



National Iranian American Council

Advancing the interests of the Iranian-American Community

April 22, 2009

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Gates,

In his testimony on April 1 before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General David Petraeus used the term “Arabian Gulf” several times in reference to the body of water historically and contemporarily recognized as the Persian Gulf. It has come to our attention that his usage of this term is reflective of official US Military policy, despite the recognition by all other US Government agencies that this term is incorrect and politically divisive.

As the largest national organization representing Americans of Iranian descent, we at the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) must inform you that this term was originally devised to create division between Arabs and non-Arabs in the Middle East. We would ask that the US Military discontinue its use of this term and abide by the judgment of the United States Board of Geographic Names that the appropriate term for that body of water is “Persian Gulf.”

Since its creation, the term “Arabian Gulf” has been a tool for spreading dissension and instability within the region and beyond. First coined by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and later promulgated by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran, this term was used as a part of a radical agenda of pan-Arabism and regional discord. Osama Bin Laden also uses the term in an effort to portray himself and his terrorist organization as champions of Arab nationalism.

Throughout the 20th century, Arab dictators often employed rhetorical stratagems against non-Arab targets such as Israel and Iran to gain their people’s support. Today, use of this term by military officials risks associating the United States with these unsavory figures in the minds of Middle Easterners--something that could jeopardize the security of American troops deployed in the region. As both you and President Obama have repeatedly stated, the objective of the US Military’s operations in the Middle East is to promote stability and regional cooperation; therefore, we believe it is counterproductive for US officials to use a term that was devised to undermine that same stability and cooperation.

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Historically, the accuracy of the term “Persian Gulf” is undisputed. The Persian Gulf has been known and recognized as such for more than 2,500 years. Official legal judgments from the United Nations as well as the Department of State’s Board of Geographic Names confirm the legitimacy of the term, as do centuries of classical history.

We find it only appropriate that the US military use the same term as the rest of the US government.

As Secretary of Defense, we believe it is important for you to provide clear guidance for others in the Armed Forces to follow on matters such as this. We respectfully request that you review current US Military policies regarding official references to the “Arabian Gulf” and issue a directive to discontinue usage of this unhelpful term.

We thank you for your consideration, and we would be glad to provide you with any further assistance you may need on this important matter. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Trita Parsi, President
National Iranian American Council

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