

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 27, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our concerns about the current dynamic in Iraq.

Some have proposed setting a fixed date for departure. We agree with you that such a policy would be counter-productive, because it would give an incentive to insurgents and jihadists to simply outlast us, and because it would also increase the chances of a civil war on our departure.

At the opposite extreme, some administration officials have said recently that we would stay in Iraq as long as needed. We believe that goes too far, because it is too open-ended a commitment to the Iraqis that we will continue to provide security even if they fail to agree on a constitution, thereby lessening the chances the Iraqis will make the compromises necessary to defeat the jihadists, end the insurgency, and become a nation.

The Iraqis have approved a timetable for adopting a constitution: August 15, with the possibility of one 6-month extension. There is a consensus that military action without a political settlement will not defeat the insurgency in Iraq. We also believe that none of the ethnic groups in Iraq wants our forces to leave. Therefore, we believe that we should send the clear message to the Iraqis that they need to reach a political settlement according to the timetable to which they have agreed.

In your speech to the nation on Iraq tomorrow night, we hope you will make it clear that unless the Iraqis meet their own timetable for adopting a constitution, we will review our position in Iraq with all of our options open, including a reevaluation of our military commitment. The failure of the Iraqis to adopt a constitution as scheduled would represent a lack of will to create a country, and would instead reflect a continued willingness by them to rely on U.S. troops to carry a burden the Iraqis must accept. We should demonstrate to the Iraqis that our willingness to bear that burden is not unlimited.

We have opened the door for the Iraqis, but only they can walk through it. We cannot hold that door open indefinitely. Only a constitutional agreement – a political agreement among all parties – can change the status quo and end the current deadly dynamic in Iraq. The possibility of our leaving unless such a settlement is reached can help bring about that agreement.

Sincerely,



Carl Levin



Susan M. Collins