

OUT OF IRAQ TO REAL SECURITY

We are now in our fifth year of occupation in Iraq. The war has cost us more than 30,000 casualties¹ and \$10 billion a month and counting.² The eventual total cost—including providing health care to the sick and wounded, replacing the weapons and other war materiel used and paying the interest on the money borrowed to pay for the war—is now estimated at a staggering \$3 trillion by Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz.

Yet Iraq is the worst foreign policy debacle in our modern history not only because of its financial and human costs but also because of its cost to our national security. It has squandered resources in a protracted civil war, while distracting attention and forces from the struggle against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. It has alienated our allies and inflamed the Muslim world.

While we have been mired in Iraq, pressing challenges to our national security—from nuclear proliferation to catastrophic climate change—have been slighted or denied. Little thought has been given to our strategy in the global market, even as the economic rise of India and China has effectively doubled the global workforce. We're now the world's largest debtor, complacently running deficits in high technology products as our economic strength—the foundation of our nation's security—erodes. We are committed to policing the world, while sustaining an empire of bases and a military budget as large as the rest of the world's combined.³ Yet we are doing so on resources borrowed from abroad. It is time for a fundamental change in course.

Iraq is not the cause of these threats and challenges, but it is central to their neglect. The longer we are mired in Iraq, the more we isolate ourselves from our allies, embolden our enemies and cripple our ability to meet our real security needs.

THE CHALLENGE

After the horrific attacks of September 11th, the world recoiled, then rallied to support America in our time of trial. The pursuit of Al Qaeda received wide international backing. The French said, "We're all Americans now." Even our sworn enemies in Iran offered their help.

Now, such unity is a distant memory. Shifting resources out of Afghanistan to invade and occupy Iraq, under false pretenses, strained our alliances and inflamed anti-American sentiment. Our moral authority was further eroded by the torture of prisoners, the flouting of the Geneva Conventions and the horrors of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and secret prisons around the world.

HOT QUOTE

"The Iraq conflict has become the cause celebre for jihadists, breeding a deep resentment of US involvement in the Muslim world and cultivating supporters for the global jihadist movement."

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

April 2006

As we poured resources and attention into Iraq, we neglected real security concerns. Al Qaeda, the intelligence community tells us, has reconstituted itself. The Taliban is making gains in Afghanistan. Our leadership in efforts to stem proliferation and clean up loose nukes has suffered from inattention or misplaced policy. The administration's denial of global warming and abandonment of the Kyoto process has left us isolated across the world, with US delegates being mocked at recent global talks on climate change. We're running up record foreign debt, selling off assets and borrowing money, yet pouring ever more resources into a military tasked with policing the globe.

And because of Iraq, our military itself has been stretched to the breaking point. Extended tours of duty, difficulty recruiting new soldiers and widespread post-traumatic stress disorder are wreaking havoc on our military readiness. In turn, the administration's policies have cannibalized our National Guard, leaving us ill equipped to handle disasters at home. And the penchant for privatization has turned over broad swathes of our operations to "private security contractors," who have become notoriously unaccountable for appalling crimes.

Fundamentally, the invasion of Iraq has been a strategic blunder that further destabilized the Gulf region, distracted us from the pursuit of Al Qaeda and eroded our real security. As our own intelligence community explains, factors fueling the "jihadist movement" include "fear of Western domination, leading to anger, humiliation, and a sense of powerlessness," "the slow pace of real and sustained economic, social, and political reforms in many Muslim majority nations" and "pervasive anti-US sentiment among most Muslims."⁴ Invading Iraq played right into Al Qaeda's hands.

Most Americans now oppose the Iraq war and want to change course. Most agree that it is not worth its costs. But to be able to change course, we must recognize that this strategic blunder was not born from incompetence but from a fundamentally flawed neo-conservative worldview.

HOT QUOTE

"This administration and the previously Republican controlled legislature have been the most caustic agents against America's Armed Forces in memory."

