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TRANSCRIPT – RUSH

(to ensure accuracy, compare transcript with audio– see below)

Antiwar Movement Debates Occupation in Brooklyn

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sponsored by Brooklyn Parents for Peace - <http://www.brooklynpeace.org/>



In order of speaking: Carolyn Eisenberg (moderator), Alex Ryabov, Anthony Arnove, and Erik Gustafson.
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Transcript of Presentations and Rebuttals (Q and A follows)

Eisenberg: Our first speaker is going to be Alex Ryabov who was born in the Ukraine and went to high school here in Brooklyn. He volunteered for the marines. He was in the Marine Corps artillery unit that went into Iraq on March 20 and was there until May. After coming back from Iraq together with others, Alex became a cofounder of a new and very important organization which is Iraq Veterans Against the War, and that's obviously a very brave, very controversial, and, I think, very important step that has been taken. Those of us who remember Vietnam know how long it took before veterans were willing to speak out, before you really had a veterans' movement. There were tens of thousands of Americans that were dead, at least a million people in Southeast Asia that were dead before we started to hear dissent from veterans. I think what Alex is working on is incredibly inspiring and courageous, and we're very glad to have him with us. The second speaker tonight is going to be Anthony Arnove, also a Brooklynite, a journalist, an author, an activist. I actually first met Anthony and his book, which I found extremely valuable, which he edited, which was "Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War," and Anthony didn't just edit that very important volume but was out there speaking about what was happening to Iraqis and the results of the sanctions. ... and he has a new book that he's doing with Howard Zinn, "Voices of a People's History of the United States." Anyway, we're very glad to have Anthony. He has done a lot of speaking. It's very exciting that we have him here tonight. Our third speaker is Erik Gustafson, who is the executive director of an organization called EPIC (Education for Peace in Iraq Center), founded in 1998. I should say that Erik was a veteran of Gulf War I and then became involved in Iraqi issues during the 90's, particularly active around the issue of the sanctions. I should also add really that he was a resource for Brooklyn Parents for Peace because, in the 90's, that was one of the things that we were very concerned about were the sanctions in Iraq. Erik has always been a person we could call up and get advice about what was

happening on the congressional level and what would be useful for us to do. EPIC as well was active in the lead-up to the war in opposing the war. Now I'll let Erik speak for himself, but I think that the position of EPIC on what the United States should do is somewhat different, and I'll let him talk for himself. In any case, we're really delighted that all three of you are here. Our format is going to be initial statements by the three, then we're going to give them a chance to respond to each other. I want to emphasize that part of why we're doing that is that we can all hear there positions in isolation, but part of why we did this evening in the way that we have is so that you could hear a clash of ideas and a real discussion. So we'll have initial statements, a short cross-exchange, a few announcements, and then we'll open it up to the floor. Our first speaker, I'm pleased to introduce, is Alex Ryabov. *applause*

Ryabov: Thank you. As Rosa said, my name is Alex Ryabov. I am 22 years old, and I joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school. I was 17 years old. My reasons in a nutshell for joining were money for college, health benefits, you know, other great things that I'd learn from the Marine Corps: discipline and honor, things like that, and, also, I was somewhat naive at 17 years old. I was going to get a rifle. I was going to get to blow things up legitimately and get paid for it, so it seemed like a dream job. I went through boot camp, got my ?? Anchor, and became a marine. When I received this ?? anchor, my motivation was pretty high, but it steadily declined over my time in the Marine Corps. When I got to the fleet and I got to my unit, which was an artillery unit, I began to see what the real Marine Corps was about, which is including a lot of bureaucracy. They'll tell you to work smarter, not harder, and there will be, for example, a common sense, straightforward way to do something, and you'd be pretty much told to bend over backwards and jump through hoops to get it done. Nevertheless, I continued on. From June through December of 2002, we were in Japan for a scheduled deployment. Towards the end of 2002, word began circulating that we were going to war with Iraq, that there was a build-up going on. In the news, everyone was being told that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and Saddam was an imminent threat and all those things. Finally, in the beginning of January, 2003, we were told that, yes, we would be going to Iraq. Our commanding officer spoke to us briefly, and then himself and other officers went back inside. At this point, our First Sergeant, who was the senior enlisted man in our unit gathered us around and began to speak to us to prepare us for going to Iraq. He said, "in going over there, don't think you're going to be heroes. Don't think you're going over to Iraq to topple Saddam Hussein, find weapons of mass destruction, or to bring democracy to the Iraqi people." He said that you're going to Iraq for one reason and one reason alone, and that's oil. Now I'm being quite serious when I say this, and this man is a veteran of the first Persian Gulf War and has been in the Marine Corps 20+ years, so he knows what he is talking about. But he continued in saying that you're still going to go because, when you signed a contract . . . the guys to the left and right of you . . . so there is a method to this madness. And we began to prepare our unit for going to Iraq. This included packing up our vehicles, guns which are 155mm Howitzers and the rest of our gear. I want to point out that this gear was not desert camouflage. It was green. So we had big, green trucks, big, green guns, and big, green camouflage netting that we actually did put up in the middle of the desert. And you don't have to be even affiliated with the military to know that that's not very smart. Our vehicles were completely unarmored. As far as body armor goes, we only had one ballistic plate instead of two. You're supposed to have one for your chest and one to protect your back. So we went over to Kuwait in the middle of February. We were in Kuwait for a little bit over a month, and I believe it was the morning of the 18th at about 2:30 Kuwait time we were woken up, told to get our things together, that we were moving out. As we began moving out, I know myself I wasn't really afraid of bullets or conventional munitions that Iraqis were going to use against us, but by that time there was the fear of chemical and biological weapons. The very first sites where we'd begin to attack Iraq were some at the Kuwaiti border because artillery can fire upwards of 15 miles away to really reach out and touch someone, except that, when you reach out and touch someone with artillery, then there's nothing left of them. Some things that really made an impact on me through my time in Iraq were, for one, seeing dead bodies for the first time. A lot of times, firefights would take place in the middle of a road or anywhere else and we'd pass through the area about 20 or 30 minutes later or sometimes sooner than that. So we passed through an area where a firefight had taken place, and there were these two dead Iraqi men lying in the middle of the road. One was lying sort of horizontal on top of the other one with his eyes wide open and glazed over. There was no doubt in my mind that he was dead. You could tell that the man's soul was no longer in his body. Another thing to mention is that, in artillery, we're firing upwards of 15 miles away, so you don't get to see what you're shooting at. As a result, you're somewhat desensitized from the killing. At one point, we were firing at an Iraqi artillery unit, and, about 20 or 30 minutes later, we were passing through the area where they had been. We were told through our two-way radios to look at the right

side of the road because that's where they'd be. I looked at the right side of the road, and I didn't see them. I expected to see maybe pieces of vehicles, stuff like that. I saw a piece of metal here, a piece of metal a little further down, and everything else looked like it had been put in a . . . blender, spun around, and poured back over the ground. It was completely indistinguishable. At the time I was in Iraq, I ended up blocking these things out because, had I tried to deal with these things, I would have been no good to myself and no good to the rest of the unit. And then the thing that really had the most impact on me was when we were moving up to Tikrit. The windshield in my vehicle along with several other vehicles had been blown out because of flying gunpowder charges weighing in excess of 48 pounds. And when we were moving up to Tikrit, it was about 4:00 in the morning. The vehicle in front of us the way artillery units work, the howitzer is stowed behind the truck, and it just so happens that the end of the barrel lines up directly with the windshield on the vehicle behind it. And the vehicle in front of us kicked up sand and dust and came to a stop as soon as it did this, and we were unable to see them; it was like a smokescreen put up in front of us. By the time my driver did see their vehicle, it was too late, and we ran directly into the howitzer. The howitzer (you can imagine is sort of a steel telephone pole) went through where the windshield used to be, brushed my right shoulder, and went out the back of the cab. Then we backed up, and the entire roof came off our vehicle and fell to the ground, and we were told to get the pieces off the ground and we had to keep going. When daylight hit, aside from smoking a lot of cigarettes in a short period of time, I looked at my right shoulder. As you've seen, the desert uniforms are a light beige color or something like that. This entire shoulder was totally pitch black from the carbon and gunpowder residue from the barrel, meaning that, had it been another six inches to my left, I wouldn't be here right now.

