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## On Democratizing the World

By YANO Takuya

In Azerbaijan, the constitutional restriction to elect one and the same person President for more than two terms in a row has been removed by over ninety per cent of approving votes in a referendum held this March. Consequently, incumbent President Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev can run for office as many times as he wishes. In short, this constitutional change has paved the way for him to become "President-for-Life." Similar patterns of paving the way for "President-for-Life" by going through "legitimate" procedure have also taken place in various parts of the world as in the case of Algeria last November and that of Venezuela this January.

It is quite doubtful whether those procedures were truly "democratic," even though in each case a majority of votes were won in a referendum or in parliament. Generally speaking, republics in the world put term-limits for presidents. At any rate, lifting those limits is far from being contributive to fostering democracy, and should draw infinitely close to autocracy. It comes as genuine surprise to us living in the twenty-first century that such regimes come in a stream. As our common assumption that democratization is the trend of the world is blatantly challenged, we must admit that there is as yet no consensus in international community on an ideal form of government.

Shortly after the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama announced that History, as ideological evolution of humankind, was over, with resounding victory of liberal democracy. Even back then, such unabashed optimism embarrassed many of us, but is now only reminiscent of the days gone by. Besides, it is now clear that establishing liberal democracy throughout the world is a task of invincible difficulty. And those countries uncongenial to liberal democracy like Russia and China have gained greater voices in the world against the backdrop of rapid economic growth. Interestingly enough, some of the existing development models have been "inverted" to explain the "status quo" of such countries.

For instance, there was coined a phrase "the Beijing Consensus," which is apparently an "inverted" version of "the Washington Consensus." This notion would rather provide some of the existing authoritarian regimes with convenient excuses for the "status quo," than give concrete theoretical implications to their developmental policy. The demand for such notion is rather high, because there are a host of regimes in the world, which are badly in need of such excuses. Besides, it is supported by the very performances of some non-democratic regimes and is therefore seductively convincing. Thus, this kind of argument is likely to continue to carry some weight in the world.

What should we do, then? Here, I would like to propose that we should "passively" champion democracy, just in a way Winston Churchill's famous dictum goes; "Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Instead of giving unqualified approval for democracy, we should come as close as possible to embracing it with all its defects and weakness. From this standpoint, we do not think that every country can easily move onto a path towards democracy, nor are we blind to the susceptibility of many regimes to the charm of alternative models to democracy.

The bottom line is, however, that we shall never budge an inch on the comparative advantage of democracy. We might be flexible over some minor concessions, but we would never compromise the fundamental principle to which we adhere. Sometimes in patience, sometimes swift, we should wheel and deal. Even when we meet an obstacle, we would not despair of ever making a breakthrough. Well, this is almost tantamount to talking about the ABCs of diplomacy. And it is no wonder. The strategy for world democratization requires "the art of subtlety," just as does diplomacy.

**(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. YANO Takuya, Research Fellow, JFIR, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron-Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on March 23 and 24, 2009.)**