



Issue Brief: Iraq

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“We pray for our nation's leaders and for ourselves. May we have the courage and conviction to honestly engage the difficult questions; to speak hard truths, to accept our responsibility to each other and the world. May we find the strength and vision to end the cycles of violence.”

-UUA President Rev. William G. Sinkford on the 3rd Anniversary of the Iraq War

Introduction

The four years of American occupation have seen the fall of the Ba'athist regime and the capture of Saddam Hussein, the abuses at the Abu Ghraib detention facility, the continuing threat poised by insurgents and their roadside bombs, and the election of a permanent Iraqi government. During the occupation, over 3,500 American soldiers have died and 25,600 have been wounded (11,500 of which cannot return to duty); while there is no official count of Iraqi casualties, estimates have ranged from 45,000 to 655,000.

The Iraq war presents a difficult moral dilemma to both Unitarian Universalists and the world at large. Saddam Hussein's actions and leadership were blatantly immoral, completely disregarding international human rights standards. However, by unilaterally invading Iraq, the U.S. disregarded the established procedures for international security as outlined in the UN charter, an organization that the UUA has long supported. By doing so the U.S. seriously damaged its international credibility by setting a dangerous military precedent.

Throughout the four years of America's occupation of Iraq, the UUA has used its voice to promote accountability, international cooperation, and the placing of Iraq's future back into the hands of its people. In 2003 the UUA General Assembly adopted an Action of Immediate Witness (AIW) calling upon Congress to conduct open bi-partisan hearings to examine the moral and legal justifications for the invasion of Iraq; in 2004 another AIW was passed calling upon the U.S. to transition from occupation to a complete restoration of Iraqi sovereignty; and in 2006 another AIW was passed endorsing the Declaration for Peace campaign and calling for a withdrawal of US troops.

Current Situation

Over the course of the past year, the Bush administration's "stay-the-course" policy became widely acknowledged as a failure. Largely because of the public's dissatisfaction with that policy, Democrats swept to power in both houses of Congress and have spent much of the first six months of 2007 trying to force the President to change course in Iraq. Shortly after the 2006 elections Donald Rumsfeld resigned as Secretary of Defense, and President Bush convened a bi-partisan commission – the Iraq Study Group – to issue a report on the war. The report suggested many changes in the administration's policies, which have been largely ignored. Refusing to hear the will of American voters and the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group, President Bush announced on January 10th that he would increase US military presence in Iraq by 20,000 troops to try and stabilize the country.

Legislative Landscape

The 110th Congress has taken up the issue of Iraq in an unprecedented way. The greater portion of the spring was spent debating an emergency supplemental that would continue funding for the war. In

March and April, both houses of Congress approved a bill, by the slimmest of margins, which would have continued funding for the war but set a firm timeline for withdrawal. On May 1st President Bush vetoed the bill, insisting that funding for the war come with no strings attached. Without the votes to override the veto and without the political will to completely cut funding for the war, both houses of Congress caved to the administration's pressure and passed an emergency supplemental funding the war through September of 2007 without any timeline for withdrawal.

Outside of the supplemental, a wide variety of stand-alone bills exist requiring various timelines for withdrawal; however none of them currently have the support to override a veto. However, In June 2007 the bipartisan **Iraq Study Group Recommendations Implementation Act of 2007** was introduced in both houses of congress. If adopted, it would implement many of the Iraq Study Group recommendations, including its provisions for a "soft withdrawal". While it would need to be followed by stronger pieces of legislation to implement a full withdrawal, it is supported by both Republicans and Democrats as a step in that direction. Furthermore, it is certain that in September more funding will be needed. After another summer of war the political landscape may have seriously shifted: **this summer is crucial for the pro-peace movement.**

Resources for Study and Action

Rev. William Sinkford, President of the UUA, has raised his voice in opposition to the war since before its inception. Most recently, as our representatives have continued to fund this war, he issued a Moral Balance Sheet, which looks at the costs of this war in both human and financial costs and dares to explore what we could have achieved as a nation were we to invest our resources differently. This is a great resource for any pro-peace activism and is available at www.uua.org.

The UUA is currently in the Social Witness process of creating a Statement of Conscience on **Peacemaking**. Recognizing that issues of war, peace, and justice have long been of concern to the UUA but we have not had clarity on our response to violence, war, and "the responsibility to protect", we have begun a four year process of study and action. To participate in this process and to get more information visit www.uua.org/csw or contact **Alex Winnett, the UUA Program Associate for Peacemaking**, at awinnett@uua.org or (202) 296-4672 ext. 20.

Contacting Congress

Write: The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Call: The Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your representative.

Email: Check for congress members' websites at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov

Fax: Look-up your member's fax number on their website. **Note: For security reasons, please consider faxing your letter if it concerns a time-sensitive matter.**

Other ways to take action are:

- Visiting your Congress members in Washington DC or in their home district offices.
- Having a letter-writing table at coffee hour.
- **Generating MEDIA!** Send a letter to the editor or op-ed to your local paper.
- Signing up for the Washington Office's online action center at www.uua.org/socialjustice

Further Resources:

Win Without War
<http://www.winwithoutwarus.org>

Friends Committee on National Legislation
<http://www.fcnl.org>

For more information on the Iraq war, contact Adam G. Gerhardstein in the UUA Washington Office at LA_International@uua.org or (202) 296-4672 x 21