The Future of Revolution

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Throughout history, we have seen a recurring theme of revolution amongst poor countries around the world. The textbook definition of "revolution" is the forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system. However, we will be using Forrest Colburn's definition that "revolution is the sudden, violent, and drastic substitution of one group governing a territorial political entity for another group formerly excluded from the government, and an ensuing assault on state and society for the purpose of radically transforming society" (Snyder, 1999, 7). Colburn's definition is more specific to this particular piece as it specifically focuses on rebellions that have been successful in creating change (Snyder, 1999, 7).

Revolution lacks geographical boundaries, as it has taken place in countries ranging from Nicaragua, to China. As common as this theme once was, researchers now begin to beg the question of whether revolution has a place in the future, or if it has become obsolete. I argue the form of revolution we have seen throughout history is improbable in the future for a plethora of reasons.

Theories of Revolution

Theorists suggest in order for a country to become vulnerable to revolution, several structural factors must first be in place. According to Colburn (1994), political unrest must already exist within the country. Obviously, revolution is improbable in a nation whose citizens are content in their current day to day lives. Even if one small group experiences unrest, revolution is still highly unlikely as it requires a large amount of support, amongst other key conditions.

Another structural factor, posits Snyder, is that the country will more than likely need to be small. Snyder argues smaller countries are more susceptible to revolution because they tend to suffer most from the conflicts between larger, more powerful countries such as Russia or The United States (Snyder, 1999, 9). In the midst of conflict between superpowers, smaller, impoverished countries begin to experience a heightened sense of national identity. Through this heightened sense of national identity, poorer countries join together in solidarity. During the Cold War, a sense of unity across Latin America, The Middle East, Asia, and Africa was evident despite geographic distance (Colburn).

However, Snyder also suggests larger countries are equally likely to become vulnerable to revolution as a result of great power conflict (Snyder, 1999, 12). Snyder alludes to the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions and their eminent social revolutions immediately following a brutal defeat at war. Snyder specifically mentions the Cold War, stating the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union acted as encouragement for revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces due to the aid provided by the two superpowers to their third world allies (Snyder, 1999, 12). Further, Snyder further posits the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Iranian revolutions,

among others, may not have occurred if it weren't for their conflicts with the United States. Revolutionaries within Cuba, Nicaragua, and Iran stated their reasoning behind radicalization was to defend themselves against the United States (Snyder, 1999, 13).

Another key structural factor Snyder mentions is regime type. Snyder argues the regime types most vulnerable to revolution include the traditional monarchy, military dictatorships, and colonial states. Everingham reiterates the importance of regime type, alluding to examples such as Bolivia's military dictatorship, the traditional Russian monarchy, and colonial states such as Vietnam and Algeria (Everingham, 1996, 18). Snyder and Everingham argue these particular regime types are historically more susceptible to revolution due to the fact that they tend to suppress individuals' opinions and are not welcoming to new groups and their ideas (Everingham, 1996, 18).

Among the other structural factors mentioned by Snyder, Colburn, and Everingham, an experience with Colonialism also appears to be a key ingredient for revolution. Snyder claims that historically, all successful revolutions within third world countries have occurred in nations whose citizens struggled against a colonial power or where there were neo-patrimonial regimes. Neo-patrimonial is a term used to label a regime type in which the government uses state resources as a means of securing loyalty within the population. History with Colonialism created ideal conditions for revolution within third world nations as it often provoked nationalist social movements, according to Snyder, in an effort to rid themselves of the "social, political, economic, and cultural distortions that had developed during colonial rule" (1999, 10). Further, Snyder attributes the success within past revolutionary movements against colonial power to the fact that those in power failed to earn citizens' loyalty. Failure to gain loyal supporters combined with the post WWII anti-colonialist attitude left these former colonial power houses vulnerable to social revolution (Snyder, 1999, 10). Snyder also argues in unison with Skocpol that anti-colonial revolutions were rampant after the decline in colonial powers following the Cold War (Snyder, 1999, 12). Along with the defeat of communism and fascism in the twentieth century, Snyder argues the defeat of colonialism within the same time period is equally as poignant and has greatly reduced the future probability of revolution in third world countries (Snyder, 1999, 10).

Neo-patrimonial regimes such as those which existed in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Iran are structurally different from colonial powers because they tend to lack institutional ties. As a result of the lack in institutional ties, most decisions were made based on the leader's personal connections leading to high levels of corruption within the government. Tradition was a large part of neo-patrimonial rule in that the rulers would invoke tradition as a way of defending their policy decisions. Ultimately, neo-patrimonial regimes' invoking of tradition turned out to be their Achilles' heel as it made them extremely vulnerable when groups introduced new ideas challenging the "tradition" these leaders clung to (Snyder, 1999, 11).

Mobilization of the peasants is one of the most important, if not the single most important factor in forcing a successful revolution. Snyder quotes Skocpol, arguing

that uprisings within the peasant community as well as their support for guerrilla movements has been "an essential contributory condition … in all social revolutions" (Snyder, 1999, 12). Everingham posits peasant involvement is necessary in order to overthrow the regime in power and discusses the important of such involvement throughout the Nicaraguan revolution during the 1970s (Everingham, 1996, 87). Snyder refers to three separate ways in which peasants contribute to revolution, one being their feel of "anomie," which basically refers to an overall feel of instability as a result of greater emphasis on ends as opposed to means. This feeling among the peasants makes them vulnerable to communitarian movements such as Marxist-Leninist revolutions (Snyder, 1999, 12). Another reason peasants have been frequent contributors to revolutionary movements is a result of their desire for land, Snyder argues peasants' radical political views reflect their support for policies entailing a transfer of land (Snyder, 1999, 12). Finally, Snyder talks about how peasants were simply easy targets of coercion when it was in the name of "social change" (Snyder, 1999, 12).

In order to gain a better understanding of the variety of forms revolution may take, we will briefly explore the examples of China and Ethiopia, and conclude with a case study of the Nicaraguan revolution in the 1970s. Each of these three cases have similarities visible through the structural factors that were present, as well as their occurrence within the same time period. While these cases are similar in many ways, however, each case is unique in their own way.

The Chinese revolution, led by Mao Zedong, was an effort to rise against the Chinese Communist Party which was formed decades earlier (Colburn, 1994, 51). Mao and his followers argued the Chinese Communist Party had been out of touch with the majority of citizens for a long time, and pulled for more socialist policies in the nation (Colburn, 1994, 51). While Mao was open about his affinity toward socialist policies during the revolution, he gained support by touting promises of private enterprise's positive role in the new economy, should they win the revolution (Colburn, 1994, 51). The Chinese Communist Party began to introduce a military government in hopes of regaining control in the midst of the revolutionary movement, but this only resulted in failure. A large power source for any political movement in China was the peasants' support of their policies, which explains why Mao Zedong and his colleagues waited until power was truly consolidated to begin introducing socialist policies as they pleased everyone but the peasantry. Despite popular belief, socialist policies tend to hurt the peasantry more than help them. It is important to note the Chinese revolution was won through violence. Colburn writes, "…power was basically consolidated in the same way it was seized – through the barrel of a gun" (Colburn, 1994, 52).

The Ethiopian revolution differs from that of the Chinese in that it was not won militarily, but through a coup d'état, and resulted in a Marxist government which had issues of its own despite promises of post-revolutionary improvement (Colburn, 1994, 52). Resistance to the Ethiopian government was largely seen in college student organizations up until the Red Terror of 1977 (Colburn, 1994, 52). University students were known for meeting together to discuss their anger and distaste toward

the regime in power, which led to their demise. The Red Terror refers to government's mass murder of over 500,000 Ethiopian citizens for being suspected of participation in the resistance movement (McGhee, 2013). As a result of the abruptness of the coup in Ethiopia, General Mengistu took power and immediately executed moderates within the country in order to ensure support of his regime. Under Mengistu, land was nationalized and the army assumed a forefront role in the new government (Colburn, 1994, 52). The Ethiopian Revolution is an example of a revolution gone horribly wrong as a result of lack in preparation. Proponents of the Ethiopian coup admitted to foregoing the necessary preparation to take power in the event of success, which some might argue, left Ethiopians worse off than they were before the revolution.

