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# PROBLEMS OF ORDER, IDENTITY AND JUSTICE IN WORLD POLITICS: FIGHTING TERROR AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN FOSTERING DEMOCRACY ABROAD

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# PROBLEMS OF ORDER, IDENTITY AND JUSTICE IN WORLD POLITICS: FIGHTING TERROR AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN FOSTERING DEMOCRACY ABROAD

Daniel Baldino*

## Introduction

> We in Australia have since endured the shock, brutality and grief of Bali. We have seen the carnage in Istanbul, in Riyadh and in Madrid. We have seen military action in Afghanistan. We have seen the liberation of Iraq and continue to see terrorist attacks against international forces determined to bring stability. I think as a people we have realised that this is no 'bad dream'. We realise that this is not a string of unrelated, tragic events. But I think many Australians are still uncertain and understandably worried about these events. This is not surprising – the campaign waged by the terrorists is unlike any we have had to face before. And it is designed to foster fear, division and self-doubt. How can we fight a war against a tactic? Who is our enemy? Why do they attack us? How do we know whether we are winning or losing? The sad truth is that 9/11 did change the world we live in. We are engaged in a war to protect the very civilisation we have worked so hard to create – a civilisation founded on democracy, personal liberty, the rule of law, religious freedom and tolerance. It is crucial that all of us understand the threat that confronts us and understand how we can – and must – overcome it. (Downer 2004a)

Terrorism has become a defining issue of the post-9/11 world. The Australian government has argued that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, as well as tragic incidents such as the Bali bombings on 12 October 2002, have introduced new uncertainties to Australia's security environment. In response, public presentations citing the pre-eminence of democratic values and structures have become a major component of the 'war on terror'. Nonetheless, any national framework for countering terrorism through efforts to help support and stabilise the spread of democracy abroad must be built on realistic assumptions about the ability of external actors to affect the political direction and reconstruction of targeted countries. This paper will argue that, while a pro-democracy agenda and associated programs of democracy assistance can assist in addressing issues such as terrorism, democracy

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promotion will be doomed to fail unless policy makers strive to avoid fundamental errors of analysis and ethnocentric biases. In order to build on democracy-based movements and dynamics, policy makers must rethink the strengths and limitations of their government's assistance strategies. Pivotally, shortcomings and miscalculations in assistance programs can be dangerously counterproductive in the larger war against terrorism.

In 2005, Prime Minister John Howard called for a global effort to help poor and fractured nations, in a speech highlighting both Australia's strength and responsibility on the world stage. As part of Australia's global engagement, Howard committed the government to a series of wide-ranging targets that included the eradiation of extreme poverty and hunger. He argued that there were strong strategic, economic and moral reasons for doing more to reduce poverty while refocusing on democracy and elections. In responding to the rise of new transnational threats, Howard reinforced the point that poverty and instability provided conditions that could act as breeding grounds for terrorist activity and the recruitment of terrorist cells. 'Just as we destroy the agents of terror and the networks that trade in weapons, drugs and people, so we must drain the wells of misery and frustration that extremists and criminals seek to exploit' (Howard 2005).

While the Howard government planned to fight terrorism in many stages, it made the spread of democracy and 'good governance' central to its counter-terrorism outlook, echoing the neo-conservative US Bush administration. Western governments have consistently argued that seeking and supporting the growth of stable democracies can create the conditions for global peace and security. And both Howard and US President George Bush defended their decision to invade Iraq in March 2003 on the grounds that its democratic advancement would set 'a new stage for Middle East peace' and 'show the power of freedom to transform that vital region by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions' (cited in McGeary 2003: 26). Yet while external influences can have real scope in influencing the course of political construction and sustainable economic development, countries such as Australia and the US must be cautious in efforts to dismantle old states and well versed in the domestic structural conditions that may conflict with attempts at regime change.

