

The Hidden Costs to the War in Iraq --- The Challenges we Face

Address to CSIS by Congressman John P. Murtha

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In just a few weeks, we will mark the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. Five years later, the political and economic situation on the ground has changed little, while the rest of the world, including the United States, has changed significantly.

I make routine visits to our troops in the field and to those recovering at our military hospitals. I'm inspired by their service and dedication to this great country. But, the America they serve and protect today is far different than the America that existed prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

We are familiar with the visible costs associated with the war in Iraq and the sacrifices that our men and women in uniform and their families are making. We have lost almost 4,000 troops, over 28,700 have been wounded and we have appropriated nearly \$535 billion. American troop levels in Iraq have

increased to 160,000 while coalition forces have decreased from 47,500 in 2003 to 10,600 today.

We are less familiar with the hidden costs associated with the war in Iraq, and these will have long-term consequences. Every penny of the \$535 billion appropriated thus far has been borrowed; this doesn't even include over \$300 billion for the rest of FY08 and FY09. I've been saying for years that you can't fight an endless war AND cut taxes. You can't put a trillion-dollar war on a credit card and leave the bills for our children to pay. The same Americans sacrificing in Iraq today will be paying for this borrowed war for the rest of their lives.

Since the Iraq war began, the international credibility and respect of the United States has plummeted while instability has grown throughout the region.

Among our European allies, we have seen significant drops in the image of the United States from 2002 to the present. Our favorability rating has dropped from 75 percent to 51 percent in Great Britain, from 60 percent to 30 percent in Germany, and from 62 percent to 39 percent in France.

Among our Muslim allies, the United States currently has a favorability rating of only 9 percent in Turkey, 21 percent in Egypt, and 20 percent in Jordan.

At the same time, we have seen a dramatic rise in the economic, military and global influence of both Russia and China. An emboldened Iran seeks to more aggressively assert influence in the region. Our NATO allies are unwilling or unable to provide an additional 3,000 troops in Afghanistan. And the price of oil has climbed from \$27.18 per barrel before the war began to \$88.71 today. During President Bush's first two years in office, the price of oil per barrel increased by \$3, but since the beginning of the war in Iraq, the price of oil per barrel has increased by over \$61.

Here at home, the President submitted to Congress this week a budget for the next fiscal year that carries with it a projected \$407 billion record deficit. This includes only a portion of what will be required for Iraq and Afghanistan in FY09. It's hard to imagine that just eight years ago Vice President Gore and Governor Bush were arguing over how they would spend a projected budget surplus. When President Bush took office, the Congressional Budget Office projected a \$710 billion budget surplus for FY09. Now that reality

has set in, this Administration has turned a projected surplus into a record deficit.

Our national debt has ballooned by \$2.77 trillion since the beginning of the war in Iraq, increasing by nearly \$1 million per minute. The American economy appears to be slipping towards a recession as our housing and financial sectors are experiencing serious crises. Gas at the pump has increased from \$1.76 per gallon before the war began to its current price of \$3.03 per gallon.

This Administration borrows \$343 million every day to finance the war in Iraq and continues to shortchange our domestic needs. We must restore fiscal sanity, and that begins by using the \$343 million we are spending every day in Iraq and putting it to use here at home.

11 Hours in Iraq could restore the \$156 million cut by the President's FY09 budget for the Defense Department Family Advocacy Program. Congress provided \$400 million in the current fiscal year so that our military families and service members, stressed by the continued war in Iraq, would have the resources they need. This past weekend I heard from commanders in Afghanistan who said our military families at home are stressed out. The President's budget cuts the program by 39 percent.

2 ½ Days in Iraq could restore the \$800 million cut by the President's FY09 budget to maintain services for the Federal-Aid Highways Program.

4 ½ Weeks in Iraq could double the funding NIH spends on cancer research every year. Over 1,500 Americans die every day from cancer.

18 Months in Iraq could repair the 70,000+ structurally deficient bridges across America.

In the military, we have seen a deterioration of readiness, equipment and recruitment standards. We are not able to maintain the number of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan without breaking the military's own guidelines. I've been saying for years that our level of military preparedness and combat readiness are seriously deficient. Before the Iraq war, 80 percent of all Army units and almost 100 percent of active-duty combat units were rated at the highest level of military readiness. They were fully manned, equipped and trained. Just the opposite exists today. Virtually all of our active-duty combat units in the United States are rated not combat-ready.

The situation with the National Guard is even worse. There is not one Army National Guard unit that is fully combat ready. This means that we can not

sustain the current troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan let alone provide a credible deterrent to other potential adversaries.

In order to meet recruitment goals, the Army is accepting a higher percentage of recruits who would previously have been disqualified from service because of the lack of a high school diploma, a previous criminal record, drug or alcohol problems or a health condition. Since the invasion of Iraq, the percentage of Army recruits with a high school diploma has decreased from 94 percent to 71 percent. Before the war began, 4.6 percent of Army recruits required a waiver for a criminal record; today that figure has risen to 11.2 percent. Similar trends exist for retention and enlistment bonuses. In FY03, the Army paid out \$157 million in retention and enlistment bonuses. In FY07, the Army paid out over \$1 billion in retention and enlistment bonuses, an increase of 537 percent. Similarly, Army attrition rates in initial entry training (IET) have decreased from historical norms of around 15 percent to the FY07 average of 6.3 percent.

As I've said before, our ground forces in the United States simply do not have their required equipment, and the equipment of our ground forces

overseas is wearing out. It will take years and tens of billions of dollars to rehabilitate this equipment and to re-equip the force.

The Air Force operates and maintains a fleet of aircraft with an average age of 24 years. When I left Vietnam in 1967, the average age of our aircraft was 8.5 years. Over the weekend I was in Afghanistan, and they told me that aircraft maintenance hours are way up because our planes are not only older, but their extended use is having a greater toll on operational capability. Just yesterday, the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee held a hearing on the F-15 aircraft. We found that since 1996, F-15 maintenance hours have increased 236 percent, flying hour costs have increased 87 percent, and depot maintenance has increased 800 man hours on every F-15.

I've said repeatedly that the Navy's current shipbuilding request is grossly inadequate to meet the goal of a 313 ship fleet while maintaining our naval superiority. Last March, the Congressional Budget Office said that the Navy needed to spend \$20.6 billion annually on new ship construction over 30 years to meet the 313 ship fleet. The President's FY09 budget requested only

\$14.1 billion in FY09 for shipbuilding, \$300 million less than what Congress provided this year.

As serious as these problems are, the financial challenges are the ones we can quantify and project. We can't quantify threats. We live in a world today of unknowable "asymmetric" threats, but we need to look to the future and beyond just the asymmetric threats. And how are we facing them? With a military that's strained, drained and chained to Iraq.

For decades, we depended upon a credible deterrent to maintain peace.

Today, we don't know where the next threat will come from, but we have to be prepared. Our troops and their families are exhausted – repeated and extended deployments have cost lives, broken marriages, ruined careers, disrupted educations and caused financial and emotional chaos in the lives of our troops and their families. They are the ones making the disproportionate sacrifices in our country. We've got to change that. And we will.

I've just briefly touched on some of the hidden costs and problems associated with the war in Iraq. These aren't Democratic problems or Republican problems. These are American problems and American challenges.

In all my 35 years in Congress, I have never seen a major problem or challenge that hasn't been solved in a bipartisan manner. Our next President and the American people must understand that it will require tremendous resources and strong bipartisan and international cooperation to begin to solve these challenges. The future of our great country depends on it.

Notes: Iraq/Afghanistan Trips