

Democracy and Interventionism



Many countries and people pride themselves on being democratic. They still get involved in wars and international sanctions, but they consider their actions to be legitimate because they are democratic. They also feel that their superior democratic status gives them moral authority to intervene in 'less democratic' regimes.

While in general I agree that democracy can be a good thing I feel that any such hostile action, taken by a democracy or otherwise, is by its very nature undemocratic. The basic tenet of democracy is that people can decide their own fate and government. For one group of people to decide the fate and government of other people is not democratic at all. Especially the feeling that the 'better' should decide the fate of the 'lesser' is not freedom, but fascism.

For an interventionist state, such as the USA for instance, to be able to claim to act democratically the people it is deciding over should be democratically represented in the decision making process. They have not extended the right to vote in their elections to the Vietnamese, Chilean, Afghan, Iraqi, Libyan or Syrian people so by what right can their decisions to change the government of those people be called democratic? But these problems are not merely external, but also internal. How often is one of the most drastic things any country can do to another, war, even if its name is changed to 'good speak' like peace keeping, military intervention or aid, decided by referendum? Or even by the elected representatives? Most of these actions are taken by the executive branch of government, who after the fact may have to report to the representatives. This means that the process of deciding such interventions may be at best meritocratic or bureaucratic, but certainly not democratic.

The sad fact is that when it comes to interventionism people somehow forget about democracy and ignore any opinion polls. The argument most often used to maintain this method is that in a crisis situation quick action is required and that therefore controls and feedback should be suspended. I agree that it is impossible for a democracy to micro manage details in a crisis situation. The time it takes to communicate increases exponentially with the number of communicators. This makes decision processes less effective the larger the number of communicators gets. But the same does not apply to strategic decision making processes.

Military intervention in another nation is a strategic decision and even if all the people of one country would decide to make war upon another nation such a decision would not be a democratic one. Should we then be powerless against rogue nations and state sponsored terrorism? I do not believe that to be is necessary either. I believe law should deal with any aggression and transgressions. We cannot apply the same law to individuals, corporations or states, but the decision makers should always be held accountable. Governments will never by themselves choose to be accountable and thereby punishable.

I believe it is up to the people to reign in their leaders and make them answerable to all they govern. Both in their own country as well as in other countries. I do not believe in only punishing and never rewarding, which is the basis of most of our current laws. These fear based systems will only deter the rational and moral, but never the psychopath or maniac of which we unfortunately find plenty in our national institutions. We should by law not just punish, but also reward those who benefit our society and support them in their compassionate efforts.

All this brings us to a final unsolvable puzzle: 'Who guards the guardians?'. To judge well requires understanding, which usually implies peers, which in turn leads to lobby groups and favoritism. I do not have a perfect government to offer you. Just a slightly better one.

2015.12.12
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