The Rise of Democracy

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Chapter 7

FROM THE BRINK TO ‘TRIUMPH’: THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Either the world will be governed by the ideology of modern democracy … or it will be ruled by the laws of force.

Adolf Hitler (1925) (Hitler 1939: 148)

The great dilemma which modern European democracy is facing today is: totalitarian fascist and national socialist authoritarianism on one side, and Marxist socialism and communism on the other side. How democracy will try to save its existence, accepting in this dilemma a new, modern shape – that is today its life-and-death question. This question is almost insoluble – and still, it can be resolved and it must be resolved.

Edvard Beneš (1939: 16)

THE FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

In The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Quentin Skinner suggests that ‘the clearest sign that a society has entered into the self-conscious possession of a new concept is … that a new vocabulary comes to be generated, in terms of which the concept is then articulated and discussed’ (Skinner 1978: x). An equivalent process has been explored thus far, examining the way the concept of democracy came to be articulated in modern international society. With the peace settlement at Versailles, ‘a new set of words, like democracy, freedom, and self-determination,’ Martin Wight notes, ‘acquired general currency, replacing the older set of words’ (Wight 1972: 27). Popular sovereignty was embedded in international society, and democratic government had come to be recognised as a legitimate form of constitution. It is
for these reasons that the Versailles settlement is widely recognised as a foundational moment in the development of democracy in international politics (Armstrong 1993; Clark 2005; Clark 2009; Franck 1992; Hinsley 1982; Mayall 2000a; Mayall 2000b; Navari 2007; Wight 1972). Ian Clark accurately observes the significance of this moment: ‘It is not possible fully to appreciate the Versailles architecture without a clear focus on this cardinal principle of democracy as a proper concern of international society’ (Clark 2005: 116).

Democracy’s position after Versailles was both central and ambiguous. James Mayall subtly conveys this point when noting that the settlement did not entrench ‘democracy itself, but democratic values, as the standard of legitimacy within international society’ (Mayall 2000b). The defeat of the Central Powers completed a process that was already well underway in the second half of the nineteenth century: popular sovereignty – democracy as *forma imperii* – supplanted monarchy as the foundation on which members of international society would be based. Popular sovereignty, a term used interchangeably with self-determination, was embedded within the new international order, but it was not yet universalised. This would occur over the rest of the twentieth century. As Erez Manela notes, the Great War and the subsequent settlement ‘launched the transformation of the norms and standards of international relations that established the self-determining nation-state as the only legitimate political form throughout the globe’ (Manela 2007: 5; Mayall 1990: 45–7). In time, the principle of popular sovereignty would be turned against the imperial powers in the same way that the French revolutionaries had used it against the hapless Louis XVI. It would not be until the processes of decolonisation that followed the Second World War that popular sovereignty would be extended around most of the globe (Crawford 2002; Fabry 2010; R. Jackson 1993; Mayall 1990; Philpott 2001). The basic framework itself, however, had been established in international society half a century earlier. As Mikulas Fabry observes, ‘decolonization was the triumph of Wilson’s conception of self-determination’ (Fabry 2010: 149).

The standing of democratic government (*forma regiminis*) in the new international order was less clear cut. Democracy had emerged as a legitimate form of constitution, and was ideationally in the ascent after the victory of the Allies, but it would exist in a pluralist international society in which it would compete against other forms of rule. The successful waging of the Great War in democracy’s name had completed
the remarkable transformation in the evaluative dimension of the concept from negative to positive. The situation that had prevailed only 150 years earlier, where democracy was widely reviled or avoided, was firmly something of the past. Democracy assumed a normative standing and political legitimacy it has yet to lose. As we will explore later in this chapter, democracy’s existence was under great threat during the late 1930s and early 1940s as it was repudiated by fascist movements and deserted by many fair-weather friends. Yet even during these dark days, its light was never extinguished: the core democratic countries remained committed to this form of rule, even if there was much more doubt of its virtue and strength. The conceptual battles surrounding democracy in the twentieth century were no longer with the ancien régime, but the modern doctrines of fascism and communism. Democracy was certainly still contested, but the nature and participants of that battle had changed.

This study has focused primarily on one part of democracy’s larger history, namely, its appearance and rise in modern international politics. During this period from the American Revolution through to the end of the First World War the trajectories of popular sovereignty (forma imperii) and the revival of democracy as a form of domestic rule (forma regiminis) were closely intertwined. Following the Great War, these two dimensions would be separated and the dynamic of contestation would change considerably. With popular sovereignty confirmed, conflict would be exclusively over the different forms of government (formae regimini) that had emerged: democracy, communism and fascism. As Clark notes, ‘what was left unresolved [at Versailles] was the legitimacy of dominant domestic constitutional forms, and it was around this issue that the epochal war of the twentieth century was to rage until 1990’ (Clark 2005: 110). Philip Bobbitt terms this the ‘long war’, an ideological battle that lasted for most of the twentieth century over which constitutional form would be hegemonic in international society (Bobbitt 2002). This has been explored in detail by a number of scholars (Bobbitt 2002; Clark 2005; Fukuyama 1992; Fukuyama 2014b; Gat 2009; Mann 2012a; Mann 2012b; Mazower 1998; Müller 2013). It is important to note that this contestation surrounding democracy – in which it competed with the modern ideologies of communism and fascism – differed significantly from that which attended its emergence in international society, whereby popular sovereignty supplants monarchical sovereignty and democratic government was re-evaluated as a positive form of rule. It is
the latter story that has been the main focus of this book. As such, the purpose of this chapter is to outline the most significant dimensions of the ideational conflict that democratic government was involved with during the twentieth century, while observing that much of the conceptual framework for its ascendance had already been constructed by the time the ‘long war’ began.

THE INTERWAR YEARS

Democracy’s place in the Versailles settlement was more equivocal than Wilson and other liberals may have hoped for, but it still was ideationally in the ascent in the immediate years after the Great War. In his 1921 classic, *Modern Democracies*, James Bryce judged that there was a ‘universal acceptance of democracy as the normal and natural form of government’ (Bryce 1921a: 4). Bryce’s work is one of the best-known examples from a wealth of literature published on democracy at this time. Richard Roberts observed in *The Unfinished Programme of Democracy* that

> during the past few years, we have become familiar with the idea of a world made safe for democracy; and in the minds of many people democracy . . . stands as a sort of ultimate good which it is impious to challenge or to criticise. (R. Roberts 1920: 10)

This normative strength gave it political value, which meant that a wide range of actors sought to attach their projects to it. In this regard, Ivor Brown caustically remarked: ‘Everyone in these days, except a few honest unbending junkers in each country, makes at least a superficial claim to be the true supporter of Democracy’ (I. Brown 1920: 18–19). He was pessimistic about the consequences of this expansion in democracy’s meaning: ‘The word [democracy] has come to mean nothing; or rather it means so much that it means nothing at all’ (I. Brown 1920: v). A similar judgement was reached by J. S. Fulton and C. R. Morris, who noted that while the war had been fought in democracy’s name, ‘if the question had been pressed what precisely this “democracy” was or what it meant, it is doubtful whether a satisfactory answer would have been forthcoming’ (Fulton and Morris 1935: 1). This illustrative sample of the enormous literature on democracy from the interwar years indicates how democracy’s centrality in political discourse meant
that it became much more debated, contested and actively employed by various political actors, a far cry from matters a century before when it had been studiously avoided except for labelling opponents.

