End the Occupation and the War in Iraq
Bring the Troops Home Now

As the total number of American troops who have died in Iraq nears 2000, Iraq plunges into civil war, and our nation becomes increasingly unwilling to support the President's handling of the situation, many Americans including families of those serving or who have died in the Gulf are calling for the troops to come home now. In a *Washington Post*/ABC poll, 53% thought the war was not worth fighting, and 68% said the number of US casualties was unacceptable (Reuters, 8/31).

End the War on the Iraqi People

While it is true that there are many Iraqis being killed by other Iraqis (and a relatively small number of foreigners, other than Americans, in guerilla actions), much of the destruction in Iraq can be traced back to US policies. Beginning with the 13-year-long sanctions regime, which crippled Iraq's economy and left its infrastructure and health care system in shambles (imposed August 6, 1990); the "first Gulf War" (to force Iraq's troops out of Kuwait, January 16-March 3, 1991), which targeted Iraq's electrical and water treatment plants; and stretching through the invasion (March 19, 2003) to today, Iraq has been under siege for 15 years. Many have pointed out that prior to the US invasion, there was never a suicide bombing in Iraq's 7000 years of civilization.

Vince George, of Veterans for Peace and Military Families Speak Out on the "Bring Them Home Now Tour" in Philadelphia, 9/17/05 <http://bringthemhomenowtour.org>

The US says it is not interested in staying in Iraq permanently, yet in early September, according to the *Toronto Sun*, "the US Air Force's senior officer, Gen. John Jumper, stated US warplanes would remain in Iraq to fight resistance forces and protect the American-installed regime 'more or less indefinitely.' While President Bush hints at eventual troop withdrawals, the Pentagon is busy building four major, permanent air bases in Iraq. The US now finds itself in a similar position as demonized Saddam Hussein[:] battling Sunni insurgents, rebuilding Saddam's dreaded secret police, holding 15,000 prisoners and torturing captives, as the Abu Ghraib outrage showed" (9/4).

Attacks on Iraqi civilians by US forces continue as well. In August, 26 Iraqi workers were wounded by US military gunfire by "troops who mistook them for insurgents" (Agence France Presse, 8/16). Three US airstrikes in Western Iraq aimed at specific homes killed fifty-six people on August 30 (CNN, 8/30). And three members of an Iraqi special forces unit responding to a suicide blast in Baquba were killed in error by US troops, who mistook them for "insurgents" (BBC, 8/23).

The US also seems to be resorting to Vietnam-era "destroy the village to save it" tactics. Following last November's near-complete destruction of Fallujah, combined US/Iraqi forces raided the Western city of Tal Afar in a major assault in early September, killing over 200, and cutting off all contact for the civilians living there (Reuters, 9/12).

Iraq Constitution Emphasizes Fractionalism, Limits Women's Rights, Allows Permanent Bases

The draft Iraqi constitution slated for a vote on October 15 poses many problems for peace. One huge issue driving resistance to US presence is the question of permanent military bases in Iraq. Describing ways in which the US interfered with drafting the constitution, Zaid al-Ali, a legal expert who oversaw the process, said it was significant that "One article contained in a previous draft provided that setting up foreign military bases in Iraq was to be forbidden ... this article was dropped from the final draft" (Inter Press Service, 9/6).

The draft constitution is creating deep divisions in Iraq's ethnic/religious communities (Sunni and Shi'ite Muslim Arabs and non-Arab Kurds), making the possibility of a civil war more real than ever. "Its provisions for regional autonomy [for Kurds in the North and Shi'a in the south] will hasten the country's descent into a sectarian civil war that could eventually draw in neighboring states." (*Asia Times*, 8/30).

Sectarian strife similar to divisions which plunged Yugoslavia into civil war in the 1990s was becoming visible in Iraq as Shi'ites began moving out of Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad fearing for their safety. Knight Ridder reported on September 21, "Government officials and academic experts agree that the virtual expulsion of some ethnic groups from mixed communities is troubling and threatens the nation's stability. Some worry ... that homogenous neighborhoods could become future battlegrounds in the capital."

Beyond religious strife, the constitution strips women of many rights which previously made Iraq one of the most liberal for women in the Middle East. Safia Taleb al-Souhail, the Iraqi woman who raised her ink-stained finger following the Iraqi vote in February at President Bush's State of the Union Address, now doubts the future of her nation. She said, "When we came back from exile, we thought we were going to improve rights and the position of women. But look what has happened: we have lost all the gains we made over the past 30 years" (*Independent*, 8/28).

Corporations Thrive, Iraqis Go Without Power, Billions Missing

While Iraqis continue to scrape by with intermittent electricity, nearly no clean water, and limited sewage treatment, some in the West continue to make money. Of the firms which are poised to make billions of dollars from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan "Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Honeywell and United Technologies posted all-time best-ever profits in the first half of this year and they still have a huge list of orders" (*Taipei Times*, 8/24).

Meanwhile, Iraqi investigators believe $1 billion has been siphoned from their country through fraudulent weapons contracts "involving unnecessary, overpriced or outdated equipment" (Knight Ridder, 8/11).

