Democracy Promotion:
The Elusive Quest for Grand Strategies

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As the lessons from the last decade or so become clearer it is increasingly obvious that the challenge of democratizing authoritarian regimes is far from easy. It is probably fair to say that we now think we understand more about how *not* to go about that challenge than we confidently know how to do it. In the social science literature on the most recent »wave« of democracy, the mood music now signals quite definitely that the party is over. The easy victories have been won; from here on progress will be far from assured, and *if there is* progress, it will not be anything like as dramatic as say a decade ago.

With the benefit of hindsight, then, there is much still to learn both about democratization and about the means to democratize: the how far and the how fast, in what circumstances, and under what conditions, and where it will all lead to. There need be no embarrassment about this. Democratic political theory is as old as ancient Greece, but theorizing democratization, and practical endeavors by the international community to promote democracy, are both relatively new. This paper summarizes some of the principal lessons of experience, by reviewing a selection of major issues and themes. It compares the strengths and weaknesses of three main approaches the international community can take to democracy promotion: via economic relations, via the state, and via civil society.

However it does not attempt to grapple with what some of the more philosophically inclined observers of democratization might think is an essential prerequisite to any such discussion, namely the specific idea, or ideas, of democracy that should frame the democracy promotion agenda. The conventional wisdom maintains that democracy is an essentially contested concept. That engaging in democracy promotion might be no less contentious is, perhaps, a less obvious finding, but one that is apparent once we see that even the simple question »how to democratize authoritarian regimes« raises the possibility of not just one but several different challenges, for the following reasons.

The Challenges of Democracy Promotion

First, »authoritarian regimes« differ greatly among themselves – something that is perhaps best captured by relabelling this category as non-democracies. This fact can have vital implications for their future political prospects, if there is validity at all in the theory of path dependence, namely the idea that where you go depends on where you are coming from. So for example the question how to democratize a deeply institutionalized one-party communist state might not pose quite the same puzzles, or address identical problems, to questions about how to democratize a personal dictatorship, or end a lengthy period of military-bureaucratic rule. The lessons learned in one context might have only limited transfer value in a different context.

Secondly, the real world of actually existing regimes is better summed up by the idea of a continuum, rather than two opposing categories of western-style democracies and authoritarian regimes. If those two *are* the polar opposites, then in between them lie various kinds of hybrid or intermediate regimes. The many different variants of what some analysts used to call »democracy with adjectives« – semi-democracy, partial, limited, quasi, low-intensity, illiberal democracy, and so on, and to which we can now add President Putin's notion of »managed democracy«, – has now been joined by a new typology, that of »authoritarianism with adjectives«. That includes such cases as semi-authoritarian, competitive authoritarianism, liberal autocracies, liberalizing autocracies and so on. It is unlikely that every observer will agree on the most appropriate classification for each and every particular government or polity – on how authoritarian, or how close to being a democracy, it really is. The assessment will depend in part on what we believe to be the appropriate period of time for taking the temperature, and whether more weight is placed on snapshots, or on an underlying trend.

Moreover no one can be certain that even where political change is taking place, that the incumbents in power see liberal democracy as the destination. Such regimes might be what Daniel Brumberg (2003) calls »in transition to nowhere«. Thus political concessions made by its government could lead us to reclassify a country from one diminished sub-type of authoritarianism or sub-type of democracy to yet another diminished sub-type, and reflect nothing more than a strategy by the power-holders to avoid, or postpone more meaningful, substantive democratic reform. On that basis the question how to democratize authoritarian regimes

could really be about how to add momentum to political change in situations where certain freedoms and proto-democratic characteristics are already present to a limited degree. The really decisive issue there will be about who takes control of a process of change that is already under way or was commenced and then stalled, and who will determine its future direction.

Third, the emphasis on how to democratize non-democratic regimes should not lead us to loose sight of the parallel challenge, namely to establish the rule of law. In many countries we see a tendency to introduce »electoral democracy« but without a recognition by the dominant political actors that they too must be bound by the rule of law and that government too should respect certain fundamental rights of individuals and minorities. This »democratization backwards« reverses the more familiar sequence of events followed in countries now regarded as established liberal democracies. They democratized only after, and perhaps did so successfully only because, they came to terms with embedding the rule of law.

