

# In Defense of Democratic Realism

—Charles Krauthammer—

ON FEBRUARY 10, 2004, I delivered the Irving Kristol Lecture to the American Enterprise Institute outlining a theory of foreign policy that I called democratic realism. It was premised on the notion that the 1990s were a holiday from history, an illusory period during which we imagined that the existential struggles of the past six decades against the various totalitarianisms had ended for good. September 11 reminded us rudely that history had not ended, and we found ourselves in a new existential struggle, this time with an enemy even more fanatical, fatalistic and indeed undeterable than in the past. Nonetheless, we had one factor in our favor. With the passing of the Soviet Union, we had entered a unique period in human history, a unipolar era in which America enjoys a predominance of power greater than any that has existed in the half-millennium of the modern state system. The challenge of the new age is whether we can harness that unipolar power to confront the new challenge, or whether we rely, as we did for the first decade of the post-Cold War era, on the vague internationalism that characterizes the foreign policy thinking of European elites and American liberalism.

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Charles Krauthammer is a syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, an essayist for *Time* magazine and a member of the editorial board of *The National Interest*.

The speech and the subsequent AEI monograph<sup>1</sup> have occasioned some comment. None, however, as loquacious as Frank Fukuyama's twelve-page rebuttal in the previous issue of *The National Interest*.<sup>2</sup> His essay is doubly useful. It is a probing critique of democratic realism, yet demonstrates inadvertently how little the critics have to offer as an alternative.

## *Democratic Realism*

IN MY SPEECH I describe the four major schools of American foreign policy. *Isolationism* defines the American national interest extremely narrowly and essentially wishes to pull up the drawbridge to Fortress America. Unfortunately, in the age of the supersonic jet, the submarine and the ballistic missile, to say nothing of the suitcase bomb, the fortress has no moat, and the drawbridge, as was demonstrated on 9/11, cannot be drawn up. Isolationism has a long pedigree, but today it is a theory of nostalgia and reaction. It is as defunct post-9/11 as it was on December 11, 1941, the day the America First Committee disbanded.

More important is *liberal internationalism*, the dominant school of American

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<sup>1</sup>Krauthammer, *Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>Fukuyama, "The Neoconservative Moment", *The National Interest* (Summer 2004).

liberalism and of the foreign policy establishment. Its pillars are (a) legalism, the construction of a web of treaties and agreements that will bind the international community in a normative web; (b) multilateralism, acting in concert with other countries in pursuit of “international legitimacy”; and (c) humanitarianism, a deep suspicion of national interest as a justification for projecting power—hence the congressional Democrats’ overwhelming 1991 vote against the Gulf War, followed by a Democratic administration that launched humanitarian military interventions in Haiti, Bosnia and Kosovo. Liberal internationalists see national interest as a form of communal selfishness and thus as inimical to their true objective: the construction of a new international system that mimics domestic society, being based on law, treaties, covenants, understandings and norms that will ultimately abolish power politics. To do so, liberal internationalism is prepared to yield America’s unique unipolar power piece by piece by subsuming it into the new global architecture in which America becomes not the arbiter of international events but a good and tame international citizen.

The third school, *realism*, emphasizes the primacy of power in international relations. It recognizes that the international system is a Hobbesian state of nature, not to be confused with the settled order of domestic society that enjoys a community of values, a monopoly of power, and most important, an enforcer of norms—all of which are lacking in the international system. Realism has no use for a liberal internationalism that serves only to divert the United States from its real tasks. The United States spent the 1990s, for example, endlessly negotiating treaties on the spread of WMD, which would have had absolutely no effect on the very terrorists and rogue states that are trying to get their hands on these weapons.

Realism has the virtue of most clearly

understanding the new unipolarity and its uses, including the unilateral and preemptive use of power if necessary. But in the end, pure realism in any American context fails because it offers no vision beyond power. It is all means and no ends. It will not play in a country that was built on a proposition and that sees itself as the carrier of the democratic idea.

