



CAMPAIGN MESSAGING GUIDE

This guide is a tool to help ensure that all messages *No Soldier Left Behind* sends reinforce the same narrative.

I. NARRATIVE FRAMES

The Bush administration's narrative frame plays on the public's fears by using the shadowy terrorist "bad guy" to tie a worst-case scenario in Iraq to withdrawal.

"Terrorists who hate freedom fight for control of Iraq — and the whole world — and will win if we withdraw our troops from Iraq. We can't allow this and must stay the course until our mission is accomplished."

Peace Action West's narrative frame is meant to appeal to the widest possible audience, including those in the "persuadable middle." We do this by appealing to broad values of "doing what works," a belief in a positive role for the US, and a concern for the troops. Our narrative (respectfully) undermines Bush's credibility, uses pragmatic arguments that show the current strategy doesn't work, and evokes the American "can do" spirit by suggesting an alternative course. Our talking points are forward-looking, focusing more on our choices ahead than on past mistakes.

"President Bush, blind to his failures in Iraq, insists we 'stay the course,' putting more soldiers' lives at risk while America's standing in the world deteriorates, and our resources are wasted on a strategy we know doesn't work. We can't let this continue. By withdrawing all our troops and deploying in its place a comprehensive strategy, we can make real progress towards stability in Iraq and the region."

II. TALKING POINTS THAT REINFORCE OUR NARRATIVE

A. We need to change course in Iraq.

The human cost of continuing the occupation

1. *Soldiers and their families are suffering great losses for Bush's failed strategy.* More than 4000 US soldiers have died since March 2003, when the US invaded Iraq, an average of roughly 22 soldiers per month. Meanwhile, Iraq and Afghanistan veteran suicides have actually exceeded the number of combat deaths, while veterans services fail to meet veterans' needs.¹
2. *The cost to Iraqis is immeasurable.* We have a moral responsibility to change course quickly, and begin stabilizing Iraq's government and addressing Iraq's humanitarian crisis.
 - a. Estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths vary widely, from² 30,000 to 800,000. One 2006 study overseen by Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health put the number at 655,000.³

¹ ["The Truth About Veteran Suicides,"](#) *Foreign Policy in Focus*, May 9, 2008.

² ["Iraqi Civilian Deaths Estimates Congressional Research Service Reports"](#) Federation of American Scientists, March 13, 2008.

- b. According to a May 2007 UN Briefing on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, “94 Iraqi civilians died violently every day throughout 2006 with a similar number wounded.”⁴
- c. According to a May 2007 UN Briefing on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, “2 million Iraqis are now estimated to have fled the country; and nearly 1.9 million are estimated to be internally displaced persons (IDPs), of which about 800,000 individuals have been uprooted since February 2006. This means that almost one in six Iraqis is now living in displacement. An estimated 4 million are also considered to be acutely food insecure and entirely dependent on a fledgling public distribution system (PDS) for their basic nutritional requirements, while another 8 million are under threat of becoming food insecure should the ration system completely collapse. Escalating violence and human rights violations, compounded by a diminishing ability to meet basic needs and to absorb any further shocks, are pushing already vulnerable Iraqis into a crisis of survival.”⁵
- d. Beyond the numbers is the impact of the war on Iraqis’ daily lives. One place to learn about this is on “Alive in Baghdad,” a blog: <http://aliveinbaghdad.org/>.

Iraq’s problems cannot be solved with a military strategy.

