

DEMOCRATIZING THE MIDDLE EAST: A CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE?

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THE WAR IN IRAQ continues to dominate international developments and in its uncertain course casts a shadow not only on the foreign policy record of the Bush administration but on the peace of the world as well. Although the president has frequently identified his outlook with conservatism—notably compassionate conservatism—it seems that in pursuing his Iraq policy he has neglected one very important component of conservatism: a prudent respect for history.

Removing Saddam Hussein and his immediate entourage from power in Iraq may have been, as the president had suggested, a contribution to the well being of various parties—perhaps the Iraqi people, perhaps the larger Middle East, and perhaps even the greater security of the United States. Hussein was a dangerous, malevolent, and reckless leader with an alarming track record in foreign policy. That America could accomplish his removal quickly and with relatively few casualties (112 combat deaths by May 1, 2003 when the president declared the end of major combat operations) was demonstrated in a swift and impressive military campaign, one which in a few weeks resulted in the capture of all Iraq by American and British troops.

Clearly, a government was needed to replace the Hussein regime, and American power could have influenced what that government might be, and also how it could—or could not—behave both within and without the country's borders. For starters, quite a few defeated Iraqi generals were available for new careers in May of 2003. Suitable pledges of constitutional processes to follow could have been exacted.

Unfortunately, however, the Bush administration committed the United States to a far more ambitious, nation-building exercise,

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founded on the proposition that Iraq must become a democracy, and that American troops need to remain inside that country as long as necessary to address this lofty aim.

The administration has postulated the idea that democracy, seen as synonymous with the idea of freedom, is a natural desire of all peoples and that its establishment is closely linked to peace and harmony both domestically and internationally. Democracy seems now officially viewed as an antidote to both terrorism and war; if spread in the Middle East, it is expected to change the political dynamics of the whole region and ultimately the world.

There is overwhelming evidence in the experience of the world outside the United States that the Bush “investment-in-democracy” borders on the quixotic and does not reflect a genuinely conservative view of the world. What seems to have saved it thus far from really serious criticism at home is that it represents a kind of displacement of American success and America’s civic religion upon the external world. Perhaps people find it only natural to assume that their own successful experience of one sort or another is applicable to everyone everywhere. Many Americans want to share democracy with the world as Renaissance Europeans wanted to share Christianity with the peoples of newly discovered lands.

SOME ILLUSIONS ABOUT DEMOCRATIZATION

Most conservatives would agree that national entities are not assembly line products. Their identities are shaped by a myriad of specific and particular environments, shared experiences, and unique circumstances, both long-term and short-term, as indeed suggested by the likes of Edmund Burke and Baron de Montesquieu. Cultural, social, and economic circumstances in many countries around the world simply have not been as conducive to enduring democratic institutions as they have been in the United States and a few other relatively fortunate countries. Granted periods of war and revolution around the globe, the number of states which have maintained continuous regimes based on contested popular elections for one century (regardless of the inclusivity of the electorate) may be counted—almost—on the fingers of one hand. That allegedly irresistible “thirst for freedom,” like the “thirst for truth,” has always had to compete in the real world with a great many other thirsts, not all of them equally noble, it would seem.

There is simply an immense gap between the reality of human governance in all recorded history and the romantic fiction of ideologies that everyone, everywhere, and always, yearns for liberty and self-government. The gap is so great that it cannot be explained by

the malevolent ambitions of a few wicked, power-thirsty men any more than human two-footedness could be explained by a historic conspiracy of self-seeking shoe manufacturers. Democracy on a model comparable to the United States, Britain, Australia, or Canada represents a very small fraction of the political past of humanity.¹

In the present era, democratic ideals and formal institutions are much more common and familiar on a world-wide scale than they have ever been before. Nevertheless, there are still many indications that even in our time there is a great disjunction between pretense and reality so far as “democracy” is concerned.

Democracy is almost certainly as much an organic as it is a mechanical phenomenon. Just about anyone could write a democratic constitution. Elections can probably be organized, at least once or a few times most anywhere. But the process in its mechanical aspects can only be sustained over time and made meaningful if popular attitudes and prevailing norms sustain the mechanics. The rule of law is really always the rule of men (and women) who respect the law. Elections are repeatable and substantively significant only if people have sufficient confidence in one another in the sense that “your” victory will not mean “my” extinction, or vice versa. They are sustainable only in circumstances in which people see most of their fellow-participants as reasonably heedful of each other’s welfare. No constitutional document, however eloquent or elaborate, can assure the supremacy of such attitudes within the body politic.

