

COSTLY LESSONS OF THE IRAQ WAR

(not approved by the General Assembly)

Introduction (Note: This resolution builds on and summarizes the positions developed in the study paper “commended for study” by the General Assembly (GA) and thus helps elucidate those positions. Notes in parenthesis compare the proposed recommendations on pages 3-4 to the GA-adopted positions that differ mainly in items not included.

This resolution is accompanied by the study paper, “To Repent, Restore, Rebuild, and Reconcile.” This resolution summarizes the theological grounding and position of the church, raises open questions about important matters of context, puts forward “lessons learned” from the Iraq conflict, and makes recommendations for both pastoral and prophetic response. The sheer number of deaths (estimates from 100,000–1,000,000 Iraqi; 4,250 U.S. combat; 307 allied coalition; 1,000 U.S. contractor, est.), an unknown number of civilians and approximately 29,000 U.S. wounded, the destruction of the physical, cultural, and civic bases of Iraqi society, and vast expenditure of U.S. funds (approximately \$600 billion, not counting long term health and reconstruction costs and relatively limited Coalition funds), are each grievous moral challenges.¹ With the additional losses to U.S. national purpose, credibility, and reputation, all make it impossible for the church to keep silent. At the same time, recognizing that the tragic pattern of military intervention going back well before Vietnam has continued in the post-Cold War period, the recommendations section includes several long-range proposals for Presbyterian and ecumenical peacemaking witness.

The pursuit of “social righteousness” inevitably calls the church to serve as conscience in society. Just as the Holy Spirit speaks to our moral sense, convicting us of sin and drawing us to the good, so the example and witness of the church point to the way of Christ. That path of discipleship is rooted in salvation, demonstrated in love, and experienced as fullness of life. In communities of any size, that way of love is expressed in justice, and justice itself is a linchpin of peace. In the Reformed tradition, the non-violent peace of Jesus does not rule out all protective uses of force, but Jesus’ reign stands against all forms of domination. In Gethsemane, Jesus warns that those who live by the sword will die by it; in Colossians, the victory of the cross and resurrection reveals the “powers” or false gods of the world to be exposed and disarmed.

The church’s position as described below is neither pursuit of an unclear victory (“stay the course”) nor immediate withdrawal (“cut and run.”) As the study document affirms, even though the U.S. invasion was effected without adequate planning or international legitimacy, the U.S. should not withdraw in the same unilateral manner, without taking into account its continuing moral responsibilities for the condition of Iraq. Nor, above all, should the United States respond to the ironic strengthening of Iranian and Shiite influence in Iraq and elsewhere by another unilateral bombing or invasion, especially since the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate revealed the absence of an ongoing nuclear weapons program in Iran.

The position here proposed may be termed: Repent, Restore, Rebuild, and Reconcile. These goals are:

1. To repent of engaging in an unnecessary war, to express remorse for the suffering, and to change the disposition to exercise power without understanding the lasting effects of coercion on both occupying and occupied peoples.
2. To restore responsibility for sovereignty and security to Iraqi civil authorities bolstered as necessary by international troops under UN auspices, with U.S.-built bases contributed to the multilateral effort and control.
3. To rebuild a battered Iraq through serious, well-managed, and accountable foreign aid, including massive healthcare assistance for the wounded and maimed.
4. To reconcile political, ethnic, and religious groups through diplomatic and peace-building measures based in truth-seeking, mutual respect, and peace with neighbors, including the supervised return of as many as three million refugees from Syria, Jordan, and other area countries and two million who have been internally displaced.