1. *A five-year track record of failure.* The tremendous sacrifices in blood and treasure made by the US and Iraq have not resulted in the political stability promised by the Bush administration. Five years into the war, it is well past the time to examine another strategy that will meet US and Iraqi security, economic and political needs.
2. *America’s dwindling political capital.* The US occupation of Iraq continues to severely damage America’s credibility in the region, undermining US legitimacy in Iraq’s peace process and weakening our position in negotiating with Iraq’s neighbors. In Iraq and the Middle East, Abu Ghraib is far from forgotten. The continuing impunity of security contractors like Blackwater only adds to a sense of lawlessness. The civilian death toll mounts to a number no one can even agree on, but could be in the hundreds of thousands.⁶ Iraq’s neighbors see the millions of refugees that flood their borders as further evidence of a failing strategy.
3. *The occupation is not sustainable.*
 - a. Contrary to the assertions of proponents of the “surge” strategy, the influx of troops has not resulted in meeting the goal of political reconciliation. The upsurge in violence at the end of March 2008 indicates the tenuousness of the limited progress.
 - b. The limited gains seen under the surge are largely the product of leaders like Muqtada al-Sadr calling off violence and the US’s dubious “Sunni Awakening” plan of paying Sunni groups to refrain from engaging in violence. This strategy is not sustainable, nor does it point in a direction of achieving milestones of political progress.

³ [“Study Claims Iraq’s ‘Excess’ Death Toll Has Reached 655,000.”](#) By David Brown, *Washington Post*, Wednesday, October 11, 2006

⁴ [“UN Humanitarian Briefing on the Crisis in Iraq,”](#) May 2, 2007.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ [“Iraqi Civilian Deaths Estimates Congressional Research Service Reports”](#) Federation of American Scientists, March 13, 2008.

- c. In a piece titled “The Real Iraq We Knew,” 12 former Army captains who served in Iraq said that, based on their experience, the only way to succeed in Iraq would be to reinstate the draft. Barring that, they said the best option would be to leave Iraq immediately.
4. *Americans overwhelmingly support withdrawal.* According to a poll conducted by Public Agenda in Spring 2008, “two-thirds of Americans want to withdraw from Iraq.” Also, “seven in ten believe we need to emphasize diplomatic and economic efforts rather than military to fight terror.”⁷

With smart investments of resources the US could make real progress towards stability. We need to stop wasting money and time on the failing and mismanaged occupation.

1. Inspectors for a federal oversight agency recently revealed that seven of eight Iraq reconstruction projects declared “successes” by the US government are no longer functional.
2. While much of Iraq still lacks clean water and reliable electricity, the Pentagon plans to spend \$5 billion on the construction of luxurious accommodations around the US embassy that include luxury hotels and a shopping center⁸, and plans are underway to build an amusement park.⁹ This is in addition to the already enormous military bases housing Pizza Huts and movie theaters.¹⁰
3. While America’s economy slides into crisis, we are spending \$12.3 billion¹¹ per month on a failing strategy in Iraq.

B. A comprehensive and responsible plan for Iraq should start with complete withdrawal, and include a diplomatic surge and plan to address Iraq’s humanitarian crisis.

Why a binding timeline for complete withdrawal is so important

1. *To set the stage for diplomacy.* The facts on the ground demonstrate that our ability to play a constructive role in Iraq would increase if we set a clear timeline for withdrawal and begin bringing all our troops and private security contractors home immediately. We would gain crucial diplomatic leverage with most of the factions involved in Iraq’s civil strife. Announcing a full withdrawal and beginning it immediately would also instantly increase our diplomatic leverage to gain the economic and diplomatic support of regional and international actors, like Iran. In turn, that leverage could be used to encourage diverse Iraqi factions to come to the table for serious negotiation and reconciliation.
2. *Leave no soldiers (or private contractors) behind.* Many members of Congress and candidates who support a timeline for withdrawal still leave open the possibility of leaving behind tens of thousands of troops in Iraq indefinitely. Leaving behind a residual force beyond embassy protection would leave US troops and private contractors as targets for the insurgency and would do nothing to diminish the view of the US as foreign occupiers. A

⁷ “[Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index](#),” *Public Agenda*, Spring 2008.

⁸ “[Planners Dream of Five Star Hotel for Green Zone](#)” *Wired Blog Network*, May 5, 2008.

