

Chapter 1: Introduction

THE RATIONALE

The Community of Democracies was convened in Warsaw in 2000 to find ways “to work together and strengthen democracy” and will celebrate its tenth year of existence with a commemorative high level meeting in 2010, again in Poland, in Kraków.

As Cambridge scholar John Dunn has observed, while democracy has come to “dominate the world’s imagination”, it has also aroused in some quarters fear and suspicion.

Democracy is not an end in itself. As a form of governance relying on the consent of the governed, democracy is a means of fulfilling individual lives and pursuing common purposes. As such, democracy expresses human aspirations which are judged to be universal.

While no single model of democracy has pride of place, the essential positive components of democracy are straightforward. Among the most prominent are: elected, accountable government; the transparent and equitably applied rule of law; independent media; protection of human rights and freedom of speech; and equal participation by all in selecting political representation. These democratic values represent achievable ideals which today are reflected in the political cultures of most of the world’s peoples and in the aspirations of many others.

By most counts, the number of “free” states has more than doubled in the last few decades, while the number of states considered “not free” has dramatically declined.

Observers point, however, to an apparent negative counter-trend. As documented in the World Movement for Democracy’s *Defending Civil Society* (2008), democracy has suffered recent reverses, as an authoritarian backlash emerged, characterized by resistance to greater openness afforded by new communications technologies and the natural international solidarity these offer civil society.

Authoritarian regimes are banding together in a form of resistance to democratic change, in what a publication of the German Marshall Fund termed “the authoritarian internationale.” Some of them laud the stability of “liberal authoritarianism” over the dangers of “illiberal democracy”. While it is hardly plausible that humans anywhere would prefer governments which ignore the principle of consent of the governed in favor of coercion, authoritarian repression can keep the lid on for a time. But repressive government will fail in the longer run: as Gandhi observed, “Even the most powerful cannot rule without the cooperation of the ruled”, truer than ever now, when democratic models are much more universally apparent because of the information revolution.

Favorable evolution proceeds on every continent, drawing inspiration from history-changing leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Kim Dae-Jung. Notable examples of democratic restoration, consolidation, or advance in recent years include Ghana, Mali, Nepal, Taiwan, and Ukraine – and, as Chilean novelist Isabel Allende declared, “Latin America has opted for democracy.”

John Menru of Tanzania was thinking of a new political climate for Africa when he cited these goals to the late Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, but his aims were universal:

- a. *adopt as binding the principle of dialogue;*
- b. *ensure society’s participation in public life;*
- c. *observe fundamental human rights;*
- d. *begin democratization.*

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS AND NON-VIOLENT CHANGE

Each democratic culture emerges from civil society in a singular way. But many of the challenges in achieving and consolidating democracy are shared, especially the always challenging transition from an un-democratic society toward democracy, via the building blocks of civil society.

Of course, democracy activists and members of civil society struggling to create democratic conditions under non-democratic regimes often face the harsh dilemma of finding the most effective methods for wresting change from unbending authoritarians. Impatient partisans of change are tempted sometimes by the option of violent direct action. But repressive state security machinery can impose a cruel upper hand against violent insurrection which, in any case, can alienate the majority of citizens concerned about safety.

The most usual route for transformation by civil society of authoritarian repression has been that of peaceful assembly and demonstration, including organized civil resistance, often when a specific issue or grievance fires public discontent and protest. Gandhi defined the model for nonviolent civil disobedience against unjust laws in the first campaigns for human rights he launched in South Africa, which he then applied in the campaign for the self-determination of India.

Once launched, democracy's concrete rewards must be evident to citizens. Democracy relies on the realization of certain basic human needs and must aim for their improvement. The test of the democratic process is at the intersection between the participation of citizens in their own governance, and the effectiveness of governance in confronting practical challenges individuals face.

For example, freedom from extreme poverty has been termed the first of the essential freedoms – or, as Amartya Sen put it succinctly, “Freedom and development are inextricable.”

John Dunn records the history of democracy's triumphs as a “history of political choice.” To succeed, the choice must be a demonstrably effective one, not just for the majority reaping the spoils of electoral victory, but across society as a whole.

Achieving rightful opportunities for women, and the end to their abuse, are fundamental objectives and necessities. “The world is awakening to a powerful truth,” Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn have written in the New York Times. Recalling the Chinese saying that ‘Women hold up half the sky’, they stress the growing recognition on the parts of organizations as different as CARE and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff that “Focusing on women and girls is the most effective way to fight global poverty and extremism.”

Orderly succession of democratically elected political leadership is also a universal need. In announcing the winner of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for African Leadership in October, 2007, Kofi Annan cited particularly ex-President Joaquim Chissano's efforts to build Mozambique democracy on conciliation among ex-opponents.

It has been charged that democracy can impede the firm conduct of foreign relations or the organization of defense especially at a time of peril, but the record of free peoples on both accounts is eloquent. In recent years, democratic societies have debated the need to constrain some measure of civil liberties in the interests of national security and counter-terrorism. The process is often vexed and the outcome one of unsatisfactory compromises. What is clear is that transparency of purpose and full democratic debate are essential to public support.

It is also debated whether specific economic conditions and models favor democracy taking roots in a society. Some argue that democracy works most effectively only above a certain income threshold. Yet,

there are notable examples of poorer developing countries choosing and sustaining democracy.