While there are no formalistic answers, external actors cannot rewrite political history, dismiss ingrained cultures of antagonism, determine identity politics or uproot informal power balances at whim; there is a limit to their influence. The study of supporting democratic models or advancing global political developments demands a greater conceptual clarity that will be both critical and applicable within a specific environment. Further, US democracy-building efforts, in particular, have too often reflected an unnuanced and high-risk approach to using external power for nation building and an incomplete understanding of how to pursue their announced counter-terrorism goals, including the need to address imbalances in the distribution of global power and wealth. As a consequence, overblown rhetoric and questionable assumptions have cast

suspicions on the motives behind US actions and the trustworthiness of western commitments to help to democratise countries such as war-torn Afghanistan or Iraq.

During the Cold War, it can be argued that the pledge to protect the 'American' way of life and to contain communist influence initiated policy actions that did more to obstruct rather than advance democracy in the world arena. At the very least, the application of democracy promotion was a very partial and inconsistent process in a world dominated by superpower confrontation. The US displayed a clear lenience towards non-democratic standards in countries that were strategic or economic partners. In adapting to a post-Cold War world order, the construction of a revised, broad intellectual framework to guide US policies and explain the direction of international affairs has continued to be contentious and subject to challenge. The US has again defended democratic ideals on moral grounds while also arguing that all nations have a strategic interest in the spread of political freedom because tyranny and oppression deny people basic human rights and peaceful avenues for expressing dissent. Yet suspicions over the intent and nature of US democracy promotion programs linger.

Although reducing incidents of terrorism does require a deeper analysis of its root causes, there remains a danger of policy makers glossing over difficult details such as the consequences of their own foreign polices and military actions, which may contribute to the political decay that afflicts many developing nations. Further, a world divided into American good and foreign-bred barbarism will inhibit self-reflection and self-analysis. In particular, the US habit of excusing itself from global rules has polarised international opinion, distorted the quality of foreign policy debate and too often trivialised the root causes of terrorism. It is also important to acknowledge that, despite the rhetoric, democracy promotion programs and counter terrorism efforts will not always be mutually supportive. US support for democratic transitions in certain countries and under certain circumstances will remain subject to countervailing influences and the US will continue to juggle its economic, security, political and human rights goals. Any newfound commitment to fostering democracy abroad will often be grounded in geo-political terms and therefore open to charges of hypocrisy and double standards.

In short, the US is, and has been, an enormously influential external actor capable of intervening to enhance, or inhibit, democratisation. Yet while democracy promotion remains an awkwardly selective process, in a world of complex interdependence, failed states, tyrannical regimes and democratic breakdown will continue to pose a serious threat to international peace and stability. In order both to build upon democratic openings and enhance the credibility of targeted strategic projects, policy makers must strive to link their national interests with democracy promotion goals and match their promises with a more candid, realistic agenda. Any further enhancement of democracy-building strategies must include investing greater attention in exploring the diverse meanings of democracy as well as developing a more sophisticated blueprint for when and how to intervene. Pivotally, external actors must not oversell their ability to export

democracy. Viable long-term assistance for the democratic improvement of society must coordinate programs with, and build upon, local knowledge, ethic identities, indigenous traditions and local area expertise. Alternatively, unchecked unilateral actions, unworkable expectations or an over-reliance on military solutions will mobilise anti-western sentiment and, consequently, foreign policy prescriptions may become a key provocation of animosity and antagonism.

**The relationship between alienation, extremism and democracy**

It should be acknowledged that central players such as Australia and the US have not been the only actors demonstrating a strong interest in responding to economic stagnation, political transformations and in helping to mobilise democratic forces. A plurality of other players such as other nation-states, international governmental organisations and private bodies are involved in the delivery of democracy assistance and sustainable development programs. Other nation-states such the United Kingdom and Germany have made bilateral aid contingent upon democratic performance. Organisations such as the UN and the World Bank are increasingly vocal in their support for democratic governance to reduce suffering and instability in developing nations. This rise of diverse national and transnational support has been crucial in encouraging trans-cultural dialogue and providing much needed local expertise.

