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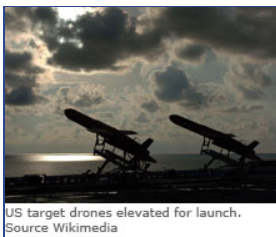
From democratic peace theory to forcible regime change

The revival of neo-Kantian theories of universal peace has led to intellectual justification of foreign "interventions" whose results have nothing to do with democracy. Evidence suggests that democracy does not precede peace but vice versa and that, even were it possible to implement, a global democratic order would not necessarily be more peaceable, writes Rein Müllerson.

Current regime changes (the Arab Spring and earlier colour revolutions in some of the former Soviet republics) raise interrelated issues of international relations (IR) theory and international law. Among these issues are democratic peace theory (DPT) and its role in supporting or justifying policies guided by economic and strategic interests as well as external inducement of, assistance or encouragement for regime change. Also raised are questions about the use of force for humanitarian purposes ("humanitarian intervention" or "responsibility to protect") and interference, militarily or otherwise, in internal conflicts on behalf of either governments or opposition.

Theory and politics of democratic peace

One of the arguments in favour of promotion of liberal democracy all over the world is the belief in so-called democratic peace theories, which have their philosophical groundings in Immanuel Kant's 1795 essay "Perpetual peace: A philosophical study". In 1964, American sociologist Dean Babst published an article entitled "Elective governments — A force for peace,"¹ in which he drew on Quincy Wright's classic work *A Study of War*, an analysis of major wars from 1480 to 1941. Babst concluded that the existence of independent states with elective governments, i.e. democracies, greatly enhances the chances for the maintenance of peace in the world.² Until the end of the Cold War, Kant's philosophical treatise was treated as a masterpiece of abstract philosophy that had little to do with the real world; very few remembered or referred to Babst's article.



There was some revival of interest in the topic in the 1980s, when a number of authors claimed that the absence of wars between democracies or liberal states is both a fact in international relations and an empirical law of IR theory. Rudolf Rummel stated that "violence will occur between states only if at least one is non-libertarian",³ while Jack Levy wrote that "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations".⁴ However, the 1990s, marked as they were by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and a new wave of

democratisation in eastern and central Europe, saw an exponential increase of interest in neo-Kantian democratic peace theories. A new IR theory (or theories) emerged — that of Democratic Peace Theory (DPT). The gist of these theories is the assertion that, since democracies do not wage wars against each other, the more democracies there are in the world the less potential there is for military conflict.⁵ Or, as President Clinton put it at the level of practical politics: "Ultimately the best strategy to insure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere".⁶

In contradistinction to realist theories, which hold that conflicts between states are inherent in and stem from the anarchical nature of international society, and

depend little on the internal characteristics of states, democratic peace theories are part of liberal IR theories, which pay close attention to the nature of states and their domestic features.⁷ Christopher Layne, an adherent of the realist IR theory, writes that DP theories and realism part company on a crucial point: "The former holds that changes within states can transform the nature of international politics. Realism takes the view that even if states change internally, the structure of the international political system remains the same. Since systemic structure is the primary determinant of international political outcomes, structural constraints mean that similarly placed states will act similarly, regardless of their domestic political systems."⁸

Several explanations tend to be given to statistical studies that, in the opinion of the adherents of DPT, prove their theories. First, because democratically elected governments are accountable to the people, and because it is the people who bear the brunt of all wars, democracies are naturally more peace-loving than non-democracies. Second, because democracies resolve their domestic problems and disputes not by violence but through discussion and compromises, they extrapolate these procedures to their external relations. The first of these two features is sometimes called "the role of institutional constraints", i.e. checks and balances embedded in democratic institutions, where public opinion has a constraining function in making democracies more peaceful. The second is referred to as "the role of normative effects", meaning that democratic norms and culture applicable domestically are externalised to cover relations between states. Finally, it has been argued by some that because democracies are wealthier, they have more to lose from wars than societies that are less well-off.

