

**AUGUST 18**

# The Iraq war and MoveOn

**T**he day after Wednesday night's nationwide vigils, the big headline at the top of the MoveOn.org home page said: "Support Cindy Sheehan." But MoveOn does not support Cindy Sheehan's call for swift withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Many groups were important to the success of the Aug. 17 vigils, but the online powerhouse MoveOn was the largest and most prominent. After a long stretch of virtual absence from Iraq war issues, the organization deserves credit for getting re-involved in recent months. But the disconnects between MoveOn and much of the grassroots antiwar movement are disturbing.

Part of the problem is MoveOn's routine fuzziness about the war – and the way that the group is inclined to water down the messages of antiwar activism, much of which is not connected to the organization.

Consider how the MoveOn website summarized the vigils: "Last night, tens of thousands of supporters gathered at 1,625 vigils to acknowledge the sacrifices made by Cindy Sheehan, her son Casey and the more than 1,800 brave American men and women who have given their lives in Iraq – and their moms and families." Such a gloss excludes a key reason why many people participated in the vigils: They wanted to express clear opposition to any further U.S. involvement in the war.

Despite its high-profile role in the vigils this week, MoveOn is still not giving a high priority to addressing the Iraq war in its ongoing work. When I went to the MoveOn website today and looked at its roster of "Current Campaigns," just a single item on the list was focused on Iraq – and that one, from June, involved "demanding that Bush address the evidence in the 'Downing Street Memo.'"

The political action wing of MoveOn has committed itself to supporting congressional legislation, co-sponsored by Reps. Walter Jones and Neil Abercrombie, which would require the president to start withdrawing troops from Iraq ... by October 2006.

In contrast, MoveOn never supported Rep. Lynn Woolsey's resolution, introduced early this year, stating that "the president should develop and implement a plan to begin the immediate withdrawal of United States Armed Forces from Iraq." (Despite

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the lack of MoveOn's support, the measure received 128 votes in the House.) Nor has MoveOn gotten behind Rep. Barbara Lee's more recent bill to prevent the establishment of permanent U.S. military bases in Iraq.

What if MoveOn were to directly ask its 3 million members (people who've signed up for its e-mailings) whether they favor the idea of waiting till autumn 2006 before the start of U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq – or whether, on the other hand, those members would prefer that withdrawal get underway before the end of this year? I believe that most MoveOn members would opt for the latter scenario. But MoveOn policy is set by a few individuals who have not been willing to put such options in front of members for a vote.

On Tuesday, the day before the vigils, Cindy Sheehan said in a conference call that the Jones-Abercrombie timeline is "not soon enough." She doesn't see any good reason to continue the U.S. military occupation; she's opposed to any delay in pulling out. And while it's all well and good for MoveOn to tell people to "Support Cindy Sheehan," the MoveOn leadership should publicly explain why the organization refuses to join her in supporting a swift withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Iraq.

During the next few weeks, MoveOn will have an opportunity to devote some of its appreciable resources to strengthening the antiwar movement. With an umbrella theme of "End the War on Iraq – Bring the Troops Home Now," protests in Washington and elsewhere are on the calendar for Sept. 24-26. The national coalition United for Peace & Justice is playing a key role in creating momentum for those demonstrations, which will begin an autumn of historic antiwar activism.

Hopefully, MoveOn will catch up with its grassroots base and get involved in a supportive way.

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*"War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death."*

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