

## The Iraq Dilemma: What It Means for Activists

Unfortunately for Bush and Company, things in Iraq are not running as predicted. Far from rolling over, the gutsy Iraqi people have mounted fierce resistance to U.S. occupation. Don't mistake this for terrorism. It is guerilla warfare, given succor by the civilian population and aimed at military targets (hapless young U.S. soldiers).

The U.S. government had hoped to enter Iraq, quickly sever the head of the "enemy" by killing or capturing Saddam Hussein, and then have their way with a compliant and even eager population. Not rape, just a slow, smooth screw.

But guerilla activity is difficult to quash. Now the U.S. is between Iraq and a hard place: it has no intention of exiting Iraq, but U.S. public opinion is becoming irritable and *restless*. What is the timetable for withdrawal? it asks. And, How much *more* will it cost? U.S. casualties are mounting. Many Iraqi civilians are demanding we leave. Domestically, the national debt is climbing and the economy is tanking. The Administration is *desperate* to get other countries and the United Nations to shoulder some of the burden of this war so that the ominous grumbling back home will fade to an inaudible whisper. But other countries and the U.N. are not stupid. If the U.S. remains in charge, raking in the lion's share of the lucrative post-war reconstruction contracts and oil concessions, maintaining the military foothold, then "What's in it for *us*?" they ask.

The Bush administration does not actually give a rat's ass how much it costs to get Iraq whipped into shape. After all, the corporations that benefit are not paying those costs. *You and I are* – in terms of a deteriorating infrastructure here at home. But it does care about public opinion and the mass media, with their symbiotic relationship. Before the war the networks mouthed neo-con rhetoric, and so public opinion was kept under (unstable) control *despite* the unprecedented millions of dissenting here and globally.

Now, thanks in part at least to our paving the way, some cracks are appearing. The print media is getting more insistent in its demand for accountability. The networks can't avoid the attacks on U.S. soldiers. And if that barometer of apathetic, conservative America – the AM radio talk shows – ever show signs of strain, we'll *know* the Bush agenda is in trouble. Although the American people's opposition has fallen since pre-war days, dissatisfaction is rising again in the polls – and the neo-cons know these trickles can quickly turn into a flash flood with the force to sweep away an administration. So they need to pay attention. (Hence the current media blitz by Bush, Condoleeza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and certain Republican Congresspersons – trying to convince us that 1. the war was justified despite any evidence and 2. there's a "parallel" story of successes in Iraq's reconstruction, underreported by the "negative" and "liberal" media.)

The truth is hard to suppress completely. As peace and justice activists, our job is to shine our light on it and help it along. There's *much* to be done. Demonstrating at intersections with signs exposing the lies. Writing to the media and to elected officials. Tabling and talking face to face with "ordinary folks" at local farmers markets, street fairs, and busy pedestrian spots. Holding town halls and showing videos. Getting involved in the elections. Taking on the media and the PATRIOT Act. Using art as a medium of protest. These are all things that we do in Neighbors for Peace and Justice, and we encourage you to join us at [mailto:neighborsforpeaceandjustice\\_reply@mailhost.groundspring.org](mailto:neighborsforpeaceandjustice_reply@mailhost.groundspring.org) or to do these in your own community.

As we use this transitional period to regroup, review past successes and weaknesses, consolidate our organizations, and do self-education, we are preparing for that groundswell that is sure to come again, whether in ten days, ten months, or ten years. We must both prepare for it *and* hasten its coming. There is no time for wallowing in despair or demoralization.