

Cheering a 'Democratic' Coup in Ukraine

Exclusive: There's been much celebration in U.S. political and media circles over the violent ouster of Ukraine's democratically elected president. Nearly everyone is hailing this putsch and ignoring that it was spurred on by neo-Nazi militias, Robert Parry reports.

By Robert Parry

There was always a measure of hypocrisy but Official Washington used to at least pretend to stand for "democracy," rather than taking such obvious pleasure in destabilizing elected governments, encouraging riots, overturning constitutional systems and then praising violent putsches.

But events in Ukraine and Venezuela suggest that the idea of respecting the results of elections and working within legal, albeit flawed, political systems is no longer in vogue, unless the "U.S. side" happens to win, of course. If the "U.S. side" loses, then it's time for some "shock doctrine." And, of course, the usual demonizing of the "enemy" leader.

Ukraine's ousted President Viktor Yanukovich was surely no one's idea of a pristine politician, though it looks like there are few to none of those in Ukraine, a country essentially controlled by a collection of billionaire oligarchs who jockey for power and shift their allegiances among corrupt politicians.

But Yanukovich was elected in what was regarded as a reasonably fair election in 2010. Indeed, some international observers called the election an important step toward establishing an orderly political process in Ukraine.

But Yanukovich sought to maintain cordial relations with neighboring Russia, which apparently rubbed American neocons the wrong way. Official Washington's still-influential neocons have been livid with Russia's President Vladimir Putin because he cooperated with U.S. President Barack Obama in averting U.S. wars against Iran and Syria.

In both cases, the neocons thought they had maneuvered Obama into confrontations that could have advanced their long-term strategy of "regime change" across the Middle East, a process that started in 2003 with the U.S. invasion of Iraq but stalled with that disastrous war.

However, last year, prospects for more U.S. military interventions in two other target countries Iran and Syria were looking up, as Israel joined with Saudi Arabia in stoking regional crises that would give Obama no choice but to launch

American air strikes, against Iran's nuclear facilities and against Syrian government targets.

Putin's Interference

That strategy was going swimmingly until Putin helped bring Iran to the negotiating table over guarantees that its nuclear program would not lead to a nuclear weapon. Putin also brokered a deal to avert threatened U.S. air strikes on Syria over disputed evidence regarding who launched a chemical attack on civilians outside Damascus. Putin got the Syrian government to agree to eliminate its chemical weapons arsenal.

So, Putin found himself in the center of the neocons' bulls-eye and given some of his own unforced errors such as defending Russia's intolerance toward gays and spending excessively on the Sochi Olympics he became the latest "designated villain," denounced and ridiculed across the neocon-dominated op-ed pages of the Washington Post and other major news outlets.

Even NBC, from its treasured spot as the network of the Olympic Games, felt it had no choice but to denounce Putin in an extraordinary commentary delivered by anchor Bob Costas. Once the demonizing ball gets rolling everyone has to join in or risk getting run over, too.

All of which set the stage for Ukraine. The issue at hand was whether Yanukovich should accept a closer relationship with the European Union, which was demanding substantial economic "reforms," including an austerity plan dictated by the International Monetary Fund. Yanukovich balked at the harsh terms and turned to Ukraine's neighbor Russia, which was offering a \$15 billion loan and was keeping Ukraine's economy afloat with discounted natural gas.

Reasonable people can disagree about whether the EU was driving too hard a bargain or whether Ukraine should undertake such painful economic "reforms" or how Yanukovich should have balanced the interests of his divided country, with the east dominated by ethnic Russians and the west leaning toward Europe.

But protesters from western Ukraine, including far-right nationalists, sought to turn this policy dispute into a means for overthrowing the elected government. Police efforts to quell the disturbances turned violent, with the police not the only culprits. Police faced armed neo-Nazi storm troopers who attacked with firebombs and other weapons.

Though the U.S. news media did show scenes of these violent melees, the U.S. press almost universally blamed Yanukovich and took almost gleeful pleasure as his elected government collapsed and was replaced by thuggish right-wing militias "guarding" government buildings.

With Yanukovych and many of his supporters fleeing for their lives, the opposition parties seized control of parliament and began passing draconian new laws often unanimously, as neo-Nazi thugs patrolled the scene. Amazingly, the U.S. news media treated all this as uplifting, a popular uprising against a tyrant, not a case of a coup government operating in collusion with violent extremists.

In the upside-down world that has become the U.S. news media, the democratically elected president was a dictator and the coup makers who overthrew the popularly chosen leader were “pro-democracy” activists.

A Curious History

There’s also a curious history behind U.S. attitudes toward ethnically divided Ukraine. During Ronald Reagan’s presidency as he escalated Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union one of his propaganda services, Radio Liberty, began broadcasting commentaries into Ukraine from right-wing exiles.

Some of the commentaries praised Ukrainian nationalists who had sided with the Nazis in World War II as the SS waged its “final solution” against European Jews. The propaganda broadcasts provoked outrage from Jewish organizations, such as B’nai B’rith, and individuals including conservative academic Richard Pipes.

According to an internal memo dated May 4, 1984, and written by James Critchlow, a research officer at the Board of International Broadcasting, which managed Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe, one RL broadcast in particular was viewed as “defending Ukrainians who fought in the ranks of the SS.”

Critchlow wrote, “An RL Ukrainian broadcast of Feb. 12, 1984 contains references to the Nazi-oriented Ukrainian-manned SS ‘Galicia’ Division of World War II which may have damaged RL’s reputation with Soviet listeners. The memoirs of a German diplomat are quoted in a way that seems to constitute endorsement by RL of praise for Ukrainian volunteers in the SS division, which during its existence fought side by side with the Germans against the Red Army.”

Harvard Professor Pipes, who was an adviser to the Reagan administration, also inveighed against the RL broadcasts, writing on Dec. 3, 1984 “the Russian and Ukrainian services of RL have been transmitting this year blatantly anti-Semitic material to the Soviet Union which may cause the whole enterprise irreparable harm.”

Though the Reagan administration publicly defended RL against some of the public criticism, privately some senior officials agreed with the critics, according to documents in the archives of the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. For instance, in a Jan. 4, 1985, memo, Walter Raymond Jr., a top

official on the National Security Council, told his boss, National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, that "I would believe much of what Dick [Pipes] says is right."

This three-decade-old dispute over U.S.-sponsored radio broadcasts underscores the troubling political reality of Ukraine, which straddles a dividing line between people with cultural ties oriented toward the West and those with a cultural heritage more attuned to Russia. Though the capital Kiev sits in a region dominated by the western Ukrainians, the Russian-allied Ukrainians represent most of the population, explaining Yanukovych's electoral victory.

Loving a Putsch

Now, right-wing militias, representing those historical resentments toward the Russians and hostility toward the Jews, have seized control of many government buildings in Kiev. Faced with this intimidation, the often-unanimous decisions by the remaining legislators would normally be viewed with extreme skepticism, including their demands for the capture and likely execution of Yanukovych.

But the U.S. press corps can't get beyond its demonization of Putin and Yanukovych. The neocon Washington Post has been almost euphoric over the coup, as expressed in a Feb. 24 editorial:

"Ukraine has shaken off its corrupt president and the immediate prospect of domination by Russia, but at the risk of further conflict. The decision by Viktor Yanukovych to flee Kiev over the weekend triggered the disintegration of his administration and prompted parliament to replace him and schedule elections for May.

"The moves were democratic, members of Mr. Yanukovych's party joined in the parliamentary votes, but they had the effect of nullifying an accord between the former government and opposition that had been brokered by the European Union and tacitly supported by Russia.

"Kiev is now controlled by pro-Western parties that say they will implement the association agreement with the European Union that Mr. Yanukovych turned away from three months ago, triggering the political crisis.

"There remain two big threats to this positive outcome. One is that Ukraine's finances will collapse in the absence of a bailout from Russia or the West. The other is that the country will split along geographic lines as Russian speakers in the east of the country, perhaps supported by Moscow, reject the new political order."

The Post continued, "What's not clear is whether Mr. Putin would accept a

Ukraine that is not under the Kremlin's thumb. The first indications are not good: Though Mr. Putin has been publicly silent about Ukraine since Friday, the rhetoric emanating from his government has been angry and belligerent. A foreign ministry statement Monday alleged that 'a course has been set to use dictatorial and sometimes terrorist methods to suppress dissenters in various regions.'"

