

  
**RELEASE IN FULL**

December 12, 2011

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The several of us follow closely relations between the United States and Iran and the situation in that country. We do so in part because of our deep preoccupation with the dangers this country might face if we and Iran came to blows. We do so as well because we believe improved relations between our two countries are key to stability in the Middle East and our broader interests. We have stayed abreast of your efforts to reach out to Iran's leaders and share your disappointment that these have born no fruit. Over the past years we have discussed these matters with Iranians, both within and outside their government.

As this year draws to a close, we remain deeply concerned about the possibility of conflict between our two countries. The troubling threat of attacks against Iran's nuclear facilities is ever present, but of immediate concern to us is the possibility of conflict through accident or miscalculation. American forces are present along Iran's borders and will remain so for some time, notably in Afghanistan. American naval deployments in the Gulf continue at a very high level and United States responsibility for assuring the freedom of navigation in those waters is a national priority. At the same time, Iran's naval units ply the same waters and often in dangerous proximity to American vessels.

We write to suggest ways be sought to ensure that accidents do not occur and that the United States and Iran do not enter through accident or miscalculation into a confrontation that neither side seeks. The consequences could be disastrous. The dangers of a mistake, a misreading of intentions, or of unauthorized actions are real and must be hedged against. It is our understanding that some technical lines of communications exist between United States naval forces and the Iranians in the Gulf. To the best of our knowledge, these are not robust nor do they necessarily engage communications with senior military or political leaders on both sides. We also understand that your administration has sought ways significantly to enhance communications and crisis management capabilities between the US and Iran and that the Iranian military has not been responsive to proposals from the United States.

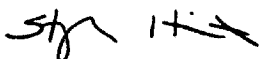
We offer a few thoughts on this important and urgent issue. First, to be effective, crisis management procedures need to encompass US and Iranian military units that face each other along the Afghan border as well as in the Gulf and on the high seas. It is our impression from our discussions with the Iranians that it might be possible to engage them in designing such procedures if they cover the full range of areas where United States forces and the Iranians are likely to be in proximity.

Second, given the difficulty that your administration has apparently encountered in working directly with the Iranian military on this matter, we suggest a combination of political and military approaches. We suggest that an intermediary nation, friendly to both the US and Iran, be invited to assist this process. Among the few governments in the region that has been capable of dealing directly with Iran and with the Supreme Leader is Oman. Given Oman's past help to the US on other issues, such as the release of the American hikers last September, we believe it would be worthwhile to work through the Sultan of Oman to engage both the Supreme Leader and the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps in discussions on emergency communications.

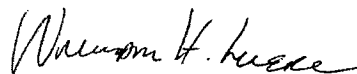
Third, we have also discussed with some Iranians the possibility of setting up crisis communications with the help of senior retired military figures on both sides. One of our group discussed this idea with Foreign Minister Salehi when he was here in September and he expressed interest. We believe there are a number of senior US military officers who would be willing and interested in helping set up this expanded communications link with Iran. Of course getting a willing group of senior US officers lined up to work on this new communications link would still leave the Administration with the problem of getting a comparable group on the Iranian side that would have the authority and capability of cooperating on this important venture. However, with the help of Oman this idea too might be tried as a second track effort to complement or if necessary, substitute for something more direct.

Given deep differences between Iran's leaders and mistrust of the United States, we can be sure that these negotiating procedures might be no easier than other efforts you have undertaken in the past. But given what is at stake, the effort should, we believe, be made. Time is clearly very important. If we can be of assistance to your officers in thinking through the best ways to proceed, we would be pleased to do so.

Sincerely,



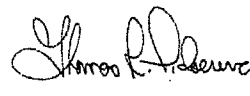
Stephen B. Heintz



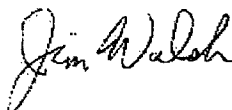
William H. Luers



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