The dyadic DP theory, supported by most adherents of the theory, suggests that democracies don't fight each other, while monadic DP theory, which has fewer adherents, supposes that democracies are generally more peace-loving. Dyadic DP theories argue that, as democracies are open and trust each other, their external contradictions are resolved like domestic disagreements — through discussion, compromises and concessions. Because non-democracies are opaque and because internal discontent is either suppressed or explodes in violent revolts, it is not possible to trust non-democratic regimes; like the methods of domestic politics in democracies, their way of doing politics at home is also externalised. Although these explanations should be usable, in principle, to support monadic theories of DP, i.e. theories that claim not only that democracies do not wage wars against each other but also that they rarely wage wars against non-democracies, monistic theories have fewer supporters since they so obviously contradict the reality. Even mature liberal democracies have waged wars against non-democracies and it has not always been the case that the initiative of such conflicts has come from the non-democracies.

Problems with democratic peace theories

Intuitively, and thinking of the European continent of today in comparison with its relatively recent past, one may indeed give credence to DP theories. European history is as bloody as the history of any other continent; twice in the last century, European wars dragged other peoples in, transforming its internal conflicts into world wars. Since 1945, however, the western part of Europe has indeed enjoyed the longest period of peace in its history. Although the democratic nature of today's France and Germany, for example, may not be the sole factor that makes a military conflict between them unimaginable, it certainly seems to be a contributing factor to the solid peace between these erstwhile enemies. The same applies to many other pairs of European states.

There are, however, serious problems with DP theories, even within the European context. First, statistical data used to prove DP theories belong to a relatively short period of time; the very phenomenon of the democratic state is fairly recent, especially if we limit democracies to "mature" or "liberal" democracies and do not go as far back as to Ancient Greece. James Lee Ray observes that "the majority of democratic states that have ever existed emerged during the Cold War", suggesting that this "historic epoch may prove idiosyncratic with respect to relationships among democratic states; only time will tell whether the large number of democratic states that have emerged in recent years will fight wars against each other in the absence of a serious threat from the Soviet Union".⁹

It is indeed true that most democracies emerged or matured during the Cold War. They all belonged to the same — western — camp of the bi-polar world that felt threatened by its communist rival. This, naturally, made all conflictual aspects of intra-camp relations secondary to the main threat, both military and ideological, from its rival — eastern — bloc. Related to this factor is the role of the overwhelmingly powerful leader of the western bloc — the United States of America. Washington played the role of the big brother that not only guaranteed the security of the smaller members of the western bloc from outside threats, but also kept order within the camp (though it should be emphasised that the smaller brothers succumbed to Washington's leadership much more voluntarily than eastern bloc members yielded to Moscow's authority). However, Tony Smith is right when he writes that, "in conceptual terms, the chief failure of DPT is that it does not acknowledge the role of a hegemonic leader in creating, protecting and expanding the zone of democratic peace".¹⁰ Indeed, there existed a uni-polar and hegemonic peace within one of the parts of the bi-polar world. The presence of the totalitarian adversary, whose threat was not only military but also ideological, certainly played a role in liberal democracies' submission to the will of the protector, acting as a kind of a Leviathan for that part of the world — the so-called "first world". The domestically democratic United States has been and remains internationally hegemonic. This factor, on the one hand, contributed to the democratic peace practice within the camp of mature democracies during the Cold War period; on the other hand, the same factor explains why Washington, as a hegemonic power, behaved and continues to behave quite aggressively in its external relations beyond the camp of mature liberal democracies following its lead. Even today, the "hard face" of Enlightenment's legacy, which is morally neutral and whose purpose may be not only liberation but also domination, has a tendency that Martti Koskenniemi has defined as a "hegemonic struggle to make one's partial view seem like the universal preference".¹¹

