

## Pro Reading •

**AMERICA'S GLOBAL ROLE: Discussion Guides, Public Agenda, February 25, 2007**

[http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/debate.cfm?issue\\_type=americas\\_global\\_role](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/debate.cfm?issue_type=americas_global_role)

(adapted and extended for classroom use by Carla Geovanis, instructor, West High School, Madison, Wisconsin, February, 2007)

The United States must renew its commitment to promote democracy and protect human rights around the world. This is the perspective that best reflects America's values and ideals. America is a nation founded on ideals and principles, and we have always been an example to the world. This is part of our history and part of who we are.

The nations that we have the most difficulty with are almost never democracies. Ultimately, helping to spread democracy is the most practical way to promote world peace. In recent times the U.S. has never gone to war against a democracy, nor have we been attacked by one.

Even though we should try to spread democracy mainly for moral reasons, it would be helpful for us as a nation as well. If there are more democracies, the U.S. will have more trading partners. We will have more places to sell what we produce. We will also be able to buy the products of more countries without having to worry that they were produced in bad conditions.

Defending democracy and human rights worldwide should be our primary duty and our overriding concern. America must be prepared to defend something more than our military needs and our economic self-interest. With the end of the Cold War, we have a historic opportunity to encourage democracy around the globe. If the U.S. doesn't take the role of defending democracy and human rights, no other nation will defend those values. Promoting democratic governments is the best way to ensure stability over the long run, and to expand markets for American-made goods.

## Con Reading •

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Given the amount of instability around the world, trying to spread democracy is hopelessly unrealistic. The U.S. has a limited ability to end world suffering and resolve tensions that lead to civil war and regional strife. We can't fix every problem in the world. We also can't make groups get along inside a country.

Problems in other parts of the world are complex and often cannot be understood through the lens of our own expectations, moral judgments and preferences. What we think of as a solution may not be what another country wants. The U.S. cannot on its own enforce human rights. There is very little agreement around the world about what those rights people should have and the best methods of enforcing them.

If we want to help poor nations, we should export our economic system, not our political system. Many of the nations that are not democratic are very poor. Helping them improve their economies is more important than encouraging a democratic form of government. This might improve their standards of living and at the same time open new markets for U.S. goods. New markets are more in our interest than new democracies.

Making the U.S. the global champion of democracy and human rights will result in endless entanglements in the internal affairs of other nations. It will also put the lives of U.S. soldiers at risk. Our troops should be for our own defense. It is not our job to police the world.

## Pro Reading • •

### The Case for Democracy

Sunday, March 5, 2006; B06, The Washington Post opinion and commentary, no author given.

THE "DEMOCRACY backlash" is in full swing, largely because of the carnage in Iraq and the electoral success of the terrorist organization Hamas in the Palestinian Authority. In the past week our op-ed writers from right to left have expressed doubts about, or opposition to, the Bush administration's project of encouraging democracy in the Middle East. From their and others' arguments, three principles tend to emerge: You can't impose democracy by force. You shouldn't push for elections, or expect a democracy to develop, until a mature "civil society" is in place. We are better off with dictators like Mubarak, Musharraf and the rest than with the alternative, which is anarchy, terrorism and religious fundamentalism.

These are serious arguments, and those of us who supported the war in Iraq in particular have a responsibility to consider them seriously. It would be comfortable for us to blame the Bush administration for everything that's gone wrong there: After all, it failed to anticipate a Baathist underground resistance, failed to prepare for postwar nation-building, failed to commit enough troops. All true. But even war planners far more diligent and serious than this administration's will get things wrong -- an assumption that should be built into any prewar calculation. And even if President Bush had gotten a lot more right than he did, Iraq still might not be at peace today.

