

2007 December 25, 2006 Today we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. In Iraq, however, war rages on with no end in sight. The midterm congressional elections are over, and the Iraq Study Group report is complete. Many Americans are unhappy about the war and want a change in policy. But what we are going to get from both parties in Washington is more of the same-- much more-- when it comes to Iraq. President Bush not only wants to stay the course, he wants to increase the number of troops in Iraq. The "new approach" is simply escalation, with no timetable and still no definition of victory. In fact, the president promised last week that, "They can't run us out of the Middle East," and that we will not retreat from Iraq. Worse, he asserted that America will, "Stay in the fight for a long period of time." According to the President, we must increase the size of our Army and Marine Corps to provide the bodies to make this possible. In other words, our troops will stay in Iraq indefinitely. Remember, we are building several huge, permanent military bases there, along with the biggest embassy in the world to serve as the command post for our occupation. The embassy compound alone will cost more than one billion dollars. This doesn't sound like the "new generation" warfare envisioned by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, but more like old-fashioned occupation-- which requires hundreds of thousands of soldiers on the ground in Iraq. Once again, more of the same. The Pentagon, not surprisingly, has requested an additional \$100 billion to keep the war going. This money will not be included in the annual budget or deficit numbers, but will be whitewashed as an "off-budget" expenditure. If all this were not enough, the president has ordered aircraft carrier groups to position themselves in the Persian Gulf in a new show of bellicosity toward Iran. Anyone who voted for Democrats last month expecting a change in our Iraq policy was sorely mistaken. Incoming congressional leaders have publicly stated their support for increasing troop levels, and Democrats have no intention of pursuing any serious withdrawal plan in Congress. They will not withhold war funding. The war will plod on, and Democrats will call for more of the same. In Washington, the answer to every problem is always more of the same. If a war is not successful, escalate it-- or even start another one. This is our only policy in Iraq, where we don't even know whom the enemy really is. Can one in ten Americans even distinguish between Sunni, Shia, and Kurds? Unless we rethink our senseless policy of endless occupation, regime change, and nation building in the Middle East, we must expect more of the same: More troops injured or killed, more spending, more debt, more taxes, more militarism, and especially more government. Merry Christmas to all, and please share my wishes for peace on earth and goodwill toward men in 2007.