

## Chapter five

### Containment and democratic cosmopolitanism

My aim here is to defend containment as the national security policy of choice for cosmopolitan democrats. *Containment* here refers to George Kennan's argument developed in the 1940s, as modified in my book *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror*.<sup>1</sup> I take *cosmopolitan democrats* to be people who are committed to the view that democracy is the best system of government and who favor its preservation and diffusion around the world. I develop my argument from an American perspective, but it could equally be developed from that of any other democracy.

Whereas Kennan was interested in containment as a response to the threat posed to the U.S. by the Soviet Union, mine is a more general account of the presumptive policy for dealing with the violent threats democracies face in the post-Cold War world. This changed context entails some differences with Kennan on how best to go about containment, though there are also surprising continuities with his views. In what follows I develop the theoretical underpinnings of my account more fully than I did in the book. I also meet the objection that containment takes an unjust nation-state system, from which the U.S. has derived ill-gotten gains, for granted—and might even help perpetuate it.

Some equate the commitment to cosmopolitan democracy with the project of creating a world government. In part 1, I take up, and dispatch, the three main arguments that have been put forward in support of world government: those based on claims about the nature of public coercion, those that appeal to observations about the moral arbitrariness of the existing division of the world into nation states, and those rooted in the principle of affected interest—the idea that one's right to a say in a decision should be based on the importance of the interest that one has at stake. I turn to containment's normative basis in part 2, where I expound upon containment's elective affinity with the democratic principle of non-domination. This leads to a discussion, in part 3, of the pros and cons of democratization through forcible regime change, where I make the case that this can be justified only in a highly restricted set of circumstances of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ian Shapiro, *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

the sort presented by Japan and Germany after World War II. In most circumstances, including those pursued by the George W. Bush administration in the Middle East, the nature of democratic legitimacy makes external imposition inescapably problematic.

In part 4, on global containment, I show why, in the age of rogue regimes, weak states, and mobile terrorist threats, containment requires cooperation with other states and legitimation through international institutions. This falls notably short of the idea of world government discussed earlier, though it involves steps in the direction of strengthening the international rule of law. In parts 5 and 6, I take up the argument that containment is objectionable on the grounds that it legitimates a status-quo that incorporates the ill-gotten gains of the containing power. Compelling as such arguments about ill-gotten gains concededly are, I argue that they do not dethrone containment as the national security policy of choice for cosmopolitan democrats. Better than the going alternatives, containment fits with the imperatives of governments to protect their populations, preserve existing democratic institutions, and support the diffusion of democratic values and practices around the world.

### **I. Cosmopolitanism and world government**

Some will question why a committed cosmopolitan democrat should defend any *national* security policy. Shouldn't we be committed to world government? Not necessarily. I take a cosmopolitan commitment to democracy to involve endorsing the view that democracy is the best system of government and embracing the goal of supporting democracy's spread across the globe, but it is a huge leap from this to arguing for world government. Making that move is neither desirable nor feasible, as can be seen by examining the main arguments that have been put forward in support of world government.

One argument is connected only indirectly to democratic government. It turns on a claim about the nature of coercive force. Its logic was most clearly spelled out by Robert Nozick in the course of discussing the emergence of unified national governments. Nozick's key claim was that coercive force is a natural monopoly. Accordingly, he argued that, within a given territorial area, competing enforcement authorities cannot coexist in equilibrium. Eventually,

one will either wipe out or co-opt the others.<sup>2</sup> The survivor will then be a Weberian state—one that monopolizes the legitimate use of force within a given territory.<sup>3</sup>

Why is this relevant to democratic world government? The reason is suggested by the historical democratization of nation states. Perry Anderson established long ago that what we now think of as the developed countries of Europe did not move from feudalism to democracy, but rather from feudalism to absolutism to democracy.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars, prominent among them David Held, have detailed the process whereby the centralization of power within nation states came before their democratization.<sup>5</sup> There had to be commanding heights for democrats to seize. Held has suggested elsewhere that, at a minimum, advancing the cause of global democracy would require creation of a global rule of law via an international *rechtsstaat* for analogous reasons.<sup>6</sup> Pressing the analogy to the formation of national democracies seems to suggest the necessity for a world state to make the international *rechtsstaat* a practical reality.

Nozick was not thinking about world government, but, if his argument is valid, an obvious question to ask is, why don't we have a world government now? Nation states are the global analogues of his competing mutual protection associations within a given territory. The Nozickian global expectation should therefore be that one nation would eventually co-opt or edge out the others, yet it fails to happen.

Nozick's answer would presumably involve reference to available technologies of force. As their geographical reach expands, the relevant territorial area over which a monopoly can be exercised grows with it. World government hasn't arrived yet, but, on this telling, we will move steadily toward it as weapons too powerful to be ignored can more easily be delivered

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 54-119.

<sup>3</sup> For additional discussion see Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Schocken Books, 1979).

<sup>5</sup> David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Polity Press, 1995). This does not mean, of course, that centralized authoritarian states necessarily democratize as the modernization theorists believed. See Seymour Lipset, "Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1959), pp. 69-105 and David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (University of Chicago Press, 1967). Just as authoritarian regimes can survive in national states, the same problem might arise with a world state.

