

Veterans' Letter to the President

By Veterans For Common Sense

<http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/>

The following letter was signed by 1,000 war veterans and given to the President on March 10, 2003. March 10, 2003

Dear Mr. President:

We, the undersigned veterans who have served our country in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the 1991 Gulf War and other military conflicts, respectfully request an opportunity to meet with you about the threat of war between the United States and Iraq.

Mr. President, we are patriotic citizens and veterans who respect the office of the President and the ethics and values binding us together as Americans. As such, we feel duty-bound to share with you our serious concerns regarding issues of national security, the appropriate use of our military strength, and the health and welfare of our active duty soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines.

Those of us who are veterans of the 1991 Gulf War can offer particular insight into the ongoing troubles in the Middle East, and the likely consequences of another war in that volatile region.

A dozen years ago, we helped liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, and in the course of combat operations came face to face with brutality and the consequences of modern warfare. We learned how unpredictable the nature of war can be. And we learned that war-related losses are not simply experienced on the battlefield.

Following the 1991 Gulf War, we collectively failed to prevent Saddam Hussein's violent repression of a popular uprising and the unprecedented refugee flight that ensued. As a result, tens of thousands of innocent civilians died. In addition to those deaths, the war and immediate post-war conditions resulted in the excess deaths of 46,900 children under the age of five, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Sept. 24, 1992).

Over the long term, the 1991 Gulf War has had a lasting, detrimental impact on the health of countless people in the region, and on the health of American men and women who served there.

Twelve years after the conflict, over 164,000 American Gulf War veterans are now considered disabled by the US Department of Veterans Affairs. That number increases daily.

The possibility of large-scale war between the US and Iraq looms before us once again. For this urgent reason we would like to meet with you to discuss steps the United States and its allies can take to protect US soldiers, allied forces, and Iraqi civilians from known and suspected hazards that would result from military operations.

We understand the risks that come with war and that there are times when such risks are necessary. However, we strongly question the need for a war at this time. Despite Secretary of State Colin Powell's report to the Security Council and the testimony of others in the administration, we are not convinced that coercive containment has failed, or that war has become necessary. Our own intelligence agencies have consistently noted both the absence of an imminent threat from Iraq and reliable evidence of cooperation between Iraq and Al Qaeda.

Again, we question whether this is the right time and the right war. Further, we believe the risks involved in going to war, under the unclear and shifting circumstances that confront us today, are far greater than those faced in 1991. Instead of a desert war to liberate Kuwait, combat would likely involve protracted siege warfare, chaotic street-to-street fighting in Baghdad, and Iraqi civil conflict. If that occurs, we fear our own nation and Iraq would both suffer casualties not witnessed since Vietnam. We fear the resulting carnage and humanitarian consequences would further devastate Iraqi society and inflame an already volatile Middle East, and increase terrorism against US citizens.

Our concerns about the potential human and material costs of a military conflict in Iraq are well substantiated. In the event of a war, the UN warns that 1.26 million children under the age of five in Iraq will be at risk of death. Within the initial weeks of conflict, the World Health Organization estimates 500,000 Iraqis would need immediate medical attention. Ten million Iraqis would need immediate humanitarian assistance and over two million Iraqis would be made homeless.

The scale of the crisis would be so large that the international community would be unable to prevent widespread suffering. For these reasons and more, it remains in our nation's best interest to avoid another war. The risk of excessive civilian casualties like those predicted by the UN pose a grave risk to our national security, making the US more of a target of retaliatory attacks by terrorists.

Mr. President, as our Commander-in-Chief, we recognize the immense responsibility you have to protect our homeland and keep our nation secure. As veterans who honorably served our nation in its wars, we believe that our perspectives, knowledge and expertise can aid you at this crucial time, as you continue to deliberate on whether or not to commit our nation to war. We therefore request a meeting at your earliest possible convenience. We look

forward to any opportunity to come together with you to discuss the matters we have raised.

Sincerely,

Vice Admiral Ralph Weymouth, USN,
Retired Vice Admiral Jack Shanahan, USN,
Retired Brigadier General Evelyn P. Foote, USA,
Retired Colonel David H. Hackworth, USA,
Retired Colonel Larry Williams, USMC,
Retired Colonel James E. Unterseher, USA,
Retired Colonel James B. Burkholder, USA,
Retired Colonel Roger F. Strand, USAF,
Retired Colonel Virginia A. Metcalf, USA,
Retired Colonel Mary H. Yeakel, USA,
Retired Colonel Henrik O. Lunde, USA,
Retired Colonel Bruce S. Jarstfer, USA,
Retired Colonel Thomas Patrick Chisholm, USA,
Retired Colonel James Steven Chandler, USA
Colonel James J. Kent, USA,
Retired Colonel Grace E. Squires, USA,
Retired Colonel Carol Anne O'Donnell, USA,
Retired Captain Kris Kristofferson, USA,
Retired Captain Thomas C. Tindall Jr., USNR,
Retired Captain Herbert A. Blough, USN,
Retired Captain M. David Preston, USCG
Lieutenant Colonel Elizabeth K. McGillicuddy, USMC, Retired

Read the names of the rest of the veterans who signed the letter at Veterans For Common Sense <<http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/>>. Another veterans' group, Veterans Against Iraq War <<http://www.vaiw.org/vet/index.php>> is organizing three days of protest in Washington D.C. from March 22 to March 24.