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Honor and America's Wars: From Spain to Iraq

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Americans have long prided themselves as being a peace-loving, tolerant, and prudent nation. These lectures suggest otherwise. The kind of self-delusion, under which we as a nation suffer, has a root cause. It lies in a basic fact of human existence, the apparent or real need for group protectiveness. The anthropologist David Gilmore explains that in the persistent struggle of men seeking to fulfill "their obligations," they could easily forfeit "their reputations or their lives." Yet the discharge of male duties might be essential to their group's survival and prosperity.¹ As a result, the call to arms to uphold a nation's honor, Gilmore suggests, has been a sometimes necessary and sometimes disastrous imperative, generation after generation.

Under these conditions, one might well imagine that the secession crisis of 1861 and four long years of bloody struggle in America would have muffled the beating of war drums for over fifty years or longer thereafter. Let's glance at another nation that underwent comparable losses in lives and treasure as the Civil War generation underwent. The horrors of World War I left the French with little thirst for more bloodletting. As best they could, that nation's psychological experts of the 1920s insisted that the prime male ideal resided in exhibitions of courage, but it had become sorely imperiled. Cowardice, they argued, obliged the soldier "to forfeit his 'honor' and 'reputation,' the very qualities on which his identity as a man depended." So writes Robert A. Nye in Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France² But the dreadfulness of death in the trenches and the overwhelming numbers of veterans tormented by shell-shock hysteria called into question the very nature of French courage and fear. The cultural historian Charles Rearick explains that a deep malaise descended during the "Phony War" period in 1940 before the German offensive. "The sadness of loved ones parting and facing the terrible dangers of war," he explains, "gave way to "the longer term sadness of a nation haunted by memories of the last war, still grieving and weary of crisis and disappointment."³ France, it could be said, lost its collective nerve, a paralysis that made perhaps nearly inevitable the Nazis' easy conquest.

That withdrawal from any prospect of serious battle did not happen in this country until the tragic failure of Viet Nam a half century later. Instead, Northerners turned from military aggression to business expansion and the exploitation of the West's natural resources, Post-Civil War white Southerners, as we acknowledged last week, constructed soul-restoring myths of Rebel valor, successful guerilla warfare against the freed people, and other means of regaining collective and personal self-esteem. As a result, Southern truculence was only chastened momentarily after 1865, and the antebellum martial traditions persisted. Even in the North, as the ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic grew thinner, the next generation began to revive the ideals of manly national response, as if to outdo the daring and valor of their veteran fathers. Manliness stood in stark contrast to effeminacy.

In the 1890s, the economy plummeted, but, perhaps in part as an escape into extraneous warfare, the United States nearly challenged Great Britain. The cause arose from a dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana, whose boundaries were under contention in 1895. The "NATION'S HONOR," screamed headlines, was in dire peril. If we failed to protect the Monroe Doctrine, journalists warned, Britain might probe our weakness and initiate other imperialist demands. Senator William M. Stewart, a notable silver Republican from Nevada, pronounced, "I want American manhood asserted." The absurdity was evident to members of polite society, chiefly those in the Northeast and Midwest. Margaret Bradshaw, a Massachusetts constituent of Senator George Frisbie Hoar, informed him that war was "as uncivilized as prizefights."⁴ It was a sentiment often to be voiced in opposition to wars of honor. The crisis ended with sensible arbitration.

That happy result was not, however, the outcome a mere three years later. As the cultural historian Kristin Hoganson discloses, President McKinley's spinal column became a subject of journalistic and political ridicule. It was supposedly too breakable to meet to the effrontery of Spain's alleged sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor. His backbone, chorused Senators William E. Chandler of New Hampshire and John C. Spooner of Wisconsin, was inadequate for the crisis. Teddy Roosevelt compared it famously to "a chocolate éclair," and cartoonists had a field day. Making matters worse, a letter of the Spanish ambassador fell into the hands of Cuban rebels. Gleefully, they published Enrique De Lôme's comment characterizing the president as "weak and catering to the rabble." If only the nation had another Andrew Jackson to fill the office, jingoists complained.⁵

While his defenders employed the same language about the value of manliness and honor, they attributed to the president high measures of firmness, inner control, and manly prudence. He did not, they insisted, flip flop or ponder indecisively on the issue of war against Spain the way his critics claimed. After all, he had fought bravely at Antietam and in the Shenandoah Valley under Philip