Hence, the fourth school, *democratic globalism*, often incorrectly called neoconservatism. It sees the spread of democracy, “the success of liberty”, as John F. Kennedy put it in his inaugural address, as both the ends and the means of foreign policy. Its most public spokesmen, George W. Bush and Tony Blair, have sought to rally America and the world to a struggle over values. Its response to 9/11 is to engage in a War on Terror whose essential element is the global spread of democracy.

Democratic globalism is an improvement on realism because it understands the utility of democracy as a means for achieving global safety and security. Realists undervalue internal democratic structures. They see the state system as an arena of colliding billiard balls. Realists have little interest in what is inside. Democratic globalists understand that as a rule, fellow democracies provide the most secure alliances and most stable relationships. Therefore the spread of democracy—understood not just as elections, but as limited government, protection of minorities, individual rights, the rule of law and open economies—has ultimately not just moral but geopolitical value.

The problem with democratic globalism, as I argued in my address, is that it is too ambitious and too idealistic. The notion, expressed by Tony Blair, that “the spread of freedom is . . . our last line of defense and our first line of attack” is a bridge too far. “The danger of democratic globalism”, I wrote, “is its universalism, its open-ended commitment to human freedom, its temptation to plant the flag

of democracy everywhere.” Such a worldwide crusade would overstretch our resources, exhaust our morale and distract us from our central challenge. I therefore suggested an alternative, *democratic realism*, that is “targeted, focused and limited”, that intervenes not everywhere that freedom is threatened but only where it counts—in those regions where the defense or advancement of freedom is critical to success in the larger war against the existential enemy. That is how we fought the Cold War. The existential enemy then was Soviet communism. Today, it is Arab/Islamic radicalism. Therefore “where it really counts today is in that Islamic crescent stretching from North Africa to Afghanistan.”

### *An Existential Threat*

**A**T ITS MOST fundamental, Fukuyama’s critique is that I am misreading the new world because there is no existential struggle. By calling our war with Arab/Islamic radicalism existential, I exaggerate the threat and thus distort the whole fabric of American foreign policy. “Krauthammer”, he writes, “speaks of the United States as being in the midst of a bitter and remorseless war with an implacable enemy that is out to destroy Western civilization.” “Speaks of”—as one might speak of flying saucers. In reality, asserts Fukuyama, “Al-Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups aspire to be existential threats to American civilization but do not currently have anything like the capacity to actualize their vision.”

Fukuyama apparently believes that the phrase “not currently” saves him from existential peril. But the problem is that precisely as we speak, Al-Qaeda is energetically trying to make up for the deficiencies from which Fukuyama so complacently derives comfort. When Hitler marched into the Rhineland in 1936, he did not “currently” have the means to overrun Europe. Many Europeans

believed, delusionally, that he did not present an existential threat. By Fukuyama’s logic, they were right.

What defines an existential threat is intent, objective and potential capability. Existential struggle is a struggle over existence and identity. Until it lost heart late in life, Soviet communism was utterly committed to the eradication of what it called capitalism, in other words, the entire way of life of the West. Its mission was to do to the world what it had done to, say, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia—remake it in its image. Existential struggle is a fight to the end—extermination or, even better, conversion. That is what distinguishes it from non-existential struggles, in which the contending parties in principle can find compromise (over territory or resources or power).

Fukuyama is unimpressed with radical Islam because, in his view, it lacks the global appeal of such true existential threats as communism and Nazism. But Nazism had little global appeal. A master-race theory hardly plays well among the other races. Did it really have more sympathizers and fifth columnists in the West than does Islamism today? Islamist cells are being discovered regularly in just about every European capital, and some even in the United States. And these, of course, are just the fifth columnists we know about. The thought is sobering, given how oblivious we were to the presence among us of the 9/11 plotters. Just because Islamism in the West may not, like its Nazi or communist counterparts, take the form of a political party or capture Western celebrity intellectuals, does not minimize the threat or the power of its appeal. Radical Islam does not have its Sartre or its Pound. It is the conceit of intellectuals to think that this counts for more than a Richard Reid, armed this time not with a shoe-bomb but a nuclear suitcase or consignment of anthrax.

