

## Pensacola Patriots for Peace and the Iraq War

“The war in Iraq will soon belong to history, and your service belongs to the ages.” So spoke President Obama to troops at Fort Bragg, NC. After nearly nine years, despite reservations about not leaving some troops in Iraq to protect our “investment” and “gains,” most Americans are relieved that our men and women are returning, while we mourn the loss of those who won’t return, and those thousands of horrendously wounded veterans. (Few of us, however, will remember the 100,000 plus Iraqis, most civilians, who died in the war.)

In September, 2002, in response to the rattling of sabers by President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and their assistants, six months before the United States invaded Iraq with “shock and awe,” a group of concerned citizens formed under the banner of Pensacola Patriots for Peace. We held Friday noon vigils at the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Plaza to register our opposition to war with Iraq. Among our ranks were clergy, physicians, teachers, retired military, students, grandparents, and retirees. All of us knew that a war with Iraq would have irrevocable consequences, not only for Iraq but also for the United States. We couldn’t know, however, just how long the war would last, and how grave a price would be paid.

With the withdrawal of troops, a chapter of the Iraq War closes, but another begins, and it’s too early to draw conclusions about the outcome. We do know that, with the destruction of civil institutions and infrastructure; the exile of thousands of Iraqi professionals; no democratic traditions; and the on-going religious, political, and cultural divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, the goal of a stable Iraq will remain elusive, possibly for generations. One might very well ask, “For what?” The shallow answer that many use is that we got Saddam Hussein, that he was an evil man. How feeble that explanation rings.

I want to thank every member of Pensacola Patriots for Peace who, for over six years, until the nomination of President Obama, stood in silent protest every Friday while the war raged. After several years of horrific bloodshed, those third fingers raised by hostile passersby gradually changed to thumbs-up as they realized the futility and suspect morality of the war. We had no direct effect on ending the war, but even if people disagreed with us, everyone who saw us thought about the war, if just for a few moments, and we joined our voices with others in this country who opposed the war, each one of us moved by conscience to dissent.

The U.S. military chapter in Iraq may be closing, but it is still being written by the families of our deceased men and women, by the thousands of American wounded and their families, by Iraqi families who lost loved ones, and by all Americans who will continue to pay the price for the misplaced allocation of economic resources.

Patricia T. Edmisten  
Former Spokeswoman  
Pensacola Patriots for Peace