In sum, then, the challenge of democratizing non-democracies is not one but many different challenges. That means different approaches might work best for different situations – »horses for courses«. But in all cases clearly any sensible strategy must take account of the local political dynamics – that is the attitudes of both the political leadership *and* society – by identifying the stakeholders in democratic political change *and* the forces of resistance. In this regard there are several different possible scenarios, and for each one readers will have no difficulty in identifying real examples:

▶ The regime is determined to resist change but society is both enthusiastic and ready for democracy.
▶ The regime is resistant and in addition significant sections of society are indifferent, or suspicious, or hostile, or simply unprepared for the operation of western-style liberal democracy.
▶ We find a broadly co-operative attitude on behalf of both government and society, and there is a good measure of civil peace.
▶ The ruling political group, or society, or both are strongly divided internally over the merits of moving promptly towards liberal democracy.
▶ The regime has collapsed, civil disorder, even violent conflict reign, in other words we find a political vacuum.
▶ A brand new state or proto-state has been established which is not yet fully tried and tested, which might or might not have come about fol-

lowing a period of violent conflict, and where international intervention of one kind or another might already have played a significant role.

It is to be expected that different patterns of opportunity and constraint will present themselves in these different situations, quite apart from all the other country-specific circumstances of history, culture, religion and so on that might have a bearing on the situation. All this could have significant implications for the right choice of approach to democracy promotion by the international community.

Three Approaches to Democracy Promotion – and their Caveats

Economic Relations

The economic environment for political change is a double-edged sword. On the one hand financial and economic shocks can undermine an authoritarian regime or precipitate political developments that bring it down, as in Indonesia. But on the other hand, if that is not followed by economic improvement, or living standards continue to deteriorate, then the chances of a more democratic regime acquiring instrumental or »performance legitimacy« will be seriously impaired. In the absence of a conversion by society to the idea that the new democracy embodies some superior intrinsic moral worth, or »normative legitimacy«, then a continuing absence of instrumental legitimacy can leave it perilously exposed to shocks – political or otherwise – whether originating from within or from without.

So the question how to democratize in a cold economic climate and especially where substantial poverty, misery and great material inequality already exist, invites the international community to reflect on a broader set of relations. There are two points of entry whereby it can try to break the vicious circle in a country in which developmental problems prevent the establishment of stable democracy and the political problems in turn obstruct development. One way is to seek in some way to engineer the collapse of a non-democratic regime and then give extra assistance to its more democratic successor, until such time as it has secured, or presided over, material development. Once that brings the attainment of the minimum economic and social conditions essential to own long-term survival, the international community can then – and only then – congratulate itself on a job well done. An alternative strategy is simply to support

the development of the economic and social requisites that sooner or later will create domestic pressure for political opening, and will make transition to democracy more likely to stick once it does happen.

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However, the evidence from such places as Cuba, Myanmar, Zimbabwe and North Korea tells us that economic difficulties – even when aggravated by international sanctions or the denial of development aid – do not necessarily bring about significant and desirable political results very quickly. Much seems to depend on the character of the regime – how oppressive it is prepared to be. Perhaps South Africa is the *only* example in recent times of where international economic sanctions were a major success, and even there the relative importance of their contribution to South Africa's break with apartheid is a matter of dispute. Generally speaking the risk of imposing double jeopardy on the citizens presents itself in stark relief. Even attempts to deprive a rentier state of a large portion of its rents might end up harming the most vulnerable members of society rather than the powerful elites. There have to be genuine moral doubts over how far suffering should be inflicted by the international community, by whatever means, for the purpose of promoting democratic reform. Greater latitude might be argued for where the objective is not to democratize but to bring an end to the gross abuse of human rights. The higher value of that goal might be thought to justify more punitive or higher risk forms of intervention by external actors. But by no means all of the non-democracies are characterized by gross abuse of basic human rights. In any case, where an economic wasteland *is* created so as to bring down a regime, that is a very inauspicious foundation on which to try to build a new democracy, although Mozambique is one country that gives some cause for optimism that it can be done.

