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The Role of International Democracy Promotion in Canada's Foreign Policy



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Summary

Democratization is a complex process, especially under conditions of conflict. Even those who support international democracy assistance usually concede that long-term success in achieving sustainable democracies depends largely on efforts within the societies themselves, and cannot be externally imposed. In this study, Gerald Schmitz examines the important, though still modest, role that Canada has played in supporting democratic development abroad and suggests some directions it might take in future.

Canada's initial involvement was shaped by circumstances in the 1980s, when some Western donor nations, notably the United States, established large democracy promotion programs. While Canadian public opinion tended to be wary of ideological rationales for such aid, the federal government was spurred to act by parliamentary reviews of foreign policy and development assistance. Compelling arguments were advanced to make democratic institution-building an integral objective of Canada's contribution to international cooperation. In 1988, Parliament created the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (now Rights & Democracy), a nonpartisan organization. At the same time, government departments and agencies, notably CIDA and Elections Canada, became increasingly active in the field.

Gerald Schmitz provides a detailed review of the origins and evolution, through the 1990s, of a Canadian approach. The *Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance*, released in 1996, remains the basic template for most official assistance (CIDA 1996). Yet by then the bloom was off the early post-Cold War enthusiasm for the enterprise of peace- and democracy-building. Deadly conflicts were proliferating, many within states; assessments of the prospects for promoting democracy were becoming more sober; and major donors' democracy aid programs were increasingly being subjected to criticism — on a variety of grounds. The exposure of deficiencies has not invalidated the normative case for providing democratic development assistance. But it has underlined just how difficult it is to achieve sustainable and measurable progress in the field.

Now, in the new century, there are more actors than ever with a stake in the outcome of the enterprise, and new conflicts, particularly in so-called "failed states," have to be taken into account. Canadian policy-makers are confronting the "real world of democracy promotion," one in which troubling complexities keep being added to familiar dilemmas. Schmitz notes that Canada's endeavors in democracy assistance, while remaining quite limited, have earned international appreciation for their pluralistic and moderate orientation. At the same

time, some within and outside government argue that Canada should go further than its current activities and take on a stronger role with a higher, more visibly Canadian, profile. As an example of this new approach, Thomas Axworthy and Leslie Campbell propose that a “Democracy Canada Institute” be established at arm’s-length from government, but with substantial public funding and working closely with Canadian political parties.

As analysts and policy-makers look back on our mixed record since the 1980s and ahead to the daunting challenges of democracy-building, Canada’s role is once again in question. What should be the nature, scope and ambition of that role? In examining these issues, Gerald Schmitz concludes that now, in the context of an ongoing comprehensive review of Canada’s international policies, is an opportune time for a public debate on the extent and nature of our contribution to international democracy assistance in the years to come.

Résumé

La démocratisation est un processus complexe, en particulier lorsqu'elle se déroule dans des situations de conflit. Même ceux qui appuient l'aide internationale à la démocratie admettent habituellement qu'à long terme, le succès des démarches visant à construire des démocraties viables dépend en bonne partie des efforts menés au sein des sociétés elles-mêmes et ne peut être imposé de l'extérieur. Dans cette étude, Gerald Schmitz examine le rôle important, bien qu'encore modeste, que le Canada joue pour appuyer le développement démocratique à l'étranger, et propose certaines orientations pour l'avenir.

Les premières démarches du Canada dans ce domaine reflétaient le contexte des années 80, alors que certains pays donateurs occidentaux, en particulier les États-Unis, ont mis en place de vastes programmes de promotion de la démocratie. Bien que l'opinion publique canadienne ait tendance à se méfier des arguments idéologiques avancés en faveur de ce genre d'aide, le gouvernement fédéral s'est décidé à agir à la suite des examens de la politique étrangère et de l'aide au développement menés par le Parlement. De puissants arguments ont été invoqués pour faire de la consolidation des institutions démocratiques un objectif de base de la contribution du Canada à la coopération internationale. En 1988, le Parlement a créé un organisme non partisan, le Centre international des droits de la personne et du développement démocratique (maintenant appelé Droits et Démocratie). Au même moment, divers ministères et organismes gouvernementaux (l'ACDI et Élections Canada, notamment) devenaient de plus en plus actifs dans ce domaine.

L'auteur analyse en détail les origines et l'évolution de l'approche canadienne au cours des années 90. La *Politique du gouvernement canadien pour l'ACDI en matière de droits de la personne, de démocratisation et de bon gouvernement*, rendue publique en 1996, reste le modèle de base s'appliquant à la majeure partie de l'aide officielle. L'enthousiasme qui, après la fin de la guerre froide, s'était manifesté en faveur de la consolidation de la paix et de la démocratie, avait toutefois commencé à se refroidir à ce moment-là. Des conflits meurtriers se multipliaient, souvent à l'intérieur d'un même État, les prévisions relatives au succès éventuel des efforts de promotion de la démocratie devenaient plus réalistes et les programmes d'aide à la démocratie des grands donateurs étaient de plus en plus critiqués, pour diverses raisons. La révélation de ces carences n'invalide en rien les arguments normatifs en faveur de la prestation d'aide au développement démocratique, mais elle montre à quel point il est difficile de réaliser des progrès durables et mesurables dans ce domaine.

À l'aube du siècle actuel, les acteurs qui ont un enjeu dans l'issue de ces efforts sont plus nombreux que jamais, et il faut tenir compte de nouveaux con-

flits, en particulier dans les États fragilisés. Les autorités canadiennes doivent composer avec la réalité de la promotion démocratique, c'est-à-dire avec de nouveaux éléments complexes et troublants qui s'ajoutent sans cesse aux dilemmes déjà familiers. L'auteur souligne que les démarches canadiennes dans le domaine de l'aide à la démocratie, bien qu'elles restent plutôt limitées, se sont néanmoins mérité l'appréciation de la communauté internationale en raison de leur orientation pluraliste et modérée. Par contre, aussi bien au sein qu'à l'extérieur du gouvernement, certains estiment que le Canada devrait aller au-delà de ses activités actuelles pour jouer un rôle plus vigoureux et adopter un profil plus visible et plus visiblement canadien. Un exemple de cette nouvelle approche est la proposition faite par Thomas Axworthy et Leslie Campbell en faveur de la mise sur pied d'un « institut canadien de la démocratie » qui serait autonome par rapport à l'État mais recevrait un financement public important et travaillerait en étroite collaboration avec les partis politiques canadiens.

Alors que les analystes et les décideurs considèrent les résultats mitigés obtenus depuis les années 80 et se penchent sur les difficultés énormes qui attendent la tâche de consolidation de la démocratie, le rôle du Canada est de nouveau remis en question. Quelles devraient être la nature, la portée et l'ambition de ce rôle? En tentant de répondre à ces questions, l'auteur en vient à la conclusion que, dans le contexte de l'examen détaillé de la politique étrangère sous tous ses aspects qui se déroule présentement, la période actuelle est un moment opportun pour mener un débat public sur l'ampleur et la nature de notre contribution à l'aide internationale à la démocratie au cours des années à venir.

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Editor's Note

This paper is published as part of the International Democratic Development research program, a project that IRPP has undertaken to assess Canada's role in international assistance to democratic development. Over the past decade and a half there has been a proliferation of international assistance programs of this kind in which Canada has been an increasingly active participant. The objectives of the project are to establish how Canada can contribute most effectively to the collective international effort to assist democratic development and to determine best practices for delivery of Canadian assistance. To achieve these objectives, Canadian policy and programs need to be located in the context of the activities of the international donor community as a whole. All of the papers will be developed from this comparative perspective.

In *International Assistance to Democratic Development: A Review*, a working paper that introduced the project, I pointed out that assistance in this area poses distinctive challenges that the entire community of international donors has not yet satisfactorily dealt with. In this paper Gerald Schmitz discusses the origins and evolution of Canadian policy in the context of these challenges. Dr. Schmitz is eminently qualified to undertake this task as one of the first researchers to write about the emergence of democracy promotion as a goal of Canadian foreign policy. His paper provides valuable perspective on the issues that future papers in the series will address.

George Perlin
Project Director

"The world," Moses Coady once observed, "calls for a real democratic formula to bring life to all its people. It is not going to be done by guns, making armies or bombs, but a program in which the people themselves will participate. This is democracy not only in the political sense but it is participation by the people in the economic, social and educational forces which condition their lives." (Wiwa 2003)

Democracy represents more than institutions and elections. At its most fundamental level, democracy is based on a diffusion of power in government and in society...Although it can be encouraged from outside, democracy is best built from within. (Haass 2003, 139, 146¹)

Introduction: Sober First Thoughts on the Contested Context of Democracy Promotion

Processes of democratization, and therefore efforts to advance democracy by assisting such processes, occupy some of the most complex, difficult and contested terrain that can be imagined today — both in terms of theoretical understandings of what we, and others, mean by “democracy” and “democratization,” and more concretely in terms of the feasibility of democratization goals under highly varied, and often problematic and uncertain, geopolitical circumstances. Consider just for a moment the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq, which have recently jumped to the forefront as the largest recipients of Canadian international assistance. The democratic prospects of more traditional recipients such as Haiti are hardly easier to contemplate. As Jane Boulden’s (2004) and Ann Fitzgerald’s (2004) contributions underline, the daunting nature of the relationships among security, peace-building and democratic governance objectives challenges the ingenuity of states and international policy-makers as never before.

Canada’s experience with the complicated enterprise of assisting democratic development is less than two decades old, and still very much a work in progress. If the hope is to advance the pursuit of such objectives, there is a need to reflect on the paths already travelled, on the current state of the debate over democratic assistance, and on future possibilities.

As indicated by the opening citations, the goals of democracy promotion often appear superficially similar in affirming the virtues of participatory self-government by, of and for the people. Who could be against advancing aims that are widely perceived as manifestly a good thing? Such an apparently benign consensus may, however, disguise critically important differences.

The vision expressed in the quotation from the Canadian educator Moses Coady, a founder of the cooperative movement, indicates a concept of democracy that integrally links socio-economic participation rights and political participation rights. Moreover, it makes the participation of ordinary people in the act of self-government a fundamental element of the democratization process, not merely a desirable attribute of uncertain feasibility. In this respect, democracy is never a gift that can be bestowed from above or outside. Although under certain conditions the growth of democracy in a society may appropriately be supported externally, the essential building up of that democracy should always be a process that is generated and owned from within.

At least some leading US government policy-makers might agree in principle, if the second quotation from Richard Haass is to be taken at face value. Yet the entry of Western aid-granting governments, and notably the world's most powerful state, into the enterprise of democracy promotion in recent decades has brought with it a great deal of other baggage. As reviewed by George Perlin, the field of democracy promotion has also enormously expanded, with a proliferation of bilateral, multilateral and non-governmental actors engaged in a myriad of "democracy assistance" activities to the tune of over US\$3 billion annually (Perlin 2003, 13). Although some might consider that a small price to pay in a good cause, the doubtful results have spawned numerous critics.