Sheridan. How could anyone doubt “where his patriotism, where his courage is?” asked Congressman Charles H. Grosvenor of Ohio. (I forbear to mention any current and parallel situation.) Indeed, McKinley was the last president to have fought in the Civil War.⁶

Whatever the state of McKinley’s skeletal anatomy, he did lead the nation into war. But why in 1898 and not sooner? Cuban liberation had been an American dream for many years. Spanish authorities captured and hanged some American filibusterers to free Cuba in 1873. It was known as “the Virginus Affair.”⁷ Secretary of State Hamilton Fish and President Grant weathered unpleasant saber-rattling by conducting negotiations with the Spanish government. Nor was it the offense of blowing up a ship that prompted the outcry for war. The Lusitania’s torpedoing in 1915 did not arouse war fevers. Yet the sinking of the Maine did.⁸ In other words, perceptions of honor varied widely in the nineteenth century and still do so today. At the turn of the century, America had certainly developed a confidence and a desire to play the “Great Game,” as Rudyard Kipling called it. Teddy Roosevelt put it this way: “Is America a weakling to shrink from the world work of the great world-powers? No. . .Our nation glorious in youth and strength, looks in the future with eager eyes and rejoices as a strong man to run a race.” In other words, honor and acclaim accrue to the winner in either the game of war or the war of sports.⁹

This notion resonated with the Southern politicians and their constituents. After the Civil War, the race-conscious and isolationist South felt out of tune with imperialistic designs that could mean the incorporation of allegedly inferior brown people. In 1890 Congressman John Sharp Williams of Mississippi had helped to exclude black voters from the ballot box by a new state constitutional enactment. Yet with no sense of hypocrisy, he denounced the imperial mandate in Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines. Williams declared, “when. . .a mistaken patriotism, or a criminal covetousness leads. . .our flag out in the endless race for conquest and domination, it has lost its honor and should be unfurled in disgrace.” When material interests for gain alone dominate over good sense, Williams later said, “Chivalry is dead; manhood itself is sapped.”¹⁰ As Williams’s words suggested, honor can be invoked for war or for peace, depending on the speaker’s political judgment.

Once the fighting began, however, Southerners cheered as lustily as Teddy Roosevelt. In fact, the war offered Southern whites the chance to prove their Union loyalties and “show, as one Alabama ex-Rebel boasted, “that the South had not degenerated” into passive effeminacy. Roosevelt, Southern war enthusiasts, and other jingoists constantly stressed the vision of a rejuvenated spirit of young male adulthood. The negative result, though, was that such polemics engendered a naivety about war really was. The Civil War had taught the older Northern

generation a lesson that the succeeding one casually dismissed. Civil War veteran Senator Hoar recoiled from the prospect of a war with Spain: "I know and dread the horrors of war." Aside from the loss of life and health for thousands, the cost inevitably includes, Hoar continued, a decline of moral standards, corruption, and enormous debt.¹¹

Hoar's prophecy was soon fulfilled in the conquest of the Philippines. The war with Spain had been quick, relatively bloodless, and inexpensive. The occupation of the Spanish Philippine colony, however, soon led to atrocity, death of soldiers, and a temporary weakening of American hunger for empire. Far from bringing the renewed sense of honor to America's youth, that the jingoists had promised, the Philippine war against insurgent guerillas was nearly disastrous. Senator George L. Wellington, Republican of Maryland, pointed out that the army had gradually left "the broad highway of honorable warfare--honorable modern warfare as recognized by civilized nations--and has adopted methods of barbarism and savagery such as the wild natives of the unconquered Philippine Islands themselves could not approach."¹² Frustration with seeking out well hidden enemies has always led occupiers into the moral abyss. Time, however, precludes further remark, but I recommend Hoganson's work on the subject, a book to which I am most indebted. Instead, we come to Woodrow Wilson's experiment in nation-building, the effort to swing Mexico into the American moral and economic orbit--as that president saw it. Using the excuse of a minor stain upon American "honor," Southern-born President Woodrow Wilson in 1914 dispatched troops under General Pershing to unshackle our Mexican neighbors from the chains of Victoriano Huerta. He was a dictator whom Wilson passionately loathed.

