

February 1, 2006 Congressman Murtha's Letter to President Bush

For Immediate Release

Feb. 1, 2006

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The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

This March will mark the beginning of the 4th year of the war in Iraq. In contrast, U.S. involvement in WWI came to an end after 19 months. Victory in Europe was declared in WWII after 3 years 5 months. In the Korean War, a cease-fire was signed after 3 years and 1 month. But after more than three and a half years into the war in Iraq, your administration finally produced what is called a "Plan for Victory" in Iraq.

Iraq is not the center for the global war on terrorism. I believe Iraq has diverted our attention away from the fight against global terrorism and has depleted the required resources needed to wage an effective war. It is estimated that there are only about 750 to 1,000 al-Qaeda in Iraq. I believe the Iraqis will force them out or kill them after U.S. troops are gone. In fact, there is now evidence that Iraqi insurgent groups are increasingly turning against al-Qaeda and other foreign terrorists.

Our country needs a vigorous and comprehensive strategy for victory against global terrorism. The architect of 9/11 is still out there but now has an international microphone. We must get back to the real issue at hand - we have to root out and destroy al-Qaeda's worldwide network.

There are 4 key elements that I recommend to reinvigorate our global anti-terrorism effort: Redeploy, Replace, Reallocate, and Reconstitute.

Redeploy

The war in Iraq is fueling terrorism, not eliminating it. Our continued military presence feeds the strong anti-foreigner fervor that has existed in this part of the world for centuries. A vast majority of the Iraqi people now view American troops as occupiers, not liberators. Over 80% of Iraqis want U.S. forces to leave Iraq and 47% think it is justified to attack Americans. 70% of Iraqis favor a timetable for withdrawal of U.S. forces, with half favoring a withdrawal in the next six

months. In fact, 67% of Iraqis expect day-to-day security for Iraqi citizens will improve if U.S. forces withdraw in six months and over 60% believe violent attacks, including those that are ethnically motivated, will decrease. Our military presence is the single most important reason why the Iraqis have tolerated the foreign terrorists, who account for less than 7 percent of the insurgency. 93% of the insurgency is made up of Iraqis. Once our troops are re-deployed, the Iraqis will reject the terrorists and deny them a safe haven in Iraq. The Iraqis are against a foreign presence in Iraq of any kind.

The steadfast and valiant efforts of the United States military and coalition partners have provided the Iraqi people with the framework needed to self govern. The Iraqis held elections that have been touted as highly successful, based primarily on the accounts of Iraqis who went to the polls. But our continued military presence in Iraq, regardless of the motives behind it, is seen by Iraqis as interfering in Iraq's democratic process and undercuts the chances for the newly elected government to be successful. Recently, Iraq's National Security Adviser accused U.S. negotiators of going behind the back of the Iraqi government on talks with insurgents, saying the process could encourage more violence. He said, "Americans are making a huge and fatal mistake in their policy for appeasement and they should not do this. They should leave the Iraqi government to deal with it... The United States should allow the new Iraqi government to decide on how to quell the insurgency."

In December 2005, an ABC News poll in Iraq produced some noteworthy results. 57% of Iraqis identified national security as the country's top priority. When asked to rate the confidence in public institutions, they gave Iraqi police a 68% confidence level, the Iraqi army 67%, religious leaders 67%. But the U.S./U.K. forces scored the lowest, a mere 18%.

The longer our military stays in Iraq, the more unwelcome we will be. We will be increasingly entangled in an open-ended nation building mission, one that our military can not accomplish amidst a civil war. Our troops will continue to be the targets of Iraqis who see them as interfering occupiers.

Redeploying our forces from Iraq and stationing a mobile force outside of the country removes a major antagonizing factor. I believe we will see a swift demise of foreign terrorist groups in Iraq if we redeploy outside of the country. Further, our troops will no longer be the targets of bloody attacks.

Replace

The ever-changing justifications of the war in Iraq, combined with tragic missteps, have resulted in a worldwide collapse of support for U.S. policies in Iraq.

The credibility of the United States of America will not be restored if we continue down the path of saying one thing and doing another. We must not lower our standards and tactics to those of the terrorists. In order to keep our homeland secure, we must hold true to the values that molded our American democracy, even in the face of adversity. Former Secretary of Homeland Security, Tom Ridge, said it best during a speech in March 2004 to the Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies: "America knows we cannot seek a double standard. And, America knows we get what we give. And so we must and will always be careful to respect people's privacy, civil liberties and reputations. To suggest that there is a tradeoff between security and individual freedoms -- that we must discard one protection for the other -- is a false choice. You do not defend liberty to forsake it."

Restoring the world's confidence in America as a competent and morally superior world leader is essential to winning the war on global terrorism.

