

FORCE, ORDER, STRATEGY

THE FATE OF A CENTURY

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We know little about how the still-young 21st century will develop, but one thing is certain: It will not be the New American Century about which many were hopeful, and more were sure, just a few years ago. American power is vast and may yet grow by many measures, but the legitimacy of that power is waning, and with it the authority of both America's word and its model. This is partly because of the Bush Administration, but the fundamental source lies much deeper: It is the de-Westernization of authority structures on a global scale and with it the undermining even of the operative definition of what constitutes political units.

If America will not be master of the 21st century, perhaps it will supply an organizing principle of a different kind. Perhaps this century will deserve the "Anti-American Century" label coined by the (pro-American) Bulgarian writer Ivan Krastev. Perhaps America will shape the world by providing an organizing catalyst "in opposition", so to speak. And if that will be so, perhaps Krastev is right to fear that the 21st century will see "the end of the idea of the century of freedom."¹ Certainly, the dimming of America's light cannot herald good tidings for anyone, anywhere, who cherishes the Enlightenment and what it has made of the West over the past several centuries.

It is true that, except in eastern Europe, Israel and perhaps India, anti-Americanism provides the only common attitude today in a world otherwise devoid of positive agreement on anything. Compared to the buoyant 1990s, optimism is suddenly in short supply. Illusions of an imminent "end of history" born from the collapse of the Soviet Union have dissipated. The threats to freedom are more diverse than many imagined, even if these threats lack a comprehensive label comparable to fascism or communism. Arguably the number of these threats is still growing or, if not growing, then becoming more dangerous for other reasons.

Liberal democracy, too, is more fragile where it has been newly established, and more difficult to establish altogether, than many have thought. And American and Western military intervention is far less likely to succeed in promoting democracy and other liberal values than many anticipated only a dozen years ago. Alas, we read the present in light of our hopes for the future, and so the relative success of Western intervention in Kosovo, seen at the time, especially in Europe, as the start of something new and benign, now looks more like an anomalous episode, itself diminished by the manifest dangers of unfreezing the Kosovo arrangement in order to finally settle it.

So is the fate of the century settled? Yes, if by settled we mean that there is no going back to a unipolar system of American, and by extension Western, hegemony. No hegemonic power in history has ever relied on raw power alone, and neither America nor the West as a whole retain the authority to act as a hegemon. The rest of world, in which numbers, wealth and expectations are fast rising, will not accept it. However, this century's fate is not settled if we mean that one of the two spreading dangers of tyranny and anarchy is fated to dominate the

world. The United States and its allies can still exert important and perhaps decisive influence on the survival of a civilized world. The question that people of good faith in the West—and here I mean by “West” not so much a place or a direction as a state of mind²—should be asking is this: How can we defend our interests and principles, and how can we sustain peace and freedom together in a world in which we are bound to become less central, and in which our legitimacy—our right to act as judge or educator for others—is ever more contested?

DISORDER, ACT III

To find an answer, we must first face what we are up against by taking the full measure of the revolutionary changes that have only become discernable in the past three or four years. Indeed, the years 2003–06 represent the third act in a drama unfolding from act one (the fall of the Soviet Union) to act two (September 11, 2001 and beyond). These last few years have witnessed the humiliation of the United States in Iraq and a sharp loss of its prestige worldwide. They have witnessed, too, the failure of the European Union, the other potential engine of Western power, to develop into a coherent political actor on a global scale. At the same time, in these years all have come to acknowledge both the spectacular emergence of China and India on the world scene, and the re-emergence of Russia as both a threat to its neighborhood and an unfriendly and unreliable, yet still indispensable interlocutor of the West.

This third act of the 2003–06 period is no less important than the first two, despite its lacking a symbol as dramatic as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the destruction of the Twin Towers. We can see the truth of this assertion in the undeniable fact that the prospects for democracy in Russia and for the undisputed primacy of the United States have been significantly, perhaps irremediably, reversed. As for 9/11, while its long-term symbolic value is undiminished, its immediate importance rests less in the event itself than in America’s reaction to it, and in the reaction of the rest of the world world to that reaction.