Lessons from the Second Iraq War (March 20, 2003)

In Luke 14:25ff, Jesus gives various images of the need to count the cost: in following Jesus himself, but also in building a tower or going to war, lest one not have the resources to complete the task. Jesus recommends that an outnumbered king sue for peace, and then changes images to suggest giving up everything to be a disciple. This is realism combined with a framework of repentance. In its prophetic work, the Church is not only called to tally and mourn the dead, Iraqi as well as American and British, soldier and civilian, terrorist and contractor. The church is also called to help society to do the moral math about the basic effectiveness of war and of relying on overwhelming military force and massive weapons sales to one-party regimes as the basis for a foreign policy. Drawing on both Christian ethical and pragmatic judgments, we draw these conclusions for future deliberation by General Assemblies, ecumenical and public bodies:

1. The consequences of the initiation of the second Iraq war by the Executive branch of the United States government reaffirm the Constitution's wisdom of requiring that Congress declare war, and that only after the Just War/Just Peace criteria of just cause, legitimate authority, proportionality, protection of noncombatants, likelihood of greater peace and justice, and proactively exhausting all alternatives have been met. Preventive or preemptive wars violate international law and Just War principles, particularly the criterion of "last resort," as they involve the unilateral choice of one nation or coalition to invade another before a last resort of defensive necessity is established.²
2. The Christian church, by distinguishing patriotism from nationalism, and refusing to be stampeded through fear of terror, thereby prevents the false demonization of other societies and the false sanctification of our own, defends the civil liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, and maintains its own faithful resistance to idolatry and tyranny.
3. Unless United Nations peacekeeping forces are strengthened, or the UN authorizes humanitarian intervention, there can be no legitimate occupation, exploitation of resources by private companies, or exemption of military and contractors from civil or human rights law.
4. Democratic institutions cannot be imposed by violence on any people or nation. Democracy is not simply a matter of freedom but of "covenantal responsibility" based in equality

before law and cannot be sustained in conditions of great inequality of power or wealth or physical security.

5. War requires a national consensus and can never be a regular act of governance. Without shared sacrifice through realistic taxation and other means, the human costs of war are borne by a limited sector of the population and the financial costs by borrowing, the first weakening the military and the second weakening the economy. Even humanitarian interventions approved by international authorities need to meet Just War/Just Peace criteria and be declared by the Congress of the United States of America.

6. a. Without effective civilian and judicial oversight, human rights violations will occur.

b. Without effective executive branch and congressional oversight, military contractors will profit from no-bid contracts and insufficient performance.

c. Even with cultural awareness and oversight by a free press, even temporary occupation oppresses the subject population.

7. Those parties and lobbies favoring war deserve particular scrutiny; with regard to targets in the Middle East, such as Iran, these parties would include military contractors, oil companies, other nations in the region, and civilian contractors that profit from occupation, security, and reconstruction.

8. "A superpower that insists on absolute security for itself makes all other nations insecure."³ This affirms a realist argument for multilateral cooperation and "collective security" in an interdependent world where security interests transcend national boundaries.

9. The role of the United Nations as chief agent for multilateral cooperation would be enhanced by the existence of a significant NATO-like security alliance on each continent; rather than stretching NATO from the Balkans to Afghanistan, regional alliances, stronger than the African Union peacekeepers in Sudan for example, could help organize stabilizing international forces in places like Iraq.

10. The struggle against terrorism should return to the model of police work, as Britain has done, rather than be carried on as a "war." "The police model views terrorists as criminals, refusing them the status of combatants," and prosecutes them according to accepted traditions of international law, using techniques of detection and prevention rather than universal surveillance and indefinite detention.⁴

Recommendations (*compared to "On Building Peace" adopted by the GA*)

In light of the Gospel of peace and the lessons learned from the second Iraq war, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy recommends that the 218th General Assembly (2008):

1. Approve this resolution and receive its study paper, and direct that both be posted for study and action on the Website of the Office of the General Assembly and be given limited printing for councils, peacemaking and educational programs, and educational institutions related to the church.

