Is Democracy the Answer?

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Since the end of the Cold War, it has become axiomatic that democracy is the only political system able to heal the rifts of a divided society and help countries settle down after a civil war. Indeed, it has become axiomatic that democracy is the only acceptable political system, good for all countries under all circumstances. As a result, democracy promotion has become an important component of the relationship between the so-called international community—in practice the rich industrial democracies and the multilateral institutions they dominate—and the rest of the world. While in most countries, democracy promotion is simply an attempt to encourage and facilitate transitions from authoritarianism, in post-conflict countries, democracy promotion often takes on a strongly coercive quality. Since 1990 international interventions to end civil war, either by diplomatic means or military intervention, have been followed by a process of coercive democratization. Countries where interventions take place are forced by the international community to adopt a democratic system of government regardless of existing conditions and/or citizens' preference. They are quickly put through the formal steps expected to make democracy a reality, usually beginning with elections. This process of democratization supposedly complements any previous peace agreement, helping to stabilize the country and consolidate the peace.

A growing body of evidence suggests that coercive democratization is not a successful strategy in most post-conflict situations. Democracy can only be developed in well-established states, capable of exercising authority over their entire territory. Democracy, and in particular the majoritarian democracy to which the international community appears committed, also requires a population sharing a common identity, not deeply fragmented along lines of ethnicity and religion. Neither of these characteristics are common in countries emerging from civil war. Thus, the idea of coercive democratization as an purpose

solution in post-conflict situation needs to be discarded and a wider range of alternative solutions, particularly interim solutions, need to be taken into consideration. To the extent that the international actors control the situation in post-conflict countries, they should encourage them to opt for solutions that bring the country together—governments of national unity, consociational systems, for example—rather than pushing for the immediate adoption of competitive, and thus divisive, democratic systems.

There is no reason to challenge at the theoretical level the idea that democracy is a political system superior to all others. But democratization—the often conflictual, messy process of transformation from an authoritarian to a democratic system—and democracy—the stable political system that is the end point of successful democratization—are not the same thing. There is plenty of evidence that the benefits of democracy are not manifest in the early phases of a transformation process, particularly in countries where attempts at democratization take place in the aftermath of an internal conflict.

Well-established, mature democratic political systems are usually successful in handling the normal divisions and conflicting interests of a stable society by fostering compromise rather than confrontation. Democracy, as Ralph Dahrendorf has pointed out, is "government by conflict."[1] In other words it is a political system that recognizes there can never be unanimity of interests and views in a society and therefore creates mechanisms to institutionalize conflict and manage it. Far from facilitating the resolution or regulation of existing conflicts, however, initial political openings often exacerbate divisions or trigger new confrontations. This is because democratization entails a redistribution of power among political actors and thus creates winners and losers. The change is highly threatening to incumbent rulers—not just to few people at the top of the pyramid, but to a much broader group that benefited politically and economically from their relationship with the old political elite. Democratization can also be highly detrimental to, and thus greatly feared by, members of minority groups who believe that a system based on majoritarianism would condemn them to permanent powerlessness and render them vulnerable to bias and discrimination. This belief is not unfounded. While it is true that well-

established, strong democratic institutions can control the danger of unfettered majoritarianism, democratizing countries by definition do not have those strong institutions.

International interventions have multiplied rapidly from 1990 on. Most of these interventions have combined peace negotiations with the imposition of democratic political systems. Major interventions have taken place in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo, Timor Leste (East Timor), Afghanistan and Iraq. Some of these interventions were carried out by the UN, some by regional organizations ranging from NATO in Europe to ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) in Africa, some by individual countries acting on their own (the US in Iraq) or on behalf of the international community (Australia in East Timor). But in all these cases coercive democratization was incorporated into the intervention as an instrument to seal the initial agreement and stabilize a turbulent peace.[2]

In many of these cases, the outcome of the intervention could not be evaluated completely at the time of this writing. Even partial evidence, however, makes it abundantly clear that coercive democratization is a highly problematic tool for consolidating peace. While in some countries there may not be any alternatives to coercive democratization, this is by no means an approach that should remain unquestioned or be implemented lightly.

Difficult Process, Limited Alternatives

Democratization is always difficult, but coercive democratization unfolds under particularly unfavorable circumstances. It is usually not the solution that the organized forces responsible for the conflict in the first place would have chosen if left to their own devices. None of the main parties in Cambodia and Angola—the countries where the international community first experimented with coercive democratization—really wanted democracy. In Angola, the ruling MPLA and its rival Unita rearmed themselves while preparing for elections in 1992 and returned to war immediately afterward. In Cambodia, the Cambodian People's Party did not win the 1993 elections, but nonetheless managed to retain power.[3] It is doubtful that former warlords competing in the 2005 elections in Afghanistan wanted

democracy or even that President Hamid Karzai had democracy rather then the most basic control over the country as his primary goal. In Iraq, Sunnis are fearful of a democratic process, Shiites support elections (but not necessarily other aspects of democracy) as a means of gaining power, and Kurds will not settle for anything but autonomy no matter what the majority of Iraqis might want.

