Sustaining Democracy's Last Wave

Kim Campbell and Sean C. Carroll

"Are we next?" Syrian President Bashar Assad asked in February of this year. "The first step was Iraq and soon it will be Iran and Syria." He charges Israel and the White House with being behind the series of "objectives."[1] His comments came more as a result of the response to the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister, and the ensuing revolt in Lebanon than the events in Iraq. What he has now realized is that the people in the region, rather than the machinations of the Mossad and the White House, are the ones taking their nations toward democracy. The Lebanese are demanding to be citizens of an independent Lebanon, rather than merely inhabitants of an occupied state. A month later Assad answered his own question, promising multi-candidate elections and alternating power.[2] Exactly when and how remains to be seen, but Assad's words were deemed unthinkable by many a few months ago. It is not as astonishing or sudden as it would seem.

The gathering wave of democracy in the Arab world is real. So is the continuing wave in the former Soviet Union, which has recently watered the buds of democratic renewal in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, bringing colorful Rose, Orange, and Tulip Revolutions. Could this be the swelling of what will become democracy's last wave, breaking over the remaining bastions of autocracy? It might be, but the interna-

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tional community has a weighty obligation to ensure that this wave is not fleeting, as it was a decade ago in Africa and, prior to that, in the Middle East. The question is how democracy promoters can best support leaders and citizens of new democracies to successfully ride the wave through transition and consolidation. Democracy, to be sure, is a powerful force in itself, but international support can go a long way to secure its presence and durability.

Promoting, Not Imposing, Democracy. Ronald Reagan asked Mikhail Gorbachev to "tear down that wall," but it was the people of Berlin who actually demolished it. Either external or internal pressures can open the door to democracy, but only local actors can eventually fling it open wide and walk through it, as occurred in the Philippines and Poland, in Chile and South Africa. It is now taking place in Lebanon, Kyrgyzstan, and Egypt, and will soon in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Like previous transitions, the changes in the Arab world will come from within by some combination of reform-driven leaders and citizens. The international community must support these democrats at every step of the way by walking behind or beside them—not in front of them.

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Leadership is crucial to successful democratic transition and consolidation. One important role for international democracy supporters is to provide capacity building for new political leaders, including those in opposition to non-democratic regimes and those newly elected. Democratization is a complex, open-ended, and uncertain process in which participants learn and define what is (and is not) democratic practice over time.[3] The transitional period is critical, as democracy either takes root or flounders in the early days and weeks of change. In fluid environments, strong, principled leadership is key to establishing and sustaining democratic governance as new institutions and politicians emerge. Studies of the relationship between democracy and long-term economic development cite the leadership factor as critical for producing sustainable results.[4]

Nevertheless, donors and democracy promoters are often reluctant to support newly elected democratizing presidents or prime ministers because they are political figures. Instead, democracy promoters typically prefer to aid ministries, legislatures, or civil society. As such, these groups are often slow to support transition leaders in the early stages when they most need help. New leaders—democratically elected and with a mandate for change—assume their posts amid high esteem and with little time, making rapid involvement difficult. Still, they need support despite the

difficult circumstances.

Democracy assistance should support new leaders in a timely, targeted manner that builds on the strengths that brought him or her to power, while also recognizing that an acclaimed transition figure may need significant help tackling the job of democratic governance. The Club of Madrid formed recently in part to address this need. This new organization recognizes the importance of leadership for successful democratic transition and aims to assist new and emerging leaders and democracies around the globe by calling on the experience of its members—fifty-seven former presidents and prime ministers—to provide timely strategic leadership advice and assistance.

In approaching transitional democracies, the skill and capacity levels of citizens and emerging leaders is unknown. One cannot assume a sufficient base of knowledge and capacity borne simply out of the desire for democracy. Democracy support groups can help to develop necessary citizenship skills through education, civil society, and representative bodies such as local councils and national legislatures.

Pricing Democracy Assistance. Though its benefits are far-reaching, democracy assistance remains relatively inexpensive. Sweden, one of a handful of countries spending significant amounts on democracy support, reaped well-deserved credit for aiding the African National Congress in the fight against apartheid and for helping to bring Eastern Europe into the democratic fold. Yet in the fifteen years leading up to and including transitions in Eastern Europe and South Africa, Sweden's entire spending on government and civil society was only $1.2 billion for all countries—more than half of it (60 percent) from 1989-1990.[5] This sum would pay for only one week of the U.S. military presence in Iraq or less than one day of the U.S. FY2005 defense budget.[6]

Examples of democracy promotion's cost-effectiveness abound. The international observation mission that exposed the electoral fraud of former Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos cost less than $250,000.[7] The push for democratic change in Kyrgyzstan came about in part due to a $70,000 grant for an opposition paper that ran photos of a palatial house the now-ousted president was building with presumably misappropriated funds and borrowed time.[8] Many countries, though, still lack a full appreciation for democracy promotion's bargain price.

