



CJPME

Meeting the Challenge

A CJPME Proposal for Canada's Middle East Policy

10. Iraq

Prepared by Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East



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Iraq is still reeling from the effects of the US-led invasion in 2003. In April of 2009, Refugees International estimated that there were 1.5 million Iraqi refugees living in Syria, Jordan and other neighbouring countries, and another 2.7 million internally displaced persons in Iraq itself. That would mean that about one in six Iraqis were either refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs.) Reports of deaths from the war vary (because of differing measurement techniques), but many credible reports put the death toll in the hundreds of thousands. For example, the Lancet's June 2006 study estimated that there have been 655,000 deaths in Iraq as a result of the war. The Opinion Research Business Poll conducted in August 2007 estimated 1,033,000 deaths due to the war.

While the invasion took place in 2003, CJPME reminds policymakers that the US violated the UN Charter (i.e. international law) by launching the war without the requisite resolution from the UN Security Council. CJPME also reminds policymakers that the pretence for launching the war – to prevent Iraq from obtaining weapons of mass destruction – was ultimately shown to be a false. While some in the West may draw satisfaction in the fact that the US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, CJPME points again to the tragic and unacceptable death toll and refugee crisis that was imposed on Iraq through the invasion. CJPME does not attribute any altruistic motives to the US for its invasion of Iraq. Had there been any real concern in the US for conditions in Iraq, the US would have intervened decades earlier during the worst of Saddam Hussein's pogroms in Iraq.

Needless to say, Canada needs to pay close attention to Iraq as another key element to a secure Middle East, as developments in Iraq could have a profound impact on Middle East stability. Despite a commitment to remove all troops by the end of 2011 at the latest, the current US occupation of Iraq continues to violate many faces of international law and influence internal Iraqi politics. As such, Middle Eastern governments and populations must watch the US presence in Iraq closely to see to what degree the US will use its presence to influence the future of the region for its own purposes. CJPME agrees with most of the world community in its scepticism of present-day US motives in Iraq.

As conditions in Iraq fail to improve substantively, and given a possible US military presence in Iraq for another two years, CJPME believes that the potential exists for sharp deterioration during the coming months and years. In particular, the world economic recession and the consequent precipitous decline in oil prices will impact Iraq's fiscal resources; the pressure declining oil prices will place on Iraq's economy and fragile attempts to build inter-communal bridges could have serious consequences.

Leading up to and in the wake of the withdrawal of American and other foreign troops, a number of challenges can be anticipated, including:

- Heightened Shia-Sunni tensions and possibly violence, especially given the smaller economic pot available to share.
- A Kurdish push for an extension of autonomy, possibly equivalent to independence, given a natural desire to safeguard the economic resources of Kurdistan. Moreover, Kirkuk and Mosul, to which the Kurds lay claim with their oil resources, could be potential flash points.
- Possible increased involvement by Iraq's neighbours in the country's internal affairs as each, especially Iran, Turkey, Syria and Saudi Arabia seek to protect their own interests.

- Danger that conflict within Iraq and especially fear of Iraq's disintegration could draw its neighbours into internal Iraqi quarrels with consequences that could be very dangerous.
- Concern that the US will continue, despite troop withdrawals, to unduly influence Iraq's internal politics, particularly with regards to regional security and oil reserves.
- Concern throughout the Sunni Arab world that an alliance between Shia-led Iraq and Iran could gravely upset the Middle East balance. Such concerns would go well beyond Iraq's immediate neighbours and include countries such as Egypt.

Since 2003 Canada's non-participation in the invasion and occupation of Iraq is appreciated. CJPME notes with approval that Canada not only declined to participate in the US-led invasion of Iraq, but also worked within the UN system until the last minute in attempts to buy time for arms inspections, and to generate international consensus on how to deal with Iraq.

While Canada can have little direct impact on how events unfold in Iraq, CJPME believes that Canada has a right and responsibility to critique US Iraq policy. Canada should play a positive role by working closely with other concerned members of the international community, especially within the UN system, to address the challenges that Iraq is likely to face.

Specifically, CJPME believes that Canada should actively encourage and support a more constructive multilateral US involvement in Iraq and the region. By cooperating closely with the US and other members of the international community, Canada should work toward forestalling serious deterioration of Iraq's internal dynamics leading up to and during the American troop withdrawal. Such support could importantly include the provision of emergency economic and other assistance, such as aid to refugees.