



Conservative Internationalism

A smarter kind of engagement in world affairs

BY HENRY R. NAU

AMERICA is once again tempting fate. A broad coalition is coalescing to curtail America's role and influence in the world. After ten years of two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan, the country is hightailing it home. The urge to pull back is irresistible but wrongheaded. The world does not go away when America retreats. Each time America has come home, after the First World War, the Second World War, Vietnam, and the Cold War, new conflicts yanked it back into world affairs, always under less favorable circumstances and with higher casualties than if it had acted earlier.

America needs a strategy whereby it stays engaged in the world and accepts smaller costs in the short run to avoid much greater costs in the long run. That strategy would address direct threats from any region of the world but prioritize the spread of freedom primarily on the borders of existing free countries, use less force early to avoid the use of greater force later, back force with diplomacy to give adversaries a peaceful way out, and compromise in timely fashion to sustain public support.

Conventional approaches include some parts of this strategy

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but lack others. Liberal internationalists promote freedom but use force only as a last resort and with multilateral consent. Realists use force more readily but only to stabilize the balance of power, not to weaken despots and expand freedom. Nationalists use force most assertively but only to defend America, usually after it is attacked. And many neoconservatives use force to boost freedom but at costs that quickly exceed the limits of public patience and support.

The needed alternative strategy is internationalist but conservative and combines rather than rejects the insights of the other approaches. A conservative-internationalist strategy embraces the promotion of freedom touted by liberal internationalists, the balancing of power advocated by realists, the respect for national will and sovereignty championed by nationalists, and the diplomacy backed by force recommended by neoconservatives. In short, a conservative-internationalist strategy advances freedom against despots but disciplines the use of force by prioritizing freedom in countries that border on existing free countries and forging timely compromises that both offer despots a peaceful way out and husband domestic public support.

A CONSERVATIVE-INTERNATIONALIST strategy involves four key tenets:

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Spread freedom in a way that is disciplined by priorities. American foreign policy should seek to increase the number of regimes that are democratic, not just to preserve global stability or defend national borders. But it would seek to do so primarily on the borders of countries where freedom already exists, not in areas such as the Middle East (Iraq) or southwest Asia (Afghanistan). Today the borders of freedom stretch in Europe from Turkey through Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, and Poland to the Baltic states, and in Asia from India through Bangladesh, the Philippines, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, and Taiwan to South Korea. The greatest threats along these borders come from the major authoritarian states of Russia and China, not from terrorists and rogue states. Terrorism by itself is a threat to parts of an American city (e.g., the Twin Towers). Backed by rogue states and weapons of mass destruction, it's a threat to several American cities. Backed by a steadily rising and hostile Russia and/or China, however, it's a threat to all American cities, on the level of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, or worse.

Hence, in the future, the United States should think twice before it fights rogue states and terrorism in remote regions such as the Middle East and southwest Asia while it ignores or placates efforts by Russia and China to extend their autocratic influence along the borders of freedom in Europe and Asia. While America was preoccupied in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and China expanded their influence in these border regions. Russia established a "sphere of privileged interest" in the former Soviet space, undermining Ukrainian democracy and permanently basing Russian forces in Georgia; and China backstopped a nuclear-crazed North Korea, laid claim to island territories in the Pacific, and became the dominant economic force in democratic South Korea and much of Asia. As a result, democracy is weaker today on the frontiers of freedom in both Europe and Asia. And so is the defense of democracy. Obama pivots declining U.S. military forces to Asia while Russia, for the first time in decades, deploys a naval task force in the Mediterranean.

This does not mean that the United States should not respond to threats from remote regions such as Afghanistan. It means simply that the United States should not prioritize the promotion of democracy there. When threats come from a country that doesn't border on existing democracies, the United States should defeat the threat and get in and out of the country as quickly as possible. If it replaces a government, such as the Taliban, it should not try to install a Jeffersonian democracy but being in a position to repeat the action in the event of another attack, "ratcheting" local governments toward greater openness and stability. Such a strategy is likely to retain public support, whereas long wars exhaust public patience and preclude the return of U.S. forces under almost any circumstances.

It is not that nations in remote regions are unfit for democracy; it is just that in U.S. policy they do not have priority for democracy. In the Middle East, for example, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, which border on Israel, take priority over Libya. Yet Obama intervenes in Libya but dithers in Syria. Turkey, which borders on European members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, stands in line before Iraq. Yet George W. Bush damages ties with Turkey to invade Iraq. In other areas, Ukraine, next to Poland, ranks in priority before Georgia; Pakistan, next to India, before Afghanistan; and Taiwan and

South Korea, next to Japan, before Burma or Southeast Asia.

