

# Lost in Iraq

## The Election, Republicans, and Conservatives

by The Hon. John J. Duncan, Jr.

In one of the most memorable lines in American political history, Joseph Welch, the patrician Boston lawyer, asked Sen. Joseph McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency?" Traditional conservatives should be asking the so-called neoconservatives if they have no sense of shame.

In the pages of *Vanity Fair*, on various television interviews, and in other media, the neocons have been trying to shift blame for our disaster in Iraq. We should not let them escape responsibility, however—for Iraq or for the numerous Republican losses on Election Day. Not only did the GOP suffer big losses in both the House and Senate, but several members who eked out narrow victories will face much tougher challenges two years from now.

It is almost sickening to read and hear Richard Perle, Bill Kristol, Kenneth Adelman (of "cakewalk" fame), and other architects of the misadventure in Iraq say that the war would have been successful if more troops had been sent or if the Bush administration had not botched it. The worst thing, without question, is that nearly 3,000 young Americans have been killed, and many thousands more have been horribly wounded. Our soldiers do a great job wherever they are sent, and it is certainly no criticism of them to say this was an unnecessary war.

A secondary but still important ramification of all this is the loss of conservative seats in Congress and the elevation of Nancy Pelosi and others on the far left to positions of power. Considering the advantages Republicans enjoyed before the election because of favorable redistricting, a good economy, lower gas prices, a booming stock market, popular tax cuts, and liberal elitism that alienates so many, it is the weakest of excuses to say that their losses were just typical of a sixth-year presidency. Even Bill Clinton picked up seats for his party in his sixth year.

It was Iraq that fired up the Democrats and swung surprisingly big majorities of independents their way. About Iraq, Tim Russert said on NBC the next morning: "That was the issue that drove this election." And, while he acknowledged that there were other factors involved, in the end, it was "all about Iraq."

At 12:15 A.M. on Election Night, MSNBC's Chris Matthews correctly declared that "the decision to go to war in Iraq was not a conservative decision, historically. It was a reach of power. It was not along the old lines of limited power . . . The President has asked the Republicans to behave like a different people than they, it seems to me, intrinsically are."

Every year since we voted to go to war in 2002, I have said in speeches on the House floor that there is nothing conservative

about the war in Iraq and that it goes against every traditional conservative position. I do realize, however, that a large majority of Republicans still support the war. They like President Bush personally and want to be loyal to him. And, as the editors of *Chronicles* know better than almost anyone else, it is virtually impossible to take on the bully pulpit of the White House and foreign-policy elitists, in and out of the administration, especially when they are supported by the big guns in the national conservative media.

Still, many conservatives are beginning to express doubts, especially when such people as William F. Buckley, Jr., and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (the President's own senator) say they would have been against the war if they had known in 2002 what they know now.

Even back before the invasion, some were warning of the consequences of failure in Iraq. In the November 25, 2002, issue of *Fortune*, Bill Powell warned (in "Iraq—We Win. Then What?") that "A military victory could turn into a strategic defeat. . . . A prolonged, expensive, American-led occupation . . . could turn U.S. troops into sitting ducks for Islamic terrorists."

Eighty percent of House Republicans voted against the bombings in the former Yugoslavia under President Clinton. I am convinced that at least the same percentage would have opposed the war in Iraq if it had been started by a Democratic president. I remember as a teenager reading a pamphlet from the Republican National Committee saying that Democrats start wars and Republicans end them. Perpetual war for perpetual peace is not a traditional Republican or traditional conservative position.

What should we do now, with regard to Iraq and with regard to the future of the Republican Party?

First, we must admit that a civil war is and has been raging in the more populated areas of Iraq for many months. Deaths of 40 or 50 per day (sometimes even over 100) are not uncommon, and Iraq has a population that is only one twelfth of ours. If we were seeing equivalent internecine killings—several hundred thousand—in the United States, we would consider it a civil war.

We also need to acknowledge that, although we have great respect for our military leadership, they will always say that great progress is being made and much good is occurring. There is a reason why we have civilian leadership over the Department of Defense.

