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September 5, 2003

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to recommend five specific actions that I believe will begin to restore the nation's footing in foreign affairs and the war on terrorism. I think the time has arrived to recognize that we have suffered serious setbacks in efforts to make the American people safe. While we have done some things well, we have also made some serious mistakes that should not be repeated. Acknowledging those mistakes and learning from them is critical to improving our performance in the war against terrorists.

- First, I recommend that you allow the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense to return to the private sector. I am certain that they have worked hard and have made financial and personal sacrifices for what they perceived to be the national interest. Nonetheless, it is impossible to review the record of the past year and not conclude that they have made repeated and serious miscalculations—miscalculations that have been extremely costly to the American people in terms of lives lost, degradation of our military and intelligence capability to defend against terrorists in countries outside of Iraq, isolation from our traditional allies and unexpected demands on our budget that are crowding out other priorities. Whether one concludes that the invasion of Iraq was strategically in the best interests of the United States or not, it is impossible at this point to conclude that the unilateral way in which it was handled was in our national interest or that the planning for the post conflict portion of the operation was anything other than a disaster.

- Second, I recommend that the responsibilities for developing and implementing foreign policy that have traditionally resided in the Department of State be fully restored to that Department. I think it has become eminently clear that the Pentagon now faces daunting problems in meeting current military requirements. These include improving force protection, expanding our tactical intelligence capabilities, resolving huge logistical bottlenecks that are preventing needed equipment and munitions from reaching the troops in the field and finding ways to stretch current personnel resources to meet the mission they now face. The prominent role played by the Pentagon in making decisions in Iraq and elsewhere that are far afield from their traditional military responsibilities has no doubt reduced its focus on resolving force protection, logistical and other issues. It is also highly questionable whether the Pentagon has adequate resources to responsibly make decisions on such things as the ethnic and political makeup of the Iraqi Governing Council.

- Third, I recommend that you make it clear to whomever you appoint to replace Secretaries Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz that the uniformed leaders of our military are to be accorded their traditional role in the formulation of military policy. While I believe it is of the utmost importance that the uniformed services remain subservient to and work under the direction of civilian leaders, I believe countermanding their professional judgments in matters of war fighting should be done with the greatest of discretion—particularly when it is done by civilians with no combat experience. And that is the case with the vast majority of current political appointees in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. I believe that if the professional judgments of the uniformed leaders had been followed, we would have lost fewer lives, we would have recovered a significantly greater portion of Iraqi intelligence materials and we would have had a workable plan for the post invasion phase of the Iraq operation. I think the unwillingness of the civilian leadership to follow the recommendations of our uniformed personnel is currently exposing the country to risks posed by potential adversaries in other parts of the world because of their rejection of proposals to rebuild our active duty reserve capacity.

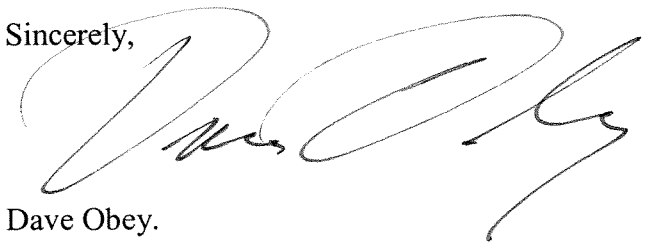
- Fourth, I recommend that you establish government wide standards for the collection and vetting of intelligence. While we should always be seeking ways to improve our nations intelligence capabilities we should also recognize the excellent performance of our established intelligence agencies. The much publicized intelligence failures of the past year were, by and large, not failures of these organizations. They were in fact, failures based on information collected outside of these organizations that found its way into the formal decision making processes of this government without the normal vetting procedures required of all other government intelligence. The assessment that the civilian leadership of the Pentagon passed on to their subordinates that the Iraqis would *"welcome us with open arms"* was

in fact not the assessment of any established U.S. intelligence agency. These mistakes have impacted the morale of our forces, the will of our citizenry and the confidence of our allies around the world. It is our responsibility to provide ample assurances that such mistakes will not be repeated.

- Fifth, I recommend that you significantly strengthen the staffing of the National Security Council. In all six of the previous administrations with which I have served the Council has played a critical role in balancing and coordinating the roles of the various entities within the executive branch that contribute to our nation's security. Each of these entities has a valuable contribution to make and each offers a useful perspective on security issues. Without the active efforts of the NSC, it is inevitable than one Department or Agency will become too dominant in that process and will exclude or reduce the contributions of other portions of the government. It is in your interest and in the interest of the American people to keep all channels open.

I hope you will accept my word when I say that I am not writing this as a criticism of any individual or group of individuals. I am certain that they all came into government to make the best effort that they could on behalf of the American people and I salute them for the long hours and considerable stress that they have had to endure. But like many Americans I am deeply disturbed not only by the current course of events but also by the process which led us to the situation in which we now find ourselves. In my travels throughout my Congressional District during the month of August I found people more deeply polarized and divided than at any time during the past 34 years that I have had the privilege of representing that portion of America. Reports from my colleagues indicate the same situation in other parts of the country. If we are going to bring the country, and perhaps the world, back together, we should begin with a fair assessment of our successes and failures and move forward with a common vision.

Sincerely,



Dave Obey.