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# Chapter 2: The International Context

## SOLIDARITY

Globalization has radically altered the context for democratization by multiplying awareness through greater ease of communication even within formerly closed or remote societies.

While each country experiences in its own way the passage toward the democratic form its citizens choose as most suitable for their own society, there is one point in common to all such passages: democracy cannot be imported from outside, much less imposed. Reform movements can only emerge from within societies.

Of course, the odds against them can often seem uneven. As US author Robin Wright observed, the contests between “inexperienced democratic activists with limited resources” and regimes “who have no intention of ceding control” can seem an “unfair battle”. While external support and mentoring of skills can help them succeed, outside allies and helpers should nonetheless always follow the lead of domestic reformers and agents of change.

International conventions and organizations promote the acceptance of human rights but ultimately these are subject mostly to circumstances within states. Moral philosopher Tzvetan Todorov pointed out in his Oxford Amnesty Lecture that the inhabitants of most countries derive their rights much more as citizens of states than as citizens of the world. The Community of Democracies counts as an important objective the strengthening of the capacity of states to assure the rights of its citizens.

Still, the “venerable practice of international solidarity” has been an important contributing force in the encouragement of democrats and the widening of democratic opportunities for citizens everywhere. In 1989, Vaclav Havel wrote to the International PEN Congress in Montreal which he was not permitted by Czechoslovak authorities to attend in person:

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“In today’s world, more and more people are aware of the indivisibility of human fate on this planet, that the problems of anyone of us, or whatever country we come from – be it the smallest and most forgotten – are the problems of us all; that our freedom is indivisible as well, and that we all believe in the same basic values, while sharing common fears about the threats that are hanging over humanity today.”

## A GLOBAL INFORMATION SYSTEM

Almost 20 years later, the revolution in information technologies and techniques has deepened the truth that all democrats are potential partners. The international reality, at least for those with the necessary means, is virtually free access to information from outside. The globalization of information encourages connections, awareness of norms elsewhere and the comparing of notes on best policies and practices. The young who are increasingly literate are especially connected with the outside.

Western radio and TV broadcasts hastened change in Eastern Europe; fax machines connected Chinese students to the outside world in 1989; text messaging a few years later mobilized popular demonstrations in South-east Asia; the Internet was pivotal in rallying widespread participation in civil resistance in Serbia and Ukraine, while Internet bloggers briefly enabled the world to witness the harshly violent repression in Burma of peaceful demonstrations.

In some constrained societies, even though moves to limit connectivity run counter to national interest in enhancing competitiveness, targeted efforts to restrict Internet access and close off sites persist, or flare up during periods of agitation or protest. In more technology-fluent societies such as China, such walls are frequently circumvented with the assistance of supporters outside, by the persistence and ingenuity of the more than two hundred million citizens who use the Internet. Nonetheless, many foreign news outlet sites or specific stories are periodically blocked by “The Great Firewall” created by the Chinese Government to keep Internet users from communicating freely with the outside world in an enduring effort to impose a considerable degree of censorship.

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## A NEW PARADIGM FOR DIPLOMACY

Once, the conduct of diplomatic relations was strictly on a state-to-state basis, conducted through private exchanges between diplomats and government officials. In recent years diplomacy as practiced by many democratic nations has “gone public” and has taken on more of a human face. For most democracies, the days are past when their Embassies were concerned only with maintaining “good relations” with the host government, irrespective of its character, as a former diplomat recalled of his mandate in Burma in the 1980’s, when human rights were not high in the hierarchy of Embassy priorities.

Today, Ambassadors and diplomats are much more likely to engage the people of the host countries and not only government officials, and to make consistent messaging on human rights and governance a central part of their country mission, as agreed with authorities at home. Moreover, diplomatic relations are only one international channel: everywhere, international networks of contacts are forming around issues, interests, and tasks, and have become the working landscape for internationalists and democratic activists.

