

Robert Cooper

Exporting Democracy

Voices in the US administration are sometimes heard explaining that they're going to "export democracy" to Iraq like they did in Japan and Germany after the war. This misunderstands both Japanese and German history. Germany was a country with very deep democratic traditions – there have been Burgomeisters there for centuries - where democracy was waiting to emerge. The Weimar constitution was highly liberal, one of the first in Europe to give women the vote. So the idea that democracy arrived in Germany in 1945 is a mistake. Equally, the Japanese state had progressively liberalised under the Taisho period when there was a certain flowering of democracy. The US should take credit for its extraordinary land reform that redistributed wealth to tenant farmers, but to take credit for the flourishing of democracy after the war is a bit much.

Can democracies develop without outside intervention? South Korea moved from a military dictatorship to democracy on its own, not as a result of great encouragement from anyone outside, in spite of the presence of American troops. Thailand has been more of a success story: there have been a couple of opportunities recently for the army to intervene in Thailand and they didn't take them, which shows, although it's imperfect, democracy is pretty well established. In Indonesia you could say that the IMF brought democracy – I don't think that was intentional but it had that effect. In South Africa, it was the international business community that forced change. The most reliable systems of government for capitalists are probably democratic because people don't like investing in places where they don't trust the court and the law. In Spain, Portugal and Greece no external forces were responsible: those countries did it themselves but the European environment certainly helped. In Central and Eastern Europe it was the *non-intervention* of Russia that brought democracy.

I would be tempted to conclude that democracy is not on the whole brought by armies. I should add a caveat: there was a counter-example to that in the Falklands War. Though it was not fought to bring democracy to anyone, the defeat of the Argentine military during this war led to a democratising "domino effect" throughout the military dictatorships of Latin America. This was definitely not the intention of the British Government, but it seemed to work.

And what of western interventions? There is a good chance of democracy in Bosnia sometime – it's taking a very long time but you can feel that the state is becoming more stable. If anything they have too much democracy there at the moment with endless elections and endless authorities, people are tired of them. It shows that they are reaching the place we are. Kosovo is a bit more difficult but, again, there's hope, and this will happen within the framework of the European Union. If there is democracy in Afghanistan it's not going to be democracy along the lines of the Westminster model, the French model, or the American model. But certainly it will be far better than what was there before. I don't think that Afghanistan is a big success at the moment. There is a lot that needs to be done there – people need to forget about tackling the symptoms, which are terrorism and drugs, and tackle the disease, which needs a stable and strong authority in Afghanistan. And I wish that the West would set itself that as a strategic objective more clearly. So, the only two conclusions I can draw from these disparate experiences is that countries introduce democracy by themselves, not through a foreign army, and secondly, history is full of surprises.

Robert Cooper is Director-General for External and Politico-Military Affairs for the European Council in Brussels, and writes in a personal capacity. Extracted from his address at the Foreign Policy Centre event Liberal Intervention: Empire's New Clothes on Saturday 26 July, St Leonard's Church, Shoreditch.