

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July:

*Building 21<sup>st</sup> century democracies*

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The fundamental fallacy underlying the neoconservative case for invading Iraq seems to have been the assumption that democracy is the natural state of government, latent and ready to flourish whenever the yoke of tyranny is lifted. Democracy is no more natural than absolute monarchy or theocracy. All forms of government are local and temporary fixes, accommodations between power, property, and individual freedom that attain a certain legitimacy and effectiveness for a time.

I decidedly do not mean to convey moral relativism by this argument – countries with a convincing case for calling themselves democracies are very evidently the places where humans have the best chance of flourishing. Moreover, I am enough of a child of the Enlightenment to assert that institutions which seek to enshrine liberty, equality, and fraternity are the best sorts of institutions to have.

What I do mean to suggest is that democracy is a goal rather than an achieved state. It is a goal to be pursued in different ways in different places, according to the cultural and historical circumstances those places find themselves in. And it is not a goal that can be simply achieved and maintained. For example, Australia is a pretty satisfactory democracy to live in, but it is at least arguable that the development of cabinet-dominated government since the 1970s has made it less of a parliamentary democracy and more an elective dictatorship of the prime minister. Getting to vote on a regular basis is a necessary condition for democracy, but is it a sufficient one?

*You each have detailed knowledge of different developing democracies in the region. Tell us about the state of democracy in your chosen nation, and the prospects for developments (good and bad) as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*