

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

War spurs debate

Students, politicians, activists sound off on Iraq

By: Amanda Drew

Posted: 12/12/07

Watch an ex-military linguist discuss the war and review the last five years in Iraq in [online-exclusive video and flash presentation](#). They will open in a new window.

Heather Voigt is a natural blond, an avid yoga student and an international relations major. She also spent six years in active military duty in Afghanistan as a Persian linguist spy.

Voigt has a different perspective on the war in Iraq because of her experience.

"I have all this information, and I know the way people are describing it isn't accurate, but I can't tell them so," she said.

Voigt finds it frustrating that students do not receive accurate information from the media about the war in Iraq.

She finds it even more frustrating when students are not concerned about it at all.

War yields unclear outcomes

During the past four years in Iraq, the United States has lost more than 4,000 coalition members and spent nearly \$500 billion.

One reason for keeping U.S. troops in Iraq is strategic protection from Iran, President George W. Bush said in a speech at the American Legion national convention.

Many of the problems American forces are facing in Iraq have stemmed from Iran, and strategy is shifting toward confronting Iran's suspected nuclear facilities.

"Today, our country has been attacked," said Rep. Wally Herger, R-Chico. "There is a tremendous concern for the Middle East and the threat of Iran is a threat to the entire world with the U.S. at No. 1."

As much as it seems that Iraq is in a state of chaos, improvements have been made, Herger said.

"We've seen tremendous progress in that area," he said. "One year ago, the biggest problem was civil war."

The House of Representatives recently passed a bill to allocate \$50 billion to war funding to reach the goal of bringing most of the troops home by December 2008, White House officials said.

The United States should keep troops in Iraq until it achieves its mission of establishing democracy, said Cliff Wagner, chief of staff for Assemblyman Rick Keene, R-Chico.

Otherwise, the war will come to American soil, he said.

"Having been there myself, I am acutely aware that we will either fight this struggle with international terrorists there or we'll do it here," Wagner said.

Others think keeping troops in Iraq at this point is doing more harm than good.

"If you look at the (Iraqi) culture, they're not just going to roll over and take it," Voigt said. "No matter how long we stay there, we will not create any more stability."

Michael Coyle, a criminal justice assistant professor, said he is in favor of an immediate withdrawal.

But leaving in the middle of such chaos is not wise either, he said.

"Having done what we have done - moving into a county, removing a regime that was there, completely turning their world upside down - it would be radically irresponsible to leave," Coyle said.

Local activists act on apathy

Coyle and other faculty members helped start Campus Involvement Awareness, a student organization that encourages involvement with the Iraq war and other political affairs.

The organization will have displays around campus to raise student awareness about the war and other political events, said student member Ashley Oakley in an e-mail. The group also plans to show political documentaries a few times each month.

"We believe that being around other students who are interested in making a positive change in the world and discussing current events with each other will spark an activism train throughout Chico," Oakley said.

Students settle for apathy because they don't think much can be done, said resident John Michael-Son.

He and other members of the Peace and Justice Center have been protesting the war in Iraq three nights a week for more than two years and will continue until the war ends.

Michael-Son invites students to join the group's protests downtown because taking a stance on the war is about numbers, he said.

"More of those numbers should come from students," he said.

Lack of student involvement is due to a lack of diverse political perspectives on the college campus, said Wagner, Keene's chief of staff.

"You don't get a cross section of ideas," Wagner said. "When I was at Chico State, speakers were there to express liberal concerns. When all you hear is one tune, you can become deaf."

The initiative to foster different viewpoints at the university comes from the students, Wagner said.

"There's plenty of opportunity for the Associated Students and campus organizations to bring speakers from a diversity of backgrounds to promote different views," he said.

Military involvement changes perspectives

When Voigt entered Afghanistan at the age of 18, she had many misconceptions about the Middle East.

"The average college student is informed by the news, but that does not include anything about the actual Middle Eastern culture," she said.

Americans are not taught to value Middle Eastern culture, and they only see the negative aspects of a few, she said.

Her experience in the military has made her more aware of culture and has broadened the narrow scope she viewed the world from prior to her deployment, she said.

After spending three years as an Army corporal in Iraq, Butte College student Steve Caput has seen firsthand how the U.S. media report an "agenda" rather than facts.

"The news is more often wrong about reporting inside the war zone than they are right," he said. "Locations, conditions, events and outcomes are often skewed to either support some sort of agenda that is being pushed or just wrong due to incompetence by the media in general."

The best way to get an accurate account of the war is to watch different news sources, he said.

"If you're a student and you aren't going to be affected on a personal level by the war, you can at least vote to support those who are affected personally," Caput said.

Amanda Drew can be reached at
adrew@theorion.com

© Copyright 2007 The Orion