<sup>6</sup> David Held, "The transformation of political community: Rethinking democracy in the context of globalization," in Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón eds., *Democracy's Edges* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 84-111.

anywhere in the world. Presumably it was reasoning of this sort that Bertrand Russell had in mind when he pushed for the U.S. to declare a world government following its first use of nuclear weapons against Japan.<sup>7</sup>

But the Nozickian story lacks plausibility, at least without large qualifications that would leave us scant reason to anticipate world government arising from the feasible worldwide deployment of lethal force any time soon. For one thing, the existence of a lethal weapon that can technically be deployed anywhere does not mean that it is practically deployable. Proliferation of such weapons might make the costs of deploying them too high, since others might use them against you. Hence the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction that gave rise to deterrence during the Cold War.

Of course Russell's argument anticipated that. His premise was that the U.S. should take advantage of the window of opportunity created by America's nuclear monopoly after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki precisely because that monopoly would otherwise be temporary. "It is obvious," Russell insisted in 1947, "that the only way in which war can be permanently prevented is the creation of a single government for the whole world, possessed of all the more powerful weapons of war." In order to do its job, the world government would have to be "irresistible; even the greatest of separate powers should be incapable of fighting against it with any hope of success." Limiting the development of nuclear weapons should therefore not be part of the agenda. "The more deadly are the weapons monopolized by the international authority, the more obvious will be its capacity to enforce its will, and the less will be the likelihood of resistance to its decrees."<sup>8</sup>

But Russell's argument lacks a plausible mechanism through which a nuclear monopoly might be translated into a world government. He conflates overwhelming military superiority with the capacity to achieve day-to-day control of populations. The Vietnam War made it plain that there is a vast difference between the two, even if the Soviet experience in Afghanistan and the post-2002 U.S. experience there and in Iraq reveal governments to be slow learners of this lesson. If the most powerful country on earth declared itself a world government, conflicts currently labeled as wars might be relabeled as insurgencies or civil wars—but there is no reason to suppose that there would be fewer conflicts or that they would be any less deadly.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Towards World Government* (London: Thorney House, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

The Russell-Nozick view also ignores many economies of smallness in enforcement. Perhaps some combination of increases in surveillance and enforcement will make a worldwide *Nineteen Eighty-Four* scenario feasible some day, but we are a long way away from that. As the literature on community policing reveals, effective law enforcement depends vitally on local knowledge and relationships.<sup>9</sup> This is essential for generating relevant information, but also for the perceived legitimacy of enforcement. As Fernand Braudel, James Scott, and others have pointed out, often the state's monopoly is incomplete and its legitimacy is at least questioned by significant sectors of the population.<sup>10</sup> Without that legitimacy, subject populations can be expected to defect—either through crime or by reaching for weapons of the weak such as terrorism. In short, it is doubtful that coercive force *is* a natural monopoly, and correspondingly dubious that its evolution will or should drive the world in the direction of a single government.<sup>11</sup>

A different argument for world government appeals to norms about legitimacy. The starting point here is the arbitrary division of the world into nation-states. Countries have been forged by wars and other historical accidents, with a huge proportion of the world's power and wealth residing in the hands of the small number of people who inhabit the strongest and richest nations. The vast majority of the world's population is effectively excluded from these resources. It is a system of global apartheid. None of the going conceptions of legitimacy plausibly lend themselves to its defense. Various fictions about social contracts are just that, since no nation has actually been ushered into existence by a consensual agreement.<sup>12</sup> Nor have

---

<sup>9</sup> See David Thacher, "Conflicting Values in Community Policing," *Law and Society Review*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2001), pp. 765-798 and Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation, Reinventing urban Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> See Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Vol. 1, (University of California Press, 1996) pp. 53-59, *The Perspective of the World: Civilization and Capitalism, 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, Vol. III (Harper and Row, 1984); and James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Even in the United States, groups like the Amish have often managed to defy the will of the state with respect to their educational practices. For decades before the famous *Wisconsin v. Yoder* 406 US 205 (1972) litigation local authorities had all but given up trying to enforce mandatory high school education on them. The *Yoder* litigation only came about as a byproduct of a school rationalization plan in Wisconsin that had nothing to do with the Amish. See Richard Arneson and Ian Shapiro, "Democratic autonomy and religious freedom: A critique of *Wisconsin v. Yoder*," in Ian Shapiro, *Democracy's Place* (Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 137-74.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Cornell University Press, 1989) Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

democratic procedures been followed in the manufacture of any nation.<sup>13</sup> Utilitarianism is notoriously at odds with the nation-state based distribution of power and resources in the world.<sup>14</sup> In sum, no good arguments have been put forward to justify this massively unequal system.

Conceding this last claim, *arguendo*, it scarcely amounts to a case for world government. Distributive injustice among people inhabiting different nations should be redressed, to be sure, because justice is predicated of individuals—not of states. But abolishing nation states in favor of world government is not a plausible path to advance toward this destination. Massive, and sometimes even increasing, inequalities persist within nation states—including those with democratic political systems based on a universal franchise. Why this happens is a continuing puzzle for political economists.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the explanation for the maldistribution, it seems implausible that creating a worldwide polity would do anything to alleviate it. On the contrary, the enforcement difficulties and collective action obstacles to change within so large an entity would likely multiply.

Sometimes the arbitrariness objection is not about access to economic resources so much as to the distribution of citizenship itself. Why should the accidents of birth privilege some to be citizens in benign countries while others are condemned to live where life is nasty, brutish, and short? Why should the former get the windfalls associated with belonging to one country while the latter suffer the costs of another? If the claim here is really about the maldistribution of life chances associated with different citizenships, then considerations like those just adduced about economic resources apply: there is no better reason to suppose that a move to world government would reduce the maldistribution of non-economic factors that influence life chances any more than it would reduce the maldistribution of economic resources.