Robert Cooper, who distinguishes between pre-modern, modern and post-modern states, believes that the United States, whose domestic structures and processes are relatively similar to those of European post-modern states, conducts itself externally as a modern state that behaves like states have always behaved, following Machiavellian principles and *raison d'état*.¹² Considering whether it is possible to place the US alongside Canada and most European states as a post-modern state, Cooper writes: "The USA is the more doubtful case since it is not clear that the US government or Congress accepts either the necessity and desirability of interdependence, or its corollaries of openness, mutual surveillance and mutual interference to the same extent as most European governments now do."¹³ Such a difference in comparison with other liberal democracies is explained by Washington's sense of its global role, which Cooper politely refers to as "the knowledge that the defence of the civilised world rests ultimately on its shoulders".¹⁴ A more impartial or critical

observer may consider this to be the role of a hegemonic power acting in the belief that its values are universal, and that its interests clash with interests of other nations only when the latter are non-democracies guided by narrow self-interest. The problem with this logic is, as Robert Cooper himself states, is that "hegemony is no longer acceptable in a liberal world that values human rights and self-determination".¹⁵ This was written in the 1990s, when China and other non-western nations were not as strong and assertive as they are today, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, and when the financial and economic crisis did not yet loom on the horizon. Any hegemony is even less acceptable in a contemporary world that is moving further towards multipolarity and diversity of political regimes and economic models. A globalised world is simply too big to be governed from one hegemonic centre. Today's Europe consists of mature liberal democracies and the potential for armed conflicts between them is not very realistic. Although the democratic nature of European states seems to be, at least intuitively, the primary factor excluding the use of force or even the threat of force between them, there are other factors as well. The most important among them is that not only are European states post-modern states, but that the European state-system is what Robert Cooper calls a "post-modern state system".¹⁶ This international system, to which western and now also central and eastern European states belong, is characterised, in Cooper's words, by the breakdown of distinctions between domestic and foreign affairs; mutual interference in (traditional) domestic affairs; formal rejection of the use of force for resolving disputes among themselves as well as the impossibility of foreseeing realistic scenarios for such use of force; the growing irrelevance of borders; and security based on transparency, openness and interdependence.¹⁷ European liberal democracies not only have similar domestic political and economic systems as well as, *grosso modo*, the same history (mostly bloody), they have also created a unique international system where realist principles (anarchy, concern for relative power, prisoners' dilemma, etc.) either do not apply at all or play only a secondary and subordinate role. Here, the structure of the international political system of which Layne speaks has not remained the same; it is not any more anarchic, or as anarchic as the whole international system or other regional international systems. The European international system has radically changed; we may say that instead of remaining Hobbesian, it has become Kantian. However, this does not mean that democracies, even vis-à-vis other democracies, act in the same way beyond such an international system. Moreover, the European international system could hardly be replicated globally, at least in the foreseeable future. Can anyone be sure that even if China does become more democratic, it will also have relations with the United States similar to those between France and Germany or the Netherlands and Spain? There is more than one reason why authoritarian rulers rather than democratically elected governments may more easily resolve certain conflictual situations peacefully (e.g. through bribery, by means of dynastic marriages, or a weaker party retreating in the face of inevitable defeat). Of course, this does not mean that the world of authoritarian states is more peaceful than the world of democracies; certainly not. However, it means that even if a world of democracies were possible, it may not be necessarily more peaceful. Moreover, proponents of DPT understand democracy as a western style liberal democracy, which is a rather limited vision of possible future political arrangements. There is something significant in Ido Oren's statement that "the democratic peace claim is not about democracies per se as much as it is about countries that are 'America like' or of 'our kind'. The apparently objective coding rules by which democracy is defined in fact represent current American values."¹⁸ That there is a hegemonic struggle going on in the world seems to be quite obvious and beyond any doubt. Globally,