In broad terms, democracy assistance refers to procedures that may assist in dismantling the legacies of previous authoritarian regimes and assisting embryonic and fragile democratic regimes to become sufficiently durable so that reversal or breakdown is no longer likely. Democracy assistance describes a broad range of activities aimed at influencing the evolution and character of new democracies. Sustaining and deepening democratic governance involves immediate issues such as dividing political authority through a system of political checks and balances and strengthening democratic safeguards through building political institutions such as an independent judiciary. The transfer to a consolidated democracy also requires a more protracted construction of a robust political culture that stimulates pluralistic patterns of behavior and habits of compromise. Linz offers a definition of a consolidated democracy as

> one in which none of the major political actors, parties or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic process to gain power, and that no (unelected) political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. (1990: 158)

Authors such as Przeworski (1991: 26) have added that democracy consolidation is a discernable process by which the rules of representation and a culture of accountability come to constitute ‘the only game in town’ and ‘when no one can imagine acting outside the democratic institutions’. A wide range of external initiatives or programs, with both negative and positive components, can be used to promote democracy and influence political pathways. Instruments for assisting democracy consolidation can

incorporate incentives, such as extending foreign aid and trade programs, as well as penalties, such as suspending military ties, imposing economic sanctions or, most controversially, the launch of a military mission to speed up the 'end of history' and install a democracy. It is worth noting that, in referring to lessons in nation building in Afghanistan and Iraq, both the Howard and Bush administrations relied on a reconstruction precedent based on the World War Two analogy of a defeated foe in Japan and Germany (Von Hippel 2000). During his address to the American Enterprise Institute in February 2002, Bush expounded a broad 'one-size-fits-all' model and a sweeping historic rationale for imposing democracy abroad. He announced that, reflecting on post-World War Two experiences in Japan and Germany, 'after defeating enemies, we did not leave behind occupying armies, we left constitutions and parliaments … In societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home' (cited in Daalder and Lindsay 2003: 10).

At the very least, the issue of democracy promotion and the search to extract the best practices in democracy building and sustainable development is enjoying both a scholarly renewal and a strategic revival. The political and psychological ramifications of 11 September, in part, served to profoundly jolt the focus and direction of democracy assistance programs and goals. The terrorist attacks spawned a broad democracy promotion campaign in many western nations that fundamentally altered a broad range of governmental objectives in negotiating and dealing with terrorists as well as failed, failing or rogue states. For example, while both the 1997 Australian White Papers *In the national interest* and *Australia's strategic policy* gave terrorism remarkably slight attention, the Australian government's 2003 *Advancing the national interest* was dominated by issues of terrorism and security. In 2004 the White Paper *Transnational terrorism: the threat to Australia* spoke of the government's commitment to strengthen cooperation with regional partners, traditional allies and other members of the international community to fight terrorism and protect national interests.

Key players in the 'war against terror' have rhetorically pledged to build democracy and support human rights as part of a long-standing counter-terrorism roadmap. Western leaders have pushed for schemes to advance desirable political change, as well as selective military action in some cases, as a strategic necessity to reshape undemocratic and unstable conditions that are conductive to the emergence of extremist movements. For the Howard government, the spectre of state failure in the Pacific area creating avenues for terrorist operations has also triggered more interventionist, contemplative actions to address poverty and promote democracy. The government announced that 'good governance and security' are now the key goals of its Pacific engagement while installing Australian civil servants in senior administrative posts in locations such as the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Nauru and Vanuatu. The Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer claimed that critics of Australia's aid program failed to recognise that security and stability were 'at the very heart of development' (Downer 2004b).

