

The Freedom Crusade

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THE GLOBAL promotion of democracy has emerged, according to the Bush Administration, as the defining mission of contemporary American foreign policy. Speaking in lofty and eloquent tones in his second Inaugural Address, Bush insisted that it would henceforth be “the policy of the United States 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.”

Insisting that “America’s vital interests and deepest beliefs are now one”, the president claims that the expansion of freedom is the imperative of America’s security, indispensable to the survival of liberty at home and the achievement of world peace. The deepest source of the vulnerability revealed on 9/11 is that “whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny—prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder.” So long as that is the case, “violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat.” Only one force can break the trend, the president avers, and that is human freedom.

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The Bush Administration’s embrace of a global crusade for democracy may be understood at several different levels. It is, in the first place, a bid to define Bush’s place in history; the speech invokes America’s Founding Fathers and especially its “second founder”, Abraham Lincoln, who insisted, “Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under the rule of a just God, cannot long retain it.” Placing the promotion of democracy at the center of American foreign policy also seems calculated to rally public support at home for the Bush foreign policies and is based on the conviction—evidently shared by many preceding presidents—that no foreign policy can long retain the support of the American people unless it competes for the great spigots of American idealism. At yet another level, the democratist crusade is aimed at restoring the tarnished legitimacy of American power in the world. Fears of U.S. domination and empire are to be eased and perhaps replaced by the hope that the United States will henceforth act as a liberating force, one that uses its unprecedented power for aspirations widely shared in the world.

In Bush’s first term, the “Bush Doctrine” meant above all the avowal that the United States would not sit on its hands and await the development of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of tyrants but was prepared, on the contrary, to take the offensive against them. Now it is the

“being” and not the “doing” of autocratic states that creates the security threat to the United States, which can only be addressed by dramatic change in the character of these governments, either through reform or revolution. Though Bush concedes that ending tyranny is the work of generations, he also styles it as an urgent task of American security. He acknowledges, too, that such change is not primarily the task of arms, but he does not exclude the possibility that it may in the future be a task for arms, and he seems to pledge U.S. support to all those who seek to revolutionize despotic governments. “All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression, or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you.”

America’s Traditional Mission

A CENTRAL question raised by the Bush Doctrine is the extent to which it comports with the historic understanding of the American purpose. Normally, an active role in the propagation of free institutions is attributed to Woodrow Wilson, and it has become customary to identify America’s recent presidents—especially Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush—as “neo-Wilsonians.” But Bush goes further, insisting that the policy proclaimed in his second Inaugural Address is a logical outgrowth of America’s historic commitment to free institutions: “From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value. . . . Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government. . . . Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation.”

The determination of the “intentions” or “original understanding” of the Founding Fathers has often excited attention and speculation, but as often as not

their intentions have seemed shrouded in ambiguity. The “silences of the Constitution” have often been as important—and mystifying—as its plain avowals. But the questions raised by the Bush Doctrine—whether it is rightful to propagate changes in another nation’s form of government and what role the United States should play in the protection and expansion of free institutions—often commanded serious attention, and the answers given by the Founders and their epigones lend no support to the Bush Doctrine.

The question of whether force might be used to revolutionize foreign governments arose quickly after the making of the Constitution, in the wars provoked by the French Revolution. The British government, James Madison would later recall, “thought a war of more than 20 years called for against France by an edict, afterwards disavowed, which assumed the policy of propagating changes of Government in other Countries.” The offensive edict to which Madison refers is the declaration of the French Convention on November 19, 1792, that “it will accord fraternity and assistance to all peoples who shall wish to recover their liberty”—a declaration that bears an uncanny resemblance to the policy Bush announced in his second Inaugural Address. Alexander Hamilton also took umbrage at the doctrine and argued that the French decree was “little short of a declaration of War against all nations, having princes and privileged classes”, equally repugnant “to the general rights of Nations [and] to the true principles of liberty.” Thomas Jefferson, who unlike Hamilton strongly sympathized with the French Revolution, nevertheless acknowledged that “the French have been guilty of great errors in their conduct toward other nations, not only in insulting uselessly all crowned heads, but endeavoring to force liberty on their neighbors in their own form.” Much as Hamilton and Jefferson differed in their assignment of guilt to the warring parties,

both of them made their normative assessments of the European war in terms that emphasized the illegitimacy of war for the purpose of propagating changes of government in other countries.

