

THE COST OF WAR IN IRAQ: WHO PAYS THE PRICE?

A PATH TOWARDS PEACE IN IRAQ

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

Made famous by Martin Luther King, Jr., these words paraphrase the writings of the great Unitarian abolitionist Theodore Parker, who expressed this idea more than one hundred years ago. Both men, in their time, knew that justice did not simply happen; it is the work of many joining hands. Our challenges today demand no less.

Over the past five years, the United States' pursuit of an immoral and illegal war in Iraq has led our country down a disastrous path. The toll is paid by our military, their families, and Iraqi civilians. The financial costs mount on a daily basis. The longer the occupation continues, the more it denies our country resources that might otherwise be used for unmet needs at home and humanitarian relief. Generations to come will continue to pay for this strategic blunder that has made the world less safe.

UUSC seeks a new path forward: a responsible plan to end the war. At its core is the recognition that there can be no military solution to the conflict. The path toward peace in Iraq must respect human rights and international law. The plan outlined in this document helps reframe the debate and seeks to repair the damage done. It represents a steadfast refusal to succumb to the fear-mongering that led our country into this war.

The way to peace in Iraq requires each of us to engage in the democratic process, challenge the status quo of the war, and provide visionary leadership. It calls on us to use our collective power at this unique moment in history to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice.



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE

689 Massachusetts Avenue • Cambridge, MA 02139-3302 • 617-868-6600 • fax: 617-868-7102 • www.uusc.org

To responsibly end the war and bring peace to Iraq, we must:

- 1. Stop Funding the War.** Give the Pentagon only enough money for the safe and orderly redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq.
- 2. Support a diplomatic offensive** – as recommended by the Iraq Study Group – to build a comprehensive solution involving many countries.
- 3. Stop funding the construction of permanent military bases.**
- 4. Refuse to support any permanent “security agreement” between President George W. Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki** unless first approved by the Senate and the Iraqi Parliament.
- 5. Provide assistance to Iraqi refugees, internally displaced persons, and Iraqis** who worked with the U.S. military and civilian authorities.

A Litany of Disasters

The Iraq war is a humanitarian disaster.

Since the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, over 4,000 American troops have lost their lives¹ and tens of thousands more suffer from severe physical and emotional injury.² Repeated tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan have demoralized many units, contributing to the highest suicide rate in the history of the U.S. Army.³ Wounded veterans and their families are not getting the support they were promised and deserve. The war has created a humanitarian disaster, with more than two million Iraqi refugees fleeing to neighboring countries and millions more displaced from their homes.⁴ While no official records track the number of Iraqi casualties, some estimates indicate that over 600,000 have died.⁵

The Iraq war is an economic disaster.

The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service estimates that the United States’ average monthly cost in Iraq is over \$10 billion.⁶ To date, more than \$526 billion have been spent and newly authorized money is slated for the coming year. Funding for the war has not been accounted for through the formal federal budgeting process. Rather, it has been paid for “off the books,” via emergency supplemental bills, and outside the normal congressional budgeting process. As a result, there has been no transparency about costs, accountability for expenditures, or discussions of real trade-offs. Moreover, these funds are borrowed, to be paid for by our children and grandchildren. According to economist and Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz, the short-term costs pale in comparison to the likely long-term cost, which could exceed \$3 trillion.⁷

The Iraq war is a strategic disaster.

The late Lt. Gen. William Odom, former director of the National Security Agency under the Reagan administration, has declared “that America’s invasion of Iraq might be the worst strategic mistake in American history.”⁸ This sentiment is now echoed by a host of retired officers, diplomats, and other government officials who are coming forward to challenge the war.⁹ The decision to launch a preemptive strike against Iraq has damaged the United States’ standing in the world, squandered post-9/11 goodwill, threatened our democracy, and undermined the United Nations. It has fueled greater resentment in the region and alienated the United States from our allies.¹⁰ Far from enhancing our security, the war erodes it. The U.S. military is stretched so thin that it cannot meet our security needs around the world.