there is still only one hegemonic power — the United States, acting sometimes unilaterally, often together with its allies. One of President G. W. Bush's aids explained to Ron Suskind how reality is created in today's world: "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality — judiciously, as you will — we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors [...] and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."¹⁹ This statement is not only arrogant but also deluded, since Washington's ability to control and guide events are increasingly diminishing and may have characterised the rather short unipolar moment²⁰ that followed the demise of the Soviet Union. If the manner in which Bush's aid put is an expression of extreme arrogance combined with ignorance and naivety, many intelligent and knowledgeable Americans think quite similarly. For example, writing recently in the *International Herald Tribune*, Yale law professor John Fabian Witt, among many interesting and rather knowledgeable comments on the use of unmanned drones, also writes: "Inside the United States government, lawyers like Jeh C. Johnson in the Pentagon and Harold Koh in the State Department, along with hundreds of other lawyers in the Justice Department, the White House and elsewhere, are creating new systems for regulating the targeting process."²¹ I know well and hold in great esteem Professor Harold Hongju Koh — the current State Department Legal Adviser, who, I am sure, does not think that he, together with his colleagues from the State, the Defence and the Justice Departments of the United States, is creating international legal rules for targeting (Witt's article is about international law). But if by "elsewhere" Witt does not mean the foreign, defence and justice ministries of China, Russia, France, Germany, Brazil and many other countries, which have not delegated to the United States Government the onerous task of making international law for the whole world, his comment — in substance, if not in tone — differs little from what President G. Bush's aid told Ron Suskind. Such a mindset is not harmless, and though it may indeed help create new realities, these often have nothing in common with the one that Washington intends to create.

Yet, when regional powers like China (e.g. in the South China Sea) or Russia (e.g. in the Caucasus) claim to have their special spheres of interest close to their borders, the global hegemon immediately cries wolf: in today's world, there must be no place for spheres of interest; there are only universal values and interests whose content (free market, democracy, secularism, etc.) is defined by the West. However, when used as an export item, there is a serious problem with this soft and humane face of Enlightenment's legacy. Though there are more than a handful of western educated or influenced people in many non-western countries, who cry for liberties and democracy, in practice such revolutions often end up in chaos, frustration, reversals to dictatorships or emergence of failed states. Why so?

Even if western values could, in principle, be universalised, not all societies are ready for their immediate introduction. Sometimes a medicine is too strong and instead of curing the patient may kill her. How things end up depends on many variables. Samuel Huntington has identified a number of conditions conducive to the consolidation of emerging democracies: 1) the experience of a previous effort at democratisation, even if it failed; 2) relatively high levels of economic development; 3) a favourable international political environment, with outside assistance; 4) early timing of the transition to democracy, relative to a worldwide "wave," indicating that the drive to democracy derived primarily from indigenous rather than outside influences; and 5) experience of a peaceful rather than violent transition.²² Thomas Carothers does not consider

these or other factors as preconditions but rather as core "facilitators or nonfacilitators" that make democratisation "harder or easier".²³ It would be possible to agree with such an approach if one were to add that some combinations of "nonfacilitators" make democratisation impossible, at least for the time being. It is important to note that democratic reforms in societies that have not had any or very little previous experience with democracy are serious business and cannot be approached slightly. As Jürgen Habermas observes, democratic institutions, if introduced from outside without domestic demand, "disintegrate without the initiatives of a population *accustomed* to freedom".²⁴ In the export–import business of democracy, it is necessary to bear in mind that democratisation has to be demand–induced, not supply–stimulated. Only if there is a strong desire among a people to build democratic institutions, along with at least a minimum of material and cultural preconditions, can the supply side play a positive role. Otherwise, its role will be destructive and, *pace* Joseph Schumpeter's theory of "creative destruction",²⁵ there is little creative in such destruction.

