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Press Release

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**Levin Statement on President Bush's Decision
to Unilaterally Withdraw From the ABM Treaty**

WASHINGTON – Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, made the following statement today regarding President Bush's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Ensuring the security and safety of the American people, especially from weapons of mass destruction, must remain our first defense priority. If I believed that withdrawing unilaterally from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty would enhance our national security, I would support doing so. However, the President's announcement that the United States will unilaterally withdraw from the ABM Treaty is a serious mistake for our national security. It is not necessary and it is not wise.

Unilateral withdrawal is not necessary because the ABM Treaty is not a significant constraint on testing at this time. Indeed, until a few months ago, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) was proceeding with research, development and testing that was entirely consistent with the treaty. This approach recognized that the United States can develop and test national missile defenses and stay in the treaty. However, the administration then added new tests that would conflict with the treaty – even though these tests are of marginal value.

Unilateral withdrawal is not wise because it focuses on the least likely threats to our security rather than the most likely threats. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that ballistic missiles are the least likely means of delivering a weapon of mass destruction to the United States. The more likely threat comes from a nuclear, biological or chemical weapon being delivered to the United States in a plane, truck, ship or a suitcase, which would be more reliable, less costly, harder to detect and have no "return address" against which to easily retaliate. We need to focus on the most likely threats to our security before accelerating the spending of billions of dollars for defenses against the least likely threats.

Unilateral withdrawal is not wise because it needlessly strains our growing relationship with Russia, a partner in the new war on terrorism. The President's decision also seems to be a violation of his campaign pledge at the Citadel in September 1999, that, if elected, he would "offer Russia the necessary amendments to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty." From newspaper accounts it appears that the administration did not offer amendments to the Russians that would allow us to proceed with the new tests that the administration added. Instead, something much broader was proposed by the administration and not necessarily in the form of amendments. In other words, rather than proceeding with tests permissible under the ABM Treaty or reaching agreement with Russia on amendments to allow for further testing and maintaining the right to withdraw at a later time, the administration has decided at this time to unilaterally withdraw. This is not the way to treat an important nation with which we seek a new relationship based on mutual cooperation. It is fair to ask: What specific amendments to the ABM Treaty were proposed to the Russians by the President as he promised?

Unilateral withdrawal is not wise because it risks upsetting strategic stability. It

risks a dangerous action-reaction cycle in offensive and defensive technologies that would leave America less secure. Even though the missile defense system being pursued by the administration is limited, the technologies that would be created as part of this limited system could quickly lead to a much larger program that could – in Russian eyes – undermine their nuclear deterrent. This could prompt Russia to take the destabilizing step of putting multiple warheads on missiles, so-called MIRVed missiles. This could lead China to rapidly increase their nuclear program. It could also lead China or other countries to devise countermeasures and decoys that they could then sell.

Finally, the President's decision to withdraw unilaterally from the ABM Treaty is not wise because it risks undermining our relationships with allies, partners and other nations just when the world is united in a common fight against terrorism. As this multilateral effort clearly demonstrates, our security is enhanced when we make common cause with other nations in pursuit of common goals. In both the short-term and the long-term, our security is diminished when we forge ahead unilaterally regardless of the impact on the security of other nations.

The Armed Services Committee will hold hearings on the administration's decision in the weeks and months ahead.

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