The normative strength of democracy was further reflected in the considerable expansion of democratic institutions across Europe. Suffrage was extended in many of the older democracies, with women gaining the vote for the first time in some countries. Most of the successor states to the fallen Romanov, Habsburg and Hohenzollern empires sought to institute democratic government. This was the peak of what Samuel Huntington identified as democracy’s ‘first wave’ (Huntington 1993: 16–17), as democratic institutions spread across eastern Europe. As Nancy Bermeo observes, ‘the interwar years were a watershed for democracy and for democratic theory. Never before had so many citizens in so many nations been accorded so many formal rights…. In 1920, 26 out of 28 European states were parliamentary democracies’ (Bermeo 2003: 21). This was a drastic change compared with a few decades earlier when only a handful of democracies had existed. In the words of Michael Mann, ‘liberal democracy seemed the coming, modern ideal. The sole deviant case, the Soviet Union, actually claimed to be more genuinely democratic’ (Mann 2004: 38).

The expansion of democracy after the First World War represented – at that point in time – the greatest singular extension of this form of rule, but the movement was broad, not deep. While democracy may have been the ruling ideology, this in itself did not create the political, economic and social conditions necessary to allow for successful democratisation. With the benefit of hindsight and findings from the comparative politics literature on the topic, it is clear that most of these countries lacked the preconditions that make democratisation a likely and sustainable prospect.

It is also important to appreciate the magnitude and intractability of the problems governments faced in the interwar years. The devastation wrought by the First World War, followed by the Great Depression and the heightened class conflict that ensued, created and exacerbated fundamental political, economic and social tensions. Even in countries that had the longest experiences with democracy its prospects were far from certain. And those that had recently adopted democratic institutions lacked the political experience and democratic culture that would enable them to manage when the economic situation worsened. Furthermore, the strongly cultural, nationalist understanding of self-determination
that emerged from the war would prove much less compatible with democracy than had initially been assumed. As Mark Thompson observes, ‘aside from the problem of nations not closely matching state boundaries, excessive emphasis on nation-building often encouraged the rise of extreme nationalism that was unfavourable for the development of democratic government, to put it mildly’ (Thompson 2002: 21). Simply put, these were hardly auspicious conditions for inaugurating new democratic regimes. As the political and economic climate darkened during the 1920s, many countries abandoned their experiments with democracy. The result was what Huntington identified as the ‘first reverse wave’: ‘only four of the seventeen countries that adopted democratic institutions between 1910 and 1931 maintained them throughout the 1920s and 1930s’ (Huntington 1993: 17).

The key development in shaping democracy’s fortunes during the interwar years was undoubtedly the Great Depression. The economic turmoil unleashed greatly exacerbated the political and social tensions that had been mostly kept at bay. Economic problems may have been the most important factor causing the tide to turn away from democracy and towards authoritarianism, but ‘material constraints were neither absolute nor unambiguous’ (Berman 1998: 205; see also Bermeo 2003: 22). While all of Europe suffered from the Great Depression, not all of it became authoritarian. A decisive factor was whether political elites – especially conservative ones – chose to abandon democracy in favour of more authoritarian solutions as the political and economic situation worsened (Bermeo 2003: 26–7; Mann 2004: 24–5). A fear of communism and social revolution would prove a powerful force in motivating elites to look for non-democratic alternatives. ‘Right across one-half of Europe, the upper classes turned toward more repressive regimes, believing these could protect themselves against the twin threats of social disorder and the political left’ (Mann 2004: 24–5). In this regard, one of the most significant consequences of the Russian Revolution was that it would provide a foil for rising right-wing extremist parties, and the fears of the left that it engendered would dilute opposition to this growing movement. Most failed to appreciate that fascism represented a far more immediate and substantial threat.

Zara Steiner identifies 1929–33 as the ‘hinge years’, the decisive period that connected ‘the two decades of the inter-war period, the decade of reconstruction and the decade of disintegration’ (Steiner 2007: part 2). This period was bookended on one side by the Wall Street
Crash of 1929, which triggered the Great Depression, and on the other by the ascendance of Adolf Hitler to the German chancellorship on 30 January 1933, which would ultimately put Europe and the world on the path to a war more dreadful than anyone could yet imagine. Following Hitler’s rise to power, ideology would become a more prominent factor in politics, with fascism emerging as a major challenger to democracy. Many of the countries that abandoned democracy did not follow Italy and Germany all the way in adopting fascism, but the ideology still played a significant role in this broader shift. As Marco Tarchi notes, ‘each time a parliamentary democracy collapsed, fascism was evoked by both followers and enemies: sometimes it was really present on the scene, sometimes it was the “silent guest” of the new authoritarian regime, and its phantom excited popular passions’ (Tarchi 2002: 128). Fascism seemingly offered what democracy could not: a set of answers to the political, economic and social problems that beset these countries, combined with decisive leadership and protection from revolution on the left.

The end of the Weimar Republic in Germany, the spread of authoritarianism and fascism throughout eastern Europe, and the considerable difficulties that established democracies faced during the Great Depression, collectively led to a widespread questioning of democracy. Certainly people such as Carl Schmitt had already begun doing so in the 1920s, when he powerfully argued in The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy that there were fatal weaknesses in the way liberalism had reconciled itself with democracy. By the mid-1930s, discussion about the crisis of democratic government was far more widespread, with an explosion of literature on the topic. Writing as Europe lurched towards war, William Rappard observed that ‘today, “popular power”, of which Lord Bryce wrote fifteen years ago that it was “welcomed, extolled, worshipped”, has come to be cursed in some quarters, apologetically defended in others, but questioned and indeed qualified everywhere’ (Rappard 1938: 506). Democracy found itself under attack from both the left and the right. Communists and socialists argued that democracy limited to the political sphere was insufficient, and that it needed to be extended to economic relations. This sentiment was shared by many New Deal liberals and social democrats. Emblematic was John MacMurray’s conclusion that ‘unless we democratize our economic system it will surely strangle our political democracy’ (MacMurray 1943: 38–9). Meanwhile on the right, fascists powerfully argued that
democracy was a weak, ineffectual form of rule, lacking in vitality and purpose. Notably, these were different to the criticisms that had traditionally plagued democracy. As one commentator at the time remarked, ‘democracy has been acquitted of these charges and a new indictment framed’ (Merriam 1939: 63–4). Alfred Zimmern concurred: ‘The issue today is no longer between democracy and the old order. The ancien regime ... has passed away beyond recall.... Democracy today has a new opposition to face’ (Zimmern 1929: 316).

The unique challenge fascism posed could be seen through its relationship with democracy. Compared with conservative doctrines, fascism did not seek the overthrow of popular sovereignty; rather, it understood it in a thoroughly exclusionary manner. In his attack on parliamentary democracy, Schmitt was clear that fascism was ‘certainly antiliberal but not necessarily antidemocratic’ (Schmitt 1985: 16). In making this claim, he asserted that ‘every actual democracy rests on the principle that not only are equals equal but unequals will not be treated equally. Democracy requires, therefore, first homogeneity and second – if the need arises – elimination or eradication of heterogeneity’ (Schmitt 1985: 9). Fascism adopted an extreme and exclusionary version of nationalism. Through such logic, popular sovereignty was not abandoned but perverted and radicalised. This also illustrates that while fascism had backward-looking elements, it was a thoroughly modern doctrine. As Michael Mann notes, ‘the combination of modern nationalism and statism was to turn democratic aspirations on their head, into authoritarian regimes seeking to “cleanse” minorities and opponents from the nation’ (Mann 2004: 2).

Another way in which fascism refashioned popular elements was through its mobilisation of the people. Indeed, democratic mechanisms played an important role in fascists achieving power. Most infamously, the rapid electoral success of the Nazi party in Germany paved the way for Hitler’s ascension to the chancellorship. In fascism, the people were not removed from politics, but controlled and channelled. They were sceptical of elections, believing that ‘popular sovereignty must be expressed “intuitively” through the fascist party and its leader’ (Passmore 2002: 29). Again, this was different from traditional dismissals of democracy, in which conservatives had wanted the people to play no part. Instead, fascism harnessed and mobilised the people for essentially non-democratic ends. Writing at the time, John Dewey observed the uniqueness of this phenomenon: ‘For practically the first time in
human history, totalitarian states exist claiming to rest upon the active consent of the governed’ (Dewey 1939: 131–2). In this sense, while the fascists strongly challenged the Versailles settlement, the doctrine of popular sovereignty it enshrined was largely accepted, albeit reinterpreted in an extreme and exclusionary manner.

Ruefully remembering the optimism surrounding democracy after the First World War, John Hobson recalled that ‘the tide of history seemed firmly set towards democracy, nor was there any reason to suspect that it would turn’ (J. Hobson 1934: 4). Yet, as Hobson was well aware, the tide did turn. Merely decades after Wilsonian ideals appeared triumphant, democracy’s future was in question. As Samuel Huntington noted, ‘the war fought to make the world safe for democracy seemed instead to have … unleashed social movements from the Right and the Left intent on destroying it’ (Huntington 1984: 196). Democracy went from being the harbinger of a more peaceful and prosperous world to being derided as a weak and feeble form of rule soon to be placed in the dustbin of history. The loss of faith in democracy was widespread, and the consequences would be profound. Reflecting on the way democracy was increasingly abandoned and fascism was embraced, Hans Kohn regretfully observed that ‘never before had mankind been so ready to betray itself’ (Kohn 1942: 242).

WORLD WAR TWO: FROM THE FLAMES TO THE FUTURE

During the 1930s the international order was challenged by the increasingly aggressive foreign policies of Germany, Italy and Japan. The League of Nations was exposed as ineffectual and few countries seemed ready to defend the Versailles settlement. On a more basic level, there was a failure to recognise the kind of threat Hitler posed. Democratic statesmen presumed they were playing the same game, mistakenly thinking that all sides would prefer to avoid war (Steiner 2011: 1051). With the memories of the Great War still fresh in people’s minds, there was little appetite in democracies for more conflict. Writing at the time, Emery Reves suggested that

All the mistakes and blunders committed during the past two fatal decades by the democratic governments were justified by the argument that only by accepting such acts could the democratic peoples preserve their precious peace. We had no policy, no
ideals, no purpose, save one – to prevent shooting. We wanted nothing but peace. So the war came. (Reves 1943: 51)

While a strong popular desire to avoid another war was significant, another reason democracies were slow to appreciate the threat posed by Hitler was that their judgement was clouded by an overriding fear of communism (Mann 2012a: 433–6). At the time Ramsay Muir suggested that ‘the racial fanaticism of the Germans, the Japanese, and (in a less degree) the Italians, is far more dangerous to the peace of the world than the doctrinaire fanaticism of the Russians’, but this position was not commonly held (Muir 1939: 2). Much more representative was Neville Chamberlain’s mistaken opinion: ‘I cannot believe that she [Russia] has the same aims and objects that we have or any sympathy with democracy as such’ (quoted in Mann 2012a: 435). While fears of communism did not lead the countries of western and northern Europe to abandon democratic government, as in eastern Europe, it did prevent them from reaching an alliance with the Soviet Union that might have forestalled or limited the conflict.

Hitler’s dreams of war were finally fulfilled when Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa responded by declaring war on Germany in the days that followed. While this was a grouping of democratic states, they were not acting in democracy’s defence. The world had stood by at Munich and accepted Hitler’s dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, one of the few countries in the region that had stayed democratic, before going to war over Poland, a country that had earlier succumbed to authoritarian rule. Meanwhile, the United States remained firmly wedded to its strict policy of isolation. If it had been primarily concerned about defending democracy and liberal values, ‘World War II was a war that should have engaged the United States from its outbreak in Europe in 1939’ (Hagan and Bickerton 2007: 118). Yet as Hitler went on the attack, few were ready to mount an adequate defence of the beleaguered form of democracy.

The remarkable speed and ease with which Germany conquered much of Europe only reinforced the image of democracy as feeble and ineffectual. This was especially the case with the stunning collapse of France, which surrendered to Germany on 22 June 1940. The narrative that emerged to explain this defeat – la décadence – pointed towards the general malaise the country had had fallen into under a divided,
impotent political class who embodied all the perceived failings of
democratic government. Peter Jackson summarises this account:

A bankrupt regime, in which parliamentary politics and narrow
self-interest took priority over community and a spirit of collective
sacrifice for the national good, the Third Republic was unable to
marshal the energies of the nation in preparation for the inevitable
war with Hitler’s Germany. (Peter Jackson 2006: 872)

The shocking capitulation of France marked an ignominious end to the
much-derided democracy of the Third Republic. Given this remark-
able contrast between the weakness of democracy and the strength of
fascism, ‘opinion in Europe at the end of the 1930s was by no means
opposed to the idea of an authoritarian reconstruction of the con-
tinent under German leadership’ (Mazower 1998). Most had yet to
comprehend the true nature of the Nazi regime, and Hitler’s energetic
leadership looked much more impressive than the indecision of the
democracies.

By the end of 1940 Germany dominated Europe, with the United
Kingdom left as the last major line of defence, bruised and battered but
not defeated after successfully holding off the Luftwaffe. The greatly
weakened position of the remaining democratic countries combating
Hitler was forcing the US president and his country to reconsider its
strict policy of isolationism. In a radio broadcast on 29 December 1940,
Franklin Roosevelt cautioned his fellow citizens about the growing
threat they faced: ‘The Axis not merely admits but proclaims that there
can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy of government
and our philosophy of government’ (Roosevelt 1940). He argued that
America’s best chance to avoid war was to provide further military
supplies to the British and others resisting, and famously announced
that in ‘democracy’s fight against world conquest’ the United States
‘must be the great arsenal of democracy’ (Roosevelt 1940). This broad-
cast was followed a few days later by Roosevelt’s 1941 State of the
Union address, the influential ‘Four Freedoms’ speech, in which he
warned ‘that the democratic way of life is at this moment being directly
assailed in every part of the world’ (Roosevelt 1941a). In response he
would offer a particularly spirited defence of this form of government.
In making the case for the United States to abandon its isolationism,
Roosevelt recalled how the country came to enter the First World War
only after ‘the American people began to visualize what the downfall of democratic nations might mean to our own democracy’ (Roosevelt 1941a). The president was clear that the United States now faced a similar situation, observing that ‘the future and the safety of our country and of our democracy are overwhelmingly involved in events far beyond our borders’ (Roosevelt 1940). In these addresses Roosevelt presented the war as a conflict between democracy and authoritarianism, and warned that by refusing to participate the United States was putting its own democracy – and the democratic movement as a whole – in grave danger.

Roosevelt argued that this battle against authoritarianism would not only be waged in Europe, and that the United States must continue to strengthen democracy at home. He announced in straightforward, but inspirational, language what a democracy must provide:

There is nothing mysterious about the foundations of a healthy and strong democracy. The basic things expected by our people of their political and economic systems are simple. They are: equality of opportunity for youth and for others; jobs for those who can work; security for those who need it; the ending of special privilege for the few; the preservation of civil liberties for all; the enjoyment of the fruits of scientific progress in a wider and constantly rising standard of living. These are the simple, basic things that must never be lost sight of in the turmoil and unbelievable complexity of our modern world. (Roosevelt 1941a)

Here Roosevelt powerfully distilled the most basic liberties that give democracy value and made it worth defending. The president went on to outline in further detail the ‘four essential human freedoms’ – freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear – which should form the basis for a world that ‘is the very antithesis of the so-called new order of tyranny which the dictators seek to create’ (Roosevelt 1941a). It is worth noting that in offering this impressive defence of democracy Roosevelt was very conscious of critiques from the left about the need to democratise socio-economic relations, and presented an expansive programme that went beyond negative liberties.