A wide range of evidence has supported the view that, while there is no single magic formula, democratic systems can help to alleviate conditions that give rise to terrorism (Carothers 2003; Windsor 2003). A number of significant studies have argued that governments have a vital interest in the spread of democracy abroad because poverty, ignorance and oppression express themselves in forms of resistance, extremism and violent outburst (Ross 1993). As Richard Haass noted, exposure to democratic outlets might increase the likelihood that young men and women choose 'to become teachers rather than terrorists' (2005: 15). The effects of stable, moderate democratic systems can act as a counter to the more malicious dimensions of closed political societies and the socioeconomic deprivation that fuel grievances and give rise to extremism and terrorist activity. As former Secretary of State Colin Powell (cited in Windsor 2003: 44) summarised, 'a shortage of economic opportunities is a ticket to despair. Combined with rigid political systems, it is a dangerous brew.' In March 2002, Bush argued that extremist Islamic groups sought to exploit political and economic tensions:

> poverty doesn't cause terrorism. Being poor doesn't make you a murderer … Yet persistent poverty and oppression can lead to a hopelessness and despair. And when governments fail to meet the basic needs of their people, these failed states can become havens for terror. (cited in Connolly and Doyle 2003: 10)

In short, the fight to destroy the roots of terrorism has been presented as part of the larger fight for democracy. Significantly, the renewed emphasis on the absence of democracy as a cause of terrorism has become a mantra for many policy experts and decision makers. Yet attempts to spread democratic institutions and practices have demonstrated an unpleasant discrepancy between intent and the actual ability to control events and outcomes. Moving beyond sweeping rhetoric into successful action will prove formidable. Western governments, including Australia and the US, have erred in not closely linking the challenges of democracy promotion with a more robust, honest discourse and with well-designed procedural and operational methods.

## The limits of democracy promotion

Foreign aid and assistance can generally help a country that is genuinely undergoing a democratic transformation. Nonetheless, the broad display of resolve by policy makers to advance freedom around the world has exposed a series of sweeping, extremely optimistic aspirations that have lacked operational precision, ignored the issue of legitimacy and were vague about their parameters. Doctrines focusing on promoting democracy abroad in order to fight terror have failed to clarify or limit the terms and conditions of external intervention and have not analysed the key foundations for longer-term processes to create permanent democratic institutions. Appeals to universal principles or good intentions are no substitute for a strategy. Democracy building is a long-term, difficult and resource-consuming path.

It is unlikely that there will ever be a broadly accepted general theory of determinants for democratic transition or consolidation. There is no simple political blueprint or single market solution. The causes of democratisation are complex and can vary from country to country, from one phase of the process to another and from one historical period to the other (Diamond 1999). Responses to security challenges have not placed enough emphasis on improving strategies for reconstruction through a lack of clear-eyed consideration regarding costs, constraints and complexities. Ambiguous policies, undue optimism and initiatives apparently fashioned on the spot make it difficult to identify the key determinants for the success of such operations. Such initiatives also raise suspicions of a creeping strategic ethnocentrism or even raise concerns about the motives of the aid donors.

Democracy-based foreign policy or foreign aid programs must offer a clear, practical policy blueprint; any democracy promotion agenda must provide a sense of temperance and a judicious balancing of priorities while being wary not to raise unrealistic expectations. In identifying the key determinants to achieve such goals, external variables and influences constitute a salient, but often highly limited, factor that will influence the stability and survival of new and fragile democracies. Countries such Australia and the US can contribute to the scope and dynamism of the so-called 'third wave'. But policy makers and the public must appreciate the inherent difficulties and obstacles of trying to foster democratic institutions in order to meet wider strategic objectives.

Firstly, democratic transition and consolidation is driven mainly by internal factors. Any analysis that stresses exogenous factors may exaggerate the leverage of peripheral influences and the ability of external actors to determine the course of democratisation in an unfavorable structural context. There is a vital need to identify and explore the domestic structural context as a key challenge in political reconstruction and democracy building. While the spread of democracy is not an impossibility in locations such as the Middle East or the Pacific, any understanding of the feasibility and pattern of democracy as the key outcome of political crafting and external contingency can lead to naive, injurious or futile undertakings.