The president's Southern supporters rallied to the cause. Congressman Pat Harrison of Mississippi expressed outrage that American sailors had been "humiliated and insulted" by their arrest on the streets of Tampico. By Wilson's command, a thousand U. S. Marines descended on Vera Cruz, seventeen of whom were killed, along with over a hundred Mexican defenders. Several Latin American countries arranged for negotiations. As a result, Huerta departed into exile, and the American occupiers went home shortly thereafter. Like the waging of the Barbary wars, the conflict was short, effective, and symbolically helpful for partisan purposes. But, how effective was Wilson's effort to impose American democracy on Mexico by removing a tyrant? The answer was far from clear.¹³

A year later, Wilson joined the Allied effort against the Austro-Hungarian-German monarchies for similar reasons of democratically inspired liberation. The diplomatic historian Joseph Fry observes that Wilson, "a man of 'southern blood, of southern bone and of southern grit,'" permanently reversed the section's narrow-minded parochialism with his crusade to internationalize democracy and his fatally flawed effort to win American participation in the League of Nations.

Regional pride in Wilson as a Southerner, not some wider vision, Fry contends, drew Southern politicians wholeheartedly to the president's side.¹⁴

However much Wilson was immersed in Southern myths of honor, another Southern President, Lyndon Johnson, was more attuned to the issue of personal and martial honor, but without at least some of the racial blinders that Wilson had worn. To throttle that ideological menace in far distant rice paddies would prevent the collapse, it was thought, of the rest of Asia into the arms of the Soviets and Mao Tse-tung. But Lyndon Johnson's vindication of his own and his nation's honor had much to do with his own self-conception. The journalist David Halberstam concludes that Johnson was "haunted by the idea that he would be judged as insufficiently manly for the job, that he would lack courage at a crucial moment." He "was a believer, not a cynic about the big things. Honor. Force. Commitments." On learning that someone in his administration had turned dovish about the war, Johnson exploded in his usual scatological way, "Hell, he has to squat to piss."¹⁵ He feared being seen as "an unmanly man" or "a man without a spine."¹⁶ His predecessor William McKinley had had to live down the same imputation.

To be sure, in the tragedy of Vietnam, honor was not the sole cause of war any more than it was in the earlier examples. Yet, far from meeting the "rational" motives to which Donald Kagan called attention in our first lecture, North Vietnam posed no threat, immediate or distant, to the security of the United States. Nor had Lincoln's election threatened immediate emancipation. Unaware of centuries of mistrust between China and the Vietnamese, the Johnson administration assumed that the little Southeast Asian country was merely a puppet of international Communism, governed not in Hanoi but Beijing and Moscow. Such ignorance in Washington's high places seems almost criminal to us now.

Even though behind the scenes, President Johnson expressed his mortal fear that hasty escalation of the war would usher in World War III, his public pronouncements were thoroughly drenched in the rhetoric of honor. A more secular understanding would refer to our "credibility" for living up to international commitments to our friends and allies. But this Texas President instead used the terminology of his native state. As representative of that frontier spirit, Johnson put the matter succinctly almost exactly a century after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. "If America's commitment is dishonored in South Vietnam, it is dishonored in forty other alliances or more. . . we do what we must" regardless of consequences. By his perspective, honor had its own logic. Practical considerations and prudence drew out no imperative to cast the ethic aside. "We love peace. We hate war. But our course," Johnson announced in 1965, "is charted always by the compass of honor."¹⁷ It was the pathway to death. Yet any

other option apparently would have betrayed America's "word of honor" and the end of capitalistic civilization. Refusing the call to honor and warfare, however, also poses problems, as we learned from John Adams's and Hamilton Fish's refusal to war with France in 1798 and Spain in 1873 respectively.

A more contemporary illustration comes from the Iranian Revolutionary seizure of the American Embassy. Some of us can recall the origins of that unhappy incident. Jimmy Carter had refused at first to welcome the dying Shah, exiled to Mexico, to visit New York for cancer treatments. Unanimously State Department officials had urged him to take no such hostile action. Carter had understood their point, accurately reasoning that the Shah's admission would endanger Americans in Tehran and elsewhere in that nation. But David Rockefeller, John McCloy, and Henry Kissinger persisted in claiming that the Shah, our dear friend, "should not be treated like a Flying Dutchman who cannot find a port of call," Kissinger put it. He had thought it "dishonorable" and "appalling" not to welcome the Shah on American soil.¹⁸ Receiving notification that the Shah's life depended upon the treatment that American physicians could supply. That medical advice was actually false, but Carter unwittingly gave in. James Bill, the U.S. Iranian expert at the College of William and Mary, declares that he did so to uphold the "honor and credibility of the United States," just as Kissinger had pressed.¹⁹ Yet, in such honor cultures as Iran's, any befriending or welcoming of an enemy, whom his enemies had labeled accursed, would be seen as an insupportable affront. A member of the Iranian Revolutionary Foreign Ministry had earlier warned the American chargé d'affaires Bruce Laingren, "You are opening a Pandora's box with this."²⁰

