

American Friends Service Committee

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Peace & Justice Group Criticizes Bush Plan to Escalate Military Occupation

It's time for political, not military, solutions in Iraq, AFSC says

The Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) condemns the Bush administration for his call to escalate the military occupation of Iraq. Bush's announcement to deploy nearly 20,000 additional soldiers in Iraq comes during intense criticism from world leaders and the American people regarding the quagmire occurring in Iraq. The past four years of war and occupation have shown that military force is not the solution to the chaos and civil war in Iraq.

The AFSC asserts the U.S. needs to negotiate and work cooperatively with Iraqis and Iraq's neighbors to create a successful reconciliation, rebuilding, and diplomatic process. President Bush continues to ignore calls, including from the Iraq Study Group, to negotiate with Iran and Syria. This is a mistake. A clear message needs to be sent to the President, Congress, and the media that it's time for creative, vigorous diplomacy rather than accelerating a failed military policy.

Congress should refuse to increase US troops in Iraq, but also vote to de-fund the occupation and remove troops and close military bases immediately. International peace-keepers have greater credibility with the Iraqi people than the military that invaded their nation 4 years ago and violently occupied their country ever since.

The AFSC says that there is one hopeful element in Bush's proposal. He proposed a \$1 billion fund for job creation and reconstruction in Iraq. By contrast, the US military spends \$2 billion every week in Iraq. We need to shift money to reconstruction.

Rebuilding Iraq is a moral imperative and a practical investment in the future. There can be no lasting peace when people are hungry, threatened, sick, jobless, or without shelter. The U.S.'s contribution towards meeting basic human needs in Iraq are an obligation, not an act of charity, and should be as large as the damage incurred. AFSC experience has shown that reconstruction and reconciliation are linked; for either to be achieved, both must be advanced.

“The Bush administration claims that more US troops will help to end the conflict. But, this administration has no credibility based on its past assertions that Iraq was responsible for 9-11, possessed weapons of mass destruction, was ready to use those weapons on US soil, and that the war would end quickly,” says Greg Coleridge, director of AFSC Economic Justice & Empowerment Program. “The real interest this administration has in Iraq is not to establish democracy and liberty, but rather to see that a new ‘hydrocarbon law’ and ‘production sharing agreements’ that the Iraqi parliament will soon consider is passed by March. This law would permit up to 75% of all profits from Iraqi oil production to be kept by US and UK oil corporations, most of which were major political investors to the Bush campaign. This is the real reason the illegal and immoral war and occupation was launched, continues and now may escalate.”

“The US is occupying Iraq in the middle of a Civil War that has a strong anti-occupation character,” says AFSC co-clerk Dana Williams. “The US is exaggerating the violence in the country and the whole region by its presence, not reducing violence.”

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The American Friends Service Committee is a Quaker social action organization and recipient of the 1947 Nobel Peace Prize. It works on peace, justice and humanitarian projects throughout the US and around the world.

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