

IRAQ: EXIT WITH HONOR?

By Thomas Storck

The majority of Americans now appear to want our swift withdrawal from Iraq. And it is no wonder. As civil strife increases, as our own troops continue to die, as billions of dollars are spent in an obviously futile attempt to control that country, the only wonder is that the American citizenry did not come to this conclusion earlier. But better late than never, though nothing will ever restore to life the many thousands of Iraqis and Americans and others killed there. But aside from the intransigence of President Bush, the major obstacle to our leaving Iraq seems to be the reluctance of almost all our politicians to simply leave. Everyone wants an "exit strategy," some means of saving face, some way to leave with our "honor intact." For the Iraq Study Group, if we can believe the leak of their upcoming report, this apparently means waiting a bit longer while even more of our troops are killed and more money wasted. Few seem willing to simply leave.

But when one's conduct has been both evil and stupid, to expect to be able to salvage anything of one's honor, let alone one's interests, seems to me to more than smack of hubris. In our personal lives, when we act wrongly and foolishly, we usually think that it is fitting for us to be a man and not only take the blame, but accept the consequences. Americans must face up to what we have done to Iraq:

We have basically destroyed an entire country, except for the Kurdish region. And we have done so not for any good motives, but on account of the lies and greed of those who control U.S. policy. And until fairly recently, most Americans continued to support the war. Indeed, had we been able to successfully occupy Iraq, almost certainly most Americans would still justify our invasion, a kind of moral reasoning condemned by the Church as "consequentialism," meaning, in effect, that success determines right. If you are successful, then your conduct was right, regardless of either an objective consideration of your actions or your subjective motives. Consequentialist reasoning is commonly used to justify abortion, but it serves equally well on behalf of wars of conquest and exploitation.

America has no legitimate business in Iraq. We need to leave as soon as we can get our troops to the border. We need to announce our intention of doing so immediately. Will the results be favorable to our interests, whether legitimate interests or illegitimate? Very likely not. But we do not have the luxury, either moral or otherwise, to wait around for some kind of honorable exit strategy. And if things go badly for us in the years to come, with perhaps more anti-American activity or a higher price for oil, we might remember that the highest price for our attack on Iraq has been and will be paid by the Iraqis themselves. Whatever we suffer, they have already suffered much more. So there is nothing to wait for. We must leave now.