At a time when democracy was on the retreat everywhere, and the Axis countries were reaching the apex of their powers, Roosevelt’s
'Four Freedoms' speech offered a robust, visionary defence of democratic government. He recognised the social and economic tensions that countries were struggling with, but his response was not to question democracy further. Instead he presented a clear restatement of what democracy should be, and reaffirmed the belief that it is the form of government most capable of providing the fundamental freedoms desired by all humans. Responding to Hitler’s apocalyptic plans for a world ordered by race and brute force, Roosevelt offered democracy, which represented ‘the greater conception – the moral order’ and the ultimate line of defence against the Nazis’ dystopia (Roosevelt 1941a). This strong defence of democracy also distinguished him from Winston Churchill, who spoke little of it, instead emphasising the unity of the British Empire under the monarchy. While Churchill’s moving oratory is justly celebrated, it is the words of his American counterpart that were more impressive when it came to democracy. Unlike Wilson, whose pledge in the First World War to make ‘the world safe for democracy’ would reframe how the conflict was understood, Roosevelt was hardly innovating in observing that Hitler and the Axis powers were attacking ‘the whole pattern of democratic life’ (Roosevelt 1941a). What made Roosevelt’s intervention significant is that he provided a spirited, but ultimately humble and visionary, defence of democracy during its darkest days.

One of the most fateful developments in determining the outcome of the war occurred on 22 June 1941, when Germany commenced Operation Barbarossa and invaded the USSR. The Soviets would ultimately bear the heaviest costs of the conflict, with total war deaths estimated between 23.9 million and 25.8 million (Harrison 2003). It was their ability to withstand and repel the Germans that would prove decisive in defeating the Axis powers. On hearing the news of the German invasion, Churchill immediately pledged British support to the Soviets. He was conscious that this made for an odd ideological alliance, stating that ‘no one has been a more consistent opponent of Communism than I have for the last twenty-five years.… But all this fades away before the spectacle which is now unfolding’ (Churchill 1941). The British prime minister made clear that this would not alter the resolve of the democratic powers:

If Hitler imagines that his attack on Soviet Russia will cause the slightest division of aims or slackening of effort in the great
democracies who are resolved upon his doom, he is woefully mis-
taken. On the contrary, we shall be fortified and encouraged in our
efforts to rescue mankind from his tyranny. (Churchill 1941)

In a radio broadcast on 3 July 1941, Joseph Stalin thanked Churchill for his offer of assistance. Like his British counterpart, the Soviet leader put aside ideological differences in the face of a common danger:

In this war of liberation we shall not be alone…. Our war for the freedom of our country will merge with the struggle of the peoples of Europe and America for their independence, for democratic lib-
erties. It will be a united front of the peoples standing for freedom and against enslavement and threats of enslavement by Hitler’s fascist armies. (Stalin 1941)

It is notable that Stalin explicitly declared that the Soviets were fight-
ing to protect ‘democratic liberties’ and were ‘standing for freedom’. This proved true: fundamental to democracy’s survival during the Second World War was its alliance with its other great ideological rival, communism.

These developments were not enough for the United States to abandon its isolationist policy, although it deepened its support of those resisting the Axis powers. Reflecting this increased involvement, on 14 August 1941 the Americans and the British jointly issued the Atlantic Charter, which set out their aims for the post-war international order. Despite being agreed upon by the two leading democratic powers, the document offered rather tepid support for democracy. Notably, it did not mention the term, the third point instead stating that the countries ‘respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self gov-
ernment restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them’ (Roosevelt and Churchill 1941). This was not a defence of democratic government, but of the principle of popular sovereignty that had been enshrined at Versailles. Indeed, Churchill was not even happy about this limited reference to self-determination, emphasising that it did not apply to the British Empire and later trying to propose that the charter was an ‘interim and partial statement of war aims designed to reassure all countries of our righteous purpose and not the complete structure which we should build after the victory’ (quoted in Prazmowska 1995: 72).
Yet the Atlantic Charter would become an important basis for Allied war aims, gaining support from the Inter-Allied Council a month later. In acknowledging its agreement, the USSR offered a clear defence of the understanding of self-determination that Churchill had been so loath to include:

The Soviet Union defends the right of every nation to the independence and territorial integrity of its country and its right to establish such a social order and to choose such a form of government as it deems opportune and necessary for the better promotion of its economic and cultural prosperity. (Inter-Allied Council 1941)

While the Atlantic Charter failed to offer an explicit defence of democratic government, it was still understood as an agreement forged by two leading democracies against their non-democratic foes. This is how Roosevelt presented it to Congress, explaining that it was part of US policy to provide assistance ‘to the democracies which East and West are waging war against dictatorships’ (Roosevelt 1941c).

The United States was finally forced out of isolation following the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent declaration of war by Germany. In responding to these events and declaring war on Japan on 8 December 1941, Roosevelt made no promises about ‘making the world safe for democracy’, as his predecessor once did. He instead emphasised the gravity of the threat the Allies faced:

Never before has there been a greater challenge to life, liberty, and civilization…. Rapid and united effort by all the peoples of the world who are determined to remain free will insure a world victory of the forces of justice and of righteousness over the forces of savagery and of barbarism. (Roosevelt 1941b)

The Axis powers now faced the combined economic and military might of the United States, the Soviet Union and the British Empire. While the outcome of the conflict was still far from inevitable, this certainly created a material imbalance that greatly favoured the alliance of democratic and communist powers. Democracy would emerge more clearly as a war aim at the Casablanca conference held in early 1943, which was attended by Roosevelt and
Churchill. In calling for the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers, the Allies – which now referred to themselves as the United Nations – explicitly identified their cause with democracy:

In the years of the American and French revolutions the fundamental principle guiding our democracies was established. The cornerstone of our whole democratic edifice was the principle that from the people and the people alone flows the authority of government. It is one of our war aims, as expressed in the Atlantic Charter, that the conquered populations of today be again the masters of their destiny. (United Nations 1943)

Roosevelt and Churchill met again at the end of the year in Tehran, together with Stalin. Once more, democracy was identified as a central part of their war platform, and they announced that they would win and establish an ‘enduring peace’, which would be constructed and maintained by ‘a world family of Democratic Nations’ (Churchill et al. 1943). While these declarations explicitly referenced democracy, what was meant was democracy as _forma imperii_: popular sovereignty or self-determination. This was primarily a war for the independence of states, rather than to advance a specific form of government.

Democracy would again assume a prominent place in the war aims announced at the Yalta conference in February 1945, where Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin discussed plans for the post-war order as the defeat of the Nazis grew closer. The declaration stated that liberated peoples should be free ‘to create democratic institutions of their own choice’ (Churchill et al. 1945). This was taken to mean popular sovereignty, not democratic government, directly referencing the conservative Atlantic Charter: ‘the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live’ (Churchill et al. 1945). While the declaration pledged to assist liberated and former Axis states with ‘the earliest possible establishment through free elections of Governments responsive to the will of the people’ (Churchill et al. 1945), the Soviets ensured that the language of the declaration was sufficiently vague that it need not entail liberal democratic government. Stalin was clear in his demand for a sphere of influence in the East, which was already being established as the Red Army moved across eastern Europe towards Berlin. Likewise at the Potsdam conference in July–August 1945, democracy was identified as being a central part of post-war plans for Germany, with the
aim being ‘to prepare for the eventual reconstruction of German political life on a democratic basis and for eventual peaceful cooperation in international life by Germany’, and with the end of war with Japan in sight they sought ‘the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people’ (Three Heads of Government 1945).

Ultimately this was not a war for democracy, but one against fascism. This was reflected in the grand alliance between the democratic powers and the Soviet Union, which together stood opposed to fascism and the German attempt to radically reorder Europe on the basis of racial hierarchy. The Nazi vision for Europe ‘promised life to the Germans, an uncertain and precarious existence to most Europeans and extermination to the Jews’ (Mazower 1998). What Japan offered Asia was little better. Certain human rights, and the need for greater economic and social equality, emerged as important themes that the United Nations claimed to be defending, but it was difficult to square these with the realities of an American democracy that remained racially segregated, European powers that were unwilling to abandon their empires, and the totalitarian nature of Stalin’s USSR. The moral rectitude of the Allied cause was further sullied by doing little to try to stop the ‘final solution’, the pitiless wartime policies of Stalin and the extreme brutality of the conflict in the Pacific, which ended with the use of nuclear weapons against Japan. The victory of the Allied powers may have laid the foundation for the development of a liberal international order that would advance democracy and human rights, but the immediate virtue of their cause lay in the much worse fate they prevented.

Allied forces moved across Italy and Germany in April 1945. Mussolini was killed on 28 April, Hitler committed suicide on 30 April, and Germany surrendered unconditionally on 8 May 1945, bringing the war in Europe to a close. The conflict in the Pacific would continue until August. Following the Soviet declaration of war against Japan and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Second World War finally came to an end with the Japanese formally surrendering on 2 September 1945. This concluded a conflict that caused death and destruction on a scale the world had never witnessed, with an estimated 50–80 million deaths. Europe lay in ruins, the status of its empires was unclear following Japan’s rampage through Asia, and the international order constructed at Versailles had been thoroughly destroyed. The Axis powers were decisively beaten, and with that defeat, Europe’s terrible experiment with fascism reached an end. The
United States and the Soviet Union, embodying the opposed ideologies of democracy and communism, emerged from the fighting as the most powerful countries still standing.

The final outcome of the Second World War was not determined by any special properties of the United States or its democratic allies, but by the force of numbers on their side and the self-destructiveness of the fascists. As Michael Mann notes, ‘fascism’s enemies did not win because they were more virtuous, or because civilization inevitably defeats barbarism, but because there were more of them, and they were better armed’ (Mann 2012a: 345). Germany and Japan were medium-sized countries with limited resources, which meant they simply did not have the same margin for error or capacity to mobilise as the countries aligned against them (Gat 2009: 4–8). And the hierarchical, exclusionary nationalist worldview of the fascists greatly restricted the possibility for forging the alliances that would have been necessary to overcome this material imbalance. It is also necessary to emphasise that the defeat of fascism was made possible through the massive sacrifices of the Soviets, who bore the heaviest losses in the conflict. Communism ensured fascism’s defeat and democracy’s survival. Now contestation would continue between these two remaining ideologies.

THE ‘LONG WAR’ CONTINUES

The optimism that defined the periods after the end of the First World War and the Cold War stands in stark contrast to the sombre tone that followed the Second World War. The immense scale of death and destruction, the brutality of the fighting on all sides, the horrific reality of the Nazis’ ‘final solution’, and the increasing ideological tension between the erstwhile democratic and communist allies, meant that this was hardly a time for celebrating victory. Rather, as Hannah Arendt wrote in 1950,

two world wars in one generation, separated by an uninterrupted chain of local wars and revolutions, followed by no peace treaty for the vanquished and no respite for the victor, have ended in the anticipation of a third World War between the two remaining world powers. This moment of anticipation is like the calm that settles after all hopes have died. (Arendt 1973: vii)
There was a keen awareness of how close civilisation had come to complete collapse and in democracy’s complicity in this. The challenge was twofold: to build an international order more durable than the shaky structure assembled at Versailles, and to find a way of strengthening democratic government so that it could manage the massive political, economic and social dislocation caused by the war. Utopian dreams had been replaced by a chastened worldview, deeply aware of the failings of the previous decades and the danger posed by the standoff between the democratic and communist powers.

Democracy had barely survived two world wars; there was limited faith it could survive a third. In comparison to assumptions about popular rule being a natural condition that flourishes simply through the removal of restraints and the protection of negative liberties, there was a strong appreciation of the constructedness of democracy. The recognition of the central role economic and social problems had played in the decline of interwar democracy, combined with the onset of the Cold War and renewed fears of communism, provided strong impetus to reform and strengthen democratic government.

The lesson taken from Great Depression was the need to revise the relationship between the political and economic spheres. Sheri Berman explains that after the war

people began to perceive states as the guardian of society, and economic imperatives were often forced to take a back seat to social ones. The result was the reconciliation of things long viewed as incompatible: a well-functioning capitalist system, democracy, and social stability. (Berman 2006: 17)

This manifested itself in the development of the social welfare state, with governments playing a much more active role in limiting the destructive tendencies of capitalism and providing basic socio-economic goods for their citizens. The success of these innovations ensured that democracy survived and subsequently thrived.

There was a similar awareness that the mistakes of the interwar years could not be repeated when it came to rebuilding international society. In his stinging rebuke of liberal internationalism, E. H. Carr powerfully argued that ‘the utopia of 1919 was hollow and without substance’, as it had mistakenly believed that ‘the unruly flow of international politics could be canalized into a set of logically impregnable
abstract formulae inspired by the doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal democracy’ (Carr 2001: 31, 207). Carr overstated his case: the failure of the Versailles settlement was not simply a result of misguided utopianism; it also reflected the intractability of the political, economic and social problems that the First World War had let loose. In comparison, the conditions in 1945 were more amenable to compromise and developing a stable order (Clark 2005: 149–50). Reflecting this, liberal ideas were not completely abandoned, but refashioned, qualified and updated. A new international organisation was built out of the failed League of Nations, the principles of popular sovereignty and non-intervention were reaffirmed, while the development of ‘embedded liberalism’ reflected an awareness of the need to alter the relationship between the political and economic spheres, based on the belief that ‘multilateralism and the quest for domestic stability were coupled and even conditioned by one another’ (Ruggie 1982: 398).

The ideological tensions between the democratic and communist countries meant the international society founded would be strongly pluralist, built more on common purpose than shared values. In this regard, G. John Ikenberry has argued that there were essentially two international orders that developed. One was a global settlement based on the balance of power between East and West, and ‘the other was aimed at creating an open, stable, and managed order among the Western democracies’ (Ikenberry 2011: 139). Within this context, the relevance of democratic government to the post-war settlement was strongly tempered by the realities of the emerging bipolar system. As Tony Smith explains, ‘America’s most basic political demand for the postwar world was that it be composed of independent (that is self-governing or self-determining) states; that these governments should be democratic was an important, but second-order, concern’ (T. Smith 1994: 118). While there was little space for advancing democratic government within the wider global settlement, in the West a more solidarist order developed in which democracy would play an important role. This was a more complex vision that went beyond simply equating democratic government with peaceful behaviour. Rather, this Western settlement ‘sought to calibrate the requirements of international order with the domestic political and socio-economic arrangements deemed necessary to support it’ (Clark 2005: 131). In this regard, the Marshall Plan and specifically the democratisation of Germany and Japan offered sustained examples of the extent to which the American-led Western
order was concerned with democratic stability among its members. It was based on the recognition that the source of the conflict had been the domestic makeup of the Axis powers, and thus ‘international order depended on the ability of national political orders to produce democracy’ (Rasmussen 2003: 91).

