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ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

February 10, 2004

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to convey my belief that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) needs to become involved in helping to rebuild Iraq. I ask that you urge our allies to consider sending troops as part of a NATO force to Iraq to participate in the stabilization and rebuilding process. Let me explain my reasoning.

I recently visited Iraq for the second time, and I came away with several impressions. First, it is clear that there is substantial animus toward American military forces by elements within the Iraqi populace. Even though we may see our presence in Iraq as a temporary occupation until a viable government and security environment may be established, many Iraqis plainly view our forces skeptically. The repeated attacks against our troops with improvised explosive devices manifest this attitude and highlight the dangers our forces face on a daily basis. To the extent that the military forces of NATO or other countries supplant our forces in Iraq, certainly fewer Americans will be killed.

Second, as we approach the transfer of sovereignty to a new Iraqi government, it is clear that whatever new government assumes power must not be seen as a puppet or instrumentality of the United States Government or it will lack legitimacy. Involving troops from NATO countries to help establish security and provide stability will reinforce the perception that it is the international community, not just the United States, that wants a new, representative government in Iraq to succeed. Moreover, the simple fact is that Europe and our NATO allies have a compelling interest in a stable Iraq and Middle East, just as we do.

Much as I believe a NATO military presence in Iraq will be beneficial, it will not be a panacea. Any NATO forces that may serve in Iraq will need to be carefully chosen. We should seek to have them serve in localities where their capabilities are most

compatible with the missions in those areas. We must also be sensitive to ethnic considerations. For example, Turkey is a key NATO ally, but a Turkish troop presence would undoubtedly exacerbate ethnic tensions in many parts of Iraq. Moreover, it will be critically important to define the rules of engagement for American and all third-country military forces before any new sovereign Iraqi government is empowered so that our ability to aggressively pursue terrorists is not compromised. Finally, the scope of our involvement in Iraq is such that we will need a substantial American military presence there for the foreseeable future, regardless of whether or not NATO forces participate in Iraq's rebuilding.

Regardless of the merit of the reasons that led us to invade Iraq, we are there, and the United States' credibility as a superpower and global leader is on the line. We simply cannot fail in Iraq or our world leadership will be compromised indefinitely, and our nation will be far less secure than it is today. I believe our chances of success in Iraq will be increased by NATO's meaningful participation in Iraq's security, and I urge you to use your good offices to achieve that result.

Sincerely,

Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat