International Effects on the Democratic Onset in Chile

By Alejandro Ortega

In September 1973, a violent coup executed by General Augusto Pinochet left the former president of Chile dead and installed in a nation with a proud history of democracy a brutal military dictatorship that would rule for the next sixteen years. That period was marked by manifold human rights violations, declining civil and political liberties, extrajudicial hearings and executions, and an overall assault on democracy in the twilight era of the Cold War. However, democracy would eventually return to Chile in 1989, largely as a result of the geopolitical community and its pressure on the Pinochet regime. This paper examines the role of international factors in compelling democracy in Chile in the era of Augusto Pinochet and concludes that international factors had a significantly positive effect on the rebirth of Chilean democracy at the end of the 20th century.
Perhaps one of the most salient objectives of this analysis is an attempt to gauge the degree to which external, or international, factors influenced the onset of democracy in Chile in the late 1980s. Indeed, if an overview of historical literature on the topic of democratic transition in Chile is any indication, the preponderance of scholarship has placed an emphasis on internal, or domestic, political factors. However, external forces were multidirectional in inducing and hindering democracy. That is, before 1973, external forces on democracy were much more ambiguous and either aided the growth of democracy, hindered it, or both. The international community played a significant role in influencing the evolution of the political field in Chile. This paper, then, seeks to analyze the effect of the international community, especially the United States, on the processes of democratic transition in Chile. Did the international community and US foreign policy help or hinder the onset of Chilean democracy? How? And why? I argue in this chapter that after 1982, international influences played a tenable, if not outstanding, role in providing a political foundation for Chile's re-democratization.

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Although initially external forces, particularly those emanating from the United States, hindered democracy by supporting the Pinochet regime, by the 1980s, it is clear that international forces were critical in both destabilizing Pinochet's military junta and galvanizing the Chilean political opposition. The combination of these two factors was critical in producing the ultimate downfall of the Pinochet regime, and the rebirth of democracy in Chile.

**Pinochet's Golden Years: 1970 - 1983**

The United States' role in Chile's democratic experience is ambiguous when observed chronologically. Beginning in the early 1960s, the United States was more interested in preventing the efflorescence of Soviet Union-inspired socialism in the Western Hemisphere than in defending democracy, or even basic human rights, in Chile. With the election of Allende in 1970, the US began to provide financing and political aid to the military in an attempt to place it in opposition to the leftist Allende regime. Numerous documents and executive records have shown the role of the US CIA in undercutting the socialist Allende regime and supporting the regime of Gen. Augusto Pinochet in its 1973 coup which resulted in the death of Allende and the implementation of what would become a brutal military dictatorship. “A clear erosion of Chile's democratic system occurred as the United States began to intervene in a covert fashion in domestic politics so as to spoil the Left's chances of gaining access to presidential power.”

In fact, Washington went so far as to sponsor a plan—the so-called “Camelot Plan” to identify factors which could lead to potentially revolutionary action in Chile in the late 1960s. President Nixon and head of the National Security Council Henry Kissinger were especially intent on quashing any seeds of Chilean socialism. In clandestine fashion, the two utilized the CIA, first attempting to prevent Allende from becoming elected, and next attempting to undermine his government. The CIA went so far as to “sponsor the kidnapping of General René Schneider, chief of the Chilean General Staff, who opposed military involvement in the 1970 elections and was against preventing Allende from taking office.” In October of 1970, a botched kidnapping attempt by a radical right wing Chilean group known as Patria y Libertad resulted in the death of General Schneider and caused public furor over the wrongful murder. However, the Nixon White House did not heel:

Recently declassified US State Department documents indicate that the CIA continued to encourage a coup in Chile after Salvador Allende had assumed the presidency. Nixon instructed the National Security Council to organize actions to destabilize Chile. Among them, Chile's economy "should be squeezed until it 'screamed.'" An "invisible blockade" sponsored by the government in Washington froze international credit and multilateral agencies' loans, which contributed to the deterioration of economic conditions in Chile and to the polarization of political and social conflict.

Muñoz points to several other mechanisms that the US utilized in buttressing the highly authoritarian Pinochet
regime, despite its dubious record in suppressing civil and political rights. In addition to helping the military junta draft its earliest economic plans, the CIA “contribute[d] to the publication of the ‘White Book,’” a document used to justify the military coup and one of several attempts the US government made to propagandize the Pinochet regime. Furthermore, “the Nixon and Ford administrations backed the renegotiation of Chile’s debt in the Paris Club...and provided massive economic assistance to the military government.”