It is, in any case, something of a non-sequitur to go from the premise of different advantages of different citizenships to the conclusion that national citizenship should be abolished. It's a bit like saying that because some people have better eyesight than others, the world would be a better place if everyone was rendered blind. The existence of different

---

<sup>13</sup> See Ian Shapiro and Casiano Hacker-Cordón, "Outer edges and inner edges" in *Democracy's Edges*, op. cit., pp. 1-15.

<sup>14</sup> See Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford University Press, 1991) and Peter Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (Yale University Press, 2004.)

<sup>15</sup> For a review of the literature see *The State of Democratic Theory*, op. cit., pp. 104-45.

national citizenships with differing values might support an argument for the most liberal sustainable immigration policies, or for compensation of those with less desirable national citizenships by those with more desirable ones, but not for the abolition of national citizenship as such. To establish the desirability of *that*, one would have to carry the additional burden of showing that people would actually be better served by being global citizens only.

If, however, the argument really is about the objectionability of the very idea of national citizenship (as distinct from benefits or costs instrumentally associated with it), it is unclear just what the basis for the objection is. Citizenship in anything short of a world state involves exclusion of some, to be sure, but exclusion is not by itself objectionable. Unrequited love leads to exclusion, but it is a form of exclusion that we routinely expect people to accept. One might say that exclusion from a civic status is different, but it is unclear why. More than two decades ago Michael Walzer made a compelling case that it is not the unequal distribution of a good as such that is objectionable, but rather the translation of that inequality into the wherewithal to dominate others.<sup>16</sup> If this translatability were absent from national citizenship, it would be hard to make the case that nations are illegitimate or that they should not be free to create and enforce exclusive forms of citizenship. It is the translatability of national citizenship into instruments of domination that is objectionable, not national citizenship as such.

These considerations suggest a third rationale for world government, one that appeals to the principle of affected interest. Democratic legitimacy is rooted in the notion that the people affected by a decision should have a say in making it. One reason why national decision-making can be troubling is that so often it operates at variance with this principle. In an increasingly global economy, decisions about trade, employment, fiscal, and monetary policy in one country have huge ramifications for people who live elsewhere. This is not to mention the spillover effects of environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, and military adventures. As power is increasingly exercised on a global basis, so the need to harness its exercise through global institutions becomes stronger. If the principle of affected interest is the wellspring of democratic legitimacy, how can we justify making national governments the repositories of decision-making in an increasingly interdependent world?

This is a powerful argument, but it does not support replacing national governments with a world government. For one thing, while everyone on earth might in some sense be

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Basic Books, 1984).

affected by a decision, some people will have basic interests at stake in many decisions while others will not.<sup>17</sup> It is the former who have the strongest claim to participation in decision-making. As I have argued elsewhere, what matters here is not the size of the interest at stake, as, say in the amount of money, but rather its importance for peoples' survival and their capacity to live normal lives under democratic conditions.<sup>18</sup>

Those with basic interests at stake in a given decision might not map well onto national populations, but a remedy that gave people with negligible interests the same say as those with basic interests at stake in the matter at hand would scarcely solve this problem. We would not want people who do not rely on publicly funded health insurance for their medical treatment to have the same say in determining which procedures should be covered by the insurance as those who have no choice but to rely on it.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, if the goal is—as I agree that it should be—for decision-making better to reflect the preferences of people with basic interests at stake, sometimes this will involve devolution to sub-national units rather than super-national ones. Recent arguments for devolution from Westminster to Scottish and Welsh assemblies appeal to this idea. And sometimes, when it does make sense to shift a decision to a larger unit, it will be to a regional body like the European Union rather than a world legislature. The principle of subsidiarity embraced in the EU recognizes this implicitly. It creates a presumption of deference to more local decision-making, and then decisions move up the ladder of subsidiarity if and when affected interests require this. No doubt there will be disagreements about where particular decisions should be located on the ladder, requiring, in turn, procedures for resolving those disagreements. But the relevant point here is that, rather than world government, the principle of affected interest suggests disaggregating the demos decision by decision. Indeed, some decisions—such as whether to terminate life support for the terminally ill—should be devolved to even smaller decision-making units like families and perhaps (by living wills and durable powers of attorney) to single individuals.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> I define basic interests by reference to the wherewithal to survive and thrive in the economy as to can reasonably be expected to operate over the course of one's lifetime and in the polity governed as a democracy. See *Democratic Justice*, pp. 85-90 and chapter eight of this volume.

<sup>18</sup> See Ian Shapiro, *Democratic Justice* (Yale University Press, 1999) pp. 85-90, 161-3, 186-90.

<sup>19</sup> For additional discussion as illustrated by the flawed deliberative sessions of the reform of Oregon's health care system in the early 1990s, see *The State of Democratic Theory*, op. cit., pp. 23-28.

<sup>20</sup> For additional discussion see *Democratic Justice*, op. cit., pp. 219-29.

## 2. Containment's normative basis

If democrats are committed to non-domination, how is containment relevant to advancing toward that goal? For George Kennan, this question was thrown up by events. Writing at the end of World War II when troops were being demobilized and budgets cut, he was acutely aware that national security would have to be pursued with an eye to husbanding scarce resources. This would not be a world in which the U.S. could afford to dominate the global security environment. In such a context, Kennan argued, the U.S. would be best able to ensure its security by building a world that no one could dominate.

