

The Handover to the “Sovereign” Iraqi Government

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That went well then. An illegal invasion and occupation, destruction of an entire civil society, murder, mayhem, chaos, torture, numerous ‘disappeared’ and an Administration – backed by an army wielding the most shocking and awesome weapons on earth – cowering in their ‘Dream Zone’ as the Iraqis have renamed it – too terrified to even walk the streets for fifteen months.

Given all, it was inevitable that the much vaunted hand over to the ‘sovereign’ Iraqi government was a furtive, hole in the corner affair, brought forward by two days, in case the ‘insurgents’ had planned to mark the day with a political human sacrifice or two.

Then, like a thief in the night, America’s top ‘Terrorist Tsar’, Kissinger Associates Viceroy Bremer – whose directives from his isolated squat in Saddam’s foremost palace poured fuel on the fire of resistance at every ill conceived move – showed the heels of his ridiculous desert boots and fled for Baghdad Airport, protected by a phalanx of goons in shades and heavy metal jackets.

Bremer’s boots trod neither Iraq’s extraordinary desert, nor Mesopotamia’s haunting pre-history archeological sites: Babylon, Qurna – site of the Garden of Eden – the Roman city of Hatra, or even Ur, believed Abraham’s birthplace, genesis of Islam, Judaism and the Christianity the US Administration so espouses and in the name of which Bush launched his ill fated ‘Crusade’.

So another chapter in the history of one of the most ancient lands on earth, closed without pageant, buntings or even a State dinner, just a shoddy little ceremony from which the world and the Iraqi people were excluded which handed over minimal power to an Executive of which about two thirds long relinquished their Iraqi citizenship and hold largely British and American passports and whose Prime Minister is a three decade CIA and MI6 ‘asset’ and according to Robert Fisk, ‘asset’ to a further twelve governments. A man for all seasons indeed. Ironically, having conceded to a hundred edicts laid down by Bremer which effectively neutralize any nascent power and pleaded with the US army to stay, the place he does not look like being much of an ‘asset’ to is Iraq. Surreally, Bremer we are told, is off to take cookery lessons. They would have been enhanced had he visited one of Baghdad’s spice markets, the most famous and fragrant on earth, but he probably was unaware of their existence. As for Prime Minister Allawi, now clutching the poisoned chalice, the best he can do is keep checking that his life insurance is fully paid up.

The furtive nature of the handover, excluding the Iraqis, announcing it Ankara before Baghdad is likely to haunt the ‘government’. The Ottomans (Turkey) ruled Iraq for four hundred bloody, repressive, unforgotten years, until less than a hundred years ago. After

thirteen years of UN sanctions, often almost daily bombings, a war and an invasion, pageantry, occasion, an inclusion in the handover might have generated if not enthusiasm, a pragmatism, a 'let's wait and see'. Iraqi pride, courage and nationalism, sense of history, is second to nothing. Gertrude Bell expresses it vibrantly in an undated essay from the 1930's:

"...No less insistent on the imagination, and no less brilliantly coloured are the later chapters of the history of Iraq The echoing name of Alexander haunts them, the jewelled splendour of the Sassanian King of Kings ... And last (to English ears not least) The enterprise, the rigours, the courage"

Iraqis for the most, have endured worse deprivation than even under the embargo, unaccountable slaughters, houses searched and trashed along with thefts by US troops; kidnappings the horrors of Abu Ghraib, the siege of Fallujah, Najaf, home demolitions - as Israeli methods in Palestine - throughout the country, mass graves courtesy of the USA, more torture at the hands of the British. What might have been a small chink of uncertain light was extinguished. Iraqis were excluded from their own history by what will certainly now be seen as a cowardly, Quisling government. It will also not be lost on Iraqis that Iyad Allawi has said remarkably little in condemnation of the torture of prisoners, or about charges, trials or potential releases.

"Iraq is no longer the home I would like to live in and I feel it no longer belongs to me nor do I relate to it. It is like someone who tried to have plastic surgery and the operation failed so the result was distortion and ugliness! Sometimes I snap and think it is only science fiction and it will all go away. In spite of all that was said and alleged, I will always cherish the memory of the great Iraq that was once upon a time ago", wrote a Baghdadi friend who withstood the wars, the embargo, but has fled the 'liberation'.

Iraqis have one more immediate shock in store in the person of the new US Ambassador, John Dimitri Negroponte, who like Bremer has worked closely with Kissinger. As Ambassador to Honduras (1981-1985) he supervised the creation of the El Aguacate Airbase which also became a CIA and Argentinean run detention centre where those held were allegedly routinely tortured. As late as 2000 remains of a believed 195 corpses were found there. Devices used in interrogation included: 'shock and suffocation devices.'

Negroponte was renowned for not letting human rights considerations get in the way of a preferred outcome. Of his time in Honduras he is quoted as remarking:

"Given the turmoil, it was not possible to support human rights.' Ironically, as Iraq, it was the US who engendered the turmoil. Prior to his last post as Ambassador to the UN, Negroponte was US Ambassador to Mexico, where he resided in: 'the block long, fortified US Embassy.'"

Human rights organisations in the US and Central and South America are attempting to have his position in Iraq nullified. In the meantime, it is hard to know whether he will be more at home in the 'Dream Zone' or Abu Ghraib.

Is there hope for Iraq as the parallels with Viet Nam and American colonial aspirations become starker? John Pilger thinks so:

“Bremer’s departure is in keeping with most colonial scuttles. The Americans believed they and their stooge regime would triumph in Vietnam, right to the bitter end and they were wrong. The Bremer/Bush project is no different. A chasm of bloodshed and failure awaits them. Perhaps only when American soldiers begin to mutiny openly, as they did in Vietnam, will the game be finally up. Unfortunately, that will not happen tomorrow, but it will happen.”

USA

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