The United States: Leading and Learning? Twenty-five years ago few states spent much money on democracy assistance. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United States and the Netherlands alone funded 55 percent of worldwide democracy assistance in 1980. Their spending on "government and civil society" programs was $20 million and $14 million respectively. Europe and the United States each spent roughly a third of the $62 million official development assistance for democracy, just one-fifth of 1 percent of all development aid in the world.[9]

In the mid-1980s, the United States quickly increased spending on democracy. By 1985, U.S. funds rose fourteen-fold, to $278 million, representing 40 percent of the total OECD funding for democratic assistance. Canada, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank also entered the picture, helping fuel an overall eleven-fold

increase in worldwide democracy funding. Europe, however, continued to spend at the same level—$20 million—as five years earlier, which constituted only 3 percent of global totals.

At the start of his second term, President Bush offered democracy promotion as a rallying point for new international cooperation, particularly between the United States and Europe. While Washington historically has taken a lead on democracy assistance, its invasion of Iraq has hurt its credibility. Many in the region perceive the U.S.-led war as, at best, democracy promotion at gunpoint. Others think the invasion had little or nothing to do with democracy in the first place. In any case, while democrats welcome outside support in their struggle against tyranny, they usually do not want invading armies, no matter whose side the soldiers are on.

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The Bush administration may be realizing that war and unilateral decision-making come with a high price. The message may be welcome, the messenger even accepted, but if the delivery is wrong, then both eventually suffer. War was not the only way to implement (so far only semi-) free elections. It was the most costly way and too costly for Washington to repeat elsewhere. Further, those who claim that the January 30 Iraqi elections have guaranteed democracy in Iraq or are the primary reason for democratic elections and change in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and other countries in the region oversimplify what has transpired in the Middle East.

Europe: Catching Up. For its part, Europe is ten years behind the United States in devoting significant resources and specialized programs—both governmental and non-governmental—to democracy promotion. Except for the long-standing German party foundations, involved in the Iberian transitions thirty years ago, Europe focused little on democracy promotion until after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even then it took Europe another few years to establish new programs. One of the oldest, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, began in 1992. International IDEA, based in Stockholm primarily funded by Europeans, will soon celebrate its ten-year anniversary. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy is even younger, dating from 2000, while the European Commission did not begin dedicating significant amounts to democracy assistance until the late 1990s. By contrast the U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and its constituent organizations are all at least twenty years old. The U.S. Agency for International Development has been a strong provider of democracy assistance since 1989.

Skeptics in Europe and the rest of the

world are learning that external factors can play a positive role in developing democracy. Europeans now realize that the recent elections in Iraq and U.S.-led pressure for democracy in the region and elsewhere are effecting change. Pictures, whether on CNN or al-Jazeera, of democracy's progress in countries whose inhabitants were so long denied the right to march, to speak freely, or to choose leaders and policies, have a great impact in Iraq, the region, and beyond. There is a growing recognition in Europe and elsewhere that democratic desires cannot be denied and must be met by support for the democrats and pressure on the non-democrats.

Europe surpassed the United States in democracy assistance funding at the start of the decade. In 2000, European OECD countries spent $1 billion more than they had five years prior, while U.S. funding for government and civil society programs actually fell by nearly $400 million. In addition to the funds provided by individual European countries, the European Commission (EC) began providing more significant support for democracy. By 2003, democracy assistance from Europe, including the EC, totaled more than $3.5 billion, or nearly half of global democracy funds and slightly more than double U.S. spending.[10]

Still, days before his mandate as EC External Affairs Commissioner ended in November 2004, Chris Patten told officials from the Club of Madrid: "Europeans want to play an active role internationally; they just don't want to pay for it." The truth is that Europe has been focused more on European integration than on exporting democratic development. Much of the European Union's democratic reform assistance has gone to membership candidate countries. Democracy promotion is, thus, more a mutually reinforcing part of European integration then an end in itself.

