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Iraq Cannot Be Won

By [**Rep. John Murtha**](#), [**AlterNet**](#). Posted [**November 19, 2005**](#).

A conservative senior House Democrat and Purple Heart-decorated Vietnam veteran describes the U.S. presence in Iraq as an 'occupation,' and calls for immediate troop withdrawal.

Tools

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Following is the transcript of a speech by conservative Democratic Representative John Murtha of

Pennsylvania on October 17. Murtha is the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriation Committee's defense panel.

I just spoke to the Democratic Caucus and told them my feelings about the war. And I started out by saying the war in Iraq is not going as advertised. It's a flawed policy wrapped in illusion. The American public is way ahead of the members of Congress.

The United States and coalition troops have done all they can in Iraq. But it's 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 of visibility of the coalition forces in Iraq is a part of our counterinsurgency strategy.

For two and a half years, I've been concerned about U.S. policy and the plan in Iraq. I've addressed my concerns with the administration and the Pentagon, and I've 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 line -- a red line around Baghdad, and they said when U.S. forces cross that line, they will be attacked by the Iraqis with weapons of mass destruction. And I believed it, and they believed it. But the U.S. forces -- the commander said, they were prepared. They said they had well-trained forces with the appropriate protective gear.

Now, let me tell you we've spent more money on intelligence than any -- than all the countries in the world put together and more on intelligence than most countries' GDP. And when they said it's a world intelligence failure, it's a U.S. intelligence failure. It's a U.S. failure, and it's a failure in the way the intelligence was used.

I've been visiting our wounded troops at Bethesda and Walter Reed, as some of you know, almost every week since the beginning of the war. And what demoralizes them is not the criticism; what

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demoralizes them is going to war with not enough troops and equipment to make the transition to peace. The devastation caused by IEDs is what they're concerned about, being deployed to Iraq when their homes have been ravaged by hurricanes -- and you've seen these stories about some of the people's whose homes were destroyed, and they were deployed to Iraq after it -- being on their second or third deployment, leaving their families behind without a network of support.

The threat by terrorism is real, but we have other threats that cannot be ignored. We must prepare to face all these threats. The future of our military is at risk. Our military and their families are stretched thin. Many say the Army's broken. Some of our troops are on their third deployment. Recruitment is down even as the military's lowered its standards. They expect to take 20 percent Category 4, which is the lowest category, which they said they'd never take, but they've been forced to do that, to try to meet a reduced quota. Defense budgets are being cut. Personnel costs are skyrocketing, particularly in health care. Choices will have to be made, and 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 programs that ensure our military dominance cannot be negotiated away.

We must be prepared. The war in Iraq has caused huge shortfalls in our bases at home. I've been to three bases in the United States, and each one of them were short of things they need to train the people going to Iraq. Much of our ground equipment is worn out. And I've told the COs you better get in the business of rehabilitating equipment because we're not going to be able to buy any new equipment because the money's not going to be there.

George Washington said to be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace. We don't want somebody to miscalculate down the road. It takes us 18 years to put a weapon system in the arsenal. And I don't know what the threat is, nobody knows what the threat is, but we better make sure we have what's necessary to preserve our 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 deficit in the coming decades. In other words, where's the money going to come from for defense?

I voted against every tax cut -- every tax cut I voted against. My wife says, "You shouldn't say that." I believe that when we voted for these tax cuts, you can't have a war, you can't have a tragedy like we had, the hurricanes, and then not have a huge deficit, which is going to increase interest rates and could cause real problems. This is the first prolonged war we've ever fought with three years of tax cuts without full mobilization of American industry and without a draft. On the college campuses they always ask me about a draft: You're for a draft. I say yeah, there's only two of us voted for it, so you don't have to worry too much about it.

The burden of this war has not been shared equally. The military and their families are shouldering the burden. Our military has been fighting this 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, captured or killed his closest associates. But the war continues to intensify. Deaths and injuries are growing, and over 2,079 in confirmed American deaths, over 15,500 have been seriously injured -- half of them returned to duty, and it's estimated over 50,000 will suffer from what I call battle fatigue. And there have been reports that at least 30,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed.