After the Shah underwent futile surgery in New York, the students raided the embassy and seized the hostages there until the Americans returned Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi to stand trial in Tehran. James Bill denounces the Islamists' reaction to the President's decision as simply "paranoid."²¹ It was, however, not merely their sense of mistrust and insecurity but their fury at so outrageous an assault on their national and religious honor. One violation of a nation's pride deserves another, it seems. With the skeleton staff held hostage, it was now American honor once again violated, as it had been in the Islamic Barbary Wars at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. And at this point, it seems to me, the Americans had cause to issue an ultimatum--free the hostages or expect the bombing of Iran's military installations and out and out war.

Perhaps a military defeat of Islamic fundamentalism in 1979 would have been preferable to what we face now. As it was, we gave the impression, then and sometimes later in Somalia and elsewhere, that we had no stomach for retribution. Two months before September 11, Al-Qassem, an extremist personality on Al-

Jazeera television, chastised a doubting viewer, “Don't you watch television? The U.S. Navy cancelled a joint maneuver with Jordan, fled Bahrain, all those things-- Can you deny that this Jihad warrior who is now in Afghanistan [Osama bin Laden] is striking fear into America, which shudders at the sound of his name?”²²

Carter proved exceptional in choosing peace and patience over war and honor. Most other southern-born or southern influenced presidents have chosen the latter course for military encounters, large or small, from Jefferson's Barbary conflict to the one recently undertaken by George W. Bush of Texas and his conservative, unilaterally-minded advisors. In 1965 a fictional attack on a U.S. Naval vessel in the Gulf of Tonkin led to full-scale warfare against Communist North Viet Nam. In 2002 Iraq was supposed to have an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. But in these instances were they the reasons for war or was it something else, something in the natures of the Presidents who have earlier plunged the nation into military action? Before the United Nations Assembly on 12 September of last year, Bush mentioned the car-bomb plot against his father, then on an official visit to Kuwait. Saddam Hussein's intelligence team had instigated the conspiracy that the Kuwaiti police had thwarted. According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, at a Houston, Texas, ballroom, Bush was addressing an “audience that suddenly grew very quiet.” He had said, “After all, this is a guy who tried to kill my dad.”²³

A book just published this week by a Hoover Institute specialist and his wife, a media consultant, explores the dynamics of the Bush family. They claim to uncover oedipal factors underlying the current president's determination for war. General Brent Scowcroft had opposed the toppling of Saddam because of the volatile tribal divisions in the country, among other sensible reasons. Even though it meant outrageous betrayal of the Shiites in rebellion, which Hussein savagely repressed, the senior Bush followed Scowcroft's pacific advice. As war approached in 2002, Bush senior apparently worried privately about his son's seeming attempt to complete the Gulf States expedition that he had perhaps prudently rejected.²⁴ George W. Bush's single-minded, unsubtle, and incurious outlook on international affairs and their complications comes out strongly in his public statements, usually to puzzlingly strenuous applause.

Now, to imply that Bush began a war simply in honor's name to avenge a conspiracy against his father in the fashion of Michael Corleone or the Sopranos, would be too simple-minded. But an ex-White House aide argues that this explanation would at least be preferable to the idea that seizing Iraqi oil was the administration's prime objective: “That's not why Americans fight wars,” he said, “Usually it's about honor or pride.”²⁵ President Bush has New England roots, but

his perspective on life, like Lyndon Johnson's, really does lie deep in the heart of Texas.