Promoting democracy abroad is a complex, long-term task that requires a modest set of expectations, differentiated activism and a lucid setting of prerogatives. A diverse range of internal structural factors have been identified as facilitating or obstructing variables influencing the prospects of consolidating democratic gains. They include levels of industrialisation (Dahl 1971), a strong domestic constituency pushing for democratization (Howard 2002), prior historical experiences with democratic institutions (Valenzuela 1992), socioeconomic conditions (Booth and Seligson 1995) and the level of ethnic polarisation and discrimination (Diamond 1999). For some authors such as Adam Przeworski et al (1996), presidential democracies may be less durable because they are more likely to generate political paralysis. Others emphasise educational conditions; the exercise of voting privileges takes some level of education

on the part of the citizenry and will be reflected in a stronger civil society (Russett 1993). At the very least, such a rich range of domestic variables provides vital insights into the facets shaping political life that may act to enhance or to inhibit the building and sustaining of democracy programs (Inglehart 1988; Huntington 1991a; Ruhl 1996).

Research into the nature of democratisation has moved beyond the mainstream preoccupation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s with the necessary set of hypothesised structural prerequisites for the origins and stability of democracy (Moore 1966). The inflexibility of determinist and mono-causal explanations, in part, has given rise to a much-needed literature measuring alternative variables such as the role of actors and individual choices (Lijphart 1994). Nevertheless, internal structural signposts concerning democratisation and political transition theory remain as vital as ever. Debate regarding structural-oriented approaches has shifted from necessary preconditions towards a closer examination of the dependent variables that may facilitate or hinder regime survival and an explanation of why democracies may persist or decay. And, as many commentators have noted, in identifying elements for addressing the building of democracy and crisis of governance, and in recognising that no single condition suffices, some structural conditions appear far more conducive than others in raising the prospects for durable, stable and legitimate democratic formation (Remmer 1991; Schmitter 1994). For example, although there is considerable disagreement over exactly how economic development influences democratisation, many authors concur with Samuel Huntington (1991b) that widespread poverty will make democratic consolidation much more difficult.

Foreign powers and leadership groups will be confronted with, and have to respond to, age-old problems and troublesome realities. Democracy builders face significant obstacles if pro-democratic forces have to deal with variables such as inequality, alienation, despair and underdevelopment. Sidestepping problems of feasibility and failing to give prominence to country-specific structural circumstances can invite false assumptions regarding the capacity of external actors to spur any transformation of the internal political conditions. Previous records of disappointment and failure, Thomas Carothers (1999) asserts, have stemmed both from the particular nature of the aid programs and the sheer magnitude of the problems they try to address. Further, local participation and local knowledge in alternative development programs also remain essential. The fine print of policy detail too often fails to take into account local identity, culture and conditions. The necessity for democracy to be driven from within and be reconciled with indigenous values also seems particularly important in today's era of globalisation, where local culture and cultural identities often feel threatened by outside forces.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, launched in March 2003, provides a far-reaching and highly pertinent example of how the use of external force failed to confront a number of critical issues regarding domestic structural variables. The US-led 'coalition of the willing' presented a grandiose perception of American power that demonstrated the

discrepancy between objectives and means. By underplaying the link between the political process and structural variables, a flawed strategy failed to address the limits of US power and to comprehend why various political regimes endure or fail.

Building democracy in Iraq is not an impossibility. However, overlooking country-specific structural circumstances, including Iraq's intricate political, economic and social crosscurrents, invited overconfidence in and confusion over the actual ability of external actors to effect change. 'A rapid transformation of internal political conditions in the Arab world is well beyond the United States government's capacity or inclination' warned some analysts (Hawthorne 2003: 21). The difficulties of democracy promotion and post-conflict rehabilitation can be broadly brought to light by highlighting two highly relevant structural variables in Iraq: its history of inefficient and autocratic state institutions and a lack of strong national consciousness. The chances for building a stable, durable democracy will also be shaped, to a significant degree, by factors such as Iraq's colonial experiences, its traumatic history of state formation and its deeply fragmented society.

