



THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
2000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2000

JUL 16 2007

POLICY

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Clinton:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Gates regarding Iraq contingency planning. I am responding on his behalf.

We remain committed to achieving our strategic objective of a united Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself and is an ally in the war on terror. In order to achieve this objective, on January 10, 2007, the President announced the *New Way Forward*. This strategy consists of several phases. In the initial phase, additional U.S. and Iraqi combat forces were deployed to key neighborhoods of Baghdad and elsewhere to develop intelligence about the enemy and relationships of trust with the local communities. This phase unfolded over five months and has recently shifted from a "surge deployment" to "surge operations."

In the second phase, Coalition and Iraqi forces are engaged in ongoing offensive operations as a part of Operation Phantom Thunder to disrupt al Qaeda and Shiite militia bases all around Baghdad in advance of major clear-and-hold operations. These operations draw upon the lessons learned from previous successes in Fallujah, Tal' Afar, and Ramadi, as well as from operations that did not fully achieve their objectives, such as the first two iterations of the Baghdad Security Plan in 2006. Consequently, this is the first operation designed to strike the enemy in almost all its major areas of operation at once. This operation also is using the successful engagement with tribal leaders on security cooperation in Anbar as a model for Diyala and Ameriyah.

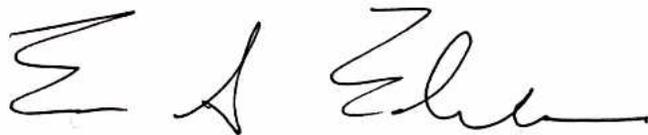
The clear-and-hold operations in Baghdad that comprise the strategy's third phase are intended to bring lasting security to Iraq's capital and create the space for political and economic progress. Because these operations will continue for many months, it is too early to assess whether this new strategy will be successful, and it is premature to say with certainty whether and how a future phased withdrawal would be conducted. However, past operations in Sadr City, Najaf, Fallujah, and Tal' Afar have demonstrated that rapid reductions in Coalition forces after clearing operations undermine the tactical success our forces fought hard for on the ground.

Although we share our commanders' belief in ours and the Iraqi Security Forces' ability to establish security in Baghdad, this is only a precondition for further political and economic progress, not a guarantee of it. Premature and public discussion of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq reinforces enemy propaganda that the United States will abandon its allies in Iraq, much as we are perceived to have done in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia. Such talk understandably unnerves the very same Iraqi allies we are asking to assume enormous personal risks in order to achieve compromises on national reconciliation, amending the Iraqi constitution, and other contentious issues. Fear of a precipitate U.S. withdrawal also exacerbates sectarian trends in Iraqi politics as factions become more concerned with achieving short-term tactical advantages rather than reaching the long-term agreements necessary for a stable and secure Iraq.

I assure you, however, that as with other plans, we are always evaluating and planning for possible contingencies. As you know, it is long-standing departmental policy that operational plans, including contingency plans, are not released outside of the Department.

I appreciate your interest in our mission in Iraq and would be happy to answer any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "E S Edelman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being a large, stylized capital letter.

Eric S. Edelman