In contrast, if in the long run capitalist economic development *does* generate pressures for greater political freedom and makes some version of liberal democracy more affordable, then why not just play the waiting game? For example, perhaps, eventually in China we witness a replay of the sequence of events experienced in South Korea and Taiwan, where remarkable economic and social progress eventually brought democratic

political change. In the meantime, encourage ever more trade and investment ties with China and look forward to the day of political »externalities« – the indirect consequences for political transition. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the typical pattern of economic growth that comes from integrating a country more closely into the global economy tends to generate increased domestic socio-economic inequalities. These can be disempowering for the least well-off citizens. Those kinds of inequalities easily turn into asymmetrical relations of power. And that seems contrary to the ideal of political equality, which for some analysts is the very essence of democracy, or democracy's leading value.

Moreover, even where the benefits of growing prosperity are widely shared in the society there are no certain guarantees about the precise political consequences. After all, Singapore, with a higher income per capita than all but six other countries in the world, is, in Freedom House terminology, still only »partly free«. The example tells us that even if shared prosperity is a necessary condition for stable democracy it is not a sufficient condition. And if any society's aspirations *are* satisfied by some modern version of »bread and circuses« – say café latte and DVDs – then is there much that democracy promoters in the West *can* do, or *should* do? There is an old saying »charity begins at home«. Perhaps the ambition to democratize the non-democracies should take a leaf from that book. That is to say all concerned citizens should address the challenges threatening the quality of democracy in its heartland, to at least ensure that those societies (continue to) »lead by example«, and provide exemplars of »best democratic practice«.

Furthermore, while manipulating economic relations and aid conditionalities as an approach to democratizing non-democracies is a plausible if not necessarily effective policy option for governments and government agencies in the international community, it is not one that the multilateral development institutions can be expected to share with equal enthusiasm. They are constitutionally constrained from overtly playing politics. And it is not a strategy that is available to the independent, non-governmental, non-profit actors like the German political foundations either. And even western governments are increasingly constrained in their conduct of international economic relations by such frameworks as World Trade Organization rules. Their foreign economic policies and policy behavior will continue to be influenced by other important national and sub-national interests to do with security, commercial advantage and economic gain. Added to which, in an increasingly globalized,

or transborder and supraterritorial world, the impact of market forces beyond the reach of any government is making it more difficult to mould international economic relations and control the economic outcomes to suit to the purposes of democracy promotion.

By comparison, there could be more mileage in choosing a different and more direct approach, such as addressing certain matters concerning the state and state relations.

State Relations

There is an assortment of possibilities here ranging from »soft diplomacy«, through the conditional promise of access or membership in some valued regional organization, to »hard power« – regime change brought about by military intervention. Clearly the European Union offers the most prominent example of political conditionality at work, and it has been credited with exerting significant positive influence for democratization in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. But both the EU itself and the situation of the former communist countries escaping Soviet domination are unique. The Organization of American States, for instance, despite occasional successes in averting unconstitutional moves in member states, or NEPAD (the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development) and its yet-to-be demonstrated commitment to peer review are in no way comparable.

Anyway, the most topical approach now seems to be regime change by force – an approach to democratization that before the invasion of Afghanistan we might have considered to be unthinkable. Issue number one must be regime change by whom? And on whose authority? As we know, in mid-2003 the Secretary-General of the United Nations initiated a wide-ranging inquiry into how the UN should shape up to issues like these. There is little point in speculating on its likely impact on the institutional architecture at the UN. Other than to say that even if the result is institutional paralysis, the actual political context for coercive intervention in the internal affairs of states could still change as a consequence – not least if powerful actors (for which read the United States) show impatience with, or disagree with, the Secretary-General's preferred solution. A case of »watch this space«, then, or, better still, a reason for continuing to think hard about what shape a post-9/11 »new world order« should take more broadly – the international legal as well as political parameters – and how to influence that outcome.

