



Toward a Just and Peaceful Solution in Iraq

March 2008

A Policy Paper on the War and Occupation of Iraq

prepared by Pax Christi USA

The fifth anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, March 19th, falls in Holy Week this year, a poignant reminder of the prolonged Holy Week suffering in Iraq. Five years after the invasion, the spiral of violence unleashed by the war continues to cause tremendous suffering on all sides with no end in sight.

Outside the United States, the invasion is largely viewed as illegal, based on faulty intelligence and deliberate deception (that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction), and in violation of the United Nations Charter. U.S. unilateralism and the use of torture, as well as the ongoing militarization and occupation of Iraq, continue to damage the U.S. reputation abroad, as well as divide our people at home.

Inside Iraq, an August 2007 poll (commissioned by the BBC, ABC News, and Japan's NHK) showed that more than 6 in 10 Iraqis viewed the U.S.-led invasion of their country as wrong, up from 52 percent in late 2006. Between 67 and 70 percent believed the surge had hampered conditions for political dialogue and reconstruction, and despite the uncertainties around threats to security, 47 percent favored the immediate withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq—a 12-point rise from early March 2007.

Careful examination of the dynamics in Iraq is essential before any claims of policy “success” can be made based on temporary drops in violence or the withdrawal of some troops. Lasting peace in Iraq depends on an end to the U.S. occupation and a comprehensive and regional peace plan. A “diplomatic offensive” was recommended by the White House-commissioned Iraq Study Group report in 2006, but the recommendations have virtually been ignored by the U.S. Administration. As new policy directions need to be charted, the future U.S. role in Iraq will be a central topic of debate in this 2008 election campaign.

Catholic Social Teaching and a vision of Gospel nonviolence suggest policy directions for Iraq that embrace international cooperation and replace reliance on military measures with diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict in Iraq and establish a just peace.

While debates in Washington focus on timetables for troop withdrawal and alternative military strategies to address internal violence, too little is said of the human, economic, and moral costs of the war, the role that the occupation plays in fanning violence, and the essential need for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict. A number of developments are scheduled to take place in the next months, including a drawdown of troops to pre-surge levels and the finalization of a formal agreement to establish an “enduring relationship” with Iraq. These events need careful scrutiny, with both Congressional and public oversight.

The key to long-term peace in Iraq lies in the United States’ willingness to commit to a multilateral, diplomatic solution to the conflict in order to lay the foundation for a just peace that respects Iraqi sovereignty and control over its people and natural resources, withdraws all U.S. troops and U.S. military bases, and advances

the difficult process of reconstruction and reconciliation.

Nothing can restore the precious lives lost and damaged, nor the ripped-apart social fabric of an ancient nation. But a change in U.S. policy focus to support a national reconciliation process in Iraq and a regional peace process offers the best hope for beginning to heal the divisions created by the continuing war and occupation, to lead to stability, and, in the long run, to strengthen the global common good.

The Human and Economic Costs

Nearly 4,000 U.S. service people have lost their lives in the war, and more than 27,000 have been maimed since the March 2003 invasion. Estimates of Iraqis killed vary greatly, with some estimates approaching one million. Over two million Iraqis have fled the country, and another two million are displaced within Iraq’s borders. The health and sewage systems have collapsed. In some areas, up to 90 percent of the children are not in school. Damage to the infrastructure and lack of basic services, coupled with the threats to personal security, make daily life in Iraq unbearable, and the situation continues to deteriorate.

Economically, U.S. taxpayers’ dollars committed to the war and occupation represent a scandalous robbing of our national treasury. According to the Congressional Budget Office last August (2007), the war has already cost over \$1 trillion, when the cost of long-term care of wounded soldiers and economic support to Iraq are included. By contrast, the Vietnam War, when adjusted for inflation, cost \$652 billion over twelve years (Center for American Progress).

The number of U.S. private security contractors has come to rival the number of U.S. troops, with estimates as high as 150,000, and firms like Blackwater operate on a daily basis with complete impunity (Institute for Policy Studies, October 2006). Quarterly fiscal reports in July 2007 showed huge profits for military defense contractors like General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, and Lockheed Martin. Lockheed Martin, for example, announced a 34 percent rise in profits to \$778 million, and projected that their revenue would soar as high as \$41.65 billion (Institute for Policy Studies, August, 2007).

The Spiral of Violence

Iraq is a case study for how “violence begets violence.” Before the U.S. invasion and occupation, Shia and Sunni Iraqis never had a civil conflict. Inter-marriage was common. While the war was launched under the banner of the “war on terrorism,” it has resulted in breeding hatred and fanning ever-expanding extremist violence.