The US approach has not surprisingly been the most contested, given that the US is by far the largest single donor and has tended to use aggressively pro-democracy rhetoric (not necessarily democratic methods) backed up by unrivalled economic and military power. Americans themselves appear to be uneasy about how that power is used to intervene on democratic grounds.² More broadly, from the Cold War to the current focus on the Middle East, many have criticized the justification for large-scale "pro-democracy" interventions because of their ties to strategic state and economic interests, notably those of the big powers.

A case in point is the fall 2004 issue of *Foreign Policy* in which editor Moises Naim contends that the cause of democracy promotion has become an "intellectual casualty" of the wars spawned by the "war on terror," and historian Eric Hobsbawm argues for including "spreading democracy" as among "the world's most dangerous ideas." Even *The Economist*, which supported the Iraq war, greeted the June 2004 G8 initiative to promote democracy in Arab countries with a pointed note of skepticism:

Western donors, including America, have long used aid to promote "democratization," "good governance," and "transparency." But results have been scant, largely because recipient governments know their benefactors would prefer stability to the political unrest that might produce, say, a flight of refugees to Europe or — ouch! — costlier oil. ("Democracy for Arabs" 2004)

These considerations are highly relevant to the international context within which any examination of the role of democracy promotion in Canadian foreign policy, past or future, must be situated. Just as President Reagan's "democracy crusade" in the 1980s was predicated on the existence of an ideological enemy and an appeal to vital security interests as well as values, the threat posed by Islamist extremism and the dearth of democracy in much of the Muslim world — notably the Arab Muslim countries of the Middle East — is reanimating a democracy-promotion agenda directed at regimes and societies that are seen, in a post-September 11 world, to constitute grave risk factors from the standpoint of Western interests and values. Parallels have been made between President George W. Bush's proposed "Greater Middle East Initiative," proclaiming that there is a "historic opportunity" for the G8 to push for democratic reforms across that much-troubled region, and the Helsinki process that preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall.³

Such strategic calculations can be dangerous in themselves, raising stakes and expectations to unrealistic heights, or worse, backfiring in ways that leave frustration and instability in their wake. The same caveats could be applied to the ambitious calls currently being made for democracy promotion on a grand scale: for example, on the interventionist Right, to use the collective might of the world's democracies to get rid of dictatorships (Palmer 2003);⁴ on the interventionist Left, to undertake a campaign of "preventive democracy" as an alternative to notions of a "preventive war" against terrorism (Barber 2003).⁵ Some enthusiastic proponents even speak of "the need for democratic imperialism," though they are usually stronger on the universal application of democratic and human rights principles in theory than in practice (Spagnoli 2003, 25-6).

There may indeed be postwar contexts so severe, or societies in which civil rights are so repressed and civic consciousness so underdeveloped, that good arguments can be made for the forceful application of external pressures and the intervention of a guiding hand in the creation of basic democratic institutions. Exceptional circumstances may call for exceptional measures. They can also be misleading as a guide for general policies.

At a time when influential voices are again being raised calling for Canada to commit to a more robust program of democracy assistance (notably Axworthy and Campbell 2004), it is well to recall that Canada's so far rather modest and cautious approach on this front was initially forged in the crucible of the democracy "crusades" of the 1980s. The Canadian approach, as it was debated and formulated in those years, had good reasons to be extremely wary of the motivations behind great-power involvement, and more broadly, of paternalistic rationales presuming that democracy was yet another area of progress in which there were bound to be superior Western answers to the developing world's problems.

Accordingly, this paper begins by going “back to the future.” The first part of the paper reviews the formative period that made promoting democracy a stated objective of Canadian foreign policy and that produced Canada’s first foray into the democratic development arena. The agencies and instruments that emerged are still, by and large, those we have today; however, there has been a considerable evolution and expansion of democracy-building concepts, strategies and programs.

The middle part of the paper offers a Canadian perspective on how these evolving democracy-related objectives have been put to the test in the real-world environment. It also alludes to some of the international comparative lessons that are beginning to be drawn about the outcomes from a growing array of democracy assistance efforts.

The last part of the paper brings democracy promotion goals into the present context of making, reviewing, and hopefully renewing, Canadian foreign policy. This final section offers a provisional assessment of Canadian democracy-assistance activities and indicates directions that may merit further consideration.

Canadian Origins and Agencies: Creating a Centre for Democratic Development

Canada’s involvement in the postwar development of the international human rights system under United Nations auspices is long-standing and well known. As well, over these decades, Canada’s growing assistance programs to developing countries were broadly understood as supporting Western values of freedom and democracy — they were a “soft power” weapon in the struggle against Communism and other perceived threats to a liberal international order. Yet there was little analysis of the actual content of economic assistance programs from either a human rights or a political development perspective. That began to change in the latter part of the Cold War era, galvanized by both external and domestic factors.

Internationally, US President Jimmy Carter moved beyond the usual calculations of “realist” statecraft to put human rights concerns at the forefront of American foreign policy in the late 1970s. However critical one might be of the results of that approach, it seemed to inaugurate an almost Wilsonian, post-Kissinger phase of moralism in US foreign policy. Carter was followed by Ronald Reagan, who was unabashedly ideological in celebrating the virtues of American freedoms and democracy and in pledging missionary zeal in their defence and promotion abroad. The application of this zeal, sometimes by overt or covert military

force, notably in regions like Central America, polarized public opinion and provoked strong negative reactions. It also placed the issues of the rights (and wrongs) of promoting freedom and democracy higher on the international agenda.

In Canada, the attention to human rights concerns that arose in both the domestic and a foreign affairs contexts — adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1982 Constitution, and parliamentary examination of relations with Latin America in the early 1980s — carried over into subsequent major reviews of foreign policy as a whole and of aid policies and programs during 1985-87. In particular, as Robert Miller points out, the 1986 report *Independence and Internationalism* of the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations was instrumental in expanding the approach to human rights beyond familiar notions of protection of individual rights towards more developmental conceptions. The report affirmed that "Canada should contribute to the long-term development of political, civil and cultural rights as it now contributes to long-term economic and social development through the aid program" (cited in Miller 1989, 380; see also Miller 2004).

The parliamentarians went further, seeing the development of political rights as extending to democratic institution-building and recommending that the government create an arm's-length agency to pursue these combined human rights and democratic objectives — an "International Institute of Human Rights and Democratic Development." The Special Joint (Hockin-Simard) Committee recommended that this be done "with carefully prepared guidelines for supporting activities by non-governmental organizations. To ensure that the Institute is sensitive to the varying national perspectives on democratic development, particularly in the Third World, we recommend that its board of directors include international representation, on the model of the International Development Research Centre. Funding for the Institute should be provided as a small fraction of official development assistance funds" (105).

A year later, the landmark review of Canadian aid policies and programs by the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade (Winegard report), observed that: "The case for a pro-active, institution-building approach to democratic human rights development is more controversial than the traditional focus on human rights protection and redress. It is, however, equally compelling if we are serious about going beyond a narrow sanctions approach to help promote an environment where there is greater respect for human rights." The committee recommended that the proposed institute "carry out its distinct mandate as an independent, free-standing body working closely with Canadian human rights groups and non-governmental organizations" (House of Commons 1987, 30-1).

The parliamentarians' good intentions survived bureaucratic resistance, to be embraced by the Mulroney government. At the same time, there was an underlying Canadian aversion to anything that might smack of a heavy-handed "exporting" of our values. We, surely, were not about to become ideological imperialists overriding the sensibilities of others. It was apparent, therefore, that the mandate and operational mission of the new institution would have to be carefully crafted to reflect our more modest ambitions of supporting human rights and democratic development beyond our borders. To that end, the government appointed two special rapporteurs, law professor Gisèle Coté-Harper and political scientist John Courtney, to prepare the ground for the establishment of what was to become the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD).

The rapporteurs did their homework during 1987, surveying the field of existing human rights activity, both domestically and internationally. In addition to a growing array of multilateral bodies with an interest in this area, they found a perhaps surprising amount of activity already taking place at home; for example, work was being undertaken by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), other government departments such as those of justice, labour, and the solicitor general (including RCMP training for foreign students), Elections Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, university-based institutes, human rights organizations such as the Canadian Human Rights Foundation, development NGOs, churches, trade unions, cooperatives, and so on.

These scattered activities did not add up to a clear or coherent presence, however. And they were certainly greatly overshadowed in international terms by the large resources of private US foundations (e.g., Ford, Rockefeller) as well as the political-party-based funding organizations set up in several G7 countries — the German *Stiftung* and especially the congressionally mandated bipartisan National Endowment for Democracy (NED), established in 1983. At the same time, as others have described, the idea of providing public support for democratic development through the aegis of political parties was not one that appealed (Miller 2004; Axworthy and Campbell 2004).

The rapporteurs instead accepted the argument that a new innovative quasi-independent Canadian organization — with an internationalist orientation and presence, modelled on the example of the IDRC, which reports annually to Parliament through the minister of foreign affairs — could provide a needed focal point for increasing Canadian support to human rights development and institution-building in other countries. Their consultations also made them extremely leery of appearing to go down a very politicized and ideologically contentious American path of

explicitly promoting “democracy” through these good works. The reasoning used in the report they submitted to the government in the summer of 1987 deserves quoting at length:

Many of our interlocutors, notably those working in the area of cooperation with developing countries, and those involved in the protection and promotion of human rights internationally, have cautioned against the use of the word “democracy” and its derivatives in the formulation of the name and the mandate of an eventual institution. This terminology, they have reminded us, has acquired an ideological, political and cultural meaning which differs profoundly from one region of the world to another. Coming from a western industrialized country, it risks being interpreted as an intention to impose on our cooperation programs in this area our own concept of democracy. Others are concerned that it will be received as indicative of the philosophy of the present USA administration. It seems to us to avoid any such ambiguity – ambiguity which could prevent, furthermore, many groups which could benefit from Canadian assistance from seeking such assistance.

The notion of democracy we have adopted, and which we believe must define and inspire Canadian assistance in this area, is quite simply the participation of citizens in decision-making which affects their lives...The ultimate objective...is to assist the population to develop the ability to intervene on its own behalf in the decision-making process at the local, regional and national level and to assist the public powers to create institutions to safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens. (Côté-Harper and Courtney 1987, 24-5)

It is hard to imagine a less offensive or objectionable definition of democracy and how to assist it. Nonetheless, in the atmosphere of the times, the rapporteurs advised excising “democratic development” from the new centre’s title in favour of the anodyne “institutional development.” The government, in its wisdom, discounted that counsel and retained the parliamentary formulation. As observed by one of the idea’s prime movers, Robert Miller, virtually any aspect of human rights promotion could be subjected to similar controversy or ideological misuse. If Canada was going to try to support *democratic* development in the field, however problematic that might be, then it should not be shy about saying so.

