

The prince by machiavelli

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In the beginning of *The Prince*, Machiavelli outlines the different types of principalities which constitute all forms of government. He then goes on to give advice on how a competent ruler would go about keeping a stronghold in the principality he had just conquered. Although perhaps not as blatant as other political leaders' attempts at gaining control after an invasion of a country, George Bush, taking action in 2003, decided to firmly plant an America influence in Iraq.

“The Decider,” as the President recently referred to himself, chose a path which has clear parallels to situations outlined in *The Prince*. Within the pages of *The Prince*, Machiavelli has given much advice as to how to deal with the current situation in which the President now finds himself. Leaving out ethical consideration of the actions our President has taken and must take in the future, this paper will explore the relationship between the teachings found in *The Prince* and the current situation in Iraq and attempt to answer the question of what advice Machiavelli would give to President Bush to ease his current situation.

In the beginning of *The Prince*, Machiavelli claims that all governments are either republics or principalities. As he has already laid out what constitutes a republic, *The Prince* is concerned with only principalities. As he explains, there are three different types of principalities; hereditary, new, and mixed.

A hereditary principality is the sort that is passed from ruler to ruler in the same family. It is the typical monarchical relationship in which a king, once no longer able to rule, passes his kingdom over to the next in line, usually his son. New principalities are entirely new territories to be ruled over, and

mixed principalities are new additions to existing territories. It is this last kind of principality that this paper will be concerned with as it is most readily illustrated with the current situation in Iraq.

To understand the relationship between Machiavelli's ideas and what the Bush administration is currently involved in in the war there, it is necessary to understand the recent history of Iraq.

Iraq was formed from three former Ottoman regions; Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. It was given to the United Kingdom at the end of World War I as a mandate. The United Kingdom granted Iraq independence in 1932 but invaded in 1941 when it seemed that the government there was threatening European oil supplies. The U. K then occupied the country for several years and installed a monarchy to rule the region.

This monarchy lasted until a coup d'état led by the Iraqi army overthrew it in 1958. After this government was itself overthrown, the Iraqi Ba'ath party gained control and out of this rose Saddam Hussein. Hussein ruled Iraq until removed from power by the United States in 2003. (Wikipedia 2006)

Although perhaps in the eyes of Hussein, Iraq could be considered a monarchy, it was more often considered a dictatorship. And because when the United States invaded Iraq they were not invading a new territory, Iraq as a principality would, by Machiavellian standards, be considered not a hereditary or new principality, but mixed. It is these sorts of principalities that, in Machiavelli's words, "...are the ones that present problems."

Aside from the hereditary principalities, in which the people of the territory do not, as evidenced by their loyalty to the King's family, mind the change in power, a mixed principality, because the people have been under the rule of one man (as in the case of Iraq), will not take well to the new ruler unless their situation improves. Machiavelli's musings on human nature bring out the idea that all people are generally looking out for themselves and those close to them.

They are generally indifferent to politics when things are going well for themselves. For this reason, if the people's situation improves even a small amount and provides them the feeling of safety and security, it will not really matter to them who is in control. As evidenced by the daily insurgent attacks, kidnappings and suicide bombings, President Bush has not created a feeling of security for the people of Iraq. Is it any wonder that the vast majority of the Iraqi's do not want us there? President Bush has failed to accomplish even this first goal of competent rule laid out by Machiavelli.

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli uses the analogy of rulers being like foxes and lions to prove a point about what constitutes a competent ruler. He mentions this in Chapter Eighteen: How Rulers Are to Keep Their Word. As he states, "Everybody recognizes how praiseworthy it is for a ruler to keep his word and to live a life of integrity, without relying on craftiness. Nevertheless, we see that in practice... those rulers who have not thought it important to keep their word have achieved great things..."

For this reason, Machiavelli believes it important to be able to rule and fight in two ways. The first, the way men fight; by the rules. The second is the

way animals fight; no holds barred. “ Because you cannot always win when you respect the rules, you must be prepared to break them. A ruler needs to know how to be both an animal and a man.”

In Machiavelli’s view, because a ruler must at times display “ beastly” qualities, it is important to know how to act like specific animals, namely, a lion and a fox. The lion is powerful, and runs over his enemies with great might, but has the disadvantage of not being able to avoid traps. The fox, on the other hand, has the cunning to avoid those traps. So it is important for the ruler to be able to act like both animals and to know when the situation calls for either brute strength, or quiet cunning.

Although many people often make fun of the President, regarding him as not too bright, he did sell a war to the American people and the world based on lies. As recently reported by Reuters, the White House had been informed by the CIA six months previous to the invasion of Iraq that there were no weapons of mass destruction. This, along with countless other officials and documents have shown that the Bush administration knew what all of us know now; that Iraq was in no way the threat they were perceived to be.

Of course, there was no way for him at the time to know that the world would find out that he was not telling the truth and if there was, maybe he would not have used the rationale of weapons of mass destruction but found another way to get enough support to invade Iraq. Nevertheless, he was cunning enough to know when to use fear and manipulation to rally the people behind him and achieved his aims with the help of many countries.

In Machiavelli's time, there would not have been governmental leaks to the extent that we have today, and anyone courageous enough to speak out about ruling governments were more than likely going to be killed. If Bush were ruling with circumstances similar to what they were in Italy in the time of Machiavelli, perhaps he would have been more successful.

However, now that Bush finds himself in the position that he is in, the question could be asked what advice might Machiavelli give to our President. The answer to this question lies in chapter five of *The Prince: How You Should Govern Cities or Kingdoms That, Before You Acquired Them, Lived Under Their Own Laws*. As Machiavelli explains, "When the states one acquires by conquest are accustomed to living under their own laws and in freedom, there are three policies one can follow in order to hold on to them." Although it could be debated whether Iraq was "free" the overall meaning of Machiavelli still applies.

"The first is to lay them to waste." With the advent of the international criminal court and the necessity of keeping the peace and favor of ones allies, President Bush could not view this first option as possible. "The second is to go and live there in person." I highly doubt President Bush has, or ever will consider such a measure. And, "The third is to let them continue to live under their own laws, make them pay you, and create there an administrative and political elite who will remain loyal to you."

This third option is the one the Bush administration is following. Although the Iraqi's are not paying taxes directly to the United States, once the

infrastructure gets up and running again, I am certain we will take our payment in the form of oil.

If someone from old Italy were familiar with Machiavelli and his works and were alive today, they would see much Machiavellian inspiration in the governmental tactics of the Bush administration. Whether President Bush is aware of it or not, he is giving us a first hand account of what happens when Machiavellian principles are followed. The interesting fact is that it seems these principles would only work today if the circumstances were just right. Nevertheless, many of Bush's detractors would probably like to see him carry certain of Machiavelli's ideas to a different level, namely the second option of ruling a newly acquired kingdom; move there.

Works Cited

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