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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

June 26, 2007

Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-6225

Dear Joe:

Thank you for your May 24, 2007 letter regarding the Department of Defense's (DOD) procurement of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. I share your concerns about this program, particularly potential vulnerabilities to Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFP). The deadly threat posed by these weapons and other Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) is having a devastating impact on our military service members, and the Committee is committed to ensuring they are provided with the best equipment and training available.

I am also concerned about the difference between the Army and Marine Corps validated requirements for MRAP vehicles. During a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on June 19, 2007, I asked Secretary Geren to help our Committee better understand these differences, and he indicated that: (1) the Army's requirement is certainly greater than 2,500; and (2) the Army is currently evaluating its immediate needs, recognizing that there are perhaps some missions the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) could continue to perform effectively. In the coming days, I expect the Army to report the results of this evaluation to the Committee.

Press reports about the February 2005 Marine Corps Urgent Operational Needs Statement that you referenced in your letter concerned me a great deal as well. Since learning of this needs statement, my Committee staff has met with the Marine Corps multiple times. The Marine Corps' answer to the Committee staff has been two-fold: 1) the Marine Corps has initiated its own internal review of how urgent operational needs statements are handled; and 2) the Marine Corps indicated that the request from theater called for more effective armor materiel, which came in the form of fragmentation kit upgrades, rather than a specialized vehicle like the MRAP. I have directed my Committee

staff to continue meeting with the Marine Corps on this matter until the internal review is completed.

The issue of the Ballistic Protection Experiment, and the proposal known as the "Bull," is addressed in the attached letter I sent to the Secretary of Defense. I cannot vouch for the claims of companies that approach DOD with new armor solutions, but I do believe it is critical for DOD to evaluate all credible armor solutions in a quick and deliberative manner. I also believe it is important that, as DOD moves forward with the production of MRAPs, the Army and Marine Corps develop a process through which incremental improvements can be inserted into MRAP production lines. Additionally, I have asked the DOD what plans and processes are in place to enable us to react quickly to the enemy's tactical adjustments to our technology improvements.

I look forward to working with you in the coming months on these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl", written over a faint circular stamp.

Carl Levin
Chairman

Enclosure

CARL LEVIN, MICHIGAN, CHAIRMAN

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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

June 19, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I remain concerned about the Army's slow reaction to the theater's urgent request for vehicles that provide better protection against Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) than the Up-Armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV).

It is my understanding that the vehicles on which the MRAP program is based, while providing protection against blasts originating beneath the vehicle, provide insufficient protection against the Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs) that are being used with such lethal effect against our forces in Iraq. This vulnerability has been highlighted in a number of recent press reports.

On January 21, 2007, Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno, USA, Commander Multi-National Corps - Iraq, issued a Joint Urgent Operational Needs request establishing a requirement for the MRAP program to address the EFP IED threat. Last fall, the Rapid Equipping Force, the Army Research Laboratory, and the Joint IED Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) funded the rapid development and testing of a special armor design that provides greatly enhanced protection against the EFPs encountered to date in Iraq.

It is my understanding that the services have engineered this armor design into the so-called "Frag-Kit 6" configuration that could be added as applique armor to the MRAP vehicles to provide some protection against EFPs. However, the applique approach will only protect a portion of the vehicle; on the other hand, if the special armor is added to the vehicles to provide full protection, the weight will overwhelm the load-carrying capacity of some or all of the MRAP variants without major redesigns.

In contrast, it is my understanding that the companies with which the Department worked to develop and demonstrate the new special armor have taken a different approach. In the last six months, the companies have developed a concept, called the "Bull," which was briefed to my committee staff last week, for integrating a commercial truck chassis and drive train with an encapsulated armored compartment that would provide seamless and comprehensive protection against underbody blasts, EFPs, and other ballistic threats. According to the briefing, the vehicle

chassis, suspension, and drive train have been selected from the start to carry the weight and bulk of the special armor. Furthermore, the truck models selected are actually smaller than many of the MRAP designs currently under contract.

Moreover, one of the companies producing MRAPs, Force Protection Industries, is apparently already selling a special variant to the United Kingdom that allegedly provides a substantial degree of protection against EFPs. In addition, the company asserts that it, too, has developed and tested a special armor design that can defeat EFPs and that is much lighter than the armor developed for "Frag-Kit 6" – light enough to be applied to protect the entire occupied area of the vehicle without modifying the chassis or suspension.

I cannot, of course, vouch for the claims of these companies. If accurate, however, they present potentially important paths to improving protection for our forces. I urge you to immediately evaluate the accuracy of the claims. Also, I would like to understand better how the Department generally plans to address repeated instances like this of companies developing more effective armoring technologies while MRAPs are in production, as well as how the Department plans to react quickly to the enemy's tactical adjustments to our technology improvements. Can companies with new products enter the MRAP program? Has the Department developed another path, beyond the fragmentation kit development process, through which new and potentially more effective force protection technologies can be evaluated and fielded?

I look forward to learning the results of the Department's evaluation of the Bull proposal and the claims of Force Protection Industries. I believe it is imperative that DoD act decisively to incorporate protection against EFPs in at least a major portion of the MRAP fleet. This is a matter of intense interest to me and my colleagues, as I know it is to you.

I look forward to frequent interactions in the coming months on this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carl Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "L".

Carl Levin
Chairman