

Democracy

On September 3, 1939, Britain and France declared war on Germany. If it had somehow been possible to impose a free and fair election on Germany that day instead of a world war, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party would undoubtedly have won a landslide victory and a wholehearted mandate for their policies. So the war would have followed anyway, the only difference being that the West would now have been fighting a regime that was unequivocally legitimate by the West's own standards. It would have been fighting a nation. A people. And of course, that is what it was fighting, in the actual war.

Facts such as these are cited by the many opponents of the Bush Doctrine (or the **Sharansky** doctrine) of victory through the imposition of democracy. Opponents of all types, from enemy sympathisers to defeatists to neo-imperialists to **idiotarians**, and even anxious supporters, think that they see a fatal flaw in this doctrine: what if the enemy, once democratised, votes the bad guys back into power?

The naive answer, that 'the people' – the majority – never have evil objectives that they value above their own safety and prosperity, and that all the harm is done against their will by their evil rulers, is simply false. Fortunately, the Bush Doctrine does not depend on such a fairy-tale premise. The doctrine is not about relying on the goodwill of a supposed silent majority of liberal democrats among the enemy population. It is about allowing such a majority, and the associated institutions of an open society, to evolve where they did not exist before, by actively destabilising – if necessary by force or the threat of force – the inherently fragile fear-based regimes that prevent their evolution. This is a much harder and more complex task than merely forcing free and fair elections at gunpoint (which, by the way, *can* be done and often has been, and is indeed sometimes part of the solution). But it is feasible.

Wed, 12/08/2004 - 17:01 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Does the editor also believe that sexual promiscuity

is a way to promote virginity?

by a reader on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 13:21 | [reply](#)

Re: Does the editor also believe

Does the editor also believe that sexual promiscuity is a way to promote virginity?

Of course it is! You think virgins grow on trees?

by a non- editor answering anyway on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 14:52 | [reply](#)

What is destabilising a regime?

When you contrast regime destabilisation with merely imposing a free and fair vote--as you seem to be doing--what are the concrete differences of policy that, for instance, make the former a harder task? In both cases, the regime must be removed from absolute control of politics.

My thought is that destabilisation involves destroying and discrediting the regime militarily before the election while hinting that you may continue to destroy and discredit it after the election even if major regime elements come into the government. That way the regime party is not a viable option for stability when the election is held. Is that the policy of the administration? And if that is not the policy you have in mind, what is the difference between forcing an election and destabilising the regime?

by [Nick](#) on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 19:15 | [reply](#)

Re: What is destabilising a regime?

You're presumably asking about what sort of things can be done to destabilise [the remnants of] a fear regime after it has been removed from power. Stability would mean its finding a way to prevent its decline into oblivion. Presumably there are two classes of measures the West could take to prevent this: one is to reduce the power of those people to instil fear today – by hunting them, defeating them militarily, defending against their attacks, ridiculing them, suborning their allies and so on. The other is to promote the institutions of an open society, which, uniquely, actually work to help people get what they want without having to hurt others to do so. The more such institutions are up and running, the more the bad guys' supporters will be persuaded to ditch them, the fewer recruits they will get, the more they will despair of winning, betray each other, and so on.

by [David Deutsch](#) on Thu, 12/09/2004 - 22:20 | [reply](#)

Re: Fear-based regimes

Are regimes such as Iran's really fear based? I think they derive their power more from the fact that they are considered virtuous by a large portion (if not the majority) of a country's population. The perceived virtue could be mild e.g. "this government prevents chaos from erupting" to extreme e.g. "this government is enforcing god's will on earth", but it is essential to the regimes power.

by a reader on Fri, 12/10/2004 - 13:03 | [reply](#)

What is much more likely is t

What is much more likely is that the cost of expressing dissatisfaction with any aspect of the regime is so high that almost nobody does it. Its more or less a fact that people who deviate from orthodoxy in Iran face violence against them and their loved ones. This constitutes a fear society regardless of the nominal ideology of its subjects.

-Dan Strimpel

by a reader on Fri, 12/10/2004 - 15:24 | [reply](#)

Re: What is much more likely

Why? Does it make more sense that a small group of armed men can physically intimidate a nation of millions? or that the nation's leader (like the leader of a cult) is giving a large portion of the nation something they need i.e.: a cause to identify with and a reason to believe in their own virtue.

by a reader on Sat, 12/11/2004 - 12:31 | [reply](#)

"a cause to identify with"

Reader,

Fortunately, that's not the case, at least if you believe the very limited opinion polling that is available. In the last poll conducted, a large majority of those sampled favored some kind of reform, either in politics or administration, with 45 per cent in favor of regime change, even with outside intervention. As to the explanation of how the regime is able to maintain itself in power, it is mainly by a combination fierceness and holding out the possibility that the parliament could reform the government without revolution.

by [Nick](#) on Sat, 12/11/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)

Democracy in Iraq

Here is a [positive note on the development of democracy in Iraq](#).

[Henry Sturman](#)

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sun, 12/26/2004 - 10:34 | [reply](#)