Disdaining the appeal of radical Islam is the conceit also of secularists. Radical

Islam is not just as fanatical and unappeasable in its anti-Americanism, anti-Westernism and anti-modernism as anything we have ever known. It has the distinct advantage of being grounded in a venerable religion of over one billion adherents that not only provides a ready supply of recruits—trained and readied in mosques and *madrassas* far more effective, autonomous and ubiquitous than any Hitler Youth or Komsomol camp—but is able to draw on a long and deep tradition of zeal, messianic expectation and a cult of martyrdom. Hitler and Stalin had to invent these out of whole cloth. Mussolini's version was a parody. Islamic radicalism flies under a flag with far more historical depth and enduring appeal than the ersatz religions of the swastika and hammer-and-sickle that proved so historically thin and insubstantial.

**F**UKUYAMA does not just underestimate the power of religion. He underestimates the power of technology. He is trapped in the notion that only Great Powers can threaten other Great Powers. Because the enemy today does not resemble a Germany or a Japan, the threat is “of a lesser order of magnitude.” For a realist, he is remarkably blind to the revolution that technology has brought. The discovery of nuclear power is the greatest “order of magnitude” leap in potential destructiveness since the discovery of fire. True, the atomic bomb was detonated half a century ago; but the democratization of the knowledge of how to make it is new. Chemical and biological weapons are perhaps a century old; but the diffusion of the capacity to develop them is new. Radical Islam's obvious intent is to decapitate the American polity, cripple its economy and create general devastation. We have seen what a mere 19 Islamists can do in the absence of WMD. We have seen what but two envelopes of mail-delivered anthrax can do to the world's most power-

ful capital. Imagine what a dozen innocuous vans in a dozen American cities dispersing aerosolized anthrax could do. Imagine what just a handful of the world's loose nukes, detonated simultaneously in New York, Washington, Chicago and just a few other cities, would do to the United States. America would still exist on the map. But what kind of country—and what kind of polity—would be left? If that is not an existential threat, nothing is.

Fukuyama, of course, has a stake in denying the obvious nature of the threat, having made his reputation proclaiming the “end of history”, which, if it means anything, means an end to precisely this kind of ideological existential threat. One can understand how he would be loath to acknowledge that history has returned, that the 1990s were not the end of history but a holiday from history, and that we find ourselves once again, sadly but unmistakably, with everything at stake. But he goes further. He has so persuaded himself in denial of this new reality that he needs some psychological reason to account for why I and other neoconservatives are so inexplicably convinced that we are in an existential struggle. His answer: Neoconservatives apparently identify so strongly with Israel that they have come to confuse America's predicament with Israel's. Neoconservatives think United States is in the same boat as Israel. Fukuyama points out that it is not.

This is bizarre. Of course the United States is not in the same predicament as Israel. So what? You do not have to be Israel to be existentially threatened. If Israel's predicament represents the standard for existential threat, then the West never experienced it during the six decades of anti-fascist, anti-communist struggle that Fukuyama himself insists was existential. Israel is threatened with Carthaginian extinction. France was conquered by Nazi Germany, and is still France today. Poland and Hungary were conquered by the Soviet Union, and have

become Poland and Hungary again. If Israel had been conquered in any of its wars, it would not be Israel today, nor ever again. Simply not matching up to the Israeli standard says nothing about whether one is engaged in an existential struggle.

What is interesting about Fukuyama's psychological speculation is that it allows him a novel way of Judaizing neoconservatism. His is not the crude kind, advanced by Pat Buchanan and Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad, among others, that American neoconservatives (read: Jews) are simply doing Israel's bidding, hijacking American foreign policy in the service of Israel and the greater Jewish conspiracy. Fukuyama's take is more subtle and implicit. One is to understand that those spreading the mistaken idea that the War on Terror is existential are neoconservatives so deeply and unconsciously identified with the Jewish state that they cannot help seeing the world through its eyes.

