WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER
A Call for Reflection at Commencement

Bloomington Peace Action Coalition joins in congratulating Indiana University graduates, welcoming their families and guests, and welcoming this year’s speaker, Senator Richard Lugar.

In a time of war, we believe that our celebration today must also encompass sorrow at war’s death and suffering, reflection on the policies that led to this war and threaten to bring new ones, and a renewed determination by each of us to devote our lives to making a more peaceful and just world.

This War’s Human Toll

More than 130 American soldiers died in the Iraq war. We must not say “only 130.” Many were not the children of the elite, but working class young Americans with few alternatives.

Many more veterans are likely to become ill in coming years with “Gulf War Syndrome” from depleted uranium used by U.S. forces. (220,000 veterans of the 1991 war are now disabled.) Depleted uranium will also bring cancer and birth defects to Iraqi civilians, as it did after the last war.

American bombs and attacks killed more than 2600 Iraqi civilians. (That would equate to more than 50,000, had the attack been by Iraq on the US.) We struck Hillah near Babylon with cluster bombs, which dismembered civilians. Amnesty International calls these “inherently indiscriminate weapons” that violate the rules of war.

The Bush administration failed to plan for the chaotic aftermath of war, which has brought even greater suffering than the war itself.

While securing oil fields and the Petroleum Ministry, US forces allowed looters to plunder hospitals, destroy or steal 5000 years of world culture from the Iraqi National Museum, and burn the National Library.

An Unjustified War

The Bush administration falsely told the American public that Iraq had close ties to Al Qaeda. The Bush administration used the alleged threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to justify war. Yet it refused to allow United Nations inspectors the chance to disarm Iraq peacefully.

Now that its claims about Iraqi weapons appear greatly exaggerated, it refuses to allow UN inspectors to return, leading to fear that it will fabricate evidence. (A document Colin Powell gave the
Security Council in March turned out to be fabricated.)

Whether or not Iraq possessed chemical or biological weapons, it did not use them even in this war for survival. Thus it seems that deterrence would have prevented Iraq from using them for any lesser cause. Its previous uses came when the US showed indifference (and Donald Rumsfeld was visiting Baghdad).

We agree that Saddam Hussein was a brutal dictator and welcome his fall. But “spreading democracy” does not justify aggressive war. US Supreme Court Chief Justice Robert Jackson, who was lead prosecutor in the Nuremberg Tribunals after World War II, stated this principle there, and the charge of launching aggressive war was at the center of the Allied case against Nazi war criminals.

By attacking Iraq despite clear lack of support in the United Nations Security Council, President Bush invites others – such as nuclear-armed India and Pakistan -- to take the law into their own hands.

“Liberation” -- or Empire?

Made for television images of what were in fact a small number of Iraqis toppling the statue of Saddam Hussein, surrounded by American troops, cannot disguise the reality of resistance to US conquest and occupation. At Falluja, US troops killed 18 and wounded 75 in a crowd of demonstrators protesting our rule.

Instead of putting postwar Iraq under the control of the United Nations, the Bush administration uses the rhetoric of turning it over to Iraqis to mask its use of handpicked collaborators and exiles, some of whom are wanted on international criminal charges.

The Bush administration awards highly lucrative reconstruction and oil contracts under closed bids to Bechtel, Halliburton, and other companies with undue influence.

Towards World War IV?

Administration officials and others close to it apparently see Iraq as only one in a series of US wars. These may extend to North Korea, Iran, and Syria, among others. Former CIA Director James Woolsey approvingly speaks of “World War IV.”

A US attack on North Korea – which might involve US nuclear weapons – could cause many thousands of deaths, bring chaos to the Korean peninsula and instability to Asia. (In an April 20 interview on “Meet the Press,” Senator Lugar endorsed “a very strong possibility” of military action against North Korea.) A US attack on Iran or Syria would outrage the Islamic world.

The Bush administration has erased the distinction between Al Qaeda, which targets the United States, and groups such as Hezbollah that do not. We become in effect a combatant on behalf of governments such as Israel’s and Colombia’s – only worsening these conflicts and weakening the United Nations. Ironically, this bias itself makes terrorism against the US itself more likely, not less.

America, Land of the Free?

While embarking on a global crusade in the name of democracy, the Bush administration and its supporters in Congress are eroding ours. Under the misnamed PATRIOT Act, the government has made secret arrests, held detainees without charge, and denied them the right to seek counsel. An even more sweeping PATRIOT II waits in the wings. It would permit the executive arbitrarily to strip citizens of their rights and deport them as aliens or imprison them indefinitely. Some intellectuals such as Harvard’s Alan Dershowitz speak favorably of torture.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Pat Roberts (R-KS) wants to allow the CIA and the military to conduct domestic spying on US citizens – erasing protections in place since 1947. Since the CIA engages in dirty tricks including framing, citizens would be exposed to politically motivated defamation and incrimination.

An Agenda for Senator Lugar

Bloomington Peace Action Coalition appreciates the attentiveness of Senator Lugar’s office and his willingness to listen. We are, however, deeply disappointed by some of his actions, in particular his October 2002 vote supporting a US attack on Iraq without United Nations authority and his vote for PATRIOT.

As Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Lugar could advance peace by the following initiatives: