

# Democracy Revisited

Editorial

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In the early 1990s, several leading political scientists, such as Samuel P. Huntington, spoke of a further wave of democratization in modern history. The so-called Third Wave toppled regimes in Europe, Africa, America and Asia. In the mid-1990s, Larry Diamond was the first to raise the question whether a reverse wave had emerged over the past few years. Diamond's assumption unfortunately proved to be true and was confirmed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its 2001 Human Development Report, which concluded that a growing number of the new democracies had regarded democracy subordinate to economic growth. Such developments have contributed to a global decay of democratic values and a redefinition of democracy. The subsequent reverse wave has not only affected new democracies but also traditional ones.

Among the new democracies, Russia has experienced the most dramatic decline in civil liberties and political rights over the last decade. In recent years, the United States has taken a similar road. The war on terrorism has endangered US values, as former President Jimmy Carter pointed out in his latest book. The new US concept of freedom vigorously promotes and defends torture, censorship, eavesdropping and other measures previously associated with authoritarian regimes.

Domestic and foreign US policies are no longer shaped by progressive forces, but rather by radical religious organizations. In the Islamic world, a similar trend is observable—a situation fostering anti-democratic developments, steering the world into religious conflicts and benefiting few countries, such as China, where democracy has never been closer to becoming reality than under the Bush administration. In terms of torture, death penalty, censorship, and social and economic policies, the two countries are narrowing at an unprecedented speed. Jimmy Carter sees US values endangered. The situation seems to be more serious, though: The conventional concept of liberal democracy is at risk.

As to East Asia, liberal democracy still has the upper hand in

South Korea, Mongolia, Japan and Taiwan. In the latter, however, the so-called new democracy movement has paved the way for unification with the People's Republic of China. (The self-declared new democracy movement has its origin in the right wing of the Kuomintang and consolidated its power base during the March Revolution.) The movement has already challenged the definition of democracy and has left little doubt that democratic development is subordinate to economic growth. Members of the movement openly praised Mainland Chinese leaders, such as Hu Jintao, and promised the people of Taiwan a better life once unified with China. In the long run, democratic institutions in Taiwan will deteriorate after the unification. Economic conditions, on the other hand, will not improve significantly as claimed by leading activists of the new democracy movement. But who cares about such developments as long as certain democratic standards are enforced and the economy flourishes—even if only on paper and in the speeches of political leaders.

The growing economic and political power of the Islamic world and the People's Republic of China are determined to further contribute to a globally accepted redefinition of democracy. China's influence on the Western world has not yet been fully acknowledged by US and European scholars. Most think tanks focus on issues related to the ongoing Chinese military built-up and disputed WTO regulations. As to the first issue, considerable effort has been made to predict a war between China and the US because of Taiwan. The Cato Institute could be mentioned here as a perfect example illustrating the lack of insightful analyses of current China and its future role. Ted Galen Carpenter, one of the institute's researchers, predicts a war between China and the USA over Taiwan in his latest publication entitled 'America's Coming War with China: A Collision Course over Taiwan.' Carpenter argues in his book that the rising Chinese nationalism and Taiwan's growing national identity will eventually lead to a military conflict between the two political entities. He, thus, advises the US government to stop offering security guarantees to Taiwan. Robert Bush, another senior figure at the Cato Institute, recently pointed out that dropping security guarantees would possibly lead to the development of a Taiwanese nuclear bomb. Listening to Carpenter and Bush makes one wonder on what kind of sources their findings are based. Carpenter's reasoning sounds logic, but fails to reflect the actual situation. First, war is always possible—anywhere and anytime. Second, although it is true that a growing number of people living in Taiwan consider themselves Taiwanese rather than Chinese, Carpenter as well as most foreign observers have neglected the tremendous influence of the pro-China forces in

Taiwan that have left Chen Shui-bian and his localization (Taiwanization) movement deadlocked in any aspect since his inauguration in May 2000. (Individuals and organizations favorable to the Beijing government tightly control a growing number of the most important institutions, such as parliament and the media.)

Moreover, the 2004 parliamentary election marked the beginning of the end of Taiwan independence. This process was confirmed by the bitter results of this year's crucial local elections. The KMT won the election not because of the fact that the party strives for unification with China, but because of the fact that the DPP failed to counter the propaganda war of the pro-Beijing forces. China's media, private and government institutions, and powerful individuals have strongly influenced the behavior and attitudes of the Taiwanese people.

There seems to be little doubt that Chinese economic incentives are powerful enough to change beliefs and values not only in Taiwan but globally. The Chinese government has begun to implement its plan of establishing over one hundred Chinese cultural centers around the world. These so-called Confucius Institutes—apart from other things— should offer Chinese courses to foreigners and train foreign teachers. According to government estimates, over one hundred million people outside China will be studying Chinese by the year 2010. Apart from that, hundreds of bilingual high schools, colleges and universities around the world will have been established. In recent years, Chinese has become popular among students around the world. In Thailand, it has even become the number one foreign language, replacing English. The Thai government has announced plans to include Chinese courses in every primary and high school by the year 2008. The US magazine U.S. News listed learning Chinese as the twelfth most efficient way to improve life in 2006. What is more important here is the very fact that learning Chinese is not just learning a language, it is getting acquainted with a foreign culture, foreign customs, with foreign connotations of morality and values.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there are several interesting developments in Thailand, one of Southeast Asia's new democracies. In this edition of *eastasia.at*, Michael Nelson looks at the recent trends in Thai politics. Over the last few months, a new democracy movement has emerged in Thailand—a movement aiming at defending and expanding political rights and civil liberties. This second wave of democratization has been caused by the growing criticism of incumbent Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who has rigidly controlled Thailand's media and other

institutions vital to the existence of personal freedom. Will charismatic opposition leader Sondhi Limthongkul succeed in ousting Thaksin?