

War in Iraq: Time to Go!

*The Honorable
John P. Murtha*

Congressman Murtha has followed long service in the US Marine Corps with more than 30 years in the United States House of Representatives. We reproduce in full his devastating call of November 2005 to 'bring the troops home'.

'One person with whom the Pentagon's top commanders have shared their private views for decades is Representative John Murtha, of Pennsylvania, the senior Democrat on the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. The President and his key aides were enraged when, on November 17th, Murtha gave a speech in the House calling for a withdrawal of troops within six months. The speech was filled with devastating information.'

Seymour Hersh, The New Yorker

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The war in Iraq is not going as advertised. It is a flawed policy wrapped in illusion. The American public is way ahead of us. The United States and coalition troops have done all they can in Iraq, but it is time for a change in direction. Our military is suffering. The future of our country is at risk. We cannot continue on the present course. It is evident that continued military action in Iraq is not in the best interest of the United States of America, the Iraqi people or the Persian Gulf Region.

General Casey said in a September 2005 Hearing, 'the perception of occupation in Iraq is a major driving force behind the insurgency.' General Abizaid said on the same date, 'Reducing the size and visibility of the coalition forces in Iraq is a part of our counterinsurgency strategy.'

For two-and-a-half years I have been concerned about the United States policy and the plan in Iraq. I have addressed my concerns with the Administration and the Pentagon and have spoken out in public about my concerns. The main reason for going to war has been discredited. A few days before the start of the war I was in Kuwait – the military drew a red line around Baghdad and said when US forces cross that line they will be attacked by the Iraqis with weapons of mass destruction – but the US forces said they were prepared. They had well trained forces with the appropriate protective gear.

We spend more money on intelligence than all the countries in the world together, and more on intelligence than most countries' gross domestic product. But the intelligence concerning Iraq was wrong. It is not a world intelligence failure. It is a United States intelligence failure and the way that intelligence was misused.

I have been visiting our wounded troops at Bethesda and Walter Reed hospitals almost every week since the beginning of the War. And what demoralizes them is going to war with not enough troops and equipment to make the transition to peace; the devastation caused by improvised explosive devices; being deployed to Iraq when their homes have been ravaged by hurricanes; being on their second or third deployment and leaving their families behind without a network of support.

The threat posed by terrorism is real, but we have other threats that cannot be ignored. We must be prepared to face all threats. The future of our military is at risk. Our military and their families are stretched thin. Many say that the Army is broken. Some of our troops are on their third deployment. Recruitment is down, even as our military has lowered its standards. Defence budgets are being cut. Personnel costs are skyrocketing, particularly in health care. Choices will have to be made. We cannot allow promises we have made to our military families in terms of service benefits, in terms of their health care, to be negotiated away. Procurement programmes that ensure our military dominance cannot be negotiated away. We must be prepared. The war in Iraq has caused huge shortfalls at our bases in the United States.

Much of our ground equipment is worn out and in need of either serious overhaul or replacement. George Washington said, 'To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace.' We must rebuild our Army. Our deficit is growing out of control. The Director of the Congressional Budget Office recently admitted to being 'terrified' about the budget deficit in the coming decades. This is the first prolonged war we have fought with three years of tax cuts, without full mobilization of American industry and without a draft. The burden of this war has not been shared equally; the military and their families are shouldering this burden.

Our military has been fighting a war in Iraq for over two and-a-half years. Our military has accomplished its mission and done its duty. Our military captured Saddam Hussein, and captured or killed his closest associates. But the war continues to intensify. Deaths and injuries are growing, with over 2,079 confirmed American deaths. Over 15,500 have been seriously injured and it is estimated that over 50,000 will suffer from battle fatigue. There have been reports of at least 30,000 Iraqi civilian deaths.

I just recently visited Anbar Province in Iraq in order to assess the conditions on the ground. Last May 2005, as part of the Emergency Supplemental Spending Bill, the House included the Moran Amendment, which was accepted in Conference, and which required the Secretary of Defense to submit quarterly reports to Congress in order to more accurately measure stability and security in

Iraq. We have now received two reports. I am disturbed by the findings in key indicator areas. Oil production and energy production are below pre-war levels. Our reconstruction efforts have been crippled by the security situation. Only \$9 billion of the \$18 billion appropriated for reconstruction has been spent. Unemployment remains at about 60 per cent. Clean water is scarce. Only \$500 million of the \$2.2 billion appropriated for water projects has been spent. And most importantly, insurgent incidents have increased from about 150 per week to over 700 in the last year. Instead of attacks going down over time and with the addition of more troops, attacks have grown dramatically. Since the revelations at Abu Ghraib, American casualties have doubled. An annual State Department report in 2004 indicated a sharp increase in global terrorism.

I said over a year ago, and now the military and the Administration agrees, Iraq cannot be won 'militarily.' I said two years ago, the key to progress in Iraq is to Iraqitize, Internationalize and Energize. I believe the same today. But I have concluded that the presence of US troops in Iraq is impeding this progress.

Our troops have become the primary target of the insurgency. They are united against US forces and we have become a catalyst for violence. US troops are the common enemy of the Sunnis, Saddamists and foreign jihadists. I believe with a US troop redeployment, the Iraqi security forces will be incentivized to take control. A poll recently conducted shows that over 80 per cent of Iraqis are strongly opposed to the presence of coalition troops, and about 45 per cent of the Iraqi population believe attacks against American troops are justified. I believe we need to turn Iraq over to the Iraqis. I believe before the Iraqi elections, scheduled for mid-December, the Iraqi people and the emerging government must be put on notice that the United States will immediately redeploy. All of Iraq must know that Iraq is free. Free from United States occupation. I believe this will send a signal to the Sunnis to join the political process for the good of a 'free' Iraq.

My plan calls:

To immediately redeploy US troops consistent with the safety of US forces.

To create a quick reaction force in the region.

To create an over-the-horizon presence of Marines.

To diplomatically pursue security and stability in Iraq

This war needs to be personalized. As I said before, I have visited with the severely wounded of this war. They are suffering.

Because we in Congress are charged with sending our sons and daughters into battle, it is our responsibility, our *obligation*, to speak out for them. That's why I am speaking out.

Our military has done everything that has been asked of them. The United States cannot accomplish anything further in Iraq militarily. *It is time to bring them home.*