It is even doubtful that democracy as practiced in the modern state is truly the universal aspiration of ordinary citizens in countries emerging from conflict. While nobody likes the midnight knock on the door or the arbitrary acts of an authoritarian government, the formal democratic systems the international community seeks to impose are alien to the experience of people in most countries. And ordinary citizens in deeply divided countries are not always motivated to pursue the common good. They often share the non-democratic aspirations of their leaders: while the ethnic conflicts that tore Bosnia apart were orchestrated by ultranationalist elites, they found plenty of willing followers ready to turn on their neighbors.

Even when the major parties accept the inevitability of the internationally imposed democratic system, they cannot make it happen on their own. Instead, the international community typically pays for post-conflict elections, provides the logistical support and often the minimum level of security that makes the process possible. It helps write constitutions and election laws as well as organizes election commissions. In extreme cases, such as in Mozambique in 2004, it even de facto pays armed movements to turn themselves into political parties. The problem is that the generous support which is lavished on the first post-conflict elections is seldom repeated, so that subsequent elections often deteriorate. Moreover, elections are not democracy, but just the tip of the iceberg of a process that continues to remain dependent on the donors' pressure and largesse. There is thus a strong element of artificiality and dependence in the course of coercive democratization.

Adding to this artificiality, coercive democratization is imposed on countries without considering whether they have met the preconditions that make democracy meaningful. Indeed, the international community operates on the tacit assumption that there are no preconditions, and that any country can undergo democratization given sufficient political will domestically and technical support internationally.

This insistence is in part a response to unproven and politically motivated claims that some populations are not yet ready for democracy because they are too ignorant, underdeveloped, or culturally unsuited for it.

But there are structural and institutional issues that cannot easily be dismissed. For populations to govern themselves democratically, they need as a prerequisite a workable state through which to do so. It is not enough for the state to be sovereign in the international system, that is, to be protected against interference from the outside. It is also crucial for the state to enjoy sovereignty internally, that is, for the government to be the supreme authority within the territory. But in severely divided societies emerging from, or immersed in, civil war, state sovereignty is contested. The state does not have political and military control of its own territory or the financial and human resources to administer it.

While the problems of post conflict coercive democratization are obvious, the alternatives are also problematic. International interventions in domestic conflict aim at preventing the outright victory of one side and to promote instead a negotiated agreement. This means that the new post-conflict government must give all sides an equal chance to compete and share in the benefits of peace and reconstruction. A government formed in a democratic manner and subject to democratic rules of accountability will in theory provide the best chance for power-sharing and even-handedness. It would be an oxymoron for the international community to promote negotiations to end a conflict and then allow the establishment of an authoritarian government controlled only by one side. The problems of coercive democratization are many, but the alternatives are not obvious.

Challenges of Coercive Democratization

The countries where the international community practices coercive democratization can be divided into two broad categories. The first includes countries that have the basic attributes of stateness that make democracy conceivable.[4] The Central European countries where the international community first mounted the first, systematic attempts at engineering democracy through specially designed "democracy assistance" programs—for example Poland, the Czech Republic or Hungary—clearly were

modern states with control over their territory, sufficient administrative capacity, and financial resources to support modern administrative and political processes. They also all had strong pro-democracy movements, meaning that there was little or no coercion in the process of democratization in such countries.

The experience in such countries, unique in many respects, put an imprint on the way in which the international community has thought of democracy promotion ever since. Democracy assistance targeted the perceived weaknesses of inexperienced civil society organizations and political parties, and it sought to encourage the development of an independent press and to strengthen the new democratic institutions. Democracy promoters were not concerned—indeed they did not have to be concerned—with the possible weaknesses of the state and how they might affect the prospects for transformation.

Countries where the weakness of the state does not preclude the possibility of democratic transformation exist in all parts of the world and many are still not democratic. Many have made little progress toward democracy on their own, and some degree of coercion may become part of the process of transformation. Egypt is a prime example of such a country. It is a strong state, with full control over its territory and a well developed—though by no means efficient—administrative apparatus. What is problematic in Egypt is not the state, but the balance of power between a government capable of both repression and co-optation, and opposition groups that are disorganized and incapable of reaching large constituencies.

The second and more problematic category of countries that can become targets of coercive democratization includes entities that do not meet, or barely meet, the basic attributes of stateness in terms of national identity, political and military control of territory, and administrative capacity. Most are post-conflict countries—for example Bosnia and Iraq, where stateness once existed but has been destroyed. Others are countries that never were real states. Afghanistan is an obvious example of a country that has never experienced stateness. The balance of factors that lead to weak stateness varies from country to country. Bosnia, for example, has the administrative capacity and financial resources to

function as a state, but is prevented from doing so by its ethnic divisions. Afghanistan has neither the administrative and financial resources nor the common identity.

Countries in this category face several major obstacles to democracy: not only an unfavorable balance of power between citizens and government, but also various forms of state weakness. Coercive democratization is particularly difficult in such cases. It entails rebuilding, or in some cases building for the first time, the country's administrative capacity. It also involves the redefinition of the identity of the state, a contested issue in countries emerging from internal conflict.

