On the weekend of March 17-20 people all around the world are mobilizing against the ongoing U.S. war and occupation in Iraq. An enormous cross-section of Portland's peace community have supported an event on March 19 which calls for an end to the war and connects a number of related issues to illustrate how to "begin the peace."

1991 war

BRING THE TROOPS HOME NOW

In addition to the dozens of towns, states and cities (including Corvallis on February 21) who have passed resolutions calling for the troops to come home, a stunning poll of the U.S. military released on February 28 shows the troops themselves seek an end to the Iraq occupation. 72% of 944 soldiers surveyed think the U.S. should withdraw within a year, with 29% of that 72% calling for an immediate withdrawal (*Stars and Stripes* Mideast edition, 3/1).

While Congress has been slow to act after conservative Democrat John Murtha called for a draw-down of troops in November, Democrats are now working on plans to move troops out of the center of Iraq. Unfortunately, their strategy calls for a "strategic redeployment," meaning troops would be "installed elsewhere in the region where they could respond to emergencies in Iraq and help fight terrorism in other countries." This idea essentially puts Iraqis back in the same box in which they were trapped by so-called "no-fly zones" enforced by the US from 1991-2003. The motivation for the proposal is an acknowledgment that "a huge US military presence in the country is straining the armed services as well as feeding the insurgency," according to Jack Reed (D-RI). A plan being discussed calls for all national guard and reserve troops to come back in 2006 (*Boston Globe,* 2/20). On March 17, Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer introduced legislation to bring the National Guard home as a first step to "redeployment."

NO MORE BLOOD FOR OIL

The death toll in this war may never be known. The difficulty of separating deaths in combat from other causes and the U.S. policy of refusing to acknowledge how many of their "enemy" they have killed both add to this problem. So do the government's narrow killed-in-action criteria which lead to a low "official" U.S. death count. The official military count as of March 16th was 2312 (http://www.icasualties.org). The web site Iraq Body Count lists a minimum of 33,638 Iraqis dead, though a study by the Lancet in October, 2004 calculated a minimum number of 100,000.

Since it is clear that the U.S. is not intervening to prevent genocide or dictatorships everywhere around the globe, it is safe to assume that part of the motivation behind the invasion of Iraq was oil and access to oil. How many more lives will be spent so Americans can afford to drive their cars?

The slogan "no more blood for oil" is also a call to the U.S. to cease its threats against Iran. Not only are its threats against Iran hypocritical (after the U.S. promised nuclear technology to India, a violator of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) but in the wake of the false claims about Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, they are highly dubious.

In early March, Egypt's President, Hosni Mubarak, warned the U.S. not to attack Iran because "If an airstrike (against Iran) takes place, then Iraq will be turned to terror groups." He added, "You have vital interests in the Gulf region, especially oil." (AP 3/1)

END THE OCCUPATIONS OF IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, THE WEST BANK & GAZA

U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is seen as the primary cause of bloodshed in those countries. Neither had experienced suicide bombings before the U.S. invasions in 2001 and 2003. Similarly, the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide bombers only began years after Israel, with tacit support from the U.S., invaded and occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. The peace movement does not support the use of violence to achieve its goals. However, the U.S. and Israel, which have far greater political power and military capabilities, have provoked resistance groups to fend off tanks, missiles, and helicopters by crude, violent means. Based on this power imbalance, the U.S. and Israel have the responsibility to bring these conflicts to a peaceful end. Criticizing Israel's occupation is consistent with U.N. resolutions dating back to #242 in November, 1967. The call to end these three occupations is not calling for the destruction of the U.S. or of Israel.

America's policies in the Middle East are upsetting more than just the "usual suspects." The Associated Press reported on February 15 that "Republican senators criticized the Bush administration over its policies in Iraq, Iran and the Palestinian territories. 'I think things are getting worse. I think they're getting worse in Iraq. I think they're getting worse in Iran,' Sen. Chuck Hagel, R-Neb., told Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice as she appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee."

On February 17, the U.S. National Council of Churches released a letter appealing to the government to close the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, citing alleged torture which violates "the fundamental Christian belief in the dignity of the human person." A concurrent statement from representatives of the 34 US members of World Council of Churches condemned the Iraq war: "We lament with special anguish the war in Iraq, launched in deception and violating global norms of justice and human rights."

