

The Poorest of the Poor: God-given Dignity in the World 2007

“A world without dictators would not be without competition and strain. But it might well be a world without wars between nations. Dictatorship itself must be recognized as a crime against humanity.”

Dictatorship – the primary threat to dignity

***Excerpts, with permission of Ambassador Mark Palmer, from
Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: How to Oust the World’s Last Dictators by 2025***

“Democracy and human rights activists must do more than write and meet and criticize. Too few activists are willing to get on the front lines, where they can help organize strategic nonviolent actions and get the job done. We should organize a global Students for Democracy whose members could train in the techniques of nonviolence, then go to China and other dictatorships to work beside the local democrats. In promoting freedom, outsiders tend to be at less risk but to have greater public impact than local insiders. Not everyone will welcome this idea. But it worked in our South, and it will work elsewhere. Yes, there are sacrifices. Local people know the risks far better than we do. There are also great rewards. Those willing should be helped to proceed.” - **author Ambassador Mark Palmer**

Book Endorsements:

"I watched Ambassador Palmer in action in Budapest, as he helped galvanize and even march with Hungarian democrats. I recommend his book to my colleagues in the Congress and in democratic parliaments around the world." - **Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader**

"Ambassador Mark Palmer's democracy manifesto is a radical blueprint for democratic change everywhere dictators oppress their people, and an impassioned call for a foreign policy true to America's founding principles." - **Senator John McCain**

"Mark Palmer's prescription for the "End of Dictatorships" is a fundamental contribution to the debate about the world's future." - **Professor Francis Fukuyama, Johns Hopkins University**

"Open societies provide the only basis for a more peaceful, prosperous world. Mark Palmer is at the cutting edge of change in the right direction." - **George Soros, investor and philanthropist**

Introduction:

This book is about the future, not the past.

As a diplomat, and an entrepreneur inside dictatorships, I've bet my career, my money, and much of my adult life on the possibility of a fully democratic world. The alternative to that possibility seems to me bleak in the extreme. To see what dictatorships will bring to the twenty-first century, one has only to look at the century recently ended – by all accounts, the bloodiest in human history. Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and others committed the worst crimes against humanity in the short history of our species. On 24 June 2001, Pope John Paul II visited the woods outside Kiev where nearly 200,000 bodies – Jews and other victims of the Hitler era—had been cached. Within days, news came that Kosovars in the thousands had been secretly killed and secretly buried, on the orders of Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic.

This book is about how humanity might rid itself of the remaining dictators by the year 2025. Indeed, there seems no positive alternative to their removal. History almost guarantees that any dictators left standing will render this century even bloodier than the last, for dictatorships, as we will see, are naturally destructive; murder, intimidation, and oppression are their business. They are likewise destructive of economic success. While tyrants raise grand palaces in orgies of self-praise, their people live in poverty, able to watch—but unable to touch—the prosperity that flows naturally from peace and freedom.

It is our task to transform the general wish for full democracy into the conviction that it can be achieved within a reasonable time; 2025 is where we set the bar. This means that our concepts of international power must now discover a political architecture that fosters democracy at every level and brands dictators as criminals and pariahs.

In democracies, we sometimes equate dictatorship dismissively with tinplate tyrants and small men on horseback. But the important tyrants in our real axis of evil are nothing of the kind. The dictator of China controls something like a fifth of the planet's population, holds vast natural and industrial resources, and has a powerful, nuclear-armed military. Much of the world's petroleum—some 50 percent—is buried under the dictatorships of the Greater Middle East, where determined sponsorship of terrorists is sometimes coupled with a yen for chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

Although these dictators may differ in terms of religion, political ideology, ethnic background, and nationality, they nevertheless have much in common. They share for example, a willingness to use such weapons as they have, whether machetes or canisters of lethal chemical agents, against all enemies, real or imagined, foreign and domestic. Under their stony gaze, millions upon millions have gone to their deaths, a great tide of refugees has swept across the planet. And promising nations have been driven into poverty, famine, and despair.

Curiously, these regimes have been able to trade in their worst qualities, parlaying modest improvements in human rights, for example, into a full partnership in world trade, or a promise of restraint in weapons sales into access to high technology. Democracies have always been willing to sit down with dictators to achieve some temporary, undemocratic end, always tricked by the illusion that the enemy of an enemy must be a friend.

Closed societies must be opened to the light of democratizing possibilities, which means that they must be engaged and their democrats nurtured. Without abolishing diplomatic conventions, the embassies of democratic nations must become freedom houses and their ambassadors, freedom

fighters. Dictators must be seen and treated as individual, not manifestations of a regime or culture. Thus armed, humanity can formulate more particular plans that will bring the tyrants down, one by one.

Most of all, this book is about intervention. On the eve of receiving his Presidential Medal of Freedom in July 2002, legendary New York Times Editor and columnist A.M. Rosenthal spoke to a gathering at Freedom House, recalling the 1964 Kitty Genovese murder in New York. More than thirty of Genovese's neighbors had watched as she was repeatedly stabbed and cried for help; no one intervened. Rosenthal asked, "When is it a sin not to intervene to help someone? When they are a hundred feet away? When they are further? When you can know they are being butchered, starved and oppressed but are not physically present?"

I answer that it is wrong to stand by and do nothing when people anywhere on earth are being brutally treated by the despots who rule them. We know millions of North Koreans have starved because of Kim Jong II. We know that the world's dictators are at the root of terrorism, famine, and war. We must act now. This is the story of the last forty-five dictators, the strategy and tactics to oust them, and the ways to empower the people of every nation to control their own destinies.

I believe that the future does not have to mimic the past, that we have the means at our disposal to end dictatorships by 2025. As the last quarter century has seen the demise of dozens of dictators, it seems reasonable to strive over the next quarter century to "finish the job," to establish a "deadline for dictators."

The Real Axis of Evil:

In January 2002, when president George W. Bush gave his first State of the Union address, a new phrase entered the American vocabulary: axis of evil. The president used it to describe three nations that have been, at one time or another, deadly enemies of the United States: Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. None of the threesome much appreciated being identified in that way or, for that matter, with one another. And the world at large saw the freshly minted term as a careless lurch toward trouble. Such figures as French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine were inclined to describe it as "simplistic," as if such a coalition of evil were an impossibility in this new century.

It seemed to me, however, that such coalitions were not just possible but exactly what was wrong with the world today. The difference was that I believed an axis of three fell woefully short of describing fully what is in fact a vast arc of tyranny, where a few dozen men hold a third of the planet's population under their thumbs.

This arc runs unbroken west from China and North Korea, through Kazakhstan, on to Syria and Algeria, and south to Angola. The map inside the front cover shows this arc appropriately in black. Asia has eight dictatorships: China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, Bhutan, and Burma (Myanmar). Eleven dictatorships survive in sub-Saharan Africa: Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Togo, and Zimbabwe. And more than half of the world's forty-five dictatorships - twenty-three in all - are concentrated in and around the Middle East. Only three - Belarus, Cuba, and Haiti - lie outside this great desert where liberty is not allowed to grow.

The Future with Dictators

The destructive hand of tyranny defies description. Millions have died because the tyrants of Germany and Japan, the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and Iraq believed the wars they ignited could be won if enough life and treasure were thrown into the cauldron. Without the Soviet dictators and their puppets there would not have been a cold war. Without a Cuban dictator the 1962 missile crisis would not have happened. Without a dictator in Iraq, there would have been no first or second Gulf War. Talking about such things, one begins to sound like an astronomer—millions of lives, trillions of dollars, entire civilizations uprooted from an ancient homeland. Without dramatic change, our new century promises to be much worse.

The Bush administration's idea of an axis of evil arose from the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 on New York and the Pentagon. In fact, such terror, appalling as it is, is really just one of a host of toxic weeds that bloom in the deep shade of dictatorship; famine, refugees, poverty, environmental degradation, corruption, genocide, war, and terrorism - all flourish there as well.