For countries bordering on free countries, the United States should employ an "inkblot" strategy. Freedom spreads by the proximity of powerful nearby capitalist markets and democratic civil societies. Cross-border pressures make success both more likely and less costly. The United States and Japan press people exchanges and economic investments in South Korea and Taiwan. The European Union mobilizes capital and nurtures nongovernmental organizations in Ukraine and Turkey. The United States champions free trade through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and U.S.–European Union Free Trade Agreement. When free markets and societies are strong, as they were in Western Europe after the Cold War, democracy surges across the borders of existing freedom, as it did in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. When the free world is weak, as it has been recently, border countries such as Ukraine, Turkey, and South Korea (eventually a united Korea) drift closer to authoritarian powers in Russia and China. Freedom lost in these border states matters far more than freedom forgone in remote regions, because in the former case tyranny moves closer to freedom's core.

America is still the only leader of freedom in the world. As history records, when the United States steps back, despots step forward, not other democracies. But without prioritizing democracy on the borders of existing freedom, any policy to spread freedom is Pollyannaish and quickly exceeds the limits of material constraints and public will. First, measure threat carefully, as nationalists urge. They do not always get it right, but they demand clarity. Then, in remote regions, handle interventions mostly as realists recommend, while ratcheting local governments toward democracy. And in border regions, handle interventions mostly as liberal internationalists recommend, mobilizing democracies, but not necessarily all U.N. member states, to stabilize and integrate new democracies.

Back diplomacy with force. Despots arm their diplomacy from the outset. That's how they maintain their power at home and extend it abroad. If America is going to deal effectively with them, it too must arm its diplomacy.

Conventional strategies for the use of force leave a gap for despots to exploit. Despots use force not just after negotiations fail, as liberal internationalists prefer, but also before and during negotiations. And they use force to weaken and change regimes, not just to balance power, as realists and nationalists prefer. They seek to spread religious governments (e.g., Iran's export of theocracy to Iraq and Syria) and weaken democratic states on their borders (e.g., Russia in Ukraine, and China in Taiwan and South Korea). If they know that democracies will use force only after negotiations fail, they negotiate until they have achieved their objectives by force outside negotiations. Thus using force only after diplomacy fails simply enables despots to use force unopposed *until* negotiations fail. Syria has been a case in point. Russia and Iran arm Assad, while the United States negotiates.

The United States should instead be willing to use force before and during negotiations, when it is a choice, not just after negotiations fail, when it is a necessity. Backing up diplomacy with the threat or use of force may be a riskier strategy in the short run, but conventional approaches are costlier strategies in

the long run. That is so because costs escalate as the use of force is delayed. As George Shultz, Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, once noted, it is "better to use force when you *should* rather than when you *must*; *last* [resort] means no *other*, and by that time the level of force and the risk involved may have multiplied many times over." Using force too soon risks unnecessary wars, because preemption can never be perfectly clairvoyant (arguably the case in Iraq). But using it too late risks bigger and costlier wars, because the stakes compound in the meantime (Iran in the future?).

"Use of force" here means build-up, deployment, and actual use of force. Such use does not disrupt negotiations; it actually gives negotiations the best chance to succeed. No one understood this better than Ronald Reagan. He used force in three specific ways to succeed in negotiations with the Soviet Union. First, he launched a massive and risky military build-up to signal to the Soviet Union that it could not win an arms race. Second, he denied the Soviet Union gains on the ground outside negotiations. Reagan pushed back against Soviet SS-20s in Europe, by deploying Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) missiles, and against Soviet interventions in Afghanistan and Central America, by aiding freedom fighters. And third, he brought to the bargaining table heavy-duty capabilities, most significantly his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

The United States is doing none of this today in the Middle East. Iran is achieving its objectives by force outside negotiations. It marches steadily toward a nuclear capability, arms and funds jihadist forces in Lebanon and Syria, and meddles increasingly in Iraq and Afghanistan as the United States withdraws. Meanwhile, the United States cuts its defense budget in a mindless sequestration, scales back missile defenses against Iran for minimal concessions from Moscow, leaves no residual forces in Iraq, agonizes and delays over arming the moderate rebels in Syria, and pivots forces to Asia that are now needed in the Middle East. What does Iran lose by negotiating as long as it can? Its influence grows stronger as violence spreads both north and south of Israel. Meanwhile, the United States launches new Middle East peace initiatives. Was this past summer really the moment to expect negotiations to succeed? The situation surrounding negotiations matters as much as the negotiations themselves, and the situation in the Middle East today is decidedly unfavorable for either side to make risky concessions for peace. Belatedly, President Obama gets the point.

