

Democracy and Good Government

Our chances are greatly enhanced by the fact that the world is now near to a consensus on democracy. This is a great victory (not without its challenges, as we constantly remind ourselves) but a victory which we do not yet fully comprehend.

It is, in part, a question of promoting a shared value system.

Liberal economies based on the principles of the market cannot easily develop and thrive without political pluralism as well.

Aid -- humanitarian or economic -- to closed societies is money gone to waste, in support of governments that follow false priorities of personal prestige and grandeur. That is why our country is increasingly linking our developmental assistance to human rights and good governance.

It is also a matter of security. Real democracies are less likely to attack each other. They are less likely to overspend on weapons.

Finally, it is a question of effective political co-operation. Much has been written about the new effectiveness of the United Nations since the end of the Cold War. But it is not just because the Soviet Union -- now replaced by Russia -- doesn't any longer veto collective action. It is also due to the fact that around the table are representatives of governments elected to do the right thing -- not, as a decade or two ago, the thing which worked best for their bloc or ideology or regional bias -- but the right thing in terms of an increasingly shared view of right and wrong.

Right Versus Wrong

That was the force of the United Nations decision to reverse Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The eventual use of force to do this -- which, by the way, we all hoped and tried to avoid -- was not a power play by a country, or a set of specific interests. It was authorized by the Security Council as being sadly necessary if there was to be a defensible concept of right over wrong in international affairs.

Without that authorization, Canada and many other coalition partners would not have had the public support for participation in the force at all.

The UN action in Iraq was comparably popular both in this country and in Canada, but for somewhat different underlying reasons. In the U.S., it was seen as a victory for U.S. weapons technology.