I came back from Iraq at the end of May, 2003. When we had been over there, when we began the initial push into Iraq, Iraqi people were on the sides of the road waving to us, sharing things like that, kids were asking for candy. I remember one negative thing we did see was an old Iraqi woman thumbing her nose at us, and that was pretty self-explanatory, and, in a way, I guess it was a foreshadow of things to come. When we did come back at the end of May and beginning of June, the sentiment of the Iraqi people began to shift: attacks being stepped up, IDs, things like that. CNN was on in the . . . hall, the cafeteria, so every single meal I was eating, I was seeing the body count continue to rise on both sides, and, after a while, something just snapped in me, and I realized that this war, with everything else taken aside, was a complete waste of human life on both sides, and I realized that I was against it. The problem was that, at this point, I still had about a year left in the Marine Corpse, so I had to bite my tongue because, if I had spoken my mind, if I had told my superiors and such how I felt, I would have very likely lost the benefits that I had almost died to keep.

I finally got out of the Marine Corps, came home in the middle of May, 2004. At that point, I knew I was against the war. I had all this anger and frustration but really no outlet for it. Michael Hoffman, who was in my unit, he had gotten out about a year before I did, and I knew he had began participating in peace movement rallies and things like that. He called me up in the beginning of June and said that there was a peace rally in Manhattan and maybe I should come. I showed up, and I expected to see people our age, you know, maybe early-to-mid twenties, things like that. The people I met were World War II veterans, Korean War veterans, Vietnam veterans, and veterans all the way up to the current conflict, including families who had lost sons, friends, and loved ones over there. I began seeing how extensive the peace movement really was. From there, at the end of July of 2004, we started Iraq Veterans Against the War in Faneuil Hall in Boston. Since then, we have been doing things ranging from phone interviews to speak-outs like this, forums, debates, things like that.

I'd like to get into our official position as far as Iraq Veterans Against the War, and that is that we are calling for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. The fact is that we should not have gone into Iraq to begin with, whereas, this is a topic unto itself, but the war in Afghanistan actually had some types of reasons for it (Bin Laden, al Qaeda were responsible for 9/11, they were in Afghanistan, so we needed to go to Afghanistan to get them.) In the case of Iraq, there was no clear line of reason. Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, which, I'd like to point out the U.S. had sold to them to begin with, and a lot of people conveniently forget this. Saddam was not an imminent threat because, even if he had those weapons of mass destruction, he did not have the means to get them over to the United States, and, as far as him being an evil dictator and committing all kinds of crimes against his people, there are plenty of evil dictators throughout the world, but that doesn't mean that we need to parade around like the world police

with a nightstick, and you can't go invading every single country that has human rights violations and things like that. And the thing is that, since the invasion of Iraq, there are estimates as to how many Iraqi civilians have been killed. The lower end of the estimates are somewhere from 10-14000, and the higher end, which I believe is a lot more accurate, is close to 100,000, and this is not including the Iraqi military, it is not including . . . foreign fighters or insurgents or anything like that, not to mention that upwards of 1500 U.S. troops have been killed, and that number (this is sort of going off on a tangent) is not accurate because suicides are not counted, vehicle accidents are not counted, older troops that have been in for a while as they're dying are actually retired, so they're not counted in a complete death toll. And, also, upwards of 10,000 U.S. troops have been injured, and that's ranging anywhere from losing feet or a toe to guys coming back with both arms missing, severe head trauma, things like that. And the dead and wounded are being brought back under the cover of night to hide the costs of this war from the American people. They're brought . . . through side exits and things like that long after the hours are closed. And, from the time that we came into Iraq, the Iraqi people, the ones that I saw, some of them were happy to see us because they thought we were bringing Iraq some good, some change, and, when we took down Saddam Hussein, the Baath Party, and the Iraqi military, I thought that our mission was finished, we'd wrap things up and come back home, but that wasn't the case. Now you have U.S. marines, the army, and other forces that are not trained as occupying forces. They're trained to go in, accomplish an objective, eliminate enemy forces, and that's it. Now these same forces are being used to police the Iraqi people. They're being used to try to control certain areas where military units instead of politicians and things like that are in control of an area, and they're charged with keeping order, making sure that there is no looting, and things like that go on. The Iraqi people, we've completely lost the trust of them. U.S. troops kicking down the doors of houses in the middle of the night because there's suspicion that the husband or they have another family member of a military agent there somehow involved with the insurgents, things like that. We have vehicles running checkpoints, this has happened countless times, that a vehicle will run a checkpoint, will get shot at, and the troops doing the shooting will check the vehicle only to realize that it was just civilians and found out that they had just killed an entire family and things like that.

Really, to kind of sum things up, the Iraqi people do not want us in their country, and, the way the word "insurgents" has been misused on the news, it makes it seem like it's a new term for bad guys and things like that when the real definition of insurgents is someone who is rebelling against established authority, especially the government, and that's exactly what the Iraqi people are doing. In terms of people saying that we cannot withdraw our troops because Iraq would fall into chaos, we are the ones causing the chaos right now. We are the ones that are responsible for a lot of the killings, whether intentional or unintentional, vehicles running checkpoints, bombing runs gone astray, things like that. And, also, a lot of times where you have insurgent attacks aimed at the U.S. military and you have a lot of Iraqi people that are getting caught in the crossfire. This is sort of misusing the term, but, in a way, becoming like collateral damage in their attempts to kill, maim, and destroy the U.S. military presence in the area. I'd just like to end by saying that we should call for the immediate withdrawal of our troops, and, really, our government has taken us into Iraq, and I believe that we should leave it up to them (supervised) to come up with a strategy to get out of Iraq. *applause*

Arno: We find ourselves in a remarkable situation today that I think we have to take stock of, which is that, despite all of the pro-war propaganda from the corporate media and despite what I would argue has been acquiescence of much of the left over the last year, a majority of people in the United States today believe that the consequences of the war, the invasion in Iraq were not worth it and are now opposing and questioning this war in a fundamental way and particularly are questioning the rising consequences of this war in their communities like the communities in Vermont that have passed a resolution about the National Guard troops that are being sent to this conflict, like the communities and military families and veterans who are speaking out against this war. The official justifications for the war have all been exposed as complete fallacies. No weapons of mass destruction that they found, no connections between Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi government and al Qaeda or the attacks of September 11. The occupation has not paid for itself as Paul Wolfowitz told us it would in the lead-up for the war saying "no, no, these estimates of how much it will cost and the troops it will take are all wrong," and U.S. soldiers, as Alex pointed out, have not been treated as liberators by the Iraqi people. Meanwhile, on the ground in Iraq today, there are more Iraqis in prison than at any point during the occupation. It's now up to around 8900 officially detained, including people who are still detained in the Abu Ghraib prison with one of the most extreme of torture and abuse took place but which by no means is unique. There are almost

certainly people who aren't being counted in those official numbers because the United States is holding people outside of any possible international inspection. Those numbers aren't contributing to that number. The British medical journal *The Lancet* has estimated in a very rigorous study that as many as 98,000 excess deaths occurred in Iraq as a consequence of the invasion in 2003. That's not counting people who have been killed by military occupation, people who were killed, for example, in the siege of Falluja. Electricity in Iraq remains at below levels even that they were under the severe sanctions that the country was subjected to under Saddam Hussein. Eight billion dollars of money that was supposedly sent to Iraq for reconstruction efforts has gone completely missing and is totally unaccounted for. Unemployment, internal displacement, lack of access to safe drinking water, all of these problems continue to profoundly plague the people of Iraq. And, as Alex pointed out, people continue to be humiliated and killed and abused in the house-to-house searches which are going on still with the participation of U.S. soldiers, although sometimes accompanied by local proxies. Iraqis are killed routinely with complete impunity at checkpoints in these raids, in these attacks, and we've seen in example after example that, when evidence of abuse emerges, certainly none of the officials are held responsible. None of the people overseeing the policies that allowed the torture in Abu Ghraib to take place, none of the people who set the framework for the rules of engagement in Iraq are being held accountable. But, also, more and more, we see examples of soldiers directly involved in the abuse and in killings being let off. Just a few weeks ago, another example of that.