They continued: "Our country responded (to the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks) by seeking to reclaim a privileged and secure place in the world, raining down terror on the truly vulnerable among our global neighbors...entering into imperial projects that seek to dominate and control for the sake of national interests." (AP 2/18)

As for Afghanistan, "the forgotten war," it was found by the U.S. Institute of Peace to be more dangerous per capita for U.S. troops than Iraq in 2005 (16 per 1000 killed or wounded in Afghanistan vs. 0.9 per 1000 in Iraq).

2005 was the deadliest year so far for U.S. troops in Afghanistan, with the 99 soldiers who died nearly doubling the annual death tolls of 2004 (58), 2003 (57) and 2002 (68). While the capital of Kabul is relatively stable, most of the rest of the country has fallen back into the chaotic state where warlords and a reformed Taliban have control.

FUND EDUCATION, HEALTH CARE, JOBS AND THE ENVIRONMENT-NOT WAR

This call to action acknowledges that the $251 billion spent so far on the war in Iraq (figure based on a report published in October 2005 by the Congressional Research Service [CRS]) could have gone to more productive uses for our country

1998
sanctions

and the planet. (http://nationalpriorities.org/numbers.html)

"Just in Oregon, for instance, our state's share of the war's cost could have instead supported over 200,000 more preschool children to attend a year of Head Start. It could have given every Oregon child health insurance for a year. It could have paid for 28,000 more school teachers, or for 77,000 more college scholarships. It is time to bring our priorities home." (www.OnwardOregon.org/iraqexit)

MILITARY RECRUITERS OUT OF SCHOOLS

Momentum is also building to keep military recruiters from preying on young men and women. In November, San Francisco voters supported a ballot measure that "makes it city policy to oppose, but not forbid, military recruiting in public schools. 59% of voters approved the measure." (*SF Chronicle* 11/9/05)

Some schools' efforts to keep recruiters out based on their discriminatory practices against gays and lesbians suffered a setback. The Supreme Court voted 8-0 in March to uphold a law that says schools receiving federal funding must give military recruiters the same access as other employers. "The justices noted that schools are still free to protest their presence on campus." (*Washington Post,* March 7)

RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS & INTERNATIONAL LAW—STOP THE TORTURE & SPYING

Including accusations regarding Guantanamo Bay and infamous photos from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, the U.S. is seen more and more as a country willing to use torture. Despite an overwhelming vote by Congress to ban "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of detainees in U.S. custody " fronted by Republican Senator John McCain, the Bush Administration says they do not have to follow that law at Guantanamo. Another part of the same bill "gives Guantanamo Bay detainees access to the courts only to appeal their enemy combatant status ...and convictions by military commissions," not to raise allegations of torture. U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler said she found allegations U.S. military tactics including force-feeding to end a detainee hunger strike "'extremely disturbing' and possibly against U.S. and international law." (*Washington Post*, March 3)

Meanwhile, in the continental U.S. the Bush administration has admitted to authorizing wiretaps on U.S. citizens not necessarily suspected of terrorist activity, and conducted without warrants. While this revelation provoked outrage by both Democrats and some Republicans, Congress quickly passed a bill that retroactively covered the illegal spying. A March 6 *New York Times* editorial noted the bill "also covers any other illegal wiretapping we don't know about ˜ including, it appears, entire 'programs' that could cover hundreds, thousands or millions of unknowing people." The Times emphasizes that there has been no evidence presented that the administration would not have been able to legally monitor supposed Al Qaida-related phone calls had they followed the existing laws governing Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (in which a secret court issues warrants).

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Looking at the above list of issues raised at Portland's March 19th "End the War, Begin the Peace" event it is easy for a person to become overwhelmed. However, with dozens of organizations doing work to educate and mobilize people around these various issues (among the over 150 participating in the event) there are many ways to plug in and get involved. You can start by learning more about the facts and figures included here, sharing them with your friends, family or coworkers, and your elected representatives. If you're just getting started you may want to start with letter writing. If you're more seasoned you may want to organize a petition drive or a direct action. Whatever you do, think about challenging yourself to take one more step for peace than what you've done before.

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Check our website at
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for other facts and
past and future event information.
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