Today we face in this third act, above all, a crisis of American influence, defined as some mutually reinforcing dynamic of its power frustrated and its authority eroded. Charles Krauthammer’s “unipolar moment” and Hubert Védrine’s “hyperpower” are gone, and now stand exposed as having been very exaggerated. But the American moment has been succeeded neither by a new concert of powers, as advocated by American realists and European Gaullists alike, nor by the rule of multilateral institutions advocated by liberal internationalists. One is again tempted to quote Gramsci, about one age dying before another can be born, or even Hesse about the special pain of ages caught in between, but neither does justice to the circumstance. On the one hand, our inheritance is not all spent, and we in and of the West are not dead to each other as allies. Classical diplomatic and military balances, including the role of the Atlantic Alliance, are still important. Functional international institutions also still maintain a modicum of rationality and moderation in international affairs, even as they suffer near-constant subversion at the hands of armed prophets spouting conflicting passions and myths.

Nonetheless, the present international order is characterized not by what it is but by what it is not: It is not an order at all in the plain sense of word. We live in a time of fundamental heterogeneity and contradiction pertaining both to the nature of political units and the

character of tensions, solidarities and oppositions between these units. One major trend, for example, seems to be that of a confrontation between West and South—between haves and have-nots—but with China and Russia playing a highly complex role of arbiters. This is the real, or at any rate the potential, significance of the otherwise anodyne Shanghai Cooperation Organization. For the West, China and Russia are indispensable partners but, at the same time, dangerous competitors and, in some cases, outright adversaries. In economic terms, too, China and Russia can be seen, despite their spectacular differences, as two of the four-part BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China): a group of emerging economic powers whose interests and policies transcend the conventionally understood North-South divide.

Another fissiparous trend is that of religious divisions within the South and, particularly, within the Middle East. These divisions, between Sunni and Shi'a at one level, Arab and non-Arab at another, between Muslim and non-Muslim at still another, may well produce new alignments of states. These new alignments could be exploited by the United States if their protagonists were not also united in their distrust and hostility toward the West.

Perhaps the most worrying feature of the present scene is a multiplication of civil wars, whether religious, ethnic or ideological in inspiration, which threaten to combine or spread. Conditions for civil wars are more propitious today than at any time since the founding of the modern state system. They now threaten to engulf entire regions—western Asia, the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region of Africa.³This would make external control, regulation or pacification of these areas, whether by great powers or by international organizations, a Herculean, if not Sisyphean, task.

Of course, the heterogeneity of the present non-order has not been created over just the past three years. What we have only lately recognized is the product of several long-term trends: the ascent of Asia, the demographic and psychological decline of Europe, and the re-emergence of Russia thanks to high oil and gas prices and Vladimir Putin's energetic neo-fascist regime. More important still is the coincidence between technological factors like the revolution in the means of both communication and destruction, on the one



[credit: AFP/Getty Images]

hand, and the tensions created by the struggle between globalization and ethno-national and sectarian parochialisms on the other. The means of both communication and destruction have become more widespread and less costly at a time when the collision between modernization and tradition has thrown off incendiary sparks of religious revival and competing fundamentalisms. Shifts in geopolitical conditions among groupings like West and South may be likened to the movements of icebergs in a great ocean, but the underlying dramas of what may at last be called a fully global transnational sociology constitute the currents themselves.

It is ironic that one important source of these underlying currents is the United States itself. It was the United States whose power, patience and skill at coalition management won the Cold War. It is the United States, too, whose revolutionary society, in both its scientific-

technological production and its values, set the stage for the great collisions of this century. While the United States was the status quo power of the Cold War in narrow geopolitical terms, its broader effect on the world was anything but status quo. Daniel Bell once famously wrote of the cultural contradictions of capitalism, of how the successes of material culture undermined the attitudinal basis of its own success. In a way, America's successes, both those of its government and of its society, seem to have driven a similar dynamic on a global scale.

The upshot of these revolutionary changes was bound to favor the non-West over the West, and to work to the advantage of subnational and transnational groups. But who has been favored has been sharply accentuated and accelerated by Western political and military actions—above all by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The Iraq fiasco, with its mistaken or false justifications (the difference matters, and yet it doesn't matter), its accompanying atrocities and its ultimate demonstration of what Hegel called the “impotence of victory”, has displayed the limited and sometimes counterproductive effects of military power for all to see.