The legislation establishing the ICHRDD in 1988 was nevertheless careful to anchor its mandate to the International Bill of Rights, not any particularly Canadian model of rights and democracy. The democratic aspect was seen as an added developmental dimension of helping countries receiving assistance to fulfill their international human rights obligations. Nonetheless, Miller saw in the

ICHRDD's dual purpose an unresolved tension between the temptation to interpret the mandate narrowly (staying safely within the established bounds of Canadian foreign policy) and the opportunity to provide backing for riskier forms of engagement such as working in solidarity with democratic popular forces and social justice movements. Moreover, he worried that a small centre might get caught up in the minutiae of micro-project funding, responding to a passing parade of human rights issues and constituencies, to little cumulative effect. As he put it:

Without a clear and compelling statement of mission, ICHRDD might become just a funder of competing conventional wisdoms, a human rights ambulance chaser in pursuit of the latest cause. Conversely, with a mission of its own, the centre can become a source of fresh thinking and a catalyst for practical Canadian assistance in human rights and democratic development...we think that ICHRDD should run more risk than diplomats are willing to run, which is why ICHRDD was created at arms-length from government in the first place. The point here is not to be bold or reckless, but to recognize that human rights development is inevitably a disturber of the status quo. Otherwise why is it needed at all? (1989, 378, 388)

The government's decision to locate the ICHRDD in Montreal rather than Ottawa (as the rapporteurs had recommended) perhaps signalled that it would enjoy a certain critical distance from conformist policy pressures; the trade-off being less direct interaction with federal policy-makers. Although the centre did not become fully operational until 1990, it also benefited from high-profile leadership in having prominent federal politicians as its first two presidents.⁶ Nevertheless, whatever the originators' ambitions for the centre might have been, it has remained limited by a comparatively tiny budget from the government, never more than \$5 million per annum (less than 5 percent of the IDRC's annual appropriation), spread over a hugely complex terrain.⁷ The centre remains tied to the annual federal budget purse strings, with few resources of its own, and one has the sense it has never been much loved by CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT),⁸ or looked to by officialdom as a source for innovative policy thinking.

No doubt the ICHRDD (which since the late 1990s favours the shorter name Rights & Democracy) has accomplished a good deal within its own terms, even as it has struggled to come to grips with the messy, contested and conflicted landscape of democratic development. Yet the dispersal of small resources — less than many NGOs — over a wide territory makes it difficult to establish and sus-

tain visibility in the public mind. Nancy Thede, as coordinator of its democratic development program, observed in her 2002 review of the centre's experience, that "[o]ver the ten-year period 1991-2000, Rights & Democracy disbursed \$8.6 million CDN in 337 democratic development projects in close to 50 countries. During that period, only four countries and regions had concentrated grant totals of over \$500,000 CDN" (12).

The ICHRDD has been subject to three statutory five-year reviews that have identified a number of areas for improvement. These exercises have tightened administration and spurred more focus on particular areas where the centre could develop solid partnerships. At the same time, Parliament, which gave birth to the centre, has unfortunately not paid much attention to its subsequent progress. The ICHRDD seems generally to fly under the radar of most parliamentarians, and most government officials, not to mention the media. When well-connected Canadian commentators call for the creation of some new democracy-promoting institution, as discussed in more detail in this paper's final section, little consideration is typically given to what the publicly funded Rights & Democracy has been doing for the past 15 years or, the issue of greater resources aside, to what this proposed vehicle would do differently and/or better.

Of course, in the current circumstances it would be fanciful to imagine a Canadian prime minister making a major policy statement to an ICHRDD gathering, as President Bush did in November 2003 on the occasion of the NED's 20th anniversary (National Endowment for Democracy 2003). It is also quite possible that most Canadians are quite content with the kind of agency that has an experimental, almost gadfly, role, and would not want to take on the kind of American-style mission and marshalling of resources on the scale that gets noticed in powerful places.

But before we get too far ahead of our story, suffice it to say that the arrival of the ICHRDD on the scene in the late 1980s had the salutary effect of directing attention to important issues whose surfaces the Canadian development aid community had hitherto only scratched. Furthermore, the enacting legislation enshrined, for the first time, the principle of supporting rights-based democratic political development abroad as an element, however fragile and small the instrument, of Canada's international relations policies. The example of the ICHRDD, coinciding with the passing of the Cold War and the promise of a new era in world politics, was also an incentive for existing federal departments and agencies (principally, CIDA, DFAIT, IDRC, and Elections Canada) to see how, with their much greater resources, they might also make an enhanced contribution to human rights and democracy promotion, linking Canadian interests and values to international goals.

The Evolution of Canadian Democracy-Building Concepts and Programming

While the creation of the ICHRDD was a cautious step forward in establishing democracy assistance as a modest formal aim of Canadian foreign policy, it did not bring with it much in the way of a “playbook” on how to “do” democratic development. Policies were only beginning to be articulated in any detail and then operationalized to the field level of decision-making and evaluation. Even in the case of the ICHRDD itself, it was not until 1993 that it elaborated a democratic development framework to guide its program and project decisions. That framework, as Thede’s 2002 review elaborates, has continued to be refined so that it includes more challenging participatory elements and partner-based perspectives.

In the case of CIDA, it also became heavily influenced by discourses gaining purchase among other bilateral aid agencies belonging to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD, multilateral UN bodies and, increasingly, international financial institutions (IFIs), notably the World Bank, that were waking up to governance as a factor in economic development failures and successes. NGOs, on the other hand, criticized what they saw as intergovernmental and elite-driven attempts to improve the capacities of state institutions to implement “neo-liberal” market-oriented reform programs promoted by donors, often to the alleged detriment of the poorest people and most vulnerable groups. In the NGOs’ counter-discourse, democratic development assistance must be about much more than good governance in the eyes of donors; it must above all strengthen the capacity of civil society actors to assert their rights and to exert genuine democratic control over publicly accountable institutions for managing the society’s resources.

Notwithstanding the contrasting perspectives, it is striking how terms such as “good governance” and “civil society” had become ubiquitous by the mid-1990s, compared to the more traditional language of political development and democratic government encountered in the documents of the previous decade. Of course, the meaningful content of such terms within a democratization agenda continues to provoke debate. (For useful analyses of these dimensions, see the contributions of Gillies 2004 on the application of governance criteria and of Franche 2004 on the role of civil society organizations.)

In the early 1990s, while directing a new program in human rights and democratic government at the North-South Institute (NSI), I collaborated with David Gillies (who went on to become the ICHRDD’s first policy coordinator) in preparing a study commissioned by CIDA to help it enter and find a way through

the thickets of the democratic development debate. The result was a book, *The Challenge of Democratic Development: Sustaining Democratization in Developing Societies*, jointly published by the NSI and ICHRDD (Schmitz and Gillies 1992). Probably we complicated as much as we clarified the issues confronting Canadian donor agencies in the field of democratic assistance. The book resolutely eschewed any how-to approach to achieving and maintaining simple electoral democracies. Instead it viewed democratization as an unfinished developmental process that permanently challenges all societies — including those considered “developed” — from an inclusive, rights-based perspective.

Beyond outlining an expansive agenda for democratic development, the book indicated particular channels for Canadian support to democratic institution-building: “good governance projects to strengthen state administrative capacities and bureaucratic accountability; strengthening formal democratic structures such as legislatures, judiciaries and human rights commissions; autonomous associations in civil society; and supporting political advocacy groups on issues such as human rights, the environment, indigenous peoples, and land reform” (92). It was thought that a natural division of labour might evolve among the Canadian institutions with capabilities in the field — DFAIT and Elections Canada looking after more procedural elements such as election observation (and the high politics of aid “conditionality” in the case of DFAIT); CIDA and the IDRC concentrating on good governance projects and the formal institutional infrastructure of democratic capacity-building; the ICHRDD (although its resources were described as “a drop in an ocean of need”) undertaking the more politically sensitive work with grassroots and advocacy groups. Among the sectoral priorities identified for civic institution-building were: “the media, trade unions, land reform movements, grassroots or pre-cooperatives, human rights monitors, environmental advocacy groups, women’s movements, legal aid groups, the churches, and urban popular movements” (96).

Although the sharpest democratic edge was given to the ICHRDD, the book insisted that Canada’s overall democratic assistance should not settle for a narrow proceduralist approach to democracy (as risked being the case with the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy at the Organization of American States⁹), arguing that: “Democratic development initiatives must go well beyond the confines of election monitoring...External support for democratic institution building should attempt as far as possible to work with institutions that the poor have themselves created...It is this component of promoting political participation that distinguishes democratic development projects from conventional aid projects” (1992, 95-6).

In a separate paper on governance issues (Schmitz 1991), also originally commissioned by CIDA, I was notably critical of their appropriation by the IFIs

in depoliticized, technocratic formulations that served these “global governors” (Culpeper 1994) in applying their economic prescriptions more than advancing democratic development (Gillies 1993; Schmitz 1995). I argued that good governance “is not some quick or simple administrative ‘fix’ which can be harnessed to a small number of economic policy considerations without affecting the larger picture. Inevitably, governance raises enormous issues of state and society, and of the deeply-held values of the political community.” Given that, it was essential to emphasize genuine participation and partnership. “We cannot come in with an engineered model that we then expect others to accept, and we cannot view participation by ‘beneficiaries’ as simply a useful but limited means of getting our dollars to work more efficiently.” And further: “The accountability which is sought should be first and foremost an accountability to ordinary people...rather than of political elites to other elites or of recipient to donor governments...to make governance projects more than a token element in the aid program would require very specialized knowledge of the political conditions and cultures within recipient countries, as well as a commitment to intensive partnerships that support political reform programs through thick and thin” (Schmitz 1991, 7, 38-9).

Ready or not, CIDA, like most other aid donors, gamely entered the field looking to fund promising projects with human rights, democratic development or good governance objectives — perhaps all three. The territorial range of Canadian international assistance activities also expanded as some “countries in transition” from the former Soviet Union joined the recipients’ queue as candidates for assistance supporting their reform processes. Within a few years, a significant inventory of projects had been built up that could be identified under a broad human rights and political development rubric, although no doubt the “reprofiling” of some pre-existing or ongoing aid activities linked to that purpose boosted the totals that could be claimed.