The Pinochet regime was also aided by international factors not including the United States’ Cold War-era containment policy. In the latter half of the 1970s, Latin America, and the Southern Cone in general, benefited from a worldwide credit boom linked to a spike in the flow of petrodollars. From 1976 until 1981, “the economy recovered and expanded at a rate of between 6.5% and 8% per year.” Indeed, this period was the “golden phase of the Chilean economy under the military junta.” However, from 1977 to 1982, Chile’s foreign debt tripled, increasing from $5.2 billion to $17.2 billion, precluding what would become a period of economic mismanagement and a decline in public opinion in favor of the junta. Economic downturn notwithstanding, in the early 1970s, with the help of the United States and a favorable international environment, “the Chilean military junta consolidated its grip on power through the suppression and destruction of political opposition and the neoliberal restructuring of the economy.”

However, there were also signs even as early as the mid 1970s that international community was beginning to take notice of Pinochet’s brutality. In 1975, a sequence of alleged humanitarian atrocities prompted the UN Human Rights Commission to send a team of observers to Chile—an action prompted not by the United States, but by several western European nations. A day before the observers were set to arrive, “Pinochet reneged on his pledge to allow the visit, thus precipitating a deterioration in foreign relations...this meant further difficulties in obtaining credit from multilateral organizations, in renegotiating foreign debt,” and “in accessing bilateral credits and assistance.” Later in 1975, the UN General Assembly formally denounced abuses such as ‘the use of institutionalized torture.’ In 1976, just before the US Congress voted to implement an arms embargo on Chile as a result of its violations of human rights, the “UN Ad Hoc Working Group on Chile concluded that cases of torture, as crimes against humanity, committed by the military government should prosecuted by the international community.”

But perhaps the most egregious error committed by the Chilean government in antagonizing the international community was the assassination of former Chilean ambassador Orlando Letelier in September 1976. Mandated by the Dirección Intelligencia Nacional, or DINA, the murder of Letelier, a Chilean activist, diplomat, and lifelong political figure, in Sheridan Circle, Washington DC was a blatant act of terrorism that came on the eve of the election of President Jimmy Carter, who would quickly take a harder stance on the Chilean military junta.

Under the Carter Administration, the US began to take much more seriously the human rights violations and democracy-undermining actions of the Pinochet regime. During his campaign, Jimmy Carter criticized the back-door US-Chile policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations. Among his first foreign policy initiatives upon taking office was to...
impose economic sanctions on Chile and mandate an immediate rectification of Pinochet’s notorious abuse of the political opposition. But while these soft sanctions were more or less nullified by the aforementioned massive international infusion of petro-wealth into Chile, his policies “probably saved many lives and shortened many jail sentences of dissidents.” For example, “less than two weeks after Carter’s election, Pinochet surprisingly freed 304 political prisoners.”11 Indeed, throughout his four years in office, Carter devoted a fair portion of his foreign policy agenda to defending human rights and civil liberties in Chile.

Perhaps the most important legacy of international diplomacy on Chile in the late 1970s was the new constitution drafted by the Pinochet government in 1980. Altman et al. write that “the accession of Jimmy Carter to the White House in early 1977, and the UN condemnation of Chile due to its systematic human rights violations, pushed Pinochet to seek an aura of legitimacy through popular mobilization.”12 He accomplished this, first with a plebiscite in 1978 to reaffirm his rule, the text of which was clearly biased, and second and more importantly, through the drafting of a new constitution in 1980 that called for yet another plebiscite to be held in 1988 which would allow the Chilean people to decide whether to grant Pinochet another eight year term. Clearly, the Pinochet team, after its 80 percent victory in the 1978 plebiscite, was feeling confident. Surely, by 1988, another eight years of economically prosperous rule would have convinced the Chilean people that Pinochet should remain in power. So the constitution was drafted and the clock began ticking until the 1988 referendum.

It should be noted that even before Carter’s accession to office, the US Congress had begun to curtail the executive’s support for the Pinochet regime in the form of denouncement of human rights violations. The Congress’ focus on human rights and civil liberties was thus pitted against the Nixon and Ford administrations’ notion of the “primacy” of security in the region at any human cost. In 1976, US Senators, concerned with reports of abuse in Chile, called in “several members of the Chilean exile” to Congressional hearings “related to human rights violations in the Southern Cone.” As a result of these dramatic hearings, both chambers of Congress voted on a $27.5 million arms embargo against the Pinochet regime. Thus for a brief period, both the US executive and legislature were united in their opposition to the Pinochet regime. Unfortunately, the work of the Carter Administration and the 1976 Congress was undone when US conservatives took the White House in 1981 with the election of Ronald Reagan.

In short, Reagan reversed the previous administration’s hardline policy against the Chilean military junta. Upon taking office, Reagan immediately lifted all sanctions on the Chilean government, including the “the prohibition imposed by Carter’s government on credits from the Ex-Im Bank to finance US exports to Chile.” Further, “the White House convinced Congress to suspend the weapons embargo” that had been implemented a few years earlier.13 Hence, the election of Reagan began a period known as ‘silent diplomacy’ toward Chile, borne of the United States’ Cold War phobias and a continuing belief that Pinochet’s regime was “an ally in the global strategy of containment of Communism.”14 The Reagan White House even went so far as to refine the US’ official diplomatic rhetoric, refusing to refer to the Pinochet regime as ‘totalitarian’ and instead dubbing it an ‘authoritarian’ regime, thereby implying that it was merely a developing society without the capacity to sustain democracy. Unfortunately, this ‘silent diplomacy’ was perceived by the Pinochet regime as a green light to continue neglecting the basic rights of its citizens. In terms of international legitimacy, and domestic popular influence, the height of the Pinochet regime was during the early 1980s. But, after a decade of unchallenged rule, the military junta was crippled by the onset of a brutal financial crisis and a subsequent galvanization of domestic and international political forces in favor of democracy. The door to redemocratization in Chile was thrown open for the world to see.

Democracy Returns to Chile: 1983 - 2000

By 1983, the period of total rapprochement with Chile began to ebb. Chile’s rising foreign debt, result of the “high international liquidity created in the aftermath of the 1973-74 and 1979-80 oil shocks,” boded poorly for its macroeconomic stability, as did the increasing financial exposure of its banking system.15 With skyrocketing interest rates and the rise of stagflation, Chile’s various financial institutions and conglomerados [private corporations] teetered dangerously on the edge of insolvency. Before 1982 “eight financieras [financial institutions] required intervention by the military government.”16 Within a
By the time Pinochet finally sacked [Treasury Minister Sergio] de Castro in April 1982, it was too late. The financial insolvency of some of the largest *conglomerados* sparked runs against the local currency. Faced with rapidly diminishing foreign reserves, a new economic team finally devalued the peso on June 16th, 1982. The currency lost almost 100 percent of its nominal value in less than two months. The Central Bank bailed out the private Chilean banks that faced insolvency by purchasing their bad debt...The great paradox for Chile in 1982 was that the military regime ended up reestablishing a monopoly over the economic and political spheres that Allende and his ilk could have only dreamt about. The high-water mark of the Chilean institutionalized authoritarian regime's control of the economic and political spheres was thus reached in 1982.17

By the end of 1982, Chile had descended into its worst economic crisis since the 1930s.

Not coincidentally, the crisis resulted in massive protests and a dramatic rise in organized opposition to the Pinochet regime. Among the groups that mobilized against a decade of social and political repression were trade unions, guerilla groups such as the *Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario*, various business organizations, middle class housewives, students, and the Catholic church.18 But international factors also played a significant role in fomenting this revival of democratic fervor. Interestingly however, the revival of Chilean democracy was less a product of United States foreign policy and more a product of European diplomacy and a favorable geopolitical environment.

**The Revival of Chilean Democracy: 1983-1990**

The debt crisis, as a result of the global nature of the 1982 financial meltdown, was an international factor that led to the downfall of the Pinochet regime and the subsequent rise of democracy. In effect, the debt crisis led the way for the galvanization of the political opposition in Chile by undercutting, for the first time, popular support for Pinochet's military junta. Indeed, when Pinochet's advisers wrote into the 1980 Constitution that a plebiscite should be held in 1988 to determine the future of the regime, they did not foresee a crisis of this magnitude, nor anticipate the effects it would have on the regime's legitimacy. This stimulation of the political opposition then gave international actors a platform on which to effectively function, allowing observers and external third parties to exert influence through the hungry mob of anti-Pinochet protestors and detractors. In this mission, the United States and Europe both played a significant role in aiding the incipience of Chilean democracy.

In early 1983, the first protests against the Pinochet regime since the 1973 coup took center stage. Social protests on behalf of trade unions, rebel groups, business organizations, employers' associations, copper industry unions, organized labor, and large sectors of Chile's middle class unequivocally indicated that the Pinochet regime no longer stood upon an ivory pedestal. The preliminary impact that these protests had was their visibility on the world stage. Media stations throughout the US and Europe documented the rapidly developing protests and quickly linked them not only with the financial crisis, but with the festering sentiments derived from Pinochet's humanitarian violations. But the most significant impact that this civil society revolt had was to revitalize the languid, but traditionally strong, parties of the opposition, specifically the *Partido de Democratas Cristianos*—the Christian Democrat Party, and the various parties of the *Union Popular* or Popular Union. It was through these opposition parties that the United States and the European Union would have the greatest impact.

