

HOW RESTRAINT LEADS TO WAR

The real danger of
the Iran deal **HENRY R. NAU**

PRESIDENT OBAMA argues that his nuclear agreement with Iran means “every pathway to a nuclear weapon is cut off.” He says, moreover, that it sets the stage to “incentivize them to behave differently in the region, to be less aggressive, less hostile, more cooperative, to operate the way we expect nations in the international community to behave.” It will be “a lot easier,” he predicts, “to check Iran’s nefarious activities, to push back against the other areas where they operate contrary to our interests

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Commentary



or our allies' interests if they don't have the bomb."

The approach is a signature feature of Obama's foreign policy. He has counted on diplomacy in a whole host of other areas to reduce tensions and preempt military conflict. And this approach has failed him repeatedly.

He reset relations with Russia—and Moscow annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. He launched a strategic partnership with China—and Beijing occupied and built military installations on disputed islands in the East and South China Seas. He extended an open hand to the Muslim world—and radical Islam erupted. Will the agreement with Iran be the next Obama initiative to invite more violence rather than less?

To judge by statements from the United States and Iran, and by the details of the deal itself, the answer is yes. In July, Secretary of State John Kerry told Congress that "if Iran fails to comply with the terms of our agreement, our intel community, our Energy Department, which is responsible for nuclear weaponry, are absolutely clear that we will quickly know it and we will be able to respond accordingly with every option available to us today." In reality, the deal gives Iran 24 days of notice to prepare any suspected nuclear sites for international inspections. Given the extensive protocols the deal allows for Iranian "disputes," those 24 days could turn into as many as three months or more, which in most cases will be enough time to clean up damning evidence of proscribed activities.

Kerry has also claimed that the deal includes no "sunsets," or time limits, on Iranian restrictions. But the facts of the deal plainly contradict this. After five years, the conventional arms embargo on Iran will be lifted. After eight years, Iran will be allowed to receive ballistic missile components. And after ten years, conveniently, the restrictions on Iran's nuclear enrichment will start to expire. This will give Iran the ability to build delivery systems for a nuclear weapon and then complete the work needed for a nuclear bomb.

All this assumes, however, that Iran complies with the deal—a risky assumption. For while Kerry and Obama were talking up its merits, Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told supporters in Iran, bluntly, that "even after this deal, our policy toward the arrogant U.S. will not change." That speech closed with chants of "Death to America!" Kerry acknowledged this was "disturbing."

Disturbing indeed, especially since the deal gives sanctions relief to Iran worth tens of billions of dollars to carry out its "Death to America" threat. The United States has no say over how this money can be spent. Given the Islamic Republic's current combat offensives in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere, we are likely to see a renewed surge of Iranian provocation once those

funds are freed up. And in light of Khamenei's boastful defiance, Iran may pour that money directly into an illicit nuclear program.

And so, as has often been the case in the past, an effort to avoid conflict may lead to far worse conflict down the road.

Why does violence escalate and war often follow? One line of argument says it's the result of the United States' acting too ambitiously and aggressively, as some believe it did in Iraq. Obama, among other critics, claimed that President George W. Bush pushed a worldwide freedom agenda and relied too heavily on military force to achieve it. Bush provoked terrorists and other rivals, and they pushed back, thus increasing conflict.

But another line of argument might be this: War happens when the United States is not ambitious or aggressive enough, and more aggressive nations respond by stepping up and attacking the interests of the United States and its allies because there is no one to prevent them from doing so.

Upon assuming office in 2009, Obama dialed back America's democracy goals and abandoned the global war on terror. He invited world leaders to solve common problems cooperatively, as if they were working on a jigsaw puzzle, not competing in a chess game.* And he lanced what he considered military boils, such as U.S. forces in Iraq and prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, which he believed incited violence against the United States.