CIDA’s program in these areas was an admitted work in progress, as can be seen from the first attempts at cumulative evaluation (Rawkins and Bergeron 1994). A survey of “lessons learned” compiled for CIDA’s Policy Branch in 1995 found a number of shortcomings needing to be addressed (Brown 1995). This summary report acknowledged that it “is essential to have a sophisticated understanding of the political context” and to be able to “tap into local knowledge and expertise.” Yet “a principal weakness for CIDA tends to be analysis rather than information collection.” There was little analytical capacity within CIDA or strong corporate guidance translated down to the field level, even though “quality human rights and democratic development programmes are labour intensive in the field; strong staff input from CIDA field staff is essential.” One can see a problem, given the survey’s observation that “staff lack experience in programming in human rights and democratic

development; they lack confidence and feel at risk operating in a high risk sector within CIDA's risk-averse environment." Moreover, "staff draw on individual rather than corporate CIDA experience when designing new projects." Conditions for establishing sound programs should include careful determination of where Canada can make substantial long-term commitments (a 10-year minimum was suggested). At the same time, this survey's telling last point — which one might consider still apt today — was that "immediate tangible benefits to Canada are not clear: the media, politicians and CIDA may have unrealistic expectations" (Brown 1995, 2-6).

CIDA, like other agencies, was also grappling with how to get a better handle on what exactly it should be trying to support and what kinds of results it should be looking for from its funding efforts. A consultant's study paper prepared for CIDA discussion in 1996 argued for a complex approach integrating both quantitative and qualitative measures of human rights and democratic progress, with participatory methods of evaluating results at the field level of analysis (Kapoor 1996). There was a long road ahead to reach that point if one also accepted its sobering observation that the "development of performance indicators for human rights and democratic development either has not happened or is at best at an incipient stage. Human rights monitoring is more advanced than democratic development monitoring, but work here is almost entirely restricted to monitoring national trends and human rights treaty violations, as opposed to project monitoring and performance" (1, emphasis in original).

This paper makes the point, still valid according to Perlin's 2003 overview of the field, that there is no overarching "objective" or internationally agreed upon framework for understanding human rights and democratic development against which progress can be measured. And indeed, I would add, there may never be one. What is proposed instead is an "intersubjective" methodology involving the participatory development of indicators and which, though it has plenty of potential problems and pitfalls of its own, offers important advantages such as the following:

Because the measurement of political development requires collecting data that are not readily observable or expressible, participatory results assessment directly captures how (i.e., descriptively, not quantitatively) people feel about their rights, freedoms, (dis)empowerment or responsibilities. Legislative bodies and elections might provide important trappings of democratic development and empowerment, yet translate into little power for local communities in terms of access to or control of resources. Participatory assessments can be more sensitive, therefore, to subtle political change and to outcomes/impacts at the local level. (Kapoor 1996, 8, emphasis in original)

In light of the many complexities associated with implementing such an approach,¹⁰ this study recommended a range of measures to enhance CIDA's corporate and field-level capacities in carrying out and learning from evaluation experience in human rights and democratic development programming.

Meanwhile, CIDA was also moving to elaborate a more explicit policy framework for what had emerged from its various supporting activities as a virtuous linked trinity of "human rights, democratization, and good governance." Given that the early political impetus, and the creation of ICHRDD, had arisen out of extensive parliamentary foreign policy and aid policy review processes, it is perhaps surprising that this level of political attention was no longer apparent during the mid-1990s. The report of the 1994 Special Joint Committee Reviewing Canadian Foreign Policy did not go into any detail on the subject of human rights and democratic development assistance.¹¹ The government's foreign policy statement, *Canada in the World*, released early in 1995, affirmed as one of six program priorities for development aid "human rights, democracy, good governance: to increase respect for human rights, including children's rights; to promote democracy and better governance; and to strengthen both civil society and the security of the individual" (Canada 1995, 42). The full participation of women was also listed as a separate priority. But there was not much more to indicate how these priorities should be carried out in practice or how linkages should be made among foreign policy instruments.

The *Government of Canada Policy for CIDA on Human Rights, Democratization and Good Governance*, which was released in 1996 (and still serves as a basic template for the bulk of Canadian publicly funded activities in this area), attempted to put some flesh on these bones (CIDA 1996). It resulted from mainly CIDA-initiated consultations and has never been the subject of any specific parliamentary review. The nub of the policy is contained in the following statements:

Democratization builds the effective participation of individuals in decision making and the exercise of power in society, both through the formal processes of democracy, and through the organizations of civil society that give voice to popular concerns. Good governance ensures the effective, honest, equitable and accountable exercise of power by governments...

[T]he Government's policy is to enhance the will and capacity of developing country societies to respect the rights of children, women and men, and to govern effectively and in a democratic manner...

The fundamental principles are universal, although each society and each region crafts its own approach, drawing on its culture, history, and political and

economic legacy. Canadians and their government, through CIDA, play a critical but supporting role, drawing on our heritage. CIDA does not seek to export particular Canadian institutions and practices; rather, the Agency seeks to work carefully and sensitively with those in developing countries who are best placed to achieve positive change. (CIDA 1996, 3-4)

All of this seems quite laudable, even noble. Nonetheless, it is still largely in the realm of declaratory good intentions, and despite the reference to universal principles (most solidly grounded in the case of widely ratified UN human rights instruments), a companion part to the paper admits that concepts such as “governance” lack any “internationally agreed definition as yet” (1996, 22). Instead, another consultant’s paper on the subject found a plethora of formulations in use among international organizations, although certain elements such as “transparency,” “accountability,” “probity,” “participation,” and “effectiveness” crop up in almost all of them. The author also suggests that the definition of “good governance” offered in the 1996 policy statement “is restrictive, in that it reduces the concept to activities and power relationships that involve government alone. It does not consider the influence, needs, contributions and responsibility of civil society or the private sector.” She therefore advocates a broader view of governance that would “go beyond the theme of public-sector management and consider how all sectors of civil society can act as a catalyst” (Johnson 1997, 1-2).

Strangely, however, this study on teasing out further aspects of governance says almost nothing about the specifically *democratic* attributes of good governance (indeed the word “democracy” barely appears), unless these are to be inferred from references to objectives such as accountability and participation or to civil-society actors (though how do we know that those elements are necessarily democratic?). Even the statements and studies that speak a lot about democracy and democratization, and about governance as an “exercise of power,” tend to do so in a rather bland decontextualized way, as if with the right comprehensive development program we could (through participatory partnerships, of course) deliver a better world of stable, peaceful, democratic societies. We wish.

What is often missing from official bureaucratic formulations is attention to the untidy political details that we know are important from our own experience living in an existing, and still very imperfect, democracy. In turn, incorporating into democratic development discourse the multiplicity of evolving factors and diverse conditions affecting prospects for democracy poses dilemmas that are certainly not unique to the Canadian policy development

context.¹² How do we actually achieve governance that is more democratic? How do we alter entrenched unequal power relationships, much less those that are dangerously oppressive? How do we strengthen forms of democratic citizen engagement (at a time when fewer people are bothering even to vote in virtually all “developed” democracies)? What is the role of political ideologies, political parties, and other explicitly political means of democratic expression and deliberation? How do repressed, marginalized or excluded groups exercise their democratic political rights as citizens?

Comparative history and experience can teach valuable lessons, but there is no prescriptive manual that can obviate insertion into political contests and struggles for power that may unfold in ways very different from the congenially democratic directions that external donors presumably intended.

Before moving on, mention should also be made of one concrete, if circumscribed, area of democratic development assistance where Canada has been particularly active, namely supporting the conduct of free and fair elections, without which no democratization process worthy of the name is likely even to leave the station, much less arrive at more ambitious destinations. Elections Canada has accumulated a recognized expertise in this field, responding to requests from DFAIT, CIDA and international organizations. Describing Canada as “the Johnny Appleseed of electoral democracy,” one article on this work cites involvement since 1990 in over 300 missions to evaluate, assist or observe elections in emerging democracies and developing countries. Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley is quoted as saying: “Canada is second to none and per capita we are probably doing as much or more than anybody else” (Wilson 2002). Nor are the costs insignificant. For example, this article refers to total spending on democracy assistance reaching nearly \$40 million in 1998-99, and to individual activity amounts of \$1.7 million for elections in Haiti in 1997 and \$4.8 million for Jamaica’s 2002 elections (equivalent to the ICHRDD’s entire annual budget).

In an earlier essay detailing the extent and nature of this electoral support, Kingsley plausibly defends its rationale on democratic development grounds:

Free and fair elections are a vital element of democracy, and independent electoral administration is one of the building blocks. But elections are not the whole story. Elections conducted in conditions that fall short of freedom or fairness can undermine the notion of sustainable democracy and even limit its prospects. However, in those instances where there is a reasonable prospect of improvement, then there is reason to support elections. (1998, 232)

Canada and the "Real World of Democracy Promotion"

Almost 40 years ago, the Canadian political philosopher C.B. Macpherson reflected on the prospects for Western liberal democracy in a series of Massey lectures broadcast on the CBC and published in a slim volume under the title *The Real World of Democracy*. I recall it as being one of the first things I read in my political science courses. But there is more than student nostalgia or archival interest that makes it worth revisiting what Macpherson had to say in the last lecture on "The Near Future of Democracy and Human Rights":

The societies which can best meet the demand of their own people for equal human rights, equal freedom for their members to realize their essential humanity, will be the ones that survive. What I am suggesting is that in the world from now on, power and influence will depend on moral advantage. And I am suggesting that we in the West will decline in power unless we can discard our possessive market morality. Power-oriented as we are, this argument should surely be decisive...

If you want an operative conclusion, it is this: tell your politicians that the free way of life depends, to an extent they have not yet dreamed of, on the Western nations remedying the inequality of human rights as between ourselves and the poor nations. Nothing less than massive aid, which will enable the poor nations to lift themselves to recognizable human equality, will now conserve the moral stature and the power of the liberal-democracies. (1965, 66-7)

Recall that this was before CIDA had even been created by Canada's "Samaritan state," to borrow the title of Keith Spicer's 1960s study of the then very limited Canadian aid program. Now, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of alternatives to capitalist democracy, the decline in aid flows and the enormous expansion of financial markets, the assertion of US military "hyperpower," and globalizing trends spreading the gospel of Western liberalization throughout every corner of the world (though not without some resistance, backlash, and possible retrogression), Macpherson's crystal ball may appear cloudy and his admonition the quaint offspring of a bygone era.

Nevertheless, the linking of power to moral purpose retains its hold on the liberal internationalist imagination. All states have interests in preserving their power resources in the international system, but it is far from self-evident that promoting human rights and democracy in other states is the way to do that.

Without the addition of the moral argument — ideally based on universal principles but necessarily embedded in the nation's social values — the case for large-scale aid interventions on humanitarian, social justice, human rights or democratic development grounds rests on shaky defensive foundations at best.