If we exclude the Cold War period due to its "idiosyncratic" nature, the statistical picture of DPT becomes more confusing still. Since there is no consensus on the criteria of democracy, for some authors certain wars were fought between democracies, while other theorists discount them. For example, Bruce Russett does not consider the 1812 war between Britain and the United States as a war between the two democracies, since Britain, in his opinion, did not become democracy until the Reform Bill of 1832.²⁶ Christopher Layne, analysing four case studies of "near misses" in which democracies almost went to war against each other (Britain and the United States in 1861 over the Trent incident; Britain and the United States in 1895–1896 over the Venezuela–Great Britain border dispute; the British–French struggle to control the Upper Nile and the Fashoda incident of 1898; and the Franco–German Ruhr crisis of 1923), finds that the reasons why none of these crises exploded into an armed conflict are much better explained by realist theory: the weaker party always climbed down, thereby shunning an imminent military conflict.²⁷ Layne also makes an important point, observing that "the greater the external threat a state faces (or believes it does), the more 'autocratic' its foreign policymaking process will be and the more centralized its political structures will be".²⁸ To formulate this observation as a principle, we may say that it is not so much democracy that leads to peace but that, in the longer run, peace is conducive to the emergence and sustainability of democracy. Moreover, even in liberal democracies, foreign policy–making is less open and less subject to parliamentary control than domestic policy–making. "In the realm of foreign policy," Layne writes, "France and Britain were no more and no less democratic than the Second Reich".²⁹ This remains the case today even in mature democracies and especially in the United States, where the use of political questions, doctrine and other mechanisms make certain that foreign affairs are less prone to legislative and judicial supervision than domestic affairs. Recent developments such as drone attacks in Pakistan, Yemen and other places as well as acts of cyber warfare in the form of Olympic Games or Stuxnet³⁰ have raised issues of executive powers vis–à–vis the legislative branch. As Malou Innocent writes, "based on a broad theory of executive power, President Obama, and possibly his successor, has the authority to target people for death — including American citizens — without a semblance of transparency, accountability or congressional consent".³¹ This correct remark, due to a tiny but significant detail, namely the reference to "American citizens", deserves a small diversion. There seems to be visceral, almost subconscious, assumption that if it may be OK to target non–Americans, American citizens deserve special, enhanced, protection. Such an attitude, if

not directly contrary to international law (the principle of non-discrimination), is a sure way leading to its breaches in concrete circumstances.

In addition, democratic governments are as skilful as non-democracies in manipulating public opinion in preparing it for use of force initiated by them. Whenever there is an intensive and sustained media attention on a conflict with special emphasis on crimes committed by one side, there are usually two possible reasons. First, it may indeed be one of those rare cases when there is only one villain in town with a few cynical self-interested manipulators supporting him. Secondly, and this happens quite often when a "regime change" is in preparation, the singling out of one main culprit, while others are depicted either as innocent victims or even freedom-fighters, usually means that it is a prelude and preparation for the use of "all necessary means" for a regime change. Moreover, the argument that democracies do not easily go to war because in democracies it is the people, i.e. electors, who bear the burden of military conflicts with their pockets and even with their lives, is only partly true. Below we will discuss problems with financing war efforts. Here, it is necessary to underline that western democracies, especially the United States, that are military-technologically much more advanced than their potential and actual foes and often use against them only airpower (and more and more unmanned drones), have tens or even hundreds of times fewer casualties than their enemy combatants and even more enemy civilians.

Immanuel Kant and the twenty-first century world

In his essay on "Perpetual Peace", Immanuel Kant laid out six preliminary steps towards perpetual peace. None of them has lost its relevance, though some of them may be quite unrealistic taking into account the political realities of Kant's and even today's world. One of Kant's preconditions was that governments should not borrow to finance wars. This preliminary condition indeed brings together in a significant way ideas of democracy and peace. Taxation, which most people may not be especially fond of, is one of the cornerstones of democracy. The slogan "no taxation without representation" may be reversed to "no representation without taxation". Take, for example, Saudi Arabia or other energy-rich autocracies. The absence of taxation or low taxes serves as a kind bribery used to placate the population, which does not have much or any say in the affairs of the state. Other energy autocrats, such as those in Turkmenistan, do not tax their citizens at all, instead bribing the population using the rent from rich natural resources.

In this context, one of the interesting and peculiar developments was George W. Bush's tax cuts at a period when the United States became almost simultaneously engaged in two serious wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Earlier American administrations had used taxation to finance wars. During the Second World War, a "highly progressive tax system" was enacted in the United States.³² It has been observed by the US Urban Institute that, "like the events of December 7, 1941, the attacks of September 11 triggered a strong 'rally round the flag effect' as Americans readied themselves for the sacrifices of war. Unlike Pearl Harbour, however, there was virtually no talk in the wake of the September 11 attacks of a need to increase taxes in order to mobilize for war. Just as earlier leaders appealed to Americans' sense of patriotism to raise taxes, some politicians used the same tack to argue for cutting them during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq".³³ By borrowing, instead of taxing, the Bush administration not only passed the war burden from this generation to the next, but also secured consent for its war efforts from the current generation. It was a kind of bribery of the current generation at the expense of future generations.