In part this was a judgment about the USSR. Convinced that the Soviet system was dysfunctional and that its own overextension would lead it eventually to implode, Kennan argued that all we had to do was hem the Soviets in and wait them out. In holding that the Soviet goal of worldwide hegemony was doomed while any comparable American goal would be unsustainably expensive, Kennan was building—however unwittingly—on traditional republican arguments to the effect that empires invariably become overextended and collapse.

Kennan's particular twist was to invert the logic of a divide-and-rule into the service of resisting domination. We might call it the principle of divide-and-refuse-to-be-ruled. Kennan thought it a mistake to conceive of our Cold War adversary as the World Communist Movement. The country that threatened the U.S. and its allies was the Soviet Union. There were conflicts and potential conflicts within the communist camp that could work to American advantage in facing down that threat. Kennan thus welcomed the rise of Titoism in Yugoslavia; this was the kind of internal challenge to Soviet hegemony that would promote competition within the Soviet camp, weaken the Soviet grip on Eastern Europe, and complicate its battle for hearts and minds in the developing world. In defending this view Kennan opposed John Foster Dulles and other proponents of "rollback" who proposed the aggressive worldwide confrontation of communism. In *Containment* I make an analogous case to Kennan's about the imprudence of the Bush administration's "Axis of Evil"—lumping together vastly different adversaries, giving them reasons to bury their differences, and to form united fronts against the capitalist democracies in general and the U.S. in particular.

For Kennan, the goal of creating a world that no one could dominate was strategic all the way down. The multilateral clusters of national powers to which it would lead offered Americans the best available guarantee of security from foreign attack. But normative

considerations, rooted in democratic theory, dovetail neatly with Kennan's case. Early in the *Discourses* Machiavelli argues that it is better to give power to the common people because, unlike the aristocracy whose desire is to dominate, their desire is not to be dominated.<sup>21</sup> Institutionalizing measures to prevent domination has been a principal aim of democratic theory since Machiavelli's time, at the root of debates over entrenching measures that are essential to the operation of democratic politics, regulating the reach of private interests in politics, and ensuring representation of disempowered minorities.

Containment extends the neo-Machiavellian case for non-domination to the realm of national security. The essential idea is to stop the bully without yourself becoming a bully. In this it appeals to the impulse to refuse to be dominated rather than the impulse to dominate. It is this rootedness of containment in the idea of non-domination that gives it an elective affinity with democratic politics, conferring legitimacy on it at home and abroad. At home, containment can provide people with security without saddling them with unsustainable military obligations, and it can lead people to support democracy beyond their borders without arrogating to themselves the task of toppling regimes in other countries. Abroad, containment can be seen as a policy that requires acceptance by others of the legitimacy of existing democracies. It also signals that, so long as this is compatible with ensuring their own survival into the future, democratic governments will join forces arrayed against domination beyond their borders by helping to protect other democracies, resisting the expansion of tyranny, and supporting viable democratic resistance to authoritarian regimes.

Containment is more behavioral than ideological in the sense that its focus is on what potential adversaries actually do internationally rather than on their internal political arrangements or the beliefs of their leaders. Political theorists might discern in it an element of a stripped down "political, not metaphysical" disposition, inasmuch as it seeks a basis for interacting with others that does not depend on persuading them of the validity of your beliefs or the folly of theirs.<sup>22</sup> In Kennan's case this was born of the conviction that arguing with Soviet leaders about the merits of international issues was a waste of time because they could never

---

<sup>21</sup> See Machiavelli's discussion, early in *The Discourses*, of the Roman argument that the common people should be made the guardians of freedom because, unlike the aristocracy whose desire is to dominate, their desire is not to be dominated. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970 [c.1517]) § 1.5).

<sup>22</sup> See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 131-254.

be persuaded of the values and commitments of America's political leaders.<sup>23</sup> He thought the Soviets would, nonetheless, respond to the logic implicit in containment even if they were unwilling or unable to acknowledge that they were doing this. He thought this supplied the best basis for dealing with them.

However true this might have been of Soviet leaders during the Cold War, in the post-cold war era it seems even more obviously so of adversaries whose beliefs are sharply at odds with those of most Americans, and who lack any history of democratic politics. Seeking to convert them to our world view seems, at best, naïve. The fusion of communism and anti-American nationalism proved to be a potent mixture in Indochina and much of Africa and Latin America during the Cold War. There is every reason to expect the fusion of Islam and anti-American nationalism to be just as potent. Just as the Vietnam conflict solidified anti-Americanism in southeast Asia, so the 2003 Iraq invasion has done it across the Middle East.

The George W. Bush Administration played into this dynamic, contributing to the “clash-of-civilizations” construction of what is at stake.<sup>24</sup> In the aftermath of 9/11 and in the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States*<sup>25</sup> the administration insisted that the war on terror is a war on people who hate “freedom” and hate us for who we are.<sup>26</sup> In a series of speeches in late 2005, President Bush began explicitly connecting the war on terror to variants of radical and militant Islam.<sup>27</sup> In this he was genuflecting in the direction of neo-conservatives

---

<sup>23</sup> This was the subject of his famous 8,000 word “long telegram” when he was a diplomat in Moscow in 1946 that first got the attention of the Truman administration.

<sup>24</sup> See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (The White House, 2002). Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf> [September 3, 2007].

