

Report of the MCC Advocacy Delegation on Iraq February, 2005

The situation in Iraq remains dire, despite the cautious optimism that resulted from the recent elections. The misguided invasion and serious subsequent failures of policy have unleashed dynamics that have had serious negative consequences for Iraqis, including its Christian minority. MCC joins many others in grieving the ongoing violence, condemning the haphazard and self-serving policies of the US government, and hoping, working and praying for the emergence of peace and stability. Furthermore, we acknowledge our ambivalence about the role of troops in restoring order. The invasion and occupation of Iraq presents all concerned parties with several seemingly intractable dilemmas.

-- The presence of US and multinational forces may be the only thing preventing a slide into full-scale civil war. Yet the presence of these troops is a destabilizing one that attracts and foments violence. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have died since the invasion in March 2003. Over 1500 US troops have died and 10,000 have been wounded.

--The presence of the US and multinational forces may be essential to the formation of a legitimate Iraq government. Yet as long as those troops remain in Iraq, they will undermine any Iraqi government's ability to provide security and fill other governmental tasks.

--The presence of the US and multinational forces may be essential to the creation of a viable Iraqi security force. Yet the Iraqi forces are the object of multiple daily attacks, resulting in hundreds of deaths, and divided loyalties, in part because of their connection to the occupation.

There seems, as yet, to be no clear resolutions to these dilemmas. The US misadventure in Iraq now takes its place alongside the war in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Israel in Lebanon, France in Algeria etc....) as a case study not just in the futility of violence, the hubris of imperialism and the irony of history, but in the way war creates new and unforeseen monsters. Yet the US administration remains determined to 'stay the course' regardless of the cost to Iraq, the US, or the rest of the world. Staying the course amounts to a denial that the chosen course is part of the problem, an unwillingness or inability to face up to the complexity of the issues, or to own their responsibility for them.

--Iraq is still presented as a front in the war on terror, even though there is no evidence of an Iraqi connection to Al Qaeda and even though power of Al Qaeda has grown significantly because of the occupation.

--The US continues to portray its role in Iraq as a champion of democracy, freedom and human rights, yet refuses to appoint an independent inquiry into the

abuses at Abu Ghraib and has failed to make an unequivocal denunciation of the use of torture.

MCC has worked in Iraq since 1991 and had personnel in Baghdad since 1998. MCC has observed first hand the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, the effects of the UN sanctions, and the post-invasion descent into lawlessness. MCC has also observed the courage, resilience, and hopefulness of ordinary Iraqis. MCC believes in the capacity of the Iraqi people to determine its own course, and that the main obstacle to that is the current US policy.

We believe the following is important for the US administration:

1. To acknowledge to the Iraqi people its regret for the blunders of the invasion and occupation including: the failure to provide security for civilians; to provide the basic services needed for daily life; and the failure of US troops to honor the dignity of the Iraqi people.
2. To acknowledge to the American people that the war was a product of duplicity indicative of a breakdown of democratic processes and that it has created a situation in which the US is less secure than it was just two years ago.
3. To make first steps towards complete troop withdrawal by halting all offensive military operations in Iraq; withdrawing all troops from visible roles in population centers; and immediately reducing the size of the occupation, both of troop numbers and embassy staff.
4. To make clear that the US intends no long term military presence in Iraq. To this end Congress should pass a 'leave no bases behind' resolution.
5. To abide by international human rights law as well as international humanitarian law and the obligations it imposes on an occupying power; to institute an independent inquiry into abuses of that law.
6. To ensure maximum involvement of Iraqis in reconstruction work at all levels, including authority over the allocation of funds, the designing and selection of projects, and the use of Iraqi businesses and labor.
7. To recognize the ways in which the future of Iraq is tied to US policy elsewhere in the region, especially Iran and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

MCC urges UN member states to strengthen the mandate of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees in countries neighboring Iraq so that impediments to refugee status are lifted and Iraqi refugees in these countries can obtain refugee status and the protection and rights such status affords.

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