The Nicaraguan revolution, according to Colburn, is the most instructive case we will study from this time period and it is labeled as a "social" revolution as opposed to the "liberal" revolution we saw in the case of China. Unlike the Ethiopian revolution, the Sandinista Front known for leading the Nicaraguan revolutionary movement put a great deal of time and effort into preparing themselves to take power. Leading up to the revolution, Nicaragua was under the control of Anastasio Somoza Debayle from 1964 up until his defeat in July of 1979 (Colburn, 1994, 52). Somoza's control of the country began when he first gained power over the Nicaraguan National Guard, and by the time he was elected President, he had built a strong relationship with those higher up in the National Guard to ensure loyalty.

Case Study of the Nicaraguan Revolution

Soon after Somoza took office, through what some claim to be a rigged election, the Sandinistas made their first large scale appearance as a revolutionary movement. The Sandinistas chose to conduct a raid of a party hosted by one of the wealthy Somoza loyalists, in which they took hostages and in order to secure their safe release, they demanded the release of their own Daniel Ortega, now the sitting Nicaraguan President, along with a plane to Cuba (Everingham, 1996, 116). Citizens became excited after word of the raid got around, and began to have hope for the future of the country.

Somoza, angered by the actions of the Sandinistas, aimed to prevent similar events from occurring in the future by implementing the War Council. Somoza's War Council was created with the purpose of enforcing the suspension of all rights to public assembly, the censorship of non-governmental publications, and most importantly, they were tasked with using martial law to punish anyone suspected of collaborating on the raid (Everingham, 1996, 116).

Despite Somoza's efforts to silence the revolutionary movement, the fight continued to gain support from elites as a result of the President's poor economic choices. Elites began to distance themselves and openly speak out against Somoza's actions when his greed became apparent and his economic policies began to resemble cronyism as opposed to a true free market system (Everingham, 1996, 117). Business elites voiced their fear of losing economic sovereignty and, subsequently, some of the

regime's most loyal supporters began to actively work toward removing the dictator from power (Everingham, 1996, 140). While political unrest became more apparent, the movement still needed a spark to truly light it's fire.

On January 10, 1978, the Somoza regime committed an act which would ultimately propel the revolutionary movement to success less than two years later. This day in January marks the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, a well-known Nicaraguan editor and journalist, who was on the verge of joining a group of Sandinistas known as Los Doce (Everingham, 1996, 139). Chamorro's death was publicized on the front page of the Nicaraguan newspaper, La Prensa, and immediately the elites came to the realization they, too, could be the regime's next targets. Leading up to Chamorro's assassination, most people believed the only victims of the dictator's wrath would be members of the peasantry and working class, that the elites were above it all (Everignham, 1996, 139). Upon the realization that all social groups were at risk, a new alliance formed across social classes with intentions of ending the dictator's reign once and for all.

Common interest in the removal of Somoza led to an alliance between businessmen and the FSLN. This unlikely alliance was formed in hopes of removing Somoza from power without going to the lengths of a full on civil war (Everingham, 1996, 141). Following Chamorro's death, capitalists from every chamber of what became known as COSEP, or the Superior Council of Private Enterprise, organized to implement a business "lock-out" by paying their employees to stay home from work (Everingham, 1996, 140). Despite a high rate of employee absence, the regime ignored the movement which led the employees to grow angry and even more resentful. Unfortunately, the businessmen's attempt at forcing the removal of Somoza solely through non-violent threats came up empty (Everingham, 1996, 141). Soon after these attempts by the businessmen appeared to be in vain, the Sandinistas began the first wave of insurrection and closed in on their impending victory.

The Nicaraguan Case is most interesting due to the cooperation across social classes, which is difficult to find in other cases of revolution around the world. The peculiar combination of the Nicaraguan elite and the peasantry working side-by-side with the working class to overthrow an oppressive regime was almost unheard of at the time. In the case of Nicaragua, according to Everingham, the peasant-intellectual combination was considered the axis for this entire revolution and its resulting success (Everingham, 1996, 87). This explains why the guerrillas made concerted efforts to penetrate rural communities and politicize their misery in order to mobilize them, just as it explains the efforts within the Sandinista movement to build relationships with the elites (Everingham, 1996, 87).

