

Ideas have consequences.

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Euro-Evil

A few months before 9/11 a Eurocrat by the name of Paul-Marie Couteaux made a rather interesting little speech in the European Parliament. Interesting because of the depth of evil to which it sinks. Mr Couteaux, who is **on** rather a lot of committees and is evidently rather distinguished in Eurocratic terms, **said**:

Madam President, the most surprising thing about our debate is our surprise, for Israel's expansionist policy is the inevitable and predictable result of the growing imbalance in the region, the stability for which we bear much of the responsibility. Firstly that is because since 1967 most of our states, with the notable exception of France, have continued to give the State of Israel – a state that is growing increasingly self-assured and domineering – the impression that it can violate international law and UN resolutions with impunity.

In reality, here as elsewhere we have followed Washington and persist in closing our eyes to the theocratic excesses of this religious state whose governments are under the thumb of fanatical parties and minorities that are just as bad as the other groups of religious fanatics in the region. That is why we should envisage imposing sanctions on Israel.

There is, however, another serious imbalance for which we are in part responsible, namely the imbalance of forces. I have no hesitation in saying that we must consider giving the Arab side a large enough force, including a large enough nuclear force, to persuade Israel that it cannot simply do whatever it wants. That is the policy my country pursued in the 1970s when it gave Iraq a nuclear force. We have now destroyed it. So we will carry on with our policy of imbalance and what is happening today is merely the annoying but inevitable result of our collective blindness and cowardice.

Try to look past the nauseating calumnies against Israel, and at what he is really saying. What is striking about the argument is how much it refers to power and how little to morality. We read of a "growing imbalance" and of Israel being "self-assured and

domineering". Look past the froth about theocracy in the second

paragraph, which we are astonished that even Couteaux was braindead enough to believe. It analyses the political situation in the Middle East in terms of who holds the power. This obsession with power finds its fullest expression in the last paragraph. To solve the problems of the Middle East, he advocates giving the Arab thugocracies the power to destroy Israel through genocide. He doesn't bother to explain how this will improve matters, he just states that it will. It is self-evident to him.

One of the reasons why the Euroweenies and the vile dictators of the Middle East get along like a house on fire is that they share this obsession with power. They see political situations not in terms of right and wrong but of who has power and who does not. This common mistake binds them together more strongly than considerations of rationality or ideology or even genuine self-interest. And that is why they will lose their war.

Sun, 05/30/2004 - 19:06 | digg | del.icio.us | permalink

Which War?

The post ends with:

And that is why they will lose their war.

Which war are you talking about exactly, and who is on each side of it?

Gil

by **Gil** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 04:13 | **reply**

Shocking

That the Eurocrat and "**The World**"s views are so fundamentally similar.

The Eurocrat believes: The EU should participate in social engineering in the middle east.

"The World" believes: The US should participate in social engineering in the middle east.(e.g. Iraq)

The Eurocrat believes: The EU will not suffer any "blowback" from such social engineering.

"The World" believes: The US will not suffer any "blowback" from such social engineering.

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 06:20 | reply

Re: Shocking...

...that the Eurocrat and "a reader"'s views are so fundamentally similar. Both of them analyse political conflicts by compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute. Thus, by ignoring

the difference between a policy of entrenching the tyrant in power

and a policy of deposing the tyrant and liberating his victims, one can call both policies "social engineering" and argue that they are alike.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 13:20 | reply

Re: Which War?

Gil asked:

Which war are you talking about exactly, and who is on each side of it?

Neither the war nor the participants have generally-accepted names yet. It is between the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys often call it, misleadingly 'the War on Terror'. The bad guys use terminology like 'the war against Jews and Crusaders'. The Eurocrats think of it as the war to humble America, and therefore tend to condone, sponsor or side with the bad guys.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:03 | **reply**

Does the editor believe...

that any action someone takes is OK as long as they have "virtuous" ideals?

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:29 | reply

Re: Does the editor believe...