MAJ. GEN. PAUL EATON

USA, Ret., May 1, 2007

THE CONSERVATIVE FAILURE

After first running for president by promising a “humble” foreign policy, President Bush formed a “neoconservative” national security team that promoted a unilateralist doctrine of pre-emptive war and believed in a presidency that operated above the law in areas of national security. They discounted the threat from decentralized, stateless terrorists and focused on nations they deemed “rogue states.” In 2001, they rebuffed requests to focus on counter-terrorism, insisting that more money was needed for missile defense.⁵ In August 2001, Bush infamously shrugged off a CIA memo titled “Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US,” telling the briefer, “All right. You’ve covered your a**, now.”⁶

President Bush often said that September 11, 2001, “changed everything.” In fact, little was changed. Instead of relentlessly pursuing Al Qaeda, the Bush administration used the terrorist attacks as a justification to oust the leader of the “rogue state” of Iraq. It did not matter that Saddam Hussein had nothing to do with September 11 and was not aligned with Al Qaeda. Iraq was a weakened state in a strategic location. Installing a friendly government that would allow the Bush administration to construct permanent military bases was considered easy to achieve—a “cakewalk”—and a boon to our national security.

They were wrong on every count.

Invading Iraq unleashed a multi-faceted civil war. Before the year is out, we will have lost more than 4,000 American lives and tens of thousands of Iraqi lives. The prospect of permanent bases with pledges to keep troops there for “100 years”—fuels anti-American sentiment among Iraqis and limits our ability to reconcile deep sectarian differences and enlist the cooperation of neighboring states.

Advocates of the war insist that the increase in troop levels in 2007 has reduced violence. But in the words of one reporter, Iraq has simply moved “from the eighth circle of hell to the fifth”⁷ with sectarian violence persisting, millions of refugees still displaced and political progress—the stated objective of the “surge”—nonexistent. What progress has been made on the ground has not been accompanied by progress in political reconciliation. The US is still trapped in a civil war that shows no signs of ending.

The Bush administration continues to conflate the Iraqi civil war and the threat from Al Qaeda, saying “We will fight them over there so we do not have to face them in the United States of America.” Such flawed logic has failed the people of London, Madrid, Bali, Casablanca, Istanbul, Jakarta, Riyadh, Amman, and Algiers. The number of terrorist attacks worldwide continues to rise, up to 14,338 in 2006.⁸ Clearly, the invasion of Iraq has not ended the threat of terrorism, and in turn, has not made America more secure.

THE PROGRESSIVE SOLUTION

Progressive foreign policy is based on American values of freedom and opportunity, and executed with strong international alliances. America has the most powerful military in the world, but military prowess alone is not sufficient to address our real security needs. Military intervention and war should be a last resort, not a permanent routine. The US simply has neither the resources nor the legitimacy to police the world alone. Our security requires developing allies and building legitimate international institutions and a stable legal order. Here's how we can deploy the full range of American influence to change course.

The president should task the Joint Chiefs with creating a plan for the ending of the Iraqi occupation and the safe removal of US troops. That mission would be gladly received by generals concerned about the future of their forces. Accompany this process with a diplomatic offensive, inside Iraq and across the region, seeking to encourage the Iraqis to resolve their differences and to limit the foreign meddling in Iraq. Scrub plans for permanent bases and further “regime change,” so we can enlist the cooperation of neighboring states, respect Iraqi sovereignty and stabilize the region.

Revive the coalition against Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks. Once we are out of Iraq, we will have the resources and the renewed moral authority to rally the world and address actual threats to global security. Despite all the bellicose rhetoric, this is far more a matter of aggressive police and intelligence work than of military deployments. One thing is clear: we cannot win the battle for hearts and minds, and deprive terrorist organizations of recruits, while exacerbating fears of Western domination.

Respect sovereignty and self-determination. Instead of coddling the dictators we like and pushing “regime change” for those we don't, we can patiently promote democracy by engaging all parties in all countries—providing an example, not an interventionist army. We should signal that we will work with whomever a sovereign people chooses to lead them, even as we state clearly our interests and our values.

