

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).

Documentation

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

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 solution 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.

Interview: Gen. Joseph Hoar

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

coalition we might cobble together, would have really no capacity to conduct any kind of substantial ground operation against Iran, but that there's widespread talk about an air operation aimed at knocking out supposed key sites involved in the nuclear weaponization program. What's your general assessment of this kind of air power approach?

Hoar: Well, I think that strategic bombing has proved to be unsuccessful, up to and including the Second World War, that it rarely achieves its objectives. At no time, in my recollection, have we been in a more disadvantaged position in terms of striking a potential opponent, because we have virtually no intelligence about the nuclear program in Iran. And so, what we have, I'm sure, at best is fragmentary. And it's clear that Iran would have learned the lessons of the Israeli strike on Iraq in the early '80s, and thus to disperse their nuclear program and to build it underground, so it's not susceptible to bombing. And further, it would seem to me that Israel would learn their lesson from this recent incursion against Hezbollah, that bombing campaigns don't destroy targets when the enemy is deeply entrenched and has planned in advanced against a bombing campaign.

EIR: There seems to be a kind of common feature to what Israel recently encountered in Lebanon, and what the U.S. forces have encountered in Iraq, where there's no dispute that Israel had a conventional military supremacy over anything that they were going to face in Lebanon, and the U.S. clearly had conventional supremacy over the Iraq army under Saddam Hussein. But we're now facing a kind of asymmetric kind of warfare that's very difficult to deal with. I wonder what your thoughts are on this? Maybe it's not quite a new dimension of warfare, but one that we seem to have really not taken into account.

Hoar: It's not new at all. And the problem is, that political considerations overrule and become more important than the military implications. And just as in Iraq and as in southern Lebanon, if you don't change the political paradigm, take away the causes of discontent, you're going to have to continue to deal militarily with an adversary that wins if they don't lose.

And to just give you some quick examples: George Washington, Ho Chi Minh, Osama bin Laden, and Hezbollah: All of them, as long as they remain on the strategic defensive and don't become decisively engaged, will ultimately win, unless you change the political paradigm. Because all they have to do, is to continue to exist. Hezbollah has done this perfectly: They declare themselves the winner. They have the moral support of Muslims and others throughout the world, and they're the first back in the region to help reconstruct all the damage that has been done by the bombing campaigns.

In our own American Revolution and in Vietnam, in the case of the British, they decided to sue for peace because they had bigger issues elsewhere, and Washington, by carefully shepherding his forces and not becoming decisively engaged



*U.S. Marine Corp.
Gen. Joseph P.
Hoar (ret.): "The
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until the French came in on our side, was able to win. Ho Chi Minh did the same thing. We militarily defeated the NVA [North Vietnam Army] and the Viet Cong in the Tet Offensive, but politically we lost the battle because the American people just were not willing to pay the price to stay on and continue to change the nature of the war.

And so we're faced with these same problems again. Unless political leaders are willing to step up and say, as Mr. de Gaulle did, after the Algerian War, that "this is all over, we're going to end it now and move on to something else."

The problem in the Middle East is the Iraq War has such regional implications for its neighbors that we can't walk away. But we could sit down with all the neighbors and hammer out at least a framework from which we could go forward, and to look to find some solutions. And anyone that thinks that we're not already in a civil war out there, is either delusional or is toeing to the party line right now that we can still pull success out of this fight in Iraq militarily, which we can't.

EIR: I mentioned just a few moments ago on the conference call, that the former Justice Minister of Israel, Yossi Beilin, who was actively involved in the Oslo negotiations and the whole process that continued, pretty much right up to the day that Clinton left office, wrote on Sunday in *Ha'aretz* that he thinks this is a moment where a second Madrid Conference should be convened to take up all of the issues affecting the region as a whole, the security and economic issues. And he noted that between Madrid and the next 15 years through Bush, Clinton, Bush 43, that most of the issues on the Israel-Palestine front had been pretty well narrowed down.