⁹ “[‘Disneyland’ comes to Baghdad with multi-million pound entertainment park](#),” *Times Online*, March, 24, 2008.

¹⁰ See both: “[Largest base in Iraq has small-town Feel](#),” *Washington Post*, and [Lynn’s Woolsey’s 1/17/07 OpEd](#) in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹¹ “[The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11](#),” *Congressional Research Service Report*, Open CRS, February 2008.

residual force would be unable to avoid being drawn into internal fighting while still stationed in Iraq.

3. *Free our resources for a smarter strategy.* Implementing a strategy of full military disengagement in the near term would free up US financial resources for diplomacy, reconstruction and reconciliation. At the same time it liberates the US government's attention so it can focus on harnessing the creativity and skill of the Departments of State, Commerce and Treasury as they help in Iraqi-led efforts to create real stability. If on the other hand we leave large numbers of troops behind, Iraqi insurgents as well as international terrorist groups will benefit from the perception that the occupation is continuing.
4. *Timeline = Accountability.* The Bush administration has avoided clearly defining success in Iraq, and has refused to commit to a timeline for withdrawal. President Bush has also been conducting secretive negotiations on a plan with the Iraqi government that would allow for an indefinite US military presence in Iraq. The deal would also give the US military immunity from the law, while giving them authority to arrest Iraqi citizens without having to consult Iraqi authorities.¹² We can't continue to give the administration free reign in defining the terms of the occupation, and the leeway to spin events, as they happen, to their advantage. When things go well, it's a reason to stay. When things go badly, it's a reason to stay.
5. *A timeline sends the right message.* Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Press Secretary Tony Snow and others have stated that the administration envisions a long-term presence in Iraq similar to the one in South Korea, where US troops have been stationed for more than 50 years. We need to send a clear message that the US does not intend to permanently occupy Iraq. The only way to do that is by adopting a binding timeline for withdrawal.
6. *We have a responsibility to respect Iraq's sovereignty.* In June 2008, a majority of Iraq's parliament signed a letter to Congress stating, "The majority of Iraqi representatives strongly reject any military-security, economic, commercial, agricultural, investment or political agreement with the United States that is not linked to clear mechanisms that obligate the occupying American military forces to fully withdraw from Iraq." The letter was part of an angry response to the Bush administration's secretive negotiations for a permanent occupation.¹³

Key Steps for a Sovereign and Stable Iraq

1. *A diplomatic surge, including regional diplomacy.* The US must redirect its resources from its failed military strategy towards a robust diplomatic initiative aimed at fostering reconciliation amongst Iraq's warring factions. A successful strategy toward the resolution of Iraq's civil war must include the diplomatic engagement of Iraq's neighbors, and rule out aggression against them. The US must reach out to Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria, to forge a regional peace process. Iran's importance in the region was underscored last spring when members of Iraq's Parliament sought Iran's help in negotiating a ceasefire with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army.¹⁴
2. *Rebuild Iraq's economy.* Iraqis are experiencing widespread unemployment and economic hardship. This provides fertile ground for sectarian militias to flourish. Unemployed youth

¹² "[Bush's Secret Plans for Permanent Occupation](#)," GroundswellOnline.org, June 9, 2008.

¹³ "[Iraq Lawmakers Want U.S. Forces Out as Part of Deal](#)," *New York Times*, June 4, 2008.

