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Book Review: Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World

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BOOK REVIEWS

Karin von Hippel, *Democracy by Force: US Military Intervention in the Post-Cold War World*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2000) 224 pp.

Karin von Hippel's intriguing work *Democracy by Force* builds on the literature of failed states and offers an assessment of America's interventions in four such settings during the post-Cold War period. Although von Hippel is not satisfied with the results, she is guardedly encouraged by the efforts.

Von Hippel begins by using US-led nation-building efforts in Germany and Japan as a guide, noting that the prevailing terms of unconditional surrender here gave America free reign and allowed it to capitalize on the high levels of education and development present in both countries to ensure that democratization took hold. Though the US has not since attempted nation-building on that scale, the demise of communism and the humanitarian crises borne of civil conflicts in Panama, Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia resulted in a sometimes reluctant US reengagement with the task, premised on the assumption that the peaceful nature of democracies enhances global security. Von Hippel's goals in this book are both practical and philosophical: pragmatically, she seeks to clarify patterns emerging out of these American interventions in order to find lessons that can improve future efforts; more conceptually, she wants to answer the question whether democratization can emerge through intervention in such settings to resolve the underlying problems that generate civilian conflict.

From a practical standpoint, von Hippel's work certainly succeeds. Her cases are generally well constructed and the policymaking lessons that she draws from each case are effectively documented. As the mixed results of the Panama mission demonstrate, it is imperative for political reconstruction to be controlled by civilian rather than military authorities if peace support and nation-building efforts are to move forward. Moreover, careful and substantial coordination of military and civilian efforts is an essential precursor to any prospects for a democratic outcome. Such insights are underscored by difficulties the US and United Nations encountered in Somalia, where the failure to coordinate diplomatic, military and humanitarian operations, along with futile attempts at mixing peace enforcement with peacekeeping, undermined all prospects for success. Lessons learned in Somalia were applied with

some profit in Haiti and Bosnia, where more limited nation building aims aided the possibilities that democratization could eventually emerge. Still, in Bosnia particularly, von Hippel finds the goals of operations remained too numerous while the commitment of time and resources was too limited; what emerged was a complicated mission that may yet do more to reinforce ethnic division than promote democracy. Overall, von Hippel asserts that clear roles for military and civilian agencies, together with careful coordination from the start with humanitarian elements, eliminates many difficulties for intervening parties, as do realistic goals and the clear understanding that such interventions require substantial commitment in time and resources.

From a more theoretical standpoint, what is less clear and convincing is whether democratization can readily emerge from such interventions at all, let alone play an effective part in promoting development and an end to civil conflicts in such failed state settings. Unlike Germany and Japan, all of her cases lacked critical conditions that she believes augur for democratic success: education and high literacy rates, advanced levels of industrialization and intervention under terms of unconditional surrender. Moreover, the US commitment to change Germany and Japan was greater than what international will has mustered in any of the post-Cold War cases. Thus, assessing the prospects for democracy by force from her work is much harder. Still, if security can be reestablished in a failed state setting, if civil society can be empowered and if representative institutions can be created and strengthened through a coordinated international commitment, von Hippel is persuaded that today's intra-state conflicts can be moved to more democratic outcomes. This will only begin to occur, however, if the international community better understands the complex dynamics of failing states and generates the will to be engaged in processes of reconstruction that often require flexibility as well as delicate diplomacy that allows people within reconstructed states to be empowered.

Von Hippel's work is particularly disquieting to read in the wake of America's initial attempts to secure and democratize post-Saddam Iraq. Indeed, her insights shed light upon many of the practical difficulties American and British forces have encountered and raise real concerns about major powers' capacities to learn lasting lessons from past engagements. In addition to saying less about the prospects of democracy

by force, however, one wishes von Hippel's work included more discussion of how the prevailing political ideology of American administrations may influence its selective choice of forceful intervention and help shape America's ultimate prospects for success.

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Ian Shapiro, *Democratic Justice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). 333 pp.

Democracy & Trust, ed. Mark E. Warren (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 370 pp.

Shapiro, Ian & Casiano Hacker-Cordón *Democracy's Edges*, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 297 pp.

Democracy, Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón tell us, is a "flawed hegemon." Such a description suits our time, now more than a decade past the Velvet Revolution. With the fading of the end of the Cold War and the dawning of new challenges for democratic nations around the globe, the arrival of these three volumes (each first published in 1999) comes at a propitious time. Certainly the dilemmas that democratic theory evokes have been long apparent, but in many respects it seems suitable that a decade should have passed since 1989 to allow some additional critical detachment from the euphoria of democratic victories in Europe. Where these studies coincide is on the ground of defining and exploring the difficulties of working within a democratic framework where we also acknowledge other—often, competing—values. Now that democracy bestrides the world stage with no competitors for legitimacy, more than ever we are well to explore the democratic dilemma critically and carefully.