

July 30, 2006

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

While the world has been focused on the crisis in the Middle East, Iraq has exploded in violence. Some 6,000 Iraqis were killed in May and June, and sectarian and insurgent violence continues to claim American and Iraqi lives at an alarming rate. In the face of this onslaught, one can only conclude that the Baghdad security plan you announced five weeks ago is in great jeopardy.

Despite the latest evidence that your Administration lacks a coherent strategy to stabilize Iraq and achieve victory, there has been virtually no diplomatic effort to resolve sectarian differences, no regional effort to establish a broader security framework, and no attempt to revive a struggling reconstruction effort. Instead, we learned of your plans to redeploy an additional 5,000 U.S. troops into an urban war zone in Baghdad. Far from implementing a comprehensive "Strategy for Victory" as you promised months ago, your Administration's strategy appears to be one of trying to avoid defeat.

Meanwhile, U.S. troops and taxpayers continue to pay a high price as your Administration searches for a policy. Over 2,500 Americans have made the ultimate sacrifice and over 18,000 others have been wounded. The Iraq war has also strained our military and constrained our ability to deal with other challenges. Readiness levels for the Army are at lows not seen since Vietnam, as virtually no active Army non-deployed combat brigade is prepared to perform its wartime missions. American taxpayers have already contributed over \$300 billion and each week we stay in Iraq adds nearly \$3 billion more to our record budget deficit.

In the interests of American national security, our troops, and our taxpayers, the open-ended commitment in Iraq that you have embraced cannot and should not be sustained.

Rather, we continue to believe that it is time for Iraqis to step forward and take the lead for securing and governing their own country. This is the principle enshrined in the "United States Policy in Iraq Act" enacted last year. This law declares 2006 to be a year of "significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security of a free and sovereign Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for the phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq." Regrettably, your policy seems to be moving in the opposite direction.

This legislation made clear that Iraqi political leaders must be informed that American patience, blood and treasure are not unlimited. We were disappointed that you did not convey this message to Prime Minister Maliki during his recent visit. Reducing the U.S. footprint in Iraq will not only give the Iraqis a greater incentive to take the lead for the

security of their own nation, but will also allow U.S. forces to be able to respond to contingencies affecting the security of the United States elsewhere in the world.

We believe that a phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq should begin before the end of 2006. U.S. forces in Iraq should transition to a more limited mission focused on counterterrorism, training and logistical support of Iraqi security forces, and force protection of U.S. personnel.

Additionally, every effort should be made to urge the Iraqis to take the steps necessary to achieve a broad-based and sustainable political settlement, including amending the constitution to achieve a fair sharing of power and resources. It is also essential to disarm the militias and ensure forces loyal to the national government. Finally, an international conference should be convened to persuade other governments to be more involved, and to secure the resources necessary to finance Iraq's reconstruction and rebuild its economy.

Mr. President, simply staying the course in Iraq is not working. We need to take a new direction. We believe these recommendations comprise an effective alternative to the current open-ended commitment which is not producing the progress in Iraq we would all like to see. Thank you for your careful consideration of these suggestions.

Harry Reid, Senate Democratic Leader

Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Leader

Dick Durbin, Senate Assistant Democratic Leader

Steny Hoyer, House Minority Whip

Carl Levin, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee

Ike Skelton, Ranking Member, House Armed Services Committee

Joe Biden, Ranking Member, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Tom Lantos, Ranking Member, House International Relations Committee

Jay Rockefeller, Vice Chairman, Senate Intelligence Committee

Jane Harman, Ranking Member, House Intelligence Committee

Daniel Inouye, Ranking Member, Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee

John Murtha, Ranking Member, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee

September 4, 2006

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

Over one month ago, we wrote to you about the war in Iraq. In the face of escalating violence, increasing instability in the region, and an overall strain on our troops that has reduced their readiness to levels not seen since Vietnam, we called upon you to change course and adopt a new strategy to give our troops and the Iraqi people the best chance for success.

Although you have not responded to our letter, we surmise from your recent press conferences and speeches that you remain committed to maintaining an open-ended presence of U.S. forces in Iraq for years to come. That was the message the American people received on August 21, 2006, when you said, “we're not leaving [Iraq], so long as I'm the President.”

Unfortunately, your stay the course strategy is not working. In the five-week period since writing to you, over 60 U.S. soldiers and Marines have been killed, hundreds of U.S. troops have been wounded, many of them grievously, nearly 1,000 Iraqi civilians have died, and the cost to the American taxpayer has grown by another \$8 billion dollars. Even the administration's most recent report to Congress on Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq indicates that security trends in Iraq are deteriorating, and likely to continue to worsen for the foreseeable future. With daily attacks against American and Iraqi troops at close to their highest levels since the start of the war, and sectarian violence intensifying, we can only conclude that our troops are caught in the middle of a low-grade civil war that is getting worse.

Meanwhile, the costs of a failed Iraq policy to our military and our security have been staggering. As you know, not a single Army non-deployed combat brigade is currently prepared to meet its wartime mission, and the Marine Corps faces equally urgent equipment and personnel shortages. Lieutenant General Blum, the National Guard Bureau Chief, has stated that the National Guard is “even further behind or in an even more dire situation than the active Army.” Your recent decision to involuntarily recall thousands of Marines to active duty to serve in Iraq is but the latest confirmation of the strain this war has placed on our troops. At the same time, the focus on Iraq and the toll it has taken on our troops and on our diplomatic capabilities has diverted our attention from other national security challenges and greatly constrained our ability to deal with them.

In short, Mr. President, this current path – for our military, for the Iraqi people, and for our security – is neither working, nor making us more secure.

