Democracy for the Long Haul

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ARTICLE

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I was last in Taipei in January 1989, participating in a conference on political change in Taiwan co-sponsored by the Institute of International Relations of National Chengchi University and the Harvard Center for

International Affairs. At that time, as a result of the leadership of President Lee Teng-hui, the process of political change was well under way and was becoming a process of democratization. Martial law had been lifted; the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) had been formed; electoral competition was expanding; legislative debates had become vigorous; press censorship was on the way out; social movements and social groups were organizing, demanding, and protesting. The conference itself was also a small part of this process, as the first public meeting in which both Kuomintang (KMT) and DPP officials took part.

The changes taking place here in 1989 were, of course, part of the vast third wave of democratization that had begun 15 years earlier in Southern Europe, and then moved on to Latin America and Asia. By 1989 this wave was in full flood, reaching its crest at the end of the year with the collapse of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, which was soon followed by the disintegration of the USSR.

These events generated a swelling tide of euphoria. Many believed that a global democratic revolution was under way, that liberal democracy was soon destined to triumph everywhere, that history was **[End Page 3]** at an end, and that, as Francis Fukuyama put it, we might be approaching "the end point of man's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." [1] Similar euphoric expectations had appeared at the end of this century's other major conflicts. The First World War was thought to be the "war to end all wars" and the war to make the world safe for democracy. The Second World War, Franklin Roosevelt said, would lead to a new security system that would "end the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries—and have always failed." Instead, we would have "a universal organization" of "peace-loving Nations" and the beginnings of a "permanent structure of peace." [2] The First World War, however, generated communism, fascism, and the reversal of the century-old first wave of democratization. The Second World War produced a Cold War that was truly global.

Now, six years after the collapse of European communism, our euphoric moment has passed, and we too have become sadder but wiser. A single dominating ideological conflict has given way to a multiplicity of ethnic conflicts, the stability of a bipolar world to the confusion and instability of a multipolar and multicivilizational world, and the potential horror of global nuclear war to the daily horror of ethnic cleansing. The word "genocide" has been heard far more often in the past five years than it was in any half-decade during the Cold War.

In this sobering world, we need to have a sober view of the prospects for democracy and to recognize the possibility that this great third wave of democratization, having brought democracy to some 40 countries, may be losing its outward dynamic and moving from a phase of expansion to one of consolidation.

Among scholars of democratization, a major debate goes on concerning the issue of crafting versus preconditions. Some argue that movement toward democracy depends on the existence within society of particular social, economic, or cultural preconditions, although there is much disagreement over what those preconditions are. A different school of thought sees democratization as primarily the product of political leaders who have the will and the skill to bring it about. Clearly, however, both preconditions and crafting have roles to play, and certain preconditions can facilitate democratic crafting. These include a relatively high level of economic development and the prevalence of what can be termed Western culture and values, including Western Christianity. At present, virtually all of the non-oil-producing high-income or upper-middle-income countries, with the exception of Singapore, are demo-cratic...

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