What makes this idea quite ridiculous is that the leading proponents of the notion of existential threat are George Bush and Tony Blair. How did they come to their delusional identification with Israel? The American war cabinet consists of Dick Cheney, Colin Powell, Don Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice. They speak passionately of the existential nature of the threat to the United States. Are they Marranos, or have they been hypnotized by "neoconservatives" into sharing the tribal bond?

### "Neoconservatism"

FUKUYAMA entitles his critique, "The Neoconservative Moment", a play on the first exposition of my theory, "The Unipolar Moment", published 14 years ago.<sup>3</sup> His intent is to take down the entire neoconservative edifice. His method is to offer a "careful analysis" of "Krauthammer's writings, particularly his AEI speech",

because "his strategic thinking has become emblematic of a school of thought", that is, neoconservatism.

What Fukuyama fails to understand is that there are two major strains of neo-conservative thinking on foreign policy, not one. There is the democratic globalism advocated by Blair and Bush and long elaborated by such thinkers as Robert Kagan and Bill Kristol. And there is the democratic realism that I and others have long advanced. Both are "democratic" because they advocate the spread of democracy as both an end and a means of American foreign policy. But one is "realism" because it rejects the universalist scope and high idealism of democratic "globalism" and always requires geopolitical necessity as a condition for intervention. This is hardly just a theoretical debate. It has very practical consequences. They were on stark display just half a decade ago, when there was a fundamental split among conservatives on the question of intervention in the Balkans. At the time, Kagan and Kristol (among many others) were strong advocates of intervention in the Balkans and of the war over Kosovo. I was not. I argued then, as I argue now, that while humanitarian considerations are necessary for any American intervention, they are not sufficient. American intervention must always be strategically grounded. In the absence of a strategic imperative, it is better to keep one's powder dry, precisely because that powder might be necessary to meet some coming strategic threat. On 9/11, that strategic threat revealed itself.

At the time of Kosovo, many realists took the same position I did, while many democratic globalists (lazily just called "neoconservatives") took the opposite view and criticized my reservations about intervention as a betrayal of democratic

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<sup>3</sup>Krauthammer, "The Unipolar Moment", *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1990/91).

principles. Fukuyama's essay does not just conflate these two distinct foreign policy schools. He repeatedly characterizes me as a champion of democratic globalism, the school with which I explicitly take issue. (Thus: "his [Krauthammer's] own position that he defines as 'democratic globalism'. . .") It is odd in the extreme to write a long critique of a speech and monograph entitled Democratic Realism and then precis that critique thus: "Krauthammer's democratic globalism fails as a guiding principle of foreign policy and creates more questions than answers." Perhaps Fukuyama believes that he alone has a proprietary right to the word "realism." Perhaps he believes that by misrepresenting me as a globalist he can then identify me with every twist and turn of the Blair and Bush foreign policies.

One of the reasons I gave this speech is that I thought the universalist, bear-any-burden language of both Blair and Bush to advance the global spread of democracy is too open-ended and ambitious. The alternative I proposed tries to restrain the idealistic universalism with the realist consideration of strategic necessity. Hence the central axiom of democratic realism:

We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is a strategic necessity—meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom.

**F**UKUYAMA finds this central axiom "less than helpful as a guideline for U.S. intervention" because "it masks a number of ambiguities." He asks the following questions.

*Does "global" here mean threats that transcend specific regions, like radical Islamism or communism?*

Yes.