The self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence did not justify the proposition that foreign states had any right to revolutionize another political order, even a tyrannical one. Jefferson also regarded it as a self-evident truth that all nations had the right to determine for themselves the form of government they would adopt. The United States, he wrote, “surely cannot deny to any nation that right whereon our own government is founded—that every one may govern itself according to whatever form it pleases, and change these forms at its own will; and that it may transact its business with foreign nations through whatever organ it thinks proper.” Such was the settled doctrine of 19th-century America. “Among the acknowledged rights of nations”, as Daniel Webster noted, is that of “establishing that form of government which it may deem most conducive to the happiness and prosperity of its own citizens, of changing that form as circumstances may require, and of managing its internal affairs according to its own will. The people of the United States claim this right for themselves, and they readily concede it to others.” Americans, Webster noted, may “sympathize with the unfortunate or the oppressed everywhere in their struggles for freedom”, but their imperative duty was to neither revolutionize nor “interfere in the government or internal policy of other nations.”

The idea that the principles underlying the American regime might have universal applicability is as old as the Founding, yet this belief existed happily alongside the idea that the United States had neither a right nor a duty to bring others to an appreciation of these truths through force. Rather than being contradictory, these ideas originated in the same school

of thought. Like religious intolerance, the denial of legitimacy to other forms of government was seen to cause perpetual war, making for an international environment hostile to the spread of free institutions. Underlying this outlook was a profound conviction that force had a logic ultimately inimical to liberty. Early Americans saw a historical dynamic at work by which force begot the expansion of executive power, inevitably hostile to liberty. It had been the ruin of free states, producing Caesars, Cromwells and Bonapartes. It was, as Madison held, “the true nurse of executive aggrandizement.” Madison’s conviction that no nation could preserve its liberty in the midst of continual warfare lay behind his view that a central purpose of America was to seek “by appeals to reason and by its liberal examples to infuse into the law which governs the civilized world a spirit which may diminish the frequency or circumscribe the calamities of war, and meliorate the social and beneficent relations of peace.”

Alongside these self-denying ordinances prescribing a policy of non-intervention and non-entanglement was the belief that the American example would ultimately lead to the progressive expansion of free institutions across the world. Jefferson’s words in the declaration, wrote Abraham Lincoln, “gave liberty not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time.” For Lincoln as for Jefferson, however, it was the American example rather than active intervention that was to be the agent of change. “Our true mission”, as Daniel Webster summarized the classic view, was “not to propagate our opinions or impose upon other countries our form of government by artifice or force, but to teach by example and show by our success, moderation and justice, the blessings of self-government and the advantages of free institutions.”

The idea that Bush embraced in his second Inaugural Address, though given

isolated expression in moments of upheaval, was usually voiced as a form of satire, the *reductio ad absurdum* of an interventionist policy. We had “better proclaim ourselves the knights errant of liberty and organize at once a crusade against all despotic governments”, wrote John Tyler in 1852. “We should announce to all Nations our determination to advance with sword the doctrines of republicanism” and proclaim that “there is but one form of government upon earth which we will tolerate and that is a Republic.”

Woodrow Wilson’s presidency marked a departure from the classic doctrine in certain respects, but it is very doubtful that “Wilson would recognize George W. Bush as his natural successor”, as one historian has recently claimed.¹ Though Wilson saw, and saw rightly, that the partnership of democratic nations would henceforth have to be a fundamental desideratum in U.S. foreign policy, his objective was not to overturn the rules traditionally governing the relations of states. The League of Nations he championed was based squarely on the need for the society of nations to devise defenses against aggression, rather than on the need to transcend the society altogether. The league contained no democratic entitlement, and Wilson’s concept of a world made safe for democracy did not mean that the world should be made wholly democratic. For Wilson, the preponderance of power the democratic coalition might achieve was to afford the basis for a progressive disarmament, not eternal U.S. military hegemony. His skepticism regarding military power and his affinity with Jefferson’s pacific system were reflected in his belief that economic sanctions and the power of public opinion would do the heavy lifting in the prevention of aggression—an idea a world apart from Bush’s readiness to make force the first rather than the last resort of American statecraft.

