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 andthe brightest is now regarded by many people involved in the 3 1/2-year effort to stabilize and rebuild Iraq as one of the Bushadministration's gravest errors. Many of those selected because oftheir political fidelity spent their time trying to impose aconservative agenda on the postwar occupation, which sidetracked moreimportant reconstruction efforts and squandered goodwill among theIraqi people, according to many people who participated in thereconstruction 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 thananyone could or should. But nothing compares to the past two yearsunder Alberto Gonzales.

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

there was a very respectable levelof competence (in some instances even exceptionally so) and arelatively strong dedication to quality government, as far as I couldsee.

Under Gonzales, though, almost immediately from the time of hisarrival in February 2005, this changed quite noticeably. First, therewas extraordinary turnover in the political ranks, including themajority of even Justice's highest-level appointees. It was reminiscentof the turnover from the second Reagan administration to the first Bushadministration in 1989, only more so. Second, the atmosphere waspalpably different, in ways both large and small. One need not have hadto be terribly sophisticated to notice that when Deputy AttorneyGeneral Jim Comey left the department in August 2005 his departure wasquite abrupt, and that his large farewell party was attended by neitherGonzales nor (as best as could be seen) anyone else on the AG'spersonal staff.

Third, and most significantly for present purposes, there was analmost immediate influx of young political aides beginning in the firsthalf of 2005 (e.g., counsels to the AG, associate deputy attorneysgeneral, deputy associate attorneys general, and deputy assistantattorneys general) whose inexperience in the processes of governmentwas surpassed only by their evident disdain for it.

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