A centerpiece of the U.S. Administration’s claim to “stay the course” in Iraq is that withdrawal of the U.S. military would result

in a bloodbath. First, this claim does not envision that other security structures and multilateral peacekeeping bodies might have better success in Iraq and in securing its borders. Second, it fails to recognize the view shared by many Iraqi analysts and politicians that the internal conflict is secondary and fueled by the occupation. Third, in characterizing the violence as largely between sectarian or religious factions, such a simplistic framework focused on Shia-Sunni tensions ignores a more important lens of the distinction between separatists and nationalists, of which both categories include Shias and Sunnis.

An illustration of the separatist-nationalist divisions within the Iraqi parliament, framed by Raed Jarrar, Iraqi advisor to the American Friends Service Committee, helps explain the tensions between the Iraqi parliament and the U.S.-backed Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki and his Governing Council. (Cf. "False Sectarianism and the Battle for Oil: Monopolizing Power in Iraq," *Fellowship of Reconciliation Magazine*, Fall, 2007.) The separatists, led by Al-Maliki, support the U.S. occupation and favor a partitioned Iraq with a weak central government, as well as decentralized natural resource revenues. The nationalists, who dominate the Iraqi parliament and include a plurality of parties from different religious sects, want to unify Iraq with a strong Baghdad government and centralized natural resource revenues. They are opposed to the privatization of Iraq's oil industry and call for an end to the U.S. occupation.

U.S. backing for the Al-Maliki government is viewed as interfering with possibilities for reaching an Iraqi political solution. In addition to the sectarian and separatist-nationalist tensions, there is an even broader and more complex set of extremist tendencies at work in Iraq, including both Sunni insurgents and a post-invasion entry of Al-Qaeda. A united Iraq could begin to address the extremist violence, but there will be no united Iraq and no end to the violence unless and until the U.S. occupation is ended. The occupation serves as a "common enemy" for Al Qaeda and Sunni insurgents and, if removed, the focus could then be put on addressing the internal extremists and battling foreign radical elements.

An additional dynamic to consider when evaluating recent claims that U.S. policy has succeeded in diminishing violence in Iraq is that the U.S. has cut deals and put 70,000 "former" Sunni insurgents on its payroll. The program, entitled "Concerned Local Citizens," turns groups of former insurgents into paid, temporary allies of the U.S. military. The U.S. also has recruited and trained members of the Iraqi Shiite-dominated military and police agencies. Viewed as a gamble to give some respite to the violence, the potential fighting capacity of these groups is worrisome. The U.S. emphasis on military strategies to foster long-term stability in Iraq fails to address the deeper and more political foundations for genuine long-term stability.

The Role of Iraqi Oil and U.S. Military Bases

The hidden war being waged in Iraq is for control of Iraq's vast oil wealth (for economic reasons) and for permanent U.S. military bases (for geo-political reasons).

For the first time since 1972, when Iraq nationalized the oil industry, foreign oil companies will have a stake in Iraq's vast oil wealth if the newly proposed Iraq Hydrocarbon Law is passed. The process of drafting the oil law itself was troublesome. Months before the draft was shown to the Iraqi parliament, it was shared with the U.S. government, major oil companies and the International Monetary Fund. The draft law would leave only 17 of

Iraq's 80 known oil fields in the hands of the national oil company, leaving two-thirds of the reserves (as well as any yet-undiscovered reserves) open to foreign control.

The benefit to Western oil companies will come at the expense of the Iraqi people, robbing them of a vital national resource tied to their economic security and political stability. Iraq has the third highest oil reserves in the world, with oil accounting for more than 90 percent of Iraq's government revenues. (*The Internationalist*, Dec. 2007)

The U.S. Administration has pursued the use of "benchmarks" as conditions for continued reconstruction aid. They include a benchmark requiring the Iraqi government to pass the oil law. If it is passed and the current Iraqi government begins signing long-term contracts with U.S. and other Western oil companies, there will be serious implications for long-term U.S. occupation. Those companies will likely press for the U.S. government to maintain a large military presence in Iraq for decades to come in order to secure their investment and protect their activities in extracting the oil.

The Bush Administration's intentions with regard to a long-term military presence in Iraq also needs to be called into question. In a memo to the fiscal 2008 Defense Authorization Bill on January 28, 2008, President Bush stated his intention to disregard several sections: a commission to probe contracting fraud in Iraq and Afghanistan; protections for whistleblowers who work for government contractors; a requirement that U.S. intelligence agencies promptly respond to congressional requests for documents; and efforts to bar funding for permanent bases in Iraq or for U.S. control over Iraq's oil money.

Such disregard for these provisions suggests that the underlying motivations of the U.S. occupation are different from the stated concerns about the need for U.S. troops to "prevent a bloodbath."