No.

by **Editor** on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 14:56 | reply

The bad guys

Since it is the white hats against the black hats, apparently, it could be useful to know who the black hats are and how they thrive. Terrorism is the struggle of the seemingly weak by tactic against the seemingly strong. The bad guys see themselves as the good guys tiny army of reformers and this is how they see their cause:

http://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/congress/9-11_commission/030709-sageman.htm

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 18:10 | reply

So not only must someone's ideals be virtuous

but their means must be virtuous as well. In addition, what the person(s) actually accomplish is as important as what their stated ideals were. Am I missing anything or does that fairly well sum it up?

Re:Re: Shocking...

Might not a principle against social engineering be a more compelling "moral principle" to the reader? and not "compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute"?

by a reader on Mon, 05/31/2004 - 23:16 | reply

Against Social Engineering?

A reader wrote:

'Might not a principle against social engineering be a more compelling "moral principle" to the reader? and not "compulsively ignoring the moral aspects of what is in dispute"?'

Having a blanket principle against social engineering would be deeply silly and wrong and would inevitably involve ignoring important moral differences.

For example, it would involve ignoring the important moral difference between piecemeal social engineering (in which the US is engaged) and utopian social engineering (in which the US is not engaged).

Utopian social engineering involves setting up institutions that will attempt to direct a whole society toward some particular end. This invariably ends in disaster for various reasons that the reader can find in books by Karl Popper and F. A. Hayek.

Piecemeal social engineering is what the US is engaged in. It involves changing specific institutions in a way that is responsive to criticism. They toppled a dictatorship that needed toppled. They are trying to help the Iraqis to train themselves to defend their country, in other words to help them to build one particular set of institutions they urgently need given the problem-situation facing Iraq. At the same time they are attempting to help Iraqis to set up institutions that will help develop a democratic government in Iraq. They are undoubtedly helping to solve lots of other problems that they have discovered since the end of the invasion. The one thing they are not trying to do is to impose a plan on the (non-terrorist) Iraqis without their consent.

by **Alan Forrester** on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 00:51 | **reply**

Re: Against Social Engineering?

Would you consider prohibition, the war on poverty, and the war on drugs examples of utopian or piecemeal social engineering? I think you could easily call the above examples utopian social engineering. What is the precise demarkation between piecemeal and utopian?

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 01:56 | **reply**

Talking about morality in the war between good and bad guys and about justifying means one must always remember that US is no exception to the common dirty way of doing all things. What I mean is that US sided with many bad guys not sharing their moral values but for the sake of enterprise against someone "trully bad". What do you, libertarians, call this method? Idiotarianism? Moral relativism? Whatever the name. US shouldn't have backed Osama Bin Laden in order to be anti-Soviet in Afganistan. Of course, USSR was such a terrible tyrany that even notorious Osama is better... Just imagine the world without this "freedom fighter" and remember that he is a USA creature, the creature that has undergoneunforeseen-transformations. This example may seem worn out, I agree. I will give you another one. Not long ago, before 9/11 Americans provided some sort of support to Chechen leaders just in order to be anti-something or pro-something again (prohumanrights, I guess). The same J.W.Bush didn't give a damn about links between Al-Qaeda and Chechen terrorists before Al-Qaeda stroke him. Chechen leaders were accepted in White house, they had their representative offices in USA, they were live legends, symbols of whatsoever... And those "freedom fighters" became terrorists for him too. Although not guite "overnight" - the idea of a "political solution" was still reiterated for some time. As the time goes by they are becoming more terrorists than liberals, then a little bit more and more again. Just look at this link, for instance: http://www.larouchepub.com/other/2001/2838whtehse_on_putin.html - this dialog had me in stitches:

Helen Thomas: Haven't we made many statements denouncing Russia for its attacks in Chechnya? And isn't there some image of freedom fighters there? And all of a sudden you're calling them terrorists?

Fleischer: As I just indicated, the concern for human rights remains a vital part of American policy, and the only solution to the problem in Chechnya is a political one.

