

Dear President Obama:

As tension with Iran continues to escalate, we urge your Administration to utilize all available tools of diplomacy to resolve the crisis over Iran's nuclear program and prevent another costly war in the Middle East.

We have supported your Administration's efforts to unite the international community to bring about the strongest sanctions on Iran to date. Now, we must redouble our diplomatic efforts to achieve robust transparency measures that can verify Iran's nuclear program is strictly a civilian one. Without a corresponding diplomatic undertaking, we are concerned that a lack of communication with Iran could lead to a dangerous escalation with potentially devastating consequences.

We hold no illusions about the abuses of the Iranian regime and are well aware that it rejected your previous diplomatic overtures. At the same time, we agree with most Americans that the United States should not enter a new war, just as we are finally ending two others. A military strike against Iran could lead to a regional war in the Middle East and attacks against U.S. interests. Even worse, such a strike would likely compel Iran to abandon the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, eject international inspectors, and rapidly pursue a nuclear deterrent.

Top military and civilian leaders have repeatedly issued warnings about the consequences of a military strike on Iran. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta cautioned that the United States "could possibly be the target of retaliation from Iran, sinking our ships, striking our military bases," and that "would not only involve many lives, but I think could consume the Middle East in a confrontation and a conflict that we would regret."

Former Israeli Mossad chief Meir Dagan made a similar prediction when he said that attacking Iran "would mean regional war, and in that case you would have given Iran the best possible reason to continue the nuclear program."

Retired General Anthony Zinni said, "If you follow this all the way down, eventually I'm putting boots on the ground somewhere. And, like I tell my friends, if you like Iraq and Afghanistan, you'll love Iran."

To avoid war, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, called for the United States to utilize "any channel that's open" for engagement with Iran, noting, "Even in the darkest days of the Cold War, we had links to the Soviet Union."

We strongly encourage your Administration to pursue bilateral and multilateral engagement with Iran. While we acknowledge that progress will be difficult, we believe that robust, sustained diplomacy is the best option to resolve our serious concerns about Iran's nuclear program, and to prevent a costly war that would be devastating for the United States and our allies in the region.

Sincerely,

Members of Congress