Altman et. al writes that “starting in 1983, the most significant international impact to [sic] the transition arose from the international political, technical, and financial support granted the democratic opposition.”19 From 1983 until the plebiscite that marked the death of the Pinochet regime in 1988, international aid and political consulting flowed from both the United States and the European Union to the grateful opposition parties in Chile. Among nations that donated to the political opposition camps in Chile in the mid-1980s were Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada, France, and the United States. But before aid could directly ameliorate the political and economic antagonisms of the opposition political camps, it catalyzed opposition in Chile more broadly by supporting a nascent sentiment of protest by Chile's technocratic and intellectual classes. The principle role of these nations, then, was providing aid not only directly to the political parties themselves, but also to a technocratic class with nascent opposition to the Pinochet regime. Puryear argues that “intellectuals
played a crucial role in determining which choices opposition political elites made” and points to the “important role played by foreign assistance in enabling intellectuals to influence the political process.”22 Dissident intellectuals who had previously been ousted from the Pinochet government found a haven in numerous private research centers which were heavily, if not entirely, funded by foreign donors and as a result “remained firmly connected to the global academic mainstream, thanks in part to the foreign academic community.”23 Institutions that provided financial support to dissident intellectuals in the 1980s included: the Ford Foundation and Inter American Foundation (United States); the Canadian International Research Center; the Swedish Agency for Research and Cooperation with Developing Countries; the German Adenauer Foundation; and even France’s Mitterand government. In total, it is estimated that at least $3 million dollars in foreign funds was channeled into private civil society groups and research centers between 1980 and 1988.24

In addition, Chile’s technocrats and intellectuals were heavily supported by foreign academic institutions, especially those in the United States and England. “Universities as diverse as Stanford, Duke, Notre Dame, UC San Diego, Oxford, and Cambridge offered fellowships” for Chilean students and “visiting professorships for senior scholars” who could not research or publish unhindered at home in Chile.25 A new and unorthodox emphasis was placed on liberal democracy, albeit with a social-democratic spin on economic policy. These new views constituted a revival of the liberal democratic right, “in favor of a restoration of democracy” and came largely from ‘renovated’ thinkers “influenced by the experience of exile in Europe.”26 While Puryear admits that “motivations of foreign donors varied considerably,” the effect of these foreign donors and institutions on the intellectual and thus political opposition to the Pinochet regime is unquestioned.

In terms of foreign aid in the 1980s, Germany was surprisingly the single largest donor to Chile. From 1984 to 1988, German intellectual foundations donated $26.05 million to Chile, compared to $6.77 million from the United States. A majority of this aid came from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, but other donors included the Ebert and Neuman Foundations. Sweden also played a significant role in Chile’s return to democracy, although in a less monetaristic vein. According to Roniger and Sznajder, Sweden harbored some 13,900 Chilean political refugees in the 1980s.27 And in the Netherlands, an innovative strategy was developed whereby Dutch aid was sent directly to victims of human rights violations in Chile, rather than channeled through the corrupt government of Pinochet where it would be absorbed and diffused through the regime.28 But perhaps the most salient effect of international aid in the mid to late 1980s, was its role in bringing together the two camps of Chilean political opposition.

From the election of Salvador Allende in 1970 until the debt crisis in 1982, the two main camps of political opposition in Chile—the Christian Democrats and the Popular Unity—were highly antagonistic. They were so opposed to each other in terms of political, economic, and social policy agendas that they could not even galvanize in the early 1970s in order to save the democratic regime from Pinochet’s military takeover. But after the onset of protests in the early 1980s, international actors found it incumbent upon themselves to help these two camps to reconcile for the purpose of bringing democracy back to Chile. The first set of external actors to facilitate interaction between Chile’s various camps of opposition were none other than the foreign embassies themselves, reflecting a genuine diplomatic commitment to democracy and reconciliation. Edgardo Boeninger, a Chilean politician, engineer, and diplomat, reflected that after 1975, embassies invited him (a Christian Democrat), as well as representatives from other opposition camps, to meetings during which plans for reconciliation were discussed.29 The Norwegian, Spanish, and Italian embassies in particular hosted many such gatherings of rival politicians. In addition, foreign governments and foundations, notably those in Venezuela, Sweden, and Germany, held many lectures and seminars “aimed at bringing the two sides together.”