2. Encourage congregations and individual Presbyterians to continue praying for the people of Iraq and all occupation forces, particularly those who have been wounded or who have lost loved ones, and to support adequate healthcare and rehabilitation, including psychiatric care, for those affected. *(similar)*

3. Commend the Reformed principle that “God alone is Lord of the conscience,” and that in evaluating U.S. actions in Iraq every Presbyterian has the right to arrive at their own judgment, even if, after prayerful consideration, that places them in opposition to the position of the General Assembly. *(not included)*

4. Direct the General Assembly Council, through its Peacemaking Program and the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), to convene a seminary- and college-wide review of peace studies and peacemaking opportunities appropriate to the major shifts needed in the approach of U.S. international relations, and to report the results of this study to the 220th General Assembly (2012). *(not included)*

5. Commend support for the UN Declaration of Human Rights on its sixtieth anniversary, the Geneva Conventions, and the International Criminal Court, and make widely known its conviction that all U.S. military and covert operations should comply with the highest human rights standards. *(not included)*

6. Urge the World Mission program of the General Assembly Council to offer material, moral, and spiritual support to the Presbyterians of Iraq, whether in country or in dispersion, in conjunction with regional ecumenical bodies, and urge the whole church to keep them in our prayers. *(similar, no mention of Presbyterians)*

7. Direct the Office of Interfaith Relations, in cooperation with ecumenical partners and other offices of the General Assembly Council, and in addition to dialogue and study assignments, to participate in shared Muslim and Christian peacemaking efforts and assist other efforts designed to improve understanding between these two families of faith, proposing public statements, worship events, and other actions as necessary between assemblies. *(not included)*

8. Direct the Office of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, the Presbyterian Washington and UN Offices, and other appropriate offices of the General Assembly Council, in conjunction with ecumenical partners, to communicate and advocate the following positions derived from this and other resolutions:

a. the swiftest possible internationalization of the occupation of Iraq under UN aegis, to improve security (removing U.S. troops as a focus of violence), prevent further religious-political cleansing, and assist return of refugees and persons internally displaced; *(similar- see “On Building Peace” #6 call for “UN peacebuilding mission.”*

b. the provision of a truly generous reconstruction fund, to be administered under international auspices with full transparency and accountability, using internationally accepted standards for procurement, attention to human rights of recipients, and high environmental standards; *(similar)*

c. a full and honest accounting for the funds expended and to be expended upon on the war, including the costs of recruitment, rehabilitation, covert operations, and interest on debt; *(not included)*

d. a plan to conclude major military operations in a responsible and expeditious manner, leading to the withdrawal of virtually all U.S. forces and the international use for peace and reconstruction of fourteen bases built by U.S. contractors; *(similar general withdrawal)*

e. the tabulation of casualties among all parties and general inventory of destruction so that the human and material costs of the war may be assessed and the moral obligations of reconstruction and restitution be kept before the conscience of the nation; *(not included)*

f. the completion of investigations of intelligence failures, human rights abuses, and contractor scandals so that accountability may be restored to U.S. government agencies; *(similar; stronger on "prosecute all charges of war crimes")*

g. the significant increase of funding for United Nations, international development, and diplomatic operations and the corresponding decrease in the funding of the military, consistent with the development of "collective security" measures and the abandonment of the doctrines of "full spectrum dominance" and unilateral regime change;⁵ *(similar first part: no mention of decreasing military expenditures or re-thinking pro-invasion doctrines)*

h. the re-adoption of the "police model" for dealing with international terror and the development of greater awareness and understanding in dealing with Muslim and Arab nations; *(not included)* and

i. a confirmation of the endorsement of congressional and judicial remedies for the use of all forms of torture (including waterboarding)⁶ *(similar to "prosecute all charges of war crimes")*

9. Direct the Stated Clerk and ecumenically involved offices of the General Assembly Council to encourage consideration of a panel of peace and security experts on the model of the Commission on a Just and Durable Peace in the post-World War II period, funded by church and foundation sources, to foster the sharing of Christian peace understandings among church bodies and with policy makers in government, universities, and the private sector. *(not included)*

