

THE GREEN ZONE AT DOJ

Rajiv Chandrasekaran deserves credit for writing the definitive narrative of what happens when a bunch of kids chosen by the Heritage Foundation converge on a country and pretend to reconstruct it.

The decision to send the loyal and the willing instead of the best and the brightest is now regarded by many people involved in the 3 1/2-year effort to stabilize and rebuild Iraq as one of the Bush administration's gravest errors. Many of those selected because of their political fidelity spent their time trying to impose a conservative agenda on the postwar occupation, which sidetracked more important reconstruction efforts and squandered goodwill among the Iraqi people, according to many people who participated in the reconstruction effort.

That story sounds an awful lot like what Daniel Metcalfe has to say about the changes in DOJ since Alberto Gonzales took over.

I used to think that [Ed Meese and John Mitchell] had politicized the department more than anyone could or should. But nothing compares to the past two years under Alberto Gonzales.

To be sure, he continued a trend of career/noncareer separation that began under John Ashcroft, yet even Ashcroft brought in political aides who in large measure were experienced in government functioning. Ashcroft's Justice Department appointees, with few exceptions, were not the type of people who caused you to wonder what they were doing there. They might not have been firm believers in the importance of government, but generally speaking,

there was a very respectable level of competence (in some instances even exceptionally so) and a relatively strong dedication to quality government, as far as I could see.

Under Gonzales, though, almost immediately from the time of his arrival in February 2005, this changed quite noticeably. First, there was extraordinary turnover in the political ranks, including the majority of even Justice's highest-level appointees. It was reminiscent of the turnover from the second Reagan administration to the first Bush administration in 1989, only more so. Second, the atmosphere was palpably different, in ways both large and small. One need not have had to be terribly sophisticated to notice that when Deputy Attorney General Jim Comey left the department in August 2005 his departure was quite abrupt, and that his large farewell party was attended by neither Gonzales nor (as best as could be seen) anyone else on the AG's personal staff.

Third, and most significantly for present purposes, there was an almost immediate influx of young political aides beginning in the first half of 2005 (e.g., counsels to the AG, associate deputy attorneys general, deputy associate attorneys general, and deputy assistant attorneys general) whose inexperience in the processes of government was surpassed only by their evident disdain for it.

That's great. Because we know how successful Ledeer's daughter was at ensuring a stable and prosperous Iraq.