I just recently visited Anbar province in Iraq in order to assess the conditions on the ground. And last May we put in the emergency supplemental spending bill -- [the] Moran amendment -- which was accepted in conference, which required the secretary of Defense to submit a quarterly report about the -- and accurately measure the stability and security in Iraq. Now -- we've now received two reports. So I've just come back from Iraq, and I looked at the next report. I'm disturbed by the findings in the key indicator areas.

Oil production and energy production are below prewar level. You remember they said that was going to pay for the war, and it's proved to (be) below prewar level. Our reconstruction efforts have been crippled by security situations. Only \$9 billion of \$18 billion appropriated for reconstruction has been spent. And I said on the floor of the House, when they passed the \$87 billion, the \$18 billion was the most important part of it because you got to get people back to work, you got to get electricity, you got to get water! Unemployment is 60 percent. Now, they tell you in the United States it's less than that, so it may be 40 percent. But in Iraq, they told me it's 60 percent when I was there. Clean water is scarce, and they only spent \$500 million of the \$2.2 billion appropriated for water projects.

And most importantly -- this is the most important point -- incidents have increased from 150 to a week to over 700 in the last year. Instead of attacks going down over a time when addition of more troops -- when we had addition of more troops, attacks have grown dramatically. Since the revelation of Abu Ghraib, American casualties have doubled. You look at the timeline. You'll see one per day average before Abu Ghraib. After Abu Ghraib, you'll see two a day -- two killed per day because of the dramatic impact that Abu Ghraib had on what we were doing in [Iraq. And] the State Department reported in 2004, right before they quit putting the reports out, that -- they indicated a sharp increase in global terrorism.

I said over a year ago now, the military and the administration agrees now that Iraq cannot be won militarily.

I said two years ago, the key to progress in Iraq is Iraqitize, internationalize and energize.

Now, we have a packet for you where I sent a letter to the president in September, and I got an answer back from assistant secretary of Defense five months later. I believe the same today. They don't want input. They only want to criticize. They -- Bush One was the opposite; Bush One might not like the criticism and constructive suggestions, but he listened to what we had to say.

I believe that and I have concluded the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq is impeding this progress. Our

troops have become the primary target of the insurgency. They are united against U.S. forces, and we have become a catalyst for violence. U.S. troops are the common enemy of the Sunnis, the Saddamists and the foreign jihadists. And let me tell you, they haven't captured any in this latest activity, so this idea that they're coming in from outside, we still think [they constitute] only seven percent [of the insurgency].

I believe with the U.S. troop redeployment the Iraqi security forces will be incentivized to take control. A poll recently conducted -- this is a British poll reported in *The Washington Times* -- over 80 percent of Iraqis are strongly opposed to the presence of coalition forces, and about 45 percent of 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. The United States will immediately redeploy -- immediately redeploy. No schedule which can be changed, nothing that's controlled by the Iraqis, this is an immediate redeployment of our American forces because they have become the target.

All of Iraq must know that Iraq is free -- free from a United States occupation, and I believe this will send a signal to the Sunnis to join the political process. My experience in a guerrilla war says that until you find out where they are, until the public is willing to tell you where the insurgent is, you're not going to win this war, and Vietnam was the same way. If you have an operation -- a military operation and you tell the Sunnis because the families are in jeopardy, they -- or you tell the Iraqis, then they are going to tell the insurgents, because they're worried about their families.

My plan calls for immediate redeployment of U.S. troops consistent with the safety of U.S. forces, to create a quick reaction force in the region, to create an over-the-horizon presence of Marines, and to diplomatically pursue security and stability in Iraq.

Now let me personalize this thing for you. I go out to the hospitals every week. One of my first visits, two young women. One was 22 or 23, had two children, lost her husband. One was 19. And they both went out to the hospitals to tell the people out there how happy they were -- or how happy they should be to be alive. In other words, they were reaching out because they felt their husbands had done their duty, but they wanted to tell them that they were so fortunate, even though they were wounded, to be alive.

