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The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In recent weeks there has been much debate, public and private, over the possibility of a United States military campaign against Iraq. I agree with the notion that Saddam Hussein is an evil man who continues to pose a serious threat to the stability of the Middle East. However, as one who voted in favor of authorizing the use of force prior to the Persian Gulf War in 1991, and supported President George H. W. Bush through the duration of that conflict, I write to express my deep reservations over launching an attack against Iraq. Without a clear purpose or strategy, I question whether you have established that waging a war at this time would be advantageous to the United States.

Mr. President, most of the world agrees that Saddam Hussein is a menace to the region, the international community, and the Iraqi people. Iraq refuses to comply with its obligations regarding weapons of mass destruction (WMD), nor does it observe U.N.-imposed no-flight zones. Saddam Hussein's Iraq has rejected its neighbors calls for reconciliation, repeatedly threatened to attack Kuwait, failed to account for 600 missing Kuwaiti citizens and as recently as last year conducted raids into Saudi Arabian territory.

Saddam Hussein's repressive policies have resulted in the deaths of countless Iraqi citizens. While defying the international community, Saddam Hussein has manipulated public opinion by blaming the United States and the United Nations for the intense hardships faced by the people of Iraq. The UN has repeatedly found that the Iraqi government supports massive and systematic human rights abuses, and has demonstrated in act and deed that it would rather manipulate the suffering of innocent civilians for propaganda effect rather than take full advantage of humanitarian relief efforts, such as the oil-for-food program.

That being said, there is great concern in the United States and around the globe over the possibility of the U.S. launching a unilateral, sustained military operation against Iraq. To date, the United States has not clearly stated its rationale for attacking Iraq, nor have we answered questions pertaining to the possible consequences of opting for military confrontation. This has triggered intense criticism of U.S. policy vis-a-vis Iraq at home and abroad. Without outlining the objectives and rationale for an attack or obtaining the necessary domestic and international support, a U.S. military campaign would be unwise. Accordingly, I firmly believe the Administration must meet the following conditions pertaining to Iraq in order to justify and guarantee the success of a military campaign:

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1) The Bush Administration must consult and obtain approval from Congress before launching a sustained attack of Iraq.
   - Congress must be provided with any and all facts justifying the need for military action, and must be offered a clear explanation as to the goals of a military campaign, including an exit strategy. The Administration must also explain to Congress why military action against the Iraqi regime is vital to the security of the United States, and why it is necessary now.
   - The Administration must make a clear and convincing case that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction -- biological, chemical, or nuclear -- and the means to deliver such agents. The Administration must explain why it believes Iraq will employ these kinds of weapons in imminent attacks on other nations.
2) Any sustained military campaign must have the support of the international community.
   - We must first be certain that our nation's traditional allies in Europe and elsewhere support a military operation against Iraq.
   - The Administration must secure the support of our regional allies, and gain access to military bases in those nations bordering Iraq which are vital to the success of a military operation.
   - The United States must have the support of, and/or be able to coordinate with, the armed forces of our regional and other allies necessary to guarantee success militarily and diplomatically.
   - The matter of Iraq must be fully debated by the United Nations. An attack on Iraq must have the support of the U.N., and must be carried out under U.N. auspices.
3) The Administration must formulate and explain its strategy for post-war Iraq. The U.S. must answer questions as to how it will assist in reconstituting a united Iraq, maintain Iraqi territorial integrity, and build a peaceful government and stable society that does not pose a threat to the U.S., our allies, or the region.
4) Congress and the American people must be informed of the anticipated cost of opting for military action, both in lives and dollars. The Administration must fully explain the cost of waging a war in Iraq, economically, militarily, and diplomatically. It must demonstrate that the considerable costs of a military endeavor justify an attack on Iraq.

Again, I would caution against unilaterally unleashing U.S. military might on Iraq until a compelling case is made to the American people, Congress, and the international community. Needless to say, we must also have clear objectives in the short and long term, less we risk suffering unintended consequences.

Sincerely yours,

John D. Dingell
Member of Congress