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Pro-Democracy Killing in Iraq

by Jacob G. Hornberger

During the recent Republican presidential debate, former Governor Mike Huckabee took Congressman Ron Paul to task for calling for a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. Huckabee suggested that it was irrelevant whether the United States should have invaded Iraq. The point, he stated, was that because the invasion had “broken” Iraq, the United States had the obligation to remain and fix it. As Huckabee put it, “We bought it because we broke it.” Huckabee said that his analysis was based on what his mother had taught him when he was a little boy: “If I picked something off the shelf and I broke it, I bought it.”

Huckabee is wrong on several counts, and his reasoning only goes to show how far American conservatives have fallen in terms of conscience and morality.

Let’s assume that when Huckabee was a teenager, he broke into his local hardware store with the intent of stealing supplies to give to the poor. Let’s say that as he reached for the items, some of them fell to the floor and broke.

When the police arrived, would Huckabee have had the right to remain in the store to fix the items he had broken? Could he have told the police that this is what his mother taught him when he was a little boy? Of course not. The police would have taken him into custody and removed him from the store. While he would have been obligated to reimburse the store owner for the broken items, Huckabee would not have had any right, legal or moral, to remain in the store to fix them.

Thus, Huckabee is wrong to suggest that the justification for invading Iraq is irrelevant. Given that the United States had no right, legal or moral, for invading and occupying Iraq, it has no right to remain there to fix anything it has broken. The United States is in no different position, legally and morally speaking, than the burglar who has broken the items in the hardware store. After all, let’s not forget that in the Iraq War, the United States is the aggressor and occupying power.

Unfortunately, as Huckabee well knows, the invasion of Iraq did not simply involve the breaking of houses, automobiles, office buildings, museums, and other inanimate objects. It also

involved the killing of Iraqi people — in fact, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people, a fact that exposes the callous and immoral way that Huckabee and so many other pro-war conservatives view the Iraqi people.

Let's go back to the hardware-store example. Suppose that when Huckabee broke into the store, there were several employees and store owners doing late-night inventory in the store, some of whom began firing weapons at the burglar. Let's say that Huckabee fired back, killing some of the people who were firing at him and, in the process, breaking many of the products in the store.

Would those deaths and those breakings entitle Huckabee to exclaim to the cops, "When I was a little boy, my mother taught me that if I broke something in a store, I bought it. Therefore, I have the right and responsibility to remain inside this store to fix what I broke"?

For one thing, how would Huckabee fix those dead people? For another, to remain in the store would presumably mean killing the people who were still resisting Huckabee's presence in the store. Could anyone really say that Huckabee would have the right to continue killing people in the store in the process of fixing what he has broken?

No, Huckabee would have no right, moral or legal, to remain in the store, despite the fact that he wished to fix the products he had broken or the people he had killed. When he was hauled into court on murder charges, could he claim that he was firing in self-defense, given that the employees and owners had fired at him first? No, he could not claim self-defense because he had no right whatsoever to be in the store. The employees and the owners had the right to shoot him and he had no right to shoot back.

Amidst all the discussion and debate as to whether the "surge" in U.S. forces has been successful or whether the "war" in Iraq can still be won, there is a dearth of conversation about something much more important: the killing of Iraqi people.

Where is the morality in the killing of even one single Iraqi citizen, much less hundreds of thousands of them, in the process of ousting Saddam Hussein from power and replacing him with a new regime? Huckabee and other pro-war conservatives take the position that the deaths of Iraqis will be worth it if certain political goals are ultimately achieved — e.g., democracy, the installation of a pro-American regime in Iraq, or stability in the Middle East. But every American needs to ask himself the following question: Is it moral to kill even one person, much less hundreds of thousands, for the sake of such political goals?

Consider the following hypothetical. Suppose that in the year 2000, the following question was put to you: If you fire a bullet into this Iraqi boy's head, Saddam Hussein will resign from office, democratic elections will be held in Iraq, a stable, pro-American regime will come into power, and all this will lead to a peaceful and harmonious Middle East. Suppose you are convinced beyond any doubt that killing the boy will produce such results.

Would you be willing to pull the trigger? Would you have the moral right to do so?

The answer to the second question is: “No.” No one has the right to kill another human being for the sake of achieving or experimenting with political goals.

As to the first question, the same principles apply to Iraq. The United States had no right, moral or legal, to invade and occupy Iraq. Neither the Iraqi people nor their government ever attacked the United States. No Iraqi citizen or government official was part of the 9/11 attacks. The purpose of the invasion was simply to bring regime change to Iraq, a political goal that U.S. officials purportedly hoped would ultimately bring stability and order to the entire Middle East.

The problem was a moral one, however. From the very start, everyone knew that the invasion would involve much more than the breaking of inanimate objects or simply capturing or killing Saddam Hussein. It would also involve the killing of Iraqi people — many, many Iraqi people. That’s why some U.S. soldiers were consulting with military chaplains prior to deployment. They wanted to know whether killing Iraqi citizens was consistent with God’s laws. In my opinion, they were right to be concerned, for God does not say “Thou shalt not kill unless the victims are Iraqis or unless the killing is done in the pursuit of democracy, stability, regime change, or other political goals.” He says, “Thou shalt not kill.”

After hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children had died as a result of the brutal economic sanctions that the United States enforced for many years against the Iraqi people, UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright reflected the mindset of U.S. officials and people such as Mike Huckabee when she told “Sixty Minutes” that the deaths of those Iraqi children had been “worth it.” She was saying, in other words, that it was worth sacrificing all those lives for the sake of the political goal known as regime change.

Albright’s mindset, with its callous attitude toward the value of Iraqi life, is obviously the mindset of U.S. officials today as well as the mindset of Mike Huckabee and all the rest of the people debating whether the “surge” has been successful and whether U.S. forces should remain in Iraq. Implicit in all the discussion is that killing more Iraqis might yet be considered “worth it,” if we’ll just stay the course. Is that not a rather cavalier attitude toward the value of Iraqi life?

In the minds of the pro-war crowd, there is actually no upper limit on the number of Iraqis who should be sacrificed for the achievement of these noble political goals. After all, the sanctions, the invasion, and occupation have together taken the lives of an estimated several hundred thousand Iraqis. That’s not a small number of dead people — people who cannot be fixed. Yet Mike Huckabee and many other conservatives want U.S. forces to remain in Iraq, which necessarily means even more Iraqi deaths that cannot be undone.

At the center of all this discussion and debate on whether the United States should remain in Iraq is one critical point: Americans had no right, moral or legal, to kill even one Iraqi. They still don’t.

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