At the heart of the new international order founded was the United Nations, the successor to the discredited League of Nations. Democracy was noticeably absent from its foundational treaty, the UN Charter. In this regard, Edward Newman and Roland Rich offer the reminder that despite the UN’s recent ‘penchant for democracy’, ‘it is not one of the stated purposes of the United Nations to foster democracy, to initiate the process of democratization, or to legitimize other actors’ efforts in this field’ (Newman and Rich 2004: 5). This absence can be partly explained by increasing ideological tensions; it was largely under Soviet pressure that democracy was not mentioned in any of the founding documents (Archibugi 1995: 245). The Soviets were hardly alone on this point, however. The drafters of the UN Charter envisaged an organisation with universal membership, thereby overcoming one of the most serious flaws of the League, which had suffered from key states not participating. Ensuring universality meant avoiding stringent membership criteria. There was little support for France’s proposal that states should demonstrate their peace-loving nature through the nature of their domestic constitutions, or Chile’s suggestion that members should ‘love the democratic system’. The British proposal was instead adopted, which became Article 4(1) of the UN Charter, and determined that membership would be open to all ‘peace-loving states’ (United Nations 1945). This allowed for ‘maximum flexibility’ while still establishing ‘some, however superfluous, conditions for membership’ (Haack 2011: 42).

The UN Charter may not have made reference to democracy, but it did notably commence with the phrase ‘we the peoples of the United Nations’. This was inserted at the insistence of the United States, who consciously sought for it to echo their own constitution and meant it to convey popular sovereignty (Haack 2011: 43). This built on the minimal-ist understanding of popular sovereignty as self-determination that had been instituted at Versailles. Article 1(2) clearly identified that one of the core purposes of the new organisation was ‘to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples’ (United Nations 1945). The UN Charter
reinforced the much more limited conception of self-determination that had developed during the First World War. Self-determination came to essentially mean little more than independence or external sovereignty, with its stronger connections to popular power lost. Through this process, it ‘moved further away from its original philosophical meaning and became a concrete legal concept applicable in a specific context’ (Haack 2011: 49). The UN Charter enshrined the principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention as the foundations of a pluralist international society, Article 2(1) establishing the organisation as ‘based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all of its members’ (United Nations 1945). What this meant was conveyed in Article 2(4) – ‘all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state’ – and Article 2(7), which pledged that ‘nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state’ (United Nations 1945). This effectively confirmed the break that had occurred between democracy as *forma imperii*, popular sovereignty, and *forma regiminis*, democratic government. Popular sovereignty understood as self-determination entailed non-intervention, with separate peoples having the sole right to determine what form of government they would live under, democratic or otherwise. While there was now a hegemonic understanding of sovereignty (*forma imperii*), contestation would continue over which was the best form of domestic constitution (*forma regiminis*).

Democracy would play an important role in the ideological contest between East and West. The political potency of the concept meant that both sides tried to lay claim to it. Writing at the time, Ithiel de Sola Pool observed: ‘Now, when there is a world-wide two-party struggle going on, it is clearly impossible for either party to yield the highly valued symbol of “democracy” to the other’ (UNESCO 1951: 330). In this regard, the communists were unwilling to cede control of this important concept and contested democracy being associated exclusively with the West. In 1947 Stalin talked proudly of building a ‘new, Soviet democracy, which rejects all, direct or indirect, inequality of citizens, sexes, races and nations, and ensures the right to work and the right to equal pay for equal work’ (Stalin 1947). In the same year, Andrei Zhdanov, chairman of the Soviet of the Union, described the emerging Cold War in the following terms:
The international arena [is split] into two major camps: the imperialist and anti-democratic camp, on the one hand, and the anti-imperialist and democratic camp, on the other. The principal driving force of the imperialist camp is the USA. Allied with it are Great Britain and France … The second camp is based on the USSR and the new democracies. (Quoted in Graebner 1963: x–xi)

The USSR presented its regime as a ‘people’s democracy’ against the liberal-democratic model championed by the United States and its allies. The Soviet version represented the ‘highest’ or ‘perfect’ type of democracy, while its satellites in eastern Europe were ‘democracy of a special type’ that were transitioning towards the people’s democracy of the USSR (Guins 1950). In this regard, N. S. Timasheff would observe that ‘among the weapons used by the foe there is perhaps none more irritating to the Americans than the assertion that the Soviets enjoy real democracy while American democracy is but a ridiculous fake’ (Timasheff 1950: 506). Yet for some it was more than simply an annoyance. Hans Kelsen, the influential jurist, warned that ‘a more dangerous adversary than fascism and national socialism is Soviet communism, which is fighting the democratic idea under the disguise of a democratic terminology’ (Kelsen 1955: 1–5).

Certainly Soviet claims to the mantle of democracy may have been a source of frustration or concern, but they were not without substance. In this regard, C. B. Macpherson suggested that both sides had legitimate claims based on democracy understood as a popular sovereignty, in which the indirect consent of the people gave the state a popular basis (Macpherson 1966). Bernard Crick agreed:

How often has one heard: ‘Well, at least the Communists claim to be democratic’? But the real trouble is, of course, that they do not pretend to be democratic. They are democratic. They are democratic in the sound historical sense of a majority actively willing to be ruled in some other way. (Crick 1964: 56)

Furthermore, as noted in previous chapters, historically democracy had been much more closely associated with socialism and communism. Reflecting this heritage, Lenin and the Soviets explicitly drew upon the language of democracy and self-determination during the Russian Revolution. Echoing his predecessor, Stalin did not reject democracy,
but made a clear distinction between ‘capitalist democracy, the democracy of the exploiting minority, based on the restriction of the rights of the exploited majority and directed against this majority’ and ‘proletarian democracy, the democracy of the exploited majority, based on the restriction of the rights of the exploiting minority and directed against this minority’ (Stalin 1953: ch. 4). Whereas the Western understanding of democracy was primarily based on the political sphere, the Soviet interpretation emphasised control of the economic realm for determining the possibility of ‘true’ democracy. Timasheff explained this logic: ‘In communist society, economic power belongs to the people; ergo, political power belongs to the people; ergo, a communist society is democratic by its very nature’ (Timasheff 1950: 509).

Conceptual contestation over democracy was one facet of the more fundamental division between East and West that defined international relations after the Second World War. While this bipolar contest continued, principles of international legitimacy were minimalist, with an emphasis on sovereign independence and equality (Reus-Smit 2005b). This was reinforced through decolonisation, which globalised the understanding of self-determination that had emerged at Versailles. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1960, announced that ‘all peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status’ and reaffirmed the pluralist principles of ‘equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of all States, and respect for the sovereign rights of all peoples’ (United Nations 1960). While decolonisation was a significant development for the advancement of popular sovereignty, its immediate impact on the spread of democratic government was much less salutary. As Samuel Huntington notes, ‘the decolonization of Africa led to the largest multiplication of independent authoritarian governments in history’ (Huntington 1993: 21). This provided clear empirical proof that Woodrow Wilson’s assumption that the expansion of popular sovereignty would lead to an expansion of democratic government was mistaken.

Cold War tensions, combined with decolonised states reacting to years of European interference, ensured that international legitimacy was defined in terms of the external characteristics of states, rather than their internal makeup. In sum, ‘it is possible to see the period 1945–1989 as one marked by a rejection of standards of civilisation,
culture and democracy as criteria for membership of the international community’ (Simpson 2004: 272). While this observation is accurate on a global scale, during this same timeframe democratic government was confirmed as a defining characteristic of the Western order. Attempts by the Eastern bloc to present their regimes as ‘true’ democracies appeared increasingly strained and implausible. This meant that when the Cold War came to an end, the ‘American-led open-democratic political order . . . was extended to the larger global system’ (Ikenberry 2011: 161). The model of democracy that had developed in the West would emerge as the international standard.

THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD

With the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 the ‘long war’ finally came to an end. The great communist experiment disintegrated under the weight of its internal contradictions, which had been amplified by the increasingly evident gap in living standards with the democratic West. The ideological contestation that had defined so much of the twentieth century had reached a conclusion, replaced by a remarkable consensus around liberal democracy. President George H. W. Bush confidently announced the change taking place: ‘The eclipse of communism is only one half of the story of our time. The other is the ascendancy of the democratic idea’ (G. H. W. Bush 2009: 53). The academic version of this argument was presented most forcefully by Francis Fukuyama:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama 1989: 3)

His confidence may have been excessive, but it was representative of the widespread optimism at the time. With communism following fascism into the dustbin of history, the ideational conflict that had defined much of the twentieth century was over. The answer to how states should govern themselves had seemingly been answered.

Only weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev would meet in Malta and declare an end to the Cold War.
The Soviet leader made it clear that the USSR would now allow the countries of eastern Europe to freely decide by themselves what political system to adopt, and he openly recognised that they were moving in a democratic direction. Gorbachev effectively raised the ideological white flag, stating that it was right to let the ‘people decide for themselves which God, figuratively speaking, to worship’ (Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation 1989: 32). Yet he strongly cautioned against presenting these dramatic changes as the victory of ‘Western values’.

In the ensuing discussion the US secretary of state, James Baker, identified self-determination and free elections as ‘Western values’, leading his Russian counterpart to respond: ‘Why are democracy, openness, [the free] market “Western values?”’ Bush answered by suggesting that ‘today it is really much clearer than it was, say, 20 years ago that we share these values with you’. Both sides concurred that the phrase ‘Western values’ would risk reigniting ideological confrontation and instead agreed that it was more appropriate to describe the political changes taking place as being based on shared ‘democratic values’ (Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation 1989: 30–3). The sharp ideological differences that had once separated the former adversaries melted away, with consensus around democracy as the political model people sought.

Democracy was a central component of the ‘new world order’ that was emerging from the ruins of the Cold War. In June 1990 the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe’s ‘Copenhagen Document’, described by Thomas Buergenthal as ‘a democratic manifesto’ (Buergenthal 1990), announced that ‘the development of societies based on pluralistic democracy and the rule of law’ is a prerequisite ‘for progress in setting up the lasting order of peace, security, justice and co-operation’ (OSCE 1990b: 2). This laid the foundations for the CSCE summit held in Paris in November 1990. Philip Bobbitt and Ian Clark identify this meeting as a pivotal moment, effectively establishing legitimacy principles for the post-Cold War international order (Bobbitt 2002; Clark 2005). Democracy was at the heart of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which sought to confirm a ‘new era of democracy, peace and unity’. The signatories declared that they would seek to ‘build and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations’ (OSCE 1990a: 3). Democracy was understood in a very specific manner, with the charter providing the following definition: ‘democracy, with its representative and pluralist character, entails
accountability to the electorate, the obligation of public authorities to comply with the law and justice administered impartially’ (OSCE 1990a: 3). Here the emphasis was on democracy as *forma regiminis*, explicitly identifying a certain form of domestic constitution – the Western liberal democratic model – as a marker of legitimate statehood.

The extensive legitimacy principles of the Paris charter were in stark contrast to the pluralist ethos of the original UN Charter, which strongly emphasised sovereign independence and non-intervention. The post-1945 international order confirmed popular sovereignty in the form of self-determination meaning external independence, but it was consciously agnostic about domestic constitutions. It could not have been otherwise during the ideological standoff between East and West. Now that the Cold War was over, legitimacy principles were extended to domestic regime type, with democracy become the defining feature of ‘what a state should look like and how it should act’ (Paris 2002: 654). Put simply, after 1989 the ballot box became the symbol of legitimate statehood. According to Clark, ‘the evidence for the promulgation of a more pronounced set of domestic legitimacy tests since the end of the cold war is overwhelming’, and these tests are primarily ‘couched in terms of conformity to democratic standards of good governance’ (Clark 2005: 174). A particularly clear example of this is arguments proposed by Thomas Franck and other jurists that a ‘right’ to democracy was ‘becoming a requirement of international law, applicable to all and implemented through global standards, with the help of regional and international organizations’ (Franck 1992). The idea that sovereignty may be conditional based on whether the state is democratic or not represents a significant break with the UN Charter and the pluralist order it instituted.

A key assumption shaping the development of post-Cold War legitimacy principles is that the domestic constitution of states plays a fundamental role in determining their international behaviour. Specifically, whether they are democratic is considered of great relevance to international society due to the increasingly widespread belief that there is a ‘symbiotic linkage among democracy, human rights and peace’ and that democracy contributes to the advancement of the international community’s ‘most important norm: the right to peace’ (Franck 1992). This thinking could be found in *An Agenda for Peace*, an influential report written by then UN secretary general Boutros Boutros-Ghali: ‘There is an obvious connection between democratic
The rise of democracy practices … and the achievement of true peace and security in any new and stable political order’ (Boutros-Ghali 1992: 16). In the 1994 State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton proposed that ‘the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don’t attack each other’ (Clinton 1994). Underwriting such claims was a growing wave of liberal theorising inspired by Immanuel Kant’s Perpetual Peace that identified the extension of liberal democracy as the key to creating a more progressive and peaceful international order. Piki Ish-Shalom observes that ‘democracy as a cure for international violence was not an exclusive American belief … It swept the democratized world in a process that was initiated in the early 1990s’ (Ish-Shalom 2013: 83). This scholarship was made by, and for, the liberal zeitgeist, reinforcing the belief that democratic states are ‘different’ and ‘better’. And regardless of the validity of these claims, a distilled and simplified version of the thesis became a social fact: many political actors in the United States, and the West more generally, came to talk of democratic peace as if it exists. Adopting this perspective suggests that domestic regime type is of concern for international society as a whole, in that whether states are democratic or not may influence the likelihood of peace and cooperation.

The flipside to the emphasis on democratic government as a standard of legitimacy has been the increasing identification of non-democracies as a threat. Non-democracies have become both behaviourally and ontologically threatening, in so far as what these states are (not democratic) is seen as the source of their problematic behaviour. Thus, democratic India acquiring nuclear weapons has been grudgingly accepted, whereas the risk of Saddam Hussein developing WMD was sufficient to justify war. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that the ‘rogue state’ classification has emerged in the post-Cold War order, as it reflects the emergence of more extensive legitimacy principles based on domestic regime type. A ‘sin’ that has united rogue and pariah states is their undemocratic nature (Geldenhuys 2004: 31–3). Such thinking could be seen with great clarity in the 2002 State of the Union address by President George W. Bush, where a common feature shared by the ‘axis of evil’ was their non-democratic status (G. W. Bush 2002b). In the post-Cold War order ‘democracy’ and ‘rogue regime’ effectively operate as asymmetrical counter-concepts, with the laudable traits of the former mirrored by the problematic nature of the latter. Democracy
has taken on the conceptual characteristics of ‘civilisation’, associated with notions of progress, development, modernisation and a host of other desirable features, whereas ‘rogue regimes’ are presented as dangerous, unstable, backward and violent. Reflecting the asymmetrical nature of this opposition, the features that mark democracies as different and more legitimate also can also justify intervention against non-democratic others (Geis 2013). This increasing push towards a far greater level of socio-political uniformity among states marked ‘the reinvention of a restrictive international society’, with democratic government coming to play a central role in defining standards of international legitimacy (Clark 2005; Clark 2009; C. Hobson 2008a).

