

SPREADING DEMOCRACY

A. Raymond Randolph*

Spreading democracy has become—I am not sure whether it still is—a centerpiece of the current administration’s foreign policy. But what makes a democracy? For the past several weeks I have been taking a poll, and the official results are now in. What makes a democracy? Ninety-nine percent say the ability of the people to elect their representatives. Well, if that is the definition, Cuba must be a democracy, and so are Iran and North Korea. North Korea calls itself the Democratic Republic of Korea.

According to one commentator, there are only five countries in the world that consider themselves not democracies.¹ But, you say, many of the elections in those countries are shams. Well, last year the Palestinian territories had an election. Everyone thought it was fair and free, and who won? Hamas, which is listed by the State Department as a terrorist organization. If you want to support democracy by making a contribution to Hamas, you will be committing a federal criminal offense. Hugo Chávez was elected—I need say no more about that. And just the other day, Daniel Ortega was elected President in Nicaragua on the Sandinista National Liberation Front ticket. So maybe elections are not the only key to a democracy.

Perhaps a true democratic country is one that has free speech, freedom of religion, private property, rule of law, and independent and honest judges. I add “honest” because according to a National Public Radio program, one of the big problems with the court system in Afghanistan, to the extent there is one, is not independence, but corruption.² Judges are on the take. If that list makes up the attributes of democracy, then we can be sure that we have narrowed the number of truly democratic countries, and we can be sure that many countries would have to go through monumental cultural change to get on that list.

Francis Fukuyama writes in his most recent book that “[our] record in nation-building is mixed: there are few successes and a large number of failures; and where . . . success[has] occurred, [it] required an extraordinary

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¹ *All Things Considered: Must a ‘Democracy’ Fight Against Terror?* (NPR radio broadcast Nov. 3, 2006), available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6430389>.

² *Backlogs, Shortages Hamper Afghan Courts* (NPR radio broadcast Nov. 16, 2006), available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6493955>.

level of effort and attention In virtually every case, the basic impetus . . . came from within the target society and not from external pressure.”³ I used to tell my children that before they try to change the behavior of someone else, they ought to consider how difficult it is to change their own behavior. Many marriages have foundered on that simple truth, I think. That may be so not only with respect to individuals, but also with respect to nation states.

³ FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, AMERICA AT THE CROSSROADS: DEMOCRACY, POWER, AND THE NEOCONSERVATIVE LEGACY 131 (2006).