

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

NEW YORK
SENATOR

RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
SUITE 476
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3204
202-224-4451

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3204

August 2, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Throughout our history, Congress has played a vital role in holding administrations accountable, protecting our nation and our military through rigorous debate and oversight. We can point to Senator Harry Truman, leading efforts in the Senate, under what would be known as the "Truman Committee", to investigate war profiteering and military spending under the Roosevelt Administration. Our system of checks and balances is a source of strength, ensuring that the policies of our nation are tested in the fires of the democratic process.

That is why, on May 22, 2007, I wrote to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to request that he provide the appropriate oversight committees in Congress with briefings on contingency plans for the future withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. In that letter, I noted that the "seeds of many problems that continue to plague our troops and mission in Iraq were planted in the failure to adequately plan for the conflict and properly equip our men and women in uniform. Congress must be sure that we are prepared to withdraw our forces without any unnecessary danger." Withdrawing our forces from Iraq will be difficult and dangerous and we cannot afford to rely on rosy scenarios and hopeful predictions.

Nearly two months after writing to Secretary Gates, I received a response from Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman on behalf of the Secretary. In that letter, the Under Secretary did not address the questions I asked. Instead, Under Secretary Edelman suggested that congressional oversight emboldens our enemies and public debate over Iraq "reinforces enemy propaganda". In response to the Under Secretary's absurd charge, I once again contacted Secretary Gates to renew my request for briefings – classified if necessary – and urged the Secretary to reject the political attacks proffered by Under Secretary Edelman.

Secretary Gates issued a conciliatory reply, regretting "that this important discussion went astray" and reaffirming his respect for congressional oversight. The Secretary stated that he would work with me 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". In fact, as a result of my inquiry, a classified Pentagon briefing regarding redeployment planning has been scheduled for Thursday, August 2, 2007 before the Senate Armed Services Committee. I welcome this briefing.

This morning, I attended a classified briefing on redeployment planning to for members of the Senate Armed Services Committee by Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, and Director for Strategic Plans and Policy Lieutenant General John Sattler. The briefing, arranged by Committee Chairman Carl Levin and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, was well attended by members of both parties. There is a growing desire in Congress around planning for the eventual redeployment of U.S. Forces from Iraq. Indeed, Senators John Warner and Richard Lugar have written legislation that in part requires the Administration to report to Congress on a new military strategy in Iraq. I am writing to encourage you and your administration to let the Congress work with you to plan for all conditions in Iraq including the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces in a manner that safeguards our national security interests and protects our men and women in uniform.

It is unfortunate, however, that Vice President Cheney has disagreed publicly with Secretary Gates, throwing his support behind the statements of Under Secretary Edelman and casting doubt on the true position of your administration. When asked about the letter in an interview on CNN, the Vice President said, "I agreed with the letter Eric Edelman wrote. I thought it was a good letter". It was a letter that impugned the patriotism of millions of Americans, including a bipartisan majority in the United States Senate, who believe it is long past time to change course in Iraq.

While it is not an uncommon occurrence for Vice President Cheney to offer support for, or participate in, politically motivated attacks against those who have a difference of opinion, it was surprising to see so outrageous a charge – one which has been disavowed by the Secretary of Defense – given credence by the vice president. While I have urged vigorous debate between the executive and legislative branches, I did not expect a public disagreement within the executive branch alone, especially on a matter as fundamental as the constitutional role of Congress to check and balance the president.

As a Senator and member of the Senate Armed Services committee, there is no matter of greater importance and urgency than the safety of our troops. That is why I am writing to request a clarification on the position of your administration on the importance of Congress in overseeing our nation's Iraq policy. Congress must hold your administration to the scrutiny which the Constitution demands and, frankly, your record in Iraq has earned.

Sincerely yours,



Hillary Rodham Clinton

Cc: The Honorable Richard B. Cheney, Vice President of the United States of America
The Honorable Josh Bolton, White House Chief of Staff
The Honorable Stephen Hadley, National Security Advisor
Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, Asst. to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor
The Honorable Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense
The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State