Embark on a global drive to curb proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We must curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and eliminate current stockpiles. We need to sustain cooperation with Russia to ensure that the “loose nukes” strewn through the states of the former Soviet Union are dismantled and protected. Instead of counterproductive saber-rattling, we must pursue stern diplomacy with states angling to obtain nuclear weapons, and make clear that contributing to global stability is the only path to economic and national security.

Launch a bold drive for energy independence. This is an opportunity to mobilize U.S. science and technology, to invest in alternative energy and efficiency, and to create good jobs and new industries. It is also a national security imperative—we need to end our dependence on foreign oil, reduce our trade imbalance and seriously address global warming. (See New Energy for America in this report for more.)

Focus on emerging real security threats. We need to adjust our security budget to decrease funds wasted on unnecessary Cold War weaponry that doesn't address 21st century threats. Terrorism thrives in failed states, so we must increase resources devoted to disease prevention, disaster relief, climate change, education and fighting poverty.

Recommit the U.S. to building international law and strong international alliances. As the world's largest economy, with investments and interests across the world, we have the greatest stake in a strong international legal order. Without effective international institutions, we cannot protect fundamental human rights, punish purveyors of genocide or prevent economically weak states from failing and becoming incubators for terrorism. We can shape international law without sacrificing our sovereignty and the right to defend ourselves militarily from imminent threats.

Make the United States a source of hope again. We have a strategic interest in re-establishing our moral authority. We should be leading the international community to respond to genocidal violence, as in Darfur. We should be leading the effort to eliminate preventable diseases. We should champion democracy with the strength of our ideas, not the force of our arms.

MAKING THE CASE

You know the challenge we face. You know how conservatism failed. You know how a progressive vision can move us forward. How do you crystallize the argument, deliver the key facts and take down conservative spin? Below are the tools you need to make the case in your community.

Core Arguments

The invasion and occupation of Iraq has further destabilized the Middle East, sapped our economic strength and stretched our military to the breaking point.

Proof Points

- The National Intelligence Estimate reports that Al Qaeda has reconstituted itself while we have been distracted in Iraq.⁹
- If present casualty rates continue, we will have lost 4,000 soldiers by April 2008.¹⁰
- Before it's over, it is estimated that the war will cost us \$3 trillion,¹¹ diverting funds that could have been invested in strengthening our foundation: energy independence, modern infrastructure, health care and education.
- We're paying for the war by racking up the world's largest debt¹² and becoming increasingly dependent on loans and goods from abroad.
- Active-duty Army combat tours are now 15 months long, with only half the recommended time at home between tours.¹³
- Roughly one-half of all Army units received the lowest readiness rating a fully formed unit can receive.¹⁴

By allowing the occupation of Iraq to drain our resources, conservatives undermine our national security and ignore real global threats.

- Terrorist attacks are on the rise, more than 14,000 in 2006.¹⁵
- Our intelligence community says "fear of Western domination" is fueling the "jihadist movement."¹⁶
- Climate change is already depleting natural resources across the globe, fueling conflict and upheaval as the crisis in Sudan illustrates.¹⁷
- Nations still seek nuclear weapons to achieve prestige, and potentially dangerous nuclear material remains unsecured.
- The AIDS pandemic continues to spread globally: 40 million people were infected in 2006, up from 33 million in 2001.¹⁸

Ending the occupation is the critical first step to restoring our moral authority, rebuilding strong alliances and refocusing on top priorities.

- Support for attacks on US troops is linked to opposition to permanent military bases.¹⁹
- Taking "regime change" off the table will help enlist the cooperation of neighboring states.
- Scrapping unilateralism will allow us to rebuild alliances needed to address terrorism, poverty, disease, genocide and climate change.

Spotlight Story

Eddy and Linda Porter spent Wednesday packing up their son Casey's apartment, to send him off to Iraq.

"It's just going to be another hellish year," Linda Porter said.