Redressing the Relation between Citizens and Government

In over a decade of democracy promotion the international community has developed logics and tools suitable for countries that have the essential attributes of stateness but need to change the balance of power between citizens and governments. Democracy promoters have worked out an intellectual framework for parsing the process of democratization into its component parts: an initial period of liberalization that opens up political life by allowing political organizing, the formation of parties and organizations of civil society, and the operation of an independent media; a moment of transition marked by the holding of competitive elections; and finally a much longer period of consolidation, which, if successful, makes democracy irreversible—"the only game in town" in the words of Linz and Stepan[5].

It has also developed standard programs to make change happen: grant and training programs for civil society organizations, training programs for political parties and the media, and tools for strengthening the independence of the judiciary by providing training and easier access to legal information or for helping new parliaments become more effective by organizing committee systems and gaining access to information. Very importantly, it has perfected the technical ability to organize elections in other countries even when political and security conditions are difficult—the elections held in Iraq in January 2005 despite the lack of security in the country were a triumph of the technical election expertise acquired by the international community.

The democratization programs the international community has implemented in stable states since the early 1990s bring about impressive results if success is measured in terms of formal results—number of multi-party elections carried out, number of NGOs formed, number of training sessions held for political parties, or judges, or journalists. Results look much more modest if measured in terms of how much political change they have brought about—the degree of press independence rather than the number of training sessions, or the impact of civil society organizations on politics and policies rather than the number of civil society organizations donors have been able to summon into life by offering funding.[6]

One of the unfortunate outcomes of democracy assistance has been the rise of an increasing number of semi-authoritarian regimes: regimes that have the formal institutions and carry out the formal processes of democracy and even allow modest amount of political space to their citizens, but manipulate all processes successfully to avoid true competition, thus perpetuating their hold on power.[7] International pressure to democratize encourages many fundamentally authoritarian regimes to make cosmetic concessions to the democratic orthodoxy, while at the same time protecting themselves from changes that would threaten their power. Many regimes, for example, organize multi-party elections because there is external pressure on them to do so, but at the same time take steps to ensure that they will not face real competition. Or they will allow independent media to develop, but force them to exercise self-censorship by harassing journalists or depriving offending publications of newsprint. Despite these and other problems, outside interventions have probably had at least some positive effect in recalibrating the balance of power between citizens and governments in reasonably well functioning states.

Overcoming Ethnic and Religious Divisions

Both the political and technical problems of democracy promotion are magnified in countries that are deeply divided along lines of ethnicity or religion and not just lines of political ideology. The international community has learned some lessons about the dangers of democracy promotion in such countries from Bosnia, and is learning more from Iraq. The major danger in such situations, as pointed

out earlier, is that voters make their choices not on the basis of individual political preferences, but on the basis of ethnic or religious group identity. When citizens vote their identities in this way, they insert fixed choices into the democratic system, subverting it. A democratic system is based on the idea that citizens can and will change their views and preferences depending on issues and circumstances, thus that there will be no permanent majorities and minorities. This does not happen when people vote their identities. In such cases, majorities and minorities become fixed and the protection of minority rights becomes more problematic.

Unfortunately, it is relatively easy for the international community to impose democratic processes that lead to majority rule and to facilitate them with technical aid. Elections in particular are events outsiders can not only encourage, but make happen. Yet outsiders are much less effective in imposing the other fundamental aspect of democracy: the protection of minority rights. Safeguarding the rights of all citizens is not an event, but an ongoing political task that outsiders can encourage, but can only enforce by imposing political and administrative control—a financially and politically onerous undertaking. The international community made elections happen in Bosnia. Eight years later, it is still maintaining the occupation to protect the rights of all citizens, because all evidence points to the fact that such rights would be violated if there was an international withdrawal.[8]

At this point, the international community has few answers to the question of how to promote democracy in deeply divided societies. International presence to safeguard minority rights cannot be maintained indefinitely. Solutions based on group representation through power-sharing on the basis of a fixed formula have their own problems, as the example of Lebanon shows. Since 1943, Lebanon has sought to address the problem of democracy and coexistence in a deeply divided society by developing a confessional system where power is apportioned among all religious groups, theoretically in proportion to their share of the country's total population. Confessional systems like the Lebanese one, however, are rarely fair because once the system is adopted, it is very difficult to make adjustments when the demographics or political power structures change. Power-sharing in Lebanon, admittedly an extreme case, is based on a formula first devised in 1943 using census data that were already a decade old at

the time. The system worked reasonably well for thirty years until the power balance in government became grossly disproportionate to the religious balance of society. Frustration and discontent erupted and the country sank into a protracted and devastating civil war followed by a very tenuous peace. It is well-known that the system is grossly unrepresentative, but revising it is an explosive issue that could once again sink the country into conflict. In addition, the confessional system prevents the development of a modern state with central authority and decision-making capabilities. This is because political space is monopolized by power struggles among confessional groups, fragmentation of the state between groups prevents effective legislation and governance, and there is no independent domestic arbiter to force compromise and cooperation.[9]

The United States' position has long been that divided societies do not need special political systems, and above all should avoid group representation because it deepens already troublesome divisions. Instead, divided countries, like all others, should apportion power not through an artificial agreement, but through the outcome of one person-one vote elections. In practice, the approach does not avoid the emergence of a confessional system. The example of Iraq is very clear: the interim constitution, or Transitional Administrative Law, did not call for power-sharing among religious groups. But in three successive polls—the elections of January 2005, the referendum of October 15, 2005, and the elections of December 15, 2005—Iraqis voted their identities, de facto making the system into a confessional one.