There are and will be many lessons to be drawn from that, but "democracy cannot be imposed by force" is not one of them. For one thing, democracies do sometimes emerge from wars (Japan and Germany). More to the point, the United States never has gone to war, and is unlikely ever to go to war, with the dominant purpose of imposing democracy. We did not fight imperial Japan because we were offended by its system of internal governance. We hoped eventually to bring democracy to Korea and Vietnam, but we fought because we saw communism as a threat. We believed that unyoking the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein would be a great benefit to them, but Congress authorized (and this editorial page supported) war in Iraq not primarily for that reason but because we believed that Saddam Hussein represented a threat to U.S. national security interests -- in the weapons he was thought to possess and to crave, his flouting of international norms, his totalitarian example and his ambition to dominate the Middle East.

The second notion -- that it is foolish to press for democracy in unready societies -- also is less useful than it appears at first blush. Of course elections don't make for a democracy; the Soviet Union conducted them for years. And it's true that many of the countries that have developed democratically in the past two decades began with advantages that not everyone shares, such as (in parts of Central and Eastern Europe) memories of a democratic past between the world wars. But other nations progress without that head start. Everyone would acknowledge that it's difficult; that culture, history and ethnic politics matter; that totalitarian habits take decades to recover from. But it's hard to look around the world -- to democracies in South Korea, India, South Africa, El Salvador and Indonesia -- and come up with rules to predict where democracy can succeed and where it can't.

The unreadiness argument is often applied to countries where the election results, as in the Palestinian Authority, are not welcome in the West. The fallacy of this thinking is that it supposes that without elections Hamas and other fundamentalist movements could be suppressed or excluded from the political system. But radical Islamists and others hostile to Western interests cannot be wished away: They are powerful forces in the Middle East that, until their recent participation in elections, pursued their goals by terrorism. Democratic participation has caused Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and at least some of Iraq's Sunni and Shiite groups to scale back violence at least temporarily. Over time, it is more likely than exclusion and suppression to moderate their political aims.

Amore fundamental problem with the readiness argument is that it imagines a choice that policymakers rarely enjoy. Yes, we might welcome the benign dictator who would nurture the "rule of law" until his nation was "ready" for democracy -- and then would give way gracefully to his matured people. But for the same reason that we wish for civil society as a precursor, most dictators do everything they can to squelch it. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak gives space to the Muslim Brotherhood while persecuting his secular liberal opposition, because he wants to be the only acceptable alternative; he doesn't want a civil society. In much of the autocratic world -- Central Asia, Russia, Burma -- the picture is the same.

So it's fair to oppose democracy promotion, but only if you're honest about the alternative. Throughout much of the Muslim world, that alternative is not a gentle flowering of civil society but the conditions that after Sept. 11 were recognized as threatening: closed and stagnant economies that leave millions of young people unemployed; brutal secret police services that permeate society and stifle education and free thinking; corrupt rulers who nurture religious extremism to shield themselves at home and make trouble abroad.

Those who promote democracy as the best alternative do not imagine that it will succeed quickly, or in all places. It's important to press autocratic allies such as Mr. Mubarak to create more space for political parties, so that when elections do take place Egyptians can take advantage of them responsibly. Of course elections aren't enough; of course civil society and prosperity and the emergence of a middle class matter, too; and which comes first, and in what ways, will be different in every country.

But without elections, or the prospect of elections -- without some measure of accountability to the people -- what will induce a dictator to allow civil society to grow? The "realists" need to answer that question, too.

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## Con Reading • •

### Spreading Democracy: The World's Most Dangerous Ideas

By [Eric J. Hobsbawm](#)

From [Foreign Policy.com](#)

Powerful nations are right now trying to create new order in the world. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are part of an effort to create world order by "spreading democracy." This idea is not merely unrealistic – it is dangerous. This crusade is based on the idea that Western-style democracy can succeed everywhere, that it can fix today's major problems, and that democracy can bring peace instead of creating disorder. It cannot.

Democracy is popular for a reason. The idea that all government should be based on the free consent of people is appealing. Of course, the right to vote doesn't guarantee any particular political result. Free elections cannot even ensure that a democracy will continue to exist. For example, Hitler was originally elected in Germany. The results of elections can be inconvenient for major world powers. If the Iraq war had depended on the freely expressed consent of "the world community," it would not have happened. But even these problems do not reduce the appeal of electoral democracy.

