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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 23, 2007

ANTONY J. BLINKEN, STAFF DIRECTOR
KENNETH A. MYERS, Jr., REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

The President
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

As you know, improvised explosive devices are responsible for seventy percent of our casualties and deaths in Iraq. Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles – with an armored V-shaped and raised undercarriage – provide four to five times the protection from IEDs than up-armored humvees (HMMWVs). The military expects a two-thirds reduction in casualties once MRAPs are in the field. That is an amazing improvement in protection. I believe we must build and deploy as many of these vehicles as the military needs as quickly as possible. I urge you to use the power of your office to make this effort a national priority.

The military has told Congress they need 7,774 MRAPs across all of the services. That number may increase significantly, however, as Congress has been informed that the Army is re-evaluating its requirements. Currently, the Army has requested only 2,500 of the 7,774. According to press reports, Lieutenant General Odierno, commander of the multinational forces in Baghdad, has asked to replace all of the approximately 18,000 Army humvees in Iraq with MRAPs. I understand that a team is in Iraq this week evaluating needs.

Secretary of Defense Gates has said that MRAP acquisition is now the highest priority for the military. I applaud his commitment, but it may not suffice to overcome obstacles to expanding production capacity, especially if the military decides to replace all or most of the humvees in Iraq with mine resistant vehicles. Your personal engagement will be necessary to make sure the government and industry are working hand in hand to get the job done.

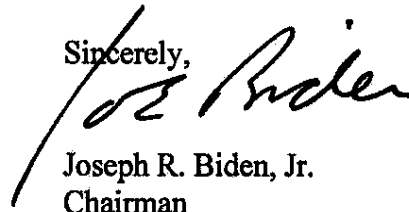
First, I urge you to make it clear, personally and publicly, that getting MRAPs into the field is a national priority. Second, I recommend that you ask Secretary Gates to provide a clear statement of the number needed and the cost by June 15, as well as any obstacles he sees to expanding production. Third, we in Congress should join with you to commit to providing the funds necessary to build what is needed by February 2008, whatever the cost. I will work with you to make that happen. Fourth, please let Congress know if there is any new authority you need to speed production. If you set the nation to this task, we will achieve it.

I am also deeply troubled by information that came to light this week which suggests that the military leadership ignored an urgent request from commanders in Iraq for 1,169 MRAPs in February 2005. It was not until more than a year later, in May 2006, that the military acted on a second request, and then for only 185 vehicles. How is it possible that with our nation at war,

with more than 130,000 Americans in danger, with roadside bombs destroying a growing number of lives and limbs, we were so slow to act to protect our troops? I have written to the Secretary of Defense and to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to ask that this failure be investigated. We need to know how and why this happened so that it does not happen again. I hope you will make clear your personal interest in getting answers.

Mr. President, whatever their views on the war in Iraq, Americans are united on this: so long as a single American soldier or marine is on the front lines, it is our shared responsibility to protect him or her with every ounce of our energy, our ingenuity, and our determination. I hope you will lead us in the effort to give our soldiers and marines in Iraq the best protection this country can provide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Biden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Joe" is written in a larger, more prominent script than "Biden".

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Chairman