

Why, how and when to end the war in Iraq

By Dave Robinson

November 2006

The recent Johns Hopkins report on Iraqi casualties is a shocking count of the costs of the Bush Administration's "shock and awe" foreign policy. How many Iraqis would have chosen "liberation" if they were told in advance that it would lunge their ancient nation into a chaotic abyss that would leave no home untouched by violent death? How many US citizens would have supported the invasion of Iraq if they had been told that thousands of US soldiers would die and tens of thousands would be crippled, blinded, maimed and disfigured for the rest of their lives? How long will this dirty war continue?

The war in Iraq must end. We must end it. Why? Why us? The war must end because it is wrong. It must end because it is a failure of historic proportions. It must end because the killing and the destruction are breeding a hatred that will punctuate our world for generations.

We must end it. We must end it because the ongoing war in Iraq poses a danger to our very souls that dwarfs the danger posed by terrorism. To continue to call ourselves Catholic in the face of the ongoing slaughter without offering a clear, unequivocal and constant effort to end this war obliterates the very foundation of our Catholicism.

"We believe..." begins the Creed. "We believe in God..." we proclaim. In this statement we find all the argument, analysis and theology necessary to oppose the war in Iraq. Everything else is superfluous. To believe in God must mean that we take seriously God's call to ground our lives in truth. To believe in God must mean that we consciously, consistently and wholeheartedly live in this world in a way that makes clear to all that we are not of this world. We are God's children. We are believers in a reality that both transcends this world and calls us to concrete action within this world. To not oppose this war condemns us as fools for a false truth. To not work to end this war convicts us of a deadly complicity with falsehood. To acquiesce to those who hold a political analysis that justifies mayhem sentences us to spiritual death.

How can the war end? A fair question that is finally beginning to be asked with increasing frequency and intensity. Our challenge is to ensure that the question does not dissipate after the congressional election—whatever the outcome—but rather coalesces into concrete action.

There are three fundamental aspects to ending the war in Iraq. First, all US forces must be removed and the permanent bases constructed over the past two years must be abandoned. Second, negotiations must commence among Iraqis to discern and establish a system of government that they choose. The United Nations, supported by leadership from the Arab League should be the conveners of such national reconciliation talks. Third, the international community, most notably the US and Europe should establish a Fund for Reconstruction in Iraq. Billions of dollars were promised to rebuild Iraq and very little has actually been spent on actual reconstruction. This Fund must be established and overseen by a truly neutral body—perhaps drawing on Nobel Laureates in Peace and Economics—to ensure that real reconstruction is the focus, and a fair and transparent process for contracting is implemented that takes a preferential option for funding Iraqi-owned businesses that will employ Iraqi citizens in the effort.

When can the war end? The answer is NOW. The US should announce that it will begin withdrawing forces in 60 days. This announcement must make clear that the US intends to fully withdraw—including closing the newly constructed US bases—leaving only medical and engineering units placed under international command. There is no magic formula for withdrawing US forces. There is no timeline that will somehow allow the Administration to miraculously snatch "victory" from the jaws of defeat. The only hope that is appropriate is a hope

for authentic US repentance. That repentance will only be authentic if it is joined with an open-eyed turning away from the false assumptions, manipulations and lies upon which this war was waged.

The Iraqi resistance must also recognize that they too have become embroiled in a spiral of violence that is destroying their nation, people and future. Serious efforts must commence to bring them to the negotiating table. Muslims in the US and around the world can play a crucial role in supporting calls upon resistance groups to enter into a cease-fire and begin talks. Propaganda aside, there are many important resistance groups that are genuinely fighting for their national life. An authentic international effort to negotiate Iraq's future that includes secular and religious Iraqi resistance groups will do more to isolate and undermine terrorism than anything the US military can offer.

What can we in Pax Christi do to support an end to this war? Advent is a time of waiting, and we can make this Advent a time of waiting and witness. Beginning Friday, Dec. 1, Pax Christi USA will offer this witness as we await the Prince of Peace. Local groups, religious communities, campuses and individual members can all play a role. In Pax Christi USA's 2006 Advent reflections, *Awakening the Prophet Within*, Dr. Arturo Chavez reminds us that faith is action-oriented. "Discipleship is not just talking about what is wrong, complaining or wishing things could be different. We are called to make our values visible through loving service, educating others, resolving conflicts and confronting injustice. Building peace is more than talking against war ... it is the firm commitment to act."

During this Advent all Pax Christi members should reflect on how we can each awaken the prophet within us. We can offer a witness to our belief in a God that stands in the rubble of our conflicts, comforting the widow and orphan, lovingly calling each to consider where we stand. Organizing materials and action suggestions to support our Advent Waiting and Witness will be available on the Pax Christi USA Web site.

Since 9-11, Pax Christi USA has grown as more and more people have committed to be peacemakers in a violent time. In the past year, we have steadfastly offered witness to Jesus' call to nonviolence. We have deepened our relationships with Catholic organizations through our leadership in Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good; raised a moral voice against torture in partnership with torture survivors; spoken out against US nuclear weapons policy and called for a nuclear-weapons-free-world; established thirty new local groups acting for peace; joined our Muslim sisters and brothers in the holy fast of Ramadan as an act of spiritual solidarity; and much, much more.

All of this is accomplished only with your ongoing support. I ask you to please prayerfully consider an extra gift to Pax Christi USA at this time. As we come to the end of the year, your support is crucial. Your regular membership is \$35 per year—roughly \$2.92 per month—less than a box of donuts. Enclosed is a return slip and envelope. Help ensure that Pax Christi USA can continue to offer the resources and witness needed in the Catholic community and in our troubled nation today. I thank you and I assure you that whatever you give will be greatly appreciated and will help us continue to grow and flourish as a beacon of peace to all who are committed to personal and social transformation.

Jeremiah tells us: "The days are coming, says God, when I will fulfill the promise I made..." Let us open our hearts to God's promise this Advent and commit ourselves to co-create the beloved community God intends for us: That is our calling as the Peace of Christ.

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