Several other factors besides democracy's popularity explain the dangerous and false belief that can be spread by foreign armies. Supporters of spreading democracy think that if gas stations, iPods, and computer geeks are the same worldwide, it should be ok to spread a form of government too. But this view doesn't take the complexity of the world into account.

The bloodshed and disorder that has occurred around the world also makes the idea of spreading democracy more attractive. Because the United Nations isn't a major military power, some human rights supporters think that the U.S. should step in and create order. The U.S. and other nations did stop the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans during the 1990s. But we should always be suspicious when a military power like the U.S. claims to be doing everyone a favor by defeating and occupying weaker countries.

Yet another factor may be the most important: The United States believes that it should do great things and that it should save the world. Today's United States is an unchallenged technological and military power. The U.S. is also convinced its social system is superior. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the U.S. has had no one to remind it that there are limits to what it can do. Some people believe the U.S. is a model society, with a combination of laws, freedoms, competitive markets, and elections in which all people can vote. These same people believe that all that remains is to remake the world in the image of this "free society."

This idea is dangerous whistling in the dark. It's never democratic to force something on another nation. Plus, all nations put their own interests first, even if they say they're just trying to help

another country. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union were part of making the world the way it is now, and helped create the problems we see today. Even the "war against terror" has a dark side, and has caused cruel and unacceptable actions.

The campaign to spread democracy will not succeed. The Cold War showed us that even great powers cannot remake the world or force quick changes inside countries. Nor can you just transfer a type of government across borders. The conditions for effective democratic government are rare. A democracy requires popular support, consent, and the ability to referee conflicts between domestic groups. If groups inside a country cannot get along, democracy won't work. If smaller groups don't feel like the majority vote inside a nation take their views and hopes into account, they won't support the government. If smaller religious or ethnic groups doesn't feel like they are treated well, they won't even view a democratic government as legitimate. Without basic agreements among groups, there is no single people in a nation. When this happens democracy has been suspended (as is the case with democratic institutions in Northern Ireland), the state has split (as in Czechoslovakia), or society has descended into permanent civil war (as in Sri Lanka). "Spreading democracy" has made ethnic conflict worse and caused nations to fall apart after both WWI and the Cold War. That makes the idea of spreading democracy a depressing prospect.

The effort to spread democracy is also dangerous in a more indirect way. It gives the impression to those who do not have this form of government the illusion that it actually governs those who do. But how "democratic" are the world's major democracies? We now know how the actual decisions to go to war in Iraq were made in the U.S. and the United Kingdom. There were complex problems of dishonesty and cover-ups. Decisions were made privately by small groups of people. It was not very different from the way decisions are made in non-democratic countries. Fortunately, the media was still independent enough to do investigative reporting in the United Kingdom. But electoral democracy does not ensure real freedom of the press, citizen rights, and an independent judiciary.

--Eric J. Hobsbawm is emeritus professor of economic and social history at Birkbeck, University of London, and author of *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914--1991* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994). (c)E.J. Hobsbawm 2004.

(adapted for high school reading levels by Carla Geovanis, Social Studies Instructor, West High School, Madison, Wisconsin, February, 2007)

# Pro Reading • • •

## Why the United States Should Spread Democracy

by Sean M. Lynn-Jones

Discussion Paper 98-07, Kennedy School of Government,  
Harvard University, March 1998, The Belfer Center

(exerpted and adapted for advanced high school reading levels by  
Carla Geovanis, West High School, Madison, Wisconsin, February, 2007)

### The Benefits of the Spread of Democracy

Most Americans assume that democracy is a good thing and that the spread of democracy will help all people. Because the virtues of democracy are taken for granted, we rarely think much about what they are. While it is important not to overstate or misrepresent the benefits of democratization, the spread of democracy has many important benefits.

The United States has an interest in promoting democracy because further democratization improves the lives of citizens of other countries and contributes to a more peaceful international system. To the extent that Americans care about citizens of other countries and international peace, they will see benefits from the continued spread of democracy. Spreading democracy also will directly advance the national interests of the United States, because democracies will not launch wars or terrorist attacks against the United States, will not produce refugees seeking asylum in the United States, and will tend to ally with the United States.