So, the Washington Post's editors consider the violent overthrow of a democratically elected president to be "democratic" and take comfort in "democratic" actions by a legislature, despite the curious lack of any no votes and the fact that this balloting has occurred under the watchful eye of neo-Nazi storm troopers patrolling government offices. And, according to the Post, the Russian government is unhinged to detect "dictatorial and sometimes terrorist methods."

The New York Times editorial page was only slightly less celebratory, proclaiming: "The venal president of Ukraine is on the run and the bloodshed has stopped, but it is far too early to celebrate or to claim that the West has 'won' or that Russia has 'lost.' One incontrovertible lesson from the events in Kiev, Ukraine's capital, is that the deeply divided country will have to contend with dangerous problems that could reverberate beyond its borders."

There has been, of course, a long and inglorious history of the U.S. government supporting the overthrow of elected governments: Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Allende in Chile in 1973, Aristide in Haiti twice, Chavez in Venezuela briefly in 2002, Zelaya in Honduras in 2009, Morsi in Egypt in 2013, and others. After Yanukovich, the next target of these U.S.-embraced "democratic" coups looks to be Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela.

In these cases, it is typical for the mainstream U.S. news media to obsess over perceived flaws in the ousted leaders. On Wednesday, for instance, the New York Times made much of an unfinished presidential palace in Ukraine, calling it "a fugitive leader's folly." The idea seems to be to cement in the minds of impressionable Americans that it is okay for the U.S. government to support the overthrow of democratically elected presidents if they have flaws.

The outcomes for the people of these countries that are "saved" from their imperfect leaders, however, often tend to be quite ugly. Usually, they experience long periods of brutal repression at the hands of dictators, but that typically happens outside the frame of the U.S. news media's focus or interest. Those unhappy countries fade from view almost as quickly as they were thrust to center stage, next to the demonization of their elected leaders.

[For more on Ukraine, see Consortiumnews.com's "Neocons and the Ukraine Coup."]

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).

Standing Up to Militarism

A federal judge meted out multi-year prison terms to three anti-nuclear activists from the Transform Now Plowshares group for a symbolic protest at a U.S. nuclear facility in Tennessee. The protesters had been inspired by the courageous White Rose movement in Nazi Germany, as Gary G. Kohls explains.

By Gary G. Kohls

On Feb. 18, 1943, three idealist anti-fascist whistleblowing students at the University of Munich were arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo for protesting their war-mongering German government. They had published and distributed [a series of anti-Hitler leaflets](#) in Munich and other German cities.

"Why do you not bestir yourselves, why do you allow these men who are in power to rob you step by step, openly and in secret," their third leaflet asked Germans. "At all points we must oppose fascism, wherever it is open to attack. We must soon bring this monster of a state to an end. A victory of fascism in this war would have immeasurable, frightful consequences."

These courageous protesters, fully aware that their acts of civil disobedience could have severe consequences (long prison terms or even the death penalty), were members of a resistance group that was code-named the White Rose. The students had seen their fascist nation commit international war crimes and crimes against humanity that would later be defined as such at the Nuremberg Trials in 1947. Knowing that something had to be done, they organized the movement to try to raise the consciousness of their cowardly grown-ups about Germany's pro-war criminal leadership.

The three that were arrested on Feb. 18, 1943, included two medical students, Christoph Probst and Hans Scholl (both of whom had recently returned from the Eastern Front where they worked in field hospitals serving injured German soldiers), and Hans Scholl's sister Sophie. They were part of a larger group of

students who had published and/or distributed the leaflets, hoping to stimulate a resistance movement against German militarism, war-mongering, mass imprisonments, anti-Semitism, secret prisons, torture, disappearances and extrajudicial assassinations.

For their efforts, these truly patriotic, homeland-loving students were tried and convicted of treason (within five days after their arrests) in a brief show trial (in which neither defense witnesses nor effective defense attorneys were permitted) that was rapidly convened on Feb. 23, 1943. The results of the "trial" had obviously been pre-determined by the diabolical Ministry of Justice that wanted the maximum punishment allowed by law, death.