The seemingly prevalent American understanding of “elections” is, by world standards, benign. Most Americans expect their major parties, in office or out of office, to collaborate with one another and

¹See Charles Humana (1992; note pp. xi and xii–xiv as well as pp. xvii–xix). Humana estimated that in 1991, 48 percent of the world population lived under a form of government that could be described as “multiparty democracy or similar” while the rest lived under “one-party or one-person rule” and “military or effective military rule.” However, when Humana analyzed his 104 nation-states with respect to as many as 40 different human rights including “multiparty elections by secret and universal ballot” but also such things as “freedom from political censorship of the press;” freedom to “practice any religion;” and many others, he classified only 22 of the 104 at levels at least equal to the United States. More interestingly still, while Humana calculated the aggregate human rights score for the U.S. at a figure of 90, his “world” average—the average of all 104 states—was only 62. The latter figure was 28 points below the U.S. but it was only 8 points above the Soviet Union (54) in its last year of existence under the Communist regime. Among the 104 countries, 58 were actually closer to the Soviets than the U.S. in their human rights scores.

to support the president on those issues that involve important common goals, or the welfare of the country as a whole. The idea that the opponent might be seen as a mortal enemy with whom no collaboration is either possible or desirable stands well outside the American ethos.²

There are some analogies to American attitudes abroad—in places like Britain, Scandinavia, and in some of the old Commonwealth countries, for example. But not throughout most of the world. It is for this reason, ultimately, that much of what passes for “democracy” outside the United States is little more than empty ritualism, something on the order of a comic opera in the midst of social anguish and even tragedy. One can, for example, speak about “democracy” being the current predominant form of government in Latin America. In many countries of the southern hemisphere, and elsewhere, elections have been taking place with at least some regularity in recent decades. But to what practical effect?

One of the nominal democracies of Latin America is Colombia. By some estimates about 35,000 people have been killed in acts of political violence in Colombia since 1989. In the 1990s several presidential incumbents and candidates have been assassinated. Drug lords, guerrillas, and right-wing paramilitary hit squads have dominated the country’s political landscape. Venezuela has been nominally a democracy since the rule of its last “formal” dictator in 1958, but under the presidency of Hugo Chavez, who attempted a coup of his own in 1992, Venezuela has experienced considerable political instability and sporadic violence.³ Under the rule of Alberto Fujimori, elected in 1990, Peru has experienced a decade of simultaneous instability, violence, and repression. The democracies of Bolivia and Ecuador, despite repeated popular elections, have a very long way to go before they achieve some genuine comparability with, say, Western Europe. Perhaps the most striking among the democratic failures of the modern world is Sri Lanka which has managed to

²Among numerous references see Burns and Peltason (1960, pp. 581–82), “Bipartisanship has enormous appeal.” The idea that “partisan politics stops at the water’s edge is comforting to the many Americans worried about diversity at home” (p. 581). See also Irish and Prothro (1968, pp. 75–78) and Lowi (1981, p. 264). Compare Lineberry (1986, pp. 186, 432).

³Note a recent survey (*The Economist* 2005, pp 35–36) of Venezuela’s popularly elected regime. President Chavez had declared himself a “Fidelista”; he has apparently designated another democracy—the U.S.—as a likely aggressor against Venezuela. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, called his government a “negative force in the region” and some aspects of his rule “very deeply troubling” (p. 35).

combine popularly elected governments with rampant separatist guerrilla insurgency and over 60,000 deaths in civil conflicts since the 1980s, as well as thousands of insurgents and suspected insurgent sympathizers seemingly “liquidated” by government security forces.

One of the ironies of the Bush position on “democracy-in-the-Middle-East” is the very important support that the United States has received, military and diplomatic, from the regime of President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan—a military dictator, no less. Musharraf’s assistance has been useful in the American campaign in Afghanistan. Certainly, it has been the administration’s position that it has been useful. Yet, there is substantial evidence from repeated public opinion surveys in the region, as well as from publicly articulated positions of political parties, politicians, and press organs, that General Musharraf has helped the Americans against the Taliban and against Osama Bin Laden—so far as he has helped—not in response to the broad preferences of Pakistani people but rather very much against them. If Pakistan were to hold a genuinely open, inclusive election today, it would be hardly surprising to find that many more Pakistanis think well of Osama Bin Laden than of George Bush (*USA Today* 2004, p. 7A).

