

## Retired Military, Diplomats Demand Policy Change on Iran

by Jeff Steinberg

A prestigious group of 22 retired generals, admirals, and ambassadors has released an open letter to President Bush on Aug. 17, demanding a fundamental policy change towards Iran and Iraq. The letter stated:

“As former military leaders and foreign policy officials, we call on the Bush Administration to engage immediately in direct talks with the government of Iran without preconditions to help resolve the current crisis in the Middle East and settle differences over the Iranian nuclear program.

“We strongly caution against any consideration of the use of military force against Iran. The current crisis must be resolved through diplomacy, not military action. An attack on Iran would have disastrous consequences for security in the region and the U.S. forces in Iraq, and it would inflame hatred and violence in the Middle East and among Muslims everywhere.

“A strategy of diplomatic engagement with Iran will serve the interests of the U.S. and its allies, and would enhance regional and international security.”

The open letter was signed by: Amb. Harry Barnes, Lt. Gen. Julius Becton (ret.), Parker Borg, Amb. Peter Burleigh, Amb. Ralph Earle II, Brig. Gen. Evelyn P. Foote (ret.), Amb. Chas W. Freeman, Morton Halperin, Lt. Gen. Robert G. Gard (ret.), Gen. Joseph P. Hoar (ret.), Brig. Gen. John Johns (ret.), Prof. Frank N. von Hippel, Dr. Lawrence Korb, Maj. Gen. Frederick H. Lawson (ret.), Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy (ret.), Lt. Gen. Charles P. Otstott (ret.), Amb. Edward L. Peck, Brig. Gen. Maurice D. Roush (ret.), Dr. Sarah Sweall, Vice Adm. Jack Shanahan (ret.), Lt. Gen. James M. Thompson (ret.), and Vice Adm. Ralph Weymouth (ret.).

On Aug. 17, former Congressman Tom Andrews, who now heads the organization Win Without War, hosted a conference call with three of the sponsors of the letter—General

Hoar, General Gard, and Morton Halperin (former Director of Policy Planning for the U.S. State Department in the Clinton Administration)—in which they made brief statements and then took questions from a number of journalists. In their opening remarks, all three speakers emphasized the total failure of the Bush Administration’s policy and the “bizarre” idea that Bush and Cheney have proposed to “negotiate” with Iran, only on the basis of demanding, in advance, that Iran agree to the essential U.S. goal—the elimination of Iran’s enrichment program. The actions of Bush and Cheney, the trio emphasized, have jeopardized U.S. national security, needlessly put American soldiers in Iraq in harm’s way, and destabilized the entire region.

In response to a question from *EIR*’s Jeff Steinberg, all three of the speakers heartily endorsed the call by Yossi Beilin for the convening of a Madrid II conference, to solve the entire Middle East conflict (see *Feature*).

Following the conference call, Steinberg interviewed General Hoar (see accompanying article).

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### Documentation

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*Here is the question posed by EIR’s Jeff Steinberg, and the panelists’ response.*

**Operator:** Our next question comes from the site of Jeff Steinberg, of *EIR*. Please go ahead.

**Steinberg:** This is a question for all three of the speakers. On Sunday, in *Ha’aretz*, Yossi Beilin, former Justice Minister of Israel and one of the Oslo negotiators, said that the moment that’s represented by this 1701 ceasefire in Lebanon

## It Is Diplomacy or A No-Win Situation

*U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Joseph P. Hoar (ret.), a four-star general, was Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command (1991-94), commanding the U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf after the 1991 war. He also served in the Vietnam War, as a battalion and brigade advisor with the Vietnamese Marines. He is one of a group of senior flag officers who on Jan. 3, 2005 released a statement of opposition to the nomination of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General, which came before the Senate Judiciary Committee on Jan. 6, 2005.*

*Jeffrey Steinberg interviewed General Hoar on Aug. 17, 2006, after a conference call by General Hoar and others to announce the release of an open letter signed by him and 21 other former military and government officials urging President Bush to change his failed policy toward Iran and in the war in Iraq (see previous article). General Hoar was previously interviewed by Steinberg in EIR, Jan. 14, 2005, and May 21, 2004.*

**EIR:** General, I see in the formal text of the letter that you and 20 or so other prominent military and diplomatic veterans have released to the President today, that you start out by saying, that you call for the Bush Administration “to engage immediately in direct talks with the government of Iran, without preconditions, to help resolve the current crisis” and you “strongly caution against any consideration of the use of military force against Iran” and that “the current crisis must be resolved through diplomacy not military action.”

There are some people who have commented to me that they viewed the Israeli attacks against Hezbollah in Lebanon as part of a largely military scheme that would lead ultimately to American potential military action against Iran. Do you see that danger as being real, given the character of the current administration?

**Hoar:** I’m very concerned, because there are senior people in the Administration that are willing to use military action when diplomacy is by far the better means of achieving your objectives. And so, it seems to me that either directly or indirectly, that supporting Israel and their concerns about Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran, could lead to a much wider war in the Middle East. We are already deeply engaged in Iraq, and this kind of activity could cause the whole region to plunge into some sort of military difficulty.

**EIR:** Just as a follow-up on that, there seems to be a pretty broad consensus that we, the United States, and whatever

offers a perfect opportunity to convene what he called a second Madrid Conference, to take up the entire scope of regional security issues—Israel, Palestine, Syria, Iran, some kind of action on Iraq, and the overall proposal by [Saudi] King Abdullah that was adopted in 2002 at the Beirut meeting of the Arab League. I’d like to get the thoughts of the three speakers on whether or not this idea is feasible. Obviously, it’s an appeal to Bush, given that Bush, Sr. and [James] Baker were the initial Madrid sponsors, after the end of Desert Storm.

**Dr. Halperin:** I can start with that—this is Mort Halperin. I think that’s absolutely right. I think that what’s happened in the Middle East reflects the disengagement of the Administration. This is the first American President who is not engaged directly in an effort to bring about peace in the Middle East. And I think the Lebanon war is partly a result of that. I think that this is the moment that the President has to engage himself personally, be willing to talk to every leader in the region, and to seek a comprehensive settlement, that will implement what everybody knows is going to be the final settlement between Palestine and Israel, and which will begin to shape a new situation in Iraq. And disengagement and simply saying, “We support Israel and oppose terrorism,” while those are obviously two important pillars of our policy, are not going to get us anywhere.

**General Gard:** This is Robert Gard. I certainly agree that we need to open up the dialogue. We just sent our Secretary of State over to the Middle East, and all she could do was talk with the Israelis! I mean, even the Lebanese, after a particularly disastrous bombing, refused to receive her. And of course, she couldn’t talk to Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, Iran—it’s a disaster!

**General Hoar:** If I could just add a couple of thoughts: Part of the difficulty, and Mort’s comments made me think about it, is, we have used a slogan, “the war on terror,” to describe the dynamic of what is existent now in the Middle East, and if we’re not careful, is going to spread throughout the world. This whole idea of taking terror, which is a technique, and turning it into a slogan, has caused us not to think about root problems here. This is really a war of ideas. And unfortunately, Mr. Bush and this Administration have led into this war virtually unarmed, talking about “democracy,” talking about “freedom,” issues that don’t resonate with the people that are under either oppressor regimes, or find themselves in countries where there are, quote, “occupier forces,” or threatened by neighbors. And until we change the paradigm, and look for a regional solutions to all of these problems, as Mort has suggested, I think we’re going to come up without a successful solution.

But this solution, this regional one, will take time, and energy. Because diplomatic solutions take far more time, and far more innovation than the military solution, and there is always the question of losing patience and choosing the military option, particularly when it is on the table.