

that human rights cannot be blamed for market fundamentalism, they nonetheless risk stalling such a political project. Already at the time, Moyn explains, human rights reflected a profound “crisis of ambition” (xi). The effect was doubly harmful in shrinking our political imagination and distracting from necessary political work. Moyn’s political utopianism here deviates from Kinley’s faith in cultural change by pointing to the concrete task of political organizing. Human rights, Moyn concludes, are at best helpful allies to an egalitarian political movement that does not yet exist. Furthermore, only if a movement fighting for this ideal will be “frightening enough” (219) to prompt social bargains can the dream of global welfare ever become reality.

Moyn and Kinley both ask us to turn our eyes away from human rights to other sources of societal change. This is not because human rights are complex but because they rely on preconditions they themselves cannot guarantee. Given today’s attacks on human rights, it is tempting to simply double down on them. But as Moyn cautions, on its own this would fail to tackle the underlying oligarchic political economy. Even worse, it might prove a fatal distraction. As Moyn forcefully points out, the focus on human rights risks narrowing the utopian imagination that drives much of the political work necessary for creating the egalitarian preconditions under which rights, especially social and economic rights, can flourish. In the end, our creativity and imagination belong to the realm of politics, not financial engineering. As we search for new political coalitions, the simultaneous challenge will be how to make banking boring again.

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Elliott Abrams: *Realism and Democracy: American Foreign Policy after the Arab Spring*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xvii, 295.)

David C. Hendrickson: *Republic in Peril: American Empire and the Liberal Tradition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. x, 287.)

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Elliott Abrams made his name as a neoconservative intellectual, secretary for human rights under Ronald Reagan, and deputy national security advisor under George W. Bush, where he handled Middle East policy for the White House. In other words, he is an intellectual deeply engaged in political practice. In contrast, David Hendrickson is a pure scholar, one of the most

impressive this reviewer has ever read. His seven books, mainly on American foreign policy as a dimension of American political thought, some cowritten with his mentor, Robert W. Tucker, are an essential starting point for anyone who wishes to understand the moral and strategic dimensions of American foreign policy from the Founding to the present.

Despite these differences, the two authors have much in common, most importantly a deep devotion to liberty. The problem is how they understand liberty and its practical meaning in American foreign policy. One identifies liberty with promoting democracy abroad; the other with maintaining the republic at home. Both consider themselves realists, but they reach diametrically opposed conclusions about what realism means in foreign affairs.

Traditional realists are averse to democracy promotion, in the Middle East especially. Repulsive as some authoritarian regimes in that region might be, realists often fear destabilizing allies whose support was needed during the Cold War and is needed now in fighting terrorism. In Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere, democracy might mean “one man, one vote, one time” (Abrams, 131–35) if some Islamist parties come to power, so realists have often argued it is best to stay loyal to allies, whatever their flaws (like murdering journalists in foreign consulates) rather than seek to transform them. In contrast, for Abrams true realism requires Americans to understand that support for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East is a self-defeating project. Long ago, Montesquieu noted that the last hope of dissent in a despotic regime was the church. When dissidents in authoritarian regimes in Arab countries can find no place to meet and talk freely but the mosque, some very angry congregants are likely to become radicalized and turned into terrorists by the angriest preachers in the mosque. So American support for authoritarian regimes winds up breeding the very terrorists Americans have now spent trillions of dollars trying to defeat in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere (210–14).

Realism thus requires that Americans support democratic change in the Arab world so that those who otherwise might choose violent solutions to their political predicaments will have at least the option of peaceful ones through the ballot. In that way, true realism and support for democracy, which many scholars and practitioners have seen as incompatible, are actually necessary for a successful and morally consistent American foreign policy in the Middle East.

It matters that Abrams is not calling for democratic jihad as such. His many collaborators among the neoconservatives were in fact willing to go to war to spread democracy in the Middle East, most notably in Iraq in 2003, but, inexplicably, Abrams refuses to talk about that indelible stain on the reputation of neoconservatives in his book. Instead, he sees the Arab world as divided between monarchies and sham republics, neither of which is willing to tolerate dissent. Like Aristotle talking to tyrants in his *Politics*, Abrams makes the practical point to such regimes, the monarchies especially, that their long-term survival depends on their legitimacy. So they have to find ways to gain

enduring popular support not merely for their policies, but also for their rule by transforming it into something non- or less-tyrannical. That means abdicating rule and embracing governance under law and eventually (or sometimes first) self-governance under representative institutions. This requires not merely allowing a civil society, but also encouraging competing political parties in elections, that is, systemic, not merely symbolic, change (214–44). This comprehensive look at the conditions for a successful democracy may be the only way in which Abrams can be described as Tocquevillian, but it is an important one. Abrams talks like a practitioner, his book almost an autobiography of his own experience with democratization, but in reality, through his work with the National Endowment for Democracy, itself a neoconservative project, his understanding of democratization theory is both broad and deep, though his judgment in making democracy promotion the foremost objective of American foreign policy deserves to be questioned.