Even Wilson’s interventions in Latin America were far more limited in scope

than is often alleged. His intervention against the Huerta government in Mexico was the only one that can plausibly be seen as having the promotion of democracy as its central purpose, and even that was pursued in very tentative fashion. When he sent troops to Vera Cruz in 1914 the announced reason was to avenge an insult to the American flag. Though it also had the purpose of stopping the flow of munitions to the Huerta government, Wilson was very uncomfortable with the position in which it placed him, and he got out as soon as he could. The main result of Wilson’s meddling in Mexico in 1913 and 1914 was not to convince him of the imperative of spreading democracy through force, but rather the reverse. “I hold it as a fundamental principle that every people has a right to determine its own form of government”, he declared in 1915. “If the Mexicans want to raise hell, let them raise hell. We have got nothing to do with it. It is their government, it is their hell.”

If the crusade for democracy embraced by Bush differs materially from that of its supposed avatar and progenitor—creating a gulf between Wilsonianism and neo-Wilsonianism about as gaping as that between conservatism and neoconservatism—it also differs sharply from the policy of containment that guided U.S. policy during most of the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine set forth a policy of containing the Soviet Union and other communist governments, not of overthrowing those governments. It pledged the United States to support free peoples resisting armed minorities or outside pressures, not peoples who had already lost their freedom.

Only with the Reagan Doctrine was the nation’s power openly and directly committed to extending freedom through force. Reagan sought to justify intervention in support of those rebelling against

¹David M. Kennedy, “What ‘W’ Owes to ‘WW’”, *The Atlantic* (March 2005).

tyrannical—particularly Marxist-Leninist—governments. Based on the assumption that a democratic revolution was sweeping the world, the Reagan Doctrine asserted America's moral responsibility for aiding popular insurgencies struggling against communist domination. Such support was deemed to express the vital security interests of the United States. Though characterized in the traditional language of self-defense, the doctrine went beyond defense in its claim of a right to overturn that part of the status quo regarded as illegitimate. Even more, it amounted to the assertion that the American government no longer believed in the reality of an international order that transcended the respective interests and moral claims of the two great adversaries in the Cold War.

Although a direct line can be traced from Reagan to Bush in their common rejection of the traditional bases of international order, there are nevertheless significant differences between the two—in the character of the men who developed them and in the circumstances in which they were pursued. Unlike Bush, Reagan did not see his popularity dependent on the successful prosecution of a war. Then, too, the Reagan presidency was conducted in the lingering shadow of Vietnam. A Congress resistant to presidential power in foreign affairs and a public still possessed of a Vietnam syndrome were realities that had to be taken into account. A fragile foreign policy consensus might be quickly shattered by the ill-advised use of military power. From the start, Reagan accepted the domestic restraints on the use of force that had emerged since Vietnam, realizing that where the public did not perceive compelling security interests to be at stake, and could not be persuaded otherwise, its support of military intervention depended on costs remaining very low and the duration of intervention being very brief. Bush has thrived in a very different domestic climate, one

in which constraints on the use of force have been loosened considerably, in large part due to the discovery of a way of war in which U.S. casualties were minimized and that allowed—so the president believed—for the rapid achievement of military victories.

Security through Freedom?

THE INCOMPATIBILITY of Bush's crusade for democracy with central elements of the American tradition does not show that it is wrong. The earth, as one earlier "practical idealist" said, belongs to the living. Even if the democratic crusade does not represent our deepest beliefs and values, it may nevertheless respond to our vital security interests. Does it?

It is, of course, the Greater Middle East that is the *fons et origo* of the Bush Doctrine. Bush's initial reaction to the 9/11 terrorist attacks was to insist that the true source of Islamic rage was the image the terrorists held of America as a free society. "They hate what we see right here in this chamber", he told Congress. "They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other." In due time, however, what the administration originally saw as the cause of Islamic hatred—our freedom—came to be seen as the remedy for it. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted in her speech at Cairo's American University in the summer of 2005, "For sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people." Rice subsequently explained that underneath the veneer of stability a very malignant form of extremism grew up "because people didn't have outlets for their political views." She went on:

Imagine what a different Middle East it can be with an Iraq that is democratic and unified and free, with a Palestinian state that is democratic and free, and with reform in great countries like Egypt. Imagine what a different Middle East that would be. It will certainly not be a Middle East that produces people who want to blow up other innocent people.