Iraq had no direct practice of democracy. It has been argued that that the nature of an old regime and a lack of prior experience with broadly based democratic habits and structures are coupled to difficulties with the quality and stability of democracy (Valenzuela 1992). Iraq does not have a successful democratic history; its experiences have been beset by interminable conflict eroding public trust in state capacity. The country is marked by an ungovernable past plagued with perennial leadership and legitimacy crises, with a limited immersion in western liberal values. Further, Iraq's history is rooted in persistent intervention by outside powers and its development has been corrupted, in part, by divisive interventions by the West in the pursuit of strategic interests. An extended US-led postwar occupation was always likely to fuel uncertainty over US intentions, increase extremist anti-American sentiment within Iraq and be regarded with suspicion by many Arabs beyond Iraq's borders. The expectations of a rapid democratisation process were not sound.

As mentioned, in referring to lessons in nation building, the Bush administration's reliance on a reconstruction precedent was based on the World War Two analogy of a defeated foe in Japan (or Germany). Such an example provided an impoverished analysis. Comparisons pointing out the suddenness of regime change and the success of US occupation between 1945 and 1952 ignored an entirely different set of internal structural conditions, facilitated in part by unconditional surrender and a broader regional stability, which do not readily lend themselves to smooth replication everywhere. The highly homogeneous Japanese society, sharing no land borders with neighbours, has no parallel in the Middle East, which is characterised by ethnic and religious factions and riddled with insecurity. Citing the success of US prerogatives in postwar Japan with a target of replicating a sort of MacArthurian regency in Iraq failed to take into account unique historical circumstances and a highly differentiated time and place.

General Douglas MacArthur's aim to oversee a transfer of power in Japan and his impressive array of reforms was bolstered by the existence of a modern bureaucratic class, a well-defined society, a viable centralised structure and a compliant administrative infrastructure. Despite some calls for retribution for wartime atrocities, the US worked through existing institutions and maintained traditional ruling groups. The Japanese governing system remained basically intact and expressed little anti-Americanism. In contrast, military action to rehabilitate Iraq was aimed at 'decapitating' the repressive Ba'athist regime while having to contend with resistance to US-led occupation, contentious indigenous groups and a damaged civilian infrastructure.

The powerful influence of structural context can also be illustrated by examining a lack of common identity and national disunity as highly relevant internal variables affecting the fate of democracy. Communal polarisation may retard the process of state formation and complicate democratic durability (Nodia 1992). Iraq faces a high level of factious ethnic/communal polarisation; understanding the demographics and diversity of Iraq's population and regions remains central to understanding the country's politics. The country is a colonial construction within an imposed boundary, with a population of over 24 million people. While particular institutional designs may assist in minimising divisions, major challenges remain in steering historically hostile constituencies toward reconciliation, trust and mutual accommodation. Visible strides towards democratic consolidation must contend with the tribalisation of Iraqi society, well-established family setups and strong personal and ethnic ties. Such traditional social relations, a diverse mix of religious groups and antagonistic nationalist inclinations were built over several decades and represent an ingrained hurdle to Iraq's integrity and the prospects of democracy.

Military calculations and combat planning dominated the pre-war Iraq agenda. 'The war plan was there in spades', argued Ron Adams, who served as deputy to Jay Garner, the initial US governor in postwar Iraq who left only 40 days after arriving. 'But we didn't see much post-conflict stuff in writing until we got into Kuwait' – two days before US forces had invaded Iraq (Ratnesar and Robinson 2003: 23). High-level military and CIA reports, released in September 2003, unearthed concerns that planners had not been given sufficient time to address pre-deployment coordination and the cost of reconstructing postwar Iraq. Such assessments provided a poor insight into the list of problems facing Iraq. They also signify, at best, a deep ambivalence about addressing democracy promotion in a pragmatic, coordinated and collaborative manner.

Secondly, the reality of the so-called 'global triumph' is that the concept of democracy is not secure; progress is neither permanent nor irreversible. Observers must be wary of being seduced by style over substance. Of Huntington's twenty-eight 'third wave' democracies from 1979 to 1989, only Spain, Portugal and Greece could be considered, according to Diamond (2000), as consolidated and authentic. The emergence of a wide variety of regime types is a sobering reminder to those who take the deterministic view

of the 'triumph of democracy'. As Case argues, electoral but illiberal democracies are not necessarily simply 'a mere way station on the road to further democracy' (1996: 464). Indeed, the record of western experience suggests the importance of time in gradually building up democratic patterns of behaviour and tolerance of political competition. Constitutional reform, free and fair elections and other institutional designs are not an end in themselves but rather a critical first step towards a particular kind of political development.