Spc. Casey Porter has been deployed once before. But this time, it's different.

"I honored my commitment, why is it not being honored on the other end?" Casey said.

Casey had just three weeks left of his enlistment when he was expecting to receive discharge papers. Instead, he received new deployment papers with a date three months away to return to war.

Now that date has come, and he's leaving later this week.

"I think it's a slap in the face to veterans who have to go through this because I know there's several other people in my position," Casey said.

Actually, there are several thousand across the country. Others' attempts to legally fight stop loss in the past, have failed.

"I view stop loss as a selective draft. It is only against those people who volunteered. I don't think that's a reward, I think that's a punishment for having volunteered," Linda said.

"If you volunteered, served your four years, you oughta get out," Casey's father, Eddy, said.

He was drafted back in the 60's during the Korean War. He sees the bigger picture of his son's situation.

"They've got to keep the continuity and there's not enough people coming in," Eddy said.

So now, those who are enlisted are being redeployed even if they're not ready.

"I've seen soldiers, my first time going, getting on the plane with crutches," Casey said.

Casey said a non-military doctor diagnosed him with post traumatic stress disorder, but the military refused to recognize it.

"It's just, 'Get on the plane.' I don't feel like I have my freedom, to live my life. To leave the military and continue on," Casey said.

It's ironic that a soldier might feel a lack of freedom since he's put his own life on the line, to protect just that.

From News 8 Austin website, March 5, 2008²⁰

Conservative Spin

Liberals have a pre-9/11 mindset and don't understand that we're at war with Islamofacism.

Progressive Response

- The threat of terrorism is very real, and conservative foreign policy has made it worse. Occupying Iraq has destabilized the Gulf region and helped Al Qaeda recruit. The first step in reassembling a broad, aggressive global coalition against Al Qaeda and its allies is to end the occupation of Iraq and redirect our energy and attention to the true threat.

We haven't had an attack on American soil since 9/11. The Bush foreign policy is working.

- The war in Iraq has proved a recruiting boon for Al Qaeda. That's reflected in terrorist attacks in London, Madrid, Bali, Casablanca, Istanbul, Jakarta, Riyadh, Amman, and Algiers. The number of terrorist attacks continues to climb. Radical terrorist networks remain a global threat, and the occupation of Iraq has made matters worse.

The surge is working. Violence in Iraq has dropped. Now is not the time to surrender.

- Iraq has only moved from "the eighth circle of hell to the fifth." Debilitating sectarian violence persists and political progress—the supposed objective of the surge—is nonexistent. Until we make it clear we're not staying permanently, we can't enlist the cooperation needed to stabilize Iraq. Our own generals say it will take a decade or so for the occupation to provide security—that is a commitment of another \$3 trillion and thousands of more lives that we cannot afford.

We have to be willing to pre-emptively strike countries like Iran to prevent them from obtaining nuclear weapons.

- Threats of regime change seem to lead nations to accelerate their weapons programs, not dismantle them. Countering proliferation and securing loose nukes requires forging a global consensus, applying global pressure, and sustaining diplomatic efforts to provide incentives—positive and negative—for countries to abandon their efforts.

Throwing money at global problems will just waste money on UN bureaucracy and corrupt governments.

- We have brought the international community together to tackle problems before, such as when we eradicated smallpox and saved the ozone layer. Leaving global problems to fester merely creates the conditions where terrorism thrives. Let's build on what we know has worked.