Famine

Let us begin with famine and proceed down this toxic list. Nobel laureate Professor Amartya Kumar Sen, of Cambridge University, shows the strong correlation between famine and autocratic rule. While natural factors no doubt play a role, the fact remains that governments accountable to their citizens cannot afford to blithely disregard their existential fates. The correlation between democracy and effective measures against famine is striking: Sen has found that famines in democracies with an independent press are exceedingly rare.

Even in his native India, where poverty is rife and many are undernourished, famines have not occurred since independence. In contrast, China has suffered a number of particularly devastating famines since the communists took power in 1949, along with many prior to that. Political factors played a decisive role in each, either in actually creating the famine, as was the case with the lunacy of the "Great Leap Forward," or in exacerbating natural phenomena and allowing ideological factors to outweigh the fundamental responsibility of a government to assure the welfare of its citizens. The case of Ethiopia in the 1980's (and Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s) show that food is often used as a weapon by dictatorships against their own people. And a lack of government, as in Somalia, makes a Kalashnikov, rather than a plow, the only assured meal ticket.

Refugees

Professor John Norton Moore of the University of Virginia estimates that 77 percent of refugees flow from undemocratic countries. If one excludes democracies that are being attacked by undemocratic states, only 8 percent of refugees emanate from very liberally defined "electoral democracies." A spot check of the world's worst crises of refugees and internally displaced persons shows Afghans and Congolese topping the charts. With the tenuous beginnings of democracy in Kabul, already the displaced are returning.

Poverty

While economic and political freedoms do not necessarily move in lockstep, a pronounced lack of one tends to affect the other over time. And these freedoms are mutually reinforcing, producing pronounced benefits where both political and economic freedoms are at high levels. Freedom House recently found that countries with the highest levels of democratic freedom produce 89

percent of the global economic output. On the other side of this spectrum, those countries with the least political freedom, which account for 36 percent of the world's population, produce only 6 percent of the world's wealth. Gwartney and Lawson's 1997 *Economic Freedom of the World* convincingly illustrated a strong correlation between economic freedom and growth in real and per capita gross domestic product. In the quintile with the most economic freedom, the annual growth rate averaged 2.9 percent, while countries at the other end actually saw their economies contract on average 1.9 percent annually. In their 2000 report, economic freedom is also positively associated with life expectancy, crop yields, and even income equality. In the past few years, the World Bank has taken notice of these factors, though in my opinion not nearly enough. Where political power is concentrated, economic power tends to be as well, and vice versa.

The free nations produce 89 percent of the world's economic output; the dictatorships produce just 6 percent. Those demonstrating in Seattle, Quebec, and Washington against globalization, the World Bank, and multinational corporations are aiming at the wrong targets. They should be crusading against dictatorships, the real cause of fundamental backwardness and war. Such African democracies as Ghana, Botswana, and South Africa shine a light on what could be the future for the Congo, Liberia, and Angola. But the matter must be pushed into that light.

Environmental Degradation

That the communist system in eastern Europe and Eurasia produced massive ecological havoc is well known. An economic system unfettered by market input costs is sure to be inefficient in its use of resources. Such misdevelopment, with all its attendant hazards for the population, could only occur under a system where there was also no need to court public consent and information about the risks at hand was strictly controlled. Even now, since the breakup of the USSR and the introduction of a semblance of democracy to Russia, the Soviet mentality that environmental data is a threatening state secret remains, but it is being challenged. In democratic states, while there have also been numerous scandals, a democratically empowered population and relentless free press help keep corporate and governmental polluters in check.

Corruption

While corruption is hardly the sole preserve of dictators and their supporting casts, there can be no doubt it is harder to accomplish in the clear light of day, where free media can expose it and the public can demand it be addressed. German nongovernmental organization Transparency International has shown a major positive correlation between reduced economic freedom and increased corruption. Of the countries deemed least corrupt in Transparency International's index, only Singapore is undemocratic. On the other end of the spectrum, Pakistan, ruled by its military, is regularly seen in these surveys to be among the most corrupt countries in the world.