Do you think that this kind of Madrid Conference approach is something, 1) that might work? And 2) do you see any prospects of the Administration learning some lessons in changing where they're headed?

Hoar: You know, one of the things that didn't come up this morning in the discussion of the use of diplomacy, that is by



U.S. Air Force/Tech. Sgt. John M. Foster

“Political considerations become more important than the military implications,” General Hoar pointed out, whether it is Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, or Iran. “If you don’t . . . take away the causes of discontent, you’re going to have to continue to deal militarily with an adversary that wins if they don’t lose.” Here, U.S. Army troops providing security at the site of bombing in Mosul, Iraq, earlier this year.

attempting to sit down with the players, and look for solutions, and be prepared to deal with countries that heretofore we were unwilling to deal with, like Syria and Iran, we give legitimacy to those people, we give them the very thing that they want. And that’s the opening manner in which you can then deal with the other issues. I think that if you had a conference that included Iran and Syria, you would have a *real* chance of getting to the bottom of this problem.

You know, I’m a great fan of Yossi Beilin. I thought that when he was working closely with the leadership in the Labor Party years ago, when we came so close to finding a solution, during Mr. Rabin’s time, that he was frequently the “idea guy,” the person that was outside the box looking for ways to define solutions to the problem. And it doesn’t appear that he has a lot of political traction any longer, but I think he’s an extraordinary guy.

And to answer the second part of your question: Given what’s happened in the last six years, Jeff, I just—I find it hard to believe that this crowd would be willing to try anything as adventurous as sitting down with everybody and talking about these issues.

EIR: I have two final questions, one just following up. I wrote an article five months ago, or so, which was provoked by reading *Cobra II*, the account by General Trainor, of the Iraq war; and also a report that came out, of the Iran letter—it was then-President Khatami who wrote to Colin Powell, proposing a kind of comprehensive U.S.-Iranian talks to put all of the issues on the table. Both of those things occurred

in May 2003.

And the report from General Trainor, was that between Jay Garner and the actual ground commanders of the U.S. invasion, there were plans to immediately stand up three divisions of the Iraqi army, to create an interim government, and to basically move immediately into a stabilization and exit strategy. All of this was before the insurgency really began. And it was killed somewhere between the Vice President’s Office and Doug Feith and Wolfowitz’s offices at the Pentagon.

The result of that is that a great deal of what was done in Iraq subsequently, including all of the reconstruction, and even a certain amount of the military operations, were turned over to the private sector, in the form of massive contracts to outfits like Halliburton, Blackwater. . . .

Hoar: Bechtel.

EIR: Bechtel. There seems to be a kind of an underlying issue here which Cheney has been promoting since he was Secretary of Defense, and that’s the outsourcing of major aspects of national security, to private, for-profit corporations. I wonder if you could comment on how you view that, and whether you think that this is something that’s excessive and is undermining our national defense?

Hoar: Well, I think that when Mr. Rumsfeld was talking about securing all of Iraq with 55,000 troops, over time, and finally the military was able to squeeze out what we actually got—which my memory doesn’t tell me how many, but something on the order of 160-170,000. The point is, that it was a huge vacuum that was created for other security forces. And so, in order to meet that need, security companies sprang up all over the place. Companies like Halliburton and Bechtel hired on security people—you remember the scandals about Halliburton paying so much money for fuel, and charging it up to security requirements. In a well-run theater of operations, those kinds of security would have been provided by coalition forces, not by going out and hiring separate contract people to do it.

And I know from my own experiences in the construction business, that many of those construction sites were the same sort of thing: There were huge amounts of money spent on security people, in order to go about doing some of these tasks, and I think the whole thing got out of hand. I don’t think there’s any question about it.