The American stumble in the Middle East, which features errors other than those pertaining to Iraq (and, for all we know, will bear new errors yet to come), has not been the only accelerator of global currents. The French and Dutch referenda of 2005 on the EU constitution and the botched Israeli effort against Hizballah in summer 2006 each in their own way demobilized decent aspirations and empowered malign ones. Who thinks that the still fragile societies of “new Europe”, wrestling as they are again with old demons, will be aided by the stuttering of European integration? Who thinks that hopes for a better life for the peoples of the Arab and Muslim worlds will be aided by the ascendance of Islamist Iran?

If we take the measure of the whole period between the human surge through the Berlin Wall in the autumn of 1989 and the U.S. military surge in Iraq in the winter of 2007, we must admit that seldom in history has the transition from *hubris* to humiliation been so rapid and abrupt. The United States is still the richest and most resourceful power—the only one that can intervene anywhere on earth, and probably, too, the only major power whose actions are most sincerely meant to help the world even when they unwittingly endanger it. But America's illusions of omnipotence and innocence—which, when combined with its new feeling of vulnerability, shaped its reaction to 9/11—are profoundly shaken. America is faced with a world from which it cannot withdraw, but which it cannot control—and which, to all appearances, it does not really understand.

Understanding is the greatest of America's challenges. The rise of new threatening powers is America's least unfamiliar burden: The United States has grown used to periodic dangers, from Germany and Russia, from Japan and China, and it has always resisted them victoriously in war and in peace. Far more disconcerting is the growing power of an increasing number of small states, including some in America's own backyard, engaged in diverse forms of trouble-making. More problematic still is the diffuse hostility of newly educated and mobilized groups abroad whose resentments, resistance and resolve mystify most Americans and challenge America's main asset: its positive perception of itself and of its role in the world.

It may be hard to accept, but we need for the time being at least, in Thomas Schelling's words, “a theory of incomplete antagonism and imperfect partnership” for a world that has become simultaneously more asymmetrical in terms of perceptions and passions, and less asymmetrical in terms of power. A way to build this theory is to work through the problems

before us in two related areas: war or violent conflict; and international security, particularly the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As we do this we recognize a world characterized by the inevitability of incomplete inequality and imperfect reciprocity, a world in which force and diplomacy must constantly struggle to find the right combination of differentiation and coherence.

The ultimate question, however, as I have suggested, is that of legitimacy in a globalized world composed mostly of open societies. Francis Fukuyama has remarked that for Americans legitimacy is based on their own Constitution and on the will of their own people, while Europeans tend to base it on abstract principles. But as the best analyst of the notion, Holy Cross political scientist Ward Thomas, has shown, legitimacy is neither subjective nor objective, but intersubjective.⁴ It can only be based on reciprocity, even though this reciprocity is never perfectly symmetrical, but results from different interests and degrees of power and influence. Action, particularly in war, is often unilateral; legitimacy and peace are always, in the last analysis, multilateral.

WAR TRANSFORMED

Modern war is undergoing a counter-revolution in military affairs. Following the era of what Sir Rupert Smith calls “industrial interstate war”, we beheld a “revolution in military affairs” based on spectacular technological advances in computers, lasers and sensors.⁵ This revolution has emphasized information, or cybernetic, warfare that puts a premium on using speed, flexibility, communication and control to ensure precision and discrimination in the use of force. The intended consequences were strategic, political and, at least in principle, moral: less need for massive armies, fewer casualties on the American side but also among the population of the enemy and even among its armed forces. Lethal strikes were to be reserved for very specific targets with minimum collateral damage. The ideal war was aimed at checkmating the adversary rather than destroying him.

Of course, the utterly predictable response of the weaker, less technologically advanced opponent has been asymmetric warfare. The weak refuse these new rules and “play dirty” by escalating conflict in two ways. First they target precisely the values that the stronger state, in its attempts at civilizing and domesticating warfare, wants to preserve: its civilian populations and possessions. Second, they tempt or force the stronger power to contravene its own principles by exposing their own populations for use as human shields, or by trying to provoke indiscriminate repression.