### Democracy is Good for the Citizens of New Democracies

The United States should attempt to spread democracy because people generally live better lives under democratic governments. Compared to inhabitants of nondemocracies, citizens of democracies enjoy greater individual liberty, political stability, freedom from governmental violence, enhanced quality of life, and a much lower risk of suffering a famine. Skeptics will immediately ask: Why should the United States attempt to improve the lives of non-Americans? Shouldn't this country focus on its own problems and interests? There are at least three answers to these questions.

First, as human beings, Americans should and do feel some obligation to improve the well-being of other human beings. Second, Americans have a particular interest in promoting the spread of liberty. The United States was founded on the principle of securing liberty for its citizens. Given its founding principles and very identity, the United States has a large stake in advancing its core value of liberty. As Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has argued: "The United States is uniquely and self-consciously a country founded on a set of ideas, and ideals, applicable to people everywhere. The Founding Fathers declared that all were created equal-not just those in Britain's 13 American colonies-and that to secure the 'unalienable rights' of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, people had the right to establish governments that derive 'their just powers from the consent of the governed.'" [21](#)

Third, improvements in the lives of individuals in other countries matter to Americans because the United States cannot insulate itself from the world. It is undeniable that changes in communications technologies, trade flows, and the environment have opened borders and created a more interconnected world. These trends give the United States a greater stake in the fate of other societies, because widespread misery abroad may create political turmoil, economic instability, refugee flows, and environmental damage that will affect Americans. The growing interconnectedness of international relations means that the United States also has an indirect stake in the well-being of those in other countries, because developments overseas can have unpredictable consequences for the United States. For these three reasons, at least, Americans should care about how the spread of democracy can improve the lives of people in other countries.

### **Democracy Leads to Liberty and Liberty is Good**

The first way in which the spread of democracy enhances the lives of those who live in democracies is by promoting individual liberty, including freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and freedom to own private property.<sup>22</sup> Respect for the liberty of individuals is an inherent feature of democratic politics. As Samuel Huntington has written, liberty is "the peculiar virtue of democracy."<sup>23</sup> A democratic political process based on electoral competition depends on freedom of expression of political views and freedom to make electoral choices. Moreover, governments that are accountable to the public are less likely to deprive their citizens of human rights. The global spread of democracy is likely to bring greater individual liberty to more and more people.

Two cases can be made for increasing individual freedom. One is the belief that increased liberty will enable more people to realize their full human potential, which will benefit not only themselves but all of humankind. Greater liberty will allow the human spirit to flourish, thereby unleashing greater intellectual, artistic, and productive energies that will ultimately benefit all of humankind. The rights-based case for liberty, on the other hand, does not focus on the consequences of increased liberty, but instead argues that all men and women, by virtue of their common humanity, have a right to freedom. This argument is most memorably expressed in the American Declaration of Independence: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness ..."

### **Liberal Democracies are Less Likely to Use Violence Against Their Own People**

Second, America should spread liberal democracy because the citizens of liberal democracies are less likely to suffer violent death in civil unrest or at the hands of their governments.<sup>27</sup> These two findings are supported by many studies, but particularly by the work of R.J. Rummel. Rummel finds that democracies—by which he means liberal democracies—between 1900 and 1987 saw only 0.14% of their populations (on average) die annually in internal violence. The corresponding figure for authoritarian regimes was 0.59% and for totalitarian regimes 1.48%.<sup>28</sup> Rummel also finds that citizens of liberal democracies are far less likely to die at the hands of their governments. Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of genocides and mass murders of civilians in the twentieth century. The states that have killed millions of their citizens all have been authoritarian or totalitarian: the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, Nazi Germany, Nationalist China, Imperial Japan,



and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. Democracies have virtually never massacred their own citizens on a large scale, although they have killed foreign civilians during wartime.

