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Thursday, December 6, 2001

Ford urges President to Support Anti-Saddam Forces In Iraq

WASHINGTON - Citing a threat to U.S. interests, Congressman Harold Ford, Jr. (D-TN) - along with several of his House and Senate colleagues - today urged President Bush to work with Iraqi opposition forces to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

Ford and Representatives Tom Lantos (D-CA) and Henry Hyde (R-IL), and Senators John McCain (R-AZ), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), Bob Graham (D-FL), Trent Lott (R-MS), Richard Shelby (R-AL), Jesse Helms (R-NC) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) sent a letter to President Bush requesting the Administration to support the Iraqi National Congress with humanitarian assistance, information gathering, and military training. The Iraqi National Congress is an umbrella group of anti-Saddam forces on the ground in Iraq.

"In the wake of the tragic events in Israel over the past few days, it is even more urgent that we do all we can to remove Saddam Hussein from power," Ford said. "Saddam has a long history of destabilizing the region and we have every reason to believe he is attempting to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction."

Ford and his colleagues pointed to the Iraq Liberation Act, passed by Congress in 1998, which gives the President the discretion to provide up to \$97 million in military support and training to Iraqi opposition organizations. In spite of the passage of this legislation, the U.S. has denied assistance to the Iraqi National Congress inside any part of Iraq.

"If we have learned one thing from the ongoing battle in Afghanistan, it is that working effectively in coordination with locals on the ground can significantly leverage our own use of military force. While we have no doubt that in the long run, the United States will always prevail in battle with the likes of the Taliban (not to speak of Saddam Hussein), we also know that we can minimize casualties and shorten conflict by cooperating with opposition forces," the lawmakers wrote in the letter.

December 5, 2001

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

Dear Mr. President

The events of September 11 have highlighted the vulnerability of the United States to determined terrorists. As we work to clean up Afghanistan and destroy al Qaeda, it is imperative that we plan to eliminate the threat from Iraq.

This December will mark three years since United Nations inspectors last visited Iraq. There is no doubt that since that time, Saddam Hussein has reinvigorated his weapons programs. Reports indicate that biological, chemical and nuclear programs continue apace and may be back to pre-Gulf War status. In addition, Saddam continues to refine delivery systems and is doubtless using the cover of a licit missile program to develop longer- range missiles that will threaten the United States and our allies.

For much of the last year, the Administration has struggled to plug loopholes in the international sanctions against Iraq. Unfortunately, efforts to co-opt Saddam's illegal trading partners - particularly Syria - have failed. In the meantime, the illegal oil trade from Iraq has flourished, and Saddam now earns an estimated \$2 billion annually, much of which he has devoted to his military and his illegal weapons programs.

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If we have learned one thing from the ongoing battle in Afghanistan, it is that working effectively in coordination with locals on the ground can significantly leverage our own use of military force. While we have no doubt that in the long run, the United States will always prevail in battle with the likes of the Taliban (not to speak of Saddam Hussein), we also know that we can minimize casualties and shorten conflict by cooperating with opposition forces. That has been a key element of U.S. strategy for decades.

Since the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act three years ago, we have fought to provide support for Iraqis inside Iraq. The Iraqi National Congress (INC), an umbrella group of all the significant anti-Saddam forces inside Iraq, has consistently requested Administration assistance for operations on the ground in Iraq ranging from the delivery of humanitarian assistance and information-gathering to military and technical training and lethal military force.

Despite the express wishes of the Congress, the INC has been denied U.S. assistance for any operations inside any part of Iraq, including liberated Kurdish areas. Instead, successive Administrations have funded conferences, offices and other intellectual exercises that have done little more than expose the INC to accusations of being "limousine insurgents" and "armchair guerillas." We note the troubling similarity of these accusations to charges made against the Afghan guerillas now helping us win the war against the Taliban.

The threat from Iraq is real, and it cannot be permanently contained. For as long as Saddam Hussein is in power in Baghdad, he will seek to acquire weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. We have no doubt that these deadly weapons are intended for use against the United States and its allies. Consequently, we believe we must directly confront Saddam, sooner rather than later. Without allies on the ground inside Iraq, we will be handicapping our own efforts. Each day that passes costs us an opportunity to unite and professionalize the Iraqi opposition, thus ensuring it will be less capable when the conflict begins.

Again, we can learn from our experience in Afghanistan. We cannot be drawn into the ethnic politics of any particular nation, but we should find a way to work with all the opposition in a unified framework. The Iraqi National Congress is the only umbrella organization comprising all elements of the Iraqi opposition. No one group is excluded, no one group is favored.

Mr. President, all indications are that in the interest of our own national security, Saddam Hussein must be removed from power. Let us maximize the likelihood of a rapid victory by beginning immediately to assist the Iraqi opposition on the ground inside Iraq by providing them money and assistance already authorized and appropriated.

We look forward to working with you on this most important matter.

Sincerely,

(signed)
John McCain
U.S. Senator

(signed)
Joseph Lieberman
U.S. Senator

(signed)
Jesse Helms
U.S. Senator

(signed)
Richard Shelby
U.S. Senator

(signed)
Bob Graham
U.S. Senator

(signed)
Henry Hyde
Member of Congress

(signed)
Harold Ford, Jr.
Member of Congress

(signed)
Tom Lantos
Member of Congress

