



Security Council

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PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE TWO THOUSAND
EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTEENTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 14 July 1988 at 10.30 a.m.

<u>President:</u> Mr. NOGUEIRA-BATISTA	(Brazil)
Algeria	Mr. DJOUDI
Argentina	Mr. DELPECH
China	Mr. LI Luye
France	Mr. BROCHAND
Germany, Federal Republic of	Mr. VERGAU
Italy	Mr. BUCCI
Japan	Mr. KAGAMI
Nepal	Mr. RANA
Senegal	Mr. SARRE
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	Mr. LOZINSKIY
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. BIRCH
United States of America	Mr. BUSH
Yugoslavia	Mr. PEJIC
Zambia	Mr. ZUZE

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

EXPRESSION OF WELCOME TO THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The PRESIDENT: I should like at the very outset of this meeting to acknowledge the presence at the Council table of the Vice-President of the United States of America, The Honourable George Bush, who as a former Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations for a number of years was closely associated with the work of this body. On behalf of the Council I extend a warm welcome to him.

EXPRESSION OF THANKS TO THE RETIRING PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT: As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of July, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute on behalf of the Council to His Excellency Mr. Marcelo E.R. Delpech, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Security Council for the month of June 1988. I am sure I speak for all members of the Security Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Delpech for the great diplomatic skill, versatility and unfailing courtesy with which he conducted the Council's business last month.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

LETTER DATED 5 JULY FROM THE ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/19981)

The PRESIDENT: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice I propose, with the consent of the Council, to

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invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I am honoured to invite the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran to take a place at the Council table and to participate in our work; I invite the representatives of India, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic to take the places reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

Mr. Velayati (Islamic Republic of Iran) took a place at the Council table; Mr. Rath (India), Mr. Muntasser (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Mr. Umer (Pakistan) and Mr. Al-Masri (Syrian Arab Republic) took the places reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The PRESIDENT: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Security Council is meeting today in response to the request contained in a letter dated 5 July 1988 from the Acting Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/19981).

I should like to draw the attention of members of the Council to the following other documents: S/19979, letter dated 3 July 1988 from the Acting Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General; S/19987, letter dated 5 July 1988 from the Acting Permanent Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General; S/19989, letter dated 6 July 1988 from the

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Acting Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/19998, letter dated 8 July 1988 from the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of Ghana to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/20002, letter dated 11 July 1988 from the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; S/20005, letter dated 11 July 1988 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council; and S/20010, letter dated 13 July 1988 from the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Permanent Mission of the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, on whom I now call.

Mr. VELAYATI (Islamic Republic of Iran) (spoke in Persian; English text furnished by delegation): At the outset I pay tribute to the everlasting memory of the 290 innocent victims of the most inhuman military attack in the history of civil aviation and ask the Almighty to bless the souls of these martyrs.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express my condolences to the families of the victims of this tragedy from Iran and other nations and also to express my appreciation and gratitude to the Governments and peoples all over the world whose expressions of sympathy have helped alleviate some of the grief of the bereaved survivors.

The great volume of messages of condolence from all over the world has demonstrated that the conscience of our human community is strongly disturbed by the enormous magnitude of this catastrophe and the inhumanity that caused it.

While Captain Reza'ian and his crew had not even a split second to try to save the lives of their unsuspecting and innocent passengers, their sense of duty and professionalism has drawn admiration and respect from all their colleagues all over the world.

I hope that the innocent blood of these martyrs will guarantee that we will all make every effort to safeguard international respect for air-travel safety and to prevent future military attacks against innocent passengers.

Allow me to express my Government's satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, presiding over these important meetings of the Security Council and to wish you every success in carrying out your important tasks. I am hopeful that under your strong and effective leadership at these important special meetings the Security Council will be successful in carrying out its mandate, which is crucial to saving the Chicago Convention from total ineffectiveness in the face of the American military attack against the civilian airliner of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Republic of Iran)

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate your distinguished predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina.

Your efforts and those of some other members of the Council to convene this emergency meeting are highly appreciated. You are aware that this is the first time I have stepped into this Chamber, and I wish to present to you the true and substantiated story of a painful and unfortunate tragedy. This may lead some to ask why the Islamic Republic of Iran decided to take part in the deliberations of the Security Council, which has always been subject to our criticism and opposition. As will be evident, after all the injustices the Iranian people have undergone in the course of the imposed war and the irresponsible, partial and unjust positions taken by the Council in a bid to support an aggressor and cover up a naked aggression, it was indeed very difficult for us to make such a decision. Our people will not be able easily to forget or forgive this series of injustices, which have cost dearly in human and financial terms in the course of the continuation and expansion of the war. But the tragedy of the attack on a civilian airliner and the horrible killing of innocent children and their mothers have so much affected public opinion among our people, as well as world public opinion, that we felt obliged to bring the carnage and its causes and consequences before the judgement of the international community for the sake of humanity and to safeguard international law.