There are two reasons for the relative absence of civil violence in democracies: (1) Democratic political systems-especially those of liberal democracies limit the power of governments, reducing their ability to commit mass murders of their own populations. [30](#) (2) Democratic governments also allow opposition to be expressed openly and have regular processes for the peaceful transfer of power. If all participants in the political process remain committed to democratic principles, critics of the government need not stage violent revolutions and governments will not use violence to repress opponents.[31](#)

### **Democracy Enhances Long-Run Economic Performance**

A third reason for promoting democracy is that democracies tend to enjoy greater prosperity over long periods of time. As democracy spreads, more individuals are likely to enjoy greater economic benefits. Democracy does not necessarily usher in prosperity, although some observers claim that "a close correlation with prosperity" is one of the "overwhelming advantages" of democracy.[32](#) Some democracies, including India and the Philippines, have been behind economically, at least until the last few years. Others are among the most richest societies on earth. Nevertheless, over the long haul democracies generally prosper. As Mancur Olson points out: "It is no accident that the countries that have reached the highest level of economic performance across generations are all stable democracies."[33](#)

Authoritarian regimes often compile impressive short-run economic records. For several decades, the Soviet Union's annual growth in gross national product (GNP) exceeded that of the United States, leading Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to pronounce "we will bury you." China has posted double-digit annual GNP increases in recent years. But dictatorships rarely can sustain these rates of growth for long. As Mancur Olson notes, "experience shows that relatively poor countries can grow extraordinarily rapidly when they have a strong dictator who happens to have unusually good economic policies, such growth lasts only for the ruling span of one or two dictators."[34](#) The Soviet Union was unable to sustain its rapid growth; its economic failings ultimately caused the country to disintegrate in the throes of political and economic turmoil. Most experts doubt that China will continue its rapid economic expansion. Economist Jagdish Bhagwati argues that "no one can maintain these growth rates in the long term. Sooner or later China will have to rejoin the human race."[35](#) Some observers predict that the stresses of high rates of economic growth will cause political fragmentation in China.[36](#)

Why do democracies perform better than autocracies over the long run? First, democracies-especially liberal democracies-are more likely to have market economies, and market economies tend to produce economic growth over the long run. Freedom House conducted a World Survey of Economic Freedom for 1995-96, which evaluated 80 countries that account for 90% of the world's population and 99% of the world's wealth on the basis of criteria such as the right to own property, operate a business, or belong to a trade union. It found that the countries rated "free" generated 81% of the world's output even though they had only 17% of the world's population.[37](#) Of course, some democracies do not adopt market economies and some autocracies do, but liberal democracies generally are more likely to pursue liberal economic policies.

Second, democracies that embrace liberal principles of government are likely to create a stable foundation for long-term economic growth. Individuals will only make long-term investments when they are confident that their investments will not be expropriated. These and other economic decisions require assurances that private property will be respected and that contracts will be enforced. These conditions are likely to be met when an impartial court system exists and can require individuals to enforce contracts. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan has argued that: "The guiding mechanism of a free market economy ... is a bill of rights, enforced by an impartial judiciary."[39](#) These conditions also happen to be those that are necessary to maintain a stable system of free and fair elections and to uphold liberal principles of individual rights. A third reason may operate in some circumstances: democratic governments are more likely to have the political legitimacy necessary to embark on difficult and painful economic reforms.[41](#) This factor is particularly likely to be important in former communist countries, but it also appears to have played a role in the decisions India and the Philippines have taken in recent years to pursue difficult economic reforms.[42](#)

### **Democracies Never Have Famines**

Fourth, the United States should spread democracy because the citizens of democracies do not suffer from famines. The economist Amartya Sen concludes that "one of the remarkable facts in the terrible history of famine is that no substantial famine has ever occurred in a country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press."[43](#) Other scholars who have studied famines and hunger reach similar conclusions. Joseph Collins, for example, argues that: "Wherever political rights for all citizens truly flourish, people will see to it that, in due course, they share in control over economic resources vital to their survival. Lasting food security thus requires real and sustained democracy."[44](#) Most of the countries that have experienced severe famines in recent decades have been among the world's least democratic: the Soviet Union (Ukraine in the early 1930s), China, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cambodia and Sudan. Throughout history, famines have occurred in many different types of countries, but never in a democracy.

