

Costs of the Iraq War April 2006

The United States has occupied Iraq for over three years. The costs are staggering. Not only have over 2300 American troops been killed, and over 17,000 wounded, but somewhere between 33,000 and 100,000 Iraqi civilians have died as a result of the war, and countless numbers injured or reduced to homelessness and other misery. In financial terms the war has cost to date over \$271 billion on top of normal military spending. For this amount we could fund global anti-hunger efforts for 11 years, hire 4.7 million public school teachers for a year, hire several million port inspectors, or provide health insurance for 162.7 million children. The total cost of the war could exceed \$2 trillion, “after factoring in long-term healthcare for wounded US veterans, rebuilding a worn-down military, and accounting for other unforeseen bills and economic losses” according to a study by Columbia Univ. economist Joseph Stiglitz” (Boston Globe, 1/8/06).

These costs show themselves in myriad ways, the most obvious of which was the monumental failure of the response to Hurricane Katrina, the result of federal dollars drained from disaster preparedness, the deployment to Iraq of the National Guard, and the fiscal crises of state governments due to loss of federal dollars. The rising deficit is bringing another round of federal budget cuts, which will in turn bring another round of state budget cuts, with no tax relief (except for the wealthy).

Lastly, we should not lose sight of the less tangible costs to our way of life resulting from the occupation of Iraq, and more generally the “war on terror” in the name of which it is being conducted. Our government has suspended civil liberties for non-citizens, who can be arbitrarily arrested, detained indefinitely without reasonable access to counsel, and deported without cause. Citizens are subject to wiretaps without judicial warrant. So called “enemy combatants,” many of whom are neither enemies nor combatants, have been held indefinitely without charge, and subjected to torture or “extraordinary rendition” to countries that practice torture in violation of human rights treaties that our government has signed. The Congress, in this time of supposed emergency, does not see fit even to inquire whether the President is guilty of high crimes and misdemeanors. One would hope that even some members of his party, in the tradition of Margaret Chase Smith, might feel some nostalgia for the rule of law.

Are we more secure? From enjoying the sympathy of most of the world after 9/11/2001, our country is subject to its condemnation. The war in Iraq is a gift to Al Qaeda, which organizes there where formerly it was virtually non-existent and is responsible for some of the deadliest attacks on Shiite targets. Our continued presence is not preventing civil war, but contributing to tensions, such that most Iraqis want us out, and nearly half of all Iraqis think that attacks on US troops are

justified. Other nations have learned the lesson that if they want to avoid invasion, they should get nuclear weapons. Thank you, Mr. President. And now, after Libby's testimony that you are the source of the leak of Valerie Plame's identity, and recalling your statement that anyone leaking classified documents from the White House should be fired, would you please fire yourself?

Mike Howard