This so-called People's Court that tried and convicted the White Rose members was presided over by the infamous, shrieking, foul-mouthed, right-wing hanging judge, Roland Freisler, who two years later, in what many regarded as an act of divine justice, was killed in an Allied bombing raid on Berlin.

A Modern Echo

On Feb. 18, 2014, exactly 71 years from the date of the arrests of the White Rose group, three harmless (unless you are an entity that is preparing to commit crimes against humanity), mild-mannered, non-violent whistleblowers – motivated by their Christian faith – were sentenced in a Tennessee federal court to prison terms ranging from 3 to 5 years for committing a symbolic act of civil disobedience against their own war-mongering nation, which has been developing and stockpiling nuclear weapons of mass destruction at the Highly Enriched Uranium Materials Facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The HEUMF is a facility for the storage of weapons-grade uranium. The development and storage of weapons of mass destruction or their precursors (and the implied intent to use them) is widely regarded by ethical people as an international war crime and a crime against humanity. (Indeed, President George W. Bush cited his belief that Iraq possessed far less dangerous WMDs as justification for invading and occupying Iraq in 2003 a war that killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis even as the world learned that Bush's WMD claims were false.)

Regarding the Oak Ridge case, it is important to know that the 1968 Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty commits the United States and other declared nuclear-weapons states to work toward eliminating their arsenals, though they remain intact more than four decades later.

The United States also is a signatory to the 1972 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Biological and Toxin Weapons.

The spirit of that agreement is to make “progress toward general and complete disarmament, including the prohibition and elimination of all types of weapons of mass destruction” and to prohibit the “development, production and stockpiling” of such weapons.

Transform Now Plowshares

The group of Catholic workers who call themselves the Transform Now Plowshares movement takes its name from Isaiah 2:4: “They shall beat swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, now shall they learn war anymore.”

This small group of experienced peacemakers who pose no threat to any sentient being on the planet was profoundly inspired by the clear ethical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth (summarized so well in the Sermon on the Mount) and the examples of Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, the Berrigan brothers, Martin Luther King Jr. and a whole host of other courageous conscientious objectors to war and killing, including the White Rose martyrs.

The three imprisoned Plowshares members are Greg Boertje-Obed, a widely respected long-term resident of the Loaves and Fishes Catholic Worker community in Duluth, Minnesota (and a member of Veterans for Peace Chapter 80); Michael Walli; and a gentle, elderly Roman Catholic nun, sister Megan Rice (who, because of the sensitivity of U.S. District Court Judge Amul R. Thapar, will “only” be in prison for the next three years). This altruistic group was and still is – hoping to raise citizen awareness of and stimulate resistance to America’s aggressive militarism, war-mongering, mass imprisonments.

The members of Transform Now Plowshares are among the many Catholic workers and assorted other peacemakers who have been protesting America’s drone program and the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), which are appropriately named the Reaper and the Predator. These drones, since George W. Bush’s administration, have been increasingly engaged in extrajudicial assassinations, with many innocent deaths resulting (euphemistically called “collateral damage”).

Heroism of White Rose and Plowshares

The Nazis thought that the influence of the White Rose ended with their arrest, trial and immediate beheadings. Very little press coverage was allowed by Hitler, probably out of fear that citizen outrage would be generated (which was the goal of the White Rose actions).

Similarly, there has been very little coverage of the Transform Now Plowshares action in the mainstream media. I would suspect that only a tiny minority of

Americans are aware of the issues involved, just as most “good Germans,” like the famous three monkeys, “saw no evil, heard no evil and spoke no truth” out of fear of what might happen to them if they did (no matter what was happening to the victims of their government, military, police or security apparatus).

The powerful story of the White Rose, the police interrogation, the trial and the punitive nature of a fascist judicial system was nicely portrayed in the powerful movie about the White Rose, “Sophie Scholl: The Final Days” (Click [here](#) to see the trailer and assorted clips.)

The White Rose movement (like the Plowshares group) saw clearly the loss of liberty and freedom, the shredding of human rights and the reality that modern wars are not just evil, but also futile and unwinnable. By the summer of 1942, these well-educated White Rose members became aware of the existence of secret prisons, torture and concentration camps. They also knew that hundreds of thousands of Jews had already been murdered in the camps.

