

Limits to the Noble Idea of Building Democratic Nations

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“The Constitution of the United States was created by the people of the United States composing the respective states, who alone had the right.” –James Madison

No matter what the Bush Administration’s intentions, the principle of a government of the people can not be installed by other people. The war in Iraq has liberated the people, but it has not given them freedom. If it is to be assumed that the natural evolution of good government is a constitutional republic, their hasn’t been the events that prepare the people or are indicative of a people ready to live in a republic. Even if the people had the understanding for and desire for a republic, the government that is legitimized by an outside entity and not the people themselves will fail to form a true republic. A government not legitimized by the people will stand a great risk of being rejected by the people.

Although it is hard to discern exactly what President Bush means when he says democracy, we can’t be completely wrong if we apply the term in the same way the audience is accustomed to hearing it on the media. In that situation, Americans know it as short for a democratic republic in the image of the United States. The United States form of government is simply a republic. A republic is a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to law. It is a form of government of the people. In this starts the paradox that any American means used in Iraq for the desired ends will be plagued. That government’s validity and potency within the country as a government of the people is based on the recognition of that government’s authority by the people. The Iraqi people may come to recognize the newly formed government of Iraq as having power, but the real question is will they recognize it as their government consistent with the definition of a republic.

If the U.S. installs a government that it thinks is best, the important step of constituting the people will have been skipped. The people will not feel like it is a government of their own making and will not have the needed interest and attachment to it. Alexander Hamilton explains this well in *The Federalist* No. 70 “Men often oppose a thing, merely because they have had no agency in planning it, or because it may have been planned by those whom they dislike. But if they have been consulted, and have happened to disapprove, opposition then becomes, in their estimation, an indispensable duty of self-love.” One likely reason for explaining this can be observed in the nature of man. Experienced parents will recognize that they achieve better results in getting children to do something, when they are able reason out the decision with the child in a way that the child feels like they are a part of the decision. Resorting to dictation, although sometimes necessary, results in a resentful child. This child is more likely to disobey or rebel without the threat of force or punishment. This has little to do with the rationality of the original decision. It is matter feeling a part of the process, which is an essential part of peaceful, group decision making and politics.

Examples of failed constitutional governments with freedom as their goal can be drawn from history. There were revolutionary upheavals that swept across European countries after World War I. The experts that wrote the constitutions that Europe came to live under were all based upon the model of the American Constitution. Lack of power, authority, and stability were a curse to nearly all of these European countries since the abolition of absolute monarchies. In these cases, the situation was different from the United States experience because instead the implementation of a constitution by which a people constitutes its own government, a constitution was imposed by a government upon a people. Simply put in the words of John Adams, “a constitution is a standard, a pillar, and a bond when it is understood,

approved and beloved. But without this intelligence and attachment, it might as be a kite or balloon flying in the air.” The role of the U.S. parallels that of a government imposing a constitution rather than the implementation of a constitution by which the people constitutes the government.

The conditions were right for the establishment of a government based on the idea of all men being created equal, at the adoption of the U.S. Constitution. The concepts of power in institutions of self-government weren't completely new to the American Revolutionists. The Mayflower Compact was drawn up on the ship and signed upon landing. When colonists from Massachusetts emigrated to Connecticut, they framed their own “Fundamental Orders”. When the royal charter arrived to unite the new settlements into the colony of Connecticut it sanctioned and confirmed an existing system of government. The royal charter of 1662 only sanctioned the Fundamental Orders of 1639. That same charter was adopted in 1776 unchanged except for the addition of the line “the Civil Constitution of this State under the sole authority of the people thereof, independent of any King and Prince whatever.” Hannah Arendt quotes Burke as she observes the environment that colonial Americans found themselves. “Even the trickle of immigrants of non-English and non-British stock in their midst was enough to remind them: ‘Whether you be English, Irish, Germans, Swedes ... you are entitled to all the liberties of Englishmen and the freedom of this constitution.’” In contrast, the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen” from the French Revolution was doomed to failure. The declaration that “All men are born equal,” was a heavy charge for change in a country which still was feudal in social and political organization.

The revolutionary Americans were so ready for the advent of freedom that a constitutional republic could provide, that they were willing to sacrifice their wealth and lives to obtain it. The strength of Saddam Hussein to stop rebellion is not something to dismiss. However, even after Saddam's grip was becoming weak, the Iraqi activity for rebellion was limited. The energy for rebellion was overwhelmingly from outside the people. Even if a rebellion did come from the people of Iraq, that is still different from the possibility for the outcome of revolution. There is a very significant difference in destruction of the old power and the creation of the new. The end of rebellion is liberation, as the Bush administration proudly boasts that it has provided the Iraqi people. The revolution is the establishment of the power that will take the place of the old. There is no guarantee that the revolution will result in the foundation of freedom.

It is possible to counter by pointing to the outcome of West Germany after World War II. The Allied forces did write the constitution for the new West German nation; now it is regarded as a successful democracy. It is to be noted that it isn't a democracy that always agrees with the U.S. and its interests. Germany has been able to evolve and modify its government and laws to the point that they feel that it is their government. Iraq on the other end is a contrived grouping of people who have a limited sense of unity as an Iraqi people. A contrived government that is not of their own making will be a continued source of animosity. Until the government of Iraq truly becomes a government of and by the people of Iraq it will not be a stable, authoritative republic. To accomplish the goal of a liberated, free Iraq, the Bush Administration needs to sit on their hands and let someone else have a chance to make the decisions for a change.

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