

Letter from Senate and House Democratic Leaders to President Bush Calling for Phased Redeployment from Iraq by End of the Year

July 30, 2006

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.

The letter is signed by:

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