In regard to forced regime change, the quality of independent thinking coming out of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in Washington, DC, deserves special mention. Leading commentators there have consistently taken issue with lines of thinking associated with the Bush administration's policies on Iraq, and specifically criticizing the view that by smashing Saddam's rule, first Iraq and then other Muslim countries in the Middle East will succumb to the urge to democratize. This idea of falling dominos is as yet unpersuasive. In reality, the historical record of sustained democracy following military conquest or occupation is not good. According to a count by Pei and Kasper (2003), only four of the 16 countries so visited by the US over the last century maintained democracy more than ten years after US forces left (Germany and Japan after 1945; Grenada after 1983 and Panama after 1989). A particularly significant finding is that the use of interim surrogate regimes in post-conflict situations has produced a record of complete failure. The lesson the report makes clear is that *multilateral* involvement committed to building *local* political legitimacy for a new regime are probably the minimum conditions for success. A different possible inference is that *even if* the UN moves to open up new legal, political, and practical possibilities for coercive intervention by the international community, then military force should still remain an option of *last resort*, or possibly, no resort at all except where the moral case gives compelling reason for throwing caution to the winds.

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This is because the problems of democratizing former non-democracies are especially acute in societies where destruction of the political regime – whether from outside or from within the society – creates a requirement to radically restructure the entire machinery of state – perhaps to create a brand new sovereign entity or more than one such entity – plus a requirement to create or re-establish some sense of national unity – that is to say to engage in nation-building. Put differently, the challenge of building a democratic state cannot be divorced from the issue of how the opportunity to do so came about: did the break-down of the non-democracy that preceded it entail such developments as the destruction of the

state machine or national disintegration? And, lest we forget, democracy building is often accompanied by an imperative to develop a thriving, market-based economy too.

In the presence of quadruple, quintuple or an even larger number of major challenges, there have to be trade-offs, even if the true nature of a trade-off becomes fully apparent only when it is too late to rescue the situation – in the sense of imposing the least bad solution. So in the international community the democratization agenda has to compete for its place in the sun; and it is not difficult to think of situations where the incentive structures are, and will be, stacked against it. For instance at the time of writing the perceived national security interests in the West explain the relatively tolerant attitudes towards certain illiberal regimes. This includes authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes that co-operate in the fight against international terrorism or in enforcing measures to restrain the exodus of economic migrants. If for instance it was thought that early moves towards liberal democracy might enable Islamists to take power, or that social and political order would break down once the concentrated powers of the center were reduced, then the likelihood of strong external pressure to reform is considerably reduced. The assumption is that significant »political opening« would pose fewer risks to contemporary security concerns of western countries if it was deferred to some time in the future, when conditions are more appropriate. Invariably that time is not specified clearly.

So there are issues of sequencing here too – is there a specific order in which the different processes of political change must occur if developments are to work out well in the end – for instance is the right approach first to craft states and then build nations, or build nations before states? If these are »chicken and egg« questions, what scope is there for varying the recipe in individual cases? Thus it could be difficult to disagree with the sort of reasoning Marina Ottaway (2003) presents in her »Democracy Challenged«, that a troubled and incomplete process of state formation is one structural condition that makes democracy an unlikely outcome of a political transition. She argues that under such conditions semi-authoritarianism may in fact be a positive outcome if it helps consolidate the state and solves the initial problems of survival, and creates a stable situation.

However, if today the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq are, as the old Chinese proverb would have it, heavily cursed to live in interesting times, then there are other countries where the state has not so much collapsed

or been destroyed but is just not very effective at delivering the goods. Here it would appear that the challenge of democratizing a non-democratic regime will face less competition, and could be allotted more privileged attention by international well wishers. But there is a qualification – one that comes from recalling the lesson learned over the 1990s that the drive to liberalize an economy must be premised on the existence of a suitable and enforceable regulatory framework and on the effective provision of certain essential public goods, for example property rights. In that arena we came to understand that a crude drive to »roll back the frontiers of the state« and downsize government is not necessarily always appropriate, even where the only interest is in seeing the economic market work better. Similarly, just as non-democratic regimes do not all offer strong and effective government, so no-one is entitled to assume that a peaceful transition to democracy will of itself correct a state's weaknesses. Indeed, transition to democracy could amplify the latent shortcomings and make a state less effective.