One of the ways that Iraq's people were supported prior to the imposition of UN sanctions was the nationalization of

most industries, especially the oil industry. Now, with the US playing a lead role, many of those industries are being privatized. *The Times* (UK) noted on August 12: "Before the US proconsul Paul Bremer left Baghdad, he enacted 100 orders as chief of the occupation authority in Iraq. Perhaps the most infamous was Order 39 which decreed that 200 Iraqi state companies would be privatized, that foreign companies could have complete control of Iraqi banks, factories and mines, and that these companies could transfer all of their profits out of Iraq... The funding of massive contracts [largely to US firms such as Bechtel and Halliburton] has largely come from the Iraqi oil revenues expropriated for US corporate use. The oil money is held in the US Federal Reserve, and the US Government is determined to keep control of it under an international board. Whether this enforced takeover of the economy and imposed privatization across the board of all the main economic sectors is in accordance with international law is now much disputed."

Iraqis protest the occupation while showing they are not supporters of Saddam Hussein (April 9, 2005, Christian Peacemaker Teams <http://www.cpt.org>).

The Iraqis are not much better off for all this private investment. In early September, the US announced it had to stop work on rebuilding some of Iraq's power and water plants because it had spent most of the allocated funds on security. "More than two years after Congress approved funding for the rebuilding effort, electricity and oil production in Iraq are at or below prewar levels; and unemployment remains high. Less than half of the US reconstruction money has been spent. US officials said security costs [are] now estimated to account for 22% of all reconstruction contracts" (*LA Times*, 9/8).

US Desperate for Troops

With the mounting death toll and growing political opposition from military families, particularly the spotlight put on the war by Gold Star Families for Peace's Cindy Sheehan, many are reluctant to join the military. As of late July, all branches of the US Army were missing recruiting goals, with the regular Army 11% behind, the reserve 20% low, and the National Guard down 23% (Reuters, 8/11). And while much of the disarray in the wake of Hurricane Katrina pointed out the error of a policy that has deployed many National Guard members overseas for long tours of duty, the recruiters are using that tragedy to try meeting their goals. "US Army recruiters are offering volunteer help for Katrina evacuees at Houston's Astrodome. But the recruiters, struggling to keep enlistment up during Iraq war, are also available with options for the jobless" (*Wall Street Journal*, 9/11).

The Real Oil-for-Food Scandal

A recent independent report on the so-called "oil-for-food scandal" lays blame on UN Secretary General Kofi Annan for hundreds of millions of dollars which made their way to Saddam Hussein in the form of "surcharges" and enriched UN officials including Benon Sevan, who headed the program. However, the real scandal was the sanctions regime that spawned the "oil-for food" program, as pointed out in an editorial in London's *Guardian* newspaper on August 19 by Alain Gresh, editor of *Le Monde diplomatique*. America and Britain vetoed contracts for much-needed supplies, claiming Iraqis would use them to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. Up to 30% of the oil money generated by Iraq for the program was used for "compensation" of companies which claimed they were harmed by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. "Sanctions did not penalize the regime's leaders. But sanctions do explain the problems now encountered in rebuilding the country... Sanctions caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians. Who will guarantee that the US and the UN will not again choose to impose sanctions on a country and punish all of its people for the crimes of its leaders?"

The Best Way to Support the Troops is to Bring Them Home Now!!

The US does not look like it will be leaving any time soon. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani stated in early September that he believes at least until 2007, "We need American troops to intimidate our neighbors" (Associated Press, 9/9).

Hassan Juma'a Awad, President of Iraq's General Union of Oil Employees, who visited Portland in June, put it this way: "I want the occupation forces to leave now... Even if the Iraqis fight among themselves, we are sure that peace will come about."

Governor Ted Kulongoski, a former Marine who has attended the funerals of most of the roughly 40 Oregonians who have died in Iraq, said of Iraqis, "These are very proud and independent people and they will not tolerate very long an occupying army in their country." He added, "It is unfair and it is actually unconscionable to me that the Defense Department thinks that they can rotate these National Guard troops two, three and four times into these areas of conflict" (KATU-TV, 6/16).

Meanwhile, several members of Congress have begun calling for at least a timetable for withdrawal. In mid-August, Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) called for all the troops to be home by December, 2006. House members Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), Neil Abercrombie (D-HI), Ron Paul (R-Texas) and Walter Jones (R-North Carolina—who wanted to call french fries "Freedom Fries") introduced a resolution to begin withdrawal by October 1, 2006 (House Joint Resolution 55, "Homeward Bound.").

Logically, though, the longer US forces remain, the more will die. The guerilla resistance will not rest until they have driven out the occupying American troops. Several groups have come up with ideas to hasten the withdrawal, including that the US should:
* disavow any plans for permanent military bases or control of Iraqi oil;
* conduct immediate peace talks with the Iraqi opposition to begin a political settlement; and
* increase aid to/cancel the debts of/pay reparations to Iraq.