The invocation of a moral imperative to help can also be problematic, however, since it can inflate matters beyond what actual policies and instruments could ever accomplish, whether that be American freedom and democracy “crusades” aiming to change the world, or NGO counter-discourses dreaming that “another world is possible.” The trajectory of democratic assistance expectations has covered a spectrum from exaggerated hopes to awful setbacks, generally landing somewhere in between, buoyed by modest successes but dampened by frequent disappointments, or at any rate, chronic uncertainty as to sustainable outcomes.

An early phase of enthusiasm for democracy promotion, coinciding with the passing of the Cold War, quickly gave way to the sobering realities of building democracy from the ground up in weak and often failing states. Just how bad things could get was underlined in the early 1990s by the horrors of the Balkan wars, the Somalia debacle, and the Rwandan genocide. In the decade since, sobering assessments have multiplied of official democracy aid, often criticized for doing little to bring about deep, long-term, reforms rooted in the indigenous political cultures of the recipient countries.

More critical attention has also focused on the challenges common to addressing a host of perceived “democratic deficits” in developed as well as developing or “transitional” societies — such as coping with the impacts of globalization, adapting new technologies such as the Internet to democratic uses, and responding to citizen demands for meaningful opportunities to influence government policies — i.e., promoting democracy's advance internally as well as externally. In this “real world of democracy promotion,” new complexities are always being added to old dilemmas.

Notwithstanding the initial promise that a post-Cold War era might produce a “peace dividend,” many of those complications also relate to continuing conditions of human insecurity around the globe. One of the first major comparative overviews of international democracy assistance, by a leading scholar of democratic transitions, Larry Diamond, was published by the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. The foreword to it by Commission Co-Chair David Hamburg begins by observing that: “In a world full of ethnocentrism, prejudice, and violent conflict, there is a vital need for core democratic values to resolve ethnic and religious conflicts and to prevent their escalation to violence. The absence of democratic mechanisms to sort out conflicts within a country often makes it easy for conflicts to spill over into violence” (1995, 1). Hamburg goes on to make points that sound almost Canadian:

Ultimately, pluralism is at the heart of democracy. Pluralism fosters the dynamic interplay of ideas, enterprises, parties, and a great variety of nongovernmental groups on the basis of reasonably clear, agreed-upon rules that reflect an attitude of tolerance, mutual respect, and sensitivity to fundamental human rights...

If democracy is viewed as an optional preoccupation of self-righteous democratizers – or even as an intrusive activity of sugar-coated neo-imperialists – then all this is much ado about nothing (or worse). But if we view democracy as a powerful and constructive mechanism for resolving the ubiquitous ongoing conflicts of our highly contentious human species, then the challenge become vital, and the opportunity precious. (1995, 2-3)

It is worth noting that the Aga Khan Foundation Canada has strongly promoted pluralism as being a particular Canadian strength, and has proposed establishing a “Global Centre for Pluralism” in Ottawa. Canada’s federalist, bilingual and multicultural experience is frequently held up as an example of a largely peaceful path to building an inclusive pluralist democracy. In her recent book *At Home in the World*, Jennifer Welsh cites the Aga Khan initiative and reflects on the value of pluralism in defining what she calls a Canadian “model citizen” approach. As she puts it:

My discussions with young Canadians suggest that while we hold the values of democracy, rule of law, and human rights very dearly, we are also deeply uncomfortable with the notion of imposing them on others. This is an aspiration associated with US foreign policy, and one that has resulted in charges of hypocrisy and imperialism. Canadians, it has been said, take other countries as they find them, rather than seeking to transform them. Nor are we confident in our ability to rebuild other societies overnight. Perhaps this derives from our own very gradual experience of building Canada – a process that we see as ongoing. Part of the magic of being Canadian is the recognition that our country is still a work in progress. With this recognition comes a sense of humility, but also a sense of empowerment that an individual can make a difference to the shape of his or her society...Canadians believe in and are committed to the appreciation of difference. (2004, 199-200)

Returning to Diamond’s wide-ranging report, it argues forcefully, no doubt mindful of an insular American public skeptical of the merits of foreign aid, that promoting democracy abroad is in the US’s as well as the global interest, a national security as well as a moral imperative. He claims that “democracy promotion programs tend to be unusually cost-efficient in financial terms,” and that

“prevention is far, far cheaper and safer than emergency response — whether in medicine or world politics” (Diamond 1995, 5). As I indicated earlier, citing Benjamin Barber, similar arguments are now being updated with a post-September 11 subtext.

Diamond also strongly defends an expanding array of players in the democratic development field: “Pluralism in outlooks, approaches, capacities, and foci has been a key factor in the success of democracy promotion efforts over the past decade and a half. Knowledge — gained and shared across cultures and borders — is indispensable to the effective design, practice, and improvement of democracy.” And in a refrain that should resonate in Canadian ears accustomed to promises to address domestic “democratic deficits,” he later adds that: “Ultimately the established democracies cannot be successful promoting democracy abroad unless they find ways to reform, repair, and revitalize their own democracies at home” (1995, 5). On that note, it is perhaps telling that a recent issue of *The Economist*, under the banner “No Way to Run a Democracy,” focused on flaws in the US electoral system (“No Way” 2004).

Compared to Diamond’s rallying call to action, another prominent American expert, Thomas Carothers, currently director of the Democracy and Rule of Law Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is much less sanguine and more circumspect in regard to both what has been achieved and what *can* be achieved (Carothers 1999). By the end of the 1990s, he acknowledged a mixed verdict: “Aid for democracy has travelled on a steep, often punishing, learning curve in the past two decades, but in fact is progressing...Aiding democracy is likely to become more challenging in the coming decades...Much new thinking and learning remains to be done concerning how to promote democracy in contexts where conventional transitions have failed” (Carothers 2000b, 199). Haiti was identified as one of those failed contexts.

Carothers sees some positive evolution in the now well-established “menu” of democracy aid programs directed at electoral processes, state and governance institutions, and support for civil society. He has been very critical of some patterns of superficial “electoral tourism” (1997), but concedes that election observing “has become much more sophisticated, and aid to improve the administration of elections has become a well-developed sub-field of its own,” although “political parties remain among the feeblest links in the democratization chain” (2000a).¹³ With respect to other parts of the formal political system (legislatures, judiciaries, etc.), Carothers argues that “democracy promoters have had a hard time giving up their fixed models and mechanistic notions about how to foster change in large institutions” (2000a).

The sector in which there has been the most prominent growth is that of aid to civil society, “because of growing enthusiasm for the idea and a certain

disillusionment with over-concentration on aid to state institutions” (Carothers 2000a). That increased attention has in turn provoked a harder look at the NGO world, raising critical questions of its own (Van Rooy 1998). While Carothers and colleague Marina Ottaway refer to this burgeoning world of civil society aid as equivalent to “funding virtue,” they doubt whether it can bear the freight of excessive expectations: “Democracy promoters wax enthusiastic about civil society, conveying a heady sense that they are ‘on to something’ and that civil society is the key that will unlock the door to democratic consolidation in the many countries that have embarked upon democratic transitions. But the modest level of funding for civil society assistance, the inherent difficulty of intervening in countries that donors only partially understand and of changing the fabric of society, and the continuing scepticism of even democratizing governments that NGOs have a legitimate role alongside elected officials all suggest that civil society assistance may not always live up to claims made about it” (Carothers and Ottaway 2000, 13-14).

In that regard, another of Carothers’ concerns is that evaluation of democracy promotion programs is an aspect that “has advanced the least...because of the difficulty of agreeing on precise criteria of success in the political domain and of establishing clear causal links between specific projects and larger political trends.” More generally, too, “Democracy aid stumbles most often in the implementation phase...Democracy promoters also have been slow to give up the belief that democracy can be promoted in a one-size-fits-all manner, and the belief that democracy promotion can be segregated from traditional development aid...A new mindset is needed: Democracy building is not something ‘we’ do to ‘them’ but something people in other countries do, sometimes with our help” (Carothers 2000a). And recently Carothers has also been notably critical of grand plans to “bring” freedom and democracy to regions seen as threatening Western security interests — notably the US “Middle East Partnership Initiative” and its proposals for a similar G8 partnership — as if whole societies and regions can be remade to suit an outside agenda so that people in the world’s most powerful countries can sleep at night (2003).

Carothers’ sobering analysis is useful in addressing the problem of managing donor-country expectations. As he puts it: “Democracy aid, as well as the complementary tools of diplomatic and economic carrots and sticks, can do little to change the fundamental social, economic and political structures and conditions that shape political life in other countries...democracy promotion must be approached as a long-term, uncertain venture” (2000a). That kind of awareness has also developed among Canadian aid practitioners. Already some years ago, then CIDA president Hughette Labelle summed up CIDA’s experience as follows: “Unless a country’s institutions work on a democratic basis, we can do many

things but they won't be sustainable. Social and politic stability are pre-requisites for the rest. We want to be seen as an ally who wants to support and help. We need to be there for the long-term. There are no quick fixes in difficult situations" (Labelle 1998, 97). And as she observed, from a Canadian standpoint, taking into account the situation of the intended beneficiaries in managing *their* needs and expectations from democracy assistance,

[f]or a programme to be successful, we must avoid incorporating our own cultural baggage into projects. As a recipient country, how much time is left for implementing a programme when you have been working with half a dozen donor countries, groups, and organizations, that have imposed endless conditions. Rwanda found itself in this situation. There is also the case of the work conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Mali. There you had twelve delegations a week, just from the UN and the World Bank alone, wanting to lend money and their support to the country. Now when you consider how many donor countries and organizations would be involved in a year, the coordinating becomes very hard. It is rare that we touch human rights and governance without working on a multi-sectoral, and multi-group level.

You also need to be careful when working with local groups and cultures. When an approach to decision-making is discussed, we should not try to sell what we have because we think it looks good. If we try to push for our brand of democracy, rather than the principles of democracy, then we are guilty of creating chaos and longer-term problems. (1998, 96-7)

International attention to democratization issues, coupled with the emergence of large-scale democracy assistance, has attracted an increasing number of comparative and critical studies. A sense of how complex, difficult and long-term this endeavour would be, already apparent from early studies of American efforts (Goldman and Douglas 1988), has only been magnified by ongoing theoretical and empirical exploration (Grugel 2002; Burnell 2003). Clearly democracy promotion is a work in progress, with many findings that suggest persistent deficiencies in meeting real-world challenges as numerous as there are situations calling for more democracy.

On the positive side, the aim of advancing democracy, however that takes place, through varying combinations of factors both internal and external to societies, seems to have captured a certain normative high ground in international affairs. Some, indeed, would like to push it higher and make it a foreign policy priority of democratic states. Still, as Peter Schraeder concludes from a collective research survey, "democracy promotion has never achieved the status of principal

foreign policy interest of the northern industrialized democracies, official rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding” (2003, 33).

Even without that status, some are cynical about the actual state interests behind the missionary normative claims made for state-supported democracy promotion. For example, according to Mathurin Hounnikpo: “A careful examination of the actions of states reveals that, while they may preach democracy, they nonetheless continue to pursue their national interests. The pursuit of national interests simultaneously with or in lieu of liberalisation undermines the North’s commitment to establishing genuine democracy in Africa and elsewhere. Indeed, the economic, political, strategic, and ideological interests of Northern states often take precedence over the promulgation of democracy in the South” (2003, 197).

Schraeder also deflates sunny assumptions that promoting democracy will bring all manner of other good things in its wake. The evidence is just not there in most cases, and the possibility of perverse effects cannot be discounted. For example: “Democracies typically have not fared well in reducing social inequalities, and in some cases — such as the transitions to democracy in eastern Europe in which female representation in national legislatures has actually declined — democracies have actually fared worse than their authoritarian predecessors” (2003, 28). He argues as well for attaching some deliberate guidelines to the interventionist practice of democracy promotion in order to enhance both legitimacy and prospects for successful outcomes, *inter alia*: determining “the degree of popular support within the target country”; seeking “majority support within the region and the international system”; and constructing “policy within the framework of international law” (31). Notwithstanding such caveats and conditions, he is cautiously optimistic, seeing the rise of this “far-reaching democracy promotion industry” in the context of successive “waves” of democratization further strengthening the international democratic context, with the end result that, compared to earlier historical periods in democracy’s advance, “Democratic reversals and the decline of democracy promotion efforts are therefore much more unlikely in today’s international system” (41).

Apart from that general benefit of the doubt, other studies indicate continuing gaps in confidence in the positive results to be obtained from specific democracy assistance interventions. Empirical research by Canadian scholar Diane Ethier suggests that under certain circumstances — notably the European Union’s accession process — democracy promotion linked to clear external conditionalities can be quite effective. Beyond that, it is often difficult to know. Ethier found no publicly available evaluations of CIDA projects’ impact in this field. She includes a table showing the distribution of over \$48 million in CIDA spending on democratic development projects from 1994 to 2002, and another table

showing that political liberties have improved in some countries receiving CIDA democracy aid; however, “it is impossible to establish a causal relation between these two sets of data” (2003, 110). She observes that “only USAID provides public assessments of its aid projects centred on good governance, human rights and democracy” (2003, 108), and she also cites a World Bank study (Knack 2000) showing that in more general terms “aid not only does not improve good governance but may increase bad governance in some circumstances.”

Another part of the problem rests with the inadequacies — to which we have already alluded — in performance evaluation indicators and donor-led methodologies in a field as complex and contested as political development. Gordon Crawford observes that all of the learned emphasis on the need to foster active local participation within recipient countries is still more theory than practice when it comes to making actual assessments. For example: “While USAID’s methodology provides the most detailed attempt at developing a suitable approach, it appears to remain oriented to fulfilling donor needs by demonstrating success and usefulness, with the evaluation process itself reproducing the negative characteristic of democracy promotion as an external imposition” (Crawford 2003a, 95).

Crawford proposes an alternative methodology for democratizing “the evaluation process itself, shifting the notion of evaluating democracy assistance from one perceived as a technical, donor-led exercise to one that involves a participatory political process, thereby becoming congruent with, and contributing to, democratization itself.” He argues that: “In this manner, democracy promotion from without can learn from within, and hence subordinate itself to internal ‘authorship’” (2003b, 1-2, 18). The importance of this “subordination” also comes from Crawford’s acceptance that: “Despite the contemporary (and historically unprecedented) phenomena of democracy promotion from outside, there remains general agreement that internal actors and activities are key to democratization, and that the contribution of external actors, while not necessarily insignificant, remains limited and marginal” (9).

In referring briefly to this growing analytical literature, which largely accepts the theoretical basis for democracy assistance but does not take on faith either the methods or merits of its delivery, I do not mean to curb an apparent appetite, discussed at greater length below, for increasing Canadian participation in such activities. I do mean to suggest that we ought to do so with our eyes open and build on the large amount of learning that has already taken place, however much remains to be incorporated into actual donor practices. If Canada is to decide to become a more important player in the real world of democracy promotion, we do not need to reinvent the wheel — nor should we spin it faster than carefully thought-out policy considerations and resource implications will allow.

Democracy Promotion in Canadian Foreign Policy: From Modest Interest and Value to Potential Mission?

George Perlin ends his background paper with a large number of questions posing choices for Canada (Perlin 2003). In a period in which a comprehensive review of all aspects of Canada's international policies has been promised — a government "International Policy Statement" is expected to be released before the end of 2004 — these are questions that need to have their day in the court of public opinion, benefiting from wider deliberation than has so far taken place on such matters.

Nonetheless, Canadian policy has already travelled a considerable distance, so a few reflections on that, and on the distance that may still lie ahead, are in order. As indicated by the first sections of this paper, to a great extent the desirability of pursuing goals of human rights and democratic development has been absorbed into the official expression of Canadian foreign policy, albeit unevenly and subject to less than coherent linkages, conflicting pressures (our relationship with our superpower neighbour being only one) and cross purposes, as Nancy Thede's paper points out (Thede 2004).

These goals have regularly been proclaimed as serving Canadian interests and values in government policy statements, ministerial speeches, and in parliamentary reports. For example, *Canada in the World* asserts that: "Successful promotion of our values — respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the environment — will make an important contribution to international security in the face of new threats to stability" (Canada 1995, ii). Although the subsequent elaboration of a "human security" agenda did not particularly highlight democracy assistance efforts, promoting human rights and pluralist forms of democracy might be seen as ideally suited to the Canadian diplomatic style of multilateralist "soft power." Indeed it is often claimed that Canada presents a nonthreatening, moderate face to the world, and, as a pluralist, federalist, multicultural, and ethnically and linguistically diverse country, offers potentially useful experience with the democratic accommodation of differences. Moreover, this experience and skill set is said to be welcomed in many parts of the world.

Such a Canadian-style approach, if not "model," is reflected in the speech that David Kilgour, then secretary of state for Latin America and Africa, gave representing Canada at the June 2000 conference in Poland that set up the international Community of Democracies network. Referring to Canada's experiences working within bodies such as the OAS, the Commonwealth and *la francophonie*, Kilgour stated:

I think that we first have concluded that there is no single model for how to address threats to democracy...For Canada, engaging global partners in democracy through multilateral institutions has been our preferred approach.

The second conclusion is that each threat to democracy must be addressed in its own context. In many cases, the best approach is one of what we might call accompaniment. That is, we need to be supportive of local initiatives and ideas on how to strengthen democracy and send a message that external actors are there to support and not necessarily to force change. Wherever possible, we should let local actors take the lead in resolving their own challenges. In other cases, however, particularly where there are violations of fundamental principles, we must be prepared to take stronger measures. This again argues against universal models, but instead supports the idea of taking a country-level approach to democracy strengthening.

[O]ur experience has shown that while in a few cases threats to democracy can be resolved in short order, most of the time we must travel a long road and have patience. As external supporters, we need to be ready to listen, enter into dialogue, and provide technical advice and assistance where needed, and we must be willing to do so over an extended period.

Finally, we must always be careful that in our efforts to be creative and supportive, we do not compromise basic principles or offer bad advice, and keep our actions in line with the promotion and protection of human rights consistent with international human rights law. Otherwise, we will not have democracy and we will have betrayed the people we are trying to help. (Kilgour 2000)

Eight years after *Canada and the World* appeared, Foreign Affairs Minister Bill Graham's *Dialogue on Foreign Policy* also reaffirmed human rights and democracy promotion as being strongly in sync with the attitudes of Canadian participants in that process. Under the heading "Human Security and Human Rights," the document reported that: "A broad conception of security as a human-centred protection of basic human rights resonates strongly with Canadians, and respondents often urge Canada to act vigorously in the cause of human rights and democratic freedoms...There is broad support for Canada to be active in helping to bring about the development of stable democratic civil societies" (DFAIT 2003a, 7).

However, beneath the accumulation of declarations and fine sentiments and the surface of public, values-based consensus lurk deficiencies, and more than a few tensions. Take, for example, the fate of the first Canadian instrument created specifically by Parliament for the purpose of promoting human rights

and democratic development. The ICHRDD's budget has remained minuscule in comparison to that expended by CIDA in this area, even if, as some suggest, the human rights and democracy mandate has not been a comfortable fit for CIDA. The ICHRDD fills a different niche, but arguably has a lower profile and less influence today than it did in its formative years under first president Ed Broadbent. As mentioned earlier, Parliament has taken only sporadic interest in the centre's work, despite the five-year statutory reviews that have been done.¹⁴

As for DFAIT and its successor, there are probably as many people in the Pearson building nervous about giving external democracy promotion a higher priority in Canadian foreign policy as those who are concerned about the preoccupation during the past decade with a promised internal democratization of Canadian foreign policy itself.¹⁵ The division into separate departments for foreign affairs and for international trade currently in progress may also potentially complicate matters while raising questions about overall policy integration. How does one get a more "joined-up" government approach to democracy assistance across the different instruments of international policy delivery? Another sticking point is that most of the available program resources are held by CIDA. One would expect the funding of new discretionary initiatives, such as the recently announced "Canada Corps," to be coordinated with related activities currently being undertaken by CIDA. And, it goes without saying that both Foreign Affairs Canada and CIDA are subject to recurrent fiscal pressures over such discretionary spending, as well as to shifting fashions and ministerial interests.

In addition to these caveats, several veteran scholarly observers of these trends would rather that Ottawa's high-minded internationalist reach exceeded its grasp less often. For example, Kim Nossal warns that "mission diplomacy has become a kind of addiction for those who make Canadian foreign policy...All too often, it can be argued, this has led to a relentless search for an initiative — any initiative — to embrace. But often the plans served up to ministers hungry for another worthwhile initiative to deliver to the world are not necessarily carefully considered" (Nossal 2000, 11).

Denis Stairs advises that "genuine creativity in international affairs is encountered more often in responses to tangible problems and specific issues than in the construction of inspirational mission statements" (2003, 506). In his view, grand pronouncements ought to be abandoned "in favour of more honest (and hence, much more cautious) accounts of what is likely to be feasible in the real world of social engineering abroad, both generally and in terms of policies suited particularly to Canada." Moreover, his cases in point all relate to dimensions of democratic assistance, including the following: "No one ought to be allowed — ever — to imply that giving third world cops a little exposure to the

RCMP will cultivate the rule of law in impoverished subsistence-level societies. No one ought to be allowed — ever — to pretend that an improvement in the administration of ballot boxes is the key to establishing a democratic political culture in polities that have never before experienced a peaceful change of government by electoral means and, least of all, that such transformation can flow from the efforts of Canada alone” (491).