*If the enemy's reach has to be global, then North Korea would be excluded from the definition of a "strategic" threat.*

Yes. North Korea is a discrete problem. Islamism is not our only problem, no more than Soviet communism was our only problem in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There can be others, though they are of a lesser order. North Korea is not on a deliberate mission to spread *Juche* communism around the globe or to destroy the United States. Its mission is regime survival, with intimations of threat to South Korea. Its ambitions do not extend beyond that. Which is why it is a very different kind of threat from the existential Arab/Islamist one we face, and falls outside the central imperative. It needs to be contained. But there is no imperative for its invasion, overthrow and reconstruction—unless we find that, for commercial and regime-sustaining reasons, it is selling WMD to our real existential enemy. Under these circumstances it would be joining the global war on the other side.

*Or does "global" instead mean any mortal threat to freedom around the globe?*

Any serious threat to what was once known as the "free world" as a whole is "global." In the 1930s and 1940s, that meant fascism. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that meant communism. Today it means Arab/Islamic radicalism.

*Does the fact that an "enemy" poses a mortal threat to another free country, but not to us, qualify it as our "enemy?"*

No.

*Is Hamas, an Islamist group which clearly poses an existential threat to Israel, our enemy as well?*

As it defines itself today, as an enemy of Israel, no. Were it to join the war on the United States, then the answer would be yes.

*Is Syria?*

Because of its hostility to Israel? No. To the extent, however, that it allies itself with and supports the jihadists in Iraq, it risks joining the enemy camp.

*And if these are our enemies, why should we choose to fight them in preference to*

*threats to free countries closer to home like the FARC or ELN, which threaten democracy in Colombia, or Hugo Chavez in Venezuela?*

We should not. See above.

*What makes something "central" in this global war?*

Whether a change in the political direction of a state or territory will have an important, perhaps decisive, effect in defeating Arab/Islamic radicalism. Afghanistan meets that test. So does Iraq.

### *Legitimacy*

**T**HIS IS NOT terribly complicated. What then is Fukuyama's quarrel with democratic realism? He seems to accept democratic realism as a theory but then condemns it in practice because ... well, because of Iraq. He has enthusiastically joined the crowd seizing upon the difficulties in Iraq as a refutation of any forward-looking policy that might have gotten us there, most specifically, any unilateralist, nation-building policy that got us there. Iraq, he says, is a mess, and the experience proves two things: the importance of "international legitimacy" and the futility of U.S. nation-building among Arabs.

On legitimacy, Fukuyama endorses my view that international support does not confer superior morality upon any action—other nations are acting out of self-interest, not priestly wisdom. He admits that the United Nations has "deep problems with legitimacy", and that Kosovo demonstrated that our European allies themselves do not believe in the necessity of legitimization through the Security Council. Nonetheless, he charges me with being too dismissive of the practical utility of international support and approval.

But no one denies the utility of international support. Of course there are practical advantages to having Security Council approval, NATO assistance or whatever political cover that might

induce, say, India or Turkey to offer assistance. You seek whatever approval, assistance, cover you can get. You even make accommodations and concessions to get it. None of this is in dispute. The only serious question is how far you go. Is "legitimacy" a limiting factor? When you fail to get it, do you abandon the policy? Should we have abandoned our policy of regime change in Iraq—military force being the only way to achieve it—because we lacked sufficient cover?

Fukuyama seems to be saying yes, we should have—although he deploys a Kerry-like ambiguity about what he would actually have done. He seems to be saying that we should have deferred to the opposition of our allies and to the absence of an international consensus, and not invaded Iraq—and that our experience in the aftermath of the war supports that prudential judgment.

But this assumes two things:

First, that a lack of legitimacy is the cause of our postwar problems. Our central problem, of course, has been the Sunni insurgency and the Moqtada Sadr rebellion. I hardly think that either of these groups, or the foreign jihadists who have come to join them, are impressed by UN resolutions. Indeed, the Security Council passed a unanimous postwar resolution legitimizing the American occupation. The UN even established a major presence in Baghdad right after the war. The insurgents were unimpressed: They blew the UN headquarters to smithereens. It is possible that we will fail to defeat these insurgencies, but the "legitimacy deficit" will hardly be the reason.