And, yet, many of the people who spoke out against this invasion, marched on February 15, who opposed sanctions for years before that now are suggesting that U.S. troops should stay in Iraq for the benefit of the Iraqi people, that the people who have been carrying out these abuses, these crimes, and have been involved in torture and killing, and, before that, in sanctions on Iraq, that the U.S. government, the military troops sent into Iraq should stay for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Thus, we confront a strange situation of the anti-war movement mobilizing against the war and then supporting an occupation that is a direct result of that war. I think it's an incoherent condition and one that we have to absolutely reject. Not having found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which was the first big lie of this invasion, the Bush administration has come up with a new big lie, and that is that Donald Rusted, George Bush, Condoleezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz are bringing democracy to the Iraqi people. But democracy has absolutely nothing to do with why the United States is in Iraq. And, in fact, the United States has no interest in seeing democracy in Iraq. The Bush administration invaded Iraq in 2003 for reasons of straight power politics having to do with the U.S. desire to control Middle Eastern energy resources. Iraq has the world's second largest oil reserves. It sits in a region with 2/3 of the world's oil reserves, and it has been an essential axiom of U.S. foreign policy for decades that the U.S. will control those resources, not so that it can import all that oil from the Middle East into the United States but so that it can control oil as a weapon of political power, that it can use oil as a weapon against the military and economic competitors who increasingly dependent on those same energy resources from the Middle East. So, for example, Europe, Japan, China, India import more of their energy resources from that region, and we have countries like China and India that are rapidly growing, that need to import more oil and are looking to the Middle East for their energy resources, and the U.S. wants to maintain its control over the Middle Eastern energy resources as a leverage against any potential economic or military rival in the future. If you look at the national security strategy document of the United States, which was released in September of 2002, it lays this out very clearly, that the U.S. wants to preserve the enormous gap that exists between itself and its potential military competitors as well as the enormous gap between itself and any other potential so-called peer competitor economically in the global state, and the U.S. saw an opportunity in going into Iraq to extend its regional hegemony and thereby extend its global hegemony on the world stage. The hope of the United States in invading Iraq was to install a more favorable regime, one that would allow it to have military bases in Iraq, and it also hoped by going into Iraq to have a staging ground for other intervention in the region, including military intervention and, of course, extending the doctrine of regime change wherever possible to other regimes that threaten U.S. interests that were destabilizing factors in the region, particularly Syria and Iran. We now know that the U.S. is establishing bases hoping that they will become permanent bases in Iraq. The U.S. has the largest embassy that it has in the world today in Baghdad. And this has nothing to do with democracy. It's important to remind ourselves of the history of U.S. intervention in the Middle East, how the U.S. has consistently backed undemocratic regimes, whether Islamist or not, as long as those regimes ensured stability for the region and how the United States has consistently undermined any popular, democratic, nationalist, communist, socialist, secular movement that might challenge the status quo in the region. Of course, this was illustrated with the support for the overthrow of Mossadeq in Iran in 1953,

and then, of course, the support for the brutal regime of the Shah in Iran that followed. It's also the reason the United States for years was allied to Saddam Hussein: armed him, trained him, providing him strategic and military intelligence, and stood by the Iraqi government during the worst of its crimes against the Kurds, against the Iraqi people, against the Iranians against whom Saddam used chemical weapons. All of those things occurred with the patronage and support of the United States, and then those very crimes were then trotted out in 1991 and again in 2003 to justify military intervention by the United States. The U.S. opposes genuine democracy in the Middle East for a few very simple reasons, one of which is that, if the ordinary people of the region had a say in really determining things, they might use the profits from the oil resources of that region for social development and for human need rather than those resources and the profits from them going to the major multinational oil companies based in the United States and the west. That's why, if you look at what the United States did in Iraq, it established transitional administrative law and passed more than a hundred resolutions that will outlive the occupation, imposing neo-liberal measures, imposing austerity measures on Iraq that will be binding on whatever government comes to power. These involve opening every aspect of Iraq's economy other than oil to 100% foreign ownership, they retain the anti-worker laws that were set up under the regime of Saddam Hussein, and they lower taxes on the rich and on corporations in Iraq to standards that would only be dreamed of by the most greedy corporations in the United States. And they have ensured that, while Iraqi oil will not be turned over to 100% foreign ownership, it will de facto be controlled by private companies and dominated by western oil giants. Even the New York Times ran a column by Jeff Madrick, a mainstream economist, who said that the consequences of these policies would be, as he put it, "widespread cruelty." This is what he wrote: "By almost any mainstream economist's standard, the plan is extreme, in fact, stunning. It would immediately make Iraq one of the most open trade and capital flows in the world and would put it among the lowest taxed in the world, rich or poor. .. The new plan reduces the top personal and corporate tax rate to only 15 percent. It reduces tariffs on imports to 5 percent, and it abolishes almost all restrictions on foreign investment. It would allow a handful of foreign banks to take over the domestic banking system." This is about neo-liberalism, and it's about U.S. control: economic control and political control, not about helping the Iraqi people. And it's not just anti-war activists in the United States or abroad who are coming to these conclusions. As Alex just eloquently pointed out, soldiers who are being sent to Iraq, reservists who are being called up for duty see through these lies. As one member of the Texas Army National Guard said on March 15 on Democracy Now, "I believe it's an unjust war on our part. I do not believe this government intends to spread democracy in the Middle East. It's not in the interests of their security or our security. I believe it's all about oil and profits." And another soldier said this on the same show on March 15: "When I first went to Iraq, I actually believed what the government was saying, that we were searching for weapons of mass destruction, we were making the country safe for democracy, and things like that. But, when we got there, I quickly found another story. I quickly found that Iraqis didn't want us there. If the soldiers has come into our country and had invaded us and had come into our homes, I would have fought back, too. I was seeing how the war felt from a lot of the Iraqis' point of view." Soldiers and their families and veterans are speaking out against this war. It's a vital part of the anti-war movement, and it takes a lot of courage, and it's something that we absolutely have to support.

The final argument that I want to address is the idea that the United States has an obligation to the Iraqi people and therefore has to stay to clean up the mess that it created and bring stability to Iraq. I think it should be clear by now that, rather than bringing stability, the U.S. occupation is the source of instability and the source of ongoing suffering and violence. Washington isn't preventing civil war from breaking out. In fact, it is actually increasing factionalism and infighting among various groups in Iraq to serve its own interests. We have to do everything we can to force the United States out of Iraq so that the Iraqi people can determine their own future. The U.S. has no business lecturing people around the world about democracy. Given the lack of democracy here at home and given the history of U.S. attempts to "impose democracy around the world." Does the United States have an obligation to the Iraqi people? Absolutely, and, if we lived in a just world, when the U.S. was forced out of Iraq, it would be forced to pay reparations to the Iraqi people for the years during which it supported Saddam Hussein, for the years of sanctions, and for the crimes of this occupation. It should also be forced to pay reparations to the soldiers and their families and communities that are being torn apart by this war.

And I'll just end with something that Mark Twain said when he was observing the imposition of Democracy in the Philippines, which involved the massacre of thousands upon thousands of Pilipino people. He said, "I am opposed to

the eagle putting its talons on any other land." I think he was absolutely right, and, like Mark Twain did in his day, I think we need a new anti-imperialist league today to oppose the U.S. putting its talons on any other land, and we have to start right now by having the U.S. out of Iraq. *applause*

Gustafson: Before I get started, and, briefly, I'm Erik Gustafson, the director of the Education for Peace in Iraq Center, an organization that focuses on improving humanitarian conditions, defending the human rights of the Iraqi people, and bringing about democratic change in Iraq, and we've actually been, in fact, around since 1998, and our message has never changed over those years. I want to pass around sign-up sheets. I've got some amazing people in the office that spend week after week compiling the best news coverage in dispatches that we send out by email, and we're one of those organizations that only sends out maybe one email per month, but it's an email that you definitely always want to get, so I want to pass those around. I also should mention that, while the organization EPIC's board of directors and myself do have a clear position, we do not support immediate withdrawal, however, we also do not believe the U.S. can stay in Iraq. Not all of our subscribers agree with that position, and there's often lively discussion, so those of you that are actually subscribed to those discussions already, you know that our Readers Write section is one of the more interesting discussions.