How Did We Get into This Mess?

According to the *Washington Post*, former White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan’s recently published memoir, *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington’s Culture of Deception*, includes a chapter entitled “Selling the War.” In that chapter, he writes that “Over that summer of 2002...top Bush aides had outlined a strategy for carefully orchestrating the coming campaign to aggressively sell the war.... In the permanent campaign era, it was all about manipulating sources of public opinion to the president’s advantage.”¹¹ According to the Center for Public Integrity, these revelations confirm its recent findings that Bush administration officials made 935 false statements about the threat posed by Iraq in the two-year period leading up to the invasion.¹²

This effort to manipulate the public can be seen in the numerous ways over the past six years that the Bush administration has characterized the objectives of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The marketing and the justifications for the war in Iraq have shifted over time.¹³ In each round, a climate of fear was created, false choices were presented, and voices of opposition were marginalized.

Justification One: Weapons of Mass Destruction

The initial threat asserted by senior U.S. officials, including the president, was that Iraq had rebuilt its capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and failed to comply with U.N. resolutions calling for their elimination. The administration further asserted that a preemptive strike was necessary because these weapons could be used against the United States or transferred to terrorists, particularly Al Qaeda, for use in a possible attack. Ultimately, no weapons of mass destruction were found.

Justification Two: Stop Bin Laden and Al Qaeda Terrorists

Ever since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the United States has kept Iraq on the list of state sponsors of terror. After the September 11 attacks, administration officials began to assert that the Saddam Hussein regime had ties to Al Qaeda terrorists. The 9/11 Commission found no evidence of a collaborative connection between the two.¹⁴

Justification Three: Bring Democracy to the Region

A later rationale for the war was that Iraq would become a model for democracy across the Middle East. The U.S. occupation was deemed necessary to ensure that Iraq could create a new constitution and government. Despite several elections, long-standing disputes between Sunni and Shiite groups remain unsettled, regularly erupting in violent clashes and instigating a complex and deadly insurgency comprising multiple factions. Few would point to Iraq as a model of anything but disaster.

Justification Four: Security and Reconciliation

The Bush administration, even as its days are

numbered, continues to present the public with limited and false choices about Iraq policy options. On January 10, 2007, President Bush announced a strategy that he dubbed “A New Way Forward” calling for a “surge” of 28,500 additional troops. The stated objective of this surge was to enhance security and stability in order for the Iraqi government to advance a reconciliation process. This is fundamentally a measure of political progress. Yet, the current “debate” about the success of the surge has been framed in strictly military and security terms.

What Will Happen Next?

Despite the administration’s protests to the contrary¹⁵, it appears to be setting the stage for a semi-permanent military occupation of Iraq. The first step was taken on November 26, 2007, when a nonbinding “Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship with Iraq” was signed by President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki. Among a wide-range of issues addressed, the document calls for a commitment to “provide security assurances to the Iraqi Government to deter any external aggression and to ensure the integrity of Iraq’s territory.”¹⁶ The draft declaration is opposed by many in Congress and in the Iraqi Parliament because of its unprecedented scope and legal ramifications.¹⁷ A final agreement is expected to be drafted by the end of July 2008.

President Bush would prefer that ratification of these principles take the form of an executive agreement rather than a treaty so that neither U.S. Senate nor Iraqi parliamentary approval would need to be secured. With the U.S. elections on the horizon and the U.N. resolution authorizing U.S. troops in Iraq expiring at the end of the year, the Bush administration will likely push for swift action on a security agreement.

Voices of opposition are marginalized when options are reduced to only one set of alternatives: either a prolonged stay in Iraq until some ill-defined objective is reached or precipitous and destabilizing withdrawal of U.S. troops leading to a blood bath. It is vital to recognize that these are NOT the only choices. We must not let the Bush administration’s fear tactics sway the public and lawmakers again.

A Responsible Plan to End the War and Bring Peace to Iraq

We need to refocus attention on a **PATH TOWARDS PEACE IN IRAQ**.