It was not only the direct action of the international community that helped to foster Chile’s return to democracy in the 1980s. The 1982 crisis created a widespread international perception that the Pinochet regime was not to be tolerated by taking from it what had heretofore been a crux of support: the middle class. A changing international climate witnessed a cooling of the United States’ relations with the Pinochet regime, as well as a trend of democratizations in Latin America that undoubtedly had a demonstration effect on neighboring Chile. In 1986, after an assassination attempt on his life by a radical Chilean populist group, Pinochet blamed the CIA of planning his overthrow.
In fact, the Washington Post reported that Pinochet had not only implicated the CIA, but the Soviet Comintern as well. Indeed “American-Chilean relations, after a rapprochement in the early Reagan years, cooled down and became strained after the military regime’s harsh responses to the social protests sparked by the 1982 economic crisis. After 1982, Washington openly criticized the human rights violations in Chile.”

The mid-1980s also witnessed the transitions from authoritarian rule in Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil, leaving Chile’s military regime as the only one remaining in South America and further isolating the regime, as well as having a demonstration effect on the Chilean people that was difficult to ignore. At the beginning of the plebiscite process, the UN, OAS, and various human rights NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International had mobilized a legion of observers to monitor voting in the plebiscite. This plebiscite provided the final opportunity for the international community to directly influence a return to democracy in Chile. And if the previous five years had been any indication, the liberal western order of the United States and Europe did not fail in their democracy-promoting endeavor.

The last hurdle that remained in Chile’s inexorable path toward democracy was its most critical: the plebiscite of 1988. The international community had done much in the previous five years to create an atmosphere suitable for the rebirth of liberal democracy by financially supporting political dissidents, facilitating intellectual discourse, harboring exiles, speaking out in favor of human rights, and ameliorating antagonisms among the political opposition. In the plebiscite of 1988, external actors again played a significant role. In particular, with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an American nongovernmental organization dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide, three distinct committees were created in Chile to monitor the fairness and veracity of the referendum. The committees loosely referred to themselves as los Comites para elecciones libres—the Committees for Free Elections or CEL. However, they are more widely known by the collective name that they chose: La Concertación de partidos para el ‘No’, or The Coordination of Parties for the ‘No’—a reference to the collective desire for a vote of ‘No’ to another eight years of military rule.

The Concertación was one of the first beneficiaries of NED. Founded by an act of the US Congress in 1983, its principal mission is to promote democracy and human rights worldwide through funds administered by the legislative branch. In the case of Chile, an offshoot of the NED, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), administered not only substantial financial aid to the Concertación, but also “sent a large delegation of observers to monitor the sanctity of the vote, the freedom to vote, and control of the process.” With the aid of European observers, the NDI placed electoral monitoring representatives at every major polling table in the capital of Santiago, and channeled information into a central command office where data was amalgamated and processed to ensure efficient verification of the polling results. Yet another organization that aided the CEL in their contentious experience at the ballot box was the global Inter American Institute for Human Rights, and the Latin American Center for Electoral Assessment and Promotion (CAPEL), its branch in Costa Rica. This organization contributed $1.2 million to processes that registered and educated Chilean voters.

Finally, the Catholic Church also played a considerable role, both domestically and internationally, in facilitating competition in the 1988 referendum. In addition to influential clergy within Chile who pushed for a return of democracy, Reverend Robert S. Pelton helped to harbor documents marked for destruction by the Pinochet regime in his church at the University of Notre Dame. And in 1983, Chilean Cardinal Francisco Fresno drafted the National Agreement for the Transition to Democracy and submitted it to the US Department of State, which quickly expressed support for a peaceful return of electoral democracy. The agreement was quickly ratified by six international parties, who then met in conference at the United

Flag of La Concertación
Democratic Onset in Chile

States’ Woodrow Wilson Center to discuss its political implications. Then, in a significant act of solidarity, both foreign affairs committees of the US Congress approved resolutions supporting the agreement. In mid 1988 then, with a confluence of domestic and political forces buttressing a nascent surge toward defeating the authoritarian Pinochet regime, the only remaining challenge was holding the vote itself.

On October 5th, 1988, an astonishing 97.5 percent of the nearly 7.5 million registered Chilean voters soundly rejected the Pinochet regime’s attempt to garner another 8 year term. On the day of the plebiscite, the United States-led National Democratic Institute “sent a large number of observers…to monitor the sanctity of the vote,” for fear that the government would attempt to manipulate both the final result of the tally and the individual voting stations. Although the government delayed releasing the results of the referendum, it was finally judged that, according to official results, 55.98 percent of Chileans had voted ‘No,’ thereby voting to elect by democratic means a new president to take office in March of 1990. Seventeen months later, on March 11th, 1990, Patricio Aylwin was sworn in as the first democratically elected president in Chile in two decades.

