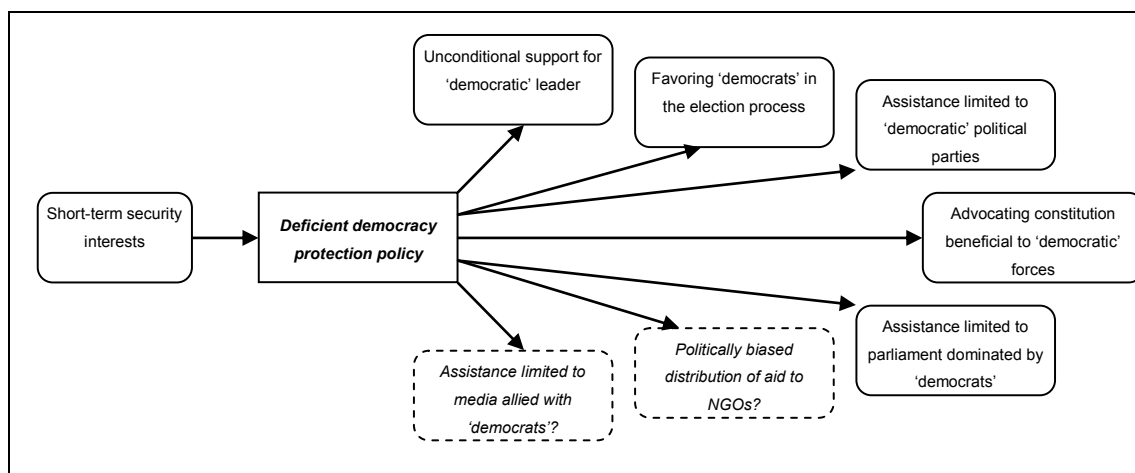


Fig. 2. Model of security-burdened democracy protection policy  
(compiled by the author)

The *figure 2* summarizes the democracy protection policy as it was pursued by the US in Yeltsin's Russia. The analysis of Russia's case revealed that Americans often supported not a democratic process but rather particular political forces which they regarded as genuinely democratic. At a diplomatic level, the US government did not apply conditionality and tended to excuse antidemocratic actions of the Russian President. At a programmatic level, US organizations interfered in the electoral process, offered support to selected "democratic" political parties, and neglected irregularities in voting if the results were favorable to "democrats". US economic advisers advocated the draft constitution which introduced a very strong presidency because they believed in Yeltsin's liberal credentials. Ties with the Russian Parliament were not prioritized by the US authorities because Americans did not want to strengthen the institution dominated by "anti-democrats". US-funded programs aimed at strengthening Russian NGOs and independent media are marked by dotted lines in the *figure 2*. It means that there is no evidence concerning the deficiency of those programs, i.e. the impact of US security interests on them. Nevertheless, I included both programs in the model because there are some preconditions for their distortion. Fresh evidence of the deficiency of US assistance to NGOs and media is likely to be discovered in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine.

## CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This paper should be regarded as the first step in examining the US democracy protection policy in the post-Soviet space. A half of decade after the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, democratic achievements in these countries seem to be more modest than expected. Georgia's and Ukraine's bumpy road to democracy recalls the fatal democratization difficulties in Yeltsin's Russia. Because of this, I started my research on US democracy protection policy from the examination of the Russia of 1991-1996.

The above-conducted analysis of diplomatic relations between the White House and the Kremlin, and US programs of democracy aid to Russia revealed that Americans often tried to strengthen the position of "democrats" in Russian domestic politics, instead of impartially supporting a democratic process. The US actions were guided by national security interests which were supposed to be best secured by pro-Western leaders in Moscow. From the point of view of security interests, American foreign policy was rational. However, it undermined the prospect of democratic consolidation in Russia. In sum, the outcome was not optimal as Russia did not become a strategic partner of the US and remained a potential source of problems.

The model of the security-burdened policy of democracy protection which is developed in this paper is not merely a theoretical creation. It has been based both on theoretical insight and on the empirical case study of Russia. The next steps in examining the US democracy protection policy in the post-Soviet space should involve testing the model in the cases of post-revolutionary Georgia and Ukraine. A thorough examination of US democracy protection policy in Georgia and Ukraine would answer a few important questions. First and foremost, was the deficient US democracy protection policy in Yeltsin's Russia an exception? In other words, could the notorious question "Who lost Russia?" be posed in relation to the cases of Georgia and Ukraine?

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