Democracies do not experience famines for two reasons. First, in democracies governments are accountable to their populations and their leaders have electoral incentives to prevent mass starvation. The need to be reelected makes politicians ensure that their people do not starve. [45](#) On the other hand, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes are not accountable to the public; they are less likely to pay a political price for failing to prevent famines. Moreover, authoritarian and totalitarian rulers often have political incentives to use famine as a means of getting rid of their domestic opponents. Second, the existence of a free press and the free flow of information in democracies prevents famine by serving as an early warning system on the effects of natural catastrophes such as floods and droughts that may cause food scarcities. A free press that criticizes government policies also can publicize the true level of food stocks and reveal problems of distribution that might cause famines even when food is plentiful.[46](#) Inadequate information has contributed to several famines. During the 1958-61 famine in China that killed 20-30 million people, the Chinese authorities overestimated the country's grain reserves by 100 million metric tons. This disaster later led Mao Zedong to concede that "Without democracy, you have no understanding of what is happening down below."[47](#)

## **Democracy is Good for the International System**

In addition to improving the lives of individual citizens in new democracies, the spread of democracy will benefit the international system by reducing the likelihood of war. Democracies do not wage war on other democracies. This absence-or near absence, depending on the definitions of "war" and "democracy" used-has been called "one of the strongest . . . generalizations that can be made about international relations."[51](#) One scholar argues that "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations."[52](#) If the number of democracies in the international system continues to grow, the number of potential conflicts that might escalate to war will diminish. Although wars between democracies and nondemocracies would persist in the short run, in the long run an international system composed of democracies would be a peaceful world. At the very least, adding to the number of democracies would gradually enlarge the democratic "zone of peace."

# Con Reading • • •

## Was Democracy Just a Moment?

by Robert Kaplan

Atlantic Monthly, December 1997

(exerpted and adapted for advanced high school reading levels by  
Carla Geovanis, West High School, Madison, Wisconsin, February, 2007)

### Majority Rule Can Lead to Abuses

Hitler and Mussolini each came to power through democracy. Democracies do not always make societies more civil-but they do always mercilessly expose the health of the societies in which they operate.

In April of 1985 I found myself in the middle of a Sudanese crowd that had just helped to overthrow a military regime and replace it with a new government, which the following year held free and fair elections. Sudan's newly elected democracy led immediately to anarchy, which in turn led to the most brutal tyranny in Sudan's postcolonial history. In Sudan only 27 percent of the population (and only 12 percent of the women) could read. If a society is not in reasonable health, democracy can be not only risky but disastrous: during the last phases of the post-First World War German and Italian democracies, for example, the unemployment and inflation figures for Germany and the amount of civil unrest in Italy were just as low as Sudan's literacy rates.

As an unemployed Tunisian student once told me, "In Tunisia we have a twenty-five percent unemployment rate. If you hold elections in such circumstances, the result will be a fundamentalist government and violence like in Algeria. First create an economy, then worry about elections." In Kurdistan and Afghanistan, two fragile tribal societies in which the United States encouraged versions of democracy in the 1990s, the security vacuums that followed Saddam Hussein for a time in Kurdistan and by Islamic tyranny in much of Afghanistan. In Bosnia democracy legitimized the worst war crimes in Europe since the Nazi era. In sub-Saharan Africa democracy has weakened institutions and services in some states, and elections have been manipulated to restore dictatorship in others. In Sierra Leone and Congo-Brazzaville elections have led to chaos. In Mali, which Africa-watchers have christened a democratic success story, recent elections were boycotted by the opposition and were marred by killings and riots. Voter turnout was less than 20 percent.