We call for a Responsible Plan to End the War in Iraq that includes a cohesive military, diplomatic, and economic strategy that protects American interests and respects human rights. The American public must reengage in discussions and decision-making about how to proceed. *All* elected officials, in *both* parties, need to be held accountable for supporting the changes that are so desperately needed.

This election year provides a unique opportunity to reframe the debate, reclaim our democracy, and put our country on a **PATH TOWARDS PEACE IN IRAQ**.

In terms of U.S. policy, a path towards peace in Iraq must be grounded in these fundamental points:

- ▶ There can be no military solution to the conflict;
- ▶ International law and human rights must be respected in order for the United States to regain moral standing in the world and return to the community of civilized nations;
- ▶ Diplomacy should be the centerpiece of any new plan of action;
- ▶ The damage that has been done must be repaired. A responsible plan must include humanitarian aid to assist internally displaced persons and refugees, economic aid to help rebuild the country, and health and education benefits for Iraq war veterans.

To responsibly end the war, we must:

1. **Stop Funding the War.** Give the Pentagon only enough money for the safe and orderly redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq.
2. **Support a diplomatic offensive** – as recommended by the Iraq Study Group – to build a comprehensive solution involving many countries.
3. **Stop funding the construction of permanent military bases.**
4. **Refuse to support any permanent “security agreement” between President Bush and Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki** unless first approved by the Senate and the Iraqi Parliament.
5. **Provide assistance to Iraqi refugees, internally displaced persons, and Iraqis** who worked with the U.S. military and civilian authorities.

1. Stop Funding the War.

Despite clear signals from the American electorate that it wants a change of direction in Iraq, none has materialized. The president has either vetoed legislation calling for a responsible withdrawal from Iraq or has issued signing statements indicating his intention not to comply with other legislative mandates that did become law. Thus, the most direct way to responsibly end the war is to give the Pentagon only enough money for the safe and orderly redeployment of U.S. troops out of Iraq.

Withdrawal of U.S. forces can be phased to coincide with returning control of their country to Iraqis. Some areas of Iraq are already self-governing. Commitments to economic and civil assistance for rebuilding Iraq must also be clearly expressed.

Polls have repeatedly shown that a majority of Iraqis want the U.S. forces out of their country. The presence of U.S. forces in Iraq has itself become a cause of violence, a rallying cry for both jihadists¹⁸ and Iraqi leaders like Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. Absent a clear and defined plan for withdrawal of American forces, genuine dialogue within Iraq and throughout the region about cessation of hostilities will not be possible.

2. Support a Diplomatic Offensive.

The bipartisan Iraq Study Group has recommended a comprehensive solution involving many countries – a “diplomatic offensive,” a “diplomatic surge.” A commitment to withdraw can serve as the starting point for determined diplomatic efforts not only within Iraq, but regionally. Many of Iraq’s neighbors are either contributing to the instability or affected by it. If Iran is part of the problem, it will also need to be part of the solution. Syria and Jordan are both affected by the dimensions of the regional humanitarian refugee problem. Turkey has its own concerns about Kurdish separatists using Iraq as safe haven. The countries in the area need to be involved in regional security. The Arab League should be involved as well. Some of its members could be willing to contribute forces for interim peacekeeping as American forces stand down.

The administration promised that the “surge” would create the political space for Iraqis to reach accords about resource sharing among Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni interests – agreements that are critical to governing Iraq. This has not happened, just as most other deadlines for meeting political milestones in Iraq have failed. In this context, U.S. forces have been placed in an impossibly (and dangerously) untenable position, acting as referees in Iraqi sectarian conflicts.

3. Stop Funding the Construction of Permanent Military Bases.

President Bush issued a signing statement in January 2008 stating that his administration would not be bound by the provision of the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 that barred the use of appropriated funds for the construction of permanent American military bases and U.S. control over Iraqi oil resources.

The United States will not be able to begin serious diplomatic initiatives, regional or local, without definitively renouncing – in word and deed – any intention to build permanent military bases in Iraq.