Addressing Stateness

Although the international community does not have an answer to the difficult problem of how to promote political participation in divided societies without deepening or at least crystallizing the divisions, there is at least an awareness of the issue and much discussion about what can be done. The impact of state weakness on democracy promotion has received a lot less attention. In fact, democracy is seen as part of the solution to restoring functional states, and democratic political reform as an integral part of the

package of steps the international community needs to take to help weak, failing or failed states to be restored, if not to health, to some level of functionality.[10]

There is no reason to question this assumption in the long run. But there is no evidence, however, that a democratic transition in the short run can work in states that are still highly dysfunctional. The example of Afghanistan, an experiment in building democracy in an extremely weak state, illustrates the problem. In late 2005, Afghanistan was preparing for parliamentary elections. The official budget for the exercise, funded by the international community, was around $ 150 million—this included the cost of administering the election, not of maintaining security in the election period. The enormity of this $ 150 million budget can best be appreciated by comparing it to the total recurrent budget of Afghanistan, about $ 600 million, and the total revenue that Afghanistan can raise from taxes and custom duties, about $ 300 million[11]. In order to carry out elections that even begin to approximate international standards, Afghanistan is thus totally dependent on foreign funding, foreign technical assistance and foreign security forces. And elections are only a small part of what is needed to make a democratic system work.

But cost is only one of the reasons to question whether it is advisable, or indeed possible, to impose coercive democratization on extremely weak states in the very early stages of reconstruction. Democracy is a system that allows citizens to choose their government and influence its policies. But, is democracy a meaningful concept in countries where the government does not have enough control over its territory or administrative institutions to implement those policies? Is it a sustainable political system when the government does not even have the economic resources to develop such control? For example, is coercive democratization meaningful in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where even the physical links between the capital and the rest of the country are problematic? Donors can come in with helicopters and all- terrain vehicles to make elections happen in 2006, but in the aftermath much of the country will still be outside the reach of ordinary administration. If that government does not control the territory, and does not have the administrative infrastructure and the financial capacity to implement

policies, the way in which the government is chosen and formulates policies has severely limited meaning.

Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo are not unique cases. The list of countries where the international community is trying to promote democracy although the existence of the state itself can be called into question has many entries—Sierra Leone, Liberia, and East Timor, for example. This raises the question whether international efforts will only result in the formation of Potemkin democracies that are essentially unsustainable and will be dependent on foreign political, administrative and financial support for a long time to come.

In conclusion, it is clear that coercive democratization is a multi-faceted undertaking in most countries, but particularly in divided countries with weak institutions just emerging from conflict. The aspect of coercive democratization that receives the most attention is the attempt to change the relation between citizens and government by giving citizens the right to elect their leaders and to hold them accountable through new or strengthened governmental and nongovernmental institutions. Elections in particular receive a disproportionate amount of attention because they are a visible process and can easily be engineered from the outside with technical and financial assistance. But in weak, post-conflict states, elections and efforts to develop new institutions are only a small part of what is needed to develop functioning democratic states, and are not the first one. Democratization has pre-conditions. One is effective stateness, which is often weak in countries where the international community tries to impose democratization. Another is the existence of mechanisms to bridge the deep divisions normally found in post-conflict countries. Without a minimum of willingness to live together on the part of most citizens, coercive democratization becomes a source of conflict rather than reconciliation.

Sustainability of Coercive and Spontaneous Democratization

Coercive democratization, as defined in this paper, is the attempt to use outside pressure and support to bring about a democratic transformation in countries where the domestic balance of forces by itself would not lead to democracy. A major issue concerning coercive democratization is thus that of

sustainability. We know from experience that international pressure, technical support, and financing can force a country to hold competitive elections reasonably successfully. But can pressure and support bring about lasting change? Can they be maintained long enough for domestic forces to develop and conditions to change, so that democracy can become self-supporting?

Democratization is not an irreversible process. Historically, many countries that started processes of democratization spontaneously, without outside intervention, failed in their attempt and reverted to authoritarian regimes[12]. Coalitions that support democratic change can fall apart. The disorder that often accompanies transitions from one political system to another can frighten citizens into turning away from democratic experiments and back to authoritarian leaders that promise order. Poorer countries are particularly prone to democratic reversals, as Adam Przeworski shows[13].

Although the mechanisms that lead to democratic reversals are not always understood—why poor countries are more prone to reversals, for example—the historical evidence that many, perhaps even most, democratic transitions fail is quite clear. Out of the 33 countries that attempted democratic transitions during democracy's first wave of 1828 to 1926, 22 of them failed. The same number, out of 52, failed after democracy's second wave of 1943 to 1962. The end result of the more recent, still ongoing, third wave that began in 1974 is unclear. As of 1990, only 4 of these 65 transitions had failed, but most of the countries undergoing political transformation were not yet consolidated democracies out of danger.[14] Przeworski comes up with similar numbers by examining the net transitions since 1950 to democracy on the one hand and dictatorship on the other; as of 1990, the score stood at 59 transitions to democracy and 49 transitions to dictatorship[15].