Canada, thankfully, does not face the kind of “imperial dilemma” that provokes raging debates within the foreign policy establishment of its superpower neighbour.¹⁶ Canadians may have appropriated Joseph Nye’s concept of “soft power,” but our adaptation of it is spared the temptations, and illusions, of being “bound to lead” or “going it alone.” A tendency to be preachy while practising what Nossal laments as “pinch-penny diplomacy” may grate on some ears but is hardly likely to be threatening to others. In fact, Canadian foreign policy may suffer from being too modest and self-effacing, too inclined to accept a diminishing visibility and influence in world affairs (Cohen 2003; Welsh 2004).

In the area of democracy assistance, some creative thinking about expanding the Canadian role has been taking place within the Department of Foreign Affairs itself, as well as from prominent pundits on the sidelines. For example, Chris Cooter, a career foreign service officer with experience in Africa and the Balkans, and currently director of the department’s policy planning division, has developed a case for ramping up Canada’s contribution through the creation of a “distinctly Canadian political foundation, one that not only would help democratic civil society abroad to flourish, but also could make better use of our resources while giving Canada a more visible face in the developing world and advancing other foreign policy goals” (2000, 99). Cooter is fully cognizant of the complexities of supporting democratic development and of the work of existing Canadian-based instruments such as the ICHRDD. But he argues that we will be both underselling our assets and underachieving without a stronger “Canada Foundation” that is “dedicated to this purpose and equipped to carry out its mandate through its own offices abroad” (2000, 102).

Cooter proposes that such a foundation could be in the form of a nonprofit consortium set up to develop

a “single window” abroad for Canadian statutory foundations, as well as other Canadian organizations interested in democratic civil society, that wished to be part of it. It would require a new vehicle, that is, an institution with its own name and legal personality would need to be formed. However, its owners would be the Canadian institutions wishing to participate in it. Thus, it would be a creature of the participating organizations, intended to leverage their ability to

promote the development of civil society abroad and at the same time advance Canadian foreign policy goals...

The proposed foundation could give Canada a new foreign policy coherence in promoting democratic civil society. It could leverage the effectiveness of existing programs and expand the breadth and depth of our reach in developing societies beyond the capacity of our diplomatic missions, helping us to match the variety of relationships our key G8 partners have there. Moreover, it could mobilize new non-government intellectual and financial resources, while making better use of current government funding. (2000, 107, 111)

The merits of such an approach are certainly worth debating, but unfortunately there has not yet been public or parliamentary engagement on innovative suggestions such as these. Of course, there is nothing that obligates Canada to try, once again, to “punch above its weight,” or to become more conscious of promoting its own “brand” along with the worthy causes that it pursues among other players on a crowded field. Nonetheless, there is a sense that Canada, if not exactly treading water, could be and should be doing more; that invoking tried and true multilateralism while better managing relations with the United States, however essential, is not enough to advance a compelling foreign policy agenda even in the latter arena.

In a provocative column a year ago, Jeffrey Simpson argued that “democratic development should be central to Canadian foreign policy. It speaks to Canada’s values, is entirely consistent with broad objectives of the US and other democratic countries, and is actually something about which Canadians know a lot. Politically, it’s a no-brainer” (2003a).¹⁷ Simpson described existing Canadian efforts as “scattered,” “insufficient,” and “almost haphazard,” — “something spoken of by ministers but practised fitfully and in an ill-co-ordinated fashion.” The latter perceived deficiency was another reason for moving beyond the current agencies for providing democracy assistance. In Simpson’s rather harsh view: “They should all be closed down or submerged into a larger institution with money provided from the CIDA and Foreign Affairs budgets, plus those of existing institutions. The new institution would be at arm’s length from Parliament and Foreign Affairs but still work with them. It should forge partnerships with universities, political parties of all stripes, trade unions, business groups and law associations” (Simpson 2003a).

Simpson has returned to the charge in subsequent articles (2003b). In a March 2004 column — which hints at bureaucratic and expert advice flowing to the Martin government “from those experienced in the area of democratic development” — he proposes a new agency that he dubs “Democracy Canada” which would “wear the Maple Leaf proudly” (2004a). And in a May 2004 column, he takes the argument a step further:

What's needed is not a Canada Corps with a limited budget and a coordinating mandate, but a major institution – call it Democracy Canada – that would subsume some existing agencies, take money from the CIDA budget and be able to organize programs itself, while helping non-governmental organizations to do their thing.

Optimists believe that the evolution of the Canada Corps from an idea thrown into the Speech from the Throne, to its latest variation, represents only a way station toward a bigger and better idea that will be fully formed once the foreign policy review is completed this fall.

We can only hope so, since the Canada Corps, as recently announced, will lack the profile and resources to do the job properly.

That job is to take Canada's demonstrated experience in federalism, democracy, law, human rights, multiculturalism and bilingualism and make that expertise available abroad in a way that makes the effort central to the country's foreign policy. (2004b)

The idea for a “Democracy Canada” entity is not original to Simpson, having been floated by two former Ottawa political aides, Leslie Campbell and Ross Reid, who left in the 1990s to work for the Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI). Campbell in particular (one of 29 Canadians employed with the NDI and currently director of its Middle East and North Africa development programs) argues that Canada lacks a sufficient counterpart to the NDI, with the result that: “Despite the wealth of talent and experience Canada has to offer in the democracy field, Canadian efforts remain disparate, underfunded, and often anonymous. Perhaps more importantly, there is little sense of ‘Canadian-ness’ and almost no effort to promote Canadian contributions to democracy as part of Canada’s international identity” (Campbell 2004, 3).

Campbell envisaged a new multiparty institute being formed under the umbrella of Democracy Canada, the parameters of which he outlines as follows:

Democracy Canada, which should be established as a nonprofit, non-governmental organization, would be endowed with significant yearly funding for its own programs and would provide grants to partner institutes and organizations. Democracy Canada would assume responsibility for many existing Canadian democracy initiatives including programs to strengthen parliamentary systems and political development, thus reducing the amount of “new” funding required for its creation. The new entity would also work collaboratively with established democracy and governance

organizations abroad. Democracy Canada would reinforce the established governance, democracy, human rights, and media development community in Canada by providing a more coherent policy structure, a higher Canadian profile abroad, and in some cases, an increased and more predictable source of grant funding.

Democracy Canada should be based in Ottawa and should be publicly funded, but it should have no direct operational ties to the Canadian government. Although Democracy Canada will form an important part of Canada's image and brand abroad, it should operate at arms length – democracy promotion activities cannot be done on an exclusive government-to-government level, so the foundation and party institute must be free to pursue and influence change, marshal nongovernmental resources, establish relationships with opposition and ruling forces, and otherwise be free of the constraints of traditional diplomacy. Just as Democracy Canada must be able to claim independence, so too should the government of Canada be able to claim an arms-length relationship if and when necessary. (2004, 2)

Is there public support for such renewed international democratic ambitions? Advocates of the idea such as Jeffrey Simpson seem convinced that “Canadians will be interested, and supportive, right across the political spectrum” (2004a). And he appears to have some prominent company in his corner. Andrew Cohen's best-selling book avers that: “At its best, Canada offers itself to the world as the good governance nation, as Michael Ignatieff calls it, promoting an engaged internationalism” (2003, 200). Ignatieff himself made the case to a capacity audience at the Department of Foreign Affairs:

The focus of our foreign policy should be to consolidate “peace, order and good government” as the sine qua non for stable states, enduring democracy and equitable development. Other countries will always have larger development budgets than we do, but few countries know as much about the intimate causal relations between good government and good development...we should specialize both in a policy framework that brings all our “governance” activity together in a single powerful program of action.

I prefer “peace, order and good government” to “governance” as an organizing frame for Canadian activities because it articulates a specifically Canadian expression of what governance ought to be about: democratic institutions, federalism, minority rights guarantees, linguistic pluralism, aboriginal self-government and a positive enabling role for government in economic and social development. (2004, 11)

Thomas Axworthy, a Harvard colleague of Ignatieff, brother of Lloyd and a former principal secretary to Pierre Trudeau, also weighed in with a similar message, telling an audience of Canada-US policy wonks that: “Many Canadians, in individual capacities, contributed to democracy abroad but until now we have had no organized Canadian structure to undertake to the effort. We should create a Canadian Democratic Institute, reporting to Parliament, not the government, and using the talents of parliamentarians and retired politicians from all parties to work on democratic governance abroad” (Axworthy 2004, 5).¹⁸

Subsequently, Axworthy has worked with Campbell to refine and elaborate the concept. In a paper presented to the September 10, 2004, IRPP conference on Canada’s role in international assistance to democratic development, they call on the Canadian government to “establish an independent Democracy Canada Institute, funded and reporting to Parliament, which would support existing Canadian organizations in the field and work closely with Canadian political parties to use some of their expertise in democratic development abroad” (Axworthy and Campbell 2004, 3).

While a precise formulation of the proposed institute remains under discussion, as does its relationship to other Canadian organizations already doing work in the field, Axworthy and Campbell are clear that this new body should have the support and involvement of Canadian political parties. They also anticipate that it “would require an annual appropriation of approximately \$50 million” (2004, 21). And they suggest that “the Institute would be mandated by Parliament to develop a coherent democratic governance strategy that would be worthy of the support of Parliament, be implemented by existing actors in the field and engage the active involvement of current and former Members of Parliament. Should the Institute prove to be a success, however, it could assume the responsibility for existing programming... (2004, 20).”

All of these ideas appear to have found some echo in several statements by Prime Minister Paul Martin during 2004 — notably a May 10 speech in Montreal and a September 22 address to the United Nations General Assembly — that advanced a leadership role for Canada in building institutional capacity within problem countries; the hardest cases being either highly oppressive or so-called “failed states” in which an international “responsibility to protect” civilian populations at risk may also come into play. At the same time, the language so far has been relatively cautious and has not been cast in explicitly *democracy*-promoting terms. (The Speech from the Throne of October 5, 2004, refers to “institutions of basic governance and rule of law” and to Canadian commitments “to pluralism and human rights,” but not to democracy promotion as such.) Perhaps there are still echoes back to the 1980s rapporteurs’ reservations about Canada’s becoming

identified with the more aggressive prodemocracy discourse associated with US government initiatives.

As well, before being carried away by a sudden wave of enthusiasm for new missions and institutions, it may be wise to pause and take stock of where we stand in the global community as one nation among others. In fact, Axworthy and Campbell provide a very useful survey of both Canadian and international expertise and organizations doing democracy-related work (2004). We are not starting from a tabula rasa without the benefit of some real progress, internationally and nationally. Indeed, ours has been described as an age of democracy, or at least of professed concern for it. At the end of the last century, a Freedom House survey found that 120 of 192 countries, representing 62.5 percent of the global population, were electoral democracies (Freedom House 1999).