At last, honorable vengeance in the name of the Bush family brings us to the third point--honor, hatred, and defeat or moral disesteem as these issues apply in the Middle East. In a sense, we can pose once more as analogy our own civil conflict, 1861-65. In a thought-provoking article, "The Fruits of Preventive War," James M. McPherson, the prize-winning specialist on the U. S. Civil War, reflects on the "preemptive" strategy of Jefferson Davis to save the allegedly threatened institution of slavery and white domination. The seceded states began the war, trusting that the other slave states would answer the trumpet of honor to defend their Deep South kinspeople from a common foe. As McPherson notes, they entered the affray convinced that with a few cannon balls, well aimed, "those blue-bellied Yankees" would soon scatter in cowardly retreat. But "the preventive war," as he concludes, led not only to devastation and ruin but to humiliation, sullen anger, and futile postwar claims to a moral superiority that elicited only scorn and indifference in the victorious Northern states.²⁶

Like the American South in 1860 and in the years thereafter, the Islamic countries are immersed in the rubrics of both honor and hatred. Agrarian-minded, slaveholding Southern whites customarily railed against Yankee imperialism and economic greed, godless feminism, hypocrisy of mind and spirit, and evil habits of every sort. In their defeat, they developed the legend of the "Lost Cause," a memorialization of the glorious dead that fed Southern resentments of black freedom and Yankee domination for years to come. Lynching in the name of preserving white women's honor not only terrorized black communities but also fed the continuing sense of humiliation that Lee's surrender at Appomattox signified.²⁷

For the last forty years, Arab nationalists have reacted against the evils of a "Westoxification" as extremist Islamists call it, with our sexualized images that they see on cinema and television screens and hear on the radio.²⁸ Throughout the Middle East, mosque and classroom have disseminated lessons of hatred directed against the secular West in the context of a beleaguered culture overwhelmed by western technology, western ways. Like the Ku Klux Klan in America, the terrorist organizations in the Middle East place honor and the satisfactions of revenge above all other considerations. Those resentments permeate whole societies in that part of the world.

Referring to her own childhood, Sahr Muhammad Hatem of Saudi Arabia, declares, "The mentality of each one of us was programmed upon entering school as a child to believe that anyone who is not a Muslim is our enemy; and that the West means enfeeblement, licentiousness, lack of values, and Jahilya (or pre-Islamic paganism) itself."²⁹ Ahmad Othman of London agrees, noting that "as usual we always blame others, and refuse to acknowledge our mistakes. . . We

taught the youth of our lands to hate America; we taught them the sanctity of Martyrdom [in dying] as we kill our enemies.”³⁰

Like the Southerners appealing to their Christian God, traditions of honor, and disdain for unchivalric commercialism, Muslim fundamentalists take similar pride in their piety, purity of principle, and militancy. Despite their technological, economic, and military inferiority, they dream that Allah and suicidal valor can restore a military parity or lead to victory. Joyful are the Iraqi mothers who send their sons “off to the realms of honor, the realms of martyrdom,” advised a leader of Hamas just days before the war began.³¹

In this encounter with the West, what could be more morally degrading than the quickness of American seizure of Baghdad and crumbling of Ba’athist resistance? Relishing the opportunity to humiliate the Muslim extremists, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz announced not long ago, “I think that already. . .the magnitude of the crimes of that regime and those images of people pulling down a statue and celebrating the arrival of American troops is having a shaming effect throughout the region.”³² Last fall, Thomas Friedman, the New York Times journalist, declared, “If I’ve learned one thing covering world affairs, it is this: The single most underappreciated force in international relations is humiliation.”³³ As if to verify his comment, Dr. Abdel Aziz Rantisi, the new leader of Hamas, declared in an interview, “we are ready to give our blood [,] but we are not ready to lose our dignity.”³⁴

In a recent article in Al-Jazeera, the author explains, “There is no doubt that one of the greatest threats to the hegemony of Islam and the dominance of *Shari’a* [Islamic law] is the American secularism that will be imposed forcefully on the region. . .The Islamic world will change from dictatorship to democracy, which means subhuman degradation in all walks of life.”³⁵ This sentiment is hardly rare in the Islamic world.

In contrast to the usual Arab reaction, a sober and quite brave Egyptian editor recently forgot the repressiveness of the honor ethic and acknowledged what Wolfowitz was gleefully pointing out. “It has been proven absolutely and irrevocably that Saddam Hussein cheated his people and the entire Arab nation. The surprising collapse of his country's capital means that nothing interested him but his own survival and personal interests, and the interests of his two sons and family. Beyond that, the homeland and citizens can go to hell!”³⁶ His realistic outburst is exceptional. Doubtless, with the Arab nations more firmly anti-American than ever before, he most likely sings more belligerent note or two today.