We have in place, then, the dialectic of the bourgeois and the barbarian.⁶ The military transformation described above, as well as nuclear deterrence itself, fit well a bourgeois society that cares about individual rights and prosperity, and which prefers to ensure its security without having to fight and risk being killed. The barbarian, on the other hand, values fighting and manliness above all else, seeing his purpose as destroying enemy populations out of revenge or some notion of restitution and compensation for real, embellished or simply imagined indignities of ages past.

Of course, things do not stop there. The relationship is dialectical because asymmetries can be reduced or even reversed. Two processes are at work: the barbarization of the bourgeois and

the *embourgeoisement* of the barbarian. In the former process the bourgeois, driven by fear, resentment, indignation or exasperation in the search for an elusive victory, find his archaic killer instincts reawakened and his good intentions abandoned as he adopts the ways of the barbarian. In the latter process, the barbarian finds that using the ways and means of the bourgeois carries with it a challenge: Either the long-term prevalence of economic interests over warlike or fanatical passions will win out, or barbarians will find ways to acquire bourgeois technological abilities without abandoning their traditional “heroic” moral code.

The first possibility is not without hope: It presupposes a peaceful evolution, and indeed many aspects of the development of former communist powers like China and Russia may be repeated in some Muslim countries. The Thermidorian tendencies of most of Iran’s mullahs would seem to be a case in point. But we see from the example of al-Qaeda, Hizballah and the Aum Shinrikyo sect in Japan that apocalyptic fanaticism can go hand in hand with the adoption and use of ever more accessible advanced military technology. Very small groups of men are now potentially capable of inflicting considerable damage on powerful states and complex societies. In addition, they are skillful enough both to adapt Western techniques to their own ends (as with flying modern aircraft into buildings) and to force Western countries to fight on their own ground (that of urban guerrilla warfare).

Advanced liberal democracies, not least the United States and Israel in current circumstances, are thus faced with a classic dilemma: Either adopt the methods of their enemies in the name of effectiveness and match, if not their taste for suicide, then at least their disdain for human life, or remain faithful to their own principles and thus fight with their hands tied behind their backs. The dilemma is compounded by a crucial consideration: The decisive factor is not the respective military strength of the two adversaries but third parties—those who are at the same time potential victim, prize and arbiter of the confrontation.

As Smith stresses, the conflicts and confrontations that now vie to replace industrial interstate wars, which he calls “wars amongst the people”, are fought neither to destroy an enemy nor to occupy a territory and seize its resources. These new wars are fought to influence the will and the allegiance of the people themselves. And by “the people” we mean not only the “locals” among whom the fighting takes place, but also the public opinion of the home country (in the case of an expeditionary force), the region and, as often as not, the whole world. This has been made true by the revolution in communications, which almost instantly carries the reverberations of torture in Abu Ghraib or civilian casualties in Qana through digital photography or television to the remotest parts of Asia, as well as back home.

This circumstance produces policy weakness not only for those who identify power with military force alone, but even for more sophisticated observers and practitioners who, like Henry Kissinger, analyze geopolitical situations essentially in terms of a skillful combination of force and negotiation. Whether in looking for a “decent interval” in Vietnam or in supporting the invasion of Iraq to strengthen the position of the United States (and Israel) in future negotiations with the Arab world, he persistently fails to anticipate the reactions of domestic societies, whether American or Middle Eastern, which upsets all his calculations.

Neither does reliance on preventive war (whether disguised as pre-emption or not) get around the problem. Prevention fails to take into account the “known unknowns and the unknown unknowns”, to recall the lexicon of Donald Rumsfeld, in societies in which suspicion of the

West is dominant, “the war for information and intelligence” (which Smith describes as the central feature of the military campaign) is far from being won, and the effects upon the targeted states and societies are almost impossible to predict, let alone to control.

This is all the more true since, as events in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate, political success is dictated not by the effectiveness of the initial bombing or invasion but by the long-term evolution of the targeted country, and by lateral international consequences as well. Experience shows that premature military withdrawal can lead to disaster, even after a successful first phase. This is why the attitude symbolized by the dictum “superpowers don’t do the windows” is a sure recipe for catastrophic failure.⁷ But the question remains whether any intervention by democracies that falls short of resembling a permanent imperial undertaking is not doomed to do more harm than good, both to the country in question and to the intervening democracy. Democracies always seem to do too little for too short a time to be effective, or too much for too long to be accepted by the people they liberate or protect (not to speak of accepted by their own people).