Normally, I stay hold up in my office in Washington. I do that because I feel like the change that has to happen right now is me and so many others both inside the government believe it or not and also outside the government with the different non-governmental organizations really trying to bring about direct policy change. There are policy battles. There are unbelievable policy battles going on in Washington right now, and there are huge opportunities as well. So that's been a lot of my focus, and it's really pulled me away from the grassroots side of things. However, the grassroots end of things is absolutely crucial as well, and I absolutely commend Alex and Anthony and Carolyn, Brooklyn Parents for Peace, it was amazing actually getting her phone calls in the lead-up to the invasion. I see a few familiar faces in the crowd. There's mass rallies. We can't forget that. It was by far, I think, the strongest, broadest anti-war effort that this country has seen since the latter years of the Vietnam War, and I think it was incredibly diverse in many ways. You had organizations that represented the radical left. You had organizations named Patriots for Peace trying to show that it's also patriotic to oppose the rush to war. It was an absolutely incredible time. The churches have never been more united against the war. NGO's, civil society groups have never been more united against the war, and we can't forget that.

But here's the challenge, and this is where we're at today, which is different. A lot of the effort to try to prevent the war, the debate, pro-war, anti-war, in the lead-up to the war, were more than appropriate and can be forgotten in terms of our own health as a democracy, but, at this point, this podium right here is the war. You can support it or you can oppose it, but it's still going to sit here. The key difference between what's happening in Iraq and what we saw in Vietnam is that, in the case of Vietnam, we clearly knew that, once the United States left Vietnam, the war would end, and that's indeed what happened. We also clearly understood who would take over, who would be in charge when we left, and that indeed happened as well. In the case of Iraq, we don't know, and, just as I saw the issue of Iraq highly politicized during the years of sanctions, I see it continue to be highly politicized to this day, and I see it politicized by everyone whether it's partisan politics inside the beltway or it's the discussions that I see when I am among the lecture circuit. I'll give you one example of how it gets politicized. You talk with the President, or the Whitehouse communications staff, and how are they going to characterize what's happening in Iraq? How do they characterize the insurgency? Anti-Iraq forces, right? Or terrorism. You talk with a number of close friends of mine who are very active in doing incredible anti-war work right now. I'll talk with them and ask them what's going on in Iraq, and they talk about the violence as though it's only a resistance. All the violence is coming from a resistance. It shows you how politicized it gets. I want to be really clear. There is a mix of factors and sources of violence in Iraq right now. U.S. forces is only one source of violence. In terms of a resistance, there is a resistance. It's because of the incredible colossal failures of this administration in not adequately preparing for the aftermath. The decision to invade Iraq in the first place but failing to address the aftermath, allowing the chaos to go month after month after month, I mean, I had Iraqi friends say to me, some of my older Iraqi friends who had lived through the decades of coups in the 1950's or the 1960's, and they said that they couldn't understand. I mean, don't the Americans know how to run a proper military coup? You talk with a regime. You capture the air waves. You tell everyone that there's an immediate curfew, go back

home, and clear the streets. It's about trying to establish order as quickly as possible. You say "show up to your jobs" the following morning, and it's about capture, capturing the top of a regime and trying to maintain the order. That's not what we saw, and, very quickly, a lot of Iraqis began to question our intentions for very good reasons. If we were still on the same original script that I believe the neo-cons, Paul Wolfowitz, Paul Bremer, and others had, Paul Bremer would still be in Baghdad right now, Iraq's oil sector would be in the process of being privatized, there would have not been elections, and we would be going down the road of seeing Iraq becoming the next Vietnam. However, the neocon dream ran up against a huge barrier, and it's called reality, and it's the obstacles that the Iraqis themselves--the Iraqi leadership as well as the resistance--created for them. It was because of that original script that we saw a resistance. It's not just the anti-Iraq forces. We are seeing a resistance concerned about U.S. intentions. Some of that is changing, and I would argue that what's crucial about the resistance is bringing as many of those that are part of the resistance into the political process.

The second factor and source of a lot of the violence we're seeing is an insurgency. We're talking about an organized effort to use violence to overthrow a constituted government, in this case a transition government. We are talking about an effort to prevent any change in the political order. This includes a lot of those that were formerly part of the regime, and, again, part of this is fueled by huge failures on the part of the Bush administration. Disbanding Iraq's national army, not a really smart idea. Hundreds of thousands of men out on the streets with guns. The purging of civil servants, we're talking somewhere in the neighborhood of 30,000 at least civil servants who were members of the Baath Party. They had to join the party to be able to protect their families, to advance in their careers. They also were turned out, many of them summarily. That really fueled an insurgency because, if people in certain provinces like Ninawa Province, where we saw a very small voter turn-out, about 12 or 19% or Anbar Province (voter turnout about 2%), we're talking about provinces that don't feel like they have a stake in Iraq's future, and, as a result, people would tend to resort to violence to try to prevent the change that they fear might be coming.

The third element, and this we saw starting in August, 2003 and getting worse and worse. I was on my honeymoon in Nova Scotia when I got word of the terrorist attack of the UN headquarters. In many ways, I've talked with UN officials, and, to this day, it's as though I walked into the State Department under the Clinton administration shortly after the Black Hawk Down incident. My wife is in Rwanda right now, and we are about to see the anniversary of the genocide that took place there. The inability of the Clinton administration and the State Department to respond to a clear genocide is connected to what had occurred in Somalia and a complete resistance on the part of Washington, D.C. to put any Americans at similar risk to be able to prevent the genocide in Rwanda. That is a grave injustice that we cannot allow again. The terrorism that we saw with the attack on the U.N. and has continued. Over 170 were killed during the Assura festivals targeting Shiite pilgrims a couple years ago. This past year, the most recent Assura festival, another 70 were killed. The targeting of civilians in Hillah, we see it over and over again, and the terrorism in many cases is getting worse.

So those are the three factors. Those are the three sources of violence, and that is what we leave the Iraqi people to if we leave before the transitional government, the Iraqi people, have the sufficient means to be able to provide for their own security, and that's why I do not support an immediate withdrawal. However, there has to be a move towards withdrawal, and I strongly argue that the most responsible way out of Iraq is through capacity building, and capacity building doesn't mean the United States goes with our people and builds institutions. No, it's about providing the Iraqis with the assistance that they need to build their institutions. I want to briefly touch on EPIC's peace plan because there's four goals that we need to start seeing progress on, and we need to start seeing it fairly fast.

The first goal is the protection of civilians and human rights. Abu Ghraib, awful failure. We're still seeing abuses of human rights both at the hands of Americans I believe but also at the hands of Iraq's transitional government. That can't happen.

We need to see a growing of Iraq's institutional capacity for security, the rule of law, and the prevention of corruption. Corruption is a serious issue. It's a legacy of Saddam's regime. It's also the product of the past two years of chaos. The 8.8 billion dollars that can't be fully accounted for was because the entire banking system crashed in Iraq. Ministries

didn't have adequate records in terms of payroll because of the looting and destruction that happened. Money was being delivered. Cash bundles of money, millions of dollars were being delivered to ministries to be able to maintain payroll and try to get things restarted, and there was insufficient accountability when those billions of dollars were being dispersed. And, by the way, that wasn't our money. That was Iraq's own oil revenue.

Third, Iraqi-lead reconstruction and job creation is a huge issue. During the great depression, our own unemployment here went beyond 25%, and it was seen as destabilizing, as a national security threat. We had wrote the WPA and other efforts to be able to put Americans back to work. It's the same case in Iraq. We're seeing unemployment rates of 30% in some of the provinces among employable men, and they become recruits in terms of the insurgency.

And then, finally, increased political inclusion and reconciliation.

