

IRAQ: September 30, 2003

# A new Constitution — Coming up!

The U.S. occupation of Iraq is getting seriously weird. The U.S. Government has served notice that the occupation won't end until the Iraqis come up with a constitution, and Secretary of State Colin Powell thinks six months is a reasonable deadline. The Iraqis appointed to do the job say they'll need at least a year.

A year? The U.S. Constitution was banged out in a couple of months in the summer of 1787. Of course conditions were somewhat different. The delegates to our Philadelphia convention were sent by the 13 states, not chosen by a foreign power, and they had plenty of experience to guide their steps.

**IT'S A LITTLE ODD** for an invading force to impose "self-government" on a conquered people. Self-government usually occurs when there are no foreigners specifying how it's to be done.

The American specifications for Iraqi self-government include, according to the *Washington Post*, the following principles: "federalism, democracy, nonviolence, a respect for diversity, and a role for women." Except for federalism, none of these principles is embodied in the U.S. Constitution, which is pretty much defunct anyway. The U.S. Government today is no more guided by the U.S. Constitution than the Unitarian Church is guided by the Book of Revelation, but the Iraqis will be expected to adhere to a constitution that hasn't been written yet.

And why must a constitution be written? The two chief allies of the United States, Great Britain and Israel, don't have written constitutions. The British Constitution can be changed by a simple majority vote in Parliament; the U.S. Constitution is supposed to be amended by a cumbersome ratification process, but can actually be changed by five votes in the U.S. Supreme Court.

You might say of our Constitution what Gandhi said of Western civilization: "I think it would be a wonderful idea." Regardless, an Iraqi constitution modeled closely on our own wouldn't meet the standards laid down for ending the occupation.

Democracy, nonviolence, diversity, women — this is the language of contemporary liberals, not the Founding Fathers, let alone Arab culture. And the Iraqis also have to cope with their own religious, ethnic, and tribal divisions. Good luck.

**SO MUCH FOR** the alleged conservatism of the Bush administration. The attempt to dictate the terms of a constitution for a foreign country with an alien culture smacks more of microwave cooking than of political wisdom. The Bush crowd knows little

of American history and tradition, and even less of those of the Middle East.

Yet the administration is in effect choosing a new set of founding fathers for Iraq and ordering them to compose a constitution, pronto, with a gun to their heads. Is it any wonder that the world sees Americans as both naive and arrogant? And can this be the same George W. Bush who, during the 2000 presidential campaign, voiced a prudent conservative skepticism about nation-building abroad?

Overpowering Iraq was the easy part. Destruction is simple in principle and America is incomparable at achieving it. But it's obvious that raw force has nothing to do with the ability to create and nurture viable insti-

tutions. The administration wasn't content with smashing Saddam Hussein's regime; it felt it must stick around and take responsibility for the aftermath for as long as it took. Now it expects to develop a new Iraqi political culture in six months.

The sheer economic cost of the occupation has already turned out to be staggering, far beyond the administration's hopeful estimates. Just keeping the water and electricity flowing is a huge job. But transplanting Western-style governance, which is clumsy enough even at home, is more like irrigating the Sahara or heating Antarctica. If you're ambitious enough to try it, you'd better not be in a big hurry.

Two years ago a war to end terror-

ism sounded futile enough. But to this Bush has now added what nobody would have predicted of him: goals that are downright utopian. He makes Woodrow Wilson at Versailles seem like a nuts-and-bolts man. He also inspires nostalgia for his father, who approached the 1991 Iraq war with sharply limited purposes — purposes so narrow that they only whetted the appetite of neoconservatives for a bigger and better war in the Middle East.

**UNFORTUNATELY**, those neoconservatives have been leading the younger Bush by the nose. We're now learning what "regime change" really meant. And learning the hard way.

---

JOSEPH SOBRAN

Copyright 2003, Griffin Internet Syndicate

---

JOSEPH  
SOBRAN