While some good things are taking place in Iraq—since so many billions have been spent there and most of what we have spent really is pure foreign aid—we must recognize that our Constitution and our debt do not permit us to run another country. What we are doing in Iraq is both unconstitutional and unaffordable.

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Perhaps a positive spin could be put on the fact that we have basically built or rebuilt the infrastructure of a country that had a total GDP of only \$65 billion the year before we took over. But we should also point out that our own State Department polls show that a vast majority of Iraqis want us to leave and that it was never our intention to stay forever.

Everyone now says there are no good options, so I believe we should begin a phased redeployment and bring most of our troops home—the sooner, the better, as far as I am concerned. Besides slowing down and (one hopes) ending the killing and maiming of our troops, conservatives could finally stop trying to defend some of the most wasteful, lavish, and ridiculous government contracts in our nation's history.

As for the Republican Party, we need to start being Republicans again. This country needs a conservative party. In my lifetime, the Republican Party has been the conservative party—and it should continue to be. We did poorly in the elections because we strayed from our conservative beliefs and forced most Republicans to support a very unpopular and very unconservative war. There really is no such thing as a “big-government conservative.” The neoconservatives who have been described that way are not conservative at all.

Conservatives used to believe in local control of schools, so we should not have been asked to support “No Child Left Behind.” Much of that bill was written by Ted Kennedy, and it greatly increased federal control over education.

Conservatives used to oppose the expansion of entitlements and should not have been asked to support the Prescription Drug Benefit. Yet the Bush administration withheld information about the true cost of the measure and made it clear they


would deal with the Democrats and make the bill much more expensive if reluctant Republicans did not go along.

Conservatives used to be against Big Brother and an overly powerful federal government and should not have been asked to support the USA PATRIOT Act. Now, several hundred local governments and even several state legislatures have lined up in opposition to this great expansion of federal power.

Conservatives used to oppose big increases in federal spending and earmarks. Over the last few years, Republicans in Congress have disappointed most conservatives by championing big increases in spending and in our deficits and debt.

And conservatives used to be against world government and interventionist foreign policies that create so much resentment toward the United States. We need to oppose empire and nation building, as President Bush did in his 2000 campaign, and return to the more humble foreign policy he advocated then. We need to tell people that world government is too elitist, arrogant, and expensive, and too far removed from control by the people. And we must oppose international rules and regulations that harm American businesses and workers.

We need noninterventionist foreign and defense policies that will keep our young people from being killed and maimed in unnecessary wars that primarily benefit other countries. And we especially need to return to conservative fiscal policies in both domestic and foreign affairs and stop turning the Department of Defense into a Department of Foreign Aid.

We need a presidential candidate who will run on a platform built of these planks, and, above all, we need a truly conservative president and Congress who will start putting our own people first. 

## *The Morality of Everyday Life: Rediscovering an Ancient Alternative to the Liberal Tradition*

by Thomas Fleming

What passes for conservatism today is really nothing more than the impossible moral and social theories of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, in which universal abstractions, such as democracy and equality, are presented as hard truths, when, in fact, they have never existed in any society in human history. Nonetheless, they are to be applied worldwide, at the tip of a spear (or cruise missile) if necessary.

Dr. Fleming's alternative is rooted in “everyday life,” the local realities of blood and soil, custom and tradition, friendship and faith, and in the wisdom born of the experiences these realities beget. This wisdom finds expression in folktales and fables, in ancient Hebrew Scriptures and Greek philosophy, and in medieval casuistry. It is the method to solving ethical problems great and small, and it is the method that undergirds authentic conservatism.

