

March 23 , 2009

To: Members of the United States Congress

On January 6, 2008, Iranian Revolutionary Guards Naval speedboats engaged in provocative actions against three US Naval vessels operating in international waters in the Persian Gulf. This incident demonstrated that, in the absence of formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran, current procedures for avoiding a dangerous accidental naval confrontation are inadequate.

President Obama has promised to engage in direct diplomacy with the Government of Iran. It is important to include negotiating a military-to-military agreement for the prevention of incidents at sea as part of his outreach.

Negotiating an incidents-at-sea agreement for the Persian Gulf would promote US national security interests and protect American sailors and naval vessels in the world's most strategically important oil chokepoint. The combination of tense relations, sizeable US and Iranian naval installations, and crowded shipping lanes makes the risk of an accidental confrontation with Iran unacceptably high.

Such an agreement with Iran should be modeled on previous US agreements with the Soviet Union and China, which have contributed valuably to the absence of military conflict between our countries for decades. As part of a larger effort to engage Iran on core issues such as the nuclear program, Iran's support for terrorist groups, stabilization efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and human rights, establishing direct communication between American and Iranian military officials could lay a foundation on which to base more positive and productive relations.

Signed,

Gen Joseph Hoar, USMC (Ret.) - former Commander, U.S. Central Command

LTG Robert Gard, USA (Ret.) - former President, National Defense University

VADM Jack Shanahan, USN (Ret.) - former Commander, NATO Strike Fleet, Atlantic

LTG James Thompson, USA (Ret.) - former Chief of Staff, Allied Forces, Southern Europe

BG Hugh Aiken, USMC (Ret.) - former Deputy Chief of Staff, Manpower, USMC

BG John Johns, USA (Ret.) - former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

BG Maurice Roush, USA (Ret.) - former Commander, Pacific Ocean Engineer Division

Col Richard Klass, USAF (Ret.) - former Military Assistant to the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs