

Iraq

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN IRAQ DEFENCE AND VETERANS

The Australian Democrats strongly opposed Australia's involvement in starting the war in Iraq. We have long called for a timetable for the withdrawal of our troops from the conflict in Iraq.

The Democrats do not believe that our presence brings peace or stability to either Iraq or the wider Middle-East region. Australia's Government has been blind to the overwhelming evidence that a protracted conflict with no foreseeable end is seriously detrimental to regional and global stability.

From the beginning, the Australian Democrats urged the Government to stay out of a war with Iraq and focus on other non-military strategies to resolve tensions.

"It is a serious failure of leadership for the Howard Government to refuse to accept that this war has been a major error in judgement and to take immediate steps to review and revise our involvement in the conflict"

Senator Andrew Bartlett
Spokesperson on
Defence

Our Action Plan

- The Australian Democrats will maintain the pressure for a timetable for the withdrawal of our troops from Iraq to be developed and implemented as a matter of urgency.
- Economic and ongoing infrastructure assistance to be provided to the Iraqis as soon as possible.
- The situation in Iraq must be brought back fully within the framework of international law and the broader international community through the United Nations.

The Issues

No WMD, no legal basis

The Democrats knew that there was no basis for Australia to join the US invasion of Iraq. The pre-emptive war against Iraq was illegal and the rising human toll and continuing unrest shows that it was also ill-founded and unwise.

The Prime Minister misled the Australian people by saying that the rationale for war was that Iraq had Weapons of Mass Destruction. We know from a Parliamentary Inquiry that some Australian intelligence agencies expressed doubt about the existence of WMD in Iraq months before the US invaded Iraq. The Australian Government was selective in its use of intelligence and chose to follow the flawed and erroneous advice provided by the US.

As it was argued all along by many, there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and no immediate threat to Australia.

Mr Howard said the war was not about regime change but enforcing UN resolutions on WMD. Mr Howard played down the issue of WMD when it became evident that



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there was no proof that Iraq possessed WMD and began to talk up the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. He has made the reason for this war a moving target.

The Democrats knew that if the real aim of the war was not weapons of mass destruction but simply to remove Hussein's regime, then it was clearly illegal under international law.

The human cost

The Prime Minister has continued to ignore the shocking human cost of the Iraq war and extended occupation, just as he ignored the damage it has done to international co-operation and stability.

The trauma to the Iraqi survivors as well as our returning Defence personnel cannot be calculated. Neither can the damage done to the prospect of long-lasting stability in the entire region.

Parliament Must Consent

The Howard Government has been the first Government in our history to go to war without majority Parliamentary support. The PM put the issue to the Parliament only after the decision had been made. This saw the Senate vote against the decision to commit Australian troops to war in Iraq at almost the same time as the bombs began to fall on Baghdad.

The Democrats have introduced legislation to take the decision to commit troops to overseas conflict out of the hands of the Prime Minister and a subservient and secretive Cabinet, and place it with the Parliament, except in the need to take swift action in an emergency.