<sup>26</sup> “Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.” George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, 09/20/01, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>. President Bush also commented after the 2004 Madrid bombings that “These people kill because they hate freedom and they hate what Spain stands for.” George W. Bush, Interview by Television of Spain, 03/12/04. <http://63.161.169.137/news/releases/2004/03/20040312-19.html>. [04/07/2006].

<sup>27</sup> See President Bush's Address at the National Endowment for Democracy, 10/06/05, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/20051006-3.html>. [06/18/06]. Bush continued to deny it was intrinsic to the Islamic religion, but—as with mentioning Iraq in the same paragraph as 9/11 while denying that he was asserting they were connected, the likely result—and perhaps event the intent—was manifest.

like David Frum and Richard Perle, who have long insisted that militant Islam is the principal cause of terrorism, that is widely endorsed across the Muslim world and among Muslim minorities in the West, and that its goal is to “overthrow our civilization and remake the nations of the West into Islamic societies, imposing on the whole world its religion and its law.”<sup>28</sup>

This analysis defies most expert opinion which recognizes that since 1980 more terrorism, including suicide bombing, has been perpetrated by secular groups than by religious fundamentalists,<sup>29</sup> and that even Islamic terrorist leaders like Osama bin Laden see themselves as engaged in a “defensive jihad” in response to American policies in the Middle East rather than an “offensive jihad” geared to the global spread of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Feeding the idea of a clash of civilizations is as self-defeating with respect to Islam as Kennan believed that it was with respect to international communism.

Containment also presupposes a normative reason to prefer the stripped down “political, not metaphysical” attitude to others’ beliefs. In one respect this attitude calls to mind the logic of the secret ballot, which shields people from any expectation that they should be expected to justify their political views to others. There are, to be sure, deliberative strands of democratic theory that call for more or less ambitious attempts at justifying one’s beliefs in terms that others will accept.<sup>31</sup> Yet even deliberation’s enthusiastic proponents do not contend that in politics deliberation should be *required* of people, or that the results of “deliberative polls” and other deliberative mechanisms should actually be binding on the decisions of a democratic polity. This marks their acknowledgment, however tacit, that it is the act of deciding rather than the mental processes behind it that is essential to democratic legitimacy.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003) p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> See Stephen Hopgood, “Tamil Tigers,” in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, ed. by Diego Gambetta (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 43-76; Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House 2005); and Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> The definitive treatment of this subject is former intelligence officer Michael Scheuer’s *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Virginia: Potomac Books, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1984, and “Three normative models of democracy,” *Constellations*, No. 1 (1994), pp. 1-20; Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Harvard University Press, 1996); and James Fishkin, *The Voice of the People: Public Opinion and Democracy* (Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>32</sup> *The State of Democratic Theory* op. cit., pp. 21-49.

Whatever one's view of deliberativist philosophical ventures, it is notable that democracies do not institutionalize them. Indeed, as John Ferejohn and Pasquale Pasquino have noted, we tend to require more in the way of reason-giving the further away we get from the ballot-box. For instance, on their telling we expect judges to give reasons for their decisions just because they are not backed by the legitimation of the ballot box.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not Ferejohn and Pasquino are right that this is the reason, it is clear that democracy requires us to accept the political choices of others regardless of their reasons for those choices, so long as they do not impose them on us in violation of democratic processes. By an analogous token, containment is indifferent to the beliefs of others, so long as the actions that flow from those beliefs do not threaten our ability to operate democratically on the basis of our own beliefs.

### **3. Containment and "regime change."**

Containment occupies a midpoint on a continuum between isolationism and proselytizing regime-change. Containment's primary imperative for democratic governments is to protect their people and resist threats to their survival as democracies. This particularist impulse does not signal indifference to democracy's fate around the world. A commitment to containment is compatible with a cosmopolitan democratic commitment to resisting the expansion of tyranny in the world. It involves willingness to help protect other democracies, to resist expansionist ambitions of tyrannical regimes, and to assist democratic oppositions in authoritarian countries.

But why protect one's own democracy *first*? This priority does not rest on the supposition that American lives are more valuable than other lives, or that American democracy is more important than democracy elsewhere (even if my argument will be attractive to people who believe those things). Rather, it reflects the reality that no government will long be in a position to protect others or to foster democracy elsewhere unless it can protect its own people and preserve its country as a democracy. In this the imperative for the U.S. to secure American democracy first is analogous to John Locke's injunction that each individual strive to preserve mankind to the extent that this is compatible with his or her self-preservation. This did not mean, for Locke, that a given person's survival was more important than that of any other. On

---

<sup>33</sup> See John Ferejohn and Pasquale Pasquino, "Constitutional courts as deliberative institutions: towards an institutional theory of constitutional justice," in Wojciech Sadurski, ed., *Constitutional Justice East and West: Democratic Legitimacy and Constitutional Courts in Post-Communist Europe in a Comparative Perspective* (Springer, 2002), pp. 21-36.

the contrary, Locke's signature and revolutionary view was that we are all equal in God's eyes. It was simply a matter of who had primary responsibility for what.<sup>34</sup> Containment's particularism is thus compatible with a cosmopolitan commitment to democracy that would suggest securing French democracy first as a French national security priority, securing South African democracy first as a South African national security priority, and so on.

