

WHY CAN'T CONGRESS STOP THE WAR?

And Other Questions About Our Wars in the Middle East.

[1] Why can't Congress stop the war in Iraq?

Actually, they can. All they have to do is stop paying for it. The Constitution gives the Congress, not the President, the power "to raise and support armies," and it specifies that "no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years." All the Democrats -- who since last year's election control both the House of Representatives and the Senate -- have to do is to refuse to vote for any more funding for the war. Because of the filibuster rule, it would only take 41 votes in the Senate to kill any funding bill. In the House, one person -- Speaker Nancy Pelosi -- can simply refuse to bring a funding bill to the floor. The administration could use the money already appropriated to bring the troops home, if the Democrats made it clear that they will not vote for any more. And a new poll shows that three out of four American don't support the President's new request for war funding.

[2] So why don't the Democrats do that?

Because they support the same long-term policy in the Middle East that the Republicans do. For more than fifty years, the US has insisted upon control of Middle East oil and gas, which are more extensive there than any place else on earth. But not because we need them here at home. In fact, we import only a small bit of our energy resources from the Middle East: most of it comes from the Atlantic region -- the US itself, followed by Canada, Nigeria, and Venezuela. But control of world energy resources gives the US control of our major economic competitors in the world -- Europe and northeast Asia (China and Japan).

[3] But aren't all the Democratic Presidential candidates against the war?

Not exactly. The leading Democratic candidates are happy to attack the horrible mess that the Republican administration has made in Iraq, but they continue to support the long-term policy. They have a problem, however: more than 70% of Americans oppose the war, and they gave the Democrats majorities in the House and the Senate last year in order to bring the war to an end. So the leading Democrats have to pretend that they're against the war while admitting that even if the Democrats regain the Presidency next year, the troops will not be withdrawn. It's been said that "The function of the Democratic Party is to sell stuff to the populace the Republicans can't get away with on their own, like throwing single mothers and children off the welfare rolls or exporting America's blue collar jobs to Mexico and China" -- and continuing a war.

[4] Aren't we bringing freedom and democracy to the people of Iraq?

They don't think so. A majority of the Iraqis -- in all parts of the country -- want the US troops to leave. And sixty percent of Iraqis think that it is acceptable to attack American troops, in order to get them to leave. That's hardly surprising -- imagine how Americans would react to an Arab army occupying the United States. As to democracy, the US didn't intend to allow a democratic government after the invasion in 2003, but the (largely non-violent) resistance of the majority community, the Shi'ites -- forced the US to conduct elections, and ever since the US has struggled to control the government that resulted, even though that government has little real authority in the country, independent of American troops. In general, as the case of Palestine shows, the US supports democracy only when it can count on elected governments to do what they're told. Otherwise it supports dictatorships, as in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

[5] But won't there be chaos in Iraq if the US troops leave -- a bloodbath, as there was in Vietnam?

There's chaos there now. We are probably responsible for a million deaths since we invaded Iraq, four and a half years ago -- and perhaps at least as many (including a half million dead children) in the sanctions the US administered in the previous twelve years. We can hardly say that we are preventing a bloodbath, although it is certainly true that we owe the Iraqis huge reparations for what we've done to their country and people. But it must be provided through neutral agencies -- not the US military, mercenaries, or corporations. (Incidentally, although the US made the same claim before we withdrew troops from Vietnam in 1973, the bloodbath occurred in Cambodia -- a country which the US did not occupy -- because we destroyed that small peasant society by bombing it with many times the ordnance used in the entire Second World War; it was in fact the Vietnamese army that put an end to the bloodbath in Cambodia, while the US was still backing the government that carried it out.)

[6] Won't the terrorists follow us home?

Everyone recognizes that US actions in the Middle East are creating a whole new generation of terrorists. The people apparently responsible for the crimes of September 11, 2001, said they committed them because of the murderous sanctions against Iraq, the oppression of the Palestinians, and US military support for oppressive governments in the Muslim holy lands. That in no way justifies them, just as continuing American war crimes aren't justified by 9-11. But the administration has not taken serious steps to prevent new terrorist attacks, even in the US, by such things as examining all airline baggage and all containers coming into US ports. Instead, the administration is willing to permit the continuation of the threat of terrorism to justify its long term policy in the Middle East. Really to combat terrorism, the US has to reverse that policy and take seriously the control of nuclear weapons. Instead, the Bush administration's torture policy, its secret prisons, its illegal wire-tapping, and the abridgment of constitutional rights, such as habeas corpus -- in which the Congress has collaborated -- are impeachable offenses that have not made us safer from terrorism.

[7] Shouldn't we attack Iran, which the President says is meddling in Iraq?

That would be to commit another war crime, and a very dangerous one. The US signed -- and in fact wrote -- the UN Charter, which forbids "the threat or use of force" in international affairs. The Nuremberg Tribunal, after the Second World War, condemned the German leaders for "initiating a war of aggression ... the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole." And Iran is not only three times the size of Iraq, it has a substantial military that's not prostrate from years of sanctions. It's amazing that the US government, with half its army occupying Iraq, can talk with a straight about Iranian "meddling." The US government is principally concerned that it does not control Iran's large energy resources, and that they may end up as part of the Russian-Chinese energy grid. There seems to be a faction of the Bush administration that wants to use the US Air Force and Navy to prevent that.

[8] Shouldn't we shift our attention to Afghanistan, where we're fighting a good war?

The US attack on Afghanistan was also a war crime, which the US claimed was justified by 9-11, because it suspected that Osama bin Laden was in that country. In fact, the government of Afghanistan asked for the evidence that he was responsible for the attacks and offered to discuss sending him out of Afghanistan for trial. We don't know if they would have done so, because the US refused to provide the evidence -- which the director of the FBI admitted he didn't have -- or to negotiate. Instead the US launched a bombing campaign, with the clear understanding that it might result in the starvation of several million people -- who of course had nothing to do with 9-11. Now the US has induced NATO countries to provide troops to attempt to put down a growing resistance to the government which we installed there.

[9] Isn't Israel really directing American policy in the Middle East?

No. Although Israel is far and away the largest recipient of US foreign and military aid, and there is a

powerful Israeli lobby in the US, American policy in the region serves the strategic and economic interests of an American elite. For forty years, the US has used Israel as "cop on the beat," to help keep down America's real enemy in the Middle East -- the desire of any group, right or left, to free the region's resources from American control. Since the 1967 war, when Israel demonstrated it could do that, it has become a stationary aircraft carrier for the United States -- with bad effects on the militarized Israeli society, which now has one of the highest poverty rates in the developed world, in spite of billions of dollars from the US each year. In return, the US gives Israel, which by law is the state of one racial group, a free hand to suppress the Palestinians.

[10] What should we do?

Bring US troops, mercenaries, and corporations home. Negotiate fair agreements with all the countries of the region, including reparations and the removal of all nuclear weapons. And hold accountable those guilty of prosecuting this vicious war and promoting its continuance.

DEFUND war in the Middle East.

REFUND human needs at home and in Iraq.

This flyer was prepared by members of AWARE (Anti-War Anti-Racism Effort), a local Champaign-Urbana peace group <<http://www.anti-war.net>>. We meet every Sunday 5-6:30pm in the basement of the old post office in Urbana. Visitors and new members are welcome.