Rationale

A. The Grounding of the Position of the Presbyterian Church

As Christ's kingdom or reign cannot be gained by violence, so the Christian faith is not a religion of war and does not trust in violence to establish peace. The church's resistance to war has been expressed over the centuries in a minority commitment to pacifism, in the development of Just War doctrine, and more recently in proactive Just Peace thinking. Increasingly, biblical scholars recognize the place of nonviolent resistance in the New Testament, heightening the contrast between early Christianity and the Roman Empire. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and many other churches have supported the establishment of the United Nations and international laws to minimize the horrors of war and enlarge the concept of human rights. Based upon this historic

Christian skepticism about war and empirical warnings heeded by many nations, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), most other ecumenical churches, and the Roman Catholic Church opposed the current Iraq war. This was done well before its vastly tragic and costly mismanagement and the steep decline in international respect for our country, out of a judgment that the administration was repudiating time-honored moral restraints on violence. The 216th General Assembly (2004), building on the concerns of the 215th General Assembly (2003) and a study of *“Religion, Violence, and Terrorism,”* termed the Iraq war “unwise, illegal, and immoral.”⁷ It urged that Iraqi sovereignty be restored and hence the occupation end as swiftly as possible, a position that was held unchanged by the 217th General Assembly (2006).

B. *The Policy Direction*

In calling for the termination of a primarily military role for the United States, the four broad goals bear resemblance to those of the Iraq Study Commission (or Baker-Hamilton) Report. The first goal addresses a motivational context within the United States, while the next three are processes in which the United States would help or support a genuine work of the international community that has been largely kept at arms length. Reconciliation also has spiritual and relational dimensions and is linked to rebuilding since the refugees are disproportionately a “brain drain” of the most educated citizens. The recommendations also focus on the very difficult situation of the already small Christian community in Iraq, whose situation (like those of Christian minorities elsewhere in the region) has been made more difficult by the actions and statements of the U.S. government. In general, the last twenty years have shown the increasing importance of addressing religious dimensions in international politics, perhaps especially in the Middle East.

The study paper provides some assessment of the effects of the multiparty civil war in “the Arab world’s Yugoslavia,” which has always made the number of troops deployed into Iraq a secondary (though important) matter. It is the basic assumption that the U.S. has the right to “transform” the Middle East, starting with Iraq, that is challenged by a belief in democracy and self-determination. Opinion polls in Iraq regularly show majorities favoring U.S. withdrawal.⁸ The effects of tactical decisions like the “surge” or the alliance with once-hostile Sunnis can be debated. Advocates of withdrawal maintain that residual U.S. garrisons will continue to focus resentment while not furthering our two main strategic interests in the region: protecting allies and oil interests, which they see achievable through naval and air power from bases outside Iraq.⁹ In the long term, Arabic and Muslim cultures need to be far better understood, alternative energy sources must be developed, and the role of inter-religious cooperation for peace much more respected. The long occupation of Palestine by Israel, as the Baker-Hamilton report notes, is widely associated with the occupation of Iraq and remains an undeniable source of radicalization throughout the Middle East, and indeed a matter of concern for most U.S. allies as well.

Any substantial increases in reconstruction funds for Iraq need to be seen in light of current war costs, which include some reconstruction efforts, primarily in Iraq. Using nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office numbers, Reuters reports: “All of the Iraq and Afghanistan war money—about \$11 billion a month—is effectively being put on a government credit card at a time when U.S. government debt has skyrocketed to more than \$9 trillion, up from around \$5.6 trillion when Bush took office. . . .”¹⁰ The recession, reinforced by the net trade deficit (\$811.5 billion in 2006) and increased oil costs, may eventually put pressure on military spending, although the Pentagon budget request has now “reached its highest level since World War II,” excluding “supplementals” for the wars.¹¹