Yet, will a facing up to the truth lead to any substantial rethinking and reform? It is unlikely. The shame of Islamic losses in Afghanistan and Iraq evokes not pragmatic response but religious fervor and the dogmas of honorable

resistance. In his determination to purify Islam and the Arabs from the corruptions of the degenerate Saudi family and the West, Osama bin Laden has successfully combined two emotional forces: resentment of imposed disgrace and religious zealotry. Two months before 11 September, Arab viewers faxed Al-Qassem, the television host in Qatar, these sentiments about Osama: "In light of the terrible Arab surrender and self-abasement to America and Israel, many of the Arabs unite around this man, who pacifies their rage and restores some of their trampled honor, their lost political, economic, and cultural honor."³⁷

Out of such powerlessness, however, there might emerge renewed strength and still greater resolve to avenge lost honor. Bernard Lewis has pointed out that Islamic faith provides the humblest believer "a dignity and a courtesy toward others. . . rarely exceeded in other civilizations. And yet, in moments of upheaval and disruption, when the deeper passions are stirred, this dignity and courtesy"-- what I call honor here--"can give way to an explosive mixture of rage and hatred."³⁸ The American authorities are quite right. If weapons of mass destruction did fall into the hands of such fearsome haters as the Arab militants, it would mean the end of civilization as we know it.

Finally, victory over a weak and vulnerable enemy, no matter how evil, provides the winners with the opportunity to refashion the world as we Americans would have it--or to experiment and then leave the scene. Make no mistake: Pax Americana carries with it a very fervent missionary zealotry, perhaps less powerful than Osama's but strong enough. Woodrow Wilson with his ideas of making the world safe for democracy had pointed the way to Lyndon Johnson in Viet Nam-- but not with much success in either the 1920s or 1960s. On February 25 of last year, the American President announced the revived Wilsonian doctrine as one of the curiously shifting reasons for going to war. "A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. America's interests in security, and America's belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq. (Applause.)"³⁹

Will democratic practice lead to stable, pro-American governments on the order of Turkey next door? Given the hatred and sense of humiliation that their honor code inscribes on so many non-westernized Arabian hearts, is it not unlikely that a Muslim fundamentalism will take hold of Iraq with Iran the model, not Turkey? As Robert Baer, a former C.I.A. official, recently observed, if given half a chance, the Saudi Arabians would overwhelmingly elect Osama bin Laden their leader in reaction to the stench of the Saudi family's tribal rule. They would do so not because they approved his Wahabbistic terrorist credo but because he defies the powers, local and foreign, that they believe oppress them.⁴⁰ We will have to casting aside our own sense of national honor that had been shattered and shamed

by 9/11. Instead, we should practice in the Middle East need, a policy of “dehumiliation and redignification,” as Thomas Friedman advises.⁴¹

Cultures of honor create tremendous volatility with all that ethic’s complex transactions and sensitivities. Arrogance, naivety, and aloofness in dealing with those who perceive only the cold steel of armies might well prove America’s undoing. One observer in Baghdad speculates that the Fallujah attack had its roots two weeks earlier. Witnesses report that U. S. forces entered a mosque with their boots on, a profanation of sacred ground and then proceeded to rough up some of the worshipers.⁴² Such high-handedness is to be expected from armies, whatever flag they follow. But that does not win the hearts and minds of those facing their guns.

To convert the defeated to the victor’s cause takes more money, policing skills, and intelligent assistance than we are perhaps willing or even able to supply. Who now thinks we had enough troops on hand to pacify and rebuild the Sunni Triangle? Paul Bremer had meantime disbanded the defeated army and purged thousands of workers in a disintegrated government, including many without ties to the Saddam regime. The Sunnis were made resentfully abject by midnight house raids, massive roundups of suspects, and, most of all, by all sorts of cultural missteps that we might think minor but ones that Iraqis will not soon forget.⁴³

Yet, one must admit, what value was there in using Saddam’s army which had simply disappeared?⁴⁴ That policy would have reinvigorated the very forces we had crushed. One might ask, would Generals Grant and Sherman have decided that for reasons of order and stability, the Rebels should re-arm themselves under the Union banner in May of 1865, having recently fought so implacably against the federal enemy? The problem in Iraq is simply immense: how to maintain order without the usual instruments that Saddam had used.