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press carried out an international survey of public opinion *vis-à-vis* U.S. foreign policy in March of 2004. Among nine nations surveyed, including Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, and the U.S. itself, Pakistani opinion was generally most hostile to the United States. Only 6 percent of Pakistanis agreed that the U.S. was making a sincere effort to reduce international terrorism, fewer than anywhere else. Pakistan had the lowest percentage (10) of respondents agreeing that the U.S. was doing a good or excellent job in rebuilding Iraq. Pakistan also had the lowest percentage of respondents (8) who thought Iraq would be better off with Saddam out of power. Only Morocco and Jordan exceeded Pakistan in the percentage of respondents who believed that suicide bombings against Americans in Iraq were justifiable (46).

The administration’s support for democracy as a way of promoting peace appears to rely on some social science literature to the effect that democracies do not wage war against other democracies, or perhaps even aggressive wars in general.⁴ But that literature rests in part on a “sleight-of-hand.” In its logical structure it is analogous to the proposition that men who pray to God—especially on hands

⁴To be sure, the very concept of “democracy” is one which does not lend itself to an “either-or test.” It is possible to say that a woman either is or is

and knees—don't murder other men. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that they could kill other human beings if they were thus occupied. But as the history of the Inquisition and the Crusades amply demonstrates, those who pray often have no problem killing others—when they are not praying. Analogously, people who are “nice and sensitive” don't kill other people, but only when they are being nice and sensitive. What they do at other times is quite another matter.

Weimar Germany did not go to war with Europe and the world to avenge the alleged wrongs of Versailles, but Germany, transmuted into Hitler's Third Reich, did. And it did so with the substantial support of millions of people who had been citizens and voters in the Weimar Republic. At the very least, Hitler's strong pluralities, two in 1932 and one in early 1933, are not to be forgotten. The implicit argument of the pro-democracy literature that dictatorships do not involve volitions of broad masses (who are somehow innately peace-loving) but just the whims of one or a few dictatorial manipulators are little more than romantic fiction disguised as “science.” Even the most personalistic dictatorships are social creations that usually operate with all sorts of bureaucratic and mass followings.

Apart from the “sleight-of-hand” aspect, the argument which absolves democracies from responsibility for war and turmoil is actually wrong on the facts. Wishful thinkers are quick to overlook evidence that contradicts their illusions. One of the best modern illustrations of this matter is the history of post-communist Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia after 1945 was a multinational state held together by the apparatus of the Communist Party led at its apex by Marshal Josip Broz Tito. Until the dictator's death in 1980, Yugoslavia not only maintained its territorial unity but, with moderate use of coercion, surveillance, censorship, and repression, it actually functioned with relatively little overt domestic strife and violence. Walking the streets

not pregnant. It is possible to say that a person either suffers from small pox or does not. But the judgment about “democracy” is always subject to some imprecision. How many voters need to turn out in an election to make it “truly democratic”? Are presidential regimes *à la* U.S. less democratic than parliamentary ones like Britain? Was Switzerland a “democracy” when it denied women the vote? Was Britain a “democracy” when it allowed at least some people more than one vote (before 1948) and imposed a higher age requirement for women than for men?

Note, however, Bueno de Mesquita et al. (1999, pp. 791–807). The authors find it virtually an empirical law that “democracies do not fight with one another.” As they put it, “the evidence for this is quite strong” (p. 781). These authors do not appear to be aware, among various other subjects, of the interplay between “democracy” and “civil war” in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

of Zagreb, Belgrade, or Sarajevo on a sunny afternoon was not a challenge either to tourists or natives during the Tito years.⁵