¹⁴ "[Iran helped prod al-Sadr cease-fire](#)" CNN.com, March 31, 2008.

are easy targets for recruitment to the cause. The radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who commands the powerful Mahdi Army, builds good will by providing basic social services the government is unable to match.¹⁵

3. *Rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.* Much of Iraq still does not have the same access to clean water and reliable electricity it had before the 2003 invasion. The US should redirect funds from outlandish and wasteful construction projects¹⁶ towards addressing these basic needs.
4. *Humanitarian assistance.* The US must live up to its moral obligation to the Iraq people by leading an international effort to fund projects that address Iraq's humanitarian crisis. For example, we should provide aid to the two million refugees who have fled Iraq, as well as the 1.9 million who are internally displaced.¹⁷
5. *Conditional international peacekeeping.* If the Iraqi people request international peacekeeping forces, the US should assist in coordinating this endeavor.
7. *Meet our moral responsibility.* According to a poll conducted by Public Agenda in Spring 2008, 56 percent of Americans believe we have a moral responsibility to Iraqis. However, there is a bipartisan push in Congress for the Iraqi people to start paying for everything from rebuilding infrastructure that the US destroyed to an unsustainable program of payoffs the US started to keep Sunni militia from attacking.¹⁸ Iraq's chances for stability will be much greater with international support, and the US should lead that effort. Making smarter investments into Iraq's stability through a comprehensive diplomatic, political and economic plan will in the long run will cost far less to Americans than an indefinite occupation.

C. No Soldier Left Behind – About the Campaign

1. *Building momentum for policy change.* While there have been obstacles to passing withdrawal legislation, Congress must continue acting on the will of the American public through votes to alter US policy in Iraq. The momentum of continued votes plays a critical role in sustaining the support of the American public and building a consensus for decisive action.
2. *Articulating a clear alternative to occupation.* A missing piece in the ongoing debate about Iraq is a clear vision of what a successful withdrawal and political solution would look like. The American public wants to know what alternatives to continued military action exist rather than simply withdrawal in isolation. We aim to push policymakers and candidates to articulate and promote a plan that includes regional diplomacy, economic and humanitarian aid, and international peacekeeping.
3. *Iraq can't wait.* Many policymakers want to delay working for progress on Iraq until after the elections. An average of 22 soldiers die every month we are in Iraq, and the figure for Iraqi civilian casualties is much higher. Policymakers may want to keep Iraq out of the picture until after the elections, but we won't let them.

¹⁵ ["Al-Sadr: A Complex Figure in the Iraqi Puzzle"](#) NPR, June 13, 2008.

¹⁶ ["Disneyland' comes to Baghdad with multi-million pound entertainment park,"](#) *The Times Online*, March, 24, 2008, and ["Planners Dream of Five Star Hotel for Green Zone"](#) Wired Blog Network, May 5, 2008.

¹⁷ ["UN Humanitarian Briefing on the Crisis in Iraq,"](#) May 2, 2007.

¹⁸ ["Would you mind paying for that bomb I just dropped on you?"](#) GroundswellOnline.org, May 2, 2008.

4. *Sending a message to policymakers.*

- a. *Get on the right side of the fence.* The 2006 Elections were a clear mandate to Congress to get our soldiers out of Iraq. While we made some progress, congressional leaders were ultimately unable to garner the votes to overcome the Bush administration's stonewalling. Too many policymakers remained on the fence, and some still support the war. We need to make it clear that politicians who support continuing the occupation of Iraq do so at great political cost. We also need to make it clear that candidates running for office improve their chances when they support a timeline for withdrawing all our troops from Iraq.
- b. *Grassroots work to be loud and clear.* The Iraq war promises to be a central issue in congressional and presidential elections, and support in the American public for a withdrawal of US troops remains high. Polls have shown that two thirds of Americans support withdrawal from Iraq. The polls also show that a majority of Americans feel a deep responsibility to meet our moral obligations to Iraqis.¹⁹ We are working to ensure that everywhere members of Congress and candidates turn, they are getting our message loud and clear from the very voters they need to court. We aim to make sure the men and women who represent us in DC understand that changing course in Iraq is their job #1.
- c. *A message to the president-elect.* It's critical to be vocal early and often throughout the general election on Iraq, to send a clear mandate to the next president that changing course in Iraq is America's top priority.

¹⁹["Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index,"](#) *Public Agenda*, Spring 2008.