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Iraq: Time to get out!

Poland is sending more troops to build democracy in Iraq but now it is obvious that no significant group of Iraqis wants that to happen. The best educated Sunnis and Christians of the Baghdad elite may admire democracy in theory, but fiercely oppose it in practice. They do not want to be ruled by the Shia majority, and still less by the emerging Kurdish-Shia alliance. According to some experts, it would be an astonishing achievement of cultural transformation if a functioning Iraqi democracy could be established in 30 years, or indeed, 60 years. Nevertheless the post-communist rulers of Poland are determined to repay their political debt to Dick Cheney, whose firm is now playing a larger role in Iraq.

Dick Cheney visited Poland for the first time as Secretary of Defense of the U.S. four days prior to the end of the presidential election in 1990. His visit was sudden but carefully staged to show support to the candidacy of Lech Walesa and pay respect to the long time communist President of Poland Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski. His visit was of a political nature and a strong interference in election campaign in Poland at that time. Now the newspapers report that oil giant Halliburton Co., once run by the U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney is now involved in the operation and distribution of oil products in Iraq, playing a more direct role in Iraq's energy business than originally believed. New contracts are estimated to have worth of \$600-million, according to Scott Saunders, a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Naturally these contracts need to be protected by old time Polish friends even though the Bush administration cannot, of course, contemplate decades of colonial government. The hopes of recruiting large numbers of peacekeepers from other countries have faded, and the time has come to prepare for the next-best exit strategy.

It is futile to push for a rapid progress in Iraq towards the formation of some kind of elected government in a mere two or three years, after the constitution is written and approved by referendum (so that elections are held). Although the new government is to have a very small army of 12,000, and a police force duly respectful of human rights, it had better be heavily armed all the same, for so are millions of Iraqis opposed to majority rule.

It is not that the troops are frightened by the sporadic attacks against them – total casualties remain too small for that. But most are utterly disgusted by the futility of their duties. They are repairing schools in the furnace of the Mesopotamian summer while able-bodied Iraqis are idly watching, if not jeering. They are clearing playgrounds for children who have been taught to throw stones at them. They are guarding hospitals from looters while being cursed by visitors of the patients they are protecting – one of whom

recently justified the killing of three American soldiers on the grounds that they were wearing shorts while off-duty, exposing their naked knees.

The officers who now govern towns, city quarters and entire districts are constantly besieged by local leaders and imams demanding more of everything from electricity to well-paid jobs, but who resist any suggestion that they themselves could, for example, lead their followers in badly needed clean-ups of garbage-strewn streets (they prefer to keep them listening to sermons for hours on end). It is therefore not just the successive delays in rotating forces home that are ruining morale, but the impossible mission of turning Iraqis into democrats in short order.

The post-communist apparatchiks like Kwasniewski and Miller will find that their gratitude and loyalty to Dick Cheney and the Bush Clan will have a very heavy price in terms of their commitment to the occupation of Iraq. Thus they should be reminded while they still have the power to prepare the exit strategy quickly. The perils of rapid exit are many, but the only alternative is a prolonged occupation that offers no greater guarantees of success and at a far greater cost. But it is doubtful if former communist apparatchiks will ever understand the value of human life, unless as in the case of Nicolai Ceausescu of Romania, their own heads are at stake.

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