

Status in Iraq

Student Handout: The Nature of the Insurgency and the Prospect of U.S. Troop Withdrawal

Background: Some Americans see the war in Iraq as a part of the war on terror being fought to protect the homeland by taking the fight to the enemy and in the cause of advancing freedom. Others see the war as a potential disaster based on ill-founded information and conducted by incompetent management. This lesson activity is intended to help you understand the facts of the issue and allow you to draw your own conclusions. It looks at the ever-increasing interrelationship between the insurgency in Iraq and the potential for withdrawal of U.S. troops. It provides background information on the nature of the insurgency and the frequency of attacks. It also encourages you to examine different points of view regarding the fight against the insurgency and the possibility of withdrawing or drawing down the numbers of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Directions:

1. In Part 1, review the two quotes below and without advocating a position as to either side, point out the apparent contradictions between the two points of view on the U.S. mission in Iraq and write one of these on the index card.
2. Share your comments on the apparent contradictions with the rest of the class.
3. In Part 2, after your teacher has divided the class into small groups, go to the section on this handout entitled “The Nature of the Insurgency in Iraq.” Go to the three links of the Washington Week program segments and other sources on the insurgency. Take notes on the research questions.
4. After you have finished your research, meet in your small groups and discuss your findings.
5. The activity in Part 3 is called a “fishbowl activity.” In this activity, you will be involved in open-ended discussions on the insurgency and the possibility of troop withdrawals from Iraq. You will be placed in new groups. Your teacher will give you directions on how to conduct this activity.

Part 1 – Speech Excerpts

“The war reached our shores on September the 11th, 2001. The terrorists who attacked us -- and the terrorists we face -- murder in the name of a totalitarian ideology that hates freedom, rejects tolerance, and despises all dissent. Their aim is to remake the Middle East in their own grim image of tyranny and oppression -- by toppling governments, by driving us out of the region, and by exporting terror.

So our strategy going forward has both a military track and a political track. The principal task of our military is to find and defeat the terrorists, and that is why we are on the offense. And as we pursue the terrorists, our military is helping to train Iraqi security forces so that they can defend their people and fight the enemy on their own. Our strategy can be summed up this way: As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.”

President Bush, addressing the nation at Fort Bragg, August 22, 2005

“The truth is coming out. The American public was deceived by the Bush administration about the motivation for and intent of the invasion of Iraq. It is equally apparent that the administration is stubbornly and incompetently adhering to a destructive course. Many Americans do not want our troops there. Many military families do not want our troops there. Many troops themselves do not want to be there. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis do not want US troops there.

These military actions are not perceived as liberations, but as occupations, and our troops are now subject to daily attacks. Meanwhile, without a clear mission, they are living in conditions of relentless austerity and hardship. At home, their families are forced to endure extended separations and ongoing uncertainty.”

From the Veterans for Peace website

Part II: The Nature of the Insurgency in Iraq

Research Questions:

1. How long has the insurgency been active in Iraq?
2. Who are the insurgents? What groups or causes do they claim to represent? Who are their leaders? What are their tactics?
3. What are the goals of the different insurgent groups? What do they hope to accomplish?
4. Have they been successful? Why or why not?
5. How spread out is the insurgency? How long can they keep their attacks going?
6. Why was the insurgency able to mount such a strong offensive after the coalition forces invaded Iraq in March of 2003? What should have been done to eliminate or reduce the effectiveness of the insurgency?
7. Describe the confusion as to the strength of the insurgency in May of 2004?
8. How were the insurgency attacks and the prospect of U.S. troop withdrawal interrelated in the summer of 2005? Describe the difficult position the U.S. found itself in related to these two issues and the formation of the Iraqi government.

Washington Week program segments

- July 18, 2003 Scroll down to “Pentagon admits US now engaged in guerrilla warfare in Iraq”
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/transcripts/transcript030718.html>
- May 6, 2005 *explain where in the transcript*
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/transcripts/transcript050506.html>
- August 5, 2005 Scroll down to “*Questions continue about security and stability as Iraqi citizens prepare for the next step for independence and democracy*”
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/washingtonweek/transcripts/transcript050805.html>

Part III: Troop Withdrawal from Iraq

Questions for the “Fishbowl” Activity:

1. The U.S. has embarked on two policy tracks in Iraq: a political track to form a government and a military track to pacify the country so the new government can take over. Should the U.S. continue to pursue these two tracks or take before the other or only take one and *not* the other? Why or why not? If it should, which track should it pursue first? Why?
2. Should the U.S. military continue to support the development of an Iraqi military force or increase its own troop strength and take on the insurgency themselves?
3. How should the U.S. help Iraqis address any of the four issues of concern to formulate a workable constitution?
4. Do you feel Iraq is headed for or already engaged in a civil war? Explain your reasoning. What actions should the U.S. and the Iraqi governments take to prevent or stop a civil war?
5. Has the progress of the war in Iraq been such that U.S. involvement is still necessary and effective or should the U.S. begin to carry out an exit strategy to bring the troops home? Defend your position.