The fundamental problem, then, in the contemporary use of armed force is the inherent new fragility of legitimacy. This critically affects tactical decisions on several levels. Various uses of force may be at odds with each other. Thus both “search and destroy” and “winning hearts and minds” may be necessary within a given military contingency, but cannot be pursued effectively at the same time in the same place by the same soldiers. Similarly, interstate war may be necessary to prevent an imminent attack or genocide, and violence may be required in the struggle against terrorism at home and abroad, and in many cases force will have to be used in peacekeeping or peace-building efforts. But these three functions involve different ways of using force that may be at odds with each other to the point that lumping them together risks policy fratricide, and with it a general loss of both reputation and legitimacy.

Clearly, the art of using force has become more political than ever, because war itself has become more democratic than ever in the sense that its misanthropies cannot be kept apart from the societies on whose behalf they are supposedly fought. Using force effectively now requires above all combining and balancing different and potentially contradictory approaches. It requires hedging one’s bets in the knowledge that one’s actions may unleash unpredictable and uncontrollable reactions along social and political dimensions that did not previously bear strategic importance. If all this is true in using “conventional” force, it is true in spades when we deal with that form of diplomacy devoted to matters of even greater violence—the diplomacy of counter proliferation.

NUCLEAR DILEMMAS

Nowhere are the complexities and contradictions involved in the 21st-century use of force more apparent and dangerous than in the policy arena concerning nuclear weapons.⁸ Four propositions seem to sum up the problem.

First, nuclear proliferation is becoming ever more dangerous, for both technological and cultural reasons: Nuclear weapons are easier to get, and their use is less unthinkable because the risk of their falling into the hands of fanatics who accept or welcome suicide cannot be wished away.

Second, proliferation can be slowed and perhaps made less catastrophic, but it cannot be ended because there is virtually no chance that all nuclear or near-nuclear states will renounce nuclear weapons.

Third, the present nuclear order, as institutionalized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, has lost its legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of most of the non-Western world. Its utility, exaggerated in any event by many observers, is rapidly diminishing.

And fourth, preventive military actions against potential nuclear states are more likely to lead to catastrophic consequences for world order and for the position of the United States and the West than they are to stopping nuclear proliferation altogether, even in its most dangerous forms.

The first point should be obvious. Nuclear knowledge is widespread and cannot be suppressed or forgotten. The costs of nuclear (and also biological) weapons are diminishing. Civilian nuclear technology is coming back into favor, and the risks of its diversion to military use can never be fully eliminated. On the other hand, deterrence by threat of retaliation presupposes rational, non-suicidal actors. It loses most of its validity when addressed to individuals or groups who accept or welcome suicide and whose hatred of enemies knows no restraints. This obviously applies to apocalyptic terrorists and possibly also to some state leaders like Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

As to the second point, abolition is impossible. Mankind will live in a world where massive destruction, including the deliberate destruction of entire states and civilizations, cannot be totally excluded. Does this mean that such destruction is inevitable? Certainly not, but it does mean that peace by mutual deterrence is not foolproof and that peace by disarmament is not attainable.

Now follows the third point: If the proliferation of nuclear weapons is not necessarily conducive to stability but cannot be entirely stopped either, then the only way left open to policy is to somehow control it. Control can take the two shapes that Raymond Aron called peace by law and peace by empire, or perhaps it can take a third, intermediary shape, which one would call today international governance. That third shape would perforce have to be both multipolar and multilateral in character. It would consist of an oligarchy of responsible powers managing nuclear affairs through a system of rules and institutions. This system would rely on consent and common interests, but would be enforced through inspections and, eventually, sanctions against those who break the rules.

As it happens, this is precisely the structure embodied by the *combination* of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Security Council. The trouble is that this potential structure is out of step with today's highly mobile international (dis)order. As presently arrayed, this combination freezes the status quo: the basic NPT bargain that the nuclear "haves" compensate the commitment of the "have-nots" to abjure nuclear weapons by moving to abolish their own nuclear forces and providing civilian nuclear energy assistance. But this is precisely the bargain that has come unstuck, not for abstract strategic or military reasons but for underlying political ones.