Yet war has followed that strategy, too. The Islamic State has seized broad swaths of territory in northern Syria and Iraq not because Americans were there but because they were not—they moved in after U.S. troops pulled out. The jihadist Taliban group in Afghanistan and Pakistan massacred school children and stepped up suicide bombings, not because Americans were there but because they were not—American forces have ended their combat roles and have been preparing to leave Afghanistan altogether in 2016. A nationalist-obsessed Russia annexed Crimea and destabilized eastern Ukraine after the United States struck a deal with Russia to give Obama some cover not to have to defend his own "red line" and go to war against Syria for using chemical weapons. China belligerently pressed claims and built military installations on disputed islands in the South and East China Seas not because the United States had badgered China over human rights but because then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had told Beijing that human-rights issues should not get in the way of a strategic partnership.

* See "The Jigsaw Puzzle and the Chess Board: The Making and Unmaking of Foreign Policy in the Age of Obama," by the same author, in the May 2012 issue of COMMENTARY.

These warlike responses were not provoked by aggressive behavior from the United States. Which raises the question: Is it possible to be too modest and restrained in foreign affairs, just as it is possible to be too ambitious and aggressive? Answer: It is, indeed, as the history of the United States over the past century demonstrates.

THE CLASSIC CASE OF EXCESSIVE AMBITION WAS PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON'S PROPOSAL FOR A LEAGUE OF NATIONS. The League committed the United States to provide for the security of every country in the world in the wake of the First World War. The classic case of excessive restraint was U.S. foreign policy in the 1920s and 1930s. The U.S. Congress rejected the League and provided for the security of no country, including the United States. The result: Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

After World War II, the United States put its faith in the United Nations and withdrew most of its military forces from Europe. The Soviet Union did not. Then in 1948 Moscow blockaded West Berlin, flaunting its capability to march uninterrupted to the English Channel if it intended to do so. And even if it didn't, President Truman recognized that this military imbalance was no basis on which to negotiate with Moscow. He ended UN talks on Poland and other postwar issues, and another war, the Cold War, followed.

Four decades later, the Cold War ended, and the United States put its faith again in the United Nations. President George H.W. Bush touted a "new world order" in 1990 and mobilized the entire world community to go to war to expel Iraq from Kuwait. The UN provided the collective security once dreamt of by Woodrow Wilson. But only a year later, ethnic conflict erupted in Yugoslavia and Somalia. Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo followed. Russia blocked UN action. NATO stepped in. Meanwhile, terrorism escalated, and jihadists twice struck the Twin Towers. America was back at war.

According to the goals originally set—the toppling of evil and deadly regimes—America won these wars, including those in Afghanistan and Iraq. But, after each war, it lost the peace as it gyrated wildly between excessive ambition and excessive restraint. In 2005, George W. Bush declared "a policy...to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world." That excessive ambition died painfully in the long occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. As costs mounted, President Obama resolved not to end tyranny but to end wars. He embraced restraint, brought America home, and declared that if America minded its own business, then other countries would mind theirs.



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Why does America cycle between excessive ambition and excessive restraint, always followed by new attacks, which precipitate a much bigger war than might have been necessary earlier? The reasons are many, and some, at least, lie deep in America's foreign-policy traditions.

SINCE ITS ORIGINS, AMERICA HAS THOUGHT ABOUT ITS APPROACH TO THE WORLD IN THREE PRINCIPLED WAYS.

Thomas Jefferson introduced the *internationalist* way, the ambition that America could not only change domestic politics from monarchy to republicanism but also world politics from war to peaceable trade and diplomacy. Alexander Hamilton championed the *realist* way, advocating national power, alliances, and territorial filibusters to defend the new nation's western borders. And George Washington advocated the *nationalist* (in extreme form, isolationist) way, prioritizing independence and warning against both ambition and alliances in foreign affairs.

These three approaches—internationalist, realist, and nationalist—became America's standard foreign-policy traditions. The internationalist tradition, sometimes called *liberal internationalism* after the Democratic presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt who championed it, encourages the United States to believe it can tame international violence and spread democracy largely through multilateral diplomacy and economic interdependence, eventually replacing the balance of power with collective security that pools force and uses it as a last resort only with multilateral consent—the first Persian Gulf War being the prime example. President Obama came into office promising a rebirth of American diplomacy that would dispel the distrust spawned by American military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. He believed that if the United States practiced peaceful diplomacy, other nations would do so as well.