THE VISION OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

In Catholic Social Teaching, "peace is not merely the absence of war, nor can it be reduced solely to the balance of power between enemies... Peace is the fruit of justice... the fruit of love." [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 494]

In the past two decades, the social teaching of the Catholic Church has become increasingly pointed in its condemnation of war. Wars of aggression are understood as intrinsically immoral; and preventive wars, waged in anticipation of some future threat, are equally immoral.

"War is a scourge and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arise between nations. It has never been and it will never be because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts... War is an adventure without return that compromises humanity's present and threatens its future. Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war... War is always a defeat for humanity." [*Compendium* 497]

Pope John Paul II was relentless in his harsh judgment on war, especially after the first war against Iraq:

"I myself, on the occasion of the recent tragic war in the Persian Gulf [1991], repeated my cry: 'Never again war! No, never again war,' which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a solution of the very problems which provoked the war....

"It must never be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered, legitimate

aspirations frustrated, poverty and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means.” [*Centesimus Annus*, 52]

Pope John Paul II spoke of the tremendous urgency to seek alternatives to war to resolve international conflicts, since “the terrifying power of the means of destruction... and the ever closer links between the peoples of the whole world make it very difficult or practically impossible to limit the consequences of a conflict.” [*Compendium* 498]

THE VALUES AT STAKE

Human Dignity and Human Rights. The Church teaches that “violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.” [*Compendium*, 496]

The war and occupation in Iraq are no exception and, as long as they continue, human rights and human dignity will suffer.

Peace as the Fruit of Justice Linked to Development. “Seeking alternative solutions to war for resolving international conflicts has taken on tremendous urgency today... It is therefore essential to seek out the causes underlying bellicose conflicts, especially those connected with structural situations of injustice, poverty and exploitation... For this reason, another name for peace is development.” [*Compendium*, 498]

In Iraq, grievances must be addressed by ending the war and committing resources to rebuilding Iraq, setting it on the road to development.

International Law and Inclusive Security. The Church teaches that “international law [is] the guarantor of the international order, that is, of coexistence among political communities that seek individually to promote the common good of their citizens, aware that the common good of a nation cannot be separated from the good of the entire human family.” [*Compendium*, 434]

Respect for international law is the guarantee of international security. In the case of Iraq, such respect was absent from the beginning. The case for war presented to the U.N. Security Council was based on a false premise, and the decision to go to war was not a last resort. The Geneva Conventions, the Convention against Torture, and the laws of war have all been ignored, and respect for world opinion, even U.S. allies, has been flouted. The United States alone cannot bring peace, either to Iraq or to the Middle East region. A multilateral diplomatic solution to the conflict is required.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness. “True peace is made possible only through reconciliation and forgiveness. It is not easy to forgive when faced with the consequences of war because violence... leaves behind a heavy burden of pain. This pain can be eased only by a deep, faithful and courageous reflection on the part of all parties... The weight of the past, which cannot be forgotten, can be accepted only when mutual forgiveness is offered and received; this is a long and difficult process, but one that is not impossible.” [*Compendium*, 517]

Reconciliation and forgiveness in Iraq will require a firm commitment over time to rebuild the country and to ensure Iraqi sovereignty. The privatization of Iraq’s oil, as well as the presence of permanent U.S. military bases, will only delay this process. Nor should the United States be exempt from admitting its mistakes and asking for forgiveness for its part in the destruction and

killing. What our political leaders may be unwilling to do falls to the people and churches of the United States to do.

Global Solidarity and Global Common Good. “The coexistence among nations is based on the same values that should guide relations among human beings: truth, justice, active solidarity and freedom. The Church’s teaching ... requires that relations among peoples and political communities be justly regulated according to the principles of reason, equity, law and negotiation, excluding recourse to violence and war, as well as to forms of discrimination, intimidation and deceit.” [*Compendium*, 433]

The solution to the war in Iraq requires that we look beyond narrow and outdated notions of our national interest and national security. In today’s globalizing world, only attention to the global common good and global human security can secure those important values at the national and, ultimately, the local levels.

TOWARD A SOLUTION

The U.S. occupation of Iraq must be brought to a decisive end and a diplomatic and regional solution to the conflict must be pursued. Such policy directions could begin to turn around the chaos and destruction in Iraq, but they require at least two major shifts in thinking and approach.

- First, the U.S. must let go of its reliance on military strategies and recognize that a comprehensive political solution is the only way to ensure long-term stability in Iraq.
- Second, the U.S. must recognize that it does not have the legitimacy or credibility in the region to broker a peace process and needs to turn over its authority.

A revitalized Iraqi government working in concert with the United Nations and regional actors, including the Arab League, could design and implement a comprehensive peace process to address the many challenges to building a stable Iraq. This would involve directly engaging the countries bordering Iraq, including Iran and Syria, as well as internal diplomacy and reconciliation to bring all factions within Iraq “to the table” to have a say in the political process.