The White Rose members knew, too, that despite extensive press censorship of the mainstream German media, atrocities were being committed in Nazi-occupied Poland. Polish intellectuals were being disappeared, military-age Polish men were being murdered and young Polish women were being forced into prostitution to “service” German soldiers in Norway. The legendary “rape and pillage” engaged in by soldiers is not just a metaphor. It was true in the world wars and has been true in every war, even those involving American boys.

The White Rose student groups, dozens of which were scattered around Germany, knew that Hitler’s aggressive war-mongering and state-sponsored terrorism was making Germany the most hated nation in the world. So, being true patriots who loved their homeland enough to have an argument with it, they knew they could no longer be passive.

After the end of the Great War (1914-1918), millions of wounded, demoralized, combat-traumatized war veterans, among them Adolf Hitler and many other Nazis-to-be, came home crazy, angry, disabled, unemployable and looked for someone to blame for their plight. Many of these angry veterans formed into armed, street-fighting militia groups all over Germany, including the infamous Brown Shirts who eventually became beholden to Hitler and the Nazi Party. The Brown Shirts obediently followed any and all orders to harass Jews, socialists, labor unionists, homosexuals, intellectuals and assorted leftists who had liberal, democratic or socialist beliefs.

These well-armed militias established their power and influence through fear, not by the strength of their ideas but by intimidating others with their guns and willingness to commit violent acts, while the conservative police and the

conservative courts looked the other way.

Embarrassing the Authorities

Although the “crime” that the White Rose members were convicted of was simply circulating the “subversive” leaflets, the real infraction may have been the act of embarrassing the Gestapo and humiliating the Nazis by successfully evading detection for so many months.

The same could be said of the American Plowshares group. They embarrassed the Y-12 nuclear bomb-making facility at Oak Ridge by breaking into it so easily; and they embarrassed the U.S. government by bringing attention to its nuclear weapons while it was having a tantrum over the alleged possibility that Iran might someday build one nuclear bomb, though Iranian officials say they have no intention of doing so.

And so the U.S. government continues to punish and marginalize America’s truth-tellers, whistleblowers and prophetic voices like Edward Snowden, Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning and WikiLeaks. Now added to the long list of Americans who have been made prisoners of conscience are the Plowshares protesters.

It seems that most governments fail to realize that the punishment of people of conscience usually backfires. Rather than eliminating them from the pages of history, martyrdom actually makes popular models of them so that their spirits live on, inspiring future nonviolent resistance efforts.

Surely the Transform Now Plowshares, inspired as they were by the White Rose, will inspire others. Their imprisonment also offers an opportunity for other Americans to raise their voices in a demand for clemency.

Dr. Kohls is involved in peace and justice and writes a regular column for the Duluth Reader, the alternative newsweekly that serves the greater Duluth, Minnesota area. He critiques fascism, corporatism, militarism, racism and other movements that are anti-democratic.

The Quixotic American Left

According to opinion polls, the American people lean toward Democratic positions on a wide variety of issues, from a higher minimum wage to gay marriage. But liberals still lack the clear-cut agenda and the organizational muscle that conservatives have demonstrated over the past several decades, as Michael

Winship notes.

By Michael Winship

That's a pretty pathetic knight up there on the cover of the March issue of *Harper's Magazine*. Battered and defeated, his shield in pieces, he's slumped and saddled backwards on a Democratic donkey that has a distinctly woeful or bored, maybe – countenance.

It's the magazine's sardonic way of illustrating a powerful throwing down of the gauntlet by political scientist Adolph Reed, Jr. He has challenged the nation's progressives with an article in the magazine provocatively titled. "Nothing Left: The Long, Slow Surrender of American Liberals."

His thesis flies in the face of a current spate of articles and op-ed columns touting a resurgence of progressive politics within the Democratic Party often pointing to last year's elections of Sen. Elizabeth Warren in Massachusetts and Bill de Blasio as mayor of New York City as evidence – although at the same time many of the pieces note that the wave is smashing up against a wall of resistance from the corporate wing of the party.