This is not unimportant. The question how to democratize should not be divorced from the question how to ensure that a democratically elected government will be able to translate the reasonable wishes of the people expressed through the ballot box into capable public action. Where society has no confidence in the state's capabilities, the case for being free to choose between candidates for elected office looks less compelling. This could mean for democracy promoters that there are a number of specific areas of possible engagement with the state – ranging from strengthening the institutions by which the executive can be made horizontally accountable, to decentralization – that are not just democracy issues, and not just governance issues, but are both. That is to say, they are issues in democratic governance. In theory, rendering support to initiatives such as these should offer the possibility of a »win-win« situation, a double bang for the buck. Unfortunately, however, it breaches the golden rule that says that using the same instrument to achieve different objectives makes failure to achieve any of the objectives much more likely, in short, the probability of a »lose-lose« situation. What is more, even enthusiasts for democracy could still fall foul of what has recently been called the »iron law of the perverse consequences of institutional design«. Put forward by Bastian and Luckham (2003) in a book called »Can Democracy be Designed?« and based on findings from several conflict-torn societies like Sri Lanka and Bosnia, this »iron law« might well have resonance in other but more peaceful situations too.

In fact, there is a view that trying to tinker with the institutions of state is not an optimal way to democratize regimes that fall short of being full liberal democracies. That approach can all too easily be co-opted by a regime that has no intention of going the full distance, but is only interested in partial liberalization – making concessions to buy time and to deflect pressure for more substantial political change. Call it the Jordanian option.

Civil Society Relations

Approaches to civil society as a strategy for the promotion of democracy is instinctively attractive to a variety of interested actors in the international community:

▶ governments, government agencies and multilateral institutions, who see civil society as offering partners less obviously »political«, and therefore politically safer to support, than interventions in the more sensitive internal affairs of state, or imposing economic sanctions and enforcing aid conditionalities, or unleashing the dogs of war;

▶ a range of civic associations, non-governmental organizations, independent research institutes and the like in the West who view civil society abroad as kindred spirits;

▶ even more radical voices speaking the language not so much of democracy, or, even, liberal democracy, but the empowerment of the people, or democratization from the bottom-up – the interface where civil society shades into social movements, and the idea that whatever else democratization means, it is a process of popular struggle.

The appeal of civil society as a route into democratization looks almost too good to be true. Anything that appears to offer all things to all people automatically arouses suspicion. So, unsurprisingly the civil society approach has attracted more attention – much of it critical – than probably any other aspect of international democracy support. The most salient issues here can be grouped for purposes of convenience into six clusters.

▶ Access to civic associations, if they are permitted to exist, will be limited by the most authoritarian regimes. Concrete expressions of international support for local actors may attract to them the unwelcome attention of the authorities, and could be counter-productive, even if international solidarity provides them with some surety against the worst excesses of state terrorism. Alternatively, the real challenge could be to go beyond mere tokenism, that is to say beyond lending support

to what is essentially a *controlled* civil society – one that is licensed by and ultimately subservient to the interests of a non-democratic regime.

▶ Not only the very concept of civil society is contested, but also the question what is – or what should be – its primary purpose is much disputed. Is it to break the mould of the old, or to facilitate the smooth running of the new? Or both? Are we talking about one idea of civil society, or several distinct ideas? Civil society's relationships to the market and to political society, in particular the state, are areas of great dispute.

▶ Even where close observers think they can identify those elements of »actually existing civil society« that are pro-democratic, non-partisan, and thereby worthy of external support, what should be the international community's attitude towards all the other civic actors – those that are viewed as »traditional« rather than »modern«, or, thought to be »uncivil«? After all, that category might include some organizations that enjoy considerable local support, by virtue of the fact that, unlike the state, they work hard to meet citizens' basic material, or spiritual, needs. Should they simply be ignored, or should attempts be made to reduce their influence with the people, to neutralize them or undermine them, or should the aim be to »convert« them into something more »acceptable«?