Nevertheless, we face a severe dilemma. The hatred of Americans grows fiercer by the day. Commenting on the horrible Fallujah killings, retired General Barry M. McCaffrey observes, “They hate us for [the occupation]. . .I think it’s a widespread rebellion” that may result in our losing control. A friendly Iraqi official warns, “If they enter Fallujah and use force it will only be met with force, and this will happen over and over. . .Everyone is angry with the occupation, and there are many tribes, which means there will be revenge.”⁴⁵

One thing is clear, however. The armored visage of honor is not easily unmasked. To do so requires more courage than even an eager volunteering to serve in the armed forces. The reasons for war, however, are so complex that discerning which course to take in future is by no means certain. In retrospect, the relatively passive responses of presidents Carter, Reagan, and Clinton to the threat of terror was fatally shortsighted. However justified inaction appeared to be at the time, a failure to act decisively in the crises of Tehran, Lebanon, and Somalia

invited the enemy's impression of cowardice, complacency, and coldness to consequences. Our present go-it-alone policy without wide international support for the sake of regaining face and respect in the Middle East has its risks. In fact, according to Al-Jazeera 57% of some 6000 polled expect that, if the Shia tribes join the Iraqi resistance, the coalition will come to grief. Only 29% anticipate no fall in American control, with just 14% undecided.⁴⁶

At this stage, Americans must come to an understanding of the mode of honor and dread of shame that have long governed Middle Eastern societies, even more than they do our more urban, institutionalized, and orderly form of our own. Not to do so opens us to enormous risks. Paul Berman reminds us that the world is by no means "a rational place."⁴⁷ Rather than follow Wilsonian dreams as President Bush wishes to reincarnate them, we might better recall the words of Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in. . .and do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

In conclusion, I would guess that honor will always be useful as a device for collective and military protection. To be sure, it is no longer as indispensable in Western societies as it once was during the Revolution or the Civil War. But in the world we encounter it remains a powerful, even commanding force. However that may be, I can safely say that devotion to honor has provoked more deaths and ruin than all the plagues that have visited mankind from the beginning of recorded history until now.

¹ David D. Gilmore, Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity (New Haven, Conn. Yale University Press, 1990), 223.

² Robert A. Nye, Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 224.

³ Charles Rearick, The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 243.

⁴ Quotations from Kristin L. Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American Wars (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 16-17.

⁵ Enrique Dupuy De Lôme quoted in Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 89, 93.

⁶ Grosvenor quoted in Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 95.

⁷ See Bryan McFarland, "The Virginius Affair and the Popular Press: National Honor and Diplomacy, 1873," unpublished seminar paper, University of Florida, December 2003.

⁸ James A. Field, The Politics of War: The Story of Two Wars Which Altered Forever the Political Life of the American Republic (1890-1920) (New York: Harper and Row, 1979),” 647-67.

⁹ Edmund Morris, Theodore Roosevelt Rex (New York: Random House, 2001), 8.

¹⁰ Williams quoted in Joseph A. Fry, Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789-1973 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 119, 122.

¹¹ Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 165.

¹² Hoganson, Fighting for American Manhood, 183.

¹³ Fry, Dixie Looks Abroad, 148-49.

¹⁴ Fry, Dixie Looks Abroad, 140.

¹⁵ David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (1972; New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 531-32. See also, Marc Feigen Fasteau The Male Machine (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 163-88.

¹⁶ Quotation from Doris Kearns, Lyndon Johnson, 253. See also Fry, Dixie Looks Abroad, 265; George C. Herring, “The Reluctant Warrior: Lyndon Johnson as Commander in Chief,” in Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Viet Nam War, 1945-1973, ed. David L. Anderson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 96; Robert Dallek, Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961-1973 (New York: ? 1998), 86, 90.

¹⁷ Michael Lind, Vietnam: The Necessary War: A Reinterpretation of America’s Most Disastrous Military Conflict (New York: Free Press, 1999); quotations in Ronnie Dugger, The Politician, The Life and Times of Lyndon Johnson: The Drive for Power, from the Frontier to Master of the Senate (New York: Norton, 1982), 146, 147.

¹⁸ William J. Daugherty, “A Look Back: Jimmy Carter and the 1979 Decision to Admit the Shah into the United States,” American Diplomacy (Chapel Hill: American Diplomacy Publishers, 2003?), page?

¹⁹ Bill, Eagle and Lion, 338; Terence Smith, “Why Carter Admitted the Shah,” New York Times, 17 March 1981.

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