Of course, whenever I talk policy, I feel like I'm putting people to sleep, so I'll get back on other messages, but I want to be very clear about this. We are seeing some progress, and a lot of the progress we're seeing is driven by Iraqi politics. But there's also some issues of concern. In terms of progress, 64 city clerics and scholars issuing a fatwa encouraging Sunni Arabs to join and cooperate with Iraq's emerging security forces, that's progress. The announcement today with the formation of a transitional government, we're a step closer. We're not quite there. Transitional, administrative law that the U.S. advised in at times a heavy-handed way I think is somewhat of a straight jacket. The more that Iraq takes steps away from the legacy of Paul Bremer, whether it's the elections with 8 million Iraqis turning out to vote or the formation of a transitional government, and then also the writing of their own constitution that they determined themselves, and direct elections, every single one of those steps away from U.S. control, and, also, coupled with capacity building, the kind of assistance Iraqis really need, and there are billions of dollars that have yet to be spent, by the way, that has already been allocated by congress. The more that's done, the more we create conditions that allow for a responsible withdrawal. Thanks. *applause*

Eisenberg: ?? Thank you, everybody. What we said we'd do here is before opening this up to the floor is to give the panelists an opportunity to respond to each other, and I think that the last set of remarks, the issues were sort of pretty sharply drawn, I think. So what we've said is that we'll give each panelist up to five minutes, and the order there will be Alex going first, and then Erik, and then Anthony. So Alex, would you like to respond?

Ryabov: Thank you. Erik mentioned the establishment of the Iraqi security forces. Now the last time I checked the number on those, they were numbering up to 14,000. I would just like to jump real quick to the fact that there are roughly 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq right now controlling a population of about 25 million. We're being told that, as soon as the Iraqi security forces are up to par, they'll be able to take over for the U.S. troops. At this rate, it doesn't seem like they'll be able to do that any time soon. The fact is that we've just reached past the two-year mark since the nation began, and the U.S. has yet to establish and maintain security for the Iraqi people. There are routine kidnappings of wounded children. Women are being sold into slavery, sold into prostitution in other countries, held for ransom, executed, things like that. Anthony mentioned that basic services like electricity, water, health care, and education have not been restored. Also, as far as the global economy, Iraqis are not able to go out like you would to a store and be able to purchase things that they need for every-day groceries, have clean drinking water, stuff like that. And, as far as the elections go, the elections in Iraq, there can be parallels run from the 1967 elections in Vietnam, and the New York Times actually printed during that election how, after this election, that things were looking up, that it'll lead to a more stable government in Vietnam, and everyone knows how that turned out. And I very strongly believe that these elections, even though to some Iraqi people they may be yet another sign for hope, I believe that these elections in the end will not make much of a difference in terms of re-stabilizing Iraq and putting into power a feasible government. And, also, as far as the other problems that the U.S. is facing in Iraq, the fact is that a lot of U.S. troops do not completely understand the culture and do not completely understand the people, and that is where a lot of misunderstandings and unintentional killings come from. So, beyond that, and this is not even saying that the war should not have taken place to begin with, but, if, after two years, the United States and the Bush administration have not been able to stabilize the government of Iraq, and, since the presence of U.S. troops is the main problem over there,

it would seem common sense; it would seem that the only feasible solution is to remove the U.S. troops from the equation and then move on. *applause*

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Eisenberg: ??: If I could, there is always a grave question as to whether I can be a fair moderator or quiet moderator, but I'd actually like to sort of step in; Erik is going to speak in a moment, and, just to follow up . . . just in terms of a question. There's a lot of agreement among the three of you in terms of how the United States has performed so far in Iraq, so I think that the difference that I'm hearing from the speakers is that, whereas two of the speakers think that what's happened so far is kind of an indicator of what's likely to happen, that you said in the remarks you're posing the question of, well, all these things we haven't done very well, let's do them better now. And so one question I'd really like to ask you to respond to is that what makes you think that they will do anything better than they've done before? What possible reason is there to imagine that would happen?

Gustafson: Briefly because some of the folks who created this mess in the first place have gotten their big asses out of the way. Some of them have also been sent out to pasture. I know that it's been interpreted that Wolfowitz going to the World Bank is about the Bush administration trying to capture the bigger stage in terms of changing the world. No, it's about putting him out to pasture. The World Bank has far less to do with policy battles in Washington. He is now out of the policy battles in Washington, which is great. John Bolton, another problem, he's out of the policy battles in a large degree because he's now taking orders from the State Department. Possibly, if he's confirmed, he's our next ambassador to the UN. I'm not excited about either of those moves, but I am seeing a lot of the neocons that created this mess not being big players and being in almost full retreat in Washington. I am not going to go into the details of all of the ways that I see things changing in terms of U.S. policy because I would really put you all to sleep, but what I can share with you is some significant changes that we saw, and, actually, many of you helped bring about, many of your members of congress helped bring about. One of them is getting the Pentagon out of being in control of nation-building in Iraq, or, as the Republicans now like to call it, post-conflict reconstruction. That was a huge step in the right direction. I know a lot of the people at the State Department. I have a lot of confidence in them. I'm not talking about the senior officials necessarily, but I'm talking about the mid-level officials. These are folks that spent time in the non-governmental sector and know best practices. Some of them even spent time working with UN agencies. They know what's up in terms of how to create jobs, how to shift money, how to really empower and provide a lot of the assistance that Iraq has needed. We are seeing change. Part of what frustrates me, and this is especially frustrating for a lot of my Iraqi friends, as westerners or Americans, we take a lot for granted for the fact that there is an institution here. There are many overlaying institutions. There is more security. I am from Washington, D.C. That's one of the murder capitals of the United States. I live on a street right downtown, but even I feel relatively safe given all the institutions and the strength of those institutions. We can take that for granted. A lot of that was in disrepair. We can't forget the impact of sanctions as well as the tyranny of Saddam Hussein for decades. We can't ignore how much the looting and chaos set things back in Iraq, and that's what the Iraqi people are having to deal with right now, and so it's building to a point. A year ago, I was close to losing all hope, but now I feel a lot more optimistic about things, and it's optimism not grounded in any being naive that suddenly better intentions are prevailing at the Whitehouse, but it's that there is more opportunities for the people who know a little bit more about what needs to happen being able to make more of a difference.

A few quick words because I wanted to respond to Alex. Again, Iraq is not Vietnam. It makes sense that many of us look at Iraq through the lens of Vietnam because Vietnam is something that we know. It's part of our popular culture. But, looking at things like the elections in Vietnam, there were supposed to be elections far earlier in Vietnam, and the United States ended up derailing that process, correct? And then, when the elections were staged, they were staged. It wasn't the kind of free and fair and open elections because, had there been those kinds of elections, I think we would have seen possibly not those that sided with the Viet Cong winning but we would have seen, I think, different results than we actually saw. It was a huge challenge for the United States. My father did spend two tours in Vietnam. It's not something that I fully understand, but it's something that I grew up with in the legacy of that, including an uncle that died from an aggressive form of cancer that's believed to be linked to Agent Orange. But, looking at these elections, when the elections were held in 1967, about 20% of Vietnamese who were eligible to vote according to age, only about 20% voted. In the case of the elections in Iraq, 57% voted. There's a slight difference between those two

numbers. That's not to say that there weren't any problems with the elections, and, like I said, every step towards these direct elections is a step away from U.S. control and is a step towards Iraqi self-rule, so we need to continue to support that process. In terms of Iraq's security forces, Iraq's new army now has about 30,000 troops, and this is a much lower figure, by the way, than you'll hear from officials, but, based on what I've seen, it's about 30,000. Of those 30,000 troops in the new military, about 75% of the officers have served under the previous regime. This is not a bad thing because this means that we're talking about a lot of Sunni Arab officers, a lot of the officer class in Iraq came from the Mosul area, so it's important that we continue to work to bring in that leadership because what it's ultimately about is isolating the terrorism and ending it and then, with the insurgency and the resistance, finding ways to bring the resistance and the insurgency into the political process so that people resort to nonviolent means in terms of political contest rather than a continuation of violence possibly leading to something far, far worse. And, by the way, what we're seeing in Iraq isn't even close to how bad it could be. Right now, it's relatively unsafe and particularly unsafe in certain areas in four provinces. There are 18 provinces in Iraq, so, if you think things are bad now, again, it's that tendency, as Americans, we look at the specific cases of violence which are reported on, but we ignore the fact that there's a much broader context, and a lot of Iraqis see that and recognize that things could be a lot worse than they are now. *applause*

Arnov: Erik referred to Abu Ghraib as a failure. I think it's much more useful to understand Abu Ghraib as a logical extension of this occupation and to understand that, the moment the United States went in, we knew that there would be Abu Ghraib's, and, as long as the United States continues to be in Iraq, there will be more abuses and more crimes like it. It's a logical outcome of trying to impose your will on a people against their will, and I'm afraid that it sounds like the logic is your position, Erik, is to advise the U.S. on how to run its occupation more effectively. I think we should be having a conversation on how to end the occupation and let the Iraqi people determine their own future. I think that there is at heart a very elitist and racist argument which is very popular in the media right now which says that the Iraqi people cannot run their own society, that the Iraqi people don't understand democracy, that the Iraqi people can't build their own institutions. I think we have to fundamentally reject that idea. Iraq has a long history of in fact being a center of education, of organization, of research, and of social struggles often against the United States in which the Iraqi people proved repeatedly their ability to organize their own affairs far better than the United States has been able to run their affairs.