The death of Tito, however, led to the gradual unraveling of the Communist dictatorship in Yugoslavia, both through developments within the League of Yugoslav Communists as successors fought over the Tito legacy and also in the society at large in response to the perceived weakening of the Party's hold on power. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing on in the 1990s, Yugoslavia began to fragment and also quite clearly to democratize. Communist party monopoly of power vanished. New political parties and associations began to spring up. Freedom of the press and freedom of expression as well as assembly were clearly on the rise in the various parts of Yugoslavia. Nationalist, cultural, and religious currents long repressed by the Communists began to manifest themselves in various parts of the country—in Croatia, in Bosnia, in Serbia and Montenegro; and also among Yugoslavia's Albanians among others. All sorts of relatively inclusive and representative elections were being held in various parts of Yugoslavia, elections that would have been utterly unimaginable during the heyday of the Tito regime. What ensued in former Yugoslavia, however, with all this increasing democratization, was not mutual popular acceptance and a live-and-let-live attitude but the very opposite: bitter, prolonged, and bloody ethnic feuds.

There were lots of elections on the road to dissolution and civil war. In January of 1990 the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in an Extraordinary Party Congress formally gave up its monopoly of power. In April and May, Franjo Tudjman, the Croatian nationalist leader, won the country's presidency and his Croatian Democratic Union won a parliamentary majority—coincidentally alarming and provoking Serbian opposition. From this period onwards, Yugoslavia's elections served not merely to reflect and unite the popular followings of different ethnic factions but just as importantly to panic and counter-mobilize the opposition for battle within and outside each of the constituent republics in the bloody struggle for survival and power.

⁵Patric Brogan (1990, p. 372) cites an additional rationale for Tito's effective grip in Yugoslavia: "However much Croats and Macedonians may have disliked Belgrade, they much preferred it to Moscow. Now that threat is lifted, and they are free to quarrel among themselves. They are increasingly availing themselves of that dispensation."

About Milosevic, he says that the latter put himself at the head of the Serbian nationalistic movement which at once won him "a degree of popularity that no Yugoslav leader has enjoyed since Tito" but that this also made Milosevic "widely distrusted in other regions" (ibid).

As Professor Lenard J. Cohen (1993, pp. 145–46) of Simon Fraser University wrote of the multi-party Yugoslav elections of 1990:

[They] . . . clarified and pointed to the weakness of those political forces that were focused on transcending inter-regional and inter-ethnic divisions in Yugoslavia. . . . To a very large extent, the nature and outcome of the 1990 “pluralist revolution” in Yugoslavia set the stage for the subsequent dissolution of the Balkan state—and the violent warfare which would soon follow in its wake.

The ultimate costs of this whole process—“democratization” included—involved hundreds of thousands of people killed, maimed, deprived of their possessions, and thrown out of their homes often to face utter personal ruin.

NOTABLE FAILURES

As a matter of empirical reality, democracy has been tried and abandoned throughout the world so many times that a full catalogue of all its disasters would probably overwhelm a book the size of New York City’s telephone directory. It has been tried and it has failed, repeatedly, in many different locations in Latin America, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa. Free and open elections led not to the establishment of viable democracies and the preservation of freedoms but, in many cases, were no more than preludes to bitter civil strife and ultimately the establishment of repressive dictatorships. Although in the context of the American experience phrases such as people’s “natural love of freedom” may have great resonance, the reality is that people—in various places, under various circumstances, and in different contexts—seek all sorts of things, not merely “freedom” or not always “freedom.” In some cases, they may actually seek freedom for themselves but not equally for others—which may lead to conflict and warfare rather than to harmony and reconciliation. People may sometimes be more worried about safety, security, order, and property, and national or ethnic identity than they are about the right of free expression, association, and franchise—especially for those people whom they perceive as trying to take away their property, security, and identity or even physically destroy them.

In post-Versailles Europe, political democracies were tried across most of the continent. The Italian elections of 1919 were the most open, inclusive, and democratic in the country’s national experience. They were followed, however, within three years by the dictatorship of the Fascists under the leadership of Benito Mussolini. Between 1919 and 1933, Weimar Germany was a veritable model of political democracy. In fact, Germans were much more conscientious voters than modern Americans. But in two national parliamentary elections

in 1932 Hitler's Nazi Party received far more popular support than any other political entity, and this led to President von Hindenburg naming Hitler Chancellor on January 30, 1933. Democracy was tried in Poland in 1919 but collapsed in 1926. It was also variously tried in Hungary, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia but faltered in all these places long before the start of the Second World War.⁶

In 1936, Spain enjoyed—if one could actually use such a term—a free and open election. It was, however, but a prelude to massive strife, domestic upheaval, civil war, and the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, consolidated over all of Spain in 1939. In 1971, Chile enjoyed free and open elections which resulted in the presidency of Marxist Salvadore Allende, but also in enormous domestic unrest in the consequence of profound right-left divisions, and ultimately the establishment of a military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in 1973. Virtually every country in Latin America has had multiple successions of dictatorships following longer or shorter periods of democratic constitutionalism—in Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Paraguay—even in Uruguay.