The Princeton University project on national security, “Forging a World of Liberty Under Law” outlines as a common goal of democracies the support of “Popular, Accountable, and Rights-regarding governments (“PAR”)”. The approach eschews interference, but advocates that “the best way to help bring governments up to PAR is to connect them and their citizens in as many ways as possible to governments that are already at PAR and provide them with incentives and support to follow suit”.

It is in this spirit that in contemporary diplomacy, Embassies and Consulates become vehicles of public diplomacy and outreach, and brokers promoting contact and communications between the peoples and nongovernmental organizations and groups of both sending and host countries. Democracy development and human rights are among the most active topics of such communication.

In addition to encouraging and facilitating some of these connections, Embassies are called upon to promote and defend the rights of people to so communicate. They also intervene when necessary to defend and support threatened human rights defenders and democratic activists, either demonstrably in public view, or, as the case merits, privately, below the radar. The *Handbook* will illustrate the many ways this has happened in the past, including occasions when authoritarian governments attempted to intimidate or expel diplomats for such legal activity. In such circumstances, of course, it is essential that diplomatic initiative in support of human rights defenders and democratic activists be welcomed and even rewarded by the career culture of foreign ministries.

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## REVOLUTION, REFORM, AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT – CASE STUDIES

There is in practice a “right to be helped” as well as a “right to help”. The role of outsiders is never primary, but their support can be catalytic.

### All situations are different

Each country and situation is different. This *Handbook* is meant to be applicable in different ways to a wide variety of conditions. Diplomats of democratic governments have different challenges depending on whether they are assisting democrats living under repressive regimes, assisting fragile emerging democracies, including in post-conflict recovery conditions, or assisting recently transformed democracies to consolidate democratic gains.

But there are common patterns in how international solidarity benefits extended struggles for human rights and self-determination.

The *Handbook* documents peaceful transitions in self-governance, such as in Tanzania. It is an obligation of solidarity to support the wide array of countries, and civil society, in the difficult process of democratic development and consolidation.

The *Handbook* presents case studies of successful transitions from repressive societies to democracy, such as in South Africa and Chile. There, and in other countries where democratic activists had worked to end authoritarian

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conditions, transitions to democracy were greatly aided by opportunities over the years for democrats to develop their competence in law, economics, and other key areas of governance via access to programs administered internationally.

But the *Handbook* also presents case-studies of ongoing situations, such as in Myanmar and Zimbabwe where repressive regimes are seemingly indifferent to outside counsel, at least from democracies, and where diplomats operate in difficult circumstances of minimal productive communication with host authorities.

### International solidarity

International solidarity's support for civil society over time can also contribute to the resolution of short-term crises, such as protecting the integrity of early electoral processes in Ukraine.

Internal, domestic actions which were decisive in these and other struggles for democracy – the demonstrations, boycotts, and other forms of non-violent civil resistance – drew from a supportive external framework of psychological, political, and practical measures which circumscribed the options of non-democratic governments.

Inside activists and reformers often seek inspiration from models other societies provide, and take counsel from the comparable prior experiences of other reformers, most of which are relatively recent. After all, the consolidation of effective democratic systems is mostly a phenomenon of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, spurred by the aftermath of World War II, decolonization, the end of dictatorships in Greece, Portugal, and Spain in the mid-1970's, and most recently, the end of Cold War competition.

The Gandhian example of nonviolent conflict has served as a template for hundreds of millions of aspiring democrats. More recently, the experience of the Solidarnosc movement in Poland had immense influence beyond its region. Institutional example can be passed on, such as the Chilean effort to construct a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose model proved useful a few years later in South Africa. Their lessons are studied in turn in other post-authoritarian and post-conflict locales, such as Afghanistan, where a truth-seeking and reconciliation effort with the financial support of democratic allies is underway.

Positions taken internationally by outside democratic governments can be crucial. Not taking a position in support of democratic activists or reformers can also be negatively crucial. As the President of Venezuela Carlos Andres Peres once said, non-response can be a form of intervention.