Second, it assumes that the choice in March 2003 was between invasion and postwar difficulties on the one hand and pre-invasion stability on the other. It assumes there were no serious prudential considerations that impelled us towards war. Of course the lack of Franco-German support made things more difficult. Of course the lack of international consensus

constituted a prudential reason not to invade. But Fukuyama assumes these were the only prudential considerations, that doing nothing about Iraq had no cost, that the Iraq problem before the war was in some kind of sustainable equilibrium. It was not. The tense post-Gulf War settlement was unstable and created huge and growing liabilities for all concerned, most especially for the United States. First, it caused enormous suffering for the Iraqi people under a cruel and corrupt sanctions regime—suffering and starvation that throughout the Middle East and in much of Europe were blamed squarely on the United States. Second, the standoff with Iraq made it necessary to maintain a large American garrison in Saudi Arabia, land of the Islamic holy places—for many Muslims, a provocative and deeply offensive presence. Indeed, in his 1998 fatwa against the United States, Bin Laden listed these two offenses as crimes numbers one and two justifying jihad against America.

Moreover, the sanctions regime was collapsing. That collapse was temporarily halted by the huge pre-war infusion of American troops into Kuwait that forced the Security Council to reaffirm the sanctions—but only as a way to avert an American invasion. The troop deployment was itself unsustainable. Upon its withdrawal, the collapse of the sanctions regime would have continued, resulting in a re-energized and re-legitimized regime headed by Saddam (and ultimately, even worse, by his sons) that was increasingly Islamicizing its Ba'athi ideology, re-arming and renewing WMD programs, and extending its connections with terror groups. As the quintessential realist Henry Kissinger wrote recently—in the full light and awareness of our postwar troubles—of “the calculus for preemption”:

Could the United States wait until weapons were actually produced by a country with the largest army in the region, the second-largest potential oil income, a record of having used

these weapons against its own population and neighbors, and—according to the Sept. 11 commission—intelligence contact with Al-Qaeda?<sup>4</sup>

There is no dispute that a paucity of international support is a prudential consideration in any major decision. But in Iraq, the paucity of international support is not the source of our troubles today, and before the war it was far outweighed by the prudential considerations in favor of removing Saddam. And finally, in any decision, the legitimacy issue is never decisive. In the 1980s, our European allies were almost universally opposed to American support for the Nicaraguan Contras. The common opinion of mankind was that American imperialism was trying to bring back Somozism. The policy had zero “international legitimacy.” If Fukuyama’s belief in international legitimacy is real, that should have been grounds for abandoning the policy—a policy that was right at the time and that history has decisively vindicated.

### *Nation-Building*

THE LAST OF Fukuyama’s questions about my “central axiom” was this: Was Iraq central to the war against radical Islamism? I believe it was and is. I argued that before the war, and I believe it is all the more true today. September 11 led to the inexorable conclusion that a half-century of American policy towards the Arab world had failed. Ever since Franklin Roosevelt made alliance with King Ibn Saud, the United States has chosen to leave the Arab world to its own political and social devices, so long as it remained a reasonably friendly petrol station. The arrangement lasted a very long time. Had 9/11 never happened, it would have lasted

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<sup>4</sup>Kissinger, “Better Intelligence Reform”, *Washington Post*, August 16, 2004.



longer. The policy of Arab exceptionalism was never enunciated, but it was universally understood: America was pursuing democratization in Europe, East Asia, South and Central America—everywhere except the Arab world. Democratization elsewhere was remarkably successful and was the key to stability and pacification. The Arab exception proved costly. On 9/11, we reaped the whirlwind from that policy and finally understood that it was untenable. We could continue to fight Arab/Islamic radicalism by catching a terrorist leader here, rolling up a cell there. Or we could go to the heart of the problem and take the risky but imperative course of trying to reorder the Arab world. Success in Iraq would be a singular victory in the war on radical Islam. Failure in Iraq would be a singular defeat.

I never underestimated the task. I have written before, during and after the war that the task was enormous, the risk great and failure possible—but that the undertaking was necessary.