But what if other nations do not reciprocate with friendly responses? What if they choose not to work together in international institutions but to compete for political, economic, and military advantage? What if they, like Russia and China, use UN negotiations to drag out or dilute nuclear negotiations with Iran and North Korea and support rather than oppose states, such as Syria, that sponsor terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere? What if they initiate military interventions of their own in Ukraine and the South and East China Seas to roll back Western influence?

The other two traditions, realism and nationalism, expect other countries to behave this way. Realists and nationalists consider it naive to believe that Amer-

ica can spread democracy through economic ties and international institutions. They empathize with other countries when these countries push back and defy Western encroachment. Why should Russia let Ukraine join NATO when Moscow has naval bases in Crimea? Why should China not patrol its own coastal sea lanes? The world is messy, and realists and nationalists have always said that America must accept the world as it is, not as we might wish it to be. Other countries value their independence and form of government as much as we value ours, and often their values and our values clash. Domestic differences cannot be altered; democracy is Western, not universal; and international affairs remain an arena of decentralized competition and anarchy that can be managed only by a statesmanlike combination of defense and diplomacy.

Under the influence of liberal internationalism, America overextends to transform the world in hopes of reducing the use of military force and subjecting it to multilateral control. Under the influence of realism and nationalism, America retreats from the world to concentrate on stability and limited military defenses and abandons support for expanding freedom. Each internationalist overreach encounters pushback by other countries and eventually higher military costs. Each realist or nationalist retreat is followed by renewed anarchy in the world and fresh attacks on the United States or its allies, attacks more devastating than if the United States had stayed in the world and acted earlier.

IT IS TIME FOR A FOURTH APPROACH. What can be done about this cycle? There is no quick fix. But over the longer run, there is another approach that might improve the American debate and from time to time anchor America's role in the world, moderating the tendency toward cycling. This approach would combine liberal internationalism's commitment to spread democracy and make the world a better place with the instruments of realism to back up diplomacy with military force. But it would limit this combination of freedom and force by making the spread of freedom a priority only *on the borders of existing free countries*, primarily in Europe and Asia, not in "every nation and culture" worldwide. And it would tie military actions to diplomatic compromises that favor freedom—not to military victory followed by occupation and interminable nation-building. In the end, such restrained ambition—what we might call *conservative internationalism*—aims for a world in which nation-states remain separate, sovereign, and armed, and do not entrust vital national-security interests to international institutions—and yet, as democracy spreads, live side by side

in peaceful competition under the democratic peace.

This approach was favored by Presidents Truman and Reagan, the presidents who initiated and won the Cold War. They did not shrink from the support of freedom abroad, and they armed their diplomacy to negotiate with authoritarian powers. But they also disciplined their approach. They prioritized the advance of freedom along the borders of existing free countries in Europe and Asia—not in every country in Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. And they accumulated and used military leverage not to defeat their adversaries, but to achieve timely compromises that pushed authoritarian states incrementally toward freedom.

Here is how this conservative internationalist approach might work to confront contemporary challenges.

FIRST, THE UNITED STATES WOULD REMAIN THE CHAMPION OF FREEDOM IN THE WORLD. A world with more democratic states is without question a safer world for America. To grasp this fact, compare Europe and Japan in 2014 with Europe and Japan in 1914. If no effort had been made to democratize Germany and Japan, the world today would look much more like it did in 1914 or 1940; America would be surrounded by ideologically hostile states.

Since 2006, the number of free countries has ebbed, and the world is again drifting toward despotism. In 2014 nearly twice as many countries regressed from the standards of freedom as countries that advanced. Turkey, Egypt, Russia, and China all took steps backward. As *Freedom in the World 2015* reports, “acceptance of democracy as the world’s dominant form of government—and of an international system built on democratic ideals—is under greater threat than at any point in the last 25 years.”*

This fading of freedom matters. Authoritarian regimes are the primary source of violence in the world. With dictators such as Vladimir Putin in Russia and Xi Jinping in China, these regimes eliminate opponents at home and seize territory abroad. As they increase their influence, they make the world a more unstable place. Neighboring states take note and recalibrate. Hungary becomes friendlier with Moscow, Turkey drifts away from Israel and NATO, South Korea becomes more dependent on China, and Iraq turns to partnership with Iran.

