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A Nightmare in Iraq

by Sheldon Richman

Americans soldiers are killing innocent Iraqi civilians almost on a regular basis. In recent days and in separate incidents they killed eight Iraqi policemen, an Iraqi interpreter working for the U.S. occupiers, a woman and her child at a wedding, and a young teenager at another wedding. Many more have been seriously injured. As British journalist Robert Fisk reports from Baghdad, “Every day, Iraqi civilians are wounded or shot dead by US troops.”

No wonder that U.S. government analysts believe that the troops have more to fear from average citizens than from the remnant of Saddam Hussein sympathizers. Citing Defense Department officials, the *New York Times* reported, “New intelligence assessments are warning that the United States’ most formidable foe in Iraq in the months ahead may be the resentment of ordinary Iraqis increasingly hostile to the American military occupation.” This has got to be an eye-opener to all those who insisted that the Americans would be greeted as liberators.

Things are obviously out of hand. There are a dozen attacks on American troops each day. U.S. casualties continue to mount. Scared military personnel fire on vehicles that seem suspicious at the many checkpoints along the roads. As 2nd Lt. Mallory Chambers told a Knight Ridder reporter, [“You can’t tell who’s on our side and who’s not.”](#)

Precisely. It is odd that those who most vocally “support our troops” see nothing wrong with putting them — and keeping them — in this nightmare. And all for a billion dollars a week, with \$87 billion in other costs in the hopper. For what?

Just when you would think that things could not get more bizarre, they do. The Associated Press reports that the Bush administration is considering using Israel as a model for managing an occupied people. According to the AP, “In an apparent search for pointers on how to police a hostile population, the U.S. military that’s trying to bring security to Iraq is showing interest in Israeli software instructing soldiers on how to

behave in the West Bank and Gaza, an Israeli military official said.” Attributing the description to the head of Israel’s School of Military Law, the AP reported, “Using animated graphics and clips from movies like ‘Apocalypse Now,’ the software outlines a ‘code of conduct’ for avoiding abuse of civilians while manning roadblocks, searching homes and conducting other activities.”

Who comes up with these ideas? Amnesty International just released a report documenting how Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip routinely violates the rights of Palestinians with curfews and military checkpoints. The ability of Palestinian workers even to make a living is hampered daily by the arbitrary power Israeli troops exercise over their movement. Is this what the Bush administration has in mind in Iraq? I seriously doubt it will improve things. More likely it will make them worse. After all, despite (or because of) the awesome firepower that Israel has been willing to use against innocent Palestinian civilians, terrorists still enter the country from the occupied territories and wreak murderous havoc against innocent Israeli civilians.

The situation is all the more pathetic now that the administration is begging UN members to help fund and man the occupation. (Didn’t Bush predict UN irrelevancy if it didn’t authorize war?) I assume that the French and the other opponents of the invasion can see through this appeal. Although the high-sounding term “internationalize” is invoked, it is clear that President Bush’s efforts are mainly designed to take domestic pressure off himself and his reelection campaign. Perhaps if someone other than Americans is being killed and wounded by the resentful populace, and if someone other than the American taxpayers is being hit up for the bill, things won’t look so bad for the president. I doubt that the Bush gambit will succeed. Although the administration brags about its “coalition,” the fact remains that American troops bear the brunt of the threat and American taxpayers are paying for the privilege. I don’t think the French and Germans will be rushing men or money to Iraq any time soon. Why should they?

This is and will remain a U.S. occupation. It will go on for a long time. The administration is in no hurry to leave Iraq to the Iraqis.

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