Vietnam has come up as an analogy. I think we have to recognize that there were a lot of people in the movement during the time of the Vietnam war who said we shouldn't be calling for immediate withdrawal of troops, and it was incumbent upon a number of antiwar forces to campaign and fight and organize people in the military to get the troops out, and I think it was absolutely the right decision, and I think it applies to our struggle today, and, at the end of the Vietnam War, knowing who would or would not take over the country isn't the issue because it's not our decision. I don't think people in Brooklyn should be deciding who the leadership of Iraq is. I don't think that's ours to say. *applause* And, yes, the script has changed. U.S. empire didn't get every single thing it wanted in Iraq, but the U.S. has adapted, and the elections were part of that adaptation, and we shouldn't confuse that for the changing of the fundamental reasons for why the United States went into Iraq and will continue to play a role in Iraq and the region which have nothing to do with human rights, democracy, capacity building. To talk about capacity building for the United States, which has systematically destroyed the infrastructure and capacity in Iraq, I just don't think is credible. The fundamental aims have not changed, and Paul Wolfowitz being shifted to the World Bank is part of a strategy of continuing to exercise U.S. control through multilateral institutions when they can but, of course, knowing that the military and unilateralism are there whenever they need to be called upon to impose U.S. will. We shouldn't confuse Paul Wolfowitz going around the world and saying he's listening to people with a shift in U.S. policy. It hasn't taken place. Malcolm X said, "If you stick a knife nine inches into my back and pull it out three inches, that is not progress," and that's right. We need the knife pulled out of Iraq *applause* and we need reparations. We need to talk about serious social changes in this country, but, right now, the immediate issue is getting the knife out of the back of the Iraqi people. *applause*

The Audience Comments and Asks Questions - The Panelists Respond

Q: I'd like to reduce it to Erik Gustafson. I know that Kofi Annan does not have another Sergio de Mello to send, but I really think it's important for the United Nations to play a crucial role in between us leaving and the attainment of a more viable, active government in Iraq, which we have no right to be there, but we also have no right to leave a terrible vacuum with all of the problems that we helped to create to make things worse.

Gustafson: I think you're absolutely right. The UN should play a greater role and has greater legitimacy in playing that kind of a role. Sergio de Mello played a crucial role in finding Iraqi leaders who were not ex-patriots to serve on the Iraqi Governing Council. Almost all of the non-ex-patriots that were the results of Sergio de Mello's efforts, and it's a tragic loss that he is no longer with us today. However, I remember very clearly, I mean, Dennis Kucinich, I know the congressional office, I know them very well, and I feel like they were presenting a non-option. I think it's important to differentiate between what's ideal and what's possible, and I felt that what they were presenting the ideal as though it's possible, and it's not possible at this time, and I think that that kind of goes directly to more of the change that needs to be happening. Finally, very quickly, one of the challenges I find in doing this kind of work right now is because the Bush administration never prepared the American public for what could happen with the aftermath, never prepared the American public with what would be required to leave a stable, more democratic Iraq behind. And so I am always on the receiving end because I'm a realist and I'm going to tell you exactly what I see that's being required, and, unfortunately, while the U.S. does not have any business being in Iraq, we do have a responsibility to the Iraqi people, so it's determining how to leave Iraq without leaving chaos and a power vacuum behind.

Eisenberg: What I'm going to do to have equity is that, if there's a question, I'm going to give at least one person on the opposite side a chance to respond for one minute.

Arnove: Just really quickly, I don't think we should be looking to replace one occupation with another form of occupation, and I don't think that the United States will allow the United Nations, and the U.S. is still the predominant power within the framework of the United Nations, will not allow the United Nations to set up anything that's in opposition to what U.S. interests are in Iraq and the region. Plus, we have to take into account the history of what the United Nations has done and has been in Iraq: the sanctions, the brutal sanctions that have claimed more than 500,000 lives in Iraq conservatively, just looking at the impact on children under 5 . . . I don't think that the U.N. is an independent, neutral body in this situation. If it is brought in, it will be brought in by the United States to shift the burden of occupation onto the United Nations. I don't think that is the solution that we're looking for.

Q: A quick question for Alex, then a question for either of the gentlemen flanking the table. To Alex, how did your fellow troops react when your commanding officer said it's not about being idealistic, it's about oil. And the question to either of the gentlemen, especially Anthony, I'm someone who was very much opposed to going in, but now I find myself sort of wobbling between your two positions, and one thing I would like clarified is how much is absolutely set in stone (You alluded to it, and then it wasn't challenged by Erik) as to corporate control, oil being controlled in a certain way, these are things that the American public were lead to believe were up for grabs once the Iraqi legislature got into gear, but you alluded to certain things that were actually set in stone, and I'm wondering if this should be challenged.

Ryabov: First of all, I have to correct real quick, the First Sergeant was the one who told us that we were going there for oil. The way he put it to us, he's not a pessimist. He's a realist. Our commanding officer would never have told us anything like that, to sort of give you an idea of the difference between officers and enlisted men. And, as far as the reactions of guys that had not been in the unit too long, not been in the Marine Corps too long were kind of taken back by this because these were obviously not the official reasons. This is not what was being told to them on the news. Guys like myself and Mike Hoffman had been there for a while just really shrugged . . . because we knew our

government took part in underhanded things, and it was just a matter of time before we were somehow included in them.

Gustafson: It's actually funny because, when I deployed with the 864th engineer battalion in the 91 war, we were told it's about oil as well. And I might add that the war that I took part in, the '91 Gulf War, was the second Gulf War. Don't forget that. That was the second Gulf War. The most recent war is the third major, serious war the Iraq and the Iraqi people have had over there recently. The so-called Bremer decrees, I don't pay a whole lot of attention to it because not all of them but I think a lot of the Bremer decrees are going to be undone because, now that there is an elected, transitional government, the transitional government will begin to examine a lot of those decrees, but there are going to be issues in Iraqi politics. There's corruption, and there's major challenges, so there still needs to be an effort to make sure that we don't see the U.S. continue to provide assistance and then completely ignore rampant corruption that might be happening and not just with U.S. dollars but with Iraqi oil revenue as well. \$20.9 billion has been allocated to Iraqi reconstruction. \$13.4 billion has been obligated. Only about \$5 billion has actually been spent, so you can see a lot of it still has to be spent, and these corporations, these big, prime contractors, they're having to depend on Iraqi subcontractors to be able to get the work done.

Arnov: The government that is being formed in Iraq is relying on the U.S. occupation for security, relying on the U.S. occupation for political support, is more accountable to the U.S. than it is to the Iraqi people. Now the situation is such that the United States is obviously intervening to determine outcomes favorable to its interests, which means access to oil, access to markets, neo-liberalism, creating an example in Iraq of the kind of regimes it wants in the region. It's not going to let go of those goals lightly. Does that mean that every single thing it wants it will get? No, because there will be resistance on the ground. There's a struggle in Iraq. But if we want to see opportunities for the Iraqi people to control their own resources and institutions, then the fundamental distorting fact is the occupation, and that's what we have to challenge.

Q: Erik, the election that was held was not the election Bush wanted to call. It was the election that Ali Sistani wanted to call, so we wound up doing what he wanted. And it seems to me that the U.S. forces now, Ali Sistani does not, they do not like us, but they do not want us to leave right now before they have the situation under control. So it seems to me the U.S. force in there right now is Ali Sistani's security force. And, furthermore, can you see any configuration of events in which a government in Iraq would ask us to leave, and do you see that we can do anything other than to leave if so requested?

Gustafson: These are excellent, excellent questions. One of the challenges with the elected, transitional government, as I alluded to earlier, is that not all of Iraq's 18 provinces are adequately represented. That's something that EPIC spoke about prior to the elections, and we continue to speak about it. So there needs to be more of an effort to include these other provinces, especially Ninawa Province because it's a very important province. It's got the city of Ninawa, one of the larger cities in Iraq, in that province. But the big difference here, it's not just Sistani, and you're correct, Grand Ayatollah Sistani has played a crucial role, and it's not that the other clerical establishment in Najaf and Karbala, the mass rallies, the mass demonstrations when we had hundreds of thousands turn out in the streets of Baghdad and Basra, that's part of why suddenly the time table changed, and it wasn't caucuses; we moved towards elections. But there was also pressure by Sistani and others for the transitional government to appoint a government, and we're seeing that accelerate. But, finally, last point, the transitional government was elected and is now, as a result, more accountable to Iraqis rather than Paul Bremer, who had appointed the previous government, and that's the big shift, and that's, I think, going to start to drive a lot of the change.

Ryabov: It's only been a couple months since the elections, and I guess it would be too early to tell if the newly-elected government is making any kind of difference, but, really, until all U.S. forces, all occupying forces are removed from Iraq, the government cannot actually begin to take hold and control the Iraqi people as far as reestablishing security and reestablishing stability. As long as U.S. troops are present, any kind of government can be put into place, and the violence and killing on both sides is still going to continue. The Iraqi people cannot respect occupation, and a good number of Iraqi people feel that the current government is somehow either controlled or somehow really kept in place

by the U.S. occupation. And, as long as these kinds of attitudes are maintained by the Iraqi people, the majority of the Iraqi people will not totally trust the government that's in place.

Gustafson(?): I agree with that.

Q: I think that all of the speakers and I think most of the people in the audience agree on one thing. That's how the American government should get out of Iraq as soon as possible without all hell breaking loose. I think there's agreement on that. However, there are two fundamental questions that maybe the panel has skirted. One fundamental question is how do we get the American government to do this, and, maybe more basic than that is what should the American government do to get out, and how do we get the American government to do this?

Arrove: We're going to have to compel the United States to get out over the immense interest it has in Iraq, which is going to involve, I think, civil disobedience, building a broad anti-war movement, involving soldiers and their families, having soldiers themselves organizing against it, and understanding the Iraqi people are going to continue to resist this occupation and have a legitimate right to resist this occupation, and so there will have to be, like there was in Vietnam, a fight to force the U.S. government to do something that it absolutely does not want to do, and, in terms of all hell breaking loose, we have to remember - every colonial, every imperial power has used that argument to justify its continued rule, its continued occupation. It's what the British said in India. It's what the Belgians and French said in Africa. I think we have to reject the logic that it's the U.S.'s role to preserve stability and prevent civil war in Iraq when, in fact, the United States has no history of having the interests of the Iraqi people in decision-making apparatus whatsoever.

Gustafson: We've seen an interesting shift in terms of the rhetoric, and the question is whether it will translate to actual practice with this administration, and that is from what we saw in the 1980's and previously, and this is part of the reason why the United States has real work cut out for it to be able to build trust in this region and elsewhere in the world. We shifted from backing Saddam Hussein and other tyrants and ignoring human rights abuses to now, at least in the rhetoric, supporting and promoting democratic change. We have yet to even begin to create all of the changes necessary for the United States and our policies to be a true force of good and to truly promote that kind of change. But, to be able to do it, you have to support the good guys in Washington, we have to build the institutions to create the change in the political culture, and we also not only need a lot of Americans to work on the outside, agitating, protesting, which I strongly support, but we also need to support those who are bringing the policy change from within.

Q: I had a question for Erik. How do you think that the elections are actually a step in bringing Iraqi independence? Because I know, like the vast majority of Iraqis that did vote didn't actually know who they were voting for. Only something like 7% of registered voters actually knew who the candidates were. Plus . . . the actual candidates who participate in the election, they had to be willing to work with the U.S. occupation. And, also, the U.S. specifically broke up the electorate along ethnic and sectarian lines. None of the individual religious or ethnic groups have any majority, and the U.S. is pretty explicitly trying to exacerbate the differences between them. And, also, if you remember in the run-up to the election, the U.S. ran a massive campaign against Falluja, and their whole logic for this was . . . to prepare the country for the elections, and it was absolutely devastating. Something like 65% of the buildings in Falluja were completely brought to the ground, and there's no running water, no electricity. At least tens of thousands of people are refugees now. I've actually heard reports that they were using napalm. There were actually journalists got in and saw some U.S. forces throwing dozens of bodies that were just really charred black into mass graves. This actually comes a good year and a half after Bush's whole stunt on the aircraft carrier saying: "the war is over. Now we're bringing stability." If we're using this kind of barbarity and instability, I don't see how this could actually possibly bring democracy. *applause*

Gustafson: I agree with your sentiments. A few quick things. One, a lot of it had to do with the time table, and it wasn't just the U.S., but the UN electoral division also played a role in terms of defining the process. We opposed it. EPIC opposed how it was done because the entire country of Iraq was treated as though it was one single voting district, and there's a number of other issues involved, and we believe that it should have been, in terms of the 18

provinces, making sure that all 18 provinces, regardless of voter turn-out, were proportionally represented in the new government. That hasn't happened. However, there are steps being made by a lot of the leadership to be able to reach out and draw in representatives. Like Nino, as I mentioned, Gazi Al-Yauar is actually a tribal leader from that area and is strongly supported from people in Mosul, not everybody but a number of people in Mosul. So there's opportunities, but I agree with you. I'm not here to defend the Bush administration. I'm here to talk about real changes that have happened and that we need to continue to promote and support in order to lead to an end to the occupation.

Ryabov: Now, considering the fact that Iraq continues to be a war zone, we can't expect to have an election like the type we have here where people calmly walk down to the polls, vote, and go about their business, but the fact that most candidates couldn't even appear on posters for fear of being killed, the fact that a lot of people voting didn't even know who they were voting for is a result of this. So this election did not go anywhere near I guess what an election should be, but to have this election, then to say that it's a step in the right direction is completely false. The point needs to be realized that this election was done, in my opinion, more as a show to the people of the U.S. and the rest of the world that we're doing something when really it's just an excuse to try to legitimize. . . the occupation.

Q: Here's a comment and a question for Erik. I find it astounding that, on the one hand, you are willing to lend your support to an occupation of 150,000 troops with howitzers, . . . bombers, and God knows what else, and, on the other hand, you condemn the Iraqi resistance as people resorting to violent means to change things. How do you square that circle? I'd like to hear how you can actually justify the violence of the world's largest super-power on one hand and, on the other hand, condemn people for standing up and fighting back against occupiers in their land? That's the first thing. The second is, you know, when you talk about Abu Ghraib being a failure, I think the only way in which Abu Ghraib was a failure for the administration was that the administration let the news leak out in the media. That's where they failed. *applause* Otherwise, in terms of what colonial occupation looks like, go back and look at any occupation in history. Look at Vietnam. Look at India. Look at Algeria. Look at Africa. Torture is standard. That's part of the standard operating procedure of colonial occupations. That's how you crush resistance. That's how you humiliate the people. That's how you establish the idea that these people are not human beings, and we, the white people of the world, are going to tell them how to run their society, and, unless you know who's going to run their society once we get out, we're not going to get out because who knows? Who knows what's going to happen? I think your argument here comes straight out of late 19th century classic imperialist white man's burden argument. *applause* And I find it absolutely astounding that you would say that and, at the same time, claim to be against the war. I don't see how you can square these circles.

