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“JEWS UNITING AGAINST THE WAR” — WHY NOW?

Organizers of the November 23rd conference in New York City, “Jews Uniting Against the War and to Heal America,” stand firm in their conviction that amplifying the voice of protest against the war within the American Jewish community, immediately after the presidential election, is of vital, timely importance.

We realize that the potential meltdown of the U.S. economy has shifted the war in Iraq to the back-burner of public concern. We realize, too, that daily violence in Baghdad and beyond has been significantly diminished — which the Bush Administration, candidate John McCain, and conservative media figures have all attributed to “the surge” and claimed as evidence that the U.S. is “winning the war” and will be able to withdraw troops from a stable Iraq within two years.

The reality in Iraq is far more complex, however, and far less “victorious,” than the cartoonish portrait that defenders of the war present. Moreover, the lessons that need to be learned from this war, for America and the world beyond, extend beyond its ultimate military and political outcomes.

Writing in *The New York Review of Books* (October 23), Peter W. Galbraith, a former ambassador to Croatia and an expert Middle East analyst, observed that as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, “Shiite religious parties that are Iran’s closest allies in the Middle East [now] control Iraq’s central government and the country’s oil-rich south.” Neither President Bush nor Senator McCain, he continues, “has explained how he will transform Iraq’s ruling theocrats into democrats, diminish Iran’s vast influence in Baghdad, or reconcile Kurds and Sunnis to Iraq’s new order. Remarkably, neither the Democrats nor the press has challenged them to do so. . . . It is hard to understand,” Galbraith concludes, “how this can be called a success — or a path to victory.”

Other knowledgeable analysts have made clear that U.S. policy in Iraq is no better guided today by a solid understanding of the complexities of Iraqi culture and history than it was at the start of the war, when U.S. intelligence was terribly flawed and gross ignorance was the rule in Washington. Instead, the war is still being treated by politicians as a black-and-white affair with two options: “surrender” or “victory.”

Beyond this simplistic scenario, moreover, the launching of the war — as the first round of the arrogant “preemptive war” doctrine enunciated by the Bush Administration in 2003 — needs to be investigated, with an eye towards formally renouncing that disruptive doctrine. The unilateralism of American policy, in total disregard for international opinion, law or legitimacy, needs to be amended. The violations of human rights and constitutional law that have accompanied the war must be halted, condemned, and



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compensated. The easy resort to military violence to enforce U.S. policy and guard U.S. “national interests” needs to be fundamentally challenged. The war has delivered America to an historic crossroads, and our country must reckon with the recent past in order to change direction, or else prepare itself for further tragedy and ineptitude.

“There you go again, Joe, looking back to history.” That’s what Governor Sarah Palin pooh-poohed at Senator Joe Biden during their one and only debate. But the fact is that the Iraqi debacle is not “history” and will not end on January 20th, 2009. American troops will not yet be home, and wounded veterans will not miraculously rise from their wheelchairs. The CIA torture machine will not suddenly break down, and the Muslim world will not suddenly admire us. Schools, roads and bridges will not suddenly become shiny and new, and medical offices will not suddenly open their doors to the uninsured. The dollar will not suddenly rebound in value, the national debt will not loosen its stranglehold on the federal government, and the globalized economy will not suddenly become socially responsible. The United States is bleeding heavily from multiple wounds, and it’s going to take intensive care, not over-the-counter treatment, to restore our country to health.

The election will be, at best, a beginning. The new President will have to be confronted and pressured into showing forceful, progressive leadership. The “Jews Uniting” Conference on November 23rd constitutes a critical new opportunity for the liberal Jewish majority to place ending the war high on our national agenda. We have weighed and largely withheld our words for more than five years; now is the time to lift our voices, and direct our passions and our resources towards the healing of America.

—*Jews Uniting to End the War and Heal America, National Planning Team,*
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