MERTS OF EXTERNAL FACTORS
IN THE CHILEAN CASE STUDY

The role played by external factors in fomenting Chile’s democratic revolution in the 1980s is easy to understate. Indeed, a majority of the vast literature on the topic of the Chilean transition from authoritarianism neglects the angle nearly entirely, and instead argues the merits of domestic political nuances such as elite pacting, vertical regime organization, and nationalization of the Chilean copper industry. Notwithstanding the manifold domestic pressures that crippled the Pinochet regime in the years after the 1982 debt crisis, if one examines the comparative health of the Pinochet regime historically, it is evident that the relative strength of the junta is indirectly related to the amount of external democratic leverage placed on it by the international community.

When considering the Chilean case, especially in the 1980s, Levitsky and Way’s theories of international linkage and leverage are accurate in gauging the degree to which international actors were able to influence regime change. In the Chile of the 1980s, there was both an international pressure to democratize and an international linkage to vested outside financial and social interests that compelled the Chilean people to reevaluate their political system. The outside pressure was clearly visible by the various executive decisions and Congressional resolutions made by the United States in the waning years of the Pinochet regime. The decision by President Jimmy Carter to campaign on a platform of human rights protection and his administration’s subsequent disparagement of Chile’s military junta clearly signaled that in the years after Nixon’s Cold War appeasement of the Pinochet regime, humanitarian violations and a restriction of basic political and civil rights would not be tolerated. Pressure was both direct, in the form of suspensions of military aid and commercial sanctions, and indirect, in the form of diplomatic rhetoric such as the Congress’ decision to support Francisco Fresno’s National Agreement for the Transition to Democracy.

It can be argued that in the early 1970s, there was little, or perhaps even negative, democratic leverage on the Chilean regime, at least from the United States. In the opinion of Augusto Samaniego, a professor of history at La Universidad de Santiago de Chile and a victim of Pinochet’s penchant for exiling ‘radical’ academics, Nixon, Kissinger, and the US CIA were guilty of undercutting Chile’s democracy, thereby indirectly creating a social crisis that led to “hunger and misery” for countless Chileans, all for the purposes of “appeasing the capitalist sentiment of the world economy fostered by the United States’ neoliberal proclivities.” If leverage can be bidirectional, it appears that, especially in the early part of the decade, the United States placed a negative external pressure on Chilean democracy that lasted through the Ford Administration in the form of appeasement of the Pinochet regime. It was not until Jimmy Carter came to office that the US began to exert positive diplomatic pressure on the Pinochet regime.

Leverage on Chilean democracy vacillated in the 1970s and 1980s. Jimmy Carter’s commitment to defending human rights saw, for the first time since the 1973 coup, the United State push back against Chilean authoritarianism, even if it can be properly classified as a ‘Competitive Authoritarian’ regime as defined by Levitsky and Way. But the transition to the conservative and hawkish Reagan Administration saw leverage swing back in favor of Pinochet. Only after internal heat on Pinochet began to rise did Reagan, Secretary of State Jim Baker, and the rest of the Administration begin to withdraw strategic support for Pinochet for
reasons of geopolitical self-interest. In 1980 Chile was the last nation in South America to harbor an autocrat, and in the waning years of the Cold War, Samuel Huntington’s Third Wave of Democratization was already in full swing. As Huntington points out, it was in the latter 1970s that the US, and also European, foreign policy began to shift away from obstinate political support of western-friendly regimes and toward a stance more sympathetic to political rights and civil liberties. By the mid 1980s, then, governmental and nongovernmental institutions alike, such as the White House, the US Congress, NED, and numerous human rights watchdogs, were fully behind the incipient pushback on years of military rule. It is germane to this discussion, however, to note that even in the 1980s, western ‘leverage’ was not specifically in favor of democracy. Realistically, pressure exerted by the US and Western Europe was anti-authoritarianism, and hence only ostensibly pro-democracy. However, this does not detract from the ultimate outcome of this leverage, namely, the rebirth of Chilean democracy.

The significant catalyzing effect of the global technocracy and foreign academic institutions on galvanizing the Chilean political opposition is a telling example of the role of international ‘linkage’ in fomenting democratic revolutions. Levitsky and Way argue that linkage has an even more demonstrable effect on the liberalization of regimes than does direct international leverage. Of the five dimensions of international linkage that the authors identify, the economic, social, and transnational civil society paradigms are the most relevant to the Chilean case. But not all of these paradigms contain a directly positive influence of linkage. For example, if viewed through a prism of transnational civil society linkage, linkage had a positive effect on the liberalization of the Chilean political climate as it prompted rights-based institutions such as the UN Human Rights Commission to criticize the incumbent Chilean regime. Furthermore, when considered through a lens of social policy or civil society, linkage had a salient role in aiding the development of Chilean democracy. But when viewed through an economic prism, it can be argued that linkage had a negative effect on democracy.