Despite this rhetorical commitment to democratic government, there is as yet little sign that the administration intends to make a serious effort to push democracy in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan or Egypt. Indeed, its skittishness over any direct challenge to the legitimacy of these regimes might easily lead to the conclusion that it does not really believe U.S. security rests upon their democratization. Pakistan's nuclear capability, together with its vital importance in the campaign against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, makes any destabilization of the Musharraf regime a very dangerous proposition. The Bush Administration, though calling for free elections in Egypt, has not challenged Egypt's proscription of the Muslim Brotherhood; yet, any election without the participation of this potent opposition group would scarcely deserve the appellation of "free and fair." No one can predict with any certainty the kind of government that free elections would likely yield in Saudi Arabia, but that such a government would be pro-American or would play a more responsible role in oil policy is very doubtful. The last time a major oil producer was embroiled in revolution, in Iran in the late 1970s, the result was a virtual collapse of oil production and a tripling of oil prices. If the Bush Administration really believed its own analysis, Saudi Arabia—whence hailed 15 of the 19 hijackers who took part in 9/11—would clearly be the centerpiece of any reform agenda in the Middle East. But the risks of actions that seriously destabilize the regime seem clearly to outweigh the possible rewards.

That unspoken doubts exist within the administration over the cogency of its own analysis seems not too surprising, since the analysis itself is of dubious merit. The sources of Islamic rage are many, of which anger in the "Arab street" over U.S. support for corrupt and unrepresentative regimes is only one factor. As important is the virtually unconditional support the United States has provided Israel. More important is the cavalier disregard for Arab lives the United States demonstrated in the first war against Iraq in 1991, followed by a decade of cruel and destructive sanctions. For the largest number of Arabs and Muslims, the second war against Iraq in 2003 drove hatred of the United States to yet deeper levels of intensity, and it has not been seriously allayed by the spectacle of the Iraqi elections in January. Though the Bush Administration wishes to make Iraqi democracy a spur to the larger democratization of the Arab world, the persistent anarchy that has enveloped Iraq makes it an example to be avoided rather than emulated. The imbroglio, in fact, is producing an alarmingly large number of "people who want to blow up other innocent people."

Iran is the great historic instance where the United States garnered hatred for its role in installing and helping to maintain in power an unpopular regime. The role that the United States played in overthrowing the Mossadeq government in 1953 undoubtedly "blew back" on this country when the shah was overthrown in the Islamic revolution of 1979. In retrospect, of course, it is easy to see that a nationalistic regime that exercised sovereignty over its natural resources was a far better bargain for the West than the Islamist regime that succeeded it. By blocking one path of development that, though disagreeable, was compatible with U.S. interests, the Eisenhower Administration helped prepare the ground for a regime that regarded the United States as the "Great Satan." This sequence con-

firms the historian in the judgment that the role played by the United States in 1953 was wrong and counter-productive, but the policymaker also ought clearly to see that the overthrow of the shah's regime did not exactly square the historical accounts and lead the Iranians to view America with favor. The tentative approaches the Bush Administration has made toward reform in the Arab world bear comparison to the criticism of the shah's regime that the Carter Administration made in 1977. That in the present case, as in the previous case, the United States might help set forces in motion that it cannot control and that threaten its vital interests seems a distinct possibility. The most dangerous moment for a bad government, as Tocqueville observed, is when it begins to reform.

Though the administration has renounced "sixty years" of good relations with Arab despots and now insists that "stability has not brought us security", the formulation is altogether too sweeping. Stability has brought us security in certain respects—for example, in ensuring access to oil. And even if it is accepted that stability has not brought us security in all respects, it scarcely follows that instability will do so. That assumes that things cannot get worse than they are, a hazardous assumption for a statesman to make and one belied by much of human history. The advocates of the push toward democracy concede that "democratization is the same as destabilization", that it entails "the dismantling of whole political cultures", and that it cannot be done "easily, swiftly, in conformity with an American notion of efficiency, or with a perfect understanding of the intellectual and political demands of the task." They concede, too, that "it will not be done peacefully", nor with any certainty that the values we trumpet will not be "cynically manipulated by American interests."²

If all this is true, however, it suggests that the Bush Administration will in fact

draw back from pressure on Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The administration is pushed by the logic of consistency to bring pressure against these friendly regimes, but it is pressed by the logic of interest and security to shudder at any serious confrontation with them. Its actions show plainly that the equation drawn between vital interests and "deepest beliefs" is false.

What really underlies the Bush Administration's emphasis on democracy in the Middle East is the need to justify the continuing war in Iraq and to step up the pressure against Syria and Iran. It is our presumed enemies, rather than our historic friends, that are the real objects of the Bush Doctrine. But the results of the policy do not bear out the confident prediction that out of the ashes of war comes liberal democracy. Iraq cannot be both Ground Zero in the global War on Terror and a model for liberal reform in the region. In this barricaded and devastated country, the liberal virtues of cooperation, reciprocity and compromise are most unlikely to take their storied flight. In fact, such anarchy breeds the conditions for a garrison state, not a liberal democracy. The plea of national safety has always been the most potent argument for surrendering freedom. So it has been in Iraq and even, to a very considerable degree, in the United States since the onset of the War on Terror.

