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HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS BEFORE THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Staying or Leaving

Supporters of the war in Iraq, as well as some non-supporters, warn of the dangers if we leave. But isn't it quite possible that these dangers are simply a consequence of having gone into Iraq in the first place, rather than a consequence of leaving? Isn't it possible that staying only makes the situation worse? If chaos results after our departure, it's because we occupied Iraq, not because we left.

The original reasons for our pre-emptive strike are long forgotten, having been based on false assumptions. The justification given now is that we must persist in this war or else dishonor those who already have died or been wounded. We're also told civil strife likely will engulf all of Iraq.

But what is the logic of perpetuating a flawed policy where more Americans die just because others have suffered? More Americans deaths cannot possibly help those who already have been injured or killed.

Civil strife, if not civil war, already exists in Iraq-- and despite the infighting, all factions oppose our occupation.

The insistence on using our military to occupy and run Iraq provides convincing evidence to our detractors inside and outside Iraq that we have no intention of leaving. Building permanent military bases and a huge embassy confirms these fears.

We deny the importance of oil and Israel's influence on our policy, yet we fail to convince the Arab/Muslim world that our intentions are purely humanitarian.

In truth, our determined presence in Iraq actually increases the odds of regional chaos, inciting Iran and Syria while aiding Osama bin Laden in his recruiting efforts. Leaving Iraq would do the opposite-- though not without some dangers that rightfully should be blamed on our unwise invasion rather than our exit.

Many experts believe bin Laden welcomed our invasion and occupation of two Muslim countries. It bolsters his claim that the U.S. intended to occupy and control the Middle East all along. This has galvanized radical Muslim fundamentalists against us. Osama bin Laden's campaign surely would suffer if we left.

We should remember that losing a war to China over control of North Korea ultimately did not enhance communism in China, as she now has accepted many capitalist principles. In fact, China today outproduces us in many ways-- as reflected by our negative trade balance with her.

We lost a war in Vietnam, and the domino theory that communism would spread throughout southeast Asia was proven wrong. Today, Vietnam accepts American investment dollars and technology. We maintain a trade relationship with Vietnam that the war never achieved.

We contained the USSR and her thousands of nuclear warheads without military confrontation, leading to the collapse and disintegration of a powerful Soviet empire. Today we trade with Russia and her neighbors, as the market economy spreads throughout the world without the use of arms.

We should heed the words of Ronald Reagan about his experience with a needless and mistaken military occupation of Lebanon. Sending troops into Lebanon seemed like a good idea in 1983, but in 1990 President Reagan said this in his memoirs: "...we did not appreciate fully enough the depth of the hatred and complexity of the problems that made the Middle East such a jungle...In the weeks immediately after the bombing, I believed the last thing we should do was turn tail and leave...yet, the irrationality of Middle Eastern politics forced us to rethink our policy there."

During the occupation of Lebanon by American, French, and Israeli troops between 1982 and 1986, there were 41 suicide terrorist attacks in that country. One horrific attack killed 241 U.S. Marines. Yet once these foreign troops were removed, the suicide attacks literally stopped. Today we should once again rethink our policy in this region.

It's amazing what ending military intervention in the affairs of others can achieve. Setting an example of how a free market economy works does wonders.

We should have confidence in how well freedom works, rather than relying on blind faith in the use of military force to spread our message. Setting an example and using persuasion is always superior to military force in showing how others might live. Force and war are tools of authoritarians; they are never tools of champions of liberty and justice. Force and war inevitably lead to dangerous unintended consequences.