▶ Then there is the matter of policy coherence, or »joined-up« intervention. Just as some agents of the international community are investing efforts in building up certain civic associations, so other international economic and financial forces seem to be tearing others down. More particularly, pressures of economic liberalization are weakening or have already weakened organized labor in countries like Zambia. Yet this is a social force that gave backbone to processes of democratization and helped establish viable political parties in many western European countries. (In a similar vein and just as with weak state capabilities, where countries are permitted few economic policy options but to remain within the so-called »Washington Consensus« the value of competitive politics and electoral contestation is significantly eroded). So, can civil society shaped in the image of global capitalism in the twenty-first century perform for democratization the function that civil societies of a rather different composition provided in an earlier era in what were more advanced industrial societies than most of today's prospective new democracies?

▶ What are the consequences of a bourgeoning civil society for political parties and the prospects for a stable, competitive party system –

surely, still an essential component of representative democracy, even though not a sufficient condition for it to work well – and the effects on relations between civic associations and the party system? If the relations are characterized by suspicion and hostility, or are non-existent, is that a problem, and can international involvement help fix it? In some of the more successful examples of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe it is said that civil society is in headlong retreat, as party politics has taken over. Is that transformation something to be encouraged or instead a cause for concern? In some other societies the condition of civil and uncivil society is one reason why parties and the party system seem unable to prevent authoritarian rule or largely function as vehicles for purely personal political advancement. A few studies of party assistance in Central and Eastern Europe have been carried out (see for example Phillips 1999; Mendelson and Glenn 2000). But the question what can the international community do *best* to encourage the development of sustainable competitive party systems in countries like those in Africa, where the dominant neo-patrimonial culture seems so unhelpful, is still one of the great unanswered questions (see Burnell 2001).

▶ Finally, when targeting a selection of civic associations for support and especially when seeking to create new organizations, how can external actors avoid the twin, mutually reinforcing perils of bringing about a lack of ownership and enduring dependence? These are the dangers that the favored partners will not develop either a genuine commitment to pro-democratic agendas of their own or the strong, self-supporting local roots so essential to their long-term survival.

This last, double challenge has been much discussed in the literature. It evokes a number of different responses and recommendations. One view is that the right approach is *not* to invest in building local partners – although that has been much favored by democracy promotion agencies – but instead to direct energies to bringing about an enabling environment within which civil associations can flourish. That means among other things applying pressure on governments in countries that are not liberal democracies to operate a permissive regulatory framework for collective action. It means pressing governments to enshrine and respect such freedoms as association, expression, and the media, and to be proactive in consulting civil society, for instance over public strategies for poverty reduction. In regard to this last strategy, the »process conditionalities« now required by the international financial institutions in return

for governments to gain eligibility for debt reduction under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative might offer a useful advance, although it is still early days. So far in some countries the experience appears to have had the unfortunate effect of further marginalizing the legislature and opposition parties from the policy process.

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A similar position could be held in respect of helping to develop a party system, namely strive to improve the climate for organized political opposition and the management of the electoral process rather than direct assistance to individual parties. An example would be to try to ensure that the national elections commission really does enjoy autonomy, and is properly resourced. The people then might gain in confidence that the electoral process is »free and fair« and that there is some point to organizing political opposition to the ruling group. Having gone this far, the international community then steps aside, letting society – civil and political – do the rest. However, you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. So if society does not respond to these initiatives appropriately then it would be premature for the international community to try to create civic associations or build parties and attempt to force the pace of democratization in that way.

A related view is that it does not really matter if, when a foreign sponsor »lets go«, some of its partners then collapse, so long as a constructive contribution has been made to democratization and the impact can be taken forward in some other way, for example through party politics. But a third response, different again, is to suggest that a healthy civil society is more than just an aggregation of individual civic associations, however autonomous. What democracy promoters should do is encourage strong links, collective solidarities among the different organizations, including, possibly, examples of the »traditional« variety and even some that on a bad day might be judged to be »uncivil«. Acting as a sort of marriage broker and providing support to relations across national borders could be particularly worthwhile. It might help generate regional and international civil society networks that can stand up to authoritarians at home *and* resist some of the threats posed to democracy by powerful financial

and economic institutions and forces abroad. The potential synergies between mobilizing in the cause of advancing democracy and countering the disempowering tendencies of globalization should not be underestimated. However, once again the challenge looks more problematic if the civic associations are stubbornly nationalistic or inward looking and though receptive to western financial assistance seem unwilling to work harmoniously with their counterparts in neighboring countries.