In Africa, a far greater barrier to development than the burden of foreign debt is the absolute corruption and incompetence of its dictators. The initial and necessary condition to correct this fundamental failing is good governance, which cannot flourish except in a democracy, with all that it brings: independent legal systems, a free and critical press, a voice for the people.

Genocide

Dictators make war not only on those outside their boundaries but also on citizens of their own countries. In his 1994 book, *Death by Government*, Rummel coined the term "democide" to refer to governments killing their own citizens. In the twentieth century an estimated 169 million died at the hands, or through the malign neglect, of their governments. This is an estimated two to

four times the number of combatants killed in wars over the same period. The number certainly has risen since. In addition, Rummel found that there was a direct correlation between the incidence of democide and nondemocratic government. The biggest killers in racking up this sickening death toll have been totalitarian leaders, including Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Kim Jong II, Mengistu Haile Mariam, and Idi Amin. A lesser number were murdered at the hands of authoritarian “kilokillers” such as Slobodan Milosevic, Charles Taylor, and the Argentine junta in the 1970’s.

War

Dictatorships also lead to increased warfare. Of the 353 wars between 1816 and 1991 that Professor Rudy J. Rummel, of the University of Hawaii, classified as “major international wars,” 100 percent involved no democracies as one or more of the belligerents; none occurred between two democratic states. While democracies have often engaged in warfare with nondemocratic states, the potential for external aggression is magnified in societies that do not rely on popular support. In his study of twenty major wars since 1945, Jon Norton Moore found only one case of democratic aggression in war: the Anglo-French and Israeli attack on Egypt in the 1956 Suez War. An overwhelming preponderance of wars between democracies and nondemocracies have come as a result of aggression by nondemocracies, either against democratic belligerents or against others. Democracies, however, can rely on deep reservoirs of popular support when attacked and rarely lose their wars. It is also true that a band of Atlantic democracies mounted the most effective example of deterrence in human history through NATO during the cold war.

Dictators who a generation ago would have relied on machetes, Kalashnikovs, and land mines to maintain power have begun to creep upmarket, as their nations have matured technically. A chemical industry can also yield the lethal payloads of chemical weapons. Pharmaceutical research facilities are also farms for toxic bioforms. A nation capable of operating nuclear reactors and uranium reprocessing plants is well down the road to a nuclear bomb. The aircraft and rockets used to loft conventional weapons are readily converted to deliver platforms for weapons of mass destruction. It is not a question, for example, of whether Iran and North Korea will have nuclear weapons, but of when, or even whether they already do.

Nor are chemicals, germs, and fissionable atoms the only powerful weapons now coming within the dictators’ grasp. There is also terror, raised to a grisly art by the advent of the suicide bomber.

We know from the transition in central and eastern Europe that the security situation could be transformed. The defense budgets of the former dictatorships and their neighbors in Western Europe and the United States were cut in half or better. The threat posed by central and eastern European dictatorships evaporated. Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other former members of the Warsaw Pact have entered NATO, cooperating with other democracies around the world on security issues, the environment, and other challenges.

Terrorism

None of the seven countries on the State Department’s list of countries that sponsor terror is democratically governed. Iran’s president, Mohammad Khatami, has been twice more or less democratically elected, but the Guardian Council and security apparatus remain beyond his grasp. None of the other six countries have any semblance of democratic structures.