Instead of pouring money into building military bases, the United States should help repair the damage that has been done to Iraq’s infrastructure and economy. Just as the Marshall Plan was essential for rebuilding post-WWII Europe, an unambiguous financial commitment of similar scope to rebuild Iraq is necessary to prevent it from becoming an ongoing source of instability. General (ret.) Paul Eaton, who served in Iraq, cautions that, “So long as angry young men loiter in the streets, nothing good will come. Give them a job, however, and a realistic chance at a better life and the situation improve.”¹⁹

To correct the incompetence and corruption that has characterized much of the reconstruction by contractors in Iraq, these efforts should be overseen by an international agency, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The current military

focus in Iraq should shift towards a civil, economic, and humanitarian effort that involves the international community, which remains held at arm's length by the U.S. government.

4. Refuse to Support any Permanent "Security Agreement" without Congressional Approval.

In November 2007, President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki signed a "Declaration of Principles" that outlined the terms for negotiating an "enduring" U.S.-Iraq relationship for security, economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural relations. President Bush has rejected the notion that the U.S. Congress should have a role in these negotiations over the future presence of the United States in Iraq. With this agreement, which is slated to be completed before the end of 2008, the president has signaled his intention to stay the course in Iraq. This effort is a thinly veiled attempt to deepen the U.S. military commitment for an indefinite period and tie the hands of the next U.S. president.

An Army historian has admitted that the U.S. military invaded Iraq without a formal plan for occupying and stabilizing the country.²⁰ Just as that lack of scenario planning has contributed mightily to the failure of the war in Iraq, a similar unwillingness to plan for an end to the hostilities could mean, according to Senator McCain,²¹ an American occupation with varying degrees of engagement of U.S. troops for up to one hundred years.

5. Provide assistance to Iraqi refugees, internally displaced persons, and Iraqis who worked with U.S. authorities.

An often overlooked consequence of the war is the plight of an estimated two million Iraqis who have fled to Syria and Jordan and the millions more who have been displaced internally. A responsible plan to bring peace to Iraq must include measures to help these survivors. Failure to do so will not only harm these individuals even further but will leave the region in a dangerous state of instability. Just as the United States should provide care for our Iraq war veterans, measures to protect Iraqis who have worked with military and civilian U.S. authorities must also be included. The United States has a moral obligation to protect these individuals against retaliation.

What could a Path Towards Peace in Iraq policy mean for our towns, cities, counties, and states?

The National Priorities Project (NPP) has created a calculator that enables the public to see the tradeoffs between the money communities throughout the United States have each allocated to the war in Iraq and what that funding could have provided in local services.²² The findings are staggering.

In New Orleans, La., the NPP calculator shows that “taxpayers in congressional district 2 (Jefferson) will pay \$477.7 million for total Iraq war spending approved to date.” For the same amount of money, any ONE of the following could have been provided:

- 142,503 people with health care for one year
- 346,069 homes with renewable electricity for one year
- 13,805 public safety officers for one year
- 9,674 music and arts teachers for one year
- 107,365 scholarships for university students for one year
- 5,739 affordable housing units
- 370,766 children with health care for one year
- 72,516 Head Start places for children for one year
- 9,748 elementary school teachers for one year
- 8,148 port container inspectors for one year

When we don't have enough funds to repair failing infrastructure, pay for teachers in our schools, rebuild communities devastated by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, or pay for health insurance for the millions of Americans that are without medical care, then the war is an issue for every neighborhood, city, county, and state with unmet local needs.

Exerting Our Collective Power

As members of a democratic society, we hold in our collective hands the power to steer our country on a path towards peace. If you agree that the war should end and that our precious human and material resources should be redirected, please join us.

Take your place in our democratic process and engage in the elections. We must make the 2008 elections a referendum on the Iraq war. A framework for responsibly ending the war in Iraq should be a priority issue not only in the presidential debates, but in electoral forums for congressional, state, county, and municipal races. No president of any party can effectively end the war and put the United States on a path towards peace without strong congressional support. The collateral damage the war has caused to our neglected communities requires that ending it responsibly be fully debated on the campaign trail for offices at all levels of government. Our questions and our concerns about the war must follow the candidates wherever they go.