In a story titled, "Democrats will dive left in 2016 to distance themselves from Obama" a headline designed to roil Republican fervor as well as impugn the opposition – the conservative *Washington Times* quoted Adam Green, cofounder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee: "Democrats would be smart in the primary and general election to be more populist and stand up for the little guy more on economic issues."

In November, Harold Meyerson wrote in the progressive magazine, *The American Prospect*, "The constituencies now swelling the Democrats' ranks, Latinos and millennials in particular, have created the space indeed, the necessity for the party to move to the left."

And Dan Balz and Philip Rucker reported in *The Washington Post* earlier this month, "By many measures, the party is certainly seen as more liberal than it once was. For the past 40 years, the American National Election Studies surveys have asked people for their perceptions of the two major parties. The 2012 survey found, for the first time, that a majority of Americans describe the Democratic Party as liberal, with 57 percent using that label. Four years earlier, only 48 percent described the Democrats as liberal

"Gallup reported last month that 43 percent of surveyed Democrats identified themselves as liberal, the high water mark for the party on that measurement. In Gallup's 2000 measures, just 29 percent of Democrats labeled themselves as

liberals.”

Nonetheless, Adolph Reed, Jr., who teaches political science at the University of Pennsylvania and is a long-time student of these things, makes a compelling case that we’re hearing a death rattle more than a trumpeting call to arms.

In his *Harper’s* piece, Reed argues that Democrats and liberals have become too fixated on election results, kowtowing to the status quo rather than aiming for long-term goals that address the issues of economic inequality. “During the 1980s and early 1990s, fears of a relentless Republican juggernaut pressured those left of center to take a defensive stance,” he writes, “focusing on the immediate goal of electing Democrats to stem or slow the rightward tide. Each election now becomes a moment of life-or-death urgency that precludes dissent or even reflection.”

Reed says that the presidencies of Democrats Bill Clinton and Barack Obama too often acquiesced to the demands of Wall Street and the Right. Of Clinton’s White House years, he claims, “It is difficult to imagine that a Republican administration could have been much more successful in advancing Reaganism’s agenda.”

And President Obama “has always been no more than an unexceptional neo-liberal Democrat with an exceptional knack for self-presentation persuasive to those who want to believe, and with solid connections and considerable good will from the corporate and financial sectors his appeal has always been about the persona he projects the extent to which he encourages people to feel good about their politics, the political future, and themselves through feeling good about him than about any concrete vision or political program he has advanced. And that persona has always been bound up in and continues to play off complex and contradictory representations of race in American politics.”

“The left has no particular place it wants to go,” Reed asserts. “And, to rehash an old quip, if you have no destination, any direction can seem as good as any other the left operates with no learning curve and is therefore always vulnerable to the new enthusiasm. It long ago lost the ability to move forward under its own steam”

He continues, “With the two parties converging in policy, the areas of fundamental disagreement that separate them become too arcane and too remote from most people’s experience to inspire any commitment, much less popular action. Strategies and allegiances become mercurial and opportunistic, and politics becomes ever more candidate-centered and driven by worshipful exuberance about individuals or, more accurately, the idealized and evanescent personae the political holograms their packagers project.”

Reed concludes, “The crucial tasks for a committed left in the United States now are to admit that no politically effective force exists and to begin trying to create one. This is a long-term effort, and one that requires grounding in a vibrant labor movement. Labor may be weak or in decline, but that means aiding in its rebuilding is the most serious task for the American left. Pretending some other option exists is worse than useless.”

Beyond his call for rebuilding the union movement, there’s little solace in Reed’s conclusion. If Hillary Clinton decides not to run, a strong progressive candidate could emerge for 2016, although doomsayers point to the failed candidacies of liberals George McGovern in 1972 and Walter Mondale in 1984.

One hope for Democrats is that, like the old joke about the two curmudgeonly brothers, the other one is worse. When it comes to the presidency at least, Republicans are even more riven and in disarray – a jousting tournament in which all the potential knights-in-chief are riding backwards in the saddle.

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A Selective View of ‘Democracy’

Americans like the idea of promoting “democracy,” but prominent U.S. commentators praised the ouster of democratically elected leaders in Egypt and Ukraine, siding with military coup makers in Egypt and right-wing rioters in the streets of Ukraine. That suggests “democracy” is a malleable concept for many in Official Washington, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar observes.