Authoritarian regimes do try to claim legitimacy by pointing to support from countries reliant on them for security or other interests. It is important that democracies offset these claims via coordinated international action such as the targeted sanctions and arms embargos on the South African apartheid regime. These made its finances unsustainable, especially in regard to the expenses of equipping for war with front-line states. Sanctions can always be controversial because they can hurt the innocent in an oppressed society unless carefully targeted. In this case, the crucial factor was that external sanctions were demanded by South African anti-apartheid movements, the ANC and UDF.

As noted above, there have been many occasions when democratic governments and their representatives have protested the violation of human rights, as in Burma today, and have conditioned state-to-state cooperation (except humanitarian aid) on the modification of behavior. But it is vital for democratic governments to do more than episode-by-episode protest and maintain sustained programs of democratic development support, including ongoing dialogues with the host countries. Even many authoritarian regimes feel obliged to feign some reformist intentions. These can provide activists, reformers and diplomats with potentially valuable openings and opportunities.

In Chile, external support to civil society began with humanitarian action offering asylum to thousands of refugees after the coup d'état of September 11, 1973. For the next 15 years, the resulting diaspora of Chilean exiles kept the repressive political condition of Chile high in the consciousness of democrats everywhere.

In consequence, trade union movements in Europe and North America, political parties, such as European social and Christian democrats, and individual political leaders such as German Chancellor Kohl or Senator

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Edward Kennedy provided Chilean citizens with confidence that they were not alone in the struggle which began to build up against the Pinochet dictatorship's repression.

### Sustained support for civil society

In such struggles as Chile or South Africa, broad-based coalitions of activists and reformers were able to come together as allies in seeking a democratic outcome for their country with the encouragement and assistance of links forged with civil society outside. Local groups formed around the issues of women's and youth rights, ecological protection, a free press, culture, and professions such as law or architecture, have had the support of the extensive international networks of foundations, agencies, and organizations in democratic countries with a mandate to promote contact and democracy development across borders.

There have been many efforts by authoritarian regimes to ban outside financial and other assistance from foreign governments. Outside advocacy groups and organizations benefit from some government financing under growing democracy support programs, but their independent operation in the field should necessarily be at arms' length to government, which in any case often enhances their effectiveness.

Democracy-building and the pursuit of human rights are secular political issues for the vast majority of activists. But it is not surprising that the sense of values at the core of democracy support in foreign policy has also helped enlist church groups in promoting human rights. Particularly noteworthy was the expulsion of the South African Dutch Reformed Church from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches which deepened the sense of isolation felt by those parts of the public on whose support the apartheid regime relied. The Roman Catholic Church played a central ethical and practical role in comforting opponents of the dictatorship in Poland, Chile and the Philippines. Buddhist monks' are at the forefront of opposition to dictatorial rule in Burma, and in support of human rights in Tibet today.

## **ELECTIONS**

Although there is much more to democracy than free and fair elections, the right of people to freely choose their representatives in government is a basic requirement of democracy.

International agencies help and advise in the technical organization and administration of elections, as well as the elaboration of electoral laws. Several development assistance programs support projects designed to assist and engage greater public understanding of how citizens benefit from and participate in the electoral process.

Such regional or inter-regional organizations as the European Union, the OSCE, the OAS, or the Commonwealth of Nations, prescribe democratic practice as a pre-condition of membership, and monitor and verify elections as free and fair or not. However, some OSCE members pay only lip service to democratic practice. They even contest the organization's prerogatives to verify their elections, some of which have not been judged free and fair.

A highly successful international experience in election support was the ASEAN-led "Friends" of Cambodia exercise before, during, and after the first Cambodian-run multi-party elections in 1998, including the establishment and counseling of an inaugural National Election Commission. Indonesia and the Philippines headed a multi-nation group and with prominent Japanese involvement, brokered talks to permit all political leaders in exile to return to participate. The elections resulted in a hung Parliament and diplomats encouraged and helped King Sihanouk then broker a negotiated and stable political outcome.