Options for Democracy Promotion

The question how to promote democracy can look misleadingly simple, because of the profound differences between the different kinds of non-democracy and because in some societies the more relevant question is how to secure the gains already made, however modest, or how to mitigate their erosion or decay. How to terminate a non-democratic regime and put a democracy in its place, how to accelerate or extend the liberalizing initiatives that may already be present within a non-democracy, and how to secure a new democracy against the possible risks, are all different challenges. They are bound to suggest differences in approach.

The three main approaches – economic relations, state relations and civil society – are not mutually exclusive alternatives. We should expect that *different* combinations would offer most potential purchase, and threaten least potential harm, in different situations. At the same time there is an argument for being consistent. The different actors in the international community as a whole should not send conflicting signals, and should aim at coherence among their chosen approaches to democracy promotion and in the context of the broader framework of their foreign policy and external relations towards the countries concerned.

Although for all three approaches the relevant question is not about whether it should be employed, but instead how, when and where to do it, there are reservations in each case. First, to concentrate efforts on manipulating or fine-tuning economic relations would be a mistake. This is not just because we do not fully understand the relationships between economic and political change – where evidence can be produced to refute almost any generalization we care to make. Rather it is because in today's world economic relations are driven by forces and agendas over which democracy promoters have little or no control. That situation seems unlikely to change soon.

Secondly, concentrating efforts on state relations and on the redesign of state institutions is similarly open to objections. On the one hand »capacity-building« in the public sector might be necessary if a new democracy is to have value and is to be sustained. But in the presence of a non-democratic regime it could simply place more power in the hands of rulers who have no serious intention of democratic reform, and where some measure of political liberalization is but a strategy of playing for time. However, bringing down such regimes by force purely for the purpose of advancing democracy currently has no accepted basis in morality or law. That *might* change. But in the meantime we have yet to see convincing evidence that coerced »regime change« can deliver sustainable democratic progress in those societies that on the surface, at least, look the least promising territory.

Finally, on civil society relations, there is a saying that the bigger they come, the harder they fall. So great are the hopes and expectations that have been placed in civil society that it, more than any other approach, has attracted critical examination. Perhaps that tells us as much about the way social science operates – its well-known bias towards the negative – as it does about the overall fitness of working with civil society. But it is not the case that every component of civil society will make a good partner, just as it is not the case that all parts of an authoritarian state will necessarily oppose democratic change. Armchair critics continue to pore over such questions as »whose idea of civil society is being exported and why«? Some of them wonder if the answer resembles anything more than a sell-out to the requirements of western democracy's capitalist, free market roots. Democracy promoters who are on the front line too face equally tricky dilemmas. How to select suitable partners from among the limited alternatives available, what kind of support to provide, what is meant by *effective* support and how do we measure it. And, perhaps most important of all, how well do these civic associations connect with the political society and with the rest of society, or society per se.

To conclude, when asked to advise on how to go about the business of promoting democracy in the twenty-first century we do not have the luxury of the typical opposition politician's response – »I would not start from here«. Here is where we are at. But here is not one place but several different, diverse and complex sets of political, historical, social and cultural situation. The »one size fits all« approach is unconvincing. For democracy promoters, »picking winners« and concentrating resources on those places where success seems most likely – that is where resistance

from both regime and society is minimal – has its attractions. Democratization is often easier if a society is already half way there than if it is still near the starting line. But the scope for slipping back is also greater, and efforts to prevent that happening are certainly worthwhile. The far bolder idea of concentrating efforts on the most difficult cases, where both state and society are problematic for democratic break-through, has its attractions too, if breakthrough would make a really large difference, and create a really good story to tell. Even there we need to have a clear sense of how to know when the job has been completed – a completion strategy rather than an exit strategy. Conversely, where it becomes apparent that the challenge of promoting democracy is mission impossible, then we also need to think about a strategy for what to do next.

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