



# **The Origins of Overthrow**

## **Hegemonic Expectations, Emotional Frustration, and the Impulse to Regime Change**

**Payam Ghalehdar**

**Ph.D. thesis defence on 20 March 2015**

### **Abstract**

Why has regime change, defined as military intervention aimed at forcibly transforming a target state's domestic political authority structure, been a long-standing practice in US foreign policy, used roughly two dozen times since 1900 despite its limited success in producing peace, stability and/or democracy? Extant theories fail to provide sound answers. Realist approaches, for example, under-predict the recurrence of regime change if great powers should have no reason to intervene in weaker states, or over-predict it if anything goes under anarchy. Similarly, democracy promotion arguments overstate the causal importance of the US desire to expand liberty globally.

This dissertation presents a novel explanation for the recurrence of regime change in US foreign policy, arguing that the practice of regime change is predicated upon what I call 'emotional frustration', an anger-arousing emotional state that is brought about by a foreign leader's obstructive behavior perceived to be rooted in implacable hatred. While obstruction is ubiquitous in interstate interactions, I claim that the combination of hegemonic expectations towards a target state and the perception of hatred shape the extent to which a foreign leader's conduct evokes an emotional response on the part of foreign policy elites. Once emotionally frustrated, regime change becomes an attractive foreign policy instrument to decision-makers who seek a way to confront and put a stop to the obstruction of a menacing target state. It enables frustrated leaders both to permanently get rid of a perceivedly hostile foreign leader and to discharge their frustration through the use of force. Illustrating the importance of emotional frustration, I conduct four historical case studies based on primary sources, spanning almost one hundred years of US history. Regime changes in Cuba (1906), Nicaragua (1909–12), the Dominican Republic (1965), and Iraq (2003) reveal overlooked patterns of emotional frustration that have time and again animated regime change decisions.



**Jury:** Roland Bleiker (Univ. Queensland) (in videolink), Michael Cox (LSE), Payam Ghalehdar (candidate), Jennifer Welsh (EUI), Christian Reus-Smit (formerly EUI/Univ. Queensland) (Supervisor)

### **Bio**

Payam Ghalehdar holds a BA and an MA in Political Science from the University of Mannheim. In the course of his PhD at the European University Institute, he had visiting stays at the George Washington University and University of Queensland. His research interests include US foreign policy, US-Iran relations, and military intervention.