Countries that have undergone coercive democratization also often experience reversals. Most of the post World War I coercive democratization experiments, for example, had failed long before World War II. Motivated by doctrines of self-determination and democracy after WWI, the Allies coerced many countries into embracing democratic systems. They forced Germany to become a democracy and split the Austro-Hungarian Empire into new, coercively democratized Eastern European and Balkan states. Yet among all of them, only Czechoslovakia actually functioned as a democracy during the interwar

period. Indeed, the instability of these regimes was a significant contributing factor to the eruption of the Second World War.[16]

The colonial era record in imposing democratization as part of the independence process has been just as poor. Democratic constitutions written by colonial powers in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia were revoked or simply ignored in most countries. Out of a total 68 new countries formed after1950, a mere 12 remained democracies by 1990.[17] The US failed to impose democracy in the Philippines, as it did in most of the countries in which it intervened repeatedly in the early part of the twentieth century[18]. In fact, India remains a rare example of direct colonial success at coercive democratization—one of the few former colonies to have remained democratic without interruption from the day of its independence until now.[19]

The examples of coercive democratization in the countries defeated in World War II—Germany, Japan, Italy—are much more encouraging—although it is important to remember that Germany and Italy were already carrying out their second attempt at democratization and that Germany and Japan were utterly defeated, the old regimes destroyed. Furthermore, in all three countries stateness was already well-developed and the population was extremely homegeneous.

Concerning the attempts at coercive democratization in the post-cold war period, the jury is still out because the experiences are too recent. There are a few clearly successful cases of democratization—the Czech Republic and Poland, for example, although these were spontaneous transformations where the international community helped strengthen government institutions and civil society organizations after the transition had already taken place. The countries where international pressure or intervention were crucial in fostering democratization on the other hand present a less encouraging picture, with semi-authoritarian regimes and reversals on all continents. Even in countries like Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone or Liberia, the deployment of international troops, international administrative control, and international aid have not succeeded so far in bringing about democratic change that can be expected to last beyond the international presence. Countries that have

found a degree of stability after an international intervention, for example Cambodia or Mozambique, have done so on the basis of political systems that fall short of democracy.

One of the problems of judging the likely outcome of coercive democratization is that the political process leading to change in countries exposed to foreign pressure is very different from that experienced by countries where change was spontaneous. Each historical experience at democratization has some unique characteristics, but all successful cases of spontaneous democratization share the length and slowness of the process, starting with the emergence of new political forces and coalitions and eventually culminating in the development of democratic political systems, often in stages.[20] In a process of forced democratization, the initial period of development of new political forces and coalitions is reduced to months or years, new constitutions and laws are quickly written with outside technical advice, and elections are held as soon as the international community can organize them—two years from the time an agreement is reached has become the standard in post-conflict situations.

Another important difference is that coercive democratization starts with a model of what a democratic system should look like, while political systems that emerge from a spontaneous process tend to display characteristics determined not by theories of good government, but by the pragmatic decisions and compromises of political life. Furthermore, while all democratizing countries enact measures to protect human rights, countries undergoing spontaneous democratization defined human rights in ways that were determined by their traditions and the standards of the period, and only expanded them slowly over time. Countries undergoing coercive democratization are expected to immediately embrace the entire body of human rights accepted in the established democracies, irrespective of their social norms and cultural values. Thus, the United States could see itself as a democracy even while accepting slavery and the inferior status of women, but the international community does not allow countries subject to coercive democratization to change gradually.

While it is far too early to judge the outcome of the many attempts at coercive democratization in post-conflict societies that have taken place since the early 1990s, the failure rate will almost certainly be

high. Many countries fail even when they attempt democratization spontaneously. They are even more likely to fail when the attempt is made under coercion before domestic conditions can trigger the process. The international community's long term commitment to maintain a presence may help preserve stability and prevent a relapse into conflict; but there is no evidence yet to indicate that such long term presence can transform a coerced process into a self-sustaining one.

The United States and Democracy Promotion

The United States has been at the forefront of all recent attempts to promote democracy in other countries, including attempts at coercive democratization. European countries are also actively involved in promoting democracy and they have also participated in the efforts to coercively introduce democratic processes in post-conflict situations, but they have been less outspoken than the United States on this issue and remain less likely to exercise strong overt pressure on incumbent governments to change.

The United States sees itself as a beacon for people with democratic aspirations around the world, but people around the world do not always see the United States in the same light. The range of perceptions about the United States and its commitment to democracy is broad. In some regions, the United States has a great deal of credibility when it talks of democracy; in others it has virtually none.

In Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, the United States initially enjoyed an enormous comparative advantage in the promotion of democracy. As the long-standing, uncompromising enemy of the Soviet Union and other socialist regimes, it symbolized the ideological alternative to socialism as well as a concrete model of how a successful democratic system works. It had been a source of moral support for anti-Soviet dissidents, and after the fall of the socialist regimes it became a source of financial and organizational support for struggling democratic organizations and institutions. In the 1990s, there was little opposition to or resentment of the US role in the former socialist world. After the socialist regimes collapsed, there were initially no governments to object strongly to democracy promotion interventions, which were in any case mild and non-coercive. Aid aimed at

strengthening organizations of civil society, struggling independent media, and new democratic institutions, not at imposing change on reluctant governments.

As attempted democratic transitions started faltering in many former socialist countries, however, the role of the United States became more coercive and as a result more controversial. Many new post-socialist governments erected the façade of democracy but tried in practice to eliminate competition and retain power even when they were losing support. Thus they did not welcome U.S. efforts to reverse the semi-authoritarian trend with forceful interventions. The United States' new coercive role first became apparent in Slovakia in 1999, when U.S. organizations for the first time helped train and fund Slovak NGOs for a massive effort to mobilize the opposition and vote the autocratic prime minister, Vladimir Meciar, out of power. The effort, presented as a non-partisan effort to increase voter turnout and monitor the fairness of elections, succeeded in its real goal: ousting Meciar and his party[21].

A similar operation was mounted a few months later in Croatia—although the US role was less important there. It was replicated with a much higher profile in Serbia at the end of 2000, leading to the resignation of President Slobodan Milosevic[22]. It is not altogether clear to what extent U.S. financed efforts contributed to the downfall of President Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia in November 2003 or President Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine in December 2004 (probably little in the latter case). But these events made U.S. democracy promotion very controversial among incumbent governments in the region.[23]. Of course, the US image among people seeking democratic change remained high.

In other parts of the world, the United States did not enjoy the same comparative advantage as it did in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In Latin America and to a lesser extent in Africa, Washington's new-found enthusiasm for democracy was greeted with skepticism among liberals who remembered how the US had supported numerous autocrats over the decades. Over time, however, US credibility concerning democracy promotion has increased in these areas because Washington's policy has been reasonably consistent, aided by the fact that the United States does not have other overriding interests or face major security challenges that conflict with a democracy agenda.

The most difficult challenge to the United States' role in promoting democracy arose in the Middle East. The United States remained tolerant of Middle East autocrats long after it started promoting democracy in other regions, assuming that longtime U.S. allies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt continued to maintain stability in their countries and protect US interests. The evidence that most of the September 11 hijackers came from Saudi Arabia and Egypt destroyed this illusion, leading instead to the conclusion that autocratic regimes were contributing to the rise of terrorism because the democratic deficit caused frustration among their population. Whether or not the conclusion that democratic deficits directly cause terrorism was warranted, the United States embraced a new policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East[24]. The change in U.S. thinking was met with alarm and indignation by incumbent governments and with skepticism bordering on derision by most liberals. They simply refused to believe that U.S. policy would change and the fact that talk of democracy promotion in the Middle East coincided with the beginning of the Iraq war did little to reassure them. Coercive democratization looked more like regime change at gun point than as a robust effort to put pressure on incumbent governments to open up politically and to help citizens organize more effectively.[25]

Outside the former Soviet sphere of influence, the United States role in democracy promotion has thus initially been met with caution or even outright hostility, including among those who seek political reform in their countries. Over time, skepticism has decreased in countries of Latin America and Africa where policy has been consistent, although it remains ready to flare up. Because the policy of democracy promotion in the Middle East is more recent; because the US is a controversial actor as a result of its support for Israel and the war in Iraq; and because U.S. policies are less consistent due to Washington's balancing act among its interest in democracy and its need for oil and the cooperation of Arab governments to control terrorism, Arab liberals continue to see more coercion than democracy in U.S. efforts to change Arab political systems.

No Shortcuts to Democracy

Coercive democratization as practiced since the early 1990s has not been a successful method to seal agreements and consolidate shaky peace in countries emerging from conflict. Democratization itself is a source of conflict, and in any case it cannot succeed in countries that still lack minimal degree of stateness and where citizens have not developed, or even deliberately refuse to accept, a common national identity. In fact, coercive democratization is problematic even in stable countries, a reality that should make the international community more cautious in prescribing democracy as a universal solution for post-conflict countries.

It is, however, difficult to formulate policies to replace coercive democratization in post-conflict countries. While the international community has a choice of whether or not to push a stable country toward a political transformation immediately or to wait for a more suitable opportunity, it does not have that choice in a post-conflict situation where a new government needs to be set up immediately, not at some point in the future. Even if the former government still exists, it is part of the problem that triggered the conflict and must be replaced. International administration can be imposed for an interim period before a new government is established, but this is costly and can itself become a source of conflict as happened in Iraq. And installing a friendly dictator, a standard solution during the Cold War, is no longer seen as an option fo rideological reasons. Pragmatically, furthermore, the “friendly dictator” option can be extremely effective in re-establishing stability in a country in the short-run, but it often becomes a new source of conflict in the medium and long run. Indeed, once the international community intervenes in a conflict, it really has no viable option but to work toward a democratic solution. The question is not whether this should be done, but how it can be done to minimize the problems discussed above.

