



Michael Brennan for Congress

PO Box 285 ~ Portland, ME 04112 ~ 207-773-1323 ~ www.BrennanForCongress.org

Ending the War In Iraq

The basic challenge facing our nation is to effectively chart a course in which principles of international law, morality, decency and common sense finally govern our decisions. The resulting restoration of U.S. moral authority and leadership in the world will have positive strategic ramifications for the future conduct of our foreign policy, and help us recommit resources to pressing domestic needs. Ultimately, however, the principle of doing what is right must guide our current and future actions in Iraq.

The War in Iraq is perhaps the most urgent moral issue confronting our nation today. Now entering its 6th year, the War continues to extract a devastating human and financial toll that is neither justifiable nor sustainable. Citizens in America and around the world are growing weary of politicians who discuss the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the ongoing war and occupation, in strategic and intellectual terms. Mistaking our aggressive and unprovoked takeover of Iraq for a “strategic” blunder or mistake, our elected officials continue to search in vain for strategic and tactical solutions to problems stemming from morally flawed actions and policies. An immediate withdrawal of our military forces from Iraq is not only a moral imperative, but also provides the best hope for that troubled nation to begin a journey toward true independence and stability.

In 2006, I began working with a group of current and former Maine state legislators seeking to persuade our representatives in Congress to end United States military involvement in Iraq. Beyond the grave consequences measured in loss of life and the damage to our nation’s reputation around the world, our military excursion in Iraq has taken an immense financial toll on our country and the State of Maine. Congressional appropriations on the Iraq War total approximately \$450 billion through April 2007, and Maine’s own share of that cost is currently estimated to be \$1.2 billion.

Many of my deepest impressions about the Iraq War have been shaped by my active involvement with the anti-war movement here in Maine, attending rallies, town hall meetings and marches. I have heard friends and neighbors talk about this conflict and what it means to them as citizens who are deeply concerned about their country and humanity.

I have also had the opportunity to hear from a number of our soldiers who have served in the Iraqi conflict. During a trip last year to Ireland, I was at Shannon Airport with hundreds of U.S. troops who were returning to Iraq after two weeks leave in the United States. I spoke with several of the soldiers about the War and how it was progressing. Although they expressed mixed views, each of these young men and women said they were returning to Iraq because it was their duty. I believe it is now our duty as a nation to bring them home. We cannot and should not turn away from the urgent moral and human dimensions of this ongoing War and Occupation, taught best to us by those who have been affected most deeply and directly.

In my view, the unprovoked and unilateral invasion of Iraq by the current administration – with the blessing of far too many members of Congress on both sides of the political aisle – was a moral and historic failure of the gravest order. First, it was a war of choice deceptively marketed to the American public on the basis of lies and half-truths. Second, it was an aggressive and unprovoked act of war launched in the midst of ongoing United Nations weapons inspections that had yielded no evidence of WMD’s or an Iraqi nuclear weapons program. Third, the inhumane treatment of prisoners in Iraq, and the violence that has been perpetrated against innocent Iraqi civilians, undermines our moral authority in the region and throughout the world. Fourth, ongoing and persistent U.S. efforts to control the distribution of political power, natural resources and reconstruction contracts in Iraq casts grave doubt on the purity of U.S. motives. Fifth, the ongoing expenditure of approximately \$8.5 billion per month from the U.S. treasury deprives many of our own citizens of much-needed access to education and health care, and is being paid for on the backs of our children and grandchildren through irresponsible borrowing and deficit spending.

The United States has no appropriate or legitimate basis to intervene in the current battle among Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds for political and military control of Iraq and its resources. Nor does the United States military have any legitimate role to play – apart from defending of our own forces – in combating those so-called “insurgent” and “terrorist” groups who oppose the U.S. occupation. Brigadier General John Johns, a decorated soldier who has been one of the military’s foremost experts on counterinsurgency operations since the Vietnam War, has been speaking out around the nation about the futility of using U.S. combat forces in counterinsurgency operations when those forces are part of a larger military occupation that, by its very nature, breathes life into the insurgency.

The President’s newly announced policy of expanding the War by targeting “intervention” on the part Iran and Syria – rather than engaging in diplomacy – is both hypocritical and dangerously destabilizing, raising the specter of a broader regional war in the Middle East. Moreover, the President’s policy of escalating U.S. military involvement and prolonging the Occupation until we achieve some form of “victory” defies basic common sense and is wholly at odds with the reality of the current situation in Iraq.

Solutions to the urgent crisis in Iraq must be examined and debated in the context of basic morality, common sense and international law. My 7-point plan for ending U.S. military involvement in Iraq recognizes the futility of the current strategy. My plan is based upon principles that properly reflect not only the immoral roots of the Iraq War, but also the moral obligations that now confront us more than four years after the initial invasion.

First, we must immediately commence the withdrawal of all U.S. combat forces from Iraq. If the President is unwilling to do so, then Congress should immediately amend its October 2002 Iraq War Resolution so as to authorize and direct the President to take only those steps that are necessary to effectuate the safe and expeditious withdrawal of U.S. forces. In the event that some U.S. forces in Iraq are to be redeployed to other parts of the world where their presence is needed, our military personnel should first have the opportunity to return home to their families from whom they have been separated for too long.

Second, Congress must cease all appropriation of funds for the conduct of the Iraq War and Occupation. Only that funding which is specifically related to the immediate and safe withdrawal of our forces shall be appropriated.

Third, we should commence at once to work cooperatively with the United Nations, the government of Iraq, and the other regional powers in the Middle East to confront the problems facing Iraq and craft international solutions designed to restore stability without sacrificing Iraqi sovereignty.

Fourth, the U.S. must immediately cease all construction of permanent military bases in Iraq, and work directly with the government of Iraq and the UN to provide for the phased dismantling of all such existing bases and/or the phased handover of such facilities to the Iraqi government and/or UN peacekeeping forces.

Fifth, we must fulfill our moral obligation to provide reconstruction and relief aid to Iraq, both directly and through international institutions such as the UN Development Program for Iraq Reconstruction. We shall not condition our relief and reconstruction assistance on what form of government the Iraqi people ultimately choose, nor on whether that government follows the wishes or orders of Washington.

Sixth, we must make a commitment to all military personnel who have served in Iraq, as well as their families, pledging to provide first-rate medical treatment for all physical, emotional and psychological battlefield wounds. Additionally, we must make available to all our young veterans, through new and existing government programs, educational and occupational resources to assist them in making a positive transition to the next phase of their lives.

Seventh, Congress should immediately investigate the origins of this administration’s decision to invade Iraq and its case for going to war, as well as the systemic corruption, undue influence, fraud and waste that has governed the administration of lucrative contracts in Iraq since the invasion.

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