Therefore, we urge you once again to consider changes to your Iraq policy. We propose a new direction, which would include: (1) transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq to counter-terrorism, training, logistics and force protection; (2) beginning the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq before the end of this year; (3) working with Iraqi leaders to disarm the militias and to develop a broad-based and sustainable political settlement, including amending the Constitution to achieve a fair sharing of power and resources; and (4) convening an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq, to preserve Iraq's sovereignty, and to revitalize the stalled economic reconstruction and rebuilding effort. These proposals were outlined in our July 30th letter and are consistent with the "U.S. Policy in Iraq Act" you signed into law last year.

We also think there is one additional measure you can take immediately to demonstrate that you recognize the problems your policies have created in Iraq and elsewhere – consider changing the civilian leadership at the Defense Department. From the failure to deploy sufficient numbers of troops at the start of the war or to adequately equip them, to the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib, to disbanding the Iraqi military, to the failure to plan for the post-war occupation, the Administration's mistakes have taken a toll on our troops and our security. It is unacceptable to dismiss the concerns of military personnel and their families when they are affected by the consequences of these failures, as the Secretary of Defense recently did in Alaska by suggesting that volunteers should not complain about having their deployments extended. While a change in your Iraq policy will best advance our chances for success, we do not believe the current civilian leadership at the Department of Defense is suited to implement and oversee such a change in policy.

Mr. President, staying the course in Iraq has not worked and continues to divert resources and attention from the war on terrorism that should be the nation's top security priority. We hope you will consider the recommendations for change that we have put forward. We want to work with you in finding a way forward that honors the enormous sacrifice of our troops and promotes U.S. national security interests in the region. We believe our plan will achieve those goals.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Harry Reid, Senate Democratic Leader
Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Leader
Dick Durbin, Senate Assistant Democratic Leader
Steny Hoyer, House Minority Whip
Carl Levin, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee
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Jay Rockefeller, Vice Chairman, Senate Intelligence Committee
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Daniel Inouye, Ranking Member, Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
John Murtha, Ranking Member, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee

October 20, 2006

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500
Dear Mr. President:

We write out of a deep sense of concern that the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate and that there is no effective plan for improvement. The escalating sectarian violence coupled with the recent increase in the number of dead and wounded Americans are but the latest indications that neither the current U.S. plan, nor that of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, will bring stability and security to Iraq. Vice President Cheney's recent comment that, overall, things are going "remarkably well" in Iraq is profoundly troubling if it reflects your Administration's current assessment of the situation.

Iraq continues a rapid descent into full-scale civil war, with our troops increasingly caught in the middle. Over 200 U.S. troops were killed in the last 90 days, including 70 in the first two and one-half weeks of October, and on average 100 Iraqis are killed each day. The growing militia groups are beyond the government's control and have reportedly infiltrated the ranks of government security forces. Despite your recent decision to increase the U.S. military presence in Baghdad, the capital remains, more than three and a half years after the invasion, a city beset by violence and chaos – a conclusion echoed yesterday by Major General Caldwell. Unfortunately, recent violence in Balad, Basra, and Kirkuk demonstrates that Iraq's problems are not limited to the capital. Meanwhile, the insurgency is growing stronger in al Anbar province. The increased violence and a larger U.S. military deployment come even as your Administration reports that about 450,000 Iraqi security forces have been fielded (army, police, and facilities protection service) and are increasingly operating on their own, casting doubt on the central pillar of your strategy that "as Iraqis stand up, we will stand down."

It has never been more clear that we need to change course in Iraq. We were, therefore, disappointed to learn that you persist in your "stay the course" thinking. For example, during your phone call this past Monday with Prime Minister Maliki, it is reported that you told him, "Don't worry. You still have our full support," and that the Prime Minister should disregard rumors that the U.S. government was running out of patience. This message was conveyed to the Prime Minister despite the reluctance of the Iraqi Government to disarm the militias, despite the failure to move forward with a political reconciliation plan, and despite Iraq's recent agreement to share intelligence with Iran. Such a message at this critical time is also different than the one conveyed by the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq, the Secretary of State, the Republican Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and a bipartisan majority of Congress – all of whom have stated that it is important to keep pressure on the Iraqis to take more urgent action before the end of the year to resolve the political differences plaguing their country.

Mr. President, time is not on our side in Iraq. You and your Administration must do more to clearly inform the Iraqis that our commitment is not unlimited and that they must promptly make the political compromises necessary to bring Iraq together and to quell the violence. "Staying the course" is not a strategy, nor is sitting on the sidelines hoping that the Iraqis will eventually forge a political solution. We must actively engage the Iraqi leadership, just as we must work with each other to develop a better policy.

In two previous letters to you, dated July 30th and September 4th, we outlined sound changes in U.S. policy that would give our troops and the Iraqi people the best chance for success. In addition to beginning the phased redeployment and transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq by the end of the year, we strongly believe your Administration needs to more proactively pressure Iraqi leaders to disarm the militias and to develop a broad-based and sustainable political settlement, including considering amendments to the Constitution to achieve a fair sharing of power and resources. We also believe it is imperative to convene an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq and to preserve Iraq's sovereignty. We hope you will revisit those recommendations in light of the growing crisis confronting Iraq.

The steadily mounting sectarian violence, growing insurgency, and escalating casualty figures in Iraq are unacceptable and unsustainable. We urge you to change course, level with the American people, and join with us to develop a policy that will work, before the situation in Iraq is irretrievable. Thank you for your attention to our concern about the war, which is of critical importance to the American people.

Harry Reid, Senate Democratic Leader
Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Leader
Dick Durbin, Senate Democratic Whip
Steny Hoyer, House Democratic Whip
Carl Levin, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee
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John Murtha, Ranking Member, House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV, Vice Chairman, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Jane Harman, Ranking Member, House Select Committee on Intelligence