

“War is a racket...in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.”
--Major General Smedley Butler

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“War is a racket...in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives,” a statement proven by American Foreign policy. In the Iraq war we have spent one trillion dollars, and lost 4,000 of our own soldiers. We have dropped thousands of missiles, fired millions of bullets, hit dozens of targets and missed many more. Four million Iraqis have been displaced and an estimated 700,000 have died. The way we wage war is swift, but the tangible results are painfully unproductive.

This war is the result of impatience, eagerness to see consequences; willingness to jump into battle with the attitude that crippling real death tolls and destroyed targets are evidence that something is getting done. Where we can count the dollars spent and the number dead, and when the number we sacrifice is less than the enemy's death count, then we must be ahead.

War seems to be the American approach to foreign relations, a quick remedy to any problem. War is the way we try to spread our democracy to the world. We have spent a trillion dollars on the Iraq war, but would we consider spending a fraction of that on diplomacy without bombs, without fighter jets, grenades or machine guns? Would we consider a solution where the results are not tallied in targets destroyed, where the profits are not reckoned in dollars and losses in lives? Is it naïve to think that peaceful stability around the world is possible and nonviolent conflict resolution a pathway to success?

No, it is not naïve because today's peacemakers are not pacifists. Today's peacemakers are action takers, movers and shakers. In February I traveled with a group of my peers to Washington D.C. to lobby Congress for peace. I left Davis California with high hopes and great anticipation, ready to miss a few days of school to make a difference, to change the world. But I learned that change is going to take more than a few days talking to Congress. America is a strong nation filled with 300 million citizens who all have a say in this country. In order to change America, those 300 million Americans must demand change themselves. Building a new democratic society will take time, commitment and compromise, but it will not be achieved through military might. Each of us must start a dialogue for peace and bring it to the forefront of our thoughts so that when a conflict arises, our first instinct is not war. The results of nonviolent conflict resolution and diplomacy are not swift or obvious at first. There is no fallout or rubble, there are no casualties that can be counted or laid out in graves. But there is progress to be made. There can be action taken. Openness and understanding can be reached. It will take time for such a mindset to be realized, but we can all change and learn to judge our success in stability and lives sustained instead of dollars spent and lives lost.