All state sponsors of terror are dictatorships, and all receive the backing of other dictators. But dictatorships that are not on the State Department list also have become fertile incubators of

terror. In states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan, corrupt dictators have tried to stifle all legitimate dissent; in fact, they have merely driven it underground. Unemployment and poverty born of these regimes' misrule foster widespread frustration and a population rendered susceptible to the demagoguery of radical extremists. Discontent in Saudi Arabia and Egypt has intensified until it poses a danger to both regimes, and to the rest of the region and world as well. The Saudi and Mubarak regimes have responded by trying to co-opt the preachers of extremism, handing them the keys to important media outlets. The corrupt elites in both countries hope to save themselves by letting radicals rant about the evils of the West and garner more recruits. Western countries have worsened the situation by propping up these regimes, thereby associating themselves with corrupt and brutal practices. If these regimes are ever to give way to democrats (as opposed to radical extremist dictators), a major policy shift in the West will be necessary. Until then, tyranny will crank out more terrorism. As President Bush stated on 27 February 2003, "The world has a clear interest in the spread of democratic values, because stable and free nations do not breed the ideologies of murder."

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Algeria are also major suppliers of oil to the United States and other democracies. Their vast oil-producing infrastructure of wells, pipelines, shipping lanes, and refineries is vulnerable to terrorists seeking to undermine not only their governments but also the dependent American economy. In 2000, 27.8 percent of net imports of crude oil and petroleum products into the United States came from countries categorized by Freedom House as Not Free. The actual exposure of the U.S. Economy to brittle Not Free countries is even greater. For example, though the United States doesn't do business with Libya or Iran, fungible Libyan and Iranian oil exports nonetheless affect world oil prices, which in turn affect the U.S. economy.

Beyond the possibility of terrorist attacks on U.S.-supported oil-producing dictatorships like Saudi Arabia, civil war—notably in the dictatorships of Algeria and Angola—could result in sudden increases in the price of oil. A continuation of the current number of dictators will likely cause major instability in the oil markets.

Realpolitik

Taking a pessimistic view, one may ponder the democratic texture of a world in which dictatorships, rather than fading, increase. Even without another global war, the further spread of tyranny would impose immense costs on the democratic world. Terrorists would have even more sanctuaries, supporters, and access to weapons of mass destruction. World trade would be shaken and economies deformed to pay the rising costs of more and more defense, rather than meeting such social imperatives as health care, education and environmental protection. There would be less freedom in the world; democracies would decline to a kind of mirror image of their opposites.

Thus, a war on terror is insufficient reason for a democracy to lie down with a dictator; so is a campaign for human rights, or an environmental accord, or a threatened economy. To my mind, democracies should deal with dictatorships primarily to bring them down. For with them gone—and only with them gone—their crop of horrors will wither and die.

At this juncture, some readers may shake their heads and say that I ignore the lessons of realpolitik—that democracies must now and then make hard choices among evils of varying degree. But I would argue that, in fact, political reality has shown us again and again that the problem is solved, not by picking a lesser vice over a greater one, but by removing the point at which those vices naturally concentrate—not entire nations, but the individual tyrants who

control them. Indeed, my argument springs not from innocence but from long experience and deeply felt belief.

A World Without War

Happily, this dismal forecast seems to me to go wide of the mark. The tide seems to have set against tyranny. In 1972, there were only forty-three Free countries in the world; as of 2002 there were eighty-nine; together with the Partly Free countries they make up three-quarters of all nations. Moreover, many of the surviving dictatorships are held by men who have no obvious successors beyond a few spiritually stunted, middle-aged sons.

We have noted that dictators tend to foster similar regimes around them. Adolf Hitler supported his ideological soul mates in such countries as Italy, Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, and occupied France. The Soviet Union insisted on a protective barrier of puppet communist dictatorships. Apartheid-era South Africa took pains to prop up the racist regime of Ian Smith in what is now Zimbabwe. But this is a sword that cuts two ways. In these nations, democratization in one had the effect of discrediting the shared ideology of undemocratic neighbors, further isolating and weakening the dictatorships that remained. As happened in central and eastern Europe in 1989, once the toppling begins, dictators tend to fall like dominoes. And now is the moment to start them falling.

