

# Former CENTCOM Commander Warns of Grave War Danger

*On Nov. 7, Gen. Joseph P. Hoar (U.S.MC-ret.), former Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), in a discussion with EIR, expressed his grave concerns about a new war in the Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup>*

**EIR:** You've probably seen the vast barrage of propaganda favoring war with Iran. You were the head of CENTCOM during critical periods [1988-90; 1991-94], and you've spent over 20 years working on the Middle East. Do you see the possibility of war with Iran?

**Hoar:** From what I have read over the weekend, not from formal organizations, but everybody has the same story now: that Iran are the bad guys; that they're putting the nukes underground; and that they're enriching uranium, and they're experimenting with warheads. The *New York Times* started it last week, and it's just bubbling along. It's really frightening, I think.

**EIR:** How does this kind of reporting look, as compared to the buildup to the invasion of Iraq in 2003?

**Hoar:** Well, I think that the neo-conservatives really felt that Iraq would be something that would be very easy to do, and that in the long haul, the next step would have been Iran. So, it appears to me that the same people who brought us the attack on Iraq are back, working together to put together a case for an Israeli attack, with U.S. help, on Iran. There's just too much that's gone on, from too many different sources around Washington—none of which are Federal government, all of these are



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outside organizations that believe that this is the next step; and again, I think that it's very frightening.

**EIR:** What would be the impact on the region of an Israeli, or allied U.S.-Israeli strike on Iran?

**Hoar:** First of all, whether or not the U.S. government is directly involved, we will be blamed. There are going to be American airplanes, American ordnance, American technology, involved in a strike that would be conducted by Israel. I think that's the first thing.

But I think what's more telling, that I've never seen in the press, is that several years ago, Hamad bin Jassim, the foreign minister of Qatar, traveled to Tehran, and said that Qatar has supported the United States in the liberation of Kuwait, and supported the allies in the attack on Iraq. But I'm here to tell you that, should the United States choose to strike Iran, Qatar will not participate. And he was told that he had it all wrong; that the Iranian missiles were not capable of a retaliatory strike on the United States, and so the retaliation was going to be against America's friends in the Persian Gulf.

And so, all of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] states, in my judgment, are vulnerable to a response. Missiles, fast-attack boats, aircraft—that's why there's been a continuing U.S. naval presence in the Persian Gulf that is quite sizeable; and I think with the knowledge that if this sort of an attack were to take place, the retaliation would be against the GCC countries.

**EIR:** That would get us involved one way or another. There's oil at stake; there are transportation routes, and so forth.

**Hoar:** I think we would come to the aid of these

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1. *EIR* has published interviews with General Hoar in its May 21, 2004, Jan. 14, 2005, Aug. 25, 2006, and April 27, 2007 issues. They are available at [www.larouchepub.com](http://www.larouchepub.com).

countries that have been very supportive of our efforts in the region, absolutely.

### **Bush to Obama: An Eerie Continuity**

**EIR:** Why do you think, as many have said, that there is an eerie continuity between what was going on in the Bush/Cheney regime, and what President Obama has done?

**Hoar:** I think that there's a confluence of a lot of problems. One, is the isolation of Israel, because of its relationship with Turkey, because of what has happened in Egypt, which doesn't bode well for the continued neutrality between Israel and Egypt, and the uncertainty that has been engendered around the Arab world by the so-called Arab Spring, and the perception on the part of the Israelis that the U.S. President is weak.

All of which leads to the possibility that if there were an attack on Iran, the emphasis of everything that has been going on which has had its locus in Israel, will now be shifted to Iran.

I just think that there's no response from the President, with this public attack, I think, by [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu, who, when he was in Washington the last time, there was no response in the House of Representatives to that kind of behavior. I believe that Netanyahu believes that he can get away with anything he wants to do, and the U.S. would support it.

And I've heard—I don't know this first hand, but I've heard—that a strike against Iran is opposed by the intelligence community and the military community; and so, if the strike would go forward, we would automatically be drawn in. First of all, even if we did nothing, we would be blamed. But the retaliation would almost certainly be, some against Israel, but some against the perceived allies of the United States in the Gulf, namely the GCC countries.