Fukuyama never addresses the necessity question. Instead, he invokes our difficulties and setbacks to discredit the very idea of nation-building in the Middle East, not just because of local conditions but because Americans are no good at nation-building. Iraq is a fool's errand that was bound to fail:

We have been our usual inept and disorganized selves in planning for and carrying out the reconstruction, something that was predictable in advance.

Curiously, however, Fukuyama never predicted it in advance. He waited a year to ascertain wind direction, then predicted what had already occurred. At the time of decision before the war, Fukuyama now tells the *New York Times*, he had private doubts which he kept to himself: He did not think the war was wise, but “for all I knew, it might have worked.”<sup>5</sup> At the time, then, failure was

not “predictable in advance”, after all.

And how does he come to predict now? He writes as if the history to come has already been written. It has not. Iraq is rid of Saddam, and its future is in play. We are in the midst of a generational struggle, both in the War on Terror in general and in the reconstruction of Iraq. Fukuyama's unmistakable conclusion that Iraq is lost is, to put it mildly, premature. It is reminiscent of John Dos Passos's famous 1946 essay, “Americans are Losing the Victory in Europe.”<sup>6</sup> We have made serious mistakes in Iraq. We may yet fail. But Fukuyama's conclusion that Americans are simply no good at nation-building is retrospective presumption. We have succeeded in the monumental task of reconstructing Germany, Japan and South Korea. We failed in Haiti and Somalia. What was the principal difference? Great knowledge of the local culture? Democratic tradition? In Korea we did not have any great knowledge of the culture nor did Korea have a democratic tradition upon which to draw. Yet South Korea is a remarkable success.

What was the key? Strategic value. When the stakes were high, and correctly perceived at home as such, we stayed the course and devoted the requisite effort and time to succeed. Where the strategic stakes were minimal, as in Haiti or Somalia, we failed because we correctly understood that nation-building is a huge task and that these places were not remotely worth the cost. The single most important factor in the success of nation-

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<sup>5</sup>David Kirkpatrick, “War Heats Up in the Neoconservative Fold”, *New York Times*, August 22, 2004.

<sup>6</sup>Dos Passos, “Americans are Losing the Victory in Europe”, *Life* (January 7, 1946). The ring is familiar: “We've lost the peace', men tell you. 'We can't make it stick.' . . . Never has American prestige in Europe been lower. . . . We have swept away Hitlerism, but a great many Europeans feel that the cure has been worse than the disease.”

building is seriousness.

To say that the country that rebuilt Germany and Japan and South Korea from rubble—perhaps the three greatest achievements in nation-building ever—is intrinsically no good at the job is silly. And if that is the case, by the way, should we not be cutting our losses in Afghanistan as well, since it is far more tribal, primitive and underdeveloped than Iraq?

**W**HAT IS remarkable about Fukuyama's pessimism about the spread of democracy in an enormous swath of humanity and amid one of its most venerable civilizations is that not long ago he declared that all of humanity had already made the critical turn toward democracy and its triumph was inevitable. As he now admits, "I, more than most people, am associated with the idea that history's arrow points to democracy." Except among Arabs, it seems. One searches Fukuyama's essay for a single "hearts and minds" idea to give "history's arrow" a bit of nudge in this critical region. What does one find? A single passing reference to the Bush Administration's "Greater Middle East Initiative", a tepid State Department aid and exchange program of democratic engagement—already hopelessly watered-down and understood by all to be a façade.

This will not do. Before 9/11 we were content to wait passively for however many generations it took for the Arabs to achieve what had been achieved with the help of American (often military) intervention in Europe, East Asia and the Americas: democratization, modernization and pacification. After 9/11 we no longer have the luxury of time.