A recent public opinion poll, conducted jointly with Zogby International and taken in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi

Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, found that 81% said the war in Iraq had brought less peace to the Middle East. A majority of the respondents said they view the United States as the biggest threat to their nations.

Mr. President, I believe in order to restore our credibility, you must hold accountable those responsible for so many missteps and install a fresh team that demonstrates true diplomatic skill, knowledge of cultural differences and a willingness to earnestly engage other leaders in a respectful and constructive way. This would do much to reinvigorate international participation in a truly effective war on global terrorism.

Reallocate

The Department of Defense has been allocated \$238 billion for the war in Iraq, with average monthly costs growing significantly since the beginning of the war. In 2003 the average monthly war cost was \$4.4 billion; by 2005 the average monthly cost had reached \$6.1 billion.

Despite the urgent homeland security needs of our country, the bipartisan 9/11 Commission issued a dismal report card on the efforts to improve our counter-terrorist defenses. Even the most basic of recommendations, such as the coordination of fire and police communication lines, still have not been accomplished.

In the face of threats from international terrorists, we need to reallocate funds from the war in Iraq to protecting the United States against attack. A safe and swift redeployment from Iraq will allow us to do just that.

Reconstitute

The U.S. army is the smallest it's been since 1941. It is highly capable. But this drawn out conflict has put tremendous stress on our military, particularly on our Army and Marine Corps, whose operations tempo has increased substantially since 9/11.

The Government Accountability Office issued a report in November 2005 addressing the challenges of military personnel recruitment and retention and noted that the Department of Defense had been unable to fill over 112,000 positions in critical occupational specialties. This shortfall includes intelligence analysts, special forces, interpreters, and demolition experts-- those on whom we rely so heavily in today's asymmetric battlefield.

Some of our troops have been deployed four times over the last three years. Enlistment for the regular forces as well as the guard and reserves are well below recruitment goals. In 2005, the Army missed its recruitment goal for the first time since 1999, even after offering enlistment bonuses and incentives, lowering its monthly goals, and lowering its recruitment standards. As Retired Army officer Andrew Krepinevich recently warned in a report to the Pentagon, the Army is "in a race against time" to adjust to the demands of war "or risk 'breaking' the force in the form of a catastrophic decline" in recruitment and re-enlistment.

The harsh environment in which we are operating our equipment in Iraq, combined with the equipment usage rate (ten times greater than peacetime levels) is taking a heavy toll on our ground equipment. It is currently estimated that \$50 billion will be required to refurbish this equipment.

Further, in its response to Hurricane Katrina, the National Guard realized that it had over \$1.3 billion in equipment shortfalls. This has created a tremendous burden on non-deployed guard units, on whom this country depends so heavily to respond to domestic disasters and possible terrorist attacks. Without relief, Army Guard units will face growing equipment shortages and challenges in regaining operational readiness for future missions at home and overseas.

Since 9/11, Congress has appropriated about \$334 billion for military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, while the insurgents have spent hundreds of thousands. We have seen reports estimating that the total cost of the wars may reach as high as \$1 trillion. These estimates are said to include such costs as providing long-term disability benefits and care for injured service members. It is estimated today that over 16,000 U.S. troops have been wounded in Iraq, 10,481 of whom have been wounded by "weaponry explosive devices."

But while war costs continue to climb, cuts are being made to the defense budget. As soon as the war is over there will be pressure to cut even more. This year, even while we are at war, 8 billion dollars was cut from the base defense spending bill. You ordered another \$32 billion in cuts to the defense budget over the next five years, with \$11.6 billion coming from the Army. The Pentagon told Congress only last year that it needed 77 combat brigades to fulfill its missions, but now insists it only needs 70. In fact, 6 of the 7 combat brigades will be cut from the National Guard, reducing its combat units from 34 to 28. Even though all of the National Guard combat brigades have been deployed overseas since 9/11, your Administration has determined that, because of funding shortfalls, our combat ground forces can be reduced. Not only will these cuts diminish our combat power, but our ability to respond to natural disasters and terrorist threats to our homeland will be adversely affected. It is obvious that the cost of the war, in conjunction with the Army's inability to meet recruitment goals, has impacted this estimate. My concern is that instead of our force structure being based on the future threat, it is now being based on the number of troops and level of funding available.

I am concerned that costly program cuts will lead to costly mistakes and we will be unable to sustain another deployment even if there is a real threat. The future of our military and the future of our country could very well be at stake. The high dollar forecasts of our future military weapons systems and military health care add pressure to cut costs on the backs of these programs. As our weapons systems age, the concern becomes even greater.

During a time of war, we are cutting our combat force, we have not mobilized industry, and have never fully mobilized our military. On our current path, I believe that we are not only in danger of breaking our military, but that we are increasing the chances of a major miscalculation by our future enemies, who may perceive us as vulnerable.

Sincerely,

JOHN P. MURTHA

Member of Congress