

# CAPITAL COMMENTARY

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## Democracy Through Creative Destruction?

The people most often mentioned as designers of President Bush's war on Iraq and terrorism are Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Pearle. Here is another name to remember: Michael Ledeen. According to William O. Beeman, writing for the Pacific News Service (5/8/03), Ledeen (a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington) is one of the lead visionaries behind the president's new security strategy.

"Change—above all violent change—is the essence of human history," writes Ledeen, and the United States should act on this basis. "Creative destruction is our middle name. We do it automatically...it is time once again to export the democratic revolution." As Beeman explains, Ledeen "believes that violence in the service of the spread of democracy is America's manifest destiny."

Ledeen complains in his 1996 book, *Freedom Betrayed*, that the U.S. never "won" the Cold War; the Soviet Union simply collapsed. If the U.S. had truly won, democratic institutions would be sprouting everywhere. According to Beeman, Ledeen is now the lead advocate of American "total war" in the Middle East. "Total war not only destroys the enemy's military forces," Ledeen writes, "but also brings the enemy society to an extremely personal point of decision, so that they are willing to accept a reversal of the cultural trends. The sparing of civilian lives cannot be the total war's first priority... The purpose of total war is to permanently force your will onto another people."

Ledeen, like Robert D. Kaplan and many others writing today, is not only taking great distance from the just-war tradition, he is also advocating a highly contradictory pattern of political/military behavior. Creative destruction of a society does not necessarily lead to democracy even if an occupying force tries to impose it for two or more generations.

And this is where the U.S. now appears to be in a bind. The American military had a detailed strategy for destroying the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, but the

post-war efforts thus far show little evidence of an equally detailed strategy to force democracy on Iraq. In fact, the tension now growing inside the U.S. government is between those who want the U.S. to vacate Iraq quickly and those who want an extended occupation.

The "road map" to peace between Israel and the Palestinians is now supposed to work because democracy is on its way in Iraq. But Secretary of State Colin Powell has already pushed the map to the background in trying to urge Israel and the Palestinians just to do something. The U.S. has no plan to impose democracy on Palestine, Egypt, Iran, or Syria and the administration continues to thank the highly undemocratic Saudis for their cooperation in whatever we do.

All of these actions show that the U.S. is either ambivalent about trying to impose democracy by force or has no intention of doing so. Ledeen's vision may have helped inspire American destruction of Saddam's regime (and others still to come), but it does not appear to have stirred Americans to back a total war "to permanently force [our] will onto another people."

Just-war criteria require not only that a defensive state show a just cause for going to war but also that the outcome is a more just and stable situation in the defeated country that unjustly started the war. Absent evidence of weapons of mass destruction and terrorist links that supposedly gave the U.S. just cause for invading Iraq, it appears that the U.S.-led war aimed chiefly at creative destruction. That is not a just cause. If, over the next two or three decades, the U.S. can help generate stable, just, and representative governments in countries throughout the region, the end might appear to have justified the means. That end is in question, however, after only one month since the U.S.-led coalition gained "victory" in Iraq.

—James W. Skillen  
*President*

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