

Iraq War – HHS Debate, Model Congress – September 10, 2008

On March 20, 2003, Coalition forces, spearheaded by the United States and Britain, invaded Iraq. Three weeks after the invasion, April 9, 2003, Baghdad fell, and the reign of Saddam Hussein officially ended. Soon after, however, liberated groups acted out on old grudges and religious disagreements, sparking what would escalate into a civil war. Though Bush declared “major combat operations have ended” on May 1, 2003, the situation in Iraq proceeded to deteriorate. The situation is improving in recent months, but there is still no end in sight. The issue of Iraq is central to the 2008 election. Americans are debating about what our role in Iraq really is, and whether or not we should stay there. This brief will focus more on the pros and cons of either staying the course in Iraq or withdrawing soon.

Arguments in favor of continued occupation:

Proponents of continued occupation argue that success in Iraq is just over the horizon. Security in Iraq has significantly improved, with the lowest levels of violence in two years. The surge has weakened the grip of Al-Qaeda over Sunnis. This is easing the tension between the two religious groups.

Furthermore, the country is stabilizing. Twelve of the original sixteen benchmarks set by Congress for stabilization in Iraq have been met. Furthermore, there have been some remarkable events: the Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds are beginning to cooperate. In late 2006, Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds formed a military and political bloc to defeat Al-Qaeda and Baathist insurgents and to negotiate differences peacefully. In early 2008, they strengthened this bloc by using it to strike against illegal, Iranian-supported, Shia terrorists and militias.

Many also fear what would become of Iraq if the United States were to withdraw. The country, though stabilizing, is nowhere near where it should be. If we pull out now, a new, small (5,000 well-trained members), and relatively inexperienced Iraqi police force would be most likely unable to handle the huge task of taking over security for the whole country. When they fail, a true civil war could break out and make the current bloodshed pale in comparison. Or even worse, another dictator could take power.

From a security standpoint, Iraq provides us training to fight terrorists in other parts of the Middle East. We can learn from our mistakes there and move on to handling Iran or other countries more properly.

Arguments against continued occupation:

Opponents of continued occupation argue that success in Iraq is nowhere in sight. Invading Iraq destabilized the country, which has, in turn, destabilized the Middle East region even further. Conflict is brewing, and in fact many Christians seek to provoke Armageddon in this region. Our presence is complicating things, and we have more to lose than we have to gain.

Sadly, the country is deteriorating. The Failed States Index ranks Iraq as the fifth most unstable country in the world. Despite Coalition efforts to restore order, terrorist ranks continue to swell. The conflict between Sunni and Shi'a factions has even been described by the National Intelligence Estimate as having elements of a civil war. Though it is true that the situation is improving, it is still far from where it should be.

Some, however, hope that our withdrawal would bolster the Iraqi government to take action. Factions would have to put aside their differences to fight against terrorists and restore order to the country. We came to Iraq to end Hussein's evil reign, and now that we have, we must allow Iraqis to work out their differences in rebuilding their country. We've done our best by guiding the process, and now that they are a sovereign nation, we should leave.

From a humanitarian standpoint, the invasion of Iraq has destroyed the quality of life for everyone there. Over 2.5 million have been displaced from their homes. More than 70% of Iraqis do not have access to adequate water supplies. About a third of doctors left Iraq after the invasion. Overall, in many strange ways, life is worse for Iraqis now than it was under Saddam Hussein's reign.

Current situation:

There is a strong consensus that withdrawal is imminent. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said recently that U.S. troops should leave Iraq "as soon as possible," according to an article in *Der Spiegel*. He also called Obama's suggestion of 16 months "the right timeframe for a withdrawal." Others, however, disagree with this proposal. Senator John McCain insists that we stay the course in Iraq until that country is completely ready to sustain itself. It may take 100 years, he admits, but if we leave prematurely, al-Qaeda will have one.

Clearly, this issue is central to the 2008 election. When Americans head to the polls this year, they will not only be voting for the fate of America, but the fate of Iraq.

Links:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War - comprehensive history of the war; a plethora of links

http://www.balancedpolitics.org/iraq_war.htm - pros and cons of invasion

http://www.balancedpolitics.org/iraq_withdrawal.htm - pros and cons of withdrawal

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4350&page=1 – 5th most unstable

<http://usliberals.about.com/od/homelandsecurit1/a/IraqNumbers.htm> - quality of life indicators and other numbers

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25748613/> - PM interview