Q: Yeah, but why is it just today that you're calling them terrorists? What has changed?

Fleischer: Well, as I indicated, that's not the case. That's been the long-standing position.

Q: I think this is the first time—is this not the first time you've used this word at that podium? It's the first time we've heard it.

Fleischer: I'm not sure that I have discussed the situation in Chechnya with the White House press corps prior to this. We haven't had much reason to do so.

But that's why I indicated, going back to the previous administration, in testimony before the Senate, they said what they said because it's true. And the State Department publishes a report every year that included similar information.

Q: Is it fair to assume that these words from you are in exchange

for Putin's cooperation on the U.S. effort?

Fleischer: No, it's an accurate statement about the situation on the ground and the importance of the speech that President Putin made. But keep in mind, President Putin called for political discussions. Leaders of Chechnya have now indicated they are willing to engage in such discussions. That's a positive development.

Q: It sounds like a deal, though. It sounds like, in exchange for Putin's support, we, rhetorically, from this podium, are lending him support in characterizing the opposition as international terrorists.

Fleischer: No, there's no—no such conclusion should be reached. This is consistent with actions taken by the previous administration, because it's an accurate statement about developments in Chechnya

A widely accepted principle "enemies of my enemies are my friends" is obviously immoral and eventually not effective in cases like Osama Bin Laden. But USA, UK and almost every country in the world has it as their main weapon of foreign diplomacy. European parlament is no exception either. Telling that USA are better than Euro because of moral grounds they are insisting on is very proposterous and cynical.

And that is exactly why everyone in the world hates America - not because they are doing worse things than others. Because of this outrageous cry that they are the most moral country and what they do is utterly right. European parlament is still not an accomplished master of this art - that why you have so many opportinities for critique.

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 09:28 | reply

Re: Hypocritical American policy

So, how about this?

"We must shake off decades of failed policy.... [We] have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites.... No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient."

by **Kevin** on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 16:11 | reply

Re: Hypocritical American policy

From your citation of Bush speach I can conclude:

- 1) Americans are not responsible for dodgy foreign politics anymore some stupid presidents did this in past not contemprorary accomplished highly-moral Americans.
- 2) There will be compromises no more

I personally would be happy to see this dream coming true after all.

by a reader on Tue, 06/01/2004 - 16:32 | reply

Demarcation

'Would you consider prohibition, the war on poverty, and the war on drugs examples of utopian or piecemeal social engineering? I think you could easily call the above examples utopian social engineering.'

Utopian. They are aimed at imposing a single policy of preventing peaceful behaviour that the government dislikes on people across an entire country without paying the slightest attention to their wishes.

By contrast, trying to help build free institutions in Iraq is aimed at setting up a means for the Iraqis to solve their own problems. The only behaviour they are trying to prevent in doing so is evil, violent behaviour.

'What is the precise demarkation between piecemeal and utopian?'

Utopian policies invariably involve trying to force everyone to do something that the authorities say will make people happy, while they are in fact foisting their irrationalities on people.

Piecemeal policies involve giving people access to things and letting them choose for themselves whether to support it, as well as blocking attempts to curb free choice.

by **Alan Forrester** on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 00:09 | reply

Re: Demarcation

Would imposing (or attemping to impose) free institutions on a group of people who have no interest in such freedom be utopian or piecemeal engineering? Locke considered <u>all</u> government to be by the consent of the ruled. If this is true then the majority of Iraqis at least tacitly agreed to Saddam's rule. These people would not seem to be very good candidates for leaving each other alone.

by a reader on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 02:25 | reply

Re: Hypocritical American policy

"We must shake off decades of failed policy.... [We] have been willing to make a bargain, to tolerate oppression for the sake of stability. Longstanding ties often led us to overlook the faults of local elites.... No longer should we think tyranny is benign because it is temporarily convenient."

Are our new "allies" (Afghan warlords, Pervez Musharraf, Islam Karimov etc.) examples of our "new" policy?