The substantial foreign aid received by Chilean political, human rights, and academic groups; the training received by political and intellectual ‘dissident’ exiles in Europe and the United States; and the cooperation of various academic and technocratic institutions across international boundaries all helped foster an era of repudiation of the Pinochet regime, and by consequence, a liberalizing of Chilean society. The United States NED is a fine example, as are the numerous European Foundations, such as Germany’s Adenauer Foundation, of the critical role that international actors played in providing a platform on which the Chilean opposition, heretofore antagonistic and thus ineffective, to galvanize both its vision, and its coherence. If, as is widely held, internecine domestic politics hindered Chilean democracy in the 1970s, the rapprochement fostered by international groups, both diplomatic and activist, was absolutely crucial in providing an environment for liberal democracy to flourish, rather than fester. And given that many scholars, including O’Donnell and Schmitter, and Arturo Valenzuela, emphasize the importance of the evolution of the Christian Democrats and UP into the Concertación, then these authors are neglecting to note the international factors that allowed, at least partially, this evolution to occur. An argument for the domestic political process, then, is an endorsement of the external actor theory.

The negative effects linkage had on democracy when viewed through an economic prism are better explained when considering Diamond and Linz’ observation that the “steepest international challenge to democracy emanates from a...form of economic indebtedness: external debt.” As has been noted, Chile’s external debt reached $17.2 billion by 1982, despite the fact that most of its previous debt was forgiven by the Paris Club at the behest of the Nixon Administration in the early 1970s. Chile’s economic dependence on the United States and the rest of the region was certainly a form of linkage. Eminent Chilean political-economist Hugo Fazio states that the monetarist experiments of the Chicago Boys, themselves international actors, led the Pinochet regime to nationalize Chile’s copper industry. As the largest exporter of cobre, or copper, in the world, Fazio argues that nationalization of the industry was a product of the Washington Consensus, a menu of neoliberal, market fundamentalist-based reforms popularized by United States economists in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result of this government takeover of Chile’s most lucrative export industry, “profits for foreign copper companies outstripped local profits for Chilean miners, in favor of enriching the junta.” According to Fazio, CODELCO (Chile’s state run copper industry) absorbed profits from the sale of copper to the United States, thereby impoverishing the Chilean middle and lower classes, while enriching the
junta members, and Pinochet himself. In this sense, external debt, and neoliberal economic association with the US, hindered rather than helped Chilean democracy.

All of these arguments for leverage and linkage fail to encapsulate another key international element of Chile’s transition from authoritarianism: the ‘demonstration’ or ‘contagion’ effect advanced by Whitehead, among others. The mid 1980s was a period of democratic transformation in Latin America. In 1983, Argentinians went to the polls and selected Raúl Alfonsín as their president, returning constitutional rule to Argentina for the first time after decades of interspersed military rule. One year later, in 1984, Uruguayans elected Julio María Sanguinetti, returning free and unhindered democracy to Uruguay for the first time since President Jorge Pacheco declared a prolonged state of emergency in 1968, severely curbing civil liberties and political freedoms for countless citizens. In 1985, the election of Alan García in Peru signified the nation’s first exchange of power from one democratically elected president to the other in four decades (the stability of democracy in Peru was short lived however, as has been described in previous chapters). 1985 also witnessed the popular election of Paz Estenssoro in Bolivia, after decades of military rule and special elections in which an emergency session of Congress was held to select a president. And finally, in Brazil, Tancredo Neves was elected in 1985, returning democracy to Brazil for the first time since a military ‘revolution’ swept up South America’s largest nation in 1964. In addition, Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, if not liberal democracies in the 1980s, were not ruled by military dictatorships, and had presidents installed by electoral means. Indeed, at the end of 1985, Pinochet’s regime found itself as the last remaining military junta in a fully democratized South America.

Ironically, Pinochet attempted to frame this wave of democratization as a reason to vote “Yes” in the referendum of 1988, noting the poor economic performance in Chile’s newly democratized neighbors. But the result of the plebiscite suggests that “Chilean citizens were influenced not just by their own democratic tradition, but also by the wave that engulfed its neighbors.”38 The Chilean opposition, as well as the public diplomacy initiatives of the US State Department, was quick to publicize success stories from Chile’s newly democratic neighbors, and Chileans paid attention. Public opinion for Pinochet continued to fall while public sentiment warmed to the idea of a liberal democracy. As Whitehead notes, “the highly controlled Chilean [political] process must have been affected at least to some extent by observation of what happened a few years earlier when Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru had undertaken much more disorderly transitions.”39 If the political actors angered by the crisis of 1982 needed any democratic inspiration, they were surely afforded it by the regional political climate of the 1980s. Indeed, if democratic transitions tend to occur in geographic and chronological ‘clusters,’ then Chile is a prime example of a nation at its democratic tipping point whose trajectory was heavily influenced by its geographic neighbors.