Some of the reasons, it is true, are technical: The radical distinction between civilian and

nuclear uses has become increasingly blurred, the networks practicing nuclear trade have become harder to monitor, and so forth. Some of the reasons can be attributed to the behavior of the nuclear powers: While they have sharply reduced the number of their warheads, they have nevertheless pursued the modernization of their forces and have consistently eroded the distinction between conventional and nuclear weapons in a way that legitimizes the fighting role of the latter. This is blatant in the case of Russia but clear, too, in the case of the United States under the Bush Administration, which has reportedly been considering the idea of using nuclear earth-penetrators or bunker-busters in the case of an attack against Iranian nuclear installations.

However, the real reason is that the non-Western world is tired of the institutionalized hypocrisy established when global power was overwhelmingly Western (especially if one includes Russia as part of the cultural West). No statesman of a nuclear power (with the possible exceptions of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev) was ever sincere in promising to follow a path to total nuclear disarmament. All have considered it both unattainable and undesirable. The open, *de facto* legitimation of a nuclear posture for themselves, even as they virtuously condemned others for wanting the same thing, provided the latter with a leak-proof pretext for their own efforts.

Hypocrisy has had other manifestations, as well. One has been tolerance of the nuclear status of Israel, India and Pakistan, and the recent U.S. agreement to help India in nuclear matters, in quasi-violation of the NPT, is a special case in point. This is a clear choice of political expediency over general international security, partly justified by the legalistic argument that these countries had not signed the treaty—as if that made their possession of the bomb somehow *less* dangerous.

On top of all this, the general policy of the Bush Administration has activated all these underlying impulses, which brings us to the fourth point. The Administration's rhetorical emphasis on denial over deterrence, its proclaimed intention to change the regimes of its adversaries, and the contrast between the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the negotiating approach taken toward already nuclear-armed North Korea, carries a vivid lesson that no "rogue state" could possibly fail to learn. That lesson is simple: If you want to avoid being an object of American military power, become nuclear as quickly (and quietly) as possible.

New nuclear powers in the South may be feared by their neighbors and rivals. Some may threaten to imitate them, but many may also welcome Western efforts to stop would-be nuclear powers from becoming actual nuclear powers. But they, too, ride powerful and ubiquitous new waves of anti-Americanism and, by extension, anti-Western resentment. None would find it acceptable to be branded as a criminal or punished by nuclear powers for trying to follow in their footsteps. Only norms that apply equally to all have a chance of being accepted, and any power trying to enforce norms will attain the quality of authority only if that acceptance, that legitimation, is at hand.

That is partly why policies of threatened pre-emption and regime change are so dangerous: "Solving" any one case tends to give rise to others. If Iraq had been an example of successful counterproliferation policy, even its success would still have exacerbated proliferation dangers in Iran, North Korea and who-knows where else. Certainly its failure has done so.

Even that is not the whole problem with coercive approaches these days. There certainly is a prudential case for preventive force, whether economic or military. But to be really effective, sanctions regimes today require the cooperation of China, Russia and others. Without that cooperation, such regimes are at least as likely to fail as those erected against Ba'athi Iraq. As for military attack, just as President Eisenhower thought at the time of Dien Bien Phu that a second American use of nuclear weapons on the continent of Asia would be madness, a second American war against a Muslim country in order to prevent it from going nuclear would likely lead to catastrophic consequences.

Of course, allowing Iranian WMD might also lead to catastrophic consequences, and this defines the real dilemma we face. All the more reason to devise a way of controlling change in the nuclear world that does not force the U.S. government repeatedly to choose between the devil of pre-emption and the deep blue sea of passivity. If the present combination of the NPT, the IAEA and the United Nations does not work, what might?

A new approach to the proliferation challenge should focus on a new universal nuclear order based on reciprocity, on “country-neutral” measures rather than punitive ones, and on minimal deterrence and defense-only postures among existing nuclear weapons states. Above all, such a scheme has to be based on universal assent that nuclear weapons have only one legitimate purpose: the deterrence of nuclear attack by others. No use of such weapons for attack or political blackmail is acceptable. The hard part, of course, is institutionalizing that principle in a binding global agreement that is enforceable. But hard is not impossible and, from the U.S. point of view, should be desirable compared to the unilateral attack-or-capitulate dilemma in which American leaders find themselves today.



IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei with former UN weapons negotiator Hans Blix [credit: Associated Press]

Of course, putting in place a new order to manage nuclear weapons will take time (and more proliferation in the interval) if it can ever be accomplished at all. An urgently needed and, perhaps, more realistic way to proceed is that of regional denuclearization or arms control agreements accompanying the settlement of political conflicts. Meanwhile, the burden will continue to fall on unilateral, bilateral or multilateral efforts aimed at slowing down proliferation by restrictive measures on the circulation of nuclear materials and technology, and by chasing down illicit transnational networks. We can also improve the security of potential targets by building missile defenses and by trying to reinforce extended deterrence in other ways.

Indeed, the only currently available alternative to a choice between preventive war and passivity in the face of a proliferation challenge is increased engagement—both physical and declaratory—in the protection of friendly states threatened by new nuclear neighbors. There is a short-term component to this having to do with establishing the credibility of an extended deterrence pledge, but also a longer term one. Above all, the political task is to influence the

political evolution of potentially dangerous nuclear powers through a mixture of pressures and incentives, through acting on the regional context as well as, whenever possible, influencing their domestic politics through indirect or discrete methods.

Such an approach has direct application in the case of Iran. The costs of passivity in the face of Iranian efforts and the costs of preemptive war are both prohibitively high. But there is a third way. We should not emphasize banning nuclear enrichment on Iranian territory or even unconditionally condemning its pursuit of nuclear weapons. We have prudential grounds to do so, of course; the problem is, we have every reason to believe that such an approach will be ineffective and might even be counterproductive. Rather, we should emphasize condemnation of Ahmadinejad's statements on Israel, which constitute a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and justify his country's expulsion from all international organizations. Holocaust rejectionism and Iran's support of terrorism, moreover, are activities that divide Iranians both at the popular level and in the ruling elite, while our harping only or mainly on the nuclear issue unites them by encouraging their nationalism and their self-righteousness as victims of double standards. Such a focus will not achieve Western aims and may indeed be counterproductive, not only in the Iranian context but more broadly in the non-West, as well.

OFFENSIVE DÉTENTE, REDUX

War and nuclear diplomacy in the 21st century, it should be clear, cannot be divorced from the power shifts and the underlying currents of the new global sociology we have identified. That alone should teach us that neither Mars nor Venus (despite their respective uses and attractions) can be a reliable guide for the West. Mercury, with his gift for flexibility, mobility and exchange, should be just as useful. Above all, guidance should come from Minerva and her protégé Ulysses—that is, from a wisdom that embraces cunning as well as courage or, in Machiavellian terms, which adopts the ways of the fox as well as those of the lion.

Nowhere is this truer than in the struggle for freedom and democracy in a world of economic inequality, cultural diversity and deep resentments. To take the most obvious example, if we in the West wish to change the orientation of a foreign regime, nothing is more counterproductive than the lion-like act of proclaiming “regime change” to be our policy objective. If we want to make the world a safer place, nothing is more counterproductive than declaring, in effect, a fourth world war whose aim is to transform all regimes into democracies.

American officials say repeatedly that the United States does not wish to impose democracy on anyone. They say, as did President Bush himself, that democracy promotion is “the work of generations.” Listen hard enough and you can even hear protestations of understanding that elections are not the be-all, end-all of democracy, but a consummation of other processes. Nevertheless, these demurrals grow faint when American armies patrol countries holding their first ever “free and fair” elections, after which U.S. officials are quick to proclaim outsized accomplishments on behalf of freedom, democracy and every other good thing they and their speechwriters can think of.

These are not, as a rule, mere spin or acts of bad faith. American officials, in Democratic as

well as Republican administrations, speak as though democracy and the market are the default aspirations of all peoples, and that removing their tyrants simply enables them to fulfill their own natural aspirations, because these officials actually believe this to be the case. There is of course some truth in this view: The market is a necessary condition of prosperity, democracy is in the long run an indispensable condition of freedom, and all peoples do aspire, in one way or another, to be prosperous and free.

