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### The challenge of change

Getting rid of Saddam would be one thing, but 'regime change' in Iraq presents a much bigger problem

**Mark F. Proudman**

National Post

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George W. Bush, the U.S. President, recently addressed himself to the Iraqi people, saying, "The day he and his regime are removed from power will be the day of your liberation." We know the "he" is Saddam Hussein, but what exactly is his regime?

The Bush administration has repeatedly said its main goal in Iraq is "regime change" -- though that phrase has been redefined once or twice. Assistant Secretary of State John Bolton has gone further, calling for the "de-Nazification" of Iraq -- a direct reference to the successful regime change in Germany after the Second World War.

Wars aiming to change the internal government of an enemy state have been waged throughout history. Sometimes they have succeeded: The most recent example is the replacement of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The history of externally imposed regime changes shows the relative ease of removing a dictator - and the great difficulty of reforming a society.

Regime change can mean one of two things: change of a state's ruler, or change of its governmental system. It is not entirely clear which the Bush administration has in mind in Iraq. The administration would probably be willing to work with just about any leader other than Saddam, even another secular nationalist dictator. On the other hand, many of Bush's more ambitious officials talk as though they wish to establish a federal democracy in Iraq. The former idea of "regime change" requires only the death or the flight of one man. The second would require the establishment of an entirely new kind of government in Iraq.

These two meanings of the term "regime change" hinge on two uses of the word "regime." That term is often used merely to denigrate a government the speaker doesn't like: European leftists like to talk about "the Bush regime" in Washington. This usage, of course, alludes to the common use of the term in Latin American and other Third World contexts: When newspapers speak of the Pinochet regime in Chile or the Noriega regime in Panama, the word has

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connotations of dictatorship, violence and illegitimacy.

Another sense of "regime" is the less common but more profound usage of the American conservative philosopher Leo Strauss, for whom a regime is a set of governing ideas, institutions and traditions. For example, the change from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush was not a regime change, because both shared a commitment to a cultural and political tradition, whatever their differences. In the Straussian sense of the term, the replacement of Saddam by some other dictator -- even a dictator who understood that invasions and gas attacks were not acceptable -- would not be a regime change, since the fundamental nature of the government would not have changed.

Wars of regime change have been fought forever. The Romans invaded Pontus, the most powerful kingdom in Asia Minor, to replace King Mithridates, who had slaughtered 80,000 Roman citizens, traders and travellers -- a young man called Julius Caesar narrowly escaped. But in replacing Mithridates with a Roman governor, the Romans were not really changing the political system and its underlying assumptions. They were just replacing the man at the top with someone who shared a similar world view, and who was probably equally predatory when seen from below.

Europe before the French Revolution saw a whole series of wars of regime change: The wars of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) were about who would become king or queen of Spain and Austria, and by extension about whether their foreign policies would be aligned to Bourbon France, the most powerful and, in many eyes, the most threatening state in Europe. In 1701, the British and the Dutch thought a member of the Bourbon family on the Spanish throne would create a dangerous Roman Catholic alliance and fought (successfully) to prevent that outcome. In 1740, the issue was whether a woman, Maria Theresa, could succeed to the throne of Austria. Again, the real issue was the foreign policy orientation of Austria. But though these wars were about more than personalities, they were not about regimes in the Straussian sense. Whatever happened, Spain and Austria would still have powerful kings or queens, supporting aristocracies and Catholic ecclesiastical establishments.

It was the French Revolution of 1789 that ushered in the modern era of wars for regime change in Strauss's sense. Since 1789, most major wars have not been about who would be the king but about whether there would be a king at all -- or whether there would be a führer or a commissar or a president. In the traditional European state system, a military defeat might result in a change of the royal personality; it might even result in a change of the royal family; but there would still be a royal family, and the leading classes of society usually did not change much either in personalities or outlook. Since the French Revolution, few ruling systems have been able to survive military defeat. Stalin carried this phenomenon to its logical conclusion when he observed in 1945 that "he who conquers a country imposes his social system."

One of the earliest examples of attempted regime change in the post-1789 era was an American one: the policy of "reconstruction" followed in occupied Confederate states by the Lincoln Administration and by the post-war radical Republican Congresses. "Reconstruction" became a euphemism for radical social change, or regime change in the Straussian sense: the imposition of martial

law, the exclusion of Confederate sympathizers from political office and the extension of the franchise to newly liberated black slaves. Reconstruction was ambiguous and not entirely successful. It was an experience that points to the ease of changing governments but the difficulties of changing societies. On the one hand, reconstruction permanently removed secession and slavery from the political agenda; on the other, as soon as federal troops were withdrawn from the South, anti-black Jim Crow laws were brought in and the political and economic supremacy of local white populations was reasserted.