Closer to the scene of present day conflicts, Iran held democratic elections in 1979, elections in which, very respectably, about two thirds of the eligible electorate participated but which resulted in the approval of a constitution that gave ultimate state power to a theocratic dictator, the Ayatollah Khomeini. The referendum held in March of 1979 on the adoption of an Islamic Republic, i.e., one giving ultimate supervision of the whole state to Khomeini, was accepted by an overwhelming majority of Iranian voters.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of a genuinely democratic election resulting in calamitous social conflict, and ultimately denial of political liberties to people, occurred in Algeria in December 1991 when the so-called Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) seeking to make Algeria an Islamic state on the "Khomeini model" won an overwhelming victory over all its opponents. The FIS won 188 seats in the Algerian national assembly, while the second place party, the secular Socialist Forces Front collected only 25. So much violence and chaos, however, followed this profoundly divisive election that the

⁶See Rothschild (1974). Writing about the most democratic of East European states during this period, Czechoslovakia, Rothschild makes the interesting observation that its leaders, Masaryk and Benes, had committed the country's political system to two "incompatible propositions": "democracy on the one hand and "specifically Czechoslovak national culture" on the other" (p. 134). This made the "system" essentially untenable in the long run.

Algerian government declared a state of emergency on February 6, 1992. Some two hundred soldiers and policemen lost their lives within the first ten months of the December polling. Algeria's President, Mohammed Boudiaf, was assassinated in June as turmoil and carnage gripped the land in what turned out to be a long-term conflict between the forces of a theocratic revolution on the one hand and secular repression on the other.

There is all the reason in the world to admire the courage of Iraqi voters who on January 30, 2005, turned out in great numbers, defying the threat of death and mutilation at the hands of terrorists, to cast a vote in a nation-wide election for a Constituent Assembly and a new political leadership. But the appearance of one swallow a spring does not make. The Iraqi election had considerable impact on American public opinion and gave the president a boost in the polls. What consequences the election may have for Iraq in the weeks and months, not to say years, to come is another matter.

At least once before, beginning in 1958, Iraq seemed to be on its way to the development of a modern, pluralist political democracy. In 1958 Iraq was a republic with a provisional constitution that declared the people to be the source of all power and that also guaranteed freedom of expression and assembly. By an amendment adopted in 1964, all Iraqi citizens were guaranteed equal rights and duties under the law regardless of their race, religion, or language. In 1970, the "national rights of the Kurdish people" (whom Saddam later gassed) were constitutionally recognized and guaranteed. All these noble acquisitions were dashed in a series of coups with power ultimately consolidated in the late 1970s by Saddam Hussein.

Is there any reason to believe that what was so readily reversible in the world in the 1920s, 1930s, 1950s, 1960s, or 1970s has become all but "natural" and "irreversible" in the first decade of the twenty-first century?

MISLEADING COMPARISONS

Commentators and administration figures sometimes point to Germany and to Japan as examples of spectacular American successes in "turning around" societies and cultures which were once identified with dictatorship and militarism. If we could do it there, why not now in Iraq? As usual, all sorts of particular "details" are overlooked. One of these is the element of time. Germany, conquered in 1945, did not regain its sovereignty until 1954—at least 9 years later; in Japan the process took 6 years, until the peace treaty of 1951. American troops remained stationed in both countries even after these milestones. Our aspirations for Iraq, prodded by a modern

American impatience, appear to allow much less time for the period of Iraqi preparation or tutelage in the arts of democracy.

