

A concise version of “Toward a Responsible Transition in Iraq”  
by Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, chair of the Committee of International Policy  
of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) -1/13/06

*As we begin a new year and almost three years after the initiation of war, the situation in Iraq remains complex, uncertain, and dangerous. Our Conference of bishops mourns the deaths of more than 2,100 of our nation’s sons and daughters and of tens of thousands of Iraqis. We share the pain of the countless numbers of persons who have been injured and maimed and of those whose lives will never be the same.*

*While we recognize that people of goodwill may disagree with specific prudential judgments that we offer, our religious tradition calls us to shine the light of faith and the Church’s social teaching on the moral dimensions of the future choices that lie ahead. Today some see virtually no progress in Iraq and argue for rapid strategic withdrawal. Others see enormous progress and call for continued and steady engagement. Our Conference rejects any assessment of the reality that is either too pessimistic or too optimistic. Our nation cannot afford a shrill and shallow debate that distorts reality and reduces the options to “cut and run” versus “stay the course.”*

*We must look around and look ahead. Our nation’s military forces should remain in Iraq only as long as it takes for a responsible transition, leaving sooner rather than later. The intervention in Iraq has brought with it a new set of moral responsibilities. The central moral question is not just the timing of U.S. withdrawal, but rather the nature and extent of U.S. and international engagement that allows for a responsible transition to security and stability for the Iraqi people.*

*(We) believe that our nation and the Iraqi people face a number of particular challenges that arise from the complex, uncertain and dangerous situation in Iraq. These challenges include:*

- **terrorism and our response to it...** Our nation must guard against overly aggressive and unwise military responses that ... undermine the winning of hearts and minds in (Iraq and the world).*
- .- **the violation of the human rights of persons in the custody of U.S. and Iraqi forces;** violations of the human rights ... undermine both the struggle against terrorism and the prospects of a responsible transition in Iraq.*
- **threats to religious liberty and religious minorities in Iraq;** (We) urge the active support of the U.S. to encourage clearer protection of religious freedom in both law and practice.*
- **the plight of refugees** – (Our Conference) continues to believe that U.S. policy toward Iraqi refugees and asylum seekers is too restrictive.*
- **meeting other responsibilities of our nation:** The very costly conflict in Iraq demands a major commitment of human and financial resources, but Iraq cannot become an excuse for ignoring other pressing needs at home and abroad.*

*Our nation must act with a constructive and informed realism that helps us to learn from the past and to move forward. (We) must engage in serious and civil dialogue in order to walk a difficult path toward a responsible transition that seeks to help Iraqis take responsibility for building a better future for themselves.*