But I want to advance a stronger claim: containment is not only *compatible* with a cosmopolitan commitment to democracy; containment is the best available national security policy for cosmopolitan democrats to embrace. Taking the time to establish that containment is superior to isolationism from this point of view scarcely seems necessary; for present purposes I will simply assume that cosmopolitan democrats would prefer containment over isolation. The more contentious question is whether I am right that containment beats a policy of toppling authoritarian regimes in order to replace them with democracies.

The advantages of my view should become evident once we reflect on the difficulties associated with imposing regime-change in the name of democracy. Japan and what came to be West Germany after World War II are often mentioned in this connection, in support of the contention that viable democracy can and sometimes should be imposed from the outside. But Germany and Japan were highly unusual cases in that both had waged aggressive war on the U.S. and its allies with the result that the legitimacy of the allied destruction of their regimes was widely accepted internationally, and even by many among their domestic populations. Having destroyed the regimes, we did indeed assume the obligation of building democracies in those countries if this was feasible. It is worth noting that this took a massive commitment of American resources and a military presence over many decades, even though both Germany and Japan had prewar experience with democracy.

Going to war in order to implement regime change, when you have neither been attacked nor threatened with imminent attack, is an altogether different proposition. If the justification for doing this is that democracy is better than authoritarianism, you face the conundrum that democracy gets its legitimacy from support for the regime by those over whom

---

<sup>34</sup> "Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station willfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind." John Locke, *Second Treatises of Government in Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed by Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), ch. II, § 6, p 102.

power is exercised. There are two related problems here: the new regime lacks legitimacy because it is not the creation of those who are subject to it, and your motives as an invading power are inescapably suspect. The second problem compounds the first, leading the new government all too easily to be seen as the puppet of an imperial power.

It is true that all democratic transitions require decisive action from above at critical junctures. The United States constitution was rammed through in violation of the Articles of Confederation. The terms of the South African transition were negotiated in secret by the leaderships of the ANC and the National party government, with dissenting voices in the Inkatha Freedom Party and the white right told to like it or lump it once the deal was done. But what differentiates such cases from external impositions was the existence of large domestic constituencies whose members supported the democratic transition. Moreover, the transitions were not undertaken exclusively from above. As was detailed in chapter three, they involved an interactive dynamic in which political elites were careful to build support for their actions in key constituencies as they went along.

When the installing agent is an outside power, the legitimacy hurdles are inevitably much higher. By what authority does it act? What are its real motives and agenda? How can it claim to be acting in the name of democracy when it is forcing the domestic population to accept the institutions it is imposing?

One way to mitigate these difficulties is if the outside power is acting in concert with, and at the behest of, an indigenous democratic opposition. But as John Stuart Mill warned a long time ago, if the opposition forces are too weak to overthrow the regime then the chances that they will be able to establish a viable democracy are low.<sup>35</sup> Whether the relevant support exists in fact will often be a difficult judgment call, since opposition movements might well overestimate their chances of success. This renders external intervention inherently fraught with risk.

One rule of thumb is that internal oppositions seeking outside assistance should receive more serious consideration than expatriate oppositions. Internal oppositions are more likely to have accurate information and, more important, unlike expatriate oppositions they have to live with the consequences if a planned insurrection fails. This gives them the incentive to get

---

<sup>35</sup> See John Stuart Mill, "A few words on non-intervention," in John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Politics and Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), pp. 381-82.

accurate information about their chances of success. Expatriates, particularly those who have been away for many years, are more likely to have suspect information and to be prone to the wishful thinking that comes of talking disproportionately to people with views similar to one's own.<sup>36</sup> The expatriate Cubans who assured the Kennedy administration before the Bay of Pigs that the population would rise up against Castro warranted considerable skepticism by this test. Likewise with the assurances offered by Ahmad Chalabi and his associates about how Americans would be received in Iraq in 2003.

The importance of acting at the behest of indigenous opposition is not simply a matter of their power; it extends also to questions of legitimacy. Trying to force regime-change from the outside when this is not called for by local opposition forces is likely to do little more than hand propaganda victories to the regime. The Clinton administration's sanctions against Iraq had this effect, allowing Saddam Hussein to make political hay by displaying starving babies on television. Contrast that with sanctions against South Africa imposed by Congress over Ronald Reagan's veto in 1986. The administration's argument that they would do more harm than good to South Africa's dispossessed blacks while leaving the regime untouched was undercut because the ANC had been calling for sanctions since 1959.<sup>37</sup> Comparable considerations suggest that external pressure might be plausible in the service of democracy-promotion in Burma but not in North Korea.

In Iran, following the disputed election of June 2009, the Obama administration was attacked from various quarters for failing to come out in strong support of the reformists who insisted that the election had been stolen. What Obama's critics missed was that at no time did Mir-Hossein Mousavi or any of his supporters seek American intervention, sanctions, or even declarations of support. Presumably they understood, as did Barack Obama, that this would weaken their hand in the Iranian struggle, not strengthen it. This does indeed mean, as some critics of my book have noted, that my argument disallows intervention to promote regime-change in the worst regimes, those in which no opposition of any kind is permitted to survive. This is true, but ought entails can. Toppling a dictatorship that will likely be replaced by another

---

<sup>36</sup> See Cass Sunstein, "The law of group polarization," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 175-95.

<sup>37</sup> "South Africa," *Foreign policy in Focus* Vol. 2, No. 22 (January, 1997) <http://www.fpif.org/pdf/vol2/22ifs afr.pdf> [07-14-2009].

dictatorship following an interregnum of war or civil war imposes enormous human cost with no discernible benefit for reducing domination.