Perhaps even more importantly, the role demanded by Americans of the Iraqis is the very reverse of what was demanded—or not demanded—of the Germans and the Japanese. During the Cold War, in the 1940s and 1950s, the United States, rather generously, absorbed most of the costs of the military defense of these countries. The Germans and the Japanese were not expected to function as soldiers and militiamen—on the front lines or anywhere else. From this sort of thing they were actually discouraged. In the shadow of American power, Germany and Japan were allowed to spend many relatively sheltered years busily rebuilding their infrastructures and cultivating domestic prosperity. One consequence of this was to create a scenario which was artistically portrayed with great humor—and more than a germ of truth—in the classic motion picture, *The Mouse that Roared*. Considering the benefits, let us get conquered by the Americans—that was the message! Under American occupation, both the Germans and the Japanese were able to answer affirmatively the famous question: “Are you better off now than you were a few years ago?” as life continued to significantly improve—for most people most of the time.

But in Iraq Americans demand that the Iraqis increasingly absorb the task of self-defense. On this issue there seems to be a full-fledged consensus between the Bush administration and its opposition. Under the circumstances, recent and current, this implies a lot of pain and high costs for the Iraqis. Moreover, given the acute insecurity in the streets of Iraq and periodic, destructive acts of sabotage, the answer to the question whether people are better off now than they were before the appearance of Americans and American-sponsored “democracy” is, at least, significantly more complicated. It would obviously require a treatise to catalogue all the differences between present-day Iraq and the former Axis countries of the 1940s. But among some important ones at least worth mentioning here is the fact that both Germany and Japan were ethnically and culturally more homogeneous societies. In neither case was national disintegration a serious possible consequence of democratization. Iraq, however, is closer in this respect to 1980 Yugoslavia than it is to 1945 Germany or Japan. The latter were also, unlike Iraq, highly industrialized countries, which meant that great post-war improvements in living conditions, such as the provision of electricity, transport, and water supply among many other things, could be brought about much more quickly in these countries with consequently quicker, more positive impacts on public opinion.

The quiescent attitude of German and Japanese populations in the aftermath of Allied conquest, despite great material damage, made reconstruction both easier and faster than it has been in Iraq. Employment levels and effective capital investment, with all the benefits of “normalcy,” could be restored much more quickly. As historian R.R. Palmer (1959, p. 864) observed:

the outstanding achievement of West Germany was its spectacular industrial recovery and expansion; industrial production in the early 1950's was three-fifths greater than it had been before the war in the same territories.

In substantial contrast, widespread violence in Iraq has impeded employment, investment, reconstruction, and ultimately the kind of sense of normalcy and enjoyment of life that are likely to benefit new political systems.⁷ In Japan, the emperor's sanction of the movement to democracy was most helpful. There has not been—nor could there be—an analogously strong indigenous endorser of democracy in Iraq, given its great ethnic and religious divisions.

SOME POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In a highly interdependent world the United States obviously cannot remain—or become—an isolationist power. That would almost certainly be suicidal. But just as in the practice of medicine it is easier to set a broken leg than it is to permanently alter someone's personality, so in foreign policy some things are more easily done than others. The range of American interventions requires a prudent assessment of efficacy.

In the strictest sense of the word, it is possible that the democratization of Iraq will not only demonstrably succeed in the next few years, but that, by example, it will also revolutionize the whole Middle East and indirectly ameliorate the life of the entire world—possible but highly unlikely.

The American record in undertaking what may be termed mind-altering interventions abroad is not very reassuring. In 1994, pursuant to a U.N. resolution, American forces landed in Haiti in order to end a military dictatorship and to restore Father Jean Bertrand Aristide to the presidency to which he had been duly elected in 1990 but ousted by the military the following year. The U.S.-led operation was a swift success and faced no significant armed opposition in

⁷The relationship between perceptions of political system impact and attitudes toward the system was classically formulated in Almond and Verba (1963; note remarks on Germany, e.g., pp. 362–63).

Haiti. It would be very difficult to claim, however, that this intervention to “restore democracy” produced any fundamental changes in Haitian political behavior in the ensuing years. Violence, fraud, assassinations, riots and electoral boycotts by the opposition, widespread poverty and general instability all have combined to characterize the Haitian landscape.