Although Brussels currently spends more on democracy promotion than does Washington, Europeans are not always comfortable with the concept of democracy promotion. Consequently, Europe often hesitates to support democrats fighting against autocracy or, on the other hand, to condemn autocrats for fear of upsetting the status quo. In some cases, Europe formulates its policies in reaction to U.S. plans and actions. Policy differences with the United States should not be about whether or not to promote democracy actively. Particular governments, regardless of their own political leanings, should be committed to supporting democrats on the left and right. Too often the left supports only leftist movements against right-wing dictatorships, and the right lopsidedly throws its energies into assisting opposition to leftist autocrats. Democracy promotion must be an equal opportunity activity. Europeans should do more to share their rich and stirring experiences of transition and development with aspiring democrats and democracies, who welcome a menu of democratic policies and practices. Spaniards, for example, though proud of their recent history of democratic consolidation and economic transformation, are not fully aware of what an inspiring story like theirs can do to help those striving for change and better livelihoods elsewhere.

Last generation's European transition countries—Greece, Portugal and Spain—and the new democracies of Eastern and Central Europe should spend considerably more on democracy assistance in the coming years. The United States too could spend more. Bush has asked

Congress to double NED's budget. But even with a two-fold increase, NED's current annual budget would be less than what the Pentagon spends daily in Iraq.[11]

Opportunities for Effective Collaboration. The United States, Europe, and the broader international community now have a great opportunity to work together to promote democracy where it is weak or non-existent. Numerous organizations supporting the cause can strengthen democracy promotion efforts. Ken Wollack, president of the National Democratic Institute, often points out that much of democracy promotion is actually the encouragement of pluralism. Having only one organization or program working on democracy in any one place simply does not make sense.

In the Middle East, there are political reasons for the United States and Europe to work together. For its part, the United States' traditionally pro-Israel foreign policy has hampered its efforts in the region. In addition, Washington clumsily launched its Greater Middle East Initiative with almost no consultation with Middle Eastern governments and citizens. Europe, seen as a counterweight on the Israel-Palestine question, has its Barcelona Process for peace and development in the Mediterranean. The ten-year old program, though, is poorly researched and largely ineffective. Given the records of the United States and Europe in the region, there is now room for improved, consultative programs in support of peace, development, and democracy. Spain's proposal to the UN General Assembly for an Alliance of Civilizations might be one such route, but the United Nations must first adopt and further map out the idea.

Democracy in the Palestinian territories would have a more tangible effect on the region than even the rosiest conditions in Iraq. The democratic election of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and, even more importantly, the local elections in which Hamas is participating are positive signs. Democratic development in Palestine will be particularly powerful if coupled with a lasting peace agreement. A sustained ceasefire would deprive Middle Eastern autocrats, as was the case with the late Yasir Arafat, of their most prominent pretext for stalling on democracy: the constraints of Israeli occupation and ongoing conflict. Additionally, a stable, independent Palestine would force Palestinians themselves and their neighbors to focus on problems of corruption and on fostering representative government.

While governmental support is an important ingredient in democracy promotion, governments should not run the actual programs. Democracy assistance too easily falls by the wayside if other national interests intercede. Stability, oil, open markets, extradition cases, or friendly relations with less-than-democratic governments are among a host of possible conflicts. These conflicts hamper U.S. credibility with regard to promoting democracy in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, make for French foreign policies that are often detrimental to democracy in francophone Africa, and likely explain why Spain's new government just reassured Equatorial Guinea's dictatorship that it would not interfere with the status quo. But if non-governmental actors take the lead in democracy assistance, even with government funding, then the work will continue despite other, potentially conflicting, national interests. This is one reason that Tom Carothers has rightly encouraged the

United States to privatize its Middle East Partnership Initiative.[12]

The Isolated Hard Cases. It is not easy to provide external help when there is little or no political space in the country in question. In places like Belarus, Burma, Cuba, North Korea and Zimbabwe—to name a few of the toughest nuts to crack—the ruling regime has so repressed its people with a combination of fear and misshapen nationalism that dissent is nearly impossible. The regime does whatever it can politically, legally, or extra-legally to cut off viable points of contact. What little opposition exists is difficult to reach and, therefore, largely invisible. Yet, the outside world cannot ignore the democrats—the Payas in Cuba and the Aung Sang Suu Kyis in Burma—their parties and movements and those whose names are not yet well-known. The international community should strive to provide them with political oxygen, should they request it.