**EIR:** In an ABC interview yesterday, [former Secretary of State] Condi Rice really heaped praised on Obama for continuing the Bush/Cheney global war on terrorism. In that same interview, she called not only for the use of military force in Iran, but regime change.

We just had a no-fly zone that turned into a war for regime change [in Libya]; you had the President himself mentioning regime change for Syria; and now you have the propaganda barrage on Iran. How big a war would it be?

**Hoar:** It would be considerably larger than anything that we've done up until now, in my judgment.

The Iranians have become a regional power as a result of the [U.S.] foolhardy attack on Iraq. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia had warned the United States that if we attacked Iraq, we would make Iran a regional power, and it has come to pass.

And we would be particularly vulnerable in the Persian Gulf, because our neighbors have so much in their energy facilities that is vulnerable. So many of them are close to the coast. Some are offshore, on offshore islands. There are numerous offshore oil platforms in the Gulf. All of these would be vulnerable.

You'll recall in the late 1980s, during the Iran-Iraq War, when shipping in the Gulf was threatened by the Iranians, we, the U.S. government, reflagged Kuwaiti tankers with American flags, and then undertook to protect those tankers as they moved through the Persian Gulf. And it was during that time—and very few Americans know this—that the largest naval engagement in the world, since World War II, was fought in the Persian Gulf between the United States and Iran. Ships were sunk, airplanes were shot down, oil platforms were destroyed by the U.S. Navy in that engagement, and this would start all of this all over again.

And the Iranians have the kinds of forces in small, very fast boats, that are armed with missiles and other weapons, to create enormous problems in the Gulf, and it wouldn't be surprising to see oil go to, say, \$200 a barrel, if this kind of a fight took place.

### **A Great Failing: The U.S. Is an Insular Society**

**EIR:** Back in 2007, you mentioned that there are many able people in the United States to bring in for negotiations. You said that the United States should speak directly to some of the players, and not have to spend four or five years with the Brits, the French, the Germans acting on our behalf. And that somebody has to acknowledge the history of the country, and treat them with some respect and acknowledgement of that history—with diplomacy.

That has not happened. Do you think that is still something that can be done between the U.S. and Iran?

**Hoar:** I think it would be very difficult, but it is a great failing of members of the American government, and the American public as a whole. We're very insular as a society, protected by oceans on both sides, with an English-speaking country to our north, and Mexico, which, until the last couple of decades, we haven't paid a lot of attention to.

We are not very well aware of other societies and



Rachel Avnery

*While there is significant opposition within Israel, both from military and intelligence circles, and from the population, that opposition is almost entirely blacked out of Western, especially U.S., press coverage. Here, thousands of protesters from all over Israel march in Tel Aviv against the war against Gaza, March 2009.*

how they live, and their national narratives. Most other countries in the world have long narratives about their relatives, neighbors, and so forth, and we certainly don't understand very much about the Middle East—either the Arabs and the Iranians, or the culture.

And the fact that the U.S. government, along with the British, overthrew the one earlier democratic election in Iran, that took place in 1952: This is why the United States and Britain are often pilloried by members of the Iranian government, because they remember that event, and we are oftentimes tone deaf when we hear spokesmen for other countries speak in generalized terms about what has gone before, and why that set of circumstances exists.

The reason that we got involved, back in the early 1950s, is because the United Kingdom asked us to, because they were about to lose a very, very lucrative petroleum contract in Iran, which Mr. [Mohammad] Mossaddegh [former prime minister] was going to nationalize, and in fact, it was subsequently nationalized. This had everything to do with oil, money, and imperial overreach on the part of the Brits. And we got suckered into it.

**EIR:** Well, it looks very similar to what is happening today. The financial system is in free-fall, catastrophe. They couldn't solve anything in the G-20 meeting.

So I'm glad that you mentioned that long history of a not-very-pretty picture of when the U.S. didn't live up to its anti-colonial, or anti-imperial background. We always seemed to have gotten in trouble for that.

**Hoar:** Well I can give you the rest of the story. Mr. Churchill came to Mr. Eisenhower, and Mr. Eisenhower, as the President, said, "We're not going to help you." And Churchill said, "If you don't, we'll pull the Commonwealth division out of Korea." It was during the Korean War, and that was the division that was made up, as I recall, of a brigade of British soldiers, and Australians, Canadians, and other forces from across the British Commonwealth. And Mr. Eisenhower acquiesced; and that's how we got involved.