When elections are at risk of being manipulated, a full range of international contacts and experience in mobilizing civil society can come into play. Ongoing NGO contacts had a key role in electoral crisis management such as occurred in Ukraine in 2004, or earlier in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, and Georgia, and later in Kyrgyzstan. The 2008 Presidential elections in both Kenya and Zimbabwe have been especially challenging. These experiences have shown that it is important to help emerging democracies to do more than mimic election management techniques: human rights need to be embedded in law. Effective mechanisms for mediation of conflicts need to be established to ensure post-election stability. And office-holders need to habituate themselves to the competition of those who legitimately oppose them, which does run against the grain of custom in many societies.

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The success in redeeming the election's integrity in Ukraine was due to the democratic and reform movements' mass protests and pressures, but sustained international support over time from governments, Embassies, and people-to-people NGOs was also important, as the *Handbook* case-study on Ukraine will demonstrate.

## DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

To repeat, holding elections represents only the starting point for democracy. In some cases, election winners once in power are tempted to limit democracy or slide back toward outright autocracy. "One person, one vote, one time" was a slogan skeptical of democracy in South Africa, but sadly has described a tendency elsewhere which has had deeply corrosive effect on public morale which can endure for many years. As opposition leader in Zimbabwe Morgan Tsvangirai, has pointed out, a political culture of abuse and corruption can outlive any specific authoritarian leader, as beneficiaries seek to consolidate and perpetuate their dominance.

This underlines the need to sustain a dual time-frame to democracy development: the short-term challenges and opportunities of free elections, and the longer haul of democratic consolidation which requires democratic support to continue long after the first elections are held.

Most fledgling democracies do not need to confront armed resistance to democracy. But their challenges are nonetheless daunting. There is a "legitimacy moment" when a new democracy needs immediate support. But new and fragile democracies also need sustained assistance. To cite a contrary example, in 1996, Sierra Leone managed fair and successful elections despite the efforts by a rebel rejectionist army to block them. However, the development assistance needed to consolidate the fragile democracy was not forthcoming even though resident Ambassadors of potential donor democracies tried to persuade their capitals of its importance and urgency. The brave democratic experiment under President Kabbah fell within a few short years to the armed rebels bent on seizing power. (Progress toward democracy has since been restored, as illustrated in the case-study attached.)

The establishment of the International Centre for Democratic Transition in Budapest, endorsed by the Community of Democracies at its Biennial Conference in Santiago in 2005, was designed to aggregate 20 years of efforts by the international community to support democratic societies by offering to aspiring democracy activists the experiences of successful transitions, and to help those in transition consolidate their gains. Over those 20 years, errors of foresight and misplaced emphasis abound, but lessons have been learned.

What is clear, as Fareed Zakaria has warned, the "long, hard, slog" of democratic consolidation means that donor and partner democracies must accept "constant engagement, aid, multilateral efforts and a world not of black and white, but of grey." The citizens of the new democracies are the ones who will bring clarity and definition to their society. External support can play a secondary role in helping to provide them with the greater capacity and means their development process requires, but its design aims at enabling them to choose their own government representatives and policy goals. As Salvador Allende predicted for Chile, it is the people who make history.

Successful democratic transition has been realized on every continent. No people anywhere should be judged as incapable or ineligible for ultimately settling their own destiny, nor judged as "not ready" as has happened in Hong Kong.

## WORKING TOGETHER

The effectiveness of democratic development support is enhanced when democratic partners work together.

Such concerted action – representation on human rights, or activity in support of democratic development – is what the Community of Democracies members' diplomatic Missions can aspire to achieve on the ground. The succeeding Chapter on Toolbox applications is meant to spell out the ways such efforts, coordinated and individual, have succeeded, or not, in the past.

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