Even in Latin America, the Third World's most successful venue for democracy, the record is murky. Venezuela has enjoyed elected civilian governments since 1959, whereas for most of the 1970s and 1980s Chile was effectively under military rule. But Venezuela is a society in turmoil, with periodic attempts to take over the government and rampant crime. Chile, on the other hand, has become a stable middle class society whose economic growth rate compares to those of the Pacific Rim. In Brazil and other countries democracy faces a backlash from millions of

badly educated and newly urbanized dwellers in teeming slums, who see few benefits from Western parliamentary systems. Their discontent is a reason for the multifold increases in crime in many Latin American cities over the past decade.

### **Democracy Requires Certain Conditions to Work**

Because both a middle class and civil institutions are required for successful democracy, democratic Russia, which inherited neither from the Soviet regime, remains violent, unstable, and miserably poor despite its 99 percent literacy rate. Under its authoritarian system China has dramatically improved the quality of life for hundreds of millions of its people. My point, hard as it may be for Americans to accept, is that Russia may be failing in part because it is a democracy and China may be succeeding in part because it is not. Had the student demonstrations in 1989 in Tiananmen Square led to democracy, would the astoundingly high economic growth rates of the 1990s still obtain? I am not certain, because democracy in China would have ignited turmoil not just in the Muslim west of the country but elsewhere, too; order would have decreased but corruption would not have. Look at Haiti, a small country only ninety minutes by air from Miami, where 22,000 American soldiers were dispatched in 1994 to restore "democracy." Five percent of eligible Haitian voters participated in an election last April, chronic instability continues, and famine threatens. The lesson to draw is not that dictatorship is good and democracy bad but that democracy emerges successfully only after other social and economic achievements

The very fact that we retreat to moral arguments-and often moral arguments only-to justify democracy indicates that for many parts of the world the historical and social arguments supporting democracy are just not there. Realism has come not from us but from, for example, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, an enlightened Hobbesian despot whose country has posted impressive annual economic growth rates-10 percent recently-despite tribal struggles in the country's north. In 1986 Museveni's army captured the Ugandan capital of Kampala without looting a single shop; Museveni postponed elections and saw that they took place in a manner that ensured his victory. "I happen to be one of those people who do not believe in multi-party democracy," Museveni has written. "In fact, I am totally opposed to it as far as Africa today is concerned.... If one forms a multi-party system in Uganda, a party cannot win elections unless it finds a way of dividing the ninety-four percent of the electorate [that consists of peasants], and this is where the main problem comes up: tribalism, religion, or regionalism becomes the basis for intense partisanship." In other words, in a society that has not reached a high level of development, a multi-party system merely hardens and institutionalizes established ethnic and regional divisions.

The ghosts of today we ignore-like the lesson offered by Rwanda, where the parliamentary system the West promoted was a factor in the murder of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis by Hutu militias. In 1992, responding partly to pressure from Western governments, the Rwandan regime established a multi-party system and transformed itself into a coalition government. The new political parties became masks for ethnic groups that organized murderous militias, and the coalition nature of the new government helped to prepare the context for the events that led to the genocide in 1994. Evil individuals were certainly responsible for the mass murder. But they operated within a fatally flawed system, which our own ethnocentrism and pride helped to construct. Indeed, our often moralistic attempts to impose Western democratic systems on other

countries are not dissimilar to the attempts of nineteenth-century Western colonialists-many of whom were equally idealistic.

The death of the Soviet Union was no reason for us to pressure Rwanda and other countries to form political parties, but that is what our post-Cold War foreign policy has been largely about. The Eastern European countries liberated in 1989 already had, in varying degrees, the historical and social preconditions for both democracy and advanced industrial life: middle-class traditions, exposure to the Western Enlightenment, high literacy rates, low birth rates, and so on. The post-Cold War effort to bring democracy to those countries has been reasonable. What is less reasonable is to put a gun to the head of the peoples of the developing world and say, in effect, "Behave as if you had experienced the Western Enlightenment to the degree that Poland and the Czech Republic did. Behave as if 95 percent of your population were literate. Behave as if you had no bloody ethnic or regional disputes."