In December of 1995 the so-called Dayton Accords brought to an end five years of civil war in the former Yugoslavia, especially in its focal point of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under the Dayton agreement, some 60,000 troops from NATO countries including 20,000 from the United States, were sent to enforce the peace settlement. NATO troops are still in Bosnia today nearly ten years later. The Serbian leader, Dr. Radovan Karadzic, wanted for war crimes at the Hague, has yet to be found. Has international intervention fundamentally changed hearts and minds among the ethnic factions of former Yugoslavia? Few informed observers would heartily agree.

Afghanistan was liberated from Taliban control by U.S. led forces in December of 2001. It has had, like Iraq, one seemingly successful election. But the continued presence of foreign, especially American, troops backing up the Karzai regime, and sporadic acts of insurgency directed against it, leave the country’s future prospects unclear.

The relationship between the application of physical force and the achievement of long-range cultural change is highly problematic.

The notion that all authoritarian forms of government, whether under the auspices of a king, a dictator, or perhaps an elected president wielding emergency powers, may and must vanish from the world, everywhere and for all time, is neither a conservative idea nor is it a practical idea. It is actually a denial of the reality of human experience in all its past enormity. In many places and at many times, authoritarian rule has emerged in response to internal conflicts, external dangers, the need for swift and decisive resolution of problems. Phenomena very frequently repeated in human experience probably tell us something about its essential condition. Progressive heirs to the Age of Reason characteristically believe that the world can and must be made anew—if we but try, sincerely and enthusiastically. This idea probably would amuse the likes of Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, as well as people like William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, and Jonathan Swift.

As the late American scholar, Clinton Rossiter (1948, p. 5), had said:

Civil Liberties, free enterprise, constitutionalism, government by debate and compromise—these are strictly luxury products, and in but a fraction of the governments of men since the dawn of history

has the pattern of government and society which the American people take for granted been able to thrive and prosper.

Rossiter thought that the emergencies occasioned by wars, rebellions, and economic depressions could not be effectively accommodated by characteristically and constitutionally democratic means, even in such countries as the United States. Lincoln was Rossiter's most frequent illustration. More importantly still, Rossiter recognized, in distinction to the policy makers of our own day, that the causes of all the various "emergencies" that governments encounter are far from unusual in the totality of human experience and he expected them to continue to grow in the world of the future. Interestingly, he linked this expectation in 1948 most directly to the dawn of an atomic age in which the need for quick and decisive responses to thwart annihilation would prompt societies to confer additional powers on their executives (Rossiter 1948, p. 314).

Other things being equal . . . a great emergency in the life of a constitutional democracy will be more easily mastered by the government if dictatorial forms are to some degree substituted for democratic, and if the executive branch is empowered to take strong action without an excess of deliberation and compromise. (Ibid., p. 288)

Conservatives are usually apt to recognize the somewhat discordant mosaic of human qualities and propensities. While much is to be said on behalf of love, friendship, and happiness in human affairs, grief, fear, anger, and mischief are just as surely part of the human legacy. For American conservatives this is a paradoxical problem because while they obviously greatly respect their country's political tradition, much of this tradition itself is anchored in the rebellious attitudes of the Age of Reason. The resolution of the paradox depends ultimately on the recognition that a largely successful American experience of the last two centuries cannot be rapidly and artificially projected onto the whole wide world. "If I did it, you can do it, too" concept does not always work, even if all TV body builders so imply. In facing up to our current foreign policy predicaments, the conservative values of caution and prudence are very much in order. If our policy comes to depend on a radical remaking of the whole world on the Woodrow Wilson model, it will in all likelihood not only fail, but, as in consequence of Versailles, it will actually multiply the points of conflict.

The most extreme, and costly, sanctions of American foreign policy should be reserved for urgent cases of national self-defense. Otherwise laudable goals, including the alleviation of human suffering, and the amelioration of the world's moral and political condition,

should be prudently left to the arts of persuasion, to various forms of multilateral cooperation, to assistance programs, and, of course, always, as far as possible, to leadership by example.

What is suggested here is that interventions that are impractically broad in their objectives may also have paradoxically negative results. Assuming the burden of building democracy abroad for people who may not be able or willing to do it for themselves is likely to harm liberty at home. It is bound to produce an enormous state machinery for the support and maintenance of long-term military operations beyond U.S. borders with all manner of adverse financial, regulatory, and political consequences for the citizenry at home. Debts, taxes, casualties, new layers of bureaucracy, and venomous quarrels are all likely to shadow the paths of imprudent interventions.

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