When looking at the similar case of El Salvador in the 1980s, it is clear the same level of success was not achieved. Just like in Nicaragua, both the Salvadoran elites as well as the peasantry became involved in the revolutionary movement, but something hindered their efforts. So, what is the difference between these two cases? Everingham attributes this difference between the two scenarios to the nature of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua (Everingham, 1996, 177). Somoza was known for his egregious behavior, such as locking his prisoners up in cages below his mansion and

watching them get torn to shreds by the wild animals he kept as pets. Not only were the actions of the dictator a catalyst for the revolution, but the deplorable abuse of power administered by the Nicaraguan National Guard also played an enormous role in mobilizing the citizens (Everingham, 1996, Ch.8). These factors accompanied by the FSLN's rejection of extreme ideological schemes allowed the movement to include all groups of people across the country (Everingham, 1996, Ch. 8).

After my time spent in the country speaking firsthand with former guerrilla members, it is clear the Nicaraguan revolution was not as successful as some may believe. According to Nicaraguan citizens, the new government was initially very moderate. The Junta originally consisted of conservatives, liberals, and moderates, which is part of the reason they received such overwhelming support. Everingham alludes to this tactic in Chapter 8 of his book, Revolution and the Multi-Class Coalition in Nicaragua, where he mentions the Sandinistas' overt effort to exclude radical ideologies from their original platform in order to ensure moderate and right-wing support among the citizens. However, once power within Nicaragua had been consolidated and the doubts of right-wing ideologists quelled, the Sandinistas immediately removed the moderates as well and right leaning politicians from the Junta, leaving solely supporters of Socialist ideology. Many argue this is the reason a counterrevolutionary movement came about shortly after they took power, and removed power from the Sandinistas in the country's first truly free election.

The Future of Revolution

As for the future, we are faced with the question of whether revolutions similar to the Nicaraguan Revolution in the 1970s are probable in today's world and beyond. Throughout the Nicaraguan case, we are able to identify several of the key structural factors Snyder, Everingham, and Colburn have described for us as being crucial for a revolution to take place. Mobilization of the peasantry, dependency on the United States, a neo-patrimonial regime, along with other key factors all existed in Nicaragua to create a political environment susceptible to revolution.

Along with the absence of the aforementioned structural factors, Snyder argues the existence of "democracy, markets, middle classes, and transnationalism" in today's world make revolution highly improbable (Snyder, 1999, 14). Snyder claims the widespread implementation of more liberal policies obstructs the success of revolutionary movements primarily because democracy hands the power to the people, in that they are able to pick and choose their leaders through voting (Snyder, 1999, 14). Democratic elections eliminate the need for violent revolutions, as it undermines the necessity for such movements (Snyder, 1999, 14). Snyder also argues democratic elections minimize the need for radical policy alternatives, as force and radicalization are no longer required in order to remove a particular leader from office (Snyder, 1999, 14).

Finally, democracy is often based in pluralism, which includes and respects different ideas and limits the existence of intolerance (Snyder, 1999, 14). Historically, revolutionary movements entail a level of intolerance toward those in disagreement

with the communitarian values upheld by the leaders of the given movement (Snyder, 1999, 14).

Snyder argues, in today's world, social revolutions such as the Nicaraguan Revolution are no longer necessary to produce social change within nations, and revolutions such as these should be seen as "time-bound" (Snyder, 1999, 23). However, despite the decline in neo-patrimonial regimes and other structural factors causing a nation to become vulnerable to revolution, there is still a chance of a fourth wave of revolutionary movements (Snyder, 1999, 24). Snyder proposes there is a chance we will witness anti-liberal-capitalism movements which result in revolution, but unlike the uprisings against fascist regimes in the 20th century, they will not gain universal support (Snyder, 1999, 26).

Snyder argues due to the spread of liberalism, the resulting strengthening of states and failure of revolutions in the past suggest revolution is no longer on the horizon (Snyder, 1999, 28). It is clear that the spread of liberalism around the world and the resulting decline in support for Marxist-Leninist policies create an environment in which the probability of revolution is incredibly low, but not impossible given the right circumstances.

Works Cited

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