Now, with respect to Halliburton and the U.S. Army: There has been a long relationship between those two entities, because the Army purposely took their ability to cook food, in the field under expeditionary conditions, out of the active-service Army. And so, if you were in the Army and you were stationed at Ft. Bragg, what we would call the mess halls were run by civilian contractors. But if your unit from Ft. Bragg was deployed to someplace else, Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq, there was no comparable U.S. Army unit that could go out and prepare hotdogs, or scrambled eggs and bacon. And so, Halli-

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burton fell into this, because of the way the U.S. Army chose to organize itself, putting most of their money into combat forces, rather than having people specifically trained and able to provide this kind of required service.

And so, this was all done, I would say, well before Mr. Cheney's time as the Secretary of Defense, and Halliburton stepped up to that, and that narrow area of providing food and provisioning for the U.S. Army, I think pre-dated any of the kinds of things that we saw in Iraq. However, in Iraq, those requirements were greatly expanded, and I think it was in the expansion of that stuff, where there might have been some of abuse of the original contract.

Why it was done? It was done in order to have more active infantry divisions in the Army. Was that a good decision? I'm not in a position to say. It just seems to me that the Army went forward, making a conscious decision that they were going to have to hire contractors to do certain essential services that prior to that time had been done by soldiers.

I'm not sure about the rest of it. Only that this massive use of contractors after we got into Iraq, obviously seemed to be loaded with controversy, and provided opportunities for unscrupulous people to bilk the government for the tasks that they were contracted to perform.

EIR: A final question. Since neither of us is confident that the Administration is very likely to take the extremely sound advice that's been presented in this letter that you helped to organize, what kinds of measures do you see that could be taken to contain what still looks to be like a pretty hefty war-party faction inside the Administration, that still has its eyes on Iran and Syria? What kinds of things do you think could be done?

Hoar: Well, I think the major thing is to see a change in Congress here, in a couple months. If you had, in the House of Representatives, for example, committee chairmen that have the power to hold hearings, to call witnesses, and to swear witnesses, and we start to get at some of the abuses of the last six years, and the statements that have been made, I'm aware—as I know you are, Jeff—of at least hundreds of anecdotal stories of things that were said, people that were told to do certain things, people that were told to get on board when they attempted to offer an opposing view. I think that the only way this is going to change is for the American people to become aware, of what this Administration has been doing

for the last six years. My goodness! There's still over 50% of people in this country that still think that al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were somehow linked, and that Saddam Hussein did have weapons of mass destruction! I despair at the lack of understanding of the American people about what's been going on in the world!

I don't think, until the Congress of the United States, can start to take specific action about, as we used to say, "who knew what, and when did they know it?" that we're going to get to the bottom of this, and create a sense of outrage among the American people. We've got 2,600 Americans killed in Iraq, a couple hundred more in Afghanistan, tens of thousands wounded, the numbers of Iraqis killed continues to grow every day—where is the outrage? I just don't know! I'm stumped by what's going on in this country.

EIR: Well, I hope you're right about what happens in November. . .

Hoar: Me too!

EIR: We're encountering, as we go out, especially now that Congress is out of session and back in their districts campaigning, that the mood in the population is much greater anger than gets portrayed in the media, and that there's enormous outrage that this Administration hasn't been impeached from office yet. That's the sort of common statements from the floor, when a Democratic Congressman gets up in front of his constituents.

Hoar: Well, I'd certainly not say for a moment that Connecticut is typical of the states in the United States. But you know, it's an extraordinarily strong message: That's, you would have to say, a well-educated constituency, which is throwing away an opportunity to re-elect a guy who's got wonderful credentials, who has, in terms of the overall Democratic platform, been very powerful in a lot of other issues that are important to the Democratic Party—and they just cut his ass loose, because of his stand on the war! I mean, this is extraordinary.

Now, whether that will play in Ohio, in Florida and other places, remains to be seen.

EIR: Well, we've got our work cut out for us, between now and then, that's for sure!

Hoar: I guess we do, Jeff.