Democrats should be disposed toward helping in the creation of new democracies as part of their agenda to reduce domination, but they should do this mindful of the reality that democratic legitimacy comes primarily from within and from below. Outsiders must remain in the subordinate position of assisting indigenous democratic forces, lest the outsiders morph into new agents of domination. Their actions will have been self-defeating if they are backed into installing puppet regimes that lack legitimacy on the ground.

#### **4. Global containment**

In the post-Cold War world of rogue regimes, weak states, and mobile terrorist organizations, facing down the expansion of tyranny might require a military response to belligerence—even when this does not involve strict self-defense against an imminent threat. Democrats should be willing to support international containment for this purpose. Saddam Hussein's 1991 invasion of Kuwait is a case in point. It was unprovoked aggression that clearly called for a response by those committed to resisting the spread of domination in the world. But just because it was not a matter of self-defense for the U.S. and its allies the question inevitably arose: by what authority could they act?

For such action to garner legitimacy it must involve widespread international participation, with strong involvement from the local region, and this action must be authorized through international institutions. This view involves major departures from the classic conception of containment. George Kennan had no time for international institutions such as the UN, which he believed would be sidelined in any serious conflict between the U.S. and the Soviets. He was also distrustful of alliances, believing they would hamper the U.S. unnecessarily and, in the case of NATO, that it would needlessly militarize the standoff with the Soviets in Europe. But that was then and this is now. Containing aggressive tyranny that can emerge, unpredictably, in different parts of the world requires a response that is transnationally coordinated and internationally authorized.

Coordinated transnational action with strong regional participation is needed partly for pragmatic reasons. Countries in the neighborhood of a failed or rouge regime are likely to have vital interests at stake and to be potential spoilers if their cooperation is not secured. If it is secured, this will help scotch the perception that the far-off power is acting from imperial

motives. Participation from Arab countries in the region in the U.S. effort to oust Iraq from Kuwait in 1991 was beneficial for all of these reasons. The lack of comparable cooperation with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 has compounded American difficulties there significantly. The Iraq Study Group understood this when it recommended, in December of 2006, that the administration begin working with Syria and Iran to secure Iraq's south-western and south-eastern borders.<sup>38</sup> Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was equally clear about this in late 2007.<sup>39</sup> It is inconceivable that a post-occupation containment strategy for the terrorism that will emanate from the failed state that Iraq has become will otherwise be effective.

This is not to deny that Iran will also need to be contained, any more than the Nixon Administration's opening to China as part of its containment of the Soviet Union obviated the need to continue containing China. Taking advantage of common interests does not imply that there is, or a need to pretend that there is, an identity of interest. Rather, it suggests that the U.S. should take advantage of common interests where this is possible, while reserving the right to work with others to contain external aggression and the financing and export of terror.

It will typically be true that pursuing containment on a global basis will require cooperation from others. It is sometimes said that the containment regime against Saddam Hussein's Iraq was failing by 2002—as revealed by the fact that he agreed to the return of UN weapons inspectors only once American troops were massing on his border. Granting this, *arguendo*, it also reveals the limits of unilateral action. As a containment regime, the U.S. action was unsustainable. Everyone knew that we could not keep the troops there at battle-readiness throughout the summer of 2003. This presented the Bush administration with the conundrum that either they invade or withdraw. Had he pursued the latter course, Saddam could have continued the cat-and-mouse by expelling the weapons inspectors again. The fear of appearing as a paper tiger on the world stage boxed the Administration into invading.

If, instead, President Bush had put together the kind of coalition his father had assembled in 1991, then troops from different nations could have been rotated in and out, keeping up the pressure. To this it might be objected that too few powers would have agreed to

---

<sup>38</sup> James Baker III et. al., "The Iraq Study Group Report" (December, 2006), pp. 25-40. [http://bakerinstitute.org/Pubs/iraqstudygroup\\_findings.pdf](http://bakerinstitute.org/Pubs/iraqstudygroup_findings.pdf) [09/11/07].

<sup>39</sup> Waleed Ibrahim, "Iraq PM defends government, urges regional cooperation," *The Washington Post* (September 9, 2007) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/09/AR2007090900356.html?referrer=emailarticle> [09/11/07].

participate to make this viable. Perhaps so, but that suggests, in turn, that the Americans were exaggerating the threat. If other major powers would not participate and Iraq's neighbors did not feel sufficiently threatened to get involved either, that should have been a warning that the WMD threat in Iraq might indeed be a paper tiger. This widespread reluctance on the part of those who would be most immediately and seriously threatened by a newly rearmed Iraq should have prompted hard scrutiny of what turned out later to have been the hyped intelligence claims of those bent on finding a justification for war.

Regional participation is important also for normative reasons. Nations bordering on an expansionist power will have major, possibly vital, interests at stake. The principle of affected interest thus gives them a strong claim to a say and to a role in the defensive response. To this it might be objected that, if they are not themselves democracies, why should democrats respect the appeal of the governments of regional powers to the principle of affected interest? Why should democrats care about Kuwait's interests, let alone those of Syria or Iran?

But the failure of others to respect the principle of affected interest is not a good reason for democrats to flout it. Moreover, democrats have an interest in encouraging non-democracies to adopt democratic norms and to play by democratic rules when they operate internationally—whether in institutions like the UN or in informal consultations and coalitions. The more governments accept the norm's legitimacy in one context, the more they legitimate it, willy nilly, in others—making it harder to resist domestic demands for democratic reform.