And it goes without saying that the financing of such wars is contrary to Kant's preconditions for perpetual peace. It also contradicts one of the tenets of democracy — the financial burden of today's wars, especially if these are wars of choice, not wars of necessity, should not be passed over to future generations. As the American greatest judge Oliver Wendell Holmes put it, "taxes are the price we pay for civilization".

In the context of studying current regime changes in different parts of the world, DP theories have to face some other challenges too. First, several experts have argued that though it may be true that mature liberal democracies have not fought wars against each other, authoritarian or totalitarian states usually go through a dangerous transition to democracy, and historical evidence from the last 200 years has shown that in this phase countries become more war-prone, not less, and that they do fight wars also with other democratic or democratising states. Partly, this is due to the fact that democratisation is often accompanied with a rise of nationalism, sometimes in its extreme forms.³⁴ Will Hutton is wrong when he believes that "democratising countries are less vulnerable to both internal and external conflicts".³⁵ The truth is usually just opposite. Only mature democracies are intrinsically more stable; democratising countries very often have to go through the dangerous J-curve,³⁶ when not only may their internal stability and even future as independent states be at stake, but also when they may become more rather than less war-prone than before.

Second, the fact that mature liberal democracies have not fought wars against each other does not mean that they do not act bellicosely *vis-à-vis* non-democracies or fledgling democracies. It has been emphasised by some authors that democratic peace theory has its "dark side" — the propensity for democracies to be more aggressive towards non-democracies or fledgling democracies.³⁷ Washington's military adventures against democratic Iran under Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, the democratic Chile of Salvador Allende in the 1970s, and a host of other situations, show that it is not so much democracy or its absence that determines whether peace or war prevails as whether a particular state behaves as expected by its more powerful neighbour; or if we speak of global affairs, whether its behaviour is in accordance with Washington's expectations or with expectations of those who belong to the Euro-Atlantic alliance. Finally, even if we were to assume, against the odds, that all societies will finally become liberal democracies, there will remain rivalries over limited resources, over who will lead and who will have to follow, as well as a spectrum of other potential sources of conflict. It is not only because democratising states may constitute serious security threats, but also because attempts to democratise what is not democratisable (and it is not important whether in principle or for the time being) is even a bigger threat. Besides ambiguities and pitfalls in relying on actual policies on democratic peace theories, the proactive promotion of liberal democracy, especially by means of military force, has several other dangers. Christopher Hobson has made an extremely pertinent observation: "Any early celebrations were distinctly premature, however, as ideas related to DP soon emerged as a central justification — and potential motivation — in the 'freedom agenda' of the Bush administration, which manifested itself most explicitly in the coercive democratization of Iraq. Rather than being a 'force for peace', DP scholarship became implicated in a deeply divisive and costly war."³⁸ Indeed, attempts to impose DP may well lead to wars whose results have nothing to do with democracy.

Our ability to predict future, especially long-term trends of social development, is rather limited. Every big social plan has turned out to be a kind of Utopia. All attempts to radically change societies have more significant unexpected and unwanted consequences than foreseen and desired ones. One of the most scathing criticisms of the efforts of the Bush administration to spread democracy in the Middle East came from a neo-conservative author Andrew Sullivan, who had supported the 2003 war against Iraq: "The final error was not taking culture seriously enough. There is a large discrepancy between neo-conservatism's scepticism of government's ability to change culture at home and its naiveté when it comes to complex, tribal, sectarian cultures abroad."³⁹ It is indeed amazing how quickly and with how little hesitation the American political elite embarks on the radical transformation of foreign societies, especially if we compare all this with ineptitude and sluggishness of the same elite in resolving the host of urgent domestic issues. For example, Joseph Stiglitz observes that "economists marvel at our health care sector and its ability to deliver less for more: health outcomes are worse in the United States than in almost all other advanced industrial countries, and yet the United States spends absolutely more per capita, and more as a percentage of GDP, by a considerable amount. We've been spending more than one-sixth of GDP on health care, while France has been spending less than an eighth. Per capita spending in the United States has been two and a half times higher than the average of the advanced industrial countries".⁴⁰ In comparison with the near impossibility of resolving healthcare problems at home, the democratisation of Afghanistan, Iraq and the wider Middle East seems much easier.