### The 'So-Called War on Terror'

**EIR:** You are a signatory to a letter to Sen. Harry Reid signed by 23 generals and admirals on the questions of the Defense Authorization bill relating to detention and lack of trials for terrorist suspects. Where does that fight stand? You say in the letter that Americans could be arrested and not charged with any crimes, basically stripped of their Constitutional rights.

**Hoar:** Well, I think in the so-called war on terror, there has been this continuing narrative of the U.S. position in the world, and most especially in Muslim countries, and more specifically Arab countries. We know the 9/11 perpetrators, most of them, were from Saudi Arabia. The animus that exists between that culture and the United States is largely driven by the U.S.'s unwavering support for Israel.

And so, this problem, because of the illegal settlements in the West Bank and in Jerusalem, continues to fester in that part of the world, where we overlook the fact that it is indeed illegal. And so, we see continuing problems that reinforce that belief.

The Abu Ghraib tragedy, for example, where, I believe, 22 inmates in that prison were photographed by those young soldiers and abused, I believe 21 of them were released without charges. They were young men that had been picked up on sweeps around Baghdad and incarcerated, and over time they were questioned, and the vast majority—all but one—were released. And so, this was a terrible mark against the United States.

And the idea that we are not going to treat prisoners

that are not convicted of anything—people who we believe have been involved in terrorist activities—and that’s a very, very broad subject, because it doesn’t necessarily mean active participation—could be incarcerated, held without trial, without their individual rights, just makes this whole matter worse. That’s not what the United States stands for.

We have an extraordinarily good record in our Federal courts, with prosecuting terrorists—over 400 cases that have been successfully prosecuted in the Federal court system. Those are the people that have the background and the experience to do the investigation, to interrogate people without using illegal methods, and then bring them to justice.

And this whole idea that you can move this to the military has sort of a subtext that is: When you use military courts, the rules of evidence don’t apply; we don’t have to worry about Miranda rights; we don’t have to worry about any of that stuff. We’ll lock up those guilty guys, throw them in jail, whatever. And this is the absolutely wrong approach from the standpoint of the United States. That these people, if they’re bad guys, should be tried in the regular court, accordingly punished, and if they’re picked up by mistake and tried, and we can’t convict them, we turn them loose, just as we do with our own citizens.

**EIR:** Your letter on the Defense Authorization bill says that, “If passed, we believe these provisions would reshape our counterterrorism policies in ways that would undermine our national security and transform our armed forces into judge, jury and jailor for foreign terrorism suspects. . . .” And now I have to say, executioner. How big is the debate about this question of the execution of Anwar al-Awlaki, and then later on, his teenage son, both of whom are American citizens?

**Hoar:** It’s difficult for me to say, because I don’t have all the information about this. I’m surprised that there hasn’t been more discussion, more open discussion, because they are American citizens, and this seems inconsistent with our own rules.

Now, I understand the issue of terrorism. But we have always afforded in the past to American citizens, the opportunity to be tried in a court of law. The difficulty, of course, is that these are American citizens who reside in other countries, at least, that you can’t extradite them. I don’t have a good answer to that. I’m uncomfortable with it, but I can understand the logic that leads us in that direction.

## Israel, and the Threat of an Iran War

**EIR:** You mentioned the Israelis coming out so strongly against Netanyahu et al. They are sending out a kind of plea to the U.S.—would there be a good response from our own retired military community?

**Hoar:** I think, first of all, that the newspapers of record and the magazines in this country will never publish it. You need to look in obscure journals, maybe like *Middle East Policy*. You’re not going to find it in the *New York Times*. A friend of mine who worked as a reporter for the *New York Times* some years ago, told me that he had submitted stories that directly quoted Israeli military officers, that were never published in the *New York Times*. They wouldn’t publish it, because they were considered detrimental.

These are the things that don’t find their way into the public. I was interested the other night in watching PBS, and the question of the Turkish flotilla<sup>2</sup> came up, and it was mentioned that nine Turks were killed by the Israeli commandos. The *truth* of the matter is that there were eight Turks killed, and one American, of Turkish background. The name was never released. There’s never been any discussion about that person; there’s never been any discussion about Israelis killing an American citizen, and now that unfortunate individual’s circumstances have morphed into the “fact” that he wasn’t an American citizen, but a Turk.