Given the efflorescence of democracy around the world in the last quarter century, given the fact that many of the world's dictators are growing old, it seems to me that we have a unique opportunity—and an obligation—to wipe away the stain of tyranny everywhere on the planet. At the average rate of democratization seen between 1974 and the present—more than three dictatorships ended every year—the world would be free of tyrants in thirteen years. Even half the average rate would end tyranny by 2025.

In contrast to the links between social ills and dictatorial government, a number of prominent scholars have demonstrated a strong relationship between positive economic and social indicators and liberal democracy—that is, democracy shaped by free elections, rule of law, and other fundamentals. Democratic systems, however imperfect, demand that the government answer to its people.

A world without dictators would not be without competition and strain. But it might well be a world without wars between nations. Proof of this abounds in Europe. The border between France and Germany, once deadly enemies, no longer teems with troops and armor. The cold war division of Europe healed swiftly once the communist dictatorships were democratically transformed. Romania and Hungary seem to be solving the issue of the two million ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbor state. Two of the dictatorships remaining in Europe after 1989—those in Belgrade and Zagreb—were transient anomalies and are now history, and their is hope for full democracy in the region. Only Belarus remains under one man's rule, and that will almost certainly change in time. All of this is possible because democracies have peaceful mechanisms for working away at difficult ethnic, religious, and historical problems. Dictatorships have none.

This imagined dictator-free planet, on which no nation was led by all-powerful general secretaries, ayatollahs, kings, and bosses, would not be devoid of human rights abuses, nor would democracies abandon competition. Moving fully to democracy would not be the end of history, after all; these young democracies, being eminently human institutions, would now and then

sputter and miss. But open societies end up with open borders and open minds. Even in its immature form, democracy offers a better world than the tyranny it displaces.

In that world, we see how seemingly insoluble problems can be thrashed out. A democratic China would pose no threat to Taiwan, whatever their final relationship. Arab democracies in the Middle East would be more tolerant of Israel and, even more important, of one another. Democracy could perhaps extinguish Africa's endless strife.

Real Terror

The real impact of full democracy, however, is ultimately less geopolitical than personal, less a matter of nations than of the individual. Tyranny means that North Korean mothers must watch helplessly as their children starve to death in their arms, and then starve to death themselves—while food is produced in abundance across the barrier in democratic South Korea. Before India was a democracy, famines stalked the subcontinent with the regularity of the monsoon, but there has not been a single famine since the nation's independence in 1947. Under tyranny, Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong each allowed twenty million of their subjects to starve to death, evoking a level of privation we can hardly comprehend; such atrocity is impossible where the citizens rule the land.

Tyranny ruins ordinary lives and creates extraordinary hardship and despair. And one of the curious byproducts of dictatorship is the persistent chauvinism against women. On a recent flight from Miami, a young Saudi woman and I struck up a conversation. She had just graduated from the University of Miami and I asked what she was going to do with her education. She replied, "Look across the aisle. Who do you think is sitting there and why?" It was her brother, sent from Saudi Arabia to ensure that she returned home. The Saudi woman bitterly explained that she would not be permitted to do anything with her education—she was going home to a sexist prison.

In Afghanistan, lawyer Nabila Ahmad spent five years almost entirely confined to her apartment in Kabul, prohibited from working by the enforced male chauvinism of Taliban rule. When she did venture out, the regime's religious police required that she wear a burqa to completely cover herself. The Taliban's defeat now brings new hope to Afghanistan's women, many of whom are shedding their burqas, retuning to work, and sending their daughters to school for the first time. Muslim women in democracies—where over half of all adherents of Islam now live—can pursue their faith but also work and fight openly for their rights.

Every year modern society loses some of its tolerance for tyranny. Today we have a unique opportunity to shrink this tolerance to zero. The dictators are growing old, their oppressed subjects restive. It is time for change. The democratizing impulse that swept the planet in the last quarter of the last century can finish the job in the first quarter of this one, if we will only encourage it.

Let us resolve, then, we citizens of democracies, to help eradicate those last forty-five tyrants by the year 2025. Let us consider now how we might proceed.