It is worth highlighting that there is no fixed definition of democracy and models of popular sovereignty can assume a wide variety of contested forms. There is no simple, unchangeable or perfect conception. Yet the phenomenon of a political mix between democracy and authoritarianism, revealing some representative political characteristics coexisting with other repressive features and only a tentative commitment to civil and political liberties, merits a more focused attention because it remains a key challenge facing democracy promoters. The rise of compromised governing structures and dysfunctional politics, including leaders who ostensibly pledge a commitment to popular aspirations and democratic openings while exploiting opportunities for personal power and material reward, remains a contentious issue. In this context, Joseph Schumpeter's procedural concept of democracy, summed up in *Capitalism, socialism and democracy* (1942), as a 'competitive struggle for people's vote', expresses a popular concept that is limited to short-term operations and provides a very restricted understanding of democracy. Elections are not the sole essence of democracy. Policy makers must appreciate how democratic regimes might be shaped in significant as well as ambiguous directions after formal elections have been completed. Formal electoral participation is a necessary but insufficient variable in the development of a substantive democracy.

Political leaders must not be able to exploit low standards of democracy for their own corrupt and self-serving ends. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (2000) labelled political structures that take few genuine steps to consolidate strong democratic standards as 'fig-leaf' democracies. The global trend of authoritarian regimes being replaced by fragile and flawed democracies remains a precarious reality. While cultures are historically dynamic, the potential of developing countries to advance a deep and substantive democratic regime will vary considerably (Zakaria 1997). A range of new electoral democracies, such as Nigeria, Colombia, Indonesia and the Ukraine, continue to have a record of dubious democratic practices including evidence of outright coercion. The reality in these new ambiguous regimes is that democratic and authoritarian practices, often manifested during the uncertainty of regime transition, have been inextricably mixed. Despite hybrid political models being difficult to classify, a minimal definition of democracy should not automatically secure international legitimacy.

## Conclusion

Democracy assistance can play an important role in addressing key issues such as poverty and the roots of terrorist violence. Countries such as the US and Australia have a self-interest in expanding the zone of democracies as a means of peace promotion and as a method to counter the evils of terrorism. Further, external government assistance and active involvement and support at critical political junctures can help to improve the quality of outcomes and associated operations in processes of democratic transition and consolidation. But democracy promotion raises a number of critical issues including identifying priorities, the degree of external leverage in targeted states, how to cater for specific needs within a particular culture and how to address the complex interplay of economic, political and cultural elements. Sweeping doctrines about spreading freedom abroad have fallen well short in clarifying the conditions under which external intervention, including military intervention, is called for and in analysing the key foundations for successfully promoting democracy globally.

Ethnocentrism, inflated ambitions and a failure to examine closely the domestic structural context of political and social processes can undermine the effectiveness of democracy-assistance programs. Pivotally, critical assessments and policy options must continue to demand a closer integration of the role of human actors and institutional structures within pre-existing social constraints and historical backgrounds in order to explain the complex dynamics of democratic transition and consolidation. Political structures and political leaders converge with historical legacies, political cultures, ethnic make-ups, prior regime types, levels of economic development and other structural factors that are significant variables in democratic transition and consolidation.

The conduct of foreign affairs demands a careful assessment of both the limitations and the opportunities of any democracy-promotion agenda. There remains no simple political formula for establishing longstanding democratic ideals and institutions. Any blueprint for promoting democracy abroad must avoid bland homogeneous prescriptions or imply that democratisation can be a quick and easy operation; methods of support must take into account particular political, social and economic landscapes. The study of democracy promotion demands a conceptual clarity that is both critical and applicable within a specific environment. Any focus on external variables must not deflect attention from the significant domestic structural challenges and complexities that will impact on democratic consolidation in a particular context.

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