Yet it is not so simple as that. The pursuit of life, liberty and happiness comes in many cultural forms, and many powerful loyalties deflect appreciation of their American or Western versions. Besides aspiring to freedom, for example, people may be attached to tradition, especially when it is sanctified by religion. Western-style democracy is associated with modernity, and modernity's social and cultural consequences are seen by many as morally corrupting or, worse, part of a plot against their very corporate identity.⁹ Western democracy promotion can thus lead to a more aggressive reaffirmation of traditional cultures.

Beyond tradition there is nationalism, the resistance against foreign rule and influence as such. However benevolent and oriented toward encouraging self-help, outside efforts to change regimes or "build nations" are bound to arouse suspicions of neo-colonialism, condescension and attacks on cultural or national dignity. Such reactions may strengthen or lead to authoritarian rule or, alternatively, to civil war.

These possibilities, in turn, raise other dilemmas. Intervention by Western power against inhumanity may be urgently desirable. But another aspect of the new international context may make it more difficult since, from Uzbekistan to Zimbabwe and from Serbia to Sudan, Russia and China are able to block Western efforts by giving their support to oppressive governments in exchange for economic and strategic advantages. Unlike in the optimistic 1990s (when, however, the Western readiness for intervention did not include Rwanda, the biggest recent genocide) Western powers have to undergo difficult negotiations and practice unpleasant trade-offs with rivals whose approval or abstention is crucial. Hence they are tempted to buy Putin's support for curbing Iran's search for nuclear weapons by appeasing him on Georgia or Ukraine, let alone on human rights in Russia itself.

Countering "rogue states" or influencing their domestic evolution thus becomes part of a permanent global negotiation in which military bases and access to economic resources are part of a series of tacit or explicit bargains pitting them against legal norms and moral principles. These bargains, in turn, rely on a series of gambles on a largely unpredictable future. Nor is territorial isolation of rogue regimes via sanctions a way out of these uncertainties and ambiguities, for such isolation is rarely enforceable.

What we in the West must do, if we follow the way of the fox, is to avoid both a civilizational confrontation and a civilizational Yalta. Only by avoiding or overcoming the isolation of mutually hostile nations, blocs and civilizations can we ever hope to isolate the enemies of peaceful change within each, and encourage positive transnational solidarities as opposed to destructive ones. That is why strategies of "peaceful engagement" and "offensive détente" that were successful toward the end of the Cold War might again serve us well if adapted to present circumstances. Such strategies, of course, rule out neither the use of force nor diplomacy; instead they require both. They do, or should, rule out those kinds of convictions, as Nietzsche once said, that are greater enemies of truth than lies.

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1. Krastev, “The Anti-American Century”, *Journal of Democracy* (April 2004), and “The End of the Freedom Century”, *Open Democracy*, April 27, 2006.
 2. I confess to driving rapidly here by a complex barrier, so let me explain my view in brief. The West is a notional fact, not a literal one. It consists of three successive layers: the classical inheritance of Greece and Rome; Christianity, along with traces of its Abrahamic forbear; and the Enlightenment in its several forms. These layers bear elements that are in some ways complementary, in others contradictory: The combination, and its tensions, are the wellspring of the West’s capacity for self-criticism, and hence for its vitality.
 3. See Steven David, “On Civil Wars”, *The American Interest* (March/April 2007).
 4. Thomas, “Legitimacy in International Relations”, *Justifier la guerre?* Gilles Andréani and Pierre Hassner, eds. (Presses de Science Po, 2005).
 5. Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (Penguin, 2007).
 6. Jakub Grygiel’s concept of the postmodern “barbarian” is not inconsistent with this usage; see “Empires and Barbarians”, *The American Interest* (March/April 2007).
 7. John Hillen, “Superpowers Don’t Do Windows”, *Orbis* (Spring 1997).
 8. This section covers the same ground as my more detailed analysis, “Who Killed Nuclear Enlightenment?” *International Affairs* (May 2007).
 9. Anna Simons and others have made this point in these pages: See “Making Enemies” in the Summer 2006 and Autumn 2006 issues of *The American Interest*.