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Trends. When Governments Want Government To Change

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses regime change in Germany and Iraq in a political psychological context.

It is certainly possible that the public discourse on coerced regime change in Iraq, on military intervention against Iraq, and on the “giving up” by Iraq of weapons of mass destruction might be enlightened by research on political change in other geographical locales for other political issues. A case in point is a study by Kirkcaldy et al. (2002) in the European Psychologist that focuses on Germany and contemporary efforts to change the East German economy to approach that of West Germany.

Kirkcaldy et al. have found that there are psychological differences between West and East German managers as to external locus of control, type A personality, and self-reported psychological and physical health. And these psychological differences, others yet to be identified, and even similarities that may be expressed differently may well be implicated in the political change process, e.g., what change strategies would be successful, the likely scope and time for change, etc.

The relevance for United Nations, other multilateral and bilateral, and unilateral foreign policy towards Iraq is in the identification of psychological factors as well as political structural, functional, and process factors as germane to planning, effecting, and evaluating change. The identification of psychological factors may also serve to implicitly reinforce a sense of humanity among would-be adversaries, even if psychological factors may also be demonized through the dynamics of political conflict. Moreover, the salience of psychological factors may also highlight stress phenomena that too frequently may impel disastrous decision making.