Here, governments can and must play a role. They must push tyrannies to open up and use all tools in the policy toolbox to encourage them, including funding democracy promoters when other aid is cut off. Democrats and democratic organizations in-country must also receive support so that they can point out injustices and cry foul when their repressive governments claim that cultural differences or security considerations mean democracy must wait.

Nor must democracy promotion efforts forget places where the democratic wave passed but where one or several undertows of weak institutions, battered parties, corruption, lack of economic progress, violence, and terrorism now threaten democracy's survival. In a recent meeting with the Club of Madrid on the state of democracy in Latin America, a United Nations Development Programme official recounted how he responded when asked the population of a city in which he had served: "There are six million inhabitants and 200,000 citizens." In order for democracy to be genuine, its fruits must be available to all segments of the population, and its citizens must feel they belong to and have responsibilities in a democratic society.

The Future of Democracy Promotion. The appeal for the world's democracies to work together on behalf of the two billion people still living without democracy began before and goes beyond President Bush's call for more democracy. Half of the European Union's member countries experienced a transition to democracy in the past thirty years. The European Union's new Central and Eastern European members will have a profound impact on EU engagement with democracy promotion. The Czech Republic of Vaclav Havel will continue to push for freedom and democracy everywhere, and he personally has taken up Cuba as a case of particular interest. The Baltic States will continue to petition for and help guide greater assistance to the other former Soviet Republics. Slovenia will do the same for its fellow former Yugoslav states. They all will demand that those fighting for human rights and democracy get the support they deserve. Changes in the Middle East, too, have roots before 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq.

The five-year old Community of Democracies (CD) is becoming a proactive forum for democracy promotion. In addition to convening its third ministerial meeting since its inception in Chile this April, bringing together govern-

ment ministers from more than 100 member countries, the grouping has recently sent democracy assistance delegations to East Timor and Georgia. Chile led the East Timor mission, which included representatives from such diverse democracies as Australia, Cape Verde, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, South Korea, and the United States. Likewise, Romania led a mission early this year to Georgia that included representatives from sixteen countries. Many smaller nations such as Estonia, Panama, and Mongolia, with fewer resources than the big democracy promoters, used their own funds to support the participation of their experts. Member countries also are calling for a Democracy Caucus within the United Nations and, along with the NGO-led World Movement for Democracy, are advocating for mechanisms to promote and sustain democracy in areas where these measures do not yet exist. The Club of Madrid is also actively supporting both forums for democratic action.

Successive waves of democracy will eventually make every country in the world an electoral democracy. Yet even an established democracy's work is never finished; witness the need for the United States to confront terrorism and redress the problems of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. Democracies in transition or those that face the specter of backsliding face even tougher challenges. Democracy promoters will not be out of work any time soon. To the contrary, democracy assistance will be vital until every country's inhabitants gain the rights and responsibilities to choose their leaders freely and subsequently demand accountability and transparency. As more inhabitants of the world's non-democracies insist on their right to democratic citizenship, the regimes in Burma, China, and Saudi Arabia, and the Castros, Mugabes, and Assads will see their ability to hold on to illegitimate power erode. Only when every last inhabitant is truly a citizen of democracy, will democracy's last wave have passed.

NOTES

1 Interview with foreign correspondents, cited in *La Repubblica*. 28 February 2005.

2 Interview with foreign correspondents, cited in *BBC Mundo*. 27 March 2005.

3 Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3 and 227.

4 Adam Przeworski, ed., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 9.

5 Ibid.

6 The FY 2006 budget looks set to be even higher. In recent Congressional deliberations, the House of Representatives cut Bush's $6.6 billion foreign aid request nearly in half and boosted funding for defense programs by $1.9 billion. See: "Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2006," published by the White House, Internet, http://www.whitehouse.gov/ omb/budget/fy2006/ (date accessed: 5 April 2005).

7 The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, Internet, http://www.ndi.org (date accessed: 5 April 2005).

8 Craig Smith, "West Plays Key Role in Kyrgyzstan," *New York Times*, 30 March 2005.

9 For Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) figures, Europe includes seventeen European OECD member countries: the EU-15, plus Norway and Switzerland.

10 All figures are from OECD Aid Commitment statistics.

11 The National Endowment for Democracy, Internet, http://www.ned.org (date accessed: 5 April 2005).

12 Thomas Carothers, "A Better Way to Support Middle East Reform," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Febuary 2005.