

ments of our Nation's historically Black institutions of higher learning.

*In Witness Whereof*, I have hereunto set my hand this 24th day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, and of the Independence of

the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

RONALD REAGAN

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## Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate on the United States Air Strike in the Persian Gulf

September 24, 1987

*Dear Mr. President: (Dear Mr. Speaker:)*

At approximately 4:00 p.m. (EDT) on September 21, 1987, Armed Forces of the United States assigned to the Middle East Joint Task Force observed an Iranian landing craft, the "IRAN AJR", engaging in nighttime minelaying near U.S. forces in international waters of the Persian Gulf. This hostile action posed a direct threat to the safety of U.S. warships and other U.S.-flag vessels. Accordingly, acting in self-defense and pursuant to standing Peacetime Rules of Engagement for the region, two U.S. helicopters operating off the USS JARRETT engaged the Iranian vessel, which subsequently resumed its minelaying activities. Thereupon, the helicopters re-engaged the AJR, disabling it with rocket and machine gun fire, and curtailed the further release of mines.

Subsequently, at first light in the Persian Gulf on September 22, U.S. forces boarded the disabled craft, which proved to have been manned by regular elements of the Iranian navy. Three crewmen were found dead on the vessel and nine mines were found on deck. Twenty-six survivors were recovered from the water and from lifeboats and taken to U.S. naval ships for examination and medical treatment. Arrangements are being made to turn the survivors over to an appropriate humanitarian organization. Two members of the crew of the IRAN AJR are believed missing. Search and rescue operations for them have been undertaken, as well as operations to find and clear a number of mines that, according to

discussion with surviving crewmen of the IRAN AJR, were laid prior to action against the vessel by U.S. forces.

The actions taken by U.S. forces were conducted in the exercise of our right of self-defense under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Mining of the high seas, without notice and in an area of restricted navigation, is unlawful and a serious threat to world public order and the safety of international maritime commerce. These Iranian actions were taken despite warnings given to the Government of Iran, subsequent to the recent mine damage done to the U.S.-flag vessel BRIDGETON, that the U.S. Government would take the action necessary to defend U.S. vessels from attacks of this nature.

U.S. forces in the area have returned to their prior state of alert readiness. They will remain prepared to take any further defensive action necessary to protect U.S. vessels and U.S. lives from unlawful attack.

These limited defensive actions have been taken by our Armed Forces in accordance with international law, and pursuant to my constitutional authority with respect to the conduct of foreign relations and as Commander-in-Chief. While being mindful of the historical differences between the Legislative and Executive Branches of government, and the positions taken by all of my predecessors in office, with respect to the interpretation and constitutionality of certain of the provisions of the War Powers Resolution, I nonetheless am providing this

report in a spirit of mutual cooperation toward a common goal.

Sincerely,

RONALD REAGAN

*Note: Identical letters were sent to Jim Wright, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and John C. Stennis, President pro tempore of the Senate.*

## Statement on United States Policy in the Persian Gulf September 24, 1987

I have today sent the attached letter to the Congress concerning defensive actions by our Armed Forces taken on September 21-22, 1987, against the Iranian naval vessel *Iran Ajr*. We regard this incident as closed and are currently taking steps to repatriate the 26 Iranian survivors and return the bodies of the 3 Iranians killed in the incident.

Eight Presidents over four decades have recognized that the United States has vital interests in ensuring free world access to the energy resources of the Persian Gulf and in preventing hostile domination of the Gulf region. Today those interests are threatened by the Iran-Iraq war and Iran's continued belligerent behavior in the region.

Iraq has made clear its willingness, without preconditions, to negotiate an equitable settlement of the war and to implement U.N. Security Council Resolution 598. To date, Iran has refused to implement it. Meanwhile, by aggressive military action and terrorism, Iran has continued its efforts to intimidate the nonbelligerent nations of the Gulf, to close Gulf waters to neutral shipping, and to export a destabilizing blend of religion and politics in and even beyond the region. Iranian policies create a threat that could seriously interrupt freedom of navigation and the free flow of oil in the Gulf.

Recognizing these facts, we must continue steadily to pursue our established, three-part policy in the Gulf:

1. Bringing ever-increasing international pressure to bear for a negotiated end to the war and to stop its spillover;

2. Steadfastly continuing to help our friends, the nonbelligerent nations of the Gulf, to defend themselves against Iranian

threats; and

3. Prudently pursuing cooperative efforts with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States and other friends to protect U.S.-flag ships and to prevent Iran from seriously jeopardizing freedom of nonbelligerent navigation.

Our overriding aim is peace and stability in the region. We have no interest in provoking Iran or anyone else, although we will defend ourselves as necessary. Indeed, the United States hopes that more normal relations with Iran will evolve as Iranian belligerence and tensions in the area diminish. We have made these points known repeatedly to Iran through diplomatic channels as well as by public statements.

The continuation of the Iran-Iraq war is the major cause of increasing tensions in the Gulf, to which our forces and those of other nations have responded. We look to the United Nations Security Council for a negotiated settlement to this war in its entirety through the rapid implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 598 in all its parts. We hope that the Soviet Union will cooperate as the Council moves to create conditions for such implementation by adopting a second resolution rather than delaying and seeking opportunities to expand their own influence at the expense of peace in the region.

The success of our policy will depend to a great extent on the consistency and care with which we carry it out. Our resolve to date has begun to pay off: through increased European naval contributions to protect freedom of navigation in the Gulf, through quiet but essential and effective GCC support for our naval efforts and those of other nations, through diplomatic