Back force with diplomacy. The purpose of armed diplomacy, however, is not to defeat adversaries in some conventional military showdown, as extreme hardliners might prefer, or to coexist with adversaries indefinitely in some morally ambivalent status quo, to which realists might resign themselves. It is rather to succeed in negotiations that move freedom forward in adversary countries. Compromise inside negotiations does not necessarily achieve this objective, but no compromise at all undermines it.

Again, Ronald Reagan offers pointers. He won the Cold War without firing a shot, but that does not mean he never would have been willing to fire a shot. He risked an accelerated arms race that many believed was out of control, faced down anti-nuclear peaceniks in Europe, and armed freedom fighters to the point of damaging his own presidency—not to defeat the Soviet

Union by military means but to deny it military success outside negotiations and move it toward outcomes inside negotiations that advanced freedom. In his diary in early 1983, he wrote, "I think I'm hard-line and will never appease but I do want to try and let them [the Soviets] see there is a better world if they show by deed they want to get along with the free world." He envisioned a peaceful way out of negotiations that the Soviets could accept (no offensive nukes and a globalized economy), and in the process the Soviets themselves dispensed with Communism.

Envisioning ways out of negotiations that advance freedom and that Syria, Iran, North Korea, and their patrons in Moscow and Beijing might accept is perhaps the most difficult aspect of armed diplomacy. How might such peaceful outcomes be achieved? First, don't stop calling despots despotic. Obama, with his "realism" toward Russia and China, has gone too far in ignoring human-rights violations. Reagan called the Soviet Union evil even as he negotiated with it, still defending his "evil empire" remarks on the eve of his trip to Moscow in 1988. Second, fashion an outcome that despots can accept but that does not rescue them from their own sclerotic domestic systems. As John Lewis Gaddis points out, the new element that Reagan brought to strategy toward the Soviet Union was not deterrence or *détente*; it was the deliberate weakening of the Soviet domestic system. In Syria, a mutually acceptable outcome may mean negotiating with Assad over a longer transition period to a future government. In Iran, it may mean accommodating a civilian nuclear program with less than perfect inspection guarantees if the country opens up to freer trade and contacts, much the way the Helsinki Accords nurtured openness and verifiability in the former Soviet Union. And in North Korea, it may mean eventual recognition of Pyongyang to clear the way for peaceful competition and eventual reunification between North and South Korea and their eventual reunification, as with East and West Germany.

But none of these compromises is advisable inside negotiations unless pressures persist outside negotiations—to maintain economic sanctions, vigorously protest human-rights violations, and checkmate forceful alternatives on the ground. When armed diplomacy works best, no military force is actually used. But it is a mistake to assume that therefore military force was not present or necessary.

Use timely compromise to maintain public support. A foreign policy that combines liberal internationalism's goal of freedom with the muscular but targeted diplomacy of realism and the steely will of nationalism may be more effective than any one approach by itself, but how do you make the case for such an integrated foreign policy when a democratic public is worn out by war? As the debate about Syria in Congress suggests, it is a tough sell, without a doubt, both because the goal is more ambitious—it pursues freedom, not just stability—and because the use of lesser force earlier is riskier.

The answer is timely compromise. When the United States uses force in negotiations, and especially when it goes to war, it should look immediately for ways to translate military gains into diplomatic compromises, even if such compromises do not fulfill all objectives at once.

Successful presidents have always recognized that spreading

democracy does not require the unconditional surrender of despots. Total victory means total defeat, and total defeat means protracted efforts to install new governments and build new nations. The cost of that, especially in regions remote from the borders of freedom, is simply too great for the American public to bear (and they are the ultimate judge of what the American military and economy can bear). Germany and Japan after the Second World War were exceptions. They were not remote from but on the borders of existing freedom, and public support for nation-building was sustained only because a greater threat came along after the war: the Soviet Union. In the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no greater threat in sight—at least not yet. It may come, and that’s why it is critical to have the American people on board before it arrives, to deter or preempt it at lesser cost.