Freedom withers as it quietly accommodates oppression. To hunker down now, to go into a defensive

* *Freedom in the World 2015* is available online at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#.VNZSoCjw70M>.

crouch and give up the battle of advancing freedom abroad is simply the same as waiting for the world to deteriorate again and for the next war to come. So it has always been.

If America is serious about increasing the number of democratic states in the world, however, it will face blowback by undemocratic or despotic regimes. Unlike liberal internationalism, conservative internationalism does not expect authoritarian countries to cooperate through international diplomacy and institutions. It expects them to resist and use force. These countries see common problems such as climate change, economic growth, and nonproliferation not as public goods that have only one solution (like a jigsaw puzzle) but as private solutions that compete (like a chess board). Russia reneges on its nonproliferation commitment not to attack Ukraine, which gave up its nuclear weapons in 1994, because it values the annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine more than it values Ukrainian independence. China drags its feet on carbon emissions and ending North Korea’s nuclear program because it prioritizes domestic economic growth and the survival of an autocratic regime in North Korea.

Russia and China use the UN to restrain human rights, not to facilitate them. Multilateral diplomacy supports the rule of law, but the real question is *whose* law. Repeated compromises with authoritarian states in international institutions can advance laws that just as easily restrict freedom as promote it.

TO HAVE SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITH AUTHORITARIAN COUNTRIES, THEREFORE, THE UNITED STATES NEEDS TO ARM ITS DIPLOMACY. It needs to bring military leverage to bear before and during negotiations, not just after negotiations fail. If America waits to use military power only after negotiations fail, nondemocratic states will simply negotiate until they have achieved their objectives by force outside of negotiations.

Arming diplomacy does not mean direct military intervention and regime change as a substitute for diplomacy. Indeed, direct military intervention, which involves regime change and costly nation-building, is rightly reserved as a last resort only after negotiations have failed. But armed diplomacy also does not mean that military leverage during diplomatic negotiations is off the table. The choice, as Obama insists, is not “between diplomacy and some sort of war.” Diplomacy mirrors the balance of military forces outside negotiations. No nation gives up something at the negotiating table that it can achieve outside the negotiating table. Thus, effective diplomacy involves the need to deploy and

manipulate smaller amounts of force outside negotiations, to convince adversaries to take the negotiations seriously, and the need to acquire bargaining chips to use during negotiations. Done successfully, armed diplomacy uses less force early to avoid using more force later, should diplomacy fail.

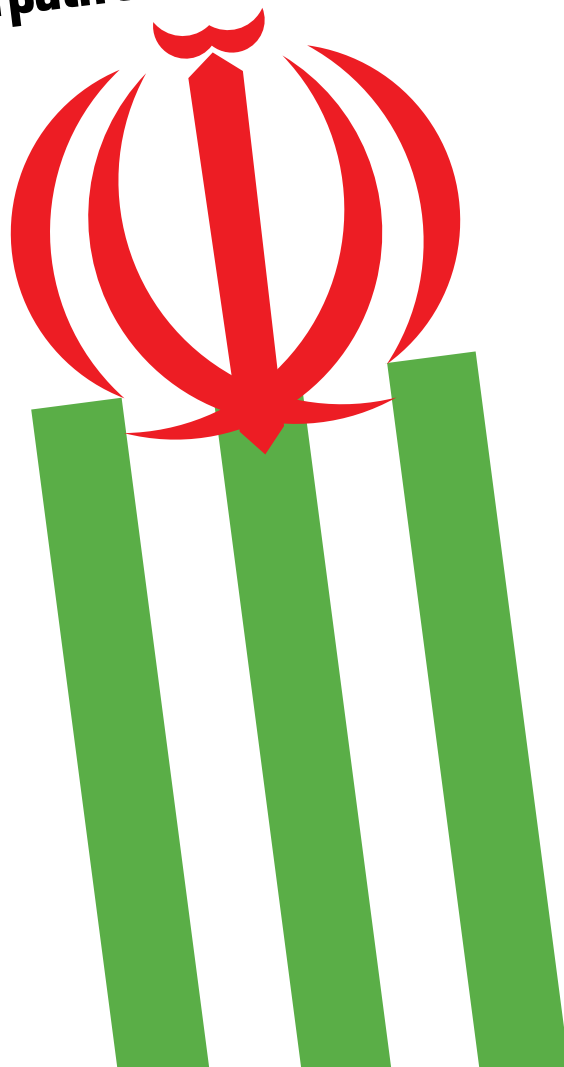
Ronald Reagan mastered this kind of armed diplomacy. He built up U.S. defenses early before he started negotiations with the Soviet Union, and he used covert and smaller military interventions—freedom fighters in Afghanistan, central America, and southern Africa—to prevent Moscow from gaining military advantage outside negotiations. Further, he deployed intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe to counter Soviet SS-20s in Eastern Europe and launched the Strategic Defense Initiative to convince the Soviet Union it could not win a wider arms race. He walked away from diplomatic agreements in the summer of 1982 (the so-called walk in the woods) and again in the fall of 1986 (Reykjavik) just because that was all the Soviet Union would accept. By deploying a few hundred INF weapons early, he eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons later. And by holding on to SDI, he ended the Cold War and the prospect of nuclear Armageddon later.