**Conclusion**

The wave of democratization that swept through South America in the 1980s was one of the most resounding geopolitical manifestations to occur in the twilight years of the Cold War era. Perhaps no democratic transition was as internationally salient as that in Chile. Given the astounding amount of international support that the Chilean opposition received on its road to overthrowing the Pinochet regime, especially post 1982, it is striking that so few students of Chilean democracy have given due credit to these external factors. To be sure, as Angell notes, “the real basis of opposition to a dictatorship must come from internal developments.”40 Indeed, the gradual accretion of internecine opposition to the Pinochet

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Chile’s current standing in the international community/current development is due in large part to international factors
regime in the 1970s reached its apogee with a bona fide political revolt against the brutal autocracy of Pinochet’s military junta in the mid-1980s. However, domestic opposition to the Pinochet regime ultimately led to his ouster and the reimplementation of liberal democracy in Chile was greatly buttressed by a variety of international forces, from direct foreign aid from the United States and Western Europe, to the international technocratic exchange fostered by foreign academic institutions, to the harboring and ideological influence of political exiles.

Notwithstanding the United States’ support for the unseating of the democratic Allende regime and its subsequent support for the Pinochet regime, international forces on democracy in Chile were fairly unidirectional. That is, international pressure was primarily against the Pinochet regime, if not directly in support for a return of Chilean democracy. This is not to say that there existed unanimous international support for Chile’s political opposition. Realistically (and unfortunately for proponents of democracy), the nations that supported democracy in Chile were western nations wealthy enough and diplomatically inclined to throw their weight behind a liberal political revolution. If support for Pinochet existed globally, it was not able to manifest itself as global opposition, perhaps as a result of the weakening of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s or the dearth of authoritarian-sympathetic nations in the region. Pinochet’s international support gradually eroded while support for his opponents steadily increased.

To accurately and completely determine the relative success of international forces in influencing a democratic transition in Chile would require one to consider the obvious counterfactual scenario: What if these forces had been absent? Would Chileans still have achieved democracy in the late 1980s? The chronological aspect of this theoretical consideration is critical. It is likely, given the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the virtual disappearance of autocracy in Latin America in the 1990s, that Chile would have eventually democratized in the absence of international forces. But would the Chilean opposition have galvanized as quickly and efficiently as they did in this absence? Without the help of the international community, Pinochet’s grip on Chile likely would have remained steady into the early 1990s, and perhaps even longer. Similarly, if the United States had not thrown so much weight behind the Pinochet regime in the 1970s, perhaps democratization would have occurred sooner. But if international forces are to be thought of as vectors, then a combination of the United States’ initial negative, anti-democratic (or as Reaganites would argue, anti-Communist) foist was easily overcome by later, positive democratic influences. If, before 1973, Chileans could proudly claim to have the most democratic historical tradition in the Southern Hemisphere as their own, then today, Chileans owe the rebirth of that proud tradition at least in part to its neighbors in the West. §

Endnotes
3 Ibid.
4 Muñoz, p 164.
7 Ibid, p 50.
11 Muñoz, p 165.
12 Altman et al., p 5.
13 González, p 32.
14 Muñoz, p 166.
15 González, p 47.
16 Ibid., p 48.
17 Ibid., p 49.
18 Ibid., pp 90-91.
19 Altman et al., p 7.
21 Ibid., p 25.
22 Ibid., p 52.
23 Ibid., p 51.
24 González, p 90.
26 Altman et. al. write that “From the start, cooperation in the realm of human rights was addressed from one government to the next, strategy that was not well received considering the repression of the state itself toward opposition groups. In this way [the Dutch] decided to supersede aid…reconveying it through nongovernmental channels.
27 Altman et al. 13.
28 González 103.
Democratic Onset in Chile

29 Altman et. al. 16.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid. 16.
32 Personal Interview with Dr. Augusto Samaniego. Professor of History, La Universidad de Santiago de Chile. August 2009.
33 According to Huntington, the Third Wave of Democratization began in with Portugal’s ‘Cararnation Revolution’ of 1974.
34 In Europe, this palpable shift was evinced by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which was instrumental in gaining civil and political rights for Eastern European nations controlled by the hegemonic USSR. Huntington, 1991.

A Chilean citizen celebrates Christmas after Pinochet’s downfall.

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