Re: Hypocritical American policy

I think your examples predate the speech I quoted — but more importantly, the USA is *not actually* a dictatorship whose policies turn on a dime at the whim of the President.

by **Kevin** on Wed, 06/02/2004 - 17:46 | **reply**

Yeah, methinks not

'Would imposing (or attemping to impose) free institutions on a group of people who have no interest in such freedom be utopian or piecemeal engineering? Locke considered all government to be by the consent of the ruled. If this is true then the majority of Iraqis at least tacitly agreed to Saddam's rule.'

Locke was wrong so your argument doesn't work.

by **Alan Forrester** on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 02:34 | **reply**

Re: Locke

Please explain why Locke is wrong and your view of how governments come to power and stay in power.

by a reader on Fri, 06/04/2004 - 12:13 | reply

Governments and Consent

'Please explain why Locke is wrong and your view of how governments come to power and stay in power.'

People frequently do not consent to the government they happen to live under. A government can come to power in one of two ways. It can win an open, honest and free election, which is repeated at regular intervals. Or it can seize power by violence. Governments that do the former have people's consent to be in power. Those that do not have not got people's consent to be in power since they have not offered people the opportunity to get rid of them, i.e. - to withdraw their consent. Saddam's government was obviously in the latter category.

by **Alan Forrester** on Sun, 06/06/2004 - 02:32 | reply

Re:Governments and Consent

Several comments:

1. An insolvable problem with democracy is that the rules of democracy cannot be established democratically. They can only be established by decree. An example of this is voter eligibility. One could argue that monarchy is a form of democracy where one voter is eligible.... the monarch.

Furthermore, there have been historically wide variations in the

eligibility of voters:

- a.only the noblemen can vote (England around the time of the Magna Carta)
- b. only property owning white males can vote (post revolutionary war America)
- c. only males can vote (post civil war America)
- d. only people over the age of 18 can vote (present day America) Would George Washington be considered a dictator since he (most likely) did not have the electoral consent of the majority of the total population of the 13 states?
- 2. How does like Saddam someone "seize" power. You could say: "I, Alan Forrester, declare myself supreme ruler of Great Britain.", but no one would think that you actually seized power. You need to have someone (a lot of someones) to carry out your orders to actually seize power. How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?

by a reader on Mon, 06/07/2004 - 23:18 | reply

Re:Governments and Consent

'1. An insolvable problem with democracy is that the rules of democracy cannot be established democratically. They can only be established by decree. An example of this is voter eligibility. One could argue that monarchy is a form of democracy where one voter is eligible.... the monarch. [followed by snipped examples]'

A democracy can't be established democratically where there was none before. However, your example don't really bear much weight. In some of the societies below, criticism of the powers that be was allowed and even encouraged. Voting was one of the means of doing that and the most effective one employed to date. Those would count as democracies IMO. So I would count (b) - (d) as democratic, although rather flawed. I should say (a) probably was not.

'2. How does like Saddam someone "seize" power. You could say: "I, Alan Forrester, declare myself supreme ruler of Great Britain.", but no one would think that you actually seized power. You need to have someone (a lot of someones) to carry out your orders to actually seize power. How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?'

From whence do tyrants originate? Well, it's not all that big a mystery really. Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas. Iraq had never been democratic even before Saddam came along and people had no knowledge of these ideas. The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious. The consequence of having a society where that sort of thing are routine and accepted are not immediately obvious. Furthermore, by the time such a system is established lots of people are all engaging in this

behaviour and to dissent from it is to invite death unless you have a lot of people on your side and any time you invite somebody into a circle of dissidents you risk death.

