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# Our Troops Must Leave Iraq

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## Our Troops Must Leave Iraq

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The American people no longer support the war in Iraq. The war is being carried on by a stubborn president who, like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon during the Vietnam War, does not want to lose. But from the beginning this has been an ill-considered and poorly prosecuted war that, like the Vietnam War, has diminished respect for America. We believe Mr. Bush would like to drag the war on long enough to hand it off to another president.

The war in Iraq reminds us of the tragedy of the Vietnam War. Both wars began with false assertions by the president to the American people and the Congress. Like Vietnam, the Iraq War has introduced a new vocabulary: "shock and awe," "mission accomplished," "the surge." Like Vietnam, we have destroyed cities in order to save them. It is not a strategy for success.

The Bush administration has attempted to forestall ending the war by putting in more troops, but more troops will not solve the problem. We have lost the hearts and minds of most of the Iraqi people, and victory no longer seems to be even a remote possibility. It is time to end our occupation of Iraq, and bring our troops home.

This war has had only limited body counts. There are reports that more than one million Iraqis have died in the war. These reports cannot be corroborated because the US military does not make public the number of the Iraqi dead and injured. There are also reports that some four million Iraqis have been displaced and are refugees either abroad or within their own country. Iraqis with the resources to leave the country have left. They are frightened. They don't trust the US, its allies or its mercenaries to protect them and their interests.

We know more about the body counts of American soldiers in Iraq. Some 4,000 American soldiers have been killed in this war, about a third more than the number of people who died in the terrorist attacks of 9/11. And some 28,000 American soldiers have suffered debilitating injuries. Many more have been affected by the trauma of war in ways that they will have to live with for the rest of their lives - ways that will have serious effects not only on their lives and the lives of their loved ones, but on society as a whole. Due to woefully inadequate resources being provided, our injured soldiers are not receiving the medical treatment and mental health care that they deserve.

The invasion of Iraq was illegal from the start. Not only was Congress lied to in order to secure its support for the invasion of Iraq, but the war lacked the support of the United Nations Security Council and thus was an aggressive war initiated on the false pretenses of weapons of mass destruction. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Nor has any assertion of a relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda proven to be true. In the end, democracy has not come to Iraq. Its government is still being forced to bend to the will of the US administration.

What the war has accomplished is the undermining of US credibility throughout the world, the weakening of our military forces, and the erosion of our Bill of Rights. Nobel Laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz calculates that the war is costing American tax payers more than \$1 trillion. This amount could double if we continue the war. Each minute we are spending \$500,000 in Iraq. Our losses are incalculable. It is time to remove our military forces from Iraq.

We must ask ourselves whether continuing to pursue this war is benefiting the American people or weakening us. We must ask whether continuing the war is benefiting the Iraqi people or inflicting greater suffering upon them. We believe the answer to these inquiries is that both the American and Iraqi people would benefit by ending the US military presence in Iraq.

Moving forward is not complicated, but it will require courage. Step one is to proceed with the rapid withdrawal of US

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troops from Iraq and hand over the responsibility for the security of Iraq to Iraqi forces. Step two is to remove our military bases from Iraq and to turn Iraqi oil over to Iraqis. Step three is to provide resources to the Iraqis to rebuild the infrastructure that has been destroyed in the war.

Congress must act. Although Congress never declared war, as required by the Constitution, they did give the president the authority to invade Iraq. Congress must now withdraw that authority and cease its funding of the war.

It is not likely, however, that Congress will act unless the American people make their voices heard with unmistakable clarity. That is the way the Vietnam War was brought to an end. It is the way that the Iraq War will also be brought to an end. The only question is whether it will be now, or whether the war will drag on, with all the suffering that implies, to an even more tragic, costly and degrading defeat. We will be a better, stronger and more decent country to bring the troops home now.

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[Walter Cronkite](#) is the former long-time anchor for CBS Evening News. **David Krieger** is President of the [Nuclear Age Peace Foundation](#).