With 300,000 Israelis living illegally in the West Bank, and another 200,000 living illegally in Jerusalem, and the numbers growing; that it’s almost politically impossible to ever get a government in power in Israel that is willing to make a change. We know the current government only won 26% of the electorate, so it’s going to become increasingly more difficult to come into an equitable arrangement between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

**EIR:** What do you think can be done to stop this looming new Gulf war against Iran?

**Hoar:** Well, I don’t have a good sense of what’s going on in Washington. I understand that the military leadership and the intelligence community are against it. But, again, I’m not sure that we’re going to see that in the newspapers. I’m afraid that this thing is going to

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2. On May 31, 2010, six ships of a Turkish “Gaza Freedom Flotilla,” bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza, were boarded by Israeli military personnel in international waters. Nine activists were killed and ten wounded. The ships were towed to Israel, and the passengers were deported.

be a *fait accompli* before anyone talks about it seriously in this country. That it's just going to happen one morning: We're going to wake up, and the strike has been conducted, and the Iranians are attacking shipping in the Gulf. And the fact that this thing was initiated by the Israelis is going to be lost in the background clutter.

But because we're going to see the price of oil spike, we're going to see the U.S. Navy involved, that there's a constant presence of the U.S. Navy in the Gulf, and we're going to be off and running.

I think it's a very perilous situation.

Well, I'm just afraid that the same cast of characters that brought us the invasion of Iraq, seem to me to be in the background on this. Most of them are out of government, but they have managed to create this situation where you have think tanks and other respected institutions that are all saying, "Something's going to happen," and it's been tied to the IAEA coming report, and I think our own Administration is very vulnerable on this—and looking forward to 2012.

I think that they will roll over and support Israel.

### The Public Doesn't Understand the Stakes

**EIR:** Lyndon LaRouche has called for President Obama's removal from office, as he earlier called for the removal of Bush and Cheney—for precisely the Constitutional violations and crimes that we have been discussing. What is your view of this war-avoidance option?

**Hoar:** I think it is too difficult to do. I think that the public at-large doesn't understand what's at stake here. We're going to be up to our hips in this thing before people begin to realize what we're up against.

You know, the Iraq War has cost us 4,000 Americans killed, tens of thousands wounded, \$800 billion, with that price rising, continuing to rise, and for what? To make Iraq a vassal of Iran? That's going to be the outcome. And to think that we're going to start all over again with Iran is just frightening.

It's really frightening. The loss of life, the destruction of the world economy if we're going to shut down the Persian Gulf. If we like what's happened in Greece, wait until you shut down the Persian Gulf.

**EIR:** I agree, and the next seven days are crucial. Like the Iraq War—when [former IAEA director Mohammed] ElBaradei exposed the Niger yellow-cake fraud [in early March 2003], there were those who said, "Go!!! It's now or never! They'll confirm that there's

no WMD, so we have to go now," and we did.

**Hoar:** And I think that's entirely true, because the fact that there were no WMD was known in the intelligence community and was covered up, and it was just that simple.

**EIR:** What about Russia and China? They have strategic interests in the Gulf region, and they have said in the strongest possible language, just in the past hours, that an attack on Iran would be unacceptable. Wouldn't a regional war immediately spin out of control?

**Hoar:** Unlikely. And if the decision were made to go into this thing, it would be terribly important for this government to go offline to talk to the Russians, and the Chinese, and our principal allies in Europe to tell them what we are doing and why. To assure them that we seek no wider war.

This thing is potentially so destabilizing, particularly for Russia, there would be a huge concern for what is going to happen next. I think Russia would be less affected economically than most countries by what goes on in the Persian Gulf. The Chinese and the Indians are going to be hugely affected.

## 10 Years Later

An LPAC-TV Feature Film

Eight months before the September 11, 2001 attacks, Lyndon LaRouche forecast that the United States was at high risk for a Reichstag Fire event, an event that would allow those in power to manage, through dictatorial means, an economic and social crisis that they were otherwise incompetent to handle. We are presently living in the wake of that history.

<http://larouchepac.com/10yearslater>