Beyond the elections, no matter the result, continue to press those in office for a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict in Iraq. The good news is that there is a convergence in 2008 of opportunity and public concern about the failing U.S. economy and growing awareness of the high costs of this war. Active voter education and engagement will create the momentum and framework that will enable us to hold those who win office accountable. Our work in the coming days, weeks, and months will have impact far beyond the immediate results of the 2008 election.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Operation Iraqi Freedom U.S. casualty status – fatalities as of June 6, 2008*, U.S. Dept. of Defense. Available at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf>.
- ² “One in five Iraq and Afghanistan veterans suffer from PTSD or major depression” (news release), Rand Corporation, April 17, 2008. Available at <http://rand.org/news/press/2008/04/17/index.html>.
- ³ “U.S. Army suicide rate continues to rise,” Voice of America News, May 29, 2008. Available at: <http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-05-29-voa64.cfm>. In the 20-year history of the U.S. Army’s tracking of suicides, rates in the past two years – 2006 and 2007 – represent the highest.
- ⁴ *The Iraq situation: The continuing needs of Iraq’s displaced*. U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq.html>.
- ⁵ The latest estimates of Iraqis killed since the U.S. invasion can be found at the websites of Just Foreign Policy (<http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/iraq/counterexplanation.html>); The Lancet (<http://www.thelancet.com/webfiles/images/journals/lancet/s0140673606694919.pdf>); and Iraq Body Count (<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/2007>).
- ⁶ “The cost of Iraq, Afghanistan and other Global War on Terror operations since 9/11,” CRS Report for Congress, April 11, 2008.
- ⁷ *The three trillion dollar war: The true cost of the Iraq conflict*, Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, 2008.
- ⁸ “America’s strategic paralysis,” William E. Odom (lecture delivered at Watson Institute for International Studies – Brown University), April 7, 2006. Streaming audio of lecture available at http://www.watsoninstitute.org/events_detail.cfm?id=710.
- ⁹ “Retired generals rising up against Iraq war,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 16, 2006. Available at: http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/opinion/266638_solarosub16.html.
- ¹⁰ *Global unease with major world powers*, Pew Global Attitudes Project, Pew Charitable Trusts, 2007. Available at: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=256>.
- ¹¹ “Ex-press aide writes that Bush misled U.S. on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, May 28, 2008.
- ¹² “Iraq: The war card – Orchestrated deception on the path to war,” The Center for Public Integrity, available at: http://www.publicintegrity.org/WarCard/Default.aspx?src=project_home&context=overview&id=945. The Center’s response to McClellan’s book can be found at: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/Report.aspx?aid=977>.
- ¹³ “Iraq: Post-Saddam governance and security,” CRS Report for Congress, July 13, 2007 (updated).
- ¹⁴ Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (“9/11 Commission Report”), p.66. Report available at: <http://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>
- ¹⁵ “What we need next in Iraq,” Secretary of State Condolezzi Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, *Washington Post* (opinion), February 13, 2008.
- ¹⁶ “Fact sheet: U.S.-Iraq Declaration of Principles for Friendship and Cooperation” White House press release, November 26, 2007. Available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/11/20071126-1.html>.
- ¹⁷ “Growing opposition to Iraq security pact,” *New York Times*, May 31, 2008.
- ¹⁸ “Most Iraqis favor immediate U.S. pullout, polls show,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2006.
- ¹⁹ “Retired generals criticize Bush’s plan for Iraq,” *Washington Post*, January 18, 2007.
- ²⁰ “Army historian cites lack of postwar plan,” *Washington Post*, December 25, 2004.
- ²¹ “Describing an exchange between John McCain and a voter in Derry, N.H. in January,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2008.
- ²² Iraq war cost calculator, National Priorities Project. Available at: http://www.nationalpriorities.org/costofwar_home.