This greater concern with the domestic makeup of states in post-Cold War international society has been further reflected in the rise of a much more expansive and assertive democracy promotion agenda. Underlying this shift is a belief in the superiority and greater legitimacy of democracy compared with other regime types. Democracy is seen to offer a host of domestic and international goods: it provides government that is more accountable and less corrupt; there is considerably less likelihood of genocide, extreme violence, famine or economic disaster; human rights and individual freedom are better protected (McFaul 2010: 34–7). Thus, democracy promotion is justified in both moral and instrumental terms, while qualms about the impact of such practices on state sovereignty have been largely discounted. With democracy promotion taken to be a ‘norm’ (McFaul 2004), states that oppose attempts by outsiders to influence the shape of domestic governance structures towards democracy are at best tolerated, but increasingly identified as delinquent. Indeed, that there is now frustration over a ‘backlash’ against democracy promotion – which essentially means resistance against the external interference in the domestic affairs of a state – is illustrative of how widespread and institutionalised these practices have become.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 reinforced and extended this concern with the domestic makeup of states. A consensus quickly emerged that the lack of democratic government in the Middle East was a root cause for the Islamic extremism that now threatened the United States and its allies (C. Hobson 2005). The promotion of democracy came to be seen as a strategic necessity, with liberal arguments being extended to suggest that democratic states are unlikely to breed terrorists or spread WMD. The expansion of democracy to the
Middle East emerged at the heart of the Bush doctrine and the ‘War on Terror’, with the 2002 National Security Strategy announcing the intention of the United States to ‘create a balance of power that favors human freedom’ and that it ‘will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants’ (G. W. Bush 2002a: i). The Bush doctrine revised and extended the Wilsonian tradition by ‘making democracy the guarantee of a country’s good conduct in world affairs, promising peace as a result of regime change, and linking American security internationally to these developments abroad’ (T. Smith 2007). This thinking was most explicitly put into action with the coercive democratisation of Iraq, with the hope that it would trigger a new wave of democratisation across the Middle East. From this perspective, the spread of democracy was desired for defensive, as well as more progressive, reasons.

If the Bush doctrine represented one logical extreme of a concern with the domestic makeup of states, its overwhelming failure has been an important factor in the lessening emphasis on democracy in international society in recent years. The optimism of the 1990s following the ‘victory’ of the West, followed by the increasing pessimism of the 2000s as a result of America’s self-destructive policies, illustrates the extent to which the trajectory of democracy has been shaped – for better or worse – by the United States. While liberals tended to downplay the importance of US power in underwriting the centrality of democracy to the post-Cold War order, this element is now becoming more apparent as the unipolar moment comes to an end. In this regard, Robert Kagan has recently argued that democracy’s fortunes have been closely tied to geopolitics: ‘It should be clear that the prospects for democracy have been much better under the protection of a liberal world order, supported and defended by a democratic superpower or by a collection of democratic great powers’ (Kagan 2015: 30).

The full consequences of China’s remarkable economic development still remain to be seen, but it may entail a shift back towards a more pluralist international order. China has consistently supported strict understandings of state sovereignty and non-intervention, and this is unlikely to change soon. Furthermore, the shift from a unipolar to a bipolar or multipolar balance of power could have an ideational component. Attending China’s ascent has been mounting interest in its politico-economic form, which mixes a liberalised economy with a closed political system that allows for no meaningful political opposition to the ruling Communist Party of China. Committed liberals
remain deeply sceptical about the sustainability of combining economic liberalisation with political closure (Deudney and Ikenberry 2009; Diamond 2014), but there is potential that China may have discovered a more stable balance. Regardless, the remarkable economic development of China is having important demonstration effects. This model of authoritarian capitalism it embodies presents itself as ‘an alternate route to modern development: growth without democracy and progress without freedom’ (Ignatieff 2014). The successes of China’s authoritarian capitalist model, when combined with the problems associated with democracy following America’s failed ‘freedom agenda’ and the 2008 financial crisis, collectively suggest that the overriding concern with domestic regime type in post-Cold War international society will be increasingly diluted.

Given that the considerable expansion of democracy promotion practices in the 1990s was partly predicated on a material and ideational balance of power in favour of liberal democracy, it is unsurprising that this agenda has been increasingly contested as part of the global power realignment now underway. Notable challenges include Hungary under the present rule of prime minister Viktor Orbán, who has been moving his country away from liberal democracy. In 2014 he announced something ‘considered to be a sacrilege in the liberal world order’, namely ‘that a democracy is not necessarily liberal’ and that there are alternate political-economic routes to success, as countries like China and Singapore demonstrated (Orbán 2014). And as relations have worsened between Russia and the West, Vladimir Putin has gone from talking of ‘sovereign democracy’ to questioning whether the United States can call itself democratic given its complex electoral college system: ‘The President can be elected by a minority of voters. Is this democracy? What is democracy? It is power of the people. Where is people’s power here? There is none. Meanwhile, you are trying to convince us that we don’t have it’ (Putin 2014). Putin’s attacks have been supported by members of his United Russia Party, who recently proposed that “democracy and democratic values” have “become the justification for the most odious actions of the West against Russia” and consequently Russia must drop any reference to democracy’ (Goble 2014). That democracy is increasingly being explicitly challenged, and in some cases repudiated, is certainly significant, but the fact that these incidents are exceptional indicates how strong democracy’s ideational hegemony remains. The confidence and belief that surrounded
democracy in the early 1990s might have faded, but it is still the most widely accepted form of rule in contemporary politics. There may, however, be a shift occurring back towards a more pluralist international society, with less emphasis placed on democratic government as a marker of state legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has charted the trajectory of democracy following the end of the First World War, when popular sovereignty supplanted monarchical right, and democratic government emerged as a legitimate constitutional form. Until this point the fates of popular sovereignty (forma imperii) and democracy as a form of domestic rule (forma regiminis) had been closely connected, but then they diverged. Popular sovereignty was embedded within international society, and contestation would revolve around different constitutional forms (formae regiminis): democracy, communism and fascism. In this regard, the ‘long war’ of the twentieth century between competing modern ideologies was a different and distinct stage in democracy’s development, compared with the period from the American Revolution through to the end of the First World War, in which it had battled and ultimately succeeded the ancien régime.

Immediately following the Great War, there was remarkable confidence in democracy. Emblematic was James Bryce’s assessment that there was a ‘universal acceptance of democracy as the normal and natural form of government’ (Bryce 1921a: 4). Yet in a short space of time democracy went from being widely lauded and praised to being dismissed as a weak, ineffectual thing of the past. Democracy reached its lowest ebb at the middle of the Second World War, when a mere handful of democratic states remained. Fascism was defeated only through the communist and democratic powers joining forces, with the monumental sacrifices of the Soviets playing a pivotal role in the war’s outcome. With the common fascist enemy defeated, ‘the long war now continued because it had not truly been ended’ (Bobbitt 2002: 45). At the heart of the Cold War was a contest between rival political-economic forms. This was ultimately resolved with the fall of the Berlin Wall, marking an end to the communist experiment and the ‘long war’ that had shaped much of the twentieth century. The basic geopolitical realignment caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union gave added
impetus to the third wave of democratisation that swept across the globe. Surveying these changes, Samuel Huntington was not exaggerating in concluding that ‘this dramatic growth of democracy in such a short time is, without doubt, one of the most spectacular and important political changes in human history’ (Huntington 1997: 4).

The ‘unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism’, as Francis Fukuyama described it at the time (Fukuyama 1989: 3), strongly shaped the way democracy was understood and embedded in post-Cold War international society. The result was a shift away from the pluralist post-1945 international order that emphasised sovereign equality and independence. Rather, legitimacy principles were extended to incorporate the domestic makeup of states. ‘Rogue regimes’ were identified as threatening not simply because of their behaviour, but because this was seen to stem from their non-democratic nature. Democracy, usually thought of as being demanded from ‘below’, was increasingly something demanded from ‘above’, as it came to be taken as a marker of state legitimacy. The remarkably strong emphasis on democratic government present in the immediate post-Cold War order now appears to be diluting, however, as the ideational and material balance of power shifts away from the United States. With the end of the liberal interregnum, it is an open question what role democracy will play in the international order that is now taking shape.