President Obama practices “unarmed” diplomacy. Take his negotiations with Iran. He initiated talks with Tehran while cutting defense budgets and removing U.S. troops from Iraq. Then, with overall defense budgets declining, he “pivoted” U.S. naval assets from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. The economic sanctions levied on Iran were not backed up by a credible threat to use force if Iran did not stop its nuclear program. Instead, Iran saw a president who had lost control of his defense budget through a mindless sequestration process, was eager to exit Iraq, and was more concerned about the American defense posture in the Pacific than in the Mediterranean.

Nor did Obama do much to counter Iranian aggression outside negotiations. He refused to support a Syrian opposition while Iran doubled down on its support of Syria’s dictator. He failed to counter Iran’s increased influence in Iraq when he bungled the negotiations over the Status of Forces Agreement between the United States and Iraq, largely because the Shiite government in Baghdad saw Tehran as a better partner for the future than Washington. Most recently, in Yemen, Iran-backed rebels seized the government, to which Obama responded by withdrawing American special-operations forces and ending the drone program against al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula that Obama once touted as a model national-security program.

Most damaging of all, Obama stoked a bitter feud with America’s principal democratic ally in the

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region, Israel. The only fully free country in the Middle East has not been getting an open hand from America, but rather the back of America's hand. The new agreement with Iran does not cut off every pathway to an Iranian nuclear capability, as President Obama claims; it merely freezes and preserves every pathway even if the agreement works perfectly for 15 years. Remember how well previous international inspection systems worked to detect and stop nuclear-weapons programs in North Korea and Iraq. Israel has no confidence in this agreement, and rightly so, because it is unlikely that the agreement, even if it were acceptable, could be implemented in the current environment. Military factors circumscribe diplomacy, and Iran foments a "ring of fire" around the borders of Israel—Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon, Hamas radicals in the Gaza Strip, Assad assassins in Syria, terrorist groups in the Sinai, and most recently Houthi rebels in Yemen. In such a ring as this, how can Israel be expected to accept a risky nuclear agreement? The conditions on the ground are working daily in Iran's favor, and yet Obama clings to the fiction that the nuclear agreement is the "game changer" that will temper Iran's aggressive behavior and usher in an era of peace in the Middle East.

President Reagan once noted a very important fact about negotiations. They cannot accomplish anything that is not backed by conditions on the ground surrounding the negotiations. Conditions on the ground in the Middle East today are decidedly unfavorable to any lasting agreements, related to nuclear programs or Arab-Israeli peace.

OBAMA SELDOM USES MILITARY LEVERAGE INSIDE NEGOTIATIONS OR WALKS AWAY FROM NEGOTIATIONS TO IDENTIFY HIS BOTTOM LINE. Instead, he has a habit of giving away such leverage even before he negotiates. He canceled missile-defense deployments in Eastern Europe as a good-faith gesture in his Russian "reset." Now, he is giving up economic sanctions, the only leverage he has used, precisely at the moment when sanctions really began to bite. As for his bottom line, he not only walked away from a *stated* red line in Syria; intelligence now reveals that Syria never gave up all its chemical weapons despite so-called intrusive international interventions.