Although Hendrickson wrote his latest book without Abrams in mind specifically, there can be no doubt that he questions Abrams's judgment in almost every way. Most fundamentally, the quarrel comes down to realism, and its relation to the American republic. For Hendrickson—a devotee of John Quincy Adams, secretary of state during the administration of President James Monroe—this means having a clear sense of priorities. As the first nation ever founded on universal principles of liberty, the United States, Adams observed, wished nothing but the best, with all its heart, to all nations seeking to recover their liberties, but it was the champion and vindicator of its rights and liberties alone. This was the original meaning of “America First”: not a doctrine of Randian egoism in foreign affairs, but rather a sense of responsibility to make the American experiment in republican government succeed at home, so that by force of example, what we call “soft power” today, its influence might spread elsewhere. Partly because the United States was weak, and could not afford crusades for liberty, but also because of his profound fear that in searching for tyrannical monsters to destroy, the United States might become such a monster itself, Adams counseled restraint and, unless the European empires intervened in the Western Hemisphere, nonintervention abroad. Abrams, in contrast, shows no sense of limits, military or political, on American intervention anywhere in the world.

For Hendrickson, Abrams's cure for terrorism and tyranny in the Arab world is just another manifestation of a disease, the desire to reshape the world in the American image, that is, the imperial temptation in democratic dress. That desire, he thinks, has not only not been good for the world (witness the anarchy in Iraq following the American invasion in 2003), but it has also been terrible for America. As Americans sought, in the twentieth century especially and the years following, to spread their system by force to the world, they have lost much of their republic and become an empire with presidents exercising quasi-imperial authorities over going to war and intelligence surveillance that none of the American Founders would have

accepted. We have failed to see that the national security state might be a greater threat to our security than any foreign adversary (25–52).

So Hendrickson advocates a “new internationalism” (168) based, surprisingly, on the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, but not the Hobbes who advocated absolute power in the sovereign nor the Hobbes who treated international politics as a permanent state of war. Instead, Hendrickson focuses on the Hobbes who established the negative Golden Rule (of restraint): “do not that to another, which thou wouldst not have done to thyself.” Since Hendrickson’s subject is American foreign policy in general, not merely toward the Middle East, he ranges widely to suggest that Americans have failed to follow the negative Golden Rule in their relations with China and Russia especially. Pushing NATO up to the border with Russia violates the rule in the same way that Russia pushing nuclear weapons to Cuba in 1962 violated the rule. Meddling in Russia’s near abroad, in Ukraine for example (184), was bound to lead the Russians to push back themselves, perhaps by meddling in the American election in 2016. If Americans can have a Monroe Doctrine limiting foreign intervention in their hemisphere, then if we put ourselves in the shoes of the Chinese, something similar ought to apply in China’s own hemisphere. Americans should back off. They should adopt a doctrine of “self-limitation,” so that they do not provoke enemies unnecessarily, so that without such enemies, they can save what is left of their liberty at home—which makes sense, if you start from the assumption that the purpose of American foreign policy is to secure American liberty, not that of everyone else (98–103).

In practice, that means Hendrickson would much prefer the United States to begin a gradual disengagement from the Middle East (and significant retrenchment in Europe and Asia), perhaps toward the role of an offshore balancer, like the role it played before the Gulf War of 1991–92 (203). This would give the United States the option of intervening when fundamental interests, like the free flow of oil, are at stake, but otherwise it would let the Arab states sort out their quarrels among themselves and leave it to them to decide who would rule at home among their own peoples.

Both of these books were written before the election of President Donald Trump, which has shaken the old liberal international order to its core. As recent as these books are, they now seem dated. ISIS as an organization (not an ideology) has been defeated, at least temporarily, in Iraq and Syria. September 11th was a tragic event, yet as Hendrickson observes, there is no evidence anything Americans have done in the Middle East, whether by force or by peaceful democracy promotion, has prevented an equally catastrophic event. Far from it: the American military presence in the Middle East is often invoked by jihadists to justify attacks on Americans in that region and on American soil. There is enormous evidence, however, that increased intergovernmental cooperation among US police and intelligence agencies especially, and with foreign police and intelligence services, has made another 9/11 far less likely. So Abrams’s case that we must democratize

the entire Middle East as a matter of realistic foreign policy simply does not convince. Indeed, as Hendrickson suggests, it may be the case that leaning forward, militarily and politically, in the Middle East makes such attacks more likely (201).

Not to let Hendrickson off the hook, he sometimes seems to presume that if the United States stops poking its nose in everyone else's business, no threats will arise. This is emphatically not true. Part of the price of globalization, a source of enormous benefits around the world, especially for the poorest nations, is that all countries now have the means to meddle in each other's affairs, through the internet especially, as the Russians, and, some say, Israelis and Saudis too, did in meddling in American elections in 2016, and as the Russians have done for years now in Europe, a subject Hendrickson inexplicably chose not to discuss. Both Hendrickson and Abrams wrote their accounts when liberal democracy was still on the march, when we wondered whether its devoted advocates were going too far or not far enough, but we live in a different world now, when liberal democracy is under severe threat from right-nationalist extremists at home and those who abet them from abroad. With liberal democracy now on the defense, Hendrickson is surely right that it is time to focus on getting our own house in order, but citing Francis Fukuyama, Abrams observes, correctly, that democracies can "choose their friends and enemies by ideological considerations" (212). Surely our most important and reliable friends are fellow liberal democracies in North America, Europe, and Asia; no less surely, strengthening our union with them is far more important now than promoting democracy in the Middle East, where a strong case can be made the Americans have no friends, just small and medium powers willing to play Americans in their own interest. The foreign policy challenge of our time is thus neither restraining the republic from the temptations of empire, though that problem will return, nor promoting democracy around the world. Instead, it is to save our own republic from a demagogic president with nothing but contempt for the norms and institutions of free government and to work with our closest allies to preserve the liberal international order both from threats posed by traditional adversaries who mean to divide the West and from so-called friends in the Middle East willing to fight to the last American.

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