

Voice of the Left

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Enough Is Enough: Let's Get Out of Iraq Now

My title pretty much sums up my position. Whether there ever were weapons of mass destruction, whether Saddam ever did have ties to Al Qaeda, whether Iraq ever was a threat to the United States – all are important questions that should be answered at some point, but what the United States and Britain need to do now is the true conundrum we should ponder. The reason couldn't be more simple -- young Americans and Britons are dying everyday. And for what?

The Bush Administration uses the fighting as justification for the continued presence of American and British military forces. Here's the cold, harsh reality – the occupation of Iraq is the CAUSE of, not the solution to, the violence in Iraq. It is precisely the presence of foreign military forces that fosters the insurgency. Ending the US/UK occupation by bringing the troops home now is a first step toward ending this nightmare. Although our corporate media doesn't tell us these things, most Iraqis would like us out too – and “on the double.”

In a poll conducted this past June by the U.S. Coalition Provisional Authority (not exactly a think tank of left-wing extremists!), 55% of Iraqis opposed the presence of US forces. While Iraqis cheered the overthrow of the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, they didn't sign up for a foreign military occupation as a replacement.

Let's look at some very basic reasons why we need to get out of Iraq now.

The Human Cost Keeps Increasing: On September 7 of last year, the death toll of US soldiers reached 1,000. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld assured us that the resistance was “nearing its end.” Like everything else about this war, he was wrong. Dead wrong. The tally now stands at 2,081 (11/17/05) -- with no end in sight. As for the Iraqi casualty totals, the US military refuses to monitor or even estimate the number of civilian casualties. Gen. Tommy Franks described the Pentagon's approach earlier, “We don't do body counts.” He has good reason. The little-publicized independent McLaughlin Report earlier this year estimated Iraqi civilian dead at a staggering 110,000. (Did you hear that on Fox News?)

Iraqis Aren't Better Off: While the removal of Saddam Hussein was a welcome development for many Iraqis, the streets of Baghdad and other cities remain dangerous war zones. Clean water, electricity and even gasoline (now that's a good one!) in this oil-rich country are all in even shorter supply than during the dark years of economic sanctions. Women face new restrictions and new dangers as well. Democracy, freedom and human rights appear out of reach. And Iraq remains occupied by 160,000 foreign troops, with all of the indignity that military occupation brings.

The War Is Bankrupting Us: The United States is spending TWO HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS A DAY IN IRAQ. Few Americans realize this insidious fact. To make matters worse, the Bush Administration is recklessly running up deficits that would make a Bolivian dictator cringe – APPROXIMATELY TWENTY-FIVE TO THIRTY BILLION DOLLARS PER MONTH. This comes just a few short years after Bill Clinton gave us record surpluses. The Bush Administration's combination of massive spending on the war and tax cuts for the wealthy means less money for social spending. (I forgot, that's a good thing the right-wingers tell us.) The Administration's fiscal-year 2006 budget proposes deep cuts in critical domestic programs. It also virtually freezes funding for domestic discretionary programs other than homeland security. (Don't get me started on Homeland Security! Did you hear the 9/11 panel's comments this week?) Among the programs the Administration seeks to eliminate: grants for low-income schools and family literacy; Community Development Block Grants; Rural Housing and Economic Development; and Arts in Education grants. You can bet there will be some scientific cuts too! Bush doesn't like science. Unless it's for the military or drilling for oil in a wildlife preserve.

Halliburton's War Profiteering: The US government's Iraq reconstruction process has cost both Iraqis and Americans. Instead of boosting Iraqi self-determination by granting contracts to experienced Iraqi businesses and working to lower the huge unemployment problem inside Iraq, the US government has favored US firms with strong political ties. (Shoot, Bush even tried to stiff the Brits. If it wasn't for Tony Blair's constant pressuring, British firms wouldn't have been able to enjoy their "fair share" of the spoils.) The plain truth is that major contracts worth billions of dollars have been awarded with limited or no competition. American auditors and the media have documented numerous cases of fraud, waste and incompetence. The most egregious problems are attributed to (guess who?) Halliburton! In case you forgot that's the old employer of the Prince of Darkness (a.k.a Dick Cheney). Yup, Halliburton has been the largest recipient of Iraq-related contracts. Their corporate motto should be: "It pays to have friends in high places." By the way, the same thing is happening in New Orleans. Real surprising.

Recruitment for Al Qaeda Has Accelerated: The war against Iraq is leaving US citizens more vulnerable to terrorist attacks at home and abroad. According to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, the best-known and most authoritative source of information on global military capabilities and trends, the war in Iraq has accelerated recruitment for Al Qaeda and made the world LESS safe. The prestigious think tank estimates worldwide Al Qaeda membership is now at 18,000, with 1,000 active in Iraq. Their report went on to state that the occupation has become the organization's "most potent global recruitment pretext," that "the occupation has divided the United States and Britain from their allies," and that the continued US/UK presence has weakened the war on terrorism.

The War Is Draining First Responders From Our Communities

Since the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 364,000 Reserve and National Guard troops have been called for military service. This spring alone, 35,000 new Guard

troops were sent to Iraq. Their deployment puts a particularly heavy burden on their home communities, because many of them serve as "first responders," including police, firefighters and emergency medical personnel. A poll conducted by the Police Executive Research Forum found that 44 percent of police forces across the nation have lost officers as a result of deployment to Iraq. Remember Katrina? Other than the bamboozling of Bush and his corporate cronies, a serious reason behind the blundering was this startling truth -- our National Guard and military were "too far away from New Orleans" to respond. (Incidentally, within 48 hours after the recent Pakistan earthquake the US military was carrying out airlifts of food and water. Guess they couldn't find the Superdome.)

And last but not least...

The Will of the People: Most Americans clearly oppose the war with over 60% in a recent CNN/USA TODAY/Gallup poll agreeing that "Iraq was not worth the cost." As for Bush's popularity overall, only 36% of eligible voters still support the President. IMAGINE THAT!

Let's get out of Iraq – NOW!!!