Across the board, Obama's diplomacy lacks muscle. Even Secretary of State John Kerry agrees. "Remember," he testified, "sanctions did not stop Iran's nuclear program from growing steadily.... They already have what they want. They got it ten years ago or more." This is a crippling indictment that the negotia-

tions were not about stopping the Iranian nuclear program but about accepting it.

None of this means that the only option left was, or is, to invade Iran. That's a red herring. But it would have been possible to be tougher and more patient and to lead rather than to follow allies, as Reagan did in the case of the Soviet Union. Make it costlier and costlier for Iran to sustain its aggressive foreign policies and let the low price of oil undermine the hardliners in Tehran, the way it did the hardliners in the Soviet Union after 1985.

The road back to a better configuration of forces on the ground in the Middle East that might support peaceful agreements will take some time. The costs of an unarmed diplomacy are never visible immediately. They compound over time. And Obama's policies of excessive restraint may have sown the seeds of violence for years to come.

IF THERE ARE RISKS TO NOT USING MILITARY LEVERAGE DURING NEGOTIATIONS, THERE ARE ALSO RISKS TO USING IT. THAT FACT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED.

After Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it should be clear that the American people do not cotton to indiscriminate and lengthy wars. The key is to subject the use of military power to serious and systematic discipline. That did not happen during the Bush and Obama years. We have invested heavily in democracy promotion in remote countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, while weakening the prospects of freedom on the borders of existing free countries, in Ukraine, Turkey, and potentially South Korea.

In the future, the U.S. should repulse terrorist threats from remote regions but make the added investment to expand freedom primarily on the borders of free countries that already exist. That means adopting a defensive strategy in North Africa, the Middle East, and south and southeast Asia, but an offensive strategy in Europe and east Asia.

The defensive strategy focuses on specific threats. The United States invaded Afghanistan to repulse the Taliban threat, and it resumed the war in Iraq to repulse the ISIS threat. Once a threat has been repulsed, however, America should get out of the countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, within two to three years at most. Use a light footprint or heavy footprint, whatever it takes, but it is most important to use a swift footprint. Why? Because the chances of building enduring democracy in these countries are minimal. They are far from the borders of existing free countries, and there are no strong nearby alliances and free markets to support the development of democracy. (Vietnam was a similar earlier case.)

The objective in these countries should be to keep the terrorists off-balance through a combination of working with local governments (even though they are often oppressive) and intervening short-term and repeatedly from offshore if local governments fall apart or fail to stanch the threat. Where stable democracies do exist in these regions—Israel in the Middle East, India in south Asia—the United States should make sure that its actions do not jeopardize their defense. It makes no sense to counter terrorist threats in Iran or Pakistan at the risk of weakening friendly democracies in Israel or India.

Otherwise, in remote regions, the United States should provide military advice and assistance to local governments and seek to improve these governments as time passes by working toward a more inclusive government in Iraq and Afghanistan or a less oppressive military government in Egypt. But when the United States occupies and stays too long in these countries to perfect democracy and leaves behind governments that are no more democratic or stable after 10 years than they were after three years, the American people lose their appetite for intervening for any purpose anywhere—until, as it has been in the past, the United States gets hit.

The offensive strategy would focus not only on threats but also on opportunities for freedom. These threats and opportunities are greatest on the central borders of existing free countries. Today these borders lie between free Europe and Russia and between free Asia and China. If freedom is won or lost in these places, the rewards or consequences will be far greater. Major breakthroughs, like the end of the Cold War, or catastrophic wars, such as World Wars I and II, may occur. Thus, the United States and its allies, with powerful nearby military and economic assets (NATO, the EU, Japan), should not only repulse threats on these borders but stay on to win the struggle for freedom. In this sense, the critical battles today are in Ukraine, Turkey, and the Korean peninsula, not in Iraq and Afghanistan.

