



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

JUL 25 2007

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-3204

Dear Senator Clinton:

I am responding to your July 19, 2007 letter regarding contingency plans for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. In preparing this response, I have reviewed Under Secretary Edelman's July 16, 2007 reply to your request for information on those plans, as well your initial May 22, 2007 inquiry.

First, allow me to reiterate that I have long been and continue to be an advocate of congressional oversight as a fundamental element of our system of government. I also have publicly expressed my belief that congressional debate on Iraq has been constructive, appropriate and necessary. In fact, you and I have engaged in fruitful exchanges along these lines. Furthermore, I agree with you that planning concerning the future of U.S. forces in Iraq – including the draw down of those forces at the right time – is not only appropriate, but essential. Under Secretary Edelman, along with the Department of Defense's senior civilian and military leadership, shares my views on these matters.

Specifically, I emphatically assure you that we do not claim, suggest, or otherwise believe that congressional oversight emboldens our enemies, nor do we question anyone's motives in this regard. My statements to this effect have been frequent and unambiguous. That said, we all recognize that there are multiple audiences for what we say, and need to be careful not to undermine the morale of our troops or encourage our enemies – the point I think Ambassador Edelman was trying to make in his letter.



With respect to your specific request, the Department's policy is to share appropriate information regarding policies, posture, and administrative plans with appropriate Congressional oversight committees. But as Under Secretary Edelman and officials from many previous Administrations have stated, it is also the Department's long-standing practice and policy spanning decades and multiple Administrations that operational military plans, including contingency plans, are not routinely shared with the Congress (or with other departments of the Executive Branch). There are a number of time-proven reasons for this policy, including considerations of operational security, the fact that plans are continuously modified as required by changing security conditions, and the need to protect the operational commander's ability to implement the plan as flexibly as the situation warrants. In short, the Department has to ensure that no commander is constrained by a plan that no longer comports with the situation on the ground.

All this said, I would be pleased to work with you and the Senate Armed Services Committee to establish a process to keep you apprised of the conceptual thinking, factors, considerations, questions and objectives associated with drawdown planning.

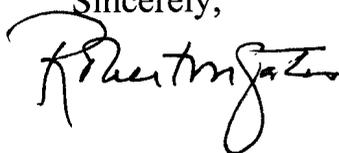
Further, you may rest assured that such planning is indeed taking place with my active involvement as well as that of senior military and civilian officials and our commanders in the field. I consider this contingency planning to be a priority for this Department.

Finally, I want to close by expressing my continued strong support for Ambassador Edelman. Dr. Edelman is a valued member of the Department of Defense team and his wise counsel and years of experience are critically important to the many pressing policy issues facing the military and our nation. Eric Edelman is a career foreign service officer who received his first senior Presidential appointment in 1998 as United States Ambassador to Finland. He has served our nation with distinction through multiple administrations and I rely on his able assistance in addressing the many challenges facing the Department in the months ahead.

I truly regret that this important discussion went astray and I also regret any misunderstanding of intention. However, I trust that this response addresses your concerns and that we can continue this dialogue in the

months ahead in a manner that keeps you and the committee properly informed and constructively furthers the national debate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Gates". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

cc: Chairman Carl Levin
Honorable John McCain