The way to keep the public on board is not to exclude military intervention from the arsenal of the United States, as the current pullback mood prescribes, but to keep such interventions short and accompany them with diplomatic compromises. By this measure, George W. Bush’s biggest mistake was not the decision to intervene militarily in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was the failure to get in and out as quickly as possible, to follow up military victories with diplomatic initiatives and earlier American withdrawals. That might have been accomplished in Afghanistan if the United States had accepted the allied offer to aid America under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. The United States demurred, not wanting to fight another campaign by NATO committee, as in Kosovo. But NATO was needed in Afghanistan eventually anyway, and its presence earlier might have facilitated both a speedier exit from Afghanistan and greater allied cooperation in the invasion of Iraq.

And a quicker exit might have been accomplished in Iraq if George W. Bush had acted like his father after the Gulf War and begun immediately, rather than four years later, follow-up diplomatic initiatives. Yes, the governments left behind in Afghanistan and Iraq might have been fragile and vulnerable to future instabilities. But look at the governments the United States is leaving behind after ten years of nation-building. They too are fragile and unlikely to survive a full American retreat. The United States might have been able to reenter these countries in 2014 if American troops had left in 2005 or 2006. Now, as with Vietnam after that war, there is little chance, without a direct attack on American forces, that the American people will support a return of boots on the ground in either country.

Conservative internationalism offers a way to stay engaged in the world at a price the American people can accept. Pursue the goal of defending and spreading freedom but discipline that goal by prioritizing freedom on the borders of existing free countries, not in remote regions; back negotiations with a lesser use of force early to avoid having to use greater force later, after negotiations fail; give adversaries a peaceful way out, but one that forces them to confront the failures of their own domestic systems; and forge timely compromises to retain public support. This strategy may not be appropriate under all circumstances. The conventional strategies continue to offer valuable guidance. But a conservative internationalism should not be excluded in the false hope that, by abandoning the spread of freedom and not using force until negotiations fail, we can succeed in taming despots and reducing overall violence in the world.

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The Cuccinelli Comeback

Virginia Republicans need it, but it's far from guaranteed

BY JIM GERAGHTY

THIS November, Republicans will face the first major test of whether their candidates can overcome “Akinization”—Democrats’ efforts to tie them to the theocratic bogeyman evoked by failed Missouri Senate candidate Todd Akin in 2012.

All the greatest hits from the Obama campaign in 2012 —“war on women,” insensitivity to minorities, “He’s fighting for his values, not ours”—are being hurled in Virginia against Republican gubernatorial candidate Ken Cuccinelli.

The good news is that Cuccinelli’s story looks like it could have been written to dispel the perception of a “war on women.” Few GOP candidates can cite their groundbreaking work with a state university’s women’s-studies department, or trace their political awakening to a late-night scream of terror from an adjacent basement bedroom.

Cuccinelli was a student at the University of Virginia, living in an off-campus group home, and the young woman in the next bedroom awoke to find an intruder standing at the foot of her bed. The intruder quickly escaped out the window.

“I had never heard a scream like that. To this day I’ve never heard a scream like that,” Cuccinelli recalls in a video on his website that’s begging to be turned into a 30-second ad.

“I started trying to figure out, ‘Well, what can I do to reduce this?’ The number is pretty staggering. There was no university-centric attempt to reduce the incidence of sexual assault or to help the victims of it. So I did an independent study in the women’s-studies program and demanded they hire somebody whose full-time responsibility would be the prevention of sexual assault and the assistance for victims of it. The university wasn’t very open to it, so we held a protest out on the Rotunda and stuck around until they said they would get somebody full-time.” Cuccinelli helped establish a student group called Sexual Assault Facts and Education and designed a brochure on preventing sexual assault.

Throughout his time in the state senate and as attorney general, one of Cuccinelli’s crusades has been against human trafficking—an issue that regularly generates heartbreaking local-news stories but rarely wins votes. As a UVA senior he interned for Governor Douglas Wilder, a Democrat and the first African American elected governor of any state. He has donated \$100,000 to Daily Planet, a Richmond-based nonprofit that provides medical and mental-health assistance to the homeless.

Then there’s Cuccinelli’s crusade on behalf of the wrongfully accused Thomas Haynesworth. In 1984 the 18-year-old Haynesworth was convicted on several counts of rape, robbery,