

## OVERVIEW: The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

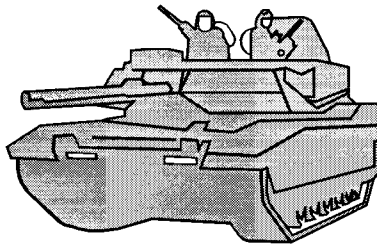
Possibly the most contentious issue of the presidential election will be the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The war in Iraq, which will enter its sixth year next spring, poses political as well as strategic problems for the candidates, as over 4,000 service men and women have lost their lives in the conflict. Most Americans are clamoring for a policy change. America's involvement in Afghanistan, alongside NATO, has not faced the same opposition here at home as the Iraq war has. But, our military forces in Afghanistan are beset by a lack of troops, which has prevented a full suppression of the Al Qaeda-led insurgency along the mountainous border Afghanistan shares with Pakistan. Alternatively, Iraq is still negotiating with its various ethnic factions – the Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis – into a representative government and a more stable political life. The Iraqi government is gradually transitioning from an inchoate authority into a legitimate democratic institution.

Claiming success for his 2007 policy of increased troop deployments to Iraq, called the 'surge,' President Bush has recently indicated that a substantial portion of American forces may be able to exit Iraq soon. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has also suggested that troop levels may indeed be substantially reduced from the 130,000 soldiers in country this summer, to a smaller figure by the end of 2008. Ancillary to the debate about troop levels and the potential need of further military force in Iraq is the question of what is actually in the best interests of the United States, and if our best interests are correlated to the responsibility we have to Iraq and its people.

Other related political and military issues related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are:

- a) The strategic importance of Iraq and its Middle Eastern neighbors as major oil producers and transportation routes
- b) ) Iran's desire to become a nuclear power despite opposition from world opinion
- c) ) The security of our close ally Israel, especially with the bellicose nature of the current Iranian government.

Both John McCain and Barack Obama have the challenge of developing and communicating a coherent policy on the wars and related Middle East issues. Often specific current events in Iraq, Afghanistan and their neighbors are affecting public opinion in America.



## **OVERVIEW: Major Presidential Candidates' Positions – The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan**

**Directions:** This summary focuses on several significant issues within the larger campaign issue- the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For a more comprehensive description and rationale for their positions check news accounts and use the official web sites of the McCain and Obama campaigns cited in “Sources” below. **Due to the changing conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan (sometimes on a daily basis) the candidates’ positions on this issue’s specifics also change.** Neither McCain’s nor Obama’s official websites list the war in Afghanistan as a separate issue. You must look under Issue – Iraq.

After studying this issue through research and current events discussion, decide how you feel about each candidate’s position for the specific issues dealing with the wars and foreign relations. Go to the **Comparing Presidential Candidates** chart to record your viewpoint on candidate policies. To help you decide write an abbreviation next to each policy statement:

SA- strongly agree; A- agree; SD- strongly disagree; D- disagree; N- no opinion

### **Purpose of our military action:**

#### **John McCain:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Supports the moral justifications defined by President Bush for invading and occupying Iraq. In 2002 Senator McCain voted to authorize the use of U.S. Armed Forces against Iraq.

\_\_\_\_\_ Supports the belief that “it is strategically and morally essential for the United States to support the Iraqi government to become capable of governing itself and safeguarding its people.”

\_\_\_\_\_ Has criticized the management of the Iraq War.

\_\_\_\_\_ Views the war in Afghanistan as part of our global war on terrorism.

#### **Barack Obama:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Opposed the war from its start in 2002 when he was a Illinois State Senator.

\_\_\_\_\_ Introduced the Iraq War De-Escalation Act in January 2007 that had the goal of withdrawing all our combat troops from Iraq by March 2008. It did not pass.

\_\_\_\_\_ Supports the proposals made by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.

\_\_\_\_\_ Believes that our invasion of Iraq permitted Al Qaeda to reemerge in Afghanistan. “The scale of our deployments in Iraq continues to set back our ability to finish the fight in Afghanistan, producing unacceptable strategic risks.” (Obama website “War in Iraq”)

**Relations with neighboring Iran:**

**John McCain:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Opposes unconditional diplomatic talks with Iranian government about its nuclear power program. States that he would work with allies to stop Iran’s activities within Iraq.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports the use of military force to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

**Barack Obama:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports having direct talks with Iran’s government.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Would consider providing economic incentives if Iran stopped meddling in Iraq and cooperates with the world community on nuclear issues.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Has not committed to using military action against Iran if it does not stop its nuclear weapons program.

**Timetable to withdraw:**

**John McCain:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports the position that American troops can return home when Iraqi forces can safeguard their own country.

**Barack Obama:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Supports an orderly, phased withdraw of American troops starting soon after the 2009 Inauguration. The Iraqi government recently agreed to this plan.

**Other related issue(s) important to you:** Use the candidate’s web sites cited below to learn their positions.

Issue: \_\_\_\_\_

Summarize the candidates’ positions on this issue on another sheet.

Sources:

- Obama-McCain Comparisons at:  
<http://www.obama-mccain.info/compare-obama-mccain-iraq.php>
- McCain campaign at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/issues>
- Obama campaign at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues>
- Google Election Tolls for Teachers at:  
[http://www.google.comeducators/elections\\_tools.html](http://www.google.comeducators/elections_tools.html)