Former leader of the British Liberal Democrat Party Paddy Ashdown has speculated that “democracy is what people choose when they have enough prosperity that they want a system of government that would protect it”. The rule of law which is favored by democratic government is certainly an essential legal framework for free market economies. Socially responsible private investment can undoubtedly support democratic transformation. But the rewards need to be felt generally by the population as a whole. What is clear is that to sustain public confidence, governments must be able to show positive economic achievement with public benefit.

Democratic practice has to be learned. As Senora Allende observed, “A country, like a husband, is always open to improvement.” Even once embarked, the democratic journey is an on-going and evolving process. Dr. Jennifer Welsh of Oxford University reminds us that elected and accountable government provides the ability of a society to “self-correct” in its pursuit of such policy goals. Poland’s Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski spoke at the Lisbon 2009 meeting of the Community of Democracies of the continuing need of a democracy “to re-design itself consensually, without violence.”

THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES

While the Community of Democracies has no ambition to be a bloc defined by or formed in antagonism to non-democratic states, member states have made clear they welcome and actively encourage further peaceful progress toward democratic governance in the world. If this general preference is contradicted by selective support for non-democrats as a function of energy, economic, or security interests, there are costs to credibility. As British Foreign Secretary David Miliband recently said in Oxford, “We must resist the arguments on both the left and the right to retreat into a world of *realpolitik*”.

This is not to dismiss lightly the merits of foreign policies grounded in the realities of national interests as well as aspirations. But the adage “Do no harm” also has merit. There is a harmful “*realpolitik*” history, especially during the Cold War, of democracies intervening to influence and even to counter democratic outcomes elsewhere. The subversion of democratically elected governments for perceived reasons of international competition leaves a bitter legacy that has haunted some relationships for generations. It also works against non-democracies banding together: Fidel Castro’s support of the Soviet-backed coup against the Czechoslovak government in 1968, and invasion, haunts Czech-Cuban relations to this day.

More recently, there have been efforts to force democracy on others, that some justified by misappropriation of the tenets of the “responsibility to protect”. Ill-prepared attempts to democratize unstable states by force without the support of the people invite ethnic and sectarian conflict. This *Handbook* favors outside arms’ length commitment to the long-term development of civil rights and civil society, with the emphasis on responsive support for citizens, democracy activists, or human rights defenders already engaged in the peaceful effort to realize empowerment.

There is, of course, something of a paradox involved. On the one hand, there is a long international history of democrats aiding each other, from the inter-mingling of the American and French revolutions, to the waves of change which swept over Europe in 1848, or in 1989. On the other hand, democracy is about people developing popular self-government for themselves.

Diplomats from democracies need to carry on the tradition of supporting democrats and sharing practical know-how, while deferring to the truth that ultimately democracy is a form of self-rule requiring that things be done by a domestic civil society itself.

It is in this spirit that participating countries of the Community of Democracies value the opportunity on

behalf of democrats everywhere to respond to requests for support from reform-minded groups and individuals struggling to introduce and improve democratic governance and human rights in their own societies, and to work with governments and nongovernmental groups to improve democratic governance.

Attempts to block such responsive support for international civil society are a matter of great concern, especially, as the *Handbook* will set out, the rights to help and be helped are consistent with the aims and obligations of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, as well as the Warsaw Declaration.

THE ROLE OF DIPLOMATS AND THE HANDBOOK

In seeking such help, civil society groups have often turned to embassies or consulates of Community of Democracies' participating states for advice and assistance. There is no codified set of procedures for diplomats to follow in order to respond effectively. Each situation is different, presenting unstructured problems and opportunities which diplomats need to interpret according to local as well as general merits, including the bilateral relationship itself. As shown by the recent actions of authorities in Iran, repressive regimes when faced with popular protest can construct a false narrative of foreign interference, and contest the legitimacy of any contacts between diplomatic representatives and local civil society.

Over the last decades, the activity of diplomats from democratic countries constitutes considerable past experience with almost every eventuality. On the basis that the record of such activity could be helpful guidance on a selective case-by-case basis to practitioners in the field, the *Handbook* attempts to record it.

This *Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support* identifies a "toolbox" of creative, human, and material resources available to Missions. It records ways in which Missions and diplomats have drawn from these tools in the past in the interest of democracy development support. The *Handbook* means to cover a full range of conditions and situations, from regimes which are flatly undemocratic and repressive, to phases of post-conflict recovery, to democratic transition and consolidation.

The Handbook is accompanied by a representative variety of case studies documenting and explaining specific country experiences. It is important that each case study be seen for its specific contextual properties. Each case is different, but there are characteristics which obviously recur. Moreover, it should always be borne in mind that activities and outcomes in one locale can have ripple effects in the region and on wider or specific other relationships.

We hope in future to collect a growing number of examples of "older" democracies adapting democratic techniques from "younger" ones; the democratic learning experience is not all one-way. For example, innovative Brazilian methods for enabling citizens to participate in budget-setting exercises in local government have been adapted for use in the United Kingdom.

A review of all these experiences bears out the validity of our belief in our inter-dependence. It will hopefully also provide practitioners with encouragement, counsel, and a greater capacity to support democrats everywhere.