

Two Years of War in Iraq

Two years after the invasion of Iraq, the world is a far more perilous place. The Iraq War and occupation represent a destabilizing factor of colossal proportions. The effects of the invasion will be far-reaching and long lasting. Life has not improved for the Iraqi people, and in many cases, things are even worse than under Saddam Hussein's brutal dictatorship. Far from making the world a safer place, the U.S. government has achieved what Osama Bin Laden was unable to do: create a haven for terrorism in the heart of the Middle East. U.S. forces in Iraq are in a quagmire. Over 1,500 U.S. troops have been killed, with another 10,000 or more wounded (the vast majority of them after "major combat operations" were declared finished). An estimated 100,000 Iraqis have been killed, many thousands more have been wounded or psychologically traumatized. Aside from the appalling cost in U.S. and Iraqi lives, there are very real and very serious economic consequences.

Before the war, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget estimated that the cost would be between \$50-\$60 billion, and the White House discounted its own economic advisor when he suggested that the war could cost between \$100-\$200 billion. Bush recently requested an additional \$82 billion in total to fund ongoing U.S. military operations, \$61 billion of which is earmarked for Iraq. This brings the total spent on the Iraq war and occupation, including military, reconstruction funding and other related expenditures to nearly \$210 billion (CostOfWar.org). At this rate the Iraq war will cost approximately a trillion dollars and last at least an entire decade. This is a staggering amount of money – money that could be used here at home for health care, social security, housing, education, job creation, etc.

The recent Iraqi elections were a farce of "democracy" and solved nothing for the long-suffering people of that country. They served only to temporarily boost Bush's flimsy "democratic" credentials. Let's be clear: it is impossible to have "free and democratic" elections under the jackboot of foreign occupation. This is glaringly obvious when we consider that the candidates were pre-selected and had to be approved by the U.S.-backed "Independent Election Commission of Iraq". Both the Iraqis and the American people hope that these elections will hasten the withdrawal of U.S. troops. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. The divisions in Iraqi society have only been aggravated, and the instability will continue to increase as realization of the farcical nature of the elections sinks in. The U.S. and their Iraqi underlings will not be able to control the situation. The U.S. is there for the long haul.

Far from "pacifying" the country, occupation forces have only inflamed the population and spurred the resistance. The "temporary" state of emergency declared 4 months ago has been extended yet again. The emergency decree includes a nighttime curfew and gives the government extra powers to make arrests without warrants and launch police and military operations at any time. Despite this, insurgent attacks are five times more frequent than a year ago. Small arms ambushes, kidnappings, executions, Improvised Explosive Devices, suicide car bombers, RPG attacks on oil pipelines, and political assassinations are daily fare in the "new" Iraq. In many cases, the Iraqi police have given up altogether and entire districts and even cities are under the control of the resistance.

Their overwhelming military advantage notwithstanding, U.S. troops simply cannot be everywhere at once. When they move in to "secure" a particular area, the insurgents simply pack up and move their operations elsewhere, or lay low among the local

population until the beefed-up occupation forces withdraw. Not so stupid as to stand their ground and fight a force far superior in arms and technology, the resistance fighters bide their time and melt into the cities and countryside, only to reappear later. This kind of work is frustrating and draining for the U.S. forces that are surrounded on all sides by a hostile population. There are no clearly defined "front lines" in a guerrilla war: all occupation troops are targets, whether they are carrying out commando raids, driving a supply truck, or just shopping on their day off. Likewise, all Iraqis, young and old, male and female, armed and unarmed, are considered potential "terrorists" – frequently with tragic consequences.

Before the invasion, it was estimated that just 30,000-40,000 troops would be required for the occupation, freeing up nearly 100,000 troops for other operations – Syria, Iran, and even Saudi Arabia were likely targets. But the reality has been far different. Two years after the relatively quick invasion and GW's "Mission Accomplished" photo-op, roughly 150,000 U.S. troops remain stationed in Iraq with no end in sight. In fact, instead of reducing the number of occupation forces in Iraq, troop levels have been increased twice in the past year to bolster security around the elections and during the siege and subsequent pulverization of Fallujah.

As a result, the U.S. military is stretched to the limit. The U.S. now has some 446,000 active troops at more than 725 acknowledged (and any number of secret) bases in at least 38 countries around the world. They have a formal "military presence" in no less than 153 countries, on every continent except Antarctica, and nearly a dozen heavily-armed fleets on all the oceans. Yet far from having the capability to fight two major wars at once, U.S. imperialism has exposed itself as a "colossus with feet of clay", unable to cope with the occupation of a small, impoverished country weakened by a decade of crippling sanctions. It's one thing to smash a regular army with the help of the most technologically advanced killing machines in the world. It's another matter altogether to hold down an entire population that doesn't want you there. According to Peter Singer, a foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, "It's the Wild West."

The U.S. "exit strategy", such as it exists at all, involves the training of Iraqi forces to take over security. This is nothing but a new policy of "Vietnamization" – the results of which are well known. Only half of the necessary Iraqi security forces have been trained, and there are significant problems with their training and consolidation. Iraqi security forces have become a favorite target of the resistance, and many of them have refused to fight or even defected to the insurgents.

There is only one solution: the immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces from Iraq. Let the Iraqi people decide! The working class will not pay for the bosses' war! Money for jobs, health care, and education! Stop the war on workers at home and abroad! Join the Workers International League in the struggle for a better world. Please contact us at wil@socialistappeal.org for more information.



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