Gustafson: Having served in the military, I know all about psychological operations. I know about establishing the in-group and the out-group, and so I guess I'm part of the out-group according to you. I'm willing to have a dialogue, and I think that this discussion is worth it. That's why I was willing to come here without getting what I normally get in terms of an honorarium. And I'll do it again because I think this discussion is crucial. In answer to your question, if you listen to what I had said earlier, I talked about how politicized Iraq continues to be--under sanctions and now under occupation--and how violence-- am I going to justify violence that targets civilians? No, whether it's coming from the United States or whether it's coming from terrorist groups or insurgents. Where they deliberately target civilians, I'm not going to defend them, and that is the vision, that is the dark vision that could occur if things get worse in Iraq. As I said earlier, you look at four provinces and areas in four provinces, you have serious violence, and occasionally you have terrorist attacks that go on in other places, including in some of the shrine cities, but you look at the other provinces, and you don't see widespread chaos and disaster, and a lot of that is to the credit of the Iraqis themselves. But, currently, in terms of central government and the government institutions, the Iraqis do not sufficiently have a means to provide for the security of the government or and the security of the civilian population. That is reality. We can walk away and act as though everything is going to become all nice, but, actually, things would turn to chaos, and, unfortunately, Americans would cease to care because, if American soldiers aren't there, we'll turn the television station to something else. That would be the worst-case disaster because reparations, I mean, again, I deal with the possible. I'm not going to deal with non-options, and, right now, we have to deal with the only responsible way out of Iraq, and that's providing capacity building and providing real assistance so that we don't see chaos when U.S. forces leave.

Eisenberg: . . . I do understand that there's a student here, one of the students from City College is here who is one of the students that's been charged and did want to say something? Am I right, David?

Elizabeth Wrigley-Field (Campus Antiwar Network/NYU) Not quite, but we do have some good news. The charges against the students apparently were dropped today, *applause* but that does not mean that the struggle is over.

Yeah, I just wanted to let everyone know, since the hearing that was scheduled to be on Friday was announced, that, actually, just today, the charges from the school against the three students were dropped. That's because of an incredible campaign that they organized with solidarity from the PSC and a lot of other allies. *applause* The staff member who was arrested, Carol Lang, is still going to have a hearing I think over the next week or two that obviously is going to require a lot of solidarity to get her charges dropped, and all of them still face criminal charges, so there's still an on-going campaign, but this is an incredible victory for them. The police charges against them are outstanding. They were arraigned on Wednesday. And I'm a member of the campus anti-war network that's involved in the struggle, and, if people want more information about it, I'd be happy to talk to you about it afterward.

We have ten more minutes of really an important discussion, and I really feel like everybody is sincerely trying to figure out what's the right position, and I think it's a really important conversation to have, but, in the interests of speed, I'm going to ask each of the speakers to take no more than one minute, and I'm only going to have one person from up here if that's okay, so you should address your comment to whoever it is going.

Q: My Name is Anita Cole. I am a veteran. I was in for four years as an interrogator before I was honorably discharged in 2002 as a conscientious objector. A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to hear Alex very candidly speak about the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that's affecting so many other soldiers and how he also spoke about the fact that giving a whole country PTSD, and I wonder, as an active duty soldier, and Alex is an active duty marine, I wonder if it's perhaps not exactly in line with the work of an engineer that we cannot, as soldiers, we don't learn conflict negotiation. We don't learn how to resolve things peacefully. We learn how to resolve them at the other end of an M16 or at the other end of a Howitzer, so what does our presence there do to support capacity building? I now work in non-profits, and so I really don't see how my non-profit work would benefit by having armed soldiers around. Finally, in answer to what people can do, I would definitely recommend supporting organizations because it's a huge step for soldiers, sailors and marines, airmen to come out against this war, support them in their transition, let them know that it's going to be okay, and support organizations like the GI Rights Hotline, from people making that reconnection to their humanity, and organizations like Iraqi Veterans Against the War. *applause*

Ryabov: That's something I would definitely like to touch upon, the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The fact is, for those of you who don't know what it is, it can be brought about by anything from a car accident, a violent crime, disasters (both natural and man-made), and combat. As far as U.S. troops receiving Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, it's just from killing, witnessing killing; myself I have not actually got into ambushes or opened fire with my M16, but the fact that our battalion killed very close to a thousand Iraqis with artillery fire had a grave impact on me. And, in terms of giving a whole country Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, that is the way the human body will react. For example, a family of Iraqis is asleep, and a bomb is dropped on their house, and one of the kids survives, that kid is not going to deal very well considering that his family has been wiped out . . . during the night and things like that.

Q: . . . I've been a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War since 1970. I have a question for Erik and Alex, who are veterans. What do you think that the attack on the administration and the congress against the Veterans' Administration, that they want to close 18 hospitals, they want to double the drug fee, they want to provide a yearly co-payment toward veterans with non-service-connected disabilities, and the VA budget is about 3-4 billion dollars short. And . . . the head of the House Veterans Affairs Committee wants to change the definition of veteran to only those that have been combat wounded or service connected disabled. And there's a conference on June 15 at the Hunter School of Social Work on PTSD.

Ryabov: As far as cuts to the VA, President Bush has no problem going in the air and saying: "I support the troops," and, just over Easter, pretty much sent over his prayers to the troops that he coincidentally sent over to Iraq, and, behind our backs, he cuts hundreds of millions of dollars from the VA. That is not supporting the troops no matter who you are. And the fact is that, a lot of people don't know, there are already homeless Iraq war veterans from this conflict. There have been countless suicides, and, for example, [Lance Corporal Jeffrey Lucey] actually slipped through the cracks of the VA system, and his dad ended up coming home and finding him hanging from the rafters from a garden hose. These are very serious problems that definitely do need to be addressed and are really within the same realm of bringing the troops home and taking care of them when they get here.

Gustafson: We have to hasten the day that U.S. forces safely come home. Already, 1.1 million Americans have served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Out of those 1.1 million, I believe somewhere around 60,000 have filed disability claims with the veteran health administration, and over 10,000 have visited veterans' centers in terms of receiving counseling. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, we're looking at somewhere around one out of four, one out of five returning soldiers. When PTSD goes untreated, it leads to suicide, it can lead to domestic abuse, it can lead to violence, it can lead to homelessness, joblessness, alcoholism and drug addiction. We're talking about a serious issue which we haven't even begun to grapple with as a society.

Eisenberg: I'm being given a very significant signal that, if we stay another minute, we're really inconveniencing the security guard. I'd like to just say two quick things. One, this is a very important discussion. Those of you who are interested in continuing it or want to set up other discussions in your neighborhood or in your home, please call Parents for Peace, and let us know, and we'll try to do what we can to help facilitate whatever kind of discussion you think would be useful. Again, I want to encourage everybody to work with us. Many of you are working with us or with another peace organization. Our efforts are really urgently needed. I especially would like to ask all of you to join me in thanking Alex, Anthony, and Erik *applause* for coming here this evening and participating in a really difficult thing, so we really appreciate your being here, and we really appreciate seeing all of you here as well. So, good night, and I hope we'll meet again.

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Carolyn Eisenberg (moderator), Co-Chair of Brooklyn Parents for Peace, is Professor of U.S. Foreign Policy at Hofstra University. <http://www.brooklynpeace.org>

Alex Ryabov, a Brooklyn marine who served during the invasion of Iraq, is co-founder of Iraq Veterans Against the War. <http://www.ivaw.net>

Anthony Arnove, an author, journalist, and activist based in Brooklyn, edited "Iraq Under Siege: The Deadly Impact of Sanctions and War" (South End Press) and Terrorism and War, a collection of interviews with Howard Zinn (Seven Stories Press). With Howard Zinn he co-edited Voices of a People's History of the United States (Seven Stories Press). His work has appeared in publications here and abroad.
<http://www.sevenstories.com/Book/index.cfm?GCOI=58322100666900>

Erik Gustafson, a veteran of the Gulf War, is founder and Executive Director of the Education for Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC), an organization dedicated to promoting policies that improve the lives of ordinary Iraqis. A recognized expert on Iraq and U.S. policy, he testifies at congressional briefings and policy forums and delivers lectures across North America. <http://www.epic-usa.org>

[Bios from Brooklyn Parents for Peace program announcement.]

We thank Mike Gorse for his excellent work in producing this transcript.
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