In Iraq, after thousands upon thousands of lost lives and

hundreds of thousands of disabling injuries, after a trillion dollars

of U.S. treasure added to our Nation's debt, after an incalculable

amount of U.S. prestige being lost, one aspect about Iraq remains

defining: It's all about oil and the spoils of oil across that region.

Exxon, the largest U.S. oil company, with profits totaling $40.6

billion in 2008--a record--just got its first contract inside Iraq.

Foreign oil companies like Exxon were thrown out of that country four

decades ago when Saddam Hussein nationalized Iraq's oil fields.

Michael Klare, in his prescient book about resource wars, ``Blood and

Oil,'' connects the dots. What a shame our world is so primitive,

people brutally fight over diminishing resources as global energy

extraction giants advantage themselves, far from home, in the wake of

our soldiers, tapping largesse these oil giants covet.

Iraq ranks fourth in global oil reserves behind Saudi Arabia, Canada,

and Iran. Iraq's central government is now picking winners in the great

oil prize bonanza--the ``Iraqi Oil Contracting Rush of 2009.'' Oil has

dominated Iraq's economy for generations. Oil has traditionally

provided more than 90 percent of that country's exchange earnings, and

that is likely to be the case for a few decades to come until it's all

sucked dry.

According to the Washington Post, the oil ministry is expected to

hold a new bidding round in December for undeveloped fields. Those are

also for service agreements. Oil giants hope the deals could one day

lead to production-sharing deals, long a goal of energy firms that have

been shut out of the Middle East for years.

The oil giants, Exxon-Mobil and Royal Dutch/Shell, signed a $50

billion deal with Iraq to extract oil from the Western Qurna oil field,

one of Iraq's largest oil fields located north of Rumaila field, west

of Basra in southern Iraq. Western Qurna is believed to hold 11 to 15

billion barrels of recoverable reserve. This prize of a deal gives

Exxon-Mobil, Shell and their partners $1.90 per barrel above the

current production rate of 2.5 million barrels per day, and they hope

to increase production to 7 million per day over the next 6 years,

meaning a windfall of $3.1 billion per year.

Are the lives of our soldiers worth it? The giant Exxon Mobil/Shell

consortium beat out the other oil giant consortiums, led by Russia's

LUKOIL, France's Total and a consortium led by China's CNPC. Dictators

have come and gone, foreign armies have come and gone, some still

remain.

One thing remains constant about Iraq. Oil is still the big prize.

That is why American and European oil company giants going all the way

back to the Ottoman Empire have coveted control of their crude. Cynics

would even say they have been willing to go to war over it. As we

observe the continuing rush to the oil fields by a world that must

transition to a greener and sustainable energy future, one must ask the

tough question, Are the lives of our noble military going to be

expended--for how long?--far away from home to access a resource that

is diminishing globally while America's Treasury is emptied, supporting

wars in foreign places to tap a resource that, by 2050, will be gone,

never to return again.

Civilized people should demand more than fighting resource wars of

the past for an oil giant's prizes, for limited remaining time on this

planet. It's time to think hard about where we have extended our most

precious assets and to say, It's time to come home.