The Iraq War, indeed, has displayed a deep contradiction between the democracy the United States says it is trying to build and the methods it has employed to battle the insurgency. For all the effort that American officials put into enshrining various individual rights in Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), the United States has been equally insistent that the restraints on governmental power that the TAL incorporated do not apply to the coalition forces that have ac-

²"Crusade", *The New Republic*, November 24, 2003.

tually held most of the police and military power in the country. “The American position”, noted one Iraqi closely involved in negotiations over the interim constitution, “was that they did not want any restriction on their movements. And they wanted to make it clear that the Bill of Rights only applied to the Iraqi government. Only the Iraqi government would need an arrest warrant; the multinational force could break down doors.” There have been few constitutional restraints on the actions of U.S. military forces in Iraq and none reachable by Iraqi authorities. U.S. forces have relied on military intelligence, often defective, rather than judicial warrants to conduct raids and pursue suspects. They have arrested and imprisoned many individuals without even a pretense of fair and public hearings by impartial courts and have often left family members with no knowledge of the whereabouts of their kin or the charges brought against them. Even if the plea is accepted that such measures are justified on grounds of military necessity, the flouting of liberal principles by U.S. forces cannot but undercut the U.S. case for democracy. Such conduct communicates to Iraqis that while limitations on the power of the state ought to be enshrined in the constitution, they may easily be brushed aside by the appeal to national security.

If the Bush policies have brought neither security nor freedom in the Middle East, they do not promise better results elsewhere. It is a necessary consequence of making the “end of tyranny” your aim that all tyrannical regimes, and even those suspected of tyranny, are converted into an enemy. States have immemorably set aside differences in regime type and negotiated with adversaries across those boundaries, because it is the only way to reach the goal of security they have set for themselves. The Bush Doctrine proposes, in effect, a reversal of this ancient logic. Strong as the United States is, the result cannot fail to be a worsening of

the American security predicament if the doctrine is given anything like a consistent application.

This is a vital lesson of the North Korean crisis. Since the prospect of a North Korean bomb emerged in the early 1990s, a settlement of the issue that deprived the North of its nuclear capability has meant a willingness on the part of the United States to accept the existence of the regime and to renounce the objective of overthrowing it by force. That had to be at least part of the quid for the North Korean quo—that is, its surrender of a nuclear capability. Clinton went a considerable distance in this direction, though even he did not adhere to the terms of the Agreed Framework signed with North Korea in 1994, which called for a normalization of relations. Bush, however, greatly disliked even Clinton’s partial concessions. He preferred the route of maximum pressure on Kim Jong-il up to and including the threat of force. He found the North Korean leader despicable and said so. All options were on the table for dealing with him and the threat he represented. It would be hard to demonstrate that the subsequent breakout of the North in nuclear weapons capabilities improved the security of the United States or of North Korea’s neighbors. There are signs that the administration has eaten of this fruitful lesson, though whether it has been fully digested is unclear. Having taken a very high ground, it now has the additional burden of finding a graceful way to retreat if it wants to make a settlement.

The general lesson is clear. One cannot seek to delegitimize regimes and make their demise a declared objective of U.S. foreign policy, and then hope to reach agreements with them on vital issues. That applies, though perhaps in varying measure, across the board to regimes we dislike for ideological reasons but whose cooperation is needed if security threats are to be minimized and

addressed without violence—that is, to China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and others. We are, of course, free to imagine a distant world in which all are free and democratic, after which conflict among peoples abruptly ceases to spill over into violence. On this side of utopia, however, security arrangements—cooperation with sometime friends, deterrence of sometime enemies—need to be made with existing regimes.

The more moderate supporters of the administration immediately reply that Bush intends no crusade for democracy but will continue to work with autocratic governments. Those assurances are welcome, since the tentative and inconsistent application of a bad policy is undoubtedly better than its determined and consistent application. One may hope that such realistic calculations find expression in the administration's policy, but if they do, it will be because administration officials realize that their larger analysis linking the achievement of security to the aggressive pursuit of free institutions is mistaken.

Restoring Legitimacy

THESE VARIOUS contradictions and tensions within the U.S. stance suggest that the Bush Administration will have difficulty making its crusade for democracy the basis for either rallying public support behind its policies or restoring legitimacy to U.S. actions in the world. Indeed, polls by the Pew Research Center and the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, among others, show consistently low support for the abstract goal of promoting democracy in foreign countries. The public does not object in principle to such promotion, just as it does not object in principle to improving living standards in other countries through foreign aid. But its willingness to bear serious costs for such objectives is weak to nonexistent.

The Bush Administration also misreads world public opinion on this score. Opinion abroad is unnerved by an administration that claims for itself a wide variety of potential justifications for the use of force. Rather than expanding such justifications, as the Bush Doctrine does in both its preventive war and democratist guises, most foreigners want to see them contracted. It is the prospect of an “America unbound” that most unsettles world public opinion, and it demands as a condition of support for American aims that the United States place itself under the restraints of international law and international institutions. If America wishes to gain legitimacy for uses of force going beyond the principles of self-defense embedded in the UN Charter—as, for instance, in humanitarian interventions—world opinion insists that the exception must be granted by international institutions that provide a voice, however modest, for the world's governments. It objects strongly to a stance in which democracy is loved in the abstract but hated when the peoples of the world give expression to their outlook in the UN and other international institutions.

The Bush Administration is no doubt right in insisting that U.S. foreign policy must seek to harmonize the nation's interests and its ideals. Where it and its neoconservative followers err is in the belief that there is only one way to read the requirements of morality, justice and idealism. The idea that force ought to be subject to certain restraints is based on principle as well as prudence, and it reflects a central conviction in the heritage of liberal constitutionalism that the neoconservatives themselves claim. The principle that the right of revolution belongs to the people of a given territory is equally central to the liberal tradition. To insist that actions that violate these norms are imprudent does not mean that they are not also condemnable on grounds of principle. In fact, they violate a central

conception of the society of states and propose a world in which the ancient principles of sovereignty, self-determination and non-intervention are abandoned in favor of a global cosmopolis, with America as judge, jury and executioner.

None of this should suggest that American ideals and institutions lack universal appeal. The constitutional principles on which this nation is founded—representative government, freedom of expression, the separation of church and state, federalism, the legal protection of private property and individual rights, restrictions on the powers of government—have shown remarkable applicability in cultures vastly different from our own. But we must also remember that in the liberal tradition, the rights of nations—above all the right to determine their own domestic institutions—were just as essential as the rights of individuals and that the right of revolution belonged to each people and no one else. The Bush Administration itself bows to the principle of national independence in claiming that “the United States has no right, no desire, and no intention to impose our form of government on anyone else.” But as this declaration is deemed compatible with invading another country for the purpose of liberating its population and is considered applicable only after a violent external revolution has been effected, the conclusion is inescapable that its actions betray its words.

At bottom, what is most objectionable about the Bush Doctrine is the junction it postulates between freedom and force. When John Quincy Adams declared that America should be the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all, but the champion and vindicator only of her own, he argued that the contrary policy would entail an insensible shift in our maxims “from *liberty* to *force*.” By the maxims of force he meant what today would be called militarism—“a tendency”, in Andrew Bacevich’s words, “to see

international problems as military problems and to discount the likelihood of finding a solution except through military means.” That was the way of the “war system” of the European powers to which the Americans of Adams’s day had such strong objections, and it is also the way of the contemporary United States.

Charity, it has been said, begins at home. So does respect for the principles of freedom. If we are to hope that others might gain instruction and profit from our example, we ought to make certain that our example is a good one. The current generation of Americans might gain instruction from the liberal tradition as much as others. The prohibition against the “midnight knock of the secret police” does not have attached to it a large asterisk that allows the supposed apostles of freedom to engage in such practices when they find it necessary or convenient. Above all, the liberal tradition condemns a promiscuous attitude toward the use of force. Nothing can be more damaging to the tradition of civil freedom than invoking the name while the substance is violated, nothing more revolting than the prostitution of the “sacred fire of liberty” to purposes at odds with its central precepts. “Observe good faith and justice toward all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all”, observed George Washington in his Farewell Address. “Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be, that good policy does not equally enjoin it?” Washington believed that “the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it.” It is a measure of the distance we have traveled from the principles of our Founding that these temporary advantages are now seen as dispositive, as the supposed dictates of necessity repeatedly trump respect for principles dear to the liberal heritage. Such an attitude mocks, rather than respects, “the honorable achievement of our fathers.” □