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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

October 23, 2003

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ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

First of all, I would like to compliment you on raising difficult questions, as discussed in recent media reports, about U.S. involvement in Iraq and in the broader war on terrorism. These efforts are central to our global leadership and can only be done well when senior leaders like yourself are consistently re-examining the fundamental premises of American policy to make sure we can sustain that policy and succeed in its goals.

The House Armed Services Committee held a hearing this past week highlighting views of outside witnesses on the lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom. Despite the many successes cited by all of the witnesses, MG Bob Scales, USA (Ret) highlighted a particular area for improvement—the need for better “cultural awareness” of our military personnel and civilian personnel in policy formulation, warfighting, and in stability operations. In simple terms, if we had better understood the Iraqi culture and mindset, our war plans would have been even better than they were, the plan for the post-war period and all of its challenges would have been far better, and we may be better prepared for the “long slog”, as you put it, that we must be prepared to face in order to win the peace in Iraq.

I am convinced that we must improve our “cultural awareness” capability by incorporating it into the curricula at the staff and war colleges. We must also seek personnel in our civilian ranks who have cultural knowledge and understanding to inform the policy process. Our policies would benefit from this not only in Iraq, but also throughout the Middle East, Asia, and elsewhere, where we will have long-term strategic relationships and potential military challenges for many years to come.

I would be happy to provide any additional assistance I can in this area and urge your staff to contact MG Scales. He would be an excellent resource on this subject.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ike Skelton", with a small dot at the end of the signature.

Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat