

Five years ago last week, the US military's "shock and awe" campaign lit up the Baghdad sky. Five years later, with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and nearly four thousand Americans dead, we should pause and reflect on just what has been gained and what has been lost. From the beginning, the march to war was paved with false assumptions and lies. Senior administration officials claimed repeatedly that Iraq was somehow responsible for the attacks of September 11, 2001. They claimed that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They manipulated the fear of the American people after 9/11 to further a war agenda that they had been planning years before that attack. The mainstream media was complicit in this war propaganda. Nearly ten years ago, long before 9/11, I requested the time in opposition to the fateful Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, where I then stated on the Floor of the House of Representatives, "I see this piece of legislation as essentially being a declaration of virtual war. It is giving the President tremendous powers to pursue war efforts against a sovereign Nation." Less than five years later we were invading Iraq. Five years into the invasion and occupation of Iraq, untold hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are dead; some two million Iraqis have fled the country as refugees; and the Iraqi Christian community – one of the oldest in the world – has been decimated more completely than even under the Ottoman occupation or the rule of Saddam Hussein. On the US side, nearly four thousand Americans have lost their lives fighting in Iraq and many thousands more are horribly wounded. Our own senior military officers warn that our military is nearly broken by the strain of the Iraq occupation. The Veterans Administration is overwhelmed by the volume of disability claims from Iraq war veterans. A study by Nobel Prize economist Joseph Stiglitz concludes that the cost of the war in Iraq could be at least \$3 trillion. The economic consequences of our enormous expenditure in Iraq are beginning to make themselves known as we fall into recession and possibly worse. Iraq war supporters claim that the "surge" of additional US troops into Iraq has been a resounding success. I am not so confident. Under the "surge" policy the United States military has trained and equipped with deadly weapons those Iraqi militia members against whom they were fighting just months ago. I fear by arming and equipping opposing militias we are just setting the stage for a more tragic and dangerous explosion of violence, possibly aimed at US troops in Iraq. There is no indication that the Iraqi government has made any political progress whatsoever. The sooner we withdraw the better. The invasion and continued US occupation has strengthened both Iran and Al-Qaeda in the region. Continuing down the road of a failed policy will only cost more money we do not have and more lives that should not be sacrificed. Interventionism has produced one disaster after another. It is time we return to a non-interventionist foreign policy that emphasizes peaceful trade and travel and no entangling alliances. We can begin by withdrawing from Iraq immediately.