Of course, that is not enough in and of itself to guarantee that a tryanny will stay alive. For that to happen, all outside ideas must be excluded. Rewards for using creativity to come up with new ways of smashing anything that vaguely resembles thought or dissent are necessary. An ideology that provides a specious pseudojustification form murder, torture and extortion also helps. Saddam's policemen had the habit of breaking into a person's home late at night while they were asleep, putting a gun to their head, telling them that Saddam had been toppled and that they must join the revolution against the Baathist state or die, of course the person would be shot if he agreed.

by **Alan Forrester** on Thu, 06/10/2004 - 00:25 | **reply**

Re:Re:Governments and Consent

If indeed: "Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas." how are the benefits of these ideas going to conveyed by an occupying force that, by in large, does not even speak the same language as Iraqis? Western civilization has evolved over a period of at least 400 years. and Iraqis are going to learn all of explicit and implicit principles in how many years? Maybe utopian isn't the right word, but....

"The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious." What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other?
"An ideology that provides a specious pseudojustification form murder, torture and extortion also helps." Helps? I think ideology is essential. To get people to follow the orders of a tyrant, become suicide bombers, or torture and murder requires ideology (however specious we may think it is). What would the Iranian or Taliban regimes have been without Islamic ideology?

But the bottom line is that Iraqi's beliefs about the world have not fundamentally changed, and the continued presence of U.S. troops will not change that.

by a reader on Fri, 06/11/2004 - 12:14 | reply

Governments and Consent

'If indeed: "Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas." how are the benefits of these ideas going to conveyed by an occupying force that, by in large, does not even speak the same language as Iraqis? Western civilization has evolved over a period of at least 400 years. and Iraqis are going to

learn all of explicit and implicit principles in how many years?

Maybe utopian isn't the right word, but....'

Oddly enough they have people there who speak Arabic. The soldiers aren't there to persuade them, they're there to provide security. also, it's harder to invent an idea from scratch than to learn it from somebody who already knows it.

"The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious." What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other?'

The suicide bombing is a result of Islamist ideology, not every tyranny features suicide bombing.

'But the bottom line is that Iraqi's beliefs about the world have not fundamentally changed...'

I tend to find arguments more useful that blank assertions. The evidence indicates that more Iraqis want democracy now than when the US arrived:

http://www.thedesertsun.com/news/stories2004/national/20040515020610.shtml

by **Alan Forrester** on Sun, 06/13/2004 - 15:31 | **reply**

Re:Governments and Consent

I asked: "How does someone like Saddam get others to carry out his orders? And what percentage of the population must follow those orders for him to stay in power?"

You replied: "Well, it's not all that big a mystery really

Democracy, human rights and freedom are all abstract and difficult to discover ideas......The rewards of smashing in a person's skull and taking their stuff, or bumping off your enemies, or committing rape are immediate and obvious."

I asked: "What are the immediate and obvious rewards of being a suicide bomber? or do you consider suicide bombing and tyrannical regimes completely unrelated to each other?"

My point was to question your theory of how tyrannies are formed (not specifically Saddam's) . That it could not simply be because the rewards of certain behaviors are "immediate and obvious". That in general humans are motivated by theories. And as long as the majority of people believe in those theories, they will tolerate a tyrant who espouses those theories.

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 03:23 | reply

LE

Or, as a more reasonable middle ground, a nation can passively agree to accept rigged elections; so that the illusory facade of

"consent" can be usued to rationalize away the harsh reality, that

we are nothing but a banana republic anyway.

Just a big, rich one.

This has certainly been clear since shortly after November of 1963, when an inconvenient US elected official was hastily replaced through public execution on the streets of Dallas.

From that point on, most Americans accepted the painful realization that their "consent" would be manufactured by elites, one way or another, with or without their active participation.

And most, predictably, stopped voting at all in national elections.

Uniquely American cultural norms in broad acceptance now, like the "couch potato", passively watching television for hours at a time, remaining thorougly detached from real political decision-making; emerge from a mature and realistic acceptance of political power the way it actually functions and not as we fancifully imagine it to work.

In a gangster republic, the preponderance of force is the ultimate arbiter of political power. Even children intuitively understand that harsh reality of the shoolyard and the street.