As usual, though, the glass was also half empty — only 85 countries (38 percent of global population) were regarded as liberal democracies, free and respectful of basic human rights and the rule of law. Moreover, despite democracy's rapid expansion in recent decades, "many new democracies are fragile and the gains could well be reversed." Freedom House has since called for the creation of a "UN Democracy Group [that] would be based on the Warsaw Declaration of the Community of Democracies signed in June 2000, which calls for democracies to 'collaborate on democracy-related issues in existing international and regional institutions'" (Freedom House 2003). Axworthy and Campbell point to an expanding network of multilateral democracy-promoting organizations, movements and forums — from the Swedish-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), to the World Movement for Democracy and the recently formed Club of Madrid — observing that "the number of new players within the international democracy field has surprised even the discipline's most ardent supporters (2004, 15)."¹⁹

The many remaining challenges to such effective collaboration are indicated by a "defending democracy" survey that was produced by the Democracy Coalition Project created in 2001 under the auspices of the Community of Democracies initiative (Herman and Piccone 2002). To mention just a few relevant points among the survey's overall findings:

- *While established democracies do a better job than other states of promoting and defending democracy abroad, in practice few regard democracy promotion as in their vital national interests.*
- *The more powerful or strategically important the state experiencing a democratic crisis, the less likely the international community will intervene.*

- Membership in multilateral organizations often serves as a cover for states unable or unwilling to act unilaterally in support of democracy abroad.
- Even when countries have few competing interests at stake, giving them greater latitude to criticize other governments without fear of reprisal, they often avoid doing so. (2002, 2)

That survey also assessed the record of a representative sample of 40 countries, including Canada, in defending democracy over the period 1992-2002. And Canada was one of only three (the others were the Netherlands and Sweden) to receive a "very good" rating on its "support of democracy abroad, as evidenced by its willingness to provide electoral assistance to fledgling democracies, to support grassroots democracy programs through bilateral aid and to criticize regimes engaged in the most egregious abuses of democracy. Canada has preferred to work through multilateral forums in these efforts, in the belief that a middle-ranking power acting unilaterally would have limited influence. Within these organizations, Canada has played a leadership role in encouraging electoral reform and democratic development." The report goes on to praise the merits of Canada's pluralistic "flexible and holistic approach to democratization," and sums up the Canadian balancing act on democracy promotion as follows:

In general, Canada has sought to avoid highly confrontational approaches when responding to concerns about democracy in other countries, seeking to balance its genuine concern for democracy abroad against other national interests. On occasion, Canada has been willing to support sanctions and diplomatic isolation when other vital national interests were not at stake. This preference for the "carrot" rather than the "stick" approach has been consistent with Canada's foreign policy goals. Having accumulated a fair amount of good will abroad due to its strong peacekeeping tradition, its liberal immigration policies and reputation for fairness, Canada seeks to preserve its influence as a trusted partner in democratic development. (2002 "Canada," 1)

Conclusion

This is an opportune moment for a public debate on the extent to which Canadians want to take on a renewed and enhanced role in democratic assistance. The process of the international policy review should be able to provide a forum for that. Undoubtedly Canada could do more and better. There are still many potential fields for further democracy-promoting action, including parts of

the Muslim world, as explored in a recent parliamentary committee report (House of Commons 2004).²⁰ As Hammoud suggests, even an environment as difficult and insecure as that of Iraq might benefit from a Canadian approach to democratic development (2004).

But recalling the spirit of the deliberations that led to the creation of the ICHRDD in the 1980s, the proponents of any project for strengthening the Canadian contribution to democratic development would be well advised to retain an orientation that is internationalist and realistic, if not unduly modest.²¹

Democracy assistance is about others' values and interests, not just our own. It works best as a shared effort rather than as a vehicle for self-promotion. Its focus is most effective when determined by pragmatic, not ideological, considerations. In short, we should see it as a continuing Canadian vocation, not a new crusade.

- 1 Then director of the Policy Planning Staff at the US Department of State. The last point is one of eight "lessons learned" that he states will guide US policy. And it appears to be affirmed even more strongly in the US-sponsored G8 "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa" (announced at the summit held on Sea Island, Georgia, June 9, 2004), one of the principles of which states: "Successful reform depends on the countries in the region, and change should not and cannot be imposed from outside."
- 2 One of the findings of a major survey of US public and leader opinion on international issues, released by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in September 2004, is the strong support for multilateral UN authorization. As stated in the executive summary to the survey's US report: "A majority of the public and leaders agree that the UN, but not an individual state, has the right to intervene to restore a democratic government that has been overthrown. The public even more forcefully rejects the use of US troops to install democratic governments in states where dictators rule" (Chicago Council on Foreign Relations 2004).
- 3 Speaking on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, DC, on November 6, 2003, President Bush declared that "the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East" (NED 2003). Subsequently, a draft US working paper for senior G8 officials proposing a "G8 Greater Middle East Partnership" "was leaked by the Arabic-language newspaper Dar al Hayat on February 13, 2004 (see the newspaper's Web site accessed November 18, 2004. <http://english.daralhayat.com/Spec/02-2004/Article-20040213-ac40bdaf-c0a8-01-ed-004e-5e7ac897d678/story.html>). For a critical assessment of the strategy, see Ottaway and Carothers (2004). See footnote 1 for reference to the final formulation of the G8 Partnership as announced at the summit in the US in June 2004.
- 4 Palmer, a former Reagan speechwriter and US ambassador, calls promoting democracy the "number one national security priority," and envisages enlisting NATO and the UN in a new global democratic alliance. Among other things, democratic development programs would be instituted for all remaining dictatorships and carried out through an "autonomous International Dictatorship-to-Democracy Center" (2003, 319-21).
- 5 Especially chapter 6, "Preventive Democracy." Although Barber is very critical of American democratic practice and democracy promotion under the sway of free-market ideology, he too sees democratic progress as key to US national security and world order. He argues that: "A world of healthy civic democracies would be a world without terror. A world whose international economic, social, and political relations were democratically regulated would be relatively secure from deep inequalities or wrenching poverty and hence less vulnerable to systematic violence" (152).
- 6 The Hon. Edward Broadbent, former leader of the federal New Democratic Party, served from 1990 to 1996, and the Hon. Warren Allmand, a former solicitor general of Canada, succeeded him from 1996 to 2002.
- 7 Although the centre has been able to raise some additional funds from other sources, its parliamentary appropriation has not increased in 15 years.
- 8 DFAIT is currently being separated into Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC) and International Trade Canada (ITC). Legislation to give statutory effect to the decision of the Martin government is

- expected to be introduced in the House of Commons and referred to its foreign affairs committee by December 2004.
- 9 On its early role see Graham (1993). Canada has supported further democracy-strengthening initiatives at the inter-American level, including the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which was coincidentally signed on September 11, 2001. The depth and sustainability of democratic transitions remains much in doubt, however. According to the sobering findings of a UNDP-sponsored report (2004), almost 55 percent of people surveyed in 18 countries of the region would support an "authoritarian" over a "democratic" government if the former could "resolve" their economic problems. The report argues that Latin American democracies face a "deep crisis of confidence" and that democracy must be deepened "beyond the ballot box" to include social citizenship and human development.
- 10 As a reality check, imagine for a moment the difficulties of applying such a participatory process in the current circumstances of Haiti, Afghanistan and Iraq, which have received large amounts and pledges of Canadian international assistance. If there are more "failed" or post-conflict states in future, these may not just be the exceptional hard cases.
- 11 Unlike *Independence and Internationalism* (Parliament 1986), the November 1994 report, *Canada's Foreign Policy: Principles and Priorities for the Future*, contained no specific section on human rights and democratic development issues, referring to them only in passing (Parliament 1994).
- 12 See, for example, the varied, and at times rather agnostic, perspectives offered in the report of the conference held by the United Nations Association in Canada (1998).
- 13 On some of the problematic issues of external assistance to electoral and multiparty processes, see also Burnell and Ware (1998).
- 14 One of the recommendations in the third review of the ICHRDD, tabled in the House of Commons in February 2004, is "If the Parliamentary Committee reviewing this report continues to regard Human Rights and Democratic Development in developing countries as priority foreign policy issues and agree that additional resources are necessary, then the Committee should request that Parliament increase the annual allocation to Rights & Democracy" (DFAIT 2003b, 34).
- 15 There is now a considerable Canadian foreign policy literature on this subject. For an early collection of critical perspectives, see Cameron and Molot (1995). The recent quiet demise of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, the main domestic "democratization" innovation flowing from the 1994 review, raises further questions about the depth of commitment to this direction.
- 16 The pros and cons of using US power for normative interventions are being particularly fiercely contested among the conservative wing. See, for example, the Nixon Center's Dimitri Simes, who argues that the US should "avoid the temptation to meddle when American interests are not at stake. This means, among other things, dropping the doctrine of universal democracy promotion" (2003). Ironically, one of the biggest boosters of American intervention on a global scale, Robert Kaplan (2003), is also notoriously skeptical of democracy's global prospects (1997) as he is of its current prospects in Iraq (2004).
- 17 A "political no-brainer," perhaps, though Simpson wrongly claims that the ICHRDD was a late accomplishment of the Trudeau era. It was set up by the Mulroney government as a result of its foreign policy review.

- 18 The argument seems to pass over the longstanding activities in this field of both the Montreal-based ICHRDD and the Ottawa-based Parliamentary Centre.
- 19 Mention could also be made of new players advocating the cause within Canada, such as the Toronto-based Canadian Coalition for Democracies, formed in 2003, with a mission statement that describes it as “a non-partisan, multi-ethnic, multi-denominational organization of concerned Canadians dedicated to the protection and promotion of democracy at home and abroad. CCD will influence the Canadian political process and public opinion to achieve amore pro-democracy foreign policy” (c. 2003).
- 20 The unanimous all-party report by the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade devotes considerable attention to issues of support for human rights and democratization, including respecting women’s rights and minority rights, in overall, regional, and country-specific terms, and especially in regard to the Arab-Muslim world, often seen as a “democracy-free” zone, yet one where there are strong and growing popular democratic aspirations.
- 21 To take a case in point, the House foreign affairs committee report refers as follows to a key consideration in the Middle East context that ought to be taken into account in the development of Canadian foreign policy: “Governance and other political and social reforms are required in Muslim countries, including in sensitive areas such as religious education. However, such reforms are unlikely to succeed on a basis of external imposition or great-power interference. Outside governments need to be smart, sensitive and sophisticated about how they provide support to internal change agents” (House of Commons 2004, 54-5). Even the controversial leaked draft of the US Working Paper for G8 Sherpas on a “G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership” concedes that since “genuine reform” in the region “must be driven internally, and since the best means to promote reform is through representative organizations, the G-8 should encourage the development of effective civil society organizations in the region” (see note 3 of the current document).

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