The rejection of nation-building, whether on grounds of American incompetence or Arab recalcitrance, reduces the War on Terror to cops-and-robbers, to fighting Al-Qaeda operatives here and there, arresting some, killing others in

some cave. It simply does not get to the root of the problem, which is the cauldron of political oppression, religious intolerance and social ruin in the Arab-Islamic world—oppression transmuted and deflected by regimes with no legitimacy into the virulent, murderous anti-Americanism that exploded upon us on 9/11. You cannot be serious about post-9/11 foreign policy unless you confront this reality.

### *What is to be Done?*

**H**OW DOES Fukuyama confront this reality? What is his alternative to democratic realism? The most bizarre part of his essay is the conclusion. When he finally comes around to offering an alternative, his three-point "recalibration", as he calls it, is so insignificant that he himself admits to "falling in Krauthammer's fourth 'democratic globalism' basket"—that is, he endorses the very foreign policy to which he ostensibly had such fundamental objections.

Of what does this three point "recalibration" consist?

1. "In the first instance, doing the simple work of diplomacy and coalition-building that the Bush Administration seemed reluctant to undertake prior to the Iraq War." Now, one can hold in high or low regard this administration's display of diplomatic skill in the six-month run-up to the Iraq War. But to imply that the administration did not work to build support both in the Security Council and outside it is absurd. It worked hard but fell short. What extra work does Fukuyama imagine would have enlisted France or Russia? Fukuyama then recommends that the United States "not gratuitously . . . insult the 'common opinions of mankind.'" Who is for that? If it is a recommendation for anything other than good manners, it is for granting other nations veto power over actions the United States believes essential

to its national interest and to the common defense. But Fukuyama himself rejects this idea categorically, saying that it is “utterly wrong” to maintain that “the United States should never stick its neck out and lead the broader Western world to actions that our allies oppose.”

2. The United States should establish a new bureaucracy for nation-building. No objection here. We could use a Colonial Office in the State Department.

3. Consider establishing, in Fukuyama’s words, a “global alliance of democracies, led by newer ones in eastern Europe and Latin America” that “could play a legitimizing function around the world in a way that NATO cannot.” Another perfectly good idea. I proposed it over a year ago.<sup>7</sup>

So, a well-mannered diplomacy, a colonial office and perhaps a new alliance of democracies. That’s it? This is Fukuyama’s alternative to democratic realism? Well, he adds: “I believe that East Asia is under-institutionalized and ripe for some creative thinking by the United States.” Al-Qaeda brings down the World Trade Center, war with the jihadists rages all over the world, Iraq is in play, and Fukuyama calls for thinking creatively about new East Asian institutions.

**F**UKUYAMA begins his essay by promising to “come up with a foreign policy that is very different from the one he [Krauthammer] lays out.” He ends with

a tweak: a couple of new institutions and more diplomacy. One finishes the essay in puzzlement. What was this polemic about? He declares himself an adherent of “democratic globalism”, the very school of thought he was ostensibly taking on. “He retains”, he tells the *New York Times*, “his neoconservative principles—a belief in the universal aspiration for democracy and the use of American power to spread democracy in the world.” What is left of his promise of a very different foreign policy?

The reason he offers none is that, as he concedes, no plausible alternative theory presents itself. Isolationism is obsolete. Liberal internationalism is too naive to be effective. And realism fails to see the power and promise of democratic transformation. Democratic realism offers a clear framework for responding to the challenge posed by history’s unwelcome return in September 2001. Fukuyama’s endorsement of democratic realism is welcome, and his recalibrations duly noted. □

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<sup>7</sup>See “A Costly Charade at the UN”, *Washington Post*, February 28, 2003. “We should begin laying the foundation for a new alliance to replace the now obsolete Cold War alliances. . . . It might include the United States, Britain, Australia, Turkey, such willing and supportive Old Europe countries as Spain and Italy, and the New Europe of deeply pro-American ex-communist states. Add perhaps India and Japan and you have the makings of a new post-9/11 structure.”

I am sick of all this horried business of politics, and Europe in general, and think you will hear of me going with the children to live in Australia.

—Queen Victoria, 1859, letter to the Princess Royal

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