

Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum: December 10, 2002
***Democracy Promotion or “Democracy by Force”: Past Uses and Implications
for the Future.***

**Notes from the comments of Elizabeth Clark, Dr. Marina S. Ottaway
& Judith Yaphe**

Elizabeth Clark’s remarks focused on what she called the most powerful tool of democracy promotion: the desire of democratizing states to become members of regional and other organizations that have democracy requirements for membership. The EU is the most notable example of membership as a motivating factor for democracy promotion. Because of the attractive power of EU membership, many countries are eager to apply and therefore must meet certain democratic criteria. Turkey is a good example of a country that would like to join the EU and has been willing to make major changes to its current laws and practices in order to do so. NATO and the OAS are other organizations with strong attractive power that have democracy requirements for membership.

These democracy requirements create pressure for countries seeking membership because they ensure that certain international standards such as holding elections are met. Democracy requirements often have a strong focus on elections and election standards because “free and fair” elections are generally recognized as an essential element of democracy and because standards for “free and fair” elections are both specific and can be universally applied. One of the basic documents embodying these standards, the OSCE Copenhagen Document, covers pre and post election periods, not simply election day itself, so that a state meeting these standards will at the same time be taking steps to strengthen democracy more generally. In providing these standards, organizations such as the EU can work as a mechanism to “bring under the tent” shaky new democracies and then help stabilize and defend them. While tough “entrance” requirements is a powerful motivating factor for democratizing countries, less rigid standards for “entrance” to international assistance is also consonant with effective democracy promotion in states that have positive prospects for democratic development and can utilize international assistance effectively.

Ms. Clark explained that the next step in promoting democracy through democracy membership requirements, such as the EU has, is to find ways to strengthen the “carrots” being offered. For example, strengthening and expanding regional organizations with the potential to adopt democracy standards is one step toward this goal. In addition, organizations can rethink their democracy requirements and add to them. There are many questions to be raised about current democracy requirements. For example, what will be the standards for party participation in elections? Can a country keep some parties out of an election? What about parties that promote violence, parties that are anti-democratic, or parties that will entrench themselves in power and refuse to hold more elections? Should the practice of “democratically elected” leaders, such as President Chavez in Venezuela, to extend their terms of office through referenda, be considered “undemocratic” and unacceptable in terms of international standards.

Another possible tool for democracy promotion is conditional aid. This aid may have nothing to do with supporting the immediate process of democratization, but it would still

support struggling democracies by helping to create the institutions that are necessary for a stable democracy. An effective area of assistance to post conflict states seeking to democratize is security assistance, especially in the area of police training and assistance. This is an area that does not get enough attention as a subject of democracy promotion analysis.

Dr. Marina Ottaway began by pointing out a contradiction within the title of the forum, stating that “democracy” is not usually associated with “force”. She explained that the most important aspect of democracy is the existence of a countervailing power. Any stable democracy needs multiple parties that promote different agendas. She defined democracy promotion as an attempt by the international community to help develop this counterbalance of power, where political parties are strengthened and viable political organizations are created to underpin a democratic system. She defined democracy by force as an attempt by the international community to try to promote democracy – not by creating a domestic counterbalance – but by making up for the weakness of the domestic opposition through intervention. In this situation, the international community may force countries into democracy before they are ready.

Dr. Ottaway argued that there are benefits and dangers inherent in both democracy by force and democracy promotion. For example, one benefit of democracy by force, a much less studied concept, is that it accelerates the process of democratization in countries that are not moving toward this system on their own. However, forcing elections often leads to the formation of regimes that have only a façade of democracy and the danger here is that this may lead to the growth of semi-authoritarian regimes, which Dr. Ottaway believes will be the dominant phenomenon in the next decade. In these regimes, there is only one center of power and this power is never truly challenged in elections as the ruling government prevents its power from being called into question. Semi-authoritarian regimes that are superficially democratic often stem from attempts at democratizing countries by force, imposing the holding of elections prematurely, before the internal conditions necessary for a democratic system are in place. This raises the question of whether or not it is still better to have elections regardless of whether the necessary conditions for democracy are in place. Dr. Ottaway emphasized that the jury is still out on certain cases. Some countries, such as Croatia, are overcoming the semi-authoritarian model but many countries are not. The attraction of EU membership may play an important role in the case of Croatia. Different situations should be judged on a case-by-case basis.

In the case of democracy promotion, Dr. Ottaway stated that perhaps we have put too much emphasis on civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, and not enough emphasis on political parties or those groups that can help develop the countervailing power necessary in a democratic system.

Dr. Judith Yaphe discussed the case of Iraq, stating that both democracy promotion and democracy by force resonate with the Iraqi people. Dr. Yaphe explained that the Iraqi people understand the theory of democracy, but they don't see how to get there. They view the U.S. as having betrayed its own democratic image by historically supporting despotic regimes. To illustrate this further, Dr. Yaphe provided a brief history of the development of Iraq's political system, describing the creation of Iraq by secret agreement and its administration as a police

state. Iraq has no history of democracy and it has always been an authoritative regime. The first democratic institutions in Iraq came from the British who installed a king and set up a government with elections and checks and balances. This system removed some power from the Iraqi military, which had been the main source of power in the country up until 1960. Dr. Yaphe argued that the reason Iraq continues to search for an identity is the result of Iraq's creation as a "democracy by force". As the Iraqis try to create their own identity, they know what kind of government and governmental institutions they would like to have in their country, but they don't know how to implement them.

Dr. Yaphe then turned to the question of whether or not Iraq can or will be democratic in the future. One argument is that because tribes and tribal customs have been so important in Iraqi culture, Iraq is not ready for democracy. Political participation has not been equal, as illustrated by the Kurds and Shiites who in the past have remained outside of Iraqi politics because they did not want to align themselves with the Sunni leadership. Because these groups opted out of politics, they are now unable to exercise political power and the control of certain institutions within Iraq is exercised solely by the Sunni majority.

Dr. Yaphe argued that the biggest question currently facing proponents of democratization in Iraq is, who can replace the current leadership? Potential "new" leaders tend to behave in a manner consistent with Iraq's history of authoritarian leadership rather than according to democratic principles. If we let the opposition take control, there is nothing to indicate that they will be any different than the current regime. The possibility of uniting different groups could be very difficult, as coalitions have never survived in Iraqi politics. Iraq also has plenty of money from oil revenues, which makes it difficult to use increased foreign aid as a carrot for democracy promotion.

Dr. Yaphe explained that if the U.S. takes control of the Iraqi regime, this may allow time for the Iraqi people to decide what they want and need to do next. They may be more welcoming of a period of U.S. administration if it protects them from a second Saddam Hussein. Young Iraqis cannot remember a time before the current regime and they need to be involved in helping to establish political stability. Another possible scenario is that the U.S. goes into Iraq, ousts the current regime and then pulls out, leaving chaos behind. This is not an acceptable alternative. Dr. Yaphe emphasized that if and when the U.S. goes into Iraq, it must be prepared to stay and implement a transparent and accountable system to stabilize the situation and lay the groundwork for an Iraqi democracy.