Authorization through international institutions also matters for reasons both practical and normative. On the practical front, it will often be the officials from the UN and other international agencies on the ground who have access to pertinent information. This is especially likely to be true as far as weak and failed states are concerned, where it is often the local representatives of international institutions who will know the details of different war lords' capacities and agendas, where the weak points in borders are, and other relevant street-level information. Moreover, international authorization of containment coalitions enhances their stability. It is harder for a country to withdraw from participation when it has become committed through an international legal process than when it is merely a coalition "of the willing"—of which some future administration might take a different view. Gordon Brown's replacement of Tony Blair is a case in point.

But the most important reasons for international authorization are normative. If major powers act either unilaterally or via coalitions of the willing when they are not themselves under threat of imminent attack, they lack principled authority for their actions. As a result, they are likely to be seen as imperialistic, opportunistic, or both. The 1991 Gulf War and the 2001 action against Afghanistan garnered worldwide support in significant part because they were authorized by the UN Security Council. This stands in stark contrast to the 2003 Iraq war, which continues widely to be seen as a rogue American action against a country that posed no regional or global threat. Rather than undermining the UN at every turn, as the Bush Administration did, the major democratic powers should strengthen the UN, and then work through it to face domination down. Cosmopolitan democrats should press their governments to get behind that enterprise. This is a far cry from the aspiration to create a world government discussed earlier. But it is a modest move in the direction of enhancing the international rule of law.

### **5. Containment and legitimating the status-quo**

A different worry about containment derives from its apparent indifference to past injustices perpetrated by the nation doing the containing. Those who recognize that the U.S. has been a source of great harm and oppression in the world over the past several decades might be reluctant to engage with the question: what should America's national security policy should be *now*? The worry is that whoever engages with the question inevitably becomes tarred with the brush of legitimating the unjust actions that have helped bring about this status-quo. A strategy for securing America today is all too easily seen as a strategy for securing ill-gotten gains.

This concern merits serious attention, not least because ignorance of the harm for which the U.S. bears responsibility limits awareness of how malevolently we are seen in much of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. But one can grant much of the left critique of American global behavior over the past half-century, yet still recognize that we are bound to pose the question: and what now? Whatever combination of decisions, forces, and events brought the U.S. to its present geo-political position; we still have to choose what our policies will be going forward. That the U.S. has often failed as a global force for democracy in the past makes all the more urgent the task of coming up with principles and strategies for it to be such a force in the future. This is why it is important to adopt a national security policy that is rooted in democratic principles, and which commits the U.S. henceforth to opposing oppression and aiding the legitimate diffusion of democracy around the world.

To be sure, much of the strategy for supporting democracy and diffusing it around the world involves the medium term: building international institutions, supporting the economic development necessary to turn weak states into viable ones, and being seen to be working to ameliorate injustice around the world. But endorsing these medium-term commitments cannot mean that national security in the more immediate sense that requires governments to provide for essential safety from violent attack can simply be ignored. A lesson to be drawn from the events since 9/11 is that if those who favor progressive democratic change in the world fail to develop a viable national security agenda, others will. In order to be in a position to develop and implement policies that promote progressive democratic change, democratic governments must come up with policies that can plausibly provide basic security to populations under their control and preserve their political institutions into the future.

## **6. Cosmopolitanism revisited**

Containment might make cosmopolitan democrats uncomfortable because it seems to legitimate the nation-state system we have inherited. But I have sought to show here that such discomfort is misplaced. Democracy finds its legitimacy and appeal in the principle of affected interest, to be sure, and this principle is often sharply at odds with a default assumption in favor of national decision-making. Despite the fact that democratic non-domination is predicated of individuals rather than states, we saw in part 1 that none of this adds up to a case in support of world government. My argument in parts 2 and 3 was that containment, which occupies a midpoint on a continuum between isolationism and proselytizing regime-change, is the national security policy of choice for cosmopolitan democrats. Containment is desirable because of its elective affinities with the democratic principle of non-domination. Containment also makes pragmatic and normative sense as the best bet for securing the populations and institutions of democratic countries, and for promoting the diffusion of democracy around the world.

In part 4 I noted that the containment doctrine inherited from George Kennan stands in need of modification for the post-Cold War world in ways that buttress the development of a global rule of law. This falls well short of the idea of world government favored by some cosmopolitan democrats, but it is a nod in their direction inasmuch as effective rule of law in a given domain is in any case a precondition for viable democratic politics there. This aspect of my argument would have been captured better had I made the subtitle to my book “a global

response to terror” rather than “a response to global terror.”<sup>40</sup> The alternative links containment more explicitly to the project of sustaining democracy on a global basis by requiring international authorization for containment that moves beyond strict self-defense by a nation in response to actual or imminent attack. And my proposed alternative also opens the way to the forward-looking view of national security policy sketched in part 5. Culpable as the U.S. has been in the injustices of the past, we are nonetheless bound to ask what the best national security policy is from now on. For cosmopolitan democrats, the view of containment sketched here is the answer to that question.

---

<sup>40</sup> This subtitle would also have been preferable on the minimizing hysteria front. As one audience member pointed out at a discussion of my book at the London School of Economics, the “global terror” formulation tends to amplify the threat. It deflects attention from the reality that in any of the advanced capitalist democracies one is much more likely to be killed in an auto accident than in a terrorist attack.

