



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

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Current United States Policy on Iraq and Unitarian Universalist Talking Points

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Context

President Obama has inherited an immoral war. Six years ago, before the invasion was launched, then-State Senator Obama opposed it. Consequently, it does not make sense to approach this administration the way we approached the previous administration. Their agendas and motives could not be more different.

During the first four years of the war we saw Iraq's fairly developed country crumble. Then, in early 2007, President Bush announced a surge of troops, which was coupled with a less publicized surge in internal and regional diplomacy. During this time, the Iraqi Sunni minority joined the anti-insurgency movement in an event known as "The Awakening". Since then there have been growing signs of stabilization and improvement in Iraq. Most recently on January 31, 2009, Iraq held a peaceful and fair provincial election.

On December 4th of 2008, Iraq's government approved a status of forces agreement (SOFA) with the Bush Administration. After months of negotiations, the agreement established that U.S. combat forces will withdraw from Iraqi cities by June 30, 2009, and all U.S. forces will be completely out of Iraq by December 31, 2011. It also includes agreements on detentions, search and seizure, and the ability to prosecute military contractors.

Current United States Policy on Iraq

President Obama was elected partly because of his promise to end the war. Upon taking office he launched a strategic review of the Iraq and Afghanistan operations. On February 27th, 2009, he announced a three prong Iraq strategy and further commitments to troops and the American people:

1. **Withdrawal of Troops:** All combat operations will end by August 31st, 2010. However, 35,000 to 50,000 troops will be left behind as transitional forces until the end of 2011, when all American forces will leave Iraq. The threefold purposes of the transitional force are to train, equip, and advise Iraqi Security Forces as long as they remain non-sectarian; conduct targeted counter-terrorism missions; and protect ongoing civilian and military efforts within Iraq.
2. **Sustained Diplomatic Engagement:** Support national elections and improving local government; serve as brokers in pursuit of agreements on divisive issues among Iraq's leaders; strengthen Iraqi institutions to protect the rule of law, confront corruption, and deliver basic services; provide assistance and increase international support for countries hosting refugees; help resettle Iraqis facing great personal risk; and work with the Iraqi government to resettle refugees and displaced Iraqis within Iraq.

3. **Comprehensive Regional Engagement:** Pursue engagement with all of the nations in the region, including Iran and Syria; refocus on al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan; develop a strategy to use all elements of American power to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon; and actively seek a lasting peace between Israel and the Arab world.

Commitments Made To Troops and Veterans: Increase the overall number of soldiers and Marines; expand the system of veterans health care to serve more patients in more places; build new wounded warrior facilities across America; invest in new ways of identifying and treating the signature wounds of this war: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury; raise military pay; provide child-care, job-training for spouses, and expand counseling and outreach to families; implement a 21st century GI Bill.

Foreign Policy Lessons Learned: America must go to war with clearly defined goals; always weigh the costs of action, and communicate those costs candidly to the American people; work closely with Congress; build and rely-on our civilian national security capacity; work closely with friends and allies.

The Promise to Troops: “I will only send you into harm’s way when it is absolutely necessary, and provide you with the equipment and support you need to get the job done.”

Unitarian Universalist Talking Points

Accountability to Iraqis and our Troops

- By fulfilling his pledge to cease combat operations by August 31st of 2010, President Obama will stay true to the needs and desires of the Iraqi people expressed in the status of forces agreement.
- It is essential that the United States fulfill its obligations under the 2008 SOFA with Iraq. Implementing the agreement sends a signal to the world that we are committed to being a respectful and responsible member of the community of nations.
- We applaud President Obama’s recognition that our support for our troops does not end with their redeployment home. We must make sure that the Veteran’s Affairs Agency is fully funded; including long-needed support for military personnel with mental and emotional injuries, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Caring for our troops and veterans is a non-negotiable moral necessity.

Concrete Goals and Timetables for American Troops

- The transitional forces left in Iraq beyond August of 2010 must have a clear mission that is transparent to the Iraqi and American people. The new era of responsibility must be built on a foundation of honesty.

Fair and Balanced Foreign Policy

- It appears that President Obama understands that ending combat missions in Iraq is not the end of the story. We have a long term obligation to help complete the reconstruction in Iraq. We must ensure that foreign aid and civilian leadership is made available to continue growing a prosperous and safe Iraq.

- We share President Obama's assessment that success in Iraq depends on success in the region. The United States must establish and maintain diplomatic ties with Iran. The Obama Administration must develop a comprehensive approach to the escalating violence in Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, recognizing that there is no pure military solution.

Overall Frame

It is imperative that we continue to witness the costs of the war in both human lives and human needs left unfunded. However, we must remember that President Obama protested the invasion of Iraq just as did many Unitarian Universalists, including Rev. William G. Sinkford, President of the UUA. Those who marched with President Obama to prevent this war now must work with him to responsibly end it.