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## U.S., Iraqi leaders perpetuate war waste

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There have been few figures in our public life in recent years who have brought more attention to the endemic problem of government waste and the setting aside of taxpayer dollars for special interests than the nominee of the Republican Party for the presidency, Sen. John McCain.

His campaign's Web site has extensive information on the subject, and his Facebook page features a video game, "Pork Invaders," in which players destroy flying pigs symbolizing government waste by shooting "vetoes" at them.

Despite Sen. McCain's admirable commitment to eliminating corruption and battling special interests, he has called for continuation of one of the most egregious examples of government waste and mismanagement in decades: the U.S. war in Iraq.

Since the start of the war, according to *Time* magazine, the U.S. has spent more than \$648 billion. More than 4,100 Americans have died, and 30,324 more have been wounded. The number of Iraqi casualties is perhaps as high as 100,000. The war, even if it were to end tomorrow, will require billions more in taxpayer dollars due to the costs associated with the debts we have incurred to pay for it (instead of raising taxes) and the long-term care of wounded veterans. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 7,000 veterans of wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq sought treatment in its Tennessee facilities last year.

## U.S. influence wanes

While there is little question that the costs of the war in Iraq represent a much smaller percentage of U.S. gross domestic product than past wars have, we haven't received nearly enough return on our investment of money and lives. Thousands of Iraqis still lack adequate electricity, clean water and jobs, in spite of the fact that the U.S. government has provided nearly \$48 billion in reconstruction aid, and Iraq is expected to have a government surplus of close to \$79 billion in 2008. Despite the much-publicized gains of the surge in U.S. forces, security remains tenuous in much of the country, especially outside of Baghdad.

The U.S. position in the Middle East and the wider world has deteriorated sharply, too. Iran and its allies have amassed nearly as much influence in Iraq and the Middle East in general as the U.S. Strikingly, Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, received a warm welcome during his recent visit to Turkey, a member of NATO and a U.S. ally for decades.

Further, Washington could do little except issue stern warnings when Russia occupied Georgia, a U.S. ally whose army had been trained by the United States and had deployed hundreds of soldiers in Iraq. The U.S. position has also deteriorated rapidly in Afghanistan, where there have not been enough Western troops to stem the resurgence of the Taliban. In the past two months, the Taliban forced U.S. soldiers to abandon a strategic base in Afghanistan's eastern mountains and killed 10 French soldiers in a single attack.

Ultimately, our policies in Iraq raise a question that Sen. McCain and other conservatives once correctly asked about many "liberal" government programs: Why do we throw so much good money after bad?