C. *The Study Paper and Continuing Questions for Christians in the United States*

After a theological introduction, the study paper reviews the arguments for the war and the facts that have been revealed concerning the pre-9/11 ambitions of some top U.S. officials to remove Saddam Hussein, as well as over-optimistic dreams of establishing democracies throughout the Middle East, and understated interests in maintaining access to oil and markets. Clearly, many false statements were made about the existence of weapons of mass destruction and about purported linkages between the Sunni extremists responsible for 9/11 and the secular Baathist regime of Iraq.¹² This resolution does not answer the question, however, of whether the patterns of deception that have been revealed approach the level of impeachable offenses. Neither does this report focus on the pattern of counterterrorism measures that have led to large-scale indefinite detention and mistreatment of alleged combatants in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, and in secret prisons acknowledged by President George W. Bush. The 2006 assembly spoke strongly against torture and government surveillance and called for an investigation of apparent violations of U.S. Constitutional and Geneva protections. The question of whether military and/or political leaders should be prosecuted is left open—only low level military personnel have been imprisoned so far.

In addition to those questions concerning the rule of law, there are questions concerning the governmental choices before Iraq and the United States. This report does not specify a level of federal devolution or even partition of Iraq on religious or ethnic lines. As in the Balkans, Somalia, the Sudan, and more recently Kenya, political pressures can open up ethnic, religious, and tribal tensions. We caution against exaggerating religious differences, and lift up instances of inter-confessional and ethnic harmony, as well as the uses of truth and reconciliation commissions, demonstrating the role of what Presbyterian ethicist Donald Shriver (in his book, *An Ethic for Enemies*) terms, “forgiveness in politics.”¹³ In the United States, the growing unpopularity of the war in Iraq has underlined the massive powers of the presidency to establish policy through administrative fiat, but we leave it an open question whether the three branches of our own government are out of balance.

In terms of the role of the church, it must be noted that the already small Presbyterian community of five congregations has been severely reduced by flight and death and functions largely underground. The Christian community overall, which had been allowed freedom of worship and relative security under Saddam Hussein, has been reduced by fundamentalist Muslim “jihadis” and driven from some areas, as have other religious minorities. With these refugees, as with others associated with the U.S. occupation, the U.S. government faces a choice of whether to allow immigration to the U.S. or to push repatriation into hostile areas.¹⁴

As this resolution is finalized in February, the “frontline” in dealing with terror seems to be Pakistan, following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, followed closely by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It lies beyond the scope of this resolution to analyze the fragility of “nation-building” in Afghanistan and the dangers of subsidizing a military dictatorship in Pakistan. Alliances with military governments or other dictatorships are inherently unstable, and high levels of military assistance do not assure that U.S. national interests or purposes will be served. Humanitarian assistance can also strengthen one party regimes, but offers greater possibility for the growth of civil society and voluntary institutions and lessens the appeal of religious and other extremism—if it is administered with competence, commitment, and international coordination.

In Iraq, despite the highest yearly U.S. death toll in 2007 (899), a “surge” in the number of U.S. troops (130,000 to 160,000), a ceasefire by the Mahdi army, plus alliances with Sunni tribal

groups and de facto ethno-religious cleansing, contributed to a decline in levels of violence in late 2007. The almost-entirely Shiite government of Prime Minister Maliki opposes the arming of new militias once allied to insurgents, but these Sunni groups have helped reduce the role of Al Qaeda of Mesopotamia (a domestic Sunni group now estimated at ten thousand that did not exist in Iraq prior to 2003). The lack of progress in meeting most “benchmarks” and moving forward politically in the time bought by the “surge” partly reflects the religious and communal polarization of Iraqi parties. Yet there remains a continuing commitment to national unity by a majority of Shiites and Sunnis, though not Kurds. And in this commitment to be Iraqis, despite all suffering and destruction, there is perhaps hope of a peaceful reconstruction without further civil war. But that remains an open question as well.

For further information and resources, please contact the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, www.pcusa.org/acswp, 1-800-728-7228 x.5823.