It was a mistake, for example, to invade Iraq without the support of Turkey, at the time a democratizing state bordering NATO. And it is a mistake today to argue that Ukraine “must not be either side’s outpost against the other.”* Ukraine is not a buffer state any more than Germany was in the Cold War. Instead, it is the very center of today’s geopolitical struggle for freedom in Europe. As Arseni Yatsenyuk, the prime minister of Ukraine, recently told the *Washington Post*: “This is about the core values of the free world. If we fail, this will be a failure for the entire free world.” The Western allies should support Ukraine with defensive weapons and economic assistance, not for the purpose of winning a military conflict with Russian-

backed separatists but for the purpose of stabilizing the military situation outside negotiations. Then Russia might take negotiations seriously and settle for a peaceful competition for Ukraine’s future between EU-based and Moscow-based alternatives. Like Germany in 1990, Kiev has the right to be free and choose its own alliances.

So does a united Korea, when that day comes. Today South Korea drifts economically toward China and politically away from Japan. Both developments weaken the future of freedom on the peninsula. When Korea reunites, it will do so under democratic control and ideological alliances with Japan and the United States, or it will slide inexorably toward China, its more powerful authoritarian neighbor. On the central borders, freedom either moves forward or backwards, and a permanent accommodation with despotism increases the prospects of war.

WE MUST ENABLE, NOT IMPOSE, DEMOCRACY. Finally, when we think about promoting democracy on the borders of an existing democracy, we must decide what we mean by the word *democracy*. President Reagan thought about this question at length during the Cold War. At Westminster in 1982, he said that to promote democracy meant most of all to promote a choice. He urged partner countries “to foster the infrastructure of democracy, the system of a free press, unions, political parties, universities, which allows a people to choose their own way to develop their own culture, to reconcile their own differences through peaceful means.”

As the world’s first large liberal republic, America had the goal of showing the world that democracy was possible in any culture and that it could be chosen by other countries based on their own traditions. As Harvard’s Harvey Mansfield once wrote: “American patriotism has always said to others not ‘We are inherently superior,’ but ‘You can have it too.’ This is conservative pride and tradition mixed with liberal inclusiveness and innovation.”**

Every country has traditions of liberty that struggle against those of oppression. Think of the battles the United States waged against British colonialism, slavery, Jim Crow, and gender inequality. What made America exceptional was not its perfection but its potential, a potential that guaranteed political space for opposition groups to argue against existing

* See Henry A. Kissinger, “To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2014.

** Harvey C. Mansfield, “You Can Have It Too,” *Atlantic*, November 2007.

policy. Kiev may not be a model democracy any more than America was in 1850, but it hosts opposing parties; Russia does not. On those grounds alone, it has a right to debate and decide its own future.

From a conservative-internationalist perspective, each country remains unique. There is no single formula for democracy. The one requirement is choice, and choice means opposing parties competing and rotating peacefully in power within a protected public square in which, as Thomas Jefferson wrote, “error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.” A Muslim government in Turkey or Egypt cannot claim to be democratic even if it is elected when it passes laws that prevent anyone else from being elected. The same goes for authoritarian oligarchies in Moscow and Beijing.

THE IRAN DEAL IS THE FINAL CODIFICATION OF OBAMA'S FOREIGN-POLICY VISION. He expects diplomacy to reduce military violence and change domestic regime behavior. But without the backing of military arms and the objective of expanding freedom, diplomacy with despots is a path to war, not peace. President Obama's initiatives with Moscow and Beijing have resulted in

more hostility, not less. And his Iran initiative is likely to produce the same.

A diplomacy that combines the pursuit of freedom through military leverage while maintaining strict limits on that pursuit offers more realistic expectations. It does not entrust national security to international institutions. It respects and preserves national sovereignty and does not seek to transcend it. It envisions a decentralized world in which separate nations remain armed, in which democracies grow from the bottom up, especially on the borders of existing free countries, and in which free markets and other institutions of democratic civil society flourish internationally. In such a world, despotic states will grow increasingly weaker.

In summary, pursue democracy, but primarily where it counts the most: on the borders of existing free countries. Be willing to use force to make sure the adversary takes negotiations seriously, but also be willing to compromise, because military power is a means and not an end. And advocate democracy, but a democracy of choice and varying traditions that preserves national sovereignty and nurtures global civil society, not centralized international bureaucracies. Above all, recognize that wars result when America is too ambitious *and* when America is too restrained. 📌