Coercive democratization as practiced since the early 1990s has largely failed. Some of the countries where democratization has been attempted have stabilized, but not because a democratic process has consolidated a peace agreement. Mozambique is the most successful case, where democracy might eventually take hold despite its domination by Frelimo, the old liberation movement that led the country to independence in 1975 and has ruled ever since. Cambodia was stable at the time of this writing, but not democratic. Angola was no longer at war, but because the government finally won

and Unita disintegrated, not because of peace negotiations and democracy. Timor Leste remained relatively stable, aided by the fact that the incumbent party had encountered little competition, but there was growing international concern about the sustainability of the imposed democratic system. Liberia, Sierra Leone and Haiti were neither stable nor democratic, although international presence kept the situation under control. Bosnia remained so divided and unsettled that the international community did not dare withdraw, even ten years after the signing of the peace agreement. Kosovo was equally unstable, with continuing ethnic tensions and no agreement as of the end of 2005 whether the territory should become an independent country or remain part of Serbia. In Afghanistan and Iraq a formal democratization imposed from the outside could not pave over the fact that both countries were still at war.

The first lesson to be derived from these experiences is that coercive democratization is at best a lengthy process with no certainty of a positive outcome. Interventions to stabilize peace through democratization must be designed as long term, open-ended operations. This immediately raises the question of resources and sustainability. How often can the international community make an indefinite commitment of funding as well as of administrative and military personnel? How many countries can it cope with simultaneously? Can it make such a commitment to large countries where the scale of operations is daunting?

The second lesson is that some post-conflict countries do not have the minimum preconditions of stateness and common identity to sustain a process of democratization.

Democracy presupposes the existence of a modern state. But Afghanistan is more a feudal state than a modern one, and the fealty of many warlords to the central and supposedly democratic government is open to question. In Sierra Leone and Liberia the administrative structures set up in colonial times, weak to begin with, have long since been disrupted. In none of these countries does the state enjoy anything even remotely resembling monopoly over the means of coercion. Under such conditions, elections and formal democratic institutions cannot be the starting point of democratization.

The third lesson, indeed a corollary of the first two, is that the international community needs to consider more seriously interim political solutions for post-conflict countries. Democracy should remain as the long term goal, but democracy is impossible in most post-conflict countries in the short and even medium term. What kind of interim arrangements can be developed? Suggestions made in recent years range from the moderate idea that post-conflict countries should be encouraged to set up national unity governments or governments of national reconciliation for a few years, to the far reaching contention that they should surrender all or part of their sovereignty to the international community until they develop the capacity to maintain their own stability and govern themselves in a democratic way.

All suggestions are difficult to implement and fraught with problems. For example, while governments of national reconciliation tend to work well countries that face a common external enemy, they are much more problematic when it is the former warring partners that are expected to unite and govern the country together. Limits to a country's sovereignty—in other words the establishment of a partial or full protectorate—also raise a host of problems, including the danger of resistance against the intervening countries and organizations. Yet despite these difficulties, democracy cannot develop instantly in post-conflict countries, so interim solutions suitable to the specific conditions of particular countries need to be explored.

Coercive democratization as implemented since the end of the Cold War does not offer a quick solution to the question of moving post-conflict countries from turbulent peace to long term stability. The dependent, Potemkin democracies coercive democratization produces risk becoming more part of the problem of renewed confrontation than a solution to lingering conflicts.