This may provide a litmus test as to whether this machinery and its composition can, free from and regardless of the influence of a super-Power, fulfil their responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations. Now the souls of the martyrs and the conscience of world public opinion wait to hear what the United Nations, as the manifestation of contemporary human civilization, has to say in response to the unjust shedding of their blood.

(Mr. Velayati, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

On the morning of Sunday, 3 July 1988, families and friends of the 290 passengers and crew, said farewell to their loved ones in Tehran and Bandar Abbas airports, unaware of the dastardly attack that awaited them, unaware of the tragic destiny that would be imposed upon them by a reckless and incompetent naval force led by aggressive and expansionist policy-makers.

The Air Bus had on board more than 100 children and women. Among the passengers were 15 nationals of the United Arab Emirates, including four women and four children; ten Indian nationals, including two women and four children; six citizens of Pakistan, among them four women; six nationals of Yugoslavia; and one Italian citizen.

The pilot requested permission to start up the engine at 10.10 a.m. and received permission for flight at 10.13 a.m. Bandar Abbas time. According to the transcript of communications between the pilot and Bandar Abbas tower, before permission for take-off was granted the tower asked the pilot to make sure that his transponder was turned on. A positive response was received from the pilot. The plane took off at 10.17 a.m. for Dubai, seven minutes after initial contact. The last communication between the pilot and Bandar Abbas tower is recorded at 10.24 a.m. local time; in it, he did not report any unusual or emergency condition.

The plane was flying on a scheduled flight, using the internationally established and published Amber 59 airway, which is used at least 14 times a week, five of which are between the same two airports. The plane was then climbing to the prescribed altitude at about 320 knots per hour. Seven minutes after departure time the aircraft reported position MOBET at 10.24 local time. The flight level was reported to be 12,000 feet, climbing to 14,000 feet. Contacts and communication were not re-established thereafter.

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The following transcript of the communication between Tehran, Bandar-Abbas, Dubai and the pilot of the aircraft vividly illustrates the details of that communication before the tragedy:

Iran Air 655: Tower, Iran Air 655.

Tower: Iran Air 655, go ahead.

Iran Air 655: Start up clearance.

Tower: Iran Air 655, Roger. Stand by. Confirm flight level 160.

Iran Air 655: Flight level 140 (14,000 feet)

Tower: Roger, flight level 140.

Iran Air 655 cleared to start up. Temperature, 35.

Iran Air 655: Thank you.

Bandar-Abbas: Tehran/Bandar-Abbas. Request flight level 140 for Iran Air 655, A-300, destination OMD (Dubai), via A-59.

Tehran: Bandar-Abbas, stand by.

Emirate/Tehran, request approval flight level 140 for Iran Air 655, A-300 (Airbus 300) from OIKB (Bandar-Abbas) to OMD (Dubai). Squawk 6760.

Emirate: Roger. Understand requesting 140 to Iran Air 6760 - oh, sorry, Iran Air 655. Squawk 6760.

Tehran: Affirm flight level 140.

Emirate: Flight level 140 is approved for Iran Air 655.

Tehran: Thank you.

Bandar-Abbas/Tehran, flight level 140 is approved. Squawk 6760.

Bandar-Abbas: Squawk 6760. 140 approved.

Iran Air 655: Tower/Iran Air 655. Request taxi.

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Tower: Iran Air 655, taxi to holding point runway 21 via Tango 05. Wind calm. QNH 998. Time 0640 (10.10, local time).

Iran Air 655: Roger. Cleared taxi for runway 21, taxiway 05, 998.

Tower: Iran Air 655, copy Air Traffic Control clearance.

Iran Air 655: Go ahead.

Tower: Iran Air 655 is cleared to destination OMDB (Dubai) via flight plan route. Climb and maintain flight level 140. Squawk 6760.

Iran Air 655: Roger. Cleared to destination flight plan route. Flight level 140. Squawk code 6760.

Tower: Squawk 6760. Read-back is correct. Call when ready for take-off.

Iran Air 655: Roger. Call when ready for take-off.

Tower, Iran Air 655 ready for take-off.

Tower: Iran Air 655 cleared for take-off runway 21. Wind calm. After departure contact Approach (Approach Unit Frequency) 124.2. Have a nice day.

Iran Air 655: 655 cleared to take off runway 21. After take-off, with Approach. Thank you very much. Good day.

Tower: Approach/Tower. Iran Air 655 departure 0647 (10.17, local time).

Approach: Roger.

Bandar-Abbas: Tehran/Bandar-Abbas. Iran Air 655 departed 0647 (10.17 local time). Flight level 140. Stand by for estimate.

Iran Air 655: Approach/Iran Air 655. Good morning. Airborne out of 3500.

Approach: Iran Air 655. Good morning to you. Continue as cleared. Next report at MOBET and standing by for estimate.