By Paul R. Pillar

A familiar conventional wisdom about how the last two U.S. administrations have approached democratization abroad has come up repeatedly in connection with crises in several foreign countries. George W. Bush is seen as the president who tried to promote democracy actively and proactively, even using military force in the effort, while Barack Obama is described as favoring a more diffident, lead-from-behind approach that defers to the initiative of the people to be democratized.

There certainly have been significant differences in the approaches of the two

presidents regarding political change abroad, and supporters of each approach voice well-rehearsed arguments in Peter Baker's review in the *New York Times* of current policy debate about the turmoil in Ukraine.

Former Bush administration official Paula Dobriansky accuses the Obama administration of "disinterest in democracy promotion and an unwillingness to lead," while deputy national security adviser Benjamin Rhodes says, "These democratic movements will be more sustainable if they are seen as not an extension of America or any other country, but coming from within these societies."

Note that both Dobriansky and Rhodes refer specifically to democracy or democratic movements even though democracy is only one of several attributes that we might like to see in foreign political systems, and toward which we might want systems lacking those attributes to evolve. There also are, for example, several attributes that would come under the *liberal* part of liberal democracy and that involve civil liberties and limitations on what a government can do to its citizens.

Those may be very important both to us and to the populations concerned, but they are something different from democracy, which has to do with the selection of rulers through some active and orderly expression of preference by the ruled. It often has been observed that for democracy to work well requires more than just the holding of elections. That is true, but holding fair elections and respecting their results, although not sufficient for successful democracy, is necessary for it and even a core part of the concept of democracy.

Here is where the invocation of democracy has been mistaken and misplaced. Some of the most enthusiastic proponents of active, U.S.-led promotion of democracy have more than once in recent months cheered what is one of the clearest possible negations of democracy: overthrow through nondemocratic means of a freely elected leader.

This happened last July in Egypt when the Egyptian military removed from office Mohamed Morsi, who had been chosen president in a free and fair election. Now it has happened again with the ouster from the Ukrainian presidency of Viktor Yanukovich.

There were good reasons to doubt the fairness of the election when Yanukovich first tried for the presidency in 2004 and the Orange Revolution ensued. But that was not the case with the election of 2010. Yanukovich's political opponent Yulia Tymoshenko alleged that this election result also was fraudulent, but the allegations did not stand up. All the pre-election polls and exit polls had Yanukovich winning, and in the official tally his winning margin was almost a

million votes. International observers accepted the election result as fair and valid.

In each of these two cases the ouster of the leader followed a combination of unrest in the streets of the capital and more pointed action by security forces. In Egypt that action was a traditional military coup. In Ukraine, where the military conspicuously stayed out of the conflict, it was police striking deals with protest leaders under which the police would walk away from their posts.

There are many criteria by which we in the West can assess what is good and what is bad about the events in these countries and any others in which similar political change occurs. What happens to democracy is only one of those criteria.

There are the various issues of human rights and governmental integrity, and in this respect an end to the more thuggish and corrupt aspects of Yanukovych's presidency may be a good thing. (Zbigniew Brzezinski describes Yanukovych as "a mendacious schemer, a coward and a thief.") And for realist observers, the foreign policy orientation of a government may be at least as important as any of the internal considerations.

Each individual case is worthy of assessment in its own right. The two cases mentioned here are quite different in important respects. Some of the cheering over Morsi's ouster reflected an ignoble Islamophobia that is not a factor in Ukraine. The alternatives to the ousted leadership are also quite different; in Egypt it is a restored authoritarian military regime, while in Ukraine we can still hope it will be something not just different but more to the benefit of the Ukrainian people.

In any assessment, we should be clear and honest about our concepts and terms. We should not apply the label of democracy where it does not belong. We should not automatically apply it to phenomena that involve in some messy way "people power", while bearing in mind that people in the streets of a capital are not necessarily speaking and acting for most of their countrymen, or for people in the streets of, say, Kharkiv or Donetsk.

Misuse of the term democracy exacerbates confusion in our own thinking about the criteria we are applying to assessments of foreign situations and the reasons we do, or should, favor or oppose a particular development. It also cheapens the concept of democracy itself and encourages cynicism about it.

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