[1] Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: Double Day, 1967), p.147.
[2] Angola has had five UN missions between 1988-2003 (UNAVEM I, UNAVEM II, UNAVEM III, MONUA and UNMA) to monitor ceasefires, verify elections, assist in achieving peace and national reconciliation and creating an environment conducive to long-term stability, democratic development and rehabilitation. Cambodia saw two UN missions; UNAMIC maintained peace from 1991-1992 and UNTAC acted as a transitional authority and held elections from 1992 to 1993. UNMOZ in Mozambique (1992-1994) sought to implement peace, monitor the ceasefire and withdrawal of foreign forces in addition to providing transportation security, technical assistance and electoral monitoring. Intervention in Liberia began in 1990 with ECOWAS's ECOMOG, a peace implementation monitoring group; the UN began UNOMIL in 1993 to implement agreements, maintain peace and verify elections. Nigeria, ECOWAS and two UN missions (UNOMSIL and UNAMSIL) intervened in Sierra Leone from 1997 to 1999 with little commitment and less success. After 2000, leadership by the UK was crucial in bringing international attention and security forces to the situation. The UN was present in Bosnia beginning in 1992, but no effective actions were taken until NATO sent in IFOR in 1995. Since that time NATO, UN, OSCE and EU missions have administered the country with broad mandates for administration, policing, elections, refugee return, and governance. Beginning in 1993 and lasting over a decade, UN, US and OAS (Organization of American States) missions have intervened in Haiti, first to simply restore and later to rebuild the country's failed government. UNMIK in Kosovo began with a broad mandate: civil administration, coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief, promotion of self-government, determination of future status, and refugee return. What began as electoral consultation in East Timor transitioned to Australian-led peacemaking and then to UN administered state-building and democratization. The American-led invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 were both followed by ambitious and ongoing programs of democratization. Information collected from: Chester Crocker et al., *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington DC: USIP Press), 2001; ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, Background: Supplementary Volume to the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty*, (Ottawa: International Development Research Center), 2001; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2005: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2005; UNPBPU, *Lessons Learned From United Nations Peacekeeping Experiences in Sierra Leone*, Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, September 2003.
[3] Frederick Z. Brown, "Cambodia's Rocky Venture in Democracy", in *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance*, Krishna Kumar, ed., (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), 87-110.; and Marina Ottaway, "Angola's Failed Elections," in *Postconflict Elections, Democratization and International Assistance*, Krishna Kumar, ed., (Boulder: Lynne Rienner), 133-151.
[4] The concept of stateness is clarified in an article by J.P. Nettl. He defines a state as 1) "a collectivity that summates a set of functions and structures in order to generalize their applicability", 2) "a unit in the field of international relations", 3) "an autonomous collectivity… in a functional sense a distinct *sector* or arena of society", and 4) "a sociocultural phenomenon." "The State as a Conceptual Variable," *World Politics,* XX, no. 4 (July 1968): 562, 563, 564, and 565.
[5] Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5. For a discussion of international community's approach to the democratization process, see Thomas Carothers et al., "Debating the Transition Paradigm", in Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 185-217.
[6] Thomas Carothers, *Critical Mission: Essays on Democracy Promotion* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 99-106.
[7] See Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: the Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002) and Daniel Brumberg, *The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy*, Journal of Democracy, 13 no.4 (October 2002):56.
[8] The International Crisis Group has provided good ongoing coverage of the situation in Bosnia. See in particular *Bosnia's Nationalist Governments: Paddy Ashdown and the Paradoxes of State Building*, ICG Europe Report No. 146, (Sarajevo/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2003); *No Early Exit: NATO's*

Continuing Challenge in Bosnia, ICG Europe Report No. 110, (Sarajevo/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2001); and *Is Dayton Failing?: Bosnia Four Years after the Peace Agreement*, ICG Europe Report No. 80, (Sarajevo/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 1999).

[9] See Arend Lijphart, *Constitutional Design for Divided Societies*, Journal of Democracy 15 no.2 (April 2004) for arguments espousing the benefits of power-sharing; Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts*, (Washington DC: USIP Press, 1996), 27-45 for typologies, strengths and weaknesses of power-sharing systems; and Julia Choucair, *Evaluating Lebanese Reform*, Carnegie Papers Middle East Series, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, forthcoming), for an explanation of the Lebanese system.

[10] See DFID, *Why We Need to Work More Effectively in Fragile States*, (London: Department for International Development, 2005); US Agency for International Development, *Fragile States Strategy*, (Washington DC: US Agency for International Development, 2005); and Robert C. Orr, *Winning the Peace*, (Washington DC: CSIS Press, 2004).

[11] These figures are derived from BBC News, *Q&A: Afghan Elections Guide*, September 16, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/4251580.stm; Jo Johnson, *Fears Challenge Vision of a Democratic Afghanistan*, Financial Times, September15, 2005; CIA, "Afghanistan", CIA World Factbook, 2005, http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html.

[12] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 15-26 and Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36-51.

[13] Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[14] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 14, 26.

[15] Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45.

[16] Martin Kitchen, *Europe Between the Wars: A Political History*, (London: Longman, 1988), 102-130; G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 117-162.

[17] Adam Przeworski et al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39.

[18] Minxin Pei and Sara Kasper, "Lessons from the Past: the American Record on Nation Building", (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).

[19] Most other countries that can be included in this list are quite small, for example Botswana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica. See Robert Pinkney, *Democracy in the Third World*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 107.

[20] See Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); Dietrich Rueschemeyer et al., *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). Robert Putnam, in *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), furthermore attributes the success in developing strong and democratic regional administration in Northern Europe to changes that had taken place over a period of centuries.

[21] Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, *Democracy Assistance and NGO Strategies in Post-Communist Societies*, Working Paper No. 8 (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000).

[22] Misha Glenny, *Milosevic's Moment of Truth*, The Times, October 3, 2000 and Steven Erlanger, *Milosevic Attacks Opponents on TV,* The New York Times, October 3, 2000 and Thomas Carothers, *Ousting Foreign Strongmen: Lessons from Serbia*, Policy Brief 1 no. 5 (May 2001).

[23] Scott Peterson, *Georgia's Partner in Democracy: US*, Christian Science Monitor, November 26, 2003 and Adrian Karatnycky, Ukraine's Orange Revolution, *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 2 (March-April 2005).

[24] For the issue's complications in U.S. foreign policy, see Thomas Carothers, *Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror*, Foreign Affairs 82 no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2003); for a thorough empirical and theoretical

discussion, see Quan Li, *Does Democracy Promote or Reduce Transnational Terrorist Incidents*, Journal of Conflict Resolution 49 no. 2.

[25] Marina Ottaway, "Promoting Democracy in the Middle East: The Problem of U.S. Credibility", Carnegie Paper no. 35 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003).