Those who rely on DPT to promote democracy in the world have to remember that Kant's philosophy is permeated with the idea not to use war as a means to promote historical change. Kant wrote: "No attempt should be made, however, to realize this idea precipitously through revolutionary methods, that is, by violent overthrow of a previously existing imperfect and corrupt government [...] Instead, the idea should be attempted and carried out through gradual reform according to fixed principles".⁴¹ Democratic peace theories have contributed to justifications of several foreign interventions. In their book *The War over Iraq*, Lawrence Kaplan and William Kristol started from the premise that "democracies rarely, if ever, wage war against one another", to conclude that "the more democratic the world becomes, the more likely it is to be congenial to America".⁴² Such a conclusion cannot be justified theoretically because of its intellectual fallacy; equally, the facts also testify that in some cases the contrary may be truer: the more democratic an entity becomes, the less it may be ready to follow the American lead.

Regime change and the 'Arab Spring'

Once again, western political leaders as well as journalists and academics in sync with them are speaking of a future democratic, even liberal Syria. Those who know and love tennis would want to address such leaders with the famous words of John McEnroe: "You cannot be serious". Joshua Landis observes that "if anyone tells you that they are going to build democracy in Syria, don't buy it".⁴³ Among the factors that make any democracy-building efforts in Syria more difficult than in some other Arab countries, besides the level of economic development of the country, traditions or the lack of them, and the ethnic and religious divides in the country, is the median age of the population (21 years). Landis refers to a study by Richard Cincotta of the Stimson Centre in Washington DC, who having studied social and political revolutions in various countries between 1972 and 1989, focusing on the age structure of countries,

found that countries with a median age of 30 or just under or over (if over 35 there weren't any revolutions) have good chances for sustaining their achievements.⁴⁴ The lower the median age, the more difficult it would be to have a successful and sustainable democratic regime change. In the Arab Spring, like in many other significant developments, local, regional and global factors become intractably interlinked. Concentrating only on one of them gives a limited and wrong picture. So far, we have emphasised the importance of local differences, since they are often neglected when western, especially American, observers look at the world. However, it would be equally wrong to lose sight of the bigger picture. The events in the Middle East also have to be seen in the light of the changing balance of power in the world as a whole. If during the Cold War, the Middle East was a region where Washington and Moscow vied for primacy, now the elephant is China and its increasing presence in the Middle East. Tariq Ramadan is right that "far removed from celebration of democratic values, a genuine economic and ideological war is being waged throughout the Arab world, in Africa and Asia" and that "the rise of strong, multifaceted competition has put the markets of the western multinationals in danger".⁴⁵ This is the context in which the Arab awakening, notwithstanding its regional and local causes and idiosyncratic determinants of success and failure, is taking place; not taking this context into account would indeed be like groping a trunk of the elephant without seeing the rest of the animal.

Today's regime change attempts manifest a new tendency that, depending on where one stands, may be seen either as promising or as worrying. With the emergence of politics and statehood and up to the emergence of the possibility of peaceful change of government through the ballot-box, there have always been those who have revolted against the authorities, be they slaves in Ancient Rome, peasant revolts in China, Russia or medieval Europe or the American, French and Russian revolutions. Neither is there anything unheard of in outside assistance, be it governments' efforts to quell rebellions (Vladimir Lenin called Tsarist Russia "the gendarme of Europe" for its assistance to conservative European governments in the mid-nineteenth century) or lending a helping hand to rebels. However, post-UN Charter international law prohibits interference in internal affairs of states, and therefore any assistance to rebels would be in breach of international law. Today, even assistance to governments in quelling rebellions may be contrary to international law, to its principle of self-determination of peoples. At the same time, the further development of international law has led to the emergence and rapid evolution of international human rights law, combined with international criminalization not only of war crimes but also genocide and crimes against humanity and the revival of the concept of humanitarian intervention.