The U.S. Civil War was one of the first modern wars, because it involved most of the population and resources of an advanced industrial nation. Such wars rarely end in any result so paltry as a change of minister or of dynasty; they necessarily entrain radical social consequences. This tendency was particularly evident in the 20th century. Though it was not initially the Allied objective, defeat in the First World War resulted in the end of the Kaiser's imperial German regime and in the end of the 1,000-year-old monarchy in Austria-Hungary, along with the reigning Hapsburg dynasty. On the Allied side, defeat in battle had similar consequences for the Tsars of Russia.

In the Second World War, regime change became the explicit aim of the Allied powers: There was no possibility of an accommodation with Hitler or Tojo. A mere change of personality -- of a Himmler for a Hitler -- would have been completely unacceptable. U.S., Russian, British and French troops (and, briefly, Canadian ones) occupied Germany, arrested Nazis and "reconstructed" the government of Germany. As Stalin had foreseen, each side imposed its own system: The Russians imposed a top-down carbon copy of Stalinism, often using Nazi officials who changed little more than their uniforms. The Western allies -- motivated by the need to find a workable alternative to a fearsome rival on the other side of what Churchill in 1946 baptized the Iron Curtain -- bumbled their way toward a pluralistic, federal democracy for West Germany.

A key element in the successful regime changes in post-war Germany -- on both sides of the Iron Curtain -- was the pounding that that country had taken in two world wars, the Depression, the Nazi persecutions and the various abortive revolutions of the inter-war Weimar period. Fatigue can be a powerful social force. And in East Germany, there were the Soviet occupation forces to prop up the new order, as when, in 1953, they were brought out to shoot down the workers opposed to the so-called workers' government of Walter Ulbricht. In West Germany, the negative example of the prison state across the Elbe was a powerful incentive to make democracy work during Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's tentative early years of parliamentary government.

Adenauer was a municipal official who had been mayor of Cologne. He had a record of anti-Nazism, and of government service going back to the Kaiser's pre-1914 era. He was able to build upon this record to create a sense of legitimacy around the post-1945 West German government. Like Hamid Karzai in present-day Afghanistan, he was both an opponent of the fallen regime, a reassuring reminder of earlier and better times and something of a conservative. The original American plan for post-war Germany, the vindictive Morgenthau plan, named for its author, treasury secretary Henry Morgenthau, had seen no place for a figure such as Adenauer -- of whom no one outside Germany had heard when Morgenthau was

putting together his plan. Like Karzai, Adenauer was a fortunate find in the confusion of victory.

Japan stands alongside West Germany as a successful American-managed regime change. Like Germany, it had suffered terribly from blockade and bombardment during the Second World War -- including, in Japan's case, the atomic bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In his much-cited (but less-read) book *The Clash of Civilizations*, the Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington has written of the exceptional difficulties facing Western troops and officials attempting to impose Western ways across cultural or religious barriers -- in Huntington's terminology, across civilizational lines.

The great counter-example to Huntington's argument is U.S. General Douglas MacArthur's success in imposing liberal democracy upon Japan, a non-Western nation that had recently been exceptionally militaristic and aggressive. But it took MacArthur six years, and one of the results has been that even now, half a century later, the American taxpayer has the privilege of paying for the military protection of the United States' chief economic competitor.

Since the aftermath of the Second World War, the United States has not had a good record at regime change. Notwithstanding popular talk and any number of paperback books about CIA-managed coups around the world, the CIA has not successfully overthrown a government (outside South Vietnam, which was under veritable occupation) since 1954 -- that is to say, for half a century.

The Pinochet coup in Chile in 1973, so frequently blamed on the CIA, was found by Senator Frank Church's investigating committee to have been an indigenous affair -- and that committee was no cover-up: It was on a hunting expedition, attempting to blacken the reputations of Republicans in the White House in advance of a presidential election.

The United States did play a role in the overthrow of the nationalist Iranian leader Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953, after having protected him from the British in earlier years. Though the United States was later accused of reinstalling the Shah as a puppet, the history of OPEC, the international oil cartel, shows the Shah was a puppet who pulled his own strings. The Shah was known as a "price hawk" within OPEC, arguing for higher prices and against the policy of moderation urged by U.S. officials. Nevertheless, the United States to this day gets the blame for the misdeeds of the Shah of Iran. The Bush Administration may be sure it will get a full measure of blame for all the shortcomings of any new regime in Baghdad -- and probably little of the credit for any of that regime's accomplishments.

Regime change in the normal sense of the term has often been easy and it has been a frequent result of war throughout history. But more profound regime change -- change in the Straussian sense -- is more difficult to bring about. In the past, such change has been the result of the thorough defeat of a discredited regime, and it has never been quick. It may turn out to be easy to get rid of Saddam -- and many would argue that outcome would be good in itself. But turning Iraq into a West Germany will be a bigger project.

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