While the U.S. should provide substantial financial resources and possibly play a limited operational role, it would need to give the Iraqi government and U.N. full independence to advance a stabilization effort. A multilateral peacekeeping arrangement, based on Iraqi-defined needs, could be assembled and prepared to assist with the security concerns.

The U.N. has been poised to take on a more robust role in Iraq. In August 2007, a resolution was passed by the Security Council to extend the United Nations Assistance Mission for twelve months and expand its mandate to “advise, support and assist” the Iraqi government with national reconciliation, constitutional review, the setting of internal boundaries and helping displaced populations. While the resolution paves the way for the U.N. to have a greater political role, the spectrum of how the U.N. might engage is largely dependent on how much control the U.S. cedes to it. Given that there also was division in the Iraqi parliament around the U.N. expanded mandate, the Iraqis would need to further their own internal process of political debate around the role of the U.N.

Such new policy directions would not be easy, for they represent a departure from the “go it alone” approach which has been drummed into the psyche of the American public under the misleading banner of a false type of “national sovereignty.”

Yet, informed by Church social teaching and the ethical values enumerated above, such a dramatic policy shift toward multilateral engagement could not only help reverse the chaos in Iraq but, in the long run, strengthen international cooperation in ways that could serve to prevent future rushes to war.

Steps the U.S. could take at once:

- Stop offensive military operations. Announce a timeline for a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops, and begin the withdrawal immediately. Unequivocally reject the use of torture. Stop construction of all permanent bases and dismantle existing ones. Establish legal accountability for private security actors.
- Assure non-interference in the proposed Iraq oil law in order to guarantee Iraqi decision-making and control over their resources and development.
- Turn over full control so that the Iraqi government and U.N. could develop and implement a comprehensive Iraqi-led peace process, engaging regional actors including the Arab League, and decide on security arrangements to help build a stable Iraq.
- Provide financial support for Iraqi-led reconstruction and for refugee assistance and resettlement.
- Pursue authentic, multilateral efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and seek a regional solution to the ongoing plight of refugees in the greater Middle East.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 2008 ELECTORAL PERIOD

A number of dynamics will be at play in the next months that create opportunities to engage the political candidates on their proposals for ending the occupation of Iraq and their commitment to international cooperation. In March, another report is to be delivered to Congress by General Petraeus on the status of progress in Iraq. It may show a decrease in casualties, both Iraqi and U.S., but unless significant progress has been made in the internal processes of reconciliation and inclusive political participation, a decline in violence will be short-lived.

The summer will bring a drawdown of troops, but no timetable has yet been established for a full withdrawal. Proposals to keep a limited number of U.S. forces in Iraq for counter-terrorism and training, as well as thousands of contractors, merely represents “occupation lite.” Recent statements by the Bush Administration indicate that the U.S. is moving toward establishing a long-term U.S. military presence in Iraq, with permanent bases. That commitment needs to be challenged, as well as U.S. pressure on the Iraqis to turn over control of their oil to Western oil companies.

In November 2007, a Declaration of Principles was signed by President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki that set parameters for an “enduring” U.S.-Iraqi partnership encompassing security, economic, political, diplomatic and cultural spheres. Due to be finalized by July 31, 2008, at issue is the legal framework for the agreement and efforts by the Administration to avoid the need to seek Congressional approval. A treaty framework would require approval of 2/3 of the Senate, which the Administration would not be able to get. As a result they are denying that this agreement is a treaty, trying to get it established through administrative processes only. Clearly for an agreement of this magnitude, Congress should have a say.

This July agreement could bind future presidents of whatever party from major changes in policy direction for years to come. The end of July is also, coincidentally, the time the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad is projected to be completed, the largest U.S. embassy in the world. These signs that the U.S. is in Iraq to stay will not be lost on those sectors in Iraq poised to use violence if the internal divisions are not addressed.

Much is at stake. A drawdown of U.S. troops does not mean success, and a swift end to the occupation is urgently needed to stop the bloodshed. Shifting from a military strategy to a diplomatic one is essential, and transition of U.S. authority to multilateral management of the stabilization effort in Iraq may be the only path for hope. Such a clear change in U.S. policy on Iraq would also go a long way toward repairing the damaged U.S. reputation abroad by demonstrating our willingness to rejoin the “community of nations” through a commitment to the underlying values of international cooperation, inclusive security, the global common good, and nonviolent means toward establishing a just peace. Yet, informed by Church social teaching and the ethical values enumerated above, such a dramatic policy shift toward multilateral engagement could not only help reverse the chaos in Iraq but, in the long run, strengthen international cooperation in ways that could serve to prevent future rushes to war.

This policy paper was prepared originally for “Voting the Common Good: Election 2008,” a program of the Center of Concern, www.coc.org/election2008.