

# Newsweek

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## Not Bombs but Baywatch

When facing dictators, democracies need to find policies that contain and contaminate

by Gerald Segal

Iraq blinked in the latest crisis but this has been a bizarre way to threaten to wage war. The democratic coalition confronting Saddam Hussein worried more about potential Iraqi casualties than they did about their own, and certainly more than Saddam worried about his own people. Yet this is the way modern democracies will continue to contemplate war; and to make matters worse, democracies also find it exceptionally hard to make peace with non-democracies. Whether it is dealing with Iraq, China, Cuba or North Korea, democracies are befuddled by how to manage dictators.

Democracies are not especially bad at making peace or war, but they are simply more at ease with other democracies. Americans have problems with the likes of Saddam because in democracies there are rival politicians who find it easy to label an opponent as an appeaser of dictators. Israel's Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated because of the most unhinged versions of such political "debate". Democrats can make peace with other democracies because the other side seems just as shambolically pluralist as you are. War among West European powers is inconceivable, even though the glue of the Cold War is melted. Canada and the United States have plenty of fishing disputes, but would never go to war. The secession of Quebec from Canada or Scotland from the United Kingdom would never see serious shots fired in anger.

The result is that democracies tend to distrust an autocratic enemy and find anything short of total surrender hard to accept and manage. That is one of the reasons why Saddam Hussein can tie the Western democracies in knots, even after having been humbled in war. Western powers can agree the Iraqi regime is evil, but its very awfulness leads democracies to feel that no more of their blood should be shed in trying to achieve complete victory. Revulsion also leads many to have no coherent policy apart from merely waving a big stick.

The problem for democracies is that ruthless war is an unpleasant option. Unless they can make their adversary more like themselves, real peace will always be elusive. The aftermath of World War II was a rare case, when democracy was imposed on Germany, Italy and Japan. Most democracies now think it is inconceivable that they should fight such bloody wars and to such a total end. Modern democracies recoil at the notion of capturing Baghdad, Damascus or Pyongyang. Defending Taiwan is one thing, bombing Beijing is quite another.

Since imposing democracy is not an option, democratic powers have to learn to be clever and patient. Democratic forces take time to mature out of civil societies and pluralist political systems. The Cold War was won not on the battlefield, but by a sustained effort both to limit the external power of the Soviet Union and to change its internal nature.

The secret to success in the defeat of Soviet communism is a guide for a modern democratic strategy towards authoritarian rivals. Communists were both contained and contaminated. They were contained by the unique organisation called NATO--a powerful fighting force created in peacetime, and which deterred a war it never had to fight. The communists were contaminated by trade, support for human rights and hostile broadcasting of the truth. Containment or contamination on their own would not have worked

What would a modern "double-C" strategy now look like? Containment of Iraq would mean continuing deployment of powerful Western forces to make a mess of Saddam's armed forces if he

misbehaves. Modern military technology makes it possible to raise the cost of such misbehaviour. Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear weapons programme with air strikes and could do the same should Iran go nuclear. The United States has deployed carrier battle groups to warn China from attacking Taiwan. That old Roman maxim remains relevant for modern democracies, "if you want peace, prepare for war".

Although **containment** is necessary, it is an insufficient strategy to defeat despots. It is the other "C", **contamination**, which in the end loosens the dictators' grip on power. Thankfully, contamination comes in many packages. Trade with the enemy (in non-strategic goods) and show them how poor they are. Encourage **capitalism's secret weapon**-an apolitical middle class unwilling to sacrifice for radical ideology. Empower business leaders through trade and you **create alternative centres of power**. Look at how Chinese democracy grows and communism rots from the bottom up when these tactics are applied.

Contaminate the Iraqis with Baywatch and **undermine the Ayatollahs with Disney**. Kim Il Sungism is no match for the Spice Girls. These lethal forces are **unleashed through tourism and via the new information technologies**. Castro will crumble because his people will see they have been misled, not because they feel the heat of American airpower or congressional legislation.

The greatest asset in the arsenal of democracies is a successful economy and open political system. Far better to **let loose the new dogs of war--Microsoft and Mickey Mouse!**

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