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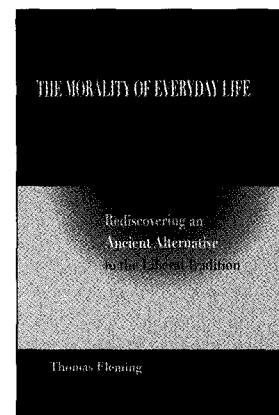
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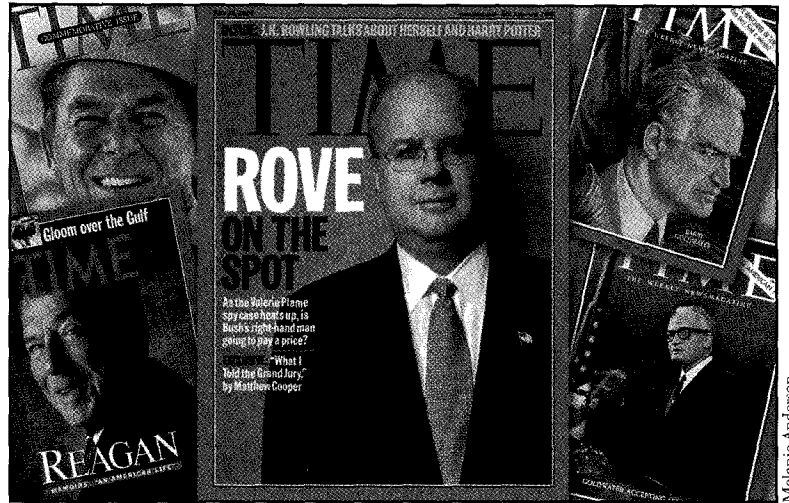
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# The End of the Rove Era in Republican Politics

## Time to Remember the Forgotten

by Tom Pauken



A few weeks after the Republicans were routed in the November 2006 elections, a longtime Bush Republican from Texas told me that it was time for Karl Rove to go. That comment spoke volumes, for it came from someone who had worked closely with Rove ever since his early days as a political consultant in the campaigns of Texas Gov. Bill Clements.

Given the November election losses suffered by Republicans across the country and the waning influence of a lame-duck President, all of a sudden the man hailed as the “political genius” of the Republican Party does not look quite so smart. That “permanent” Republican majority Rove said he was building crashed and burned in the November debacle.

Yet Rove, intent on salvaging his political legacy as “the grand Republican strategist of our times,” has a hard time letting go. To that end, he has maintained his control over the Republican National Committee (RNC) by naming Sen. Mel Martinez of Florida as general chairman of the party and Kentucky’s Mike Duncan, longtime member of the Republican National Committee, as head of the RNC’s day-to-day operations. Both men are known Rove loyalists. They replace former Rove political deputy Ken Mehlman, who chaired the RNC the last two years.

Rove’s selection of Martinez to be the public face of the GOP is an attempt to woo two groups who deserted the party in droves this past November: Catholics and Hispanics. However, even though Martinez and Duncan are Rove’s choices to run the RNC, he will not enjoy the level of control over the Republican Party that he had when Mehlman was at the helm. While Rove will try to give orders to the new party lead-

ers, there is no guarantee that Martinez or Duncan will salute when Karl Rove gives them marching orders.

The selection of Martinez, however, is typical of Rove’s top-down approach to politics. You can almost hear his mind working: “Hey, the 2006 elections showed that we have a problem with the Catholics and the Hispanics. We’ll appoint Martinez chairman of the RNC to win both groups back.” That is the tactic Rove used when he was trying to win the support of the Christian Right for George W. Bush in 2000. Rove had former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed placed on Enron’s payroll as a “consultant” so that Reed could deliver the evangelical vote to George W. Bush in the Republican presidential primary. In that same campaign, Rove recruited Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform to get taxpayer groups behind Bush’s candidacy. Later, he tapped neoconservative Catholic convert Deal Hudson of *Crisis* to win over the Catholic vote. Rove also enlisted Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff to work the Orthodox Jewish constituency, as well as to help with many of the Washington Beltway types. Interestingly, Rove, Reed, Norquist, and Abramoff all got their start in politics as College Republican activists.

As an early warning signal that things were not going well for the Rove machine in the 2006 election cycle, one by one, Rove and his key allies found themselves under fire for various reasons. The first two to fall were Hudson and Abramoff. Deal Hudson had to resign his position as head of Rove’s Catholic coalition after a liberal Catholic newspaper revealed that he had been fired as a Fordham professor for taking inappropriate liberties with a female student. Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff (known as “Casino Jack” for his lobbying work on behalf of Indian gaming interests) pled guilty to bribery and influence-peddling charges. He currently resides in a federal penitentiary. Then Ralph Reed, who was paid millions of

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