### **Democracy Cannot Create Or Stabilize a Nation**

Nations have never been created by elections. Geography, settlement patterns, the rise of a literate middle class, and, tragically, ethnic cleansing have formed nations. Greece, for instance, is a stable democracy partly because earlier in the century it carried out a mild form of ethnic cleansing-in the form of refugee transfers-which created a society with one ethnic group. Nonetheless, it took several decades of economic development for Greece finally to become stable. Democracy often weakens states by forcing ineffective compromises and fragile political agreements among groups in societies where the government never functioned well to begin with. Because democracy neither creates or strengthens nations, multi-party systems are best suited to nations that already have some important elements. These include functioning government agencies and a middle class that pays income tax. Issues such as borders and power sharing need to be resolved before a democracy exists. Democratic politicians can bicker about the budget and other secondary matters, but not about the basis of the whole country.

Social stability comes from a large middle class. Not democracies but authoritarian systems, including monarchies, create middle classes-which, having achieved a certain size and self-confidence, revolt against the very governments today that allowed them to exist. This is the pattern today in the Pacific Rim and the southern cone of South America, but not in other parts of Latin America, southern Asia, or sub-Saharan Africa. A place like the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), where the per capita gross national product is less than \$200 a year and the average person is either a rural peasant or an urban peasant; where there is little infrastructure of roads, sewers, and so on; and where reliable bureaucratic institutions are lacking, needs a strong leader in place for years. Modern government agencies generally require high literacy rates over several generations.

### **Democracy Can Cause Disorder, Leading to Worse Consequences**

People who think democracy is the same as progress miss this point, ignoring both history and centuries of political philosophy. They seem to think that the choice is between dictators and democrats. But for many places the only choice is between bad dictators and slightly better ones. To force elections on such places may give us some instant gratification. As likely as not, the democratic government will be composed of corrupt, bickering, ineffective politicians whose weak rule never had an much support to begin with. After a few months or years a bunch of

soldiers with grenades will get bored and greedy, and will easily topple their new, ineffective democracy.

Of course, our post-Cold War mission to spread democracy is partly a pose. In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, America's most important allies in the energy-rich Muslim world, our worst nightmare would be free and fair elections, as it would be elsewhere in the Middle East. We praise democracy, and meanwhile we are grateful for an autocrat like King Hussein, and for the fact that the Turkish and Pakistani militaries have always been the real powers behind the "democracies" in their countries. Obviously, democracy in theory brings undeniably good things such as civil society and a respect for human rights. But as a matter of public policy it has unfortunately come to focus on elections. What is in fact happening in many places requires a some explanation.

### **Authoritarianism May Serve Some Nations Better**

The current reality in Singapore and South Africa, for instance, shreds our democratic certainties. In Singapore, a country that is certainly not democratic, has forged prosperity from poverty. A survey of business executives and economists by the World Economic Forum ranked Singapore No. 1 among the fifty-three most advanced countries appearing on an index of global competitiveness. What is good for business executives is often good for the average citizen: per capita wealth in Singapore is nearly equal to that in Canada, the nation that ranks No. 1 in the world on the United Nations' Human Development Index. When Lee took over Singapore, more than thirty years ago, it was a mosquito-ridden bog filled with slum quarters that frequently lacked both plumbing and electricity. Doesn't liberation from filth and hunger count as a human right? Jeffrey Sachs, a professor of international trade at Harvard, writes that "good government" means relative safety from corruption, from breach of contract, from loss of property, and from bureaucratic inefficiency. Singapore's reputation in these regards is unsurpassed. If Singapore's 2.8 million citizens ever demand democracy, they will just prove the point that middle classes arise under dictators before gaining the confidence to dump their rulers. Singapore's success is frightening, yet it must be acknowledged.

Democratic South Africa, meanwhile, has become one of the most violent places on earth that are not war zones, according to the security firm Kroll Associates. The murder rate is six times that in the United States, five times that in Russia. There are ten private-security guards for every policeman. Educated people continue to flee, and international drug cartels have made the country a new transshipment center. Real unemployment is about 33 percent, and is probably much higher among youths. Jobs cannot be created without the cooperation of foreign investors, they are too afraid to invest there. Contrast South Africa and Singapore, and consider which nation is better off today.