Public Pulse

Americans oppose the war and want to end the occupation

- 64% “oppose” the Iraq war. (*CNN, February 2008*)
- 57% say the war was a “mistake.” (*USA Today/Gallup, Jan.-Feb. 2008*)
- 63% want to either withdraw “right away” or “within the next year.” (*Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg, January 2008*)
- 65% say Iraq has “made it more difficult for the U.S. military to be ready to respond to conflicts elsewhere in the world.” (*ABC/Washington Post, June 2005*)

64%

57%

63%

65%

Americans want to work with the world and raise our global standing

- 68% are “dissatisfied with the position of the United States in the world today.” (*Program on International Policy Attitudes, October 2006*)
- 71% think the United States is “not respected around the world today.” (*CBS, June 2007*)
- 79% believe the United States should “coordinate its power together with other countries according to shared ideas of what is best for the world as a whole” instead of in a way that only “serves U.S. interests and values.” (*Program on International Policy Attitudes, October 2006*)

68%

71%

79%

MORE RESOURCES

Arms Control Association, a membership organization dedicated to promoting public understanding of and support for effective arms control policies, <http://www.armscontrol.org/>

Amnesty International, a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognized human rights for all, <http://www.amnesty.org/>

The Carter Center, committed to advancing human rights and alleviating unnecessary human suffering, <http://www.cartercenter.org>

Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank dedicated to improving the lives of Americans through ideas and action, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security>

Center for Defense Information, provides expert analysis on various components of U.S. national security, international security and defense policy, <http://www.cdi.org>

Conflicts Forum, aims to open a new relationship between the West and the Muslim world, <http://conflictsforum.org>

Foreign Policy in Focus, a think tank for research, analysis and action that brings together scholars, advocates and activists who strive to make the United States a more responsible global partner, <http://www.fpiif.org>

Fourth Freedom Forum, working to create a more civilized world based on the force of law rather than the law of force, <http://www.fourthfreedom.org/>

The Henry L. Stimson Center, offers practical, nonpartisan, creative solutions to the problems of national and international security through research projects of the highest quality, <http://www.stimson.org>

Human Rights Watch, dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world, <http://www.humanrightswatch.org>

Israel Policy Forum, advocates for active and sustained American diplomatic efforts, which are essential to achieving a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, <http://www.israelpolicyforum.org/>

Just Foreign Policy, dedicated to reforming U.S. foreign policy through coordinating the broad majority of Americans to advocate their interests and values, <http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/>

National Security Archive, collects and publishes declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>

National Priorities Project—Cost of War, research organization that analyzes and clarifies federal data so that people can understand and influence how their tax dollars are spent, <http://nationalpriorities.org>, <http://costofwar.com/>

New America Foundation, working to promote a new internationalism that adapts our best foreign policy traditions to the 21st century, http://www.newamerica.net/issues/foreign_policy

Nuclear Threat Initiative, working to reduce the global threats from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, <http://www.nti.org/>

TomDispatch.com, provides deeper understanding of our post-9/11 world and a clear sense of how our imperial globe actually works, <http://www.tomdispatch.com/>

Reports

Center for American Progress, Strategic Reset: Reclaiming Control of U.S. Security in the Middle East, http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/06/strategic_reset.html

Foreign Policy in Focus, “Just Security: An Alternative Foreign Policy Framework,” <http://www.ips-dc.org/getfile.php?id=134>

National Intelligence Council, “Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate “Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,”” http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_otherprod/Global_Terrorism_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf

National Intelligence Council, “The Terrorist Threat to the US Homeland,” http://dni.gov/press_releases/20070717_release.pdf

National Priorities Project, Local Cost of the Iraq War, http://www.nationalpriorities.org/publications/local_cost_of_the_iraq_war_through_fy2008

Endnotes

¹Iraq Coalition Casualty Count. <http://icasualties.org/oif/>

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³"Dems: What about the Military Budget?," Foreign Policy in Focus, 21 February 2008. <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/5009>

⁴National Intelligence Council, "Declassified Key Judgments of the National Intelligence Estimate 'Trends in Global Terrorism: Implications for the United States,'" April 2006, http://www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_GIF_otherprod/Global_Terrorism_NIE_Key_Judgments.pdf

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⁶Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11*, Simon & Schuster, 2006

⁷Thomas E. Ricks, "The War Over The War," *Washington Post*, 20 November 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2007/11/16/DI2007111601854.html?tid=informbox>

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¹⁴Ibid

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¹⁸"The Millennium Development Goals Project," United Nations, 2007. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/mdg2007.pdf>

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