In the end, people realize that the power is in the hands of those who command the loyalty of the armed forces (regular military, Reserves, National Guard, and elite special ops units) which will finally determine the outcome of the current evolving situation.

Just like any other ordinary Third World banana republic.

Referencing Tommy Franks remarks in a recent interview with Cigar Afficionado maganize, I would say that martial law here in the America is no longer inevitable - since it has already arrived in incremental fashion. Martial law is already here.

Most Americans just don't know it yet.

by a reader on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 20:23 | reply

Most Americans just don't know it yet

Right. Just a certain **relatively small category** of them.

by **Editor** on Sun, 06/20/2004 - 22:04 | reply

"Just like any other ordinary

"Just like any other ordinary Third World banana republic."

Only you are able to say all of this publicly without the slightest fear of any retribution. I wonder what this tells us?

An Iranian Student (AIS)

by a reader on Thu, 07/08/2004 - 01:41 | reply

How remarkable! A "libertarian" web-site that, because it is not "idiotarian" (which allows them to comfortably despise the rest of "idiot" humanity) decides that when it comes to the crunch, when push comes to shove, and given the available data at the present time, then actually..... it supports the world's most gigantic military installation ever, currently rampaging around Afghanistan and Iraq (I'm sorry, "building democracy" in Afghanistan and Iraq). "Rebuilding" means the wholesale demolition of towns like Falludja, of which we hear little these days....

It also means supporting Israel. Not that I have the slightest axe to grind for the "Arab thugocracies", but if it were any other country in the world, then Israel (which explicitly bases its flag, its citizenship, and its immigration policy on RACE and RELIGION) would rightly be called a racist state. And Ariel Sharon would be denounced for what he is: a fascist killer (anyone remember Sabra and Chatila? or indeed Sharon's services to the Israeli cause when he was leading punitive expeditions against the Palestinians?).

Oh yes, and while you're slamming the "Euroweenies" (whatever that might mean) for supporting "Arab thugocracies", might you perhaps tell us which ones you are thinking of? Could it be Egypt, one of the world's biggest recipients of US aid, including military aid? Could it be Saudi Arabia, which for decades has been the lynch-pin of US power in the region? Might it be possibly be Saddam's Iraq, which the US supported (via Saudi Arabia) during a particularly ghastly and bloody war against Iran (8 years of fighting, 1 million dead, massacres of Kurds using poison gas supplied by Germany)? Could it be Osama Bin Laden and his bunch of killers, hired, armed, and trained to fight the Afghan government supported by the USSR? And if we're talking about thugocracies, then let's go outside the Arab world and talk about Pakistan, Chile (Pinochet) not to mention Guatemala, Salvador, Panama (America's man the drug-dealer Noriega...), oh yes and the racist South Africa, and and and... the list just goes on and on.

Scratch a "libertarian" it seems, and you get a defender of US imperialism!

Not that the European states are any better of course, each defends its own interests with whatever means it has available and will cosy up to the most vile dictators (Saddam, Putin the butcher of Chechnya, China as long as they can sell them an airbus or two).

by a reader on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 13:21 | reply

The History of Israel

Surprisingly enough, you are factually mistaken about both the history of Israel and the nature of Zionism. We recommend our short **account** of that.

As for the moral/political issues you raise about Israel: That the Law of Return could possibly make Israel a 'racist state' even if it were an utterly iniquitous measure, and the idea that because of special privileges granted only to Jews it escapes being called a racist state, are examples of the grotesque sophistry under which Israel and Jews are singled out for condemnation according to the prevailing political correctness. Moreover, the claim that the Law of Return *is* iniquitous in the first place makes no more sense than a claim that the **NAACP** is 'racist' because it does not turn itself into an 'International Association for the Advancement of All People'. Indeed, it makes considerably less sense because if the NAACP did do that absurd thing, the people currently receiving its assistance would not be immediately subjected to genocide.

by **Editor** on Mon, 09/12/2005 - 14:26 | **reply**

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