In the context of current regime change attempts, we face a series of problems related to these tendencies. Peoples rise up against unrepresentative governments, especially when the latter don't deliver — and more often than not they don't deliver. In the globalised world, rebellions have become contagious; they come in the form of chain reactions. One of the serious problems with such chains is that the links are very different, or rather, that the chains or links are not real at all; they are virtual, existing mostly in Facebook or Twitter. If the rebels in one country succeed relatively easily and with small casualties, in a different country the authorities may be able to suppress a revolt against them. The success or failure of rebellions depends on too many variables, most important of which are endogenous, not exogenous. Outcomes stretch from virtually bloodless coups without significant foreign involvement (Tunisia) to relatively short but bloody conflict, where foreign intervention tips

the scales in favour of the rebels (Libya). Often there is a potential for protracted bloody civil wars with an uncertain result (Syria). What is new is that outside assistance to rebels in one country encourages rebels or potential rebels in other countries. In his 2000 Millennium report, Kofi Annan, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, noted that the concept of humanitarian intervention "might encourage secessionist movements deliberately to provoke governments into committing cross violations of human rights in order to trigger external interventions that would aid their cause".⁴⁶ Alan Kuperman has called this a "problem of moral hazard", whereby the protection against a risk encourages risk-taking.⁴⁷ As he shows, threats to use force against Serbia over Kosovo emboldened the Kosovo Liberation Army and encouraged its fighters to use violence against ethnic Serbian civilians in Kosovo, in order to provoke the Serbs to overreact and thereby expedite external intervention. This was what eventually happened. Similarly, opponents of dictators such as Gaddafi in Libya and al-Assad in Syria have used or are using the same tactics.

However, the problem is that outsiders are unable to assist all the rebels, and even more importantly, as domestic circumstances differ from country to country, what works in one case may completely fail in another. At the same time, encouraged by outside support that is still not strong enough to tip the scales in their favour, rebels don't compromise even when the authorities are ready to make concessions. Their demands are uncompromising — nothing less than the change of the incumbent regime and the prosecution or murder of its leaders and their supporters satisfies them. Sometimes it may work; in different circumstances it leads to a protracted civil war and more bloodshed. Rory Stewart and Gerald Knaus write, "foreigners who comprise 'the international community' are usually much weaker than they imagine. They are inevitably isolated from local society, ignorant of local culture and context, and prey to misleading abstract theories."⁴⁸ They argue that "failure — however horrible — will always be a possibility: an option".⁴⁹ The last point — that failure is an option — needs to be emphasised, since all too often politicians and military leaders use the mantra that failure is not an option until the failure has materialised, sacrificing more lives and resources in the process.

In 1979, Jeane Kirkpatrick, at that time the US Ambassador to the United Nations in the Reagan Administration, published her famous article "Dictatorships and double standards". It deserves to be studied not because her argument is necessarily to be endorsed, but because it encourages reflection on various policies and their unintended consequences. Kirkpatrick wrote:

In each of these countries [in China before the fall of Chiang Kaishek, in Cuba before the triumph of Castro, in certain crucial periods of the Vietnamese war, and, more recently, in Angola] the American effort to impose liberalisation and democratisation on a government confronted with violent internal opposition not only failed, but actually assisted the coming to power of new regimes in which ordinary people enjoy fewer freedoms and less personal security than under the previous autocracy-regimes, moreover, hostile to American interests and policies."⁵⁰

Of course, times have changed; Jeane Kirkpatrick advocated relying on authoritarian governments, allied to the United States in its rivalry with the Soviet Union and its allies. Today, this justification for buttressing dictators no longer exists. But Kirkpatrick's conclusion that undermining dictators or

overthrowing them may lead to unintended consequences and that, under new regimes, people may enjoy fewer freedoms and less personal security than before, and that new regimes may be more hostile to American interests and policies than previous ones, continues to ring true.

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