I have a young fellow in my district who was blinded and he lost his foot. They did everything they could for him at Walter Reed, then they sent him home. His father was in jail. He had nobody at home. Imagine this. A young kid that age, 22, 23 years old, goes home to nobody. VA did everything they could do to help him. He was reaching out.

So they sent him -- to make sure that he was a blind, they sent him to Johns Hopkins. Johns Hopkins started sending bills. Then the collection agency started sending bills. Well, when I found out about it, you could imagine they stopped the collection agency and Walter Reed finally paid the bill. But imagine, a young person being blinded, without a foot, and he's getting bills from a collection agency.

I saw a young soldier who lost two legs and an arm, and his dad was pushing him around.

I go to the mental ward; you know what they say to me? They got battle fatigue. You know what they say? "We don't get nothing. We get nothing. We're just as bruised, just as injured as everybody else, but we don't even get a Purple Heart. We get nothing. We get shunted aside. We get looked at as if there's something wrong with us."

Saw a young woman from Notre Dame. Basketball player, right-handed, lost her right hand. You know what she's worried about? She's worried about her husband because he lost weight worrying about her. These are great people. These soldiers and people who are serving, they're marvelous people.

I saw a Seabee lying there with three children. His mother and his wife were there. He was paralyzed from the neck down. There were 18 of them killed in this one mortar attack. And they were all crying because they knew what it would be like in the future.

I saw a Marine rubbing his boy's hand. He was a Marine in Vietnam, and his son had just come back from Iraq. And he said he wanted his brother to come home. That's what the father said, because the kid couldn't speak. He was in a coma.

He kept rubbing his hand.

He didn't want to come home. I told him the Marine Corps would get him home.

I had one other kid, lost both his hands. Blinded. I was praising him, saying how proud we were of him and how much we appreciate his service to the country. "Anything I can do for you?" His mother said get me a -- "Get him a Purple Heart." I said, "What do you mean, get him a Purple Heart?"

He had been wounded in taking care of bomblets, these bomblets that they drop that they have to dismantle. He had been wounded and lost both his hands. The kid behind him was killed.

His mother said, "Because they're friendly bomblets, they wouldn't give him a Purple Heart."

I met with the commandant. I said, "If you don't give him a Purple Heart, I'll give him one of mine." And they gave him a Purple Heart.

Let me tell you something. We're charged -- Congress is charged with sending our sons and daughters into battle, and it's our responsibility, our obligation to speak out for them. That's why I'm speaking out.

Our military's done everything that has been asked of them. U.S. cannot accomplish anything further

in Iraq militarily; it's time to bring the troops home.

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Murtha, My Dear

Posted by: Tom Degan on Nov 19, 2005 3:33 AM [\[Report this comment\]](#)

Murtha, my dear

Though we spend our days in

Pure frustration please

You're the fresh breeze

Finally...FINALLY the democrats - or at the very least one of them - is starting to show some refreshing, long overdue courage (What makes the muskrat guard his musk? Courage!) Finally they're starting to wake up to the fact that for the second time in a generation THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IS GOING TO LOSE A WAR! Sure they'll pull out of there and "claim" victory, but the facts on the ground will tell an entirely different story. For the second time in a generation the USA has been pushed into another unwinnable war by another half-witted Texan (what is it about Texas?) Finally the American people are awakening from the right-wing coma they've been sleeping under for the last twenty-five years.

Prediction: 2008 will be 1932 all over again. Way back then a "liberal" (BOO!) democrat, a man who lived just across the river from where I'm writing from, a betrayer of his class named Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to the presidency and saved this country from the worst elements of corporate greed and stupidity. As the common knowledge has it, he saved capitalism by tempering it's excesses.

It'll happen again, folks. Count on it. Help is on the way. Did I hear anyone say, "President Feingold"??

Tom Degan
Goshen, NY

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