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Iran Air 655: Oh, Roger. Estimate MOBET time 0652 (10.22 local time).

FIR 58. Destination 0715.

Approach: 655, Roger.

Bandar-Abbas: Tehran/Bandar-Abbas, Iran Air 655 estimates DARAX 0658 (10.28, local time) and ETA (estimated time arrival) destination OMDB (Dubai) 0711.

Tehran: 0711.

Emirate/Tehran.

Emirate: Go.

Tehran: Copy estimate DARAX, Iran Air 655, A-300 (Airbus-300) from OIKB (Bandar-Abbas) to OMDB (Dubai), flight level 140. Squawk 6760. DARAX 0658 (10.28, local time). ETA 0711.

Emirate: OK. 0658. ETA 0711.

Iran Air 655: Tehran/Iran Air 655.

Tehran: Station calling Tehran.

Iran Air 655: Tehran/Iran Air 655. From OIKB (Bandar-Abbas) to OMDB (Dubai) out of 070 (7,000 feet) for 140 (14,000 feet). Estimate FIR 0658, OMDB 0715 (10.21, local time).

Tehran: Iran Air 655. Roger. Confirm squawking 6760.

Iran Air 655: Affirmative.

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Tehran: Emirate/Tehran. Revision Iran Air 655 ETA 0715 OMD (Dubai).

Emirate: Tehran, Roger.

Iran Air 655: Approach/Iran Air 655. Position MOBET out of
120 (12,000 feet). 0654 UTC (10.24, local time).

Approach: Iran Air 655. Roger. Contact Tehran Control 133.4. Have a
nice day.

Iran Air 655: Thank you. Good day.

Approach: Good day.

There was no further communication. Contact was lost.

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As representatives have clearly heard, the frequent repetition of the appropriate civilian code - namely, Squawk 6760 - and acknowledgements received from the Bandar-Abbas tower and approach unit frequency, the Tehran centre, the United Arab Emirates centre and the aircraft show full respect for this code during all phases of the flight. Moreover, the exact altitude and co-ordination of the aircraft, as well as its ascent, are clearly manifested in communication.

Seconds after the last communication between the plane and the tower, the plane was targetted by two surface-to-air standard guided missiles from the USS Vincennes, the most technologically sophisticated naval ship. The plane was shot down in approximate co-ordinates of 2643 North and 5603 East, over the territorial sea of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The plane was shot when it was at the centre line of Amber 59 airway.

Based on these easily verifiable facts, the USS Vincennes had well over 14 minutes - and not four minutes as American officials have claimed - of prior knowledge that the target was a civilian airliner on a scheduled flight from Bandar-Abbas to Dubai.

I should now like briefly to review the ensuing reactions and explanations presented by officials of the United States after the events. All arguments advanced by both military and political leaders of the United States sought to justify the decision made by the captain of the USS Vincennes in terms of self-defense and protection of his ship and its crew.

The suggested reason for shooting down the airliner as advanced by the President of the United States and also by Admiral Crowe, Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, was that the aircraft was descending towards the United States warship. American officials also argued that the airliner was off

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course, that it was not transmitting appropriate signals and that it did not respond to warnings. American officials argue that these are the four reasons, when combined with earlier involvement of the USS Vincennes and its helicopters with Iranian patrol boats, for which the USS Vincennes was compelled to fire two missiles - allegedly in self-defense - and to shoot down the passenger plane.

Let us now examine these arguments one by one. Here I will try to refute the arguments of the United States officials by their own contradictory statements and admissions.

In his briefing on Sunday, 3 July 1988, Admiral Crowe claimed:

"We do have indications that the people on the ship were led to believe that the aircraft was not only on a steady bearing but that it had gone up in altitude and was decreasing in altitude as it neared the ship."

However, admissions by another American warship destroyed the foundations of the seemingly invincible argument of the top military leader of the United States.

According to the Washington Post of 5 July 1988:

"The Pentagon received an after-action report from another ship" - USS Sides - "in the region that reported that the Iranian aircraft was ascending before it was hit."

Let us now turn briefly to the American claim that flight 655 was off course. Admiral Crowe claimed after the tragedy that "the suspect aircraft was flying outside the prescribed commercial air corridor."

However, the Washington Post of 6 July 1988 reported that behind the public relations campaign of misinformation conducted by American leaders, privately they had admitted that even their story on the deviation of the plane from its routine corridor was a deliberate fabrication. To quote House Armed Services Committee Chairman, Les Aspin:

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"Pentagon officials told House leaders in a briefing yesterday that the Iranian aircraft was not outside the commercial aircraft corridor as originally reported by Crowe on Sunday."

Under the circumstances, when the lives of 290 innocent passengers were so savagely and tragically taken, the minimum degree of human decency and integrity compels the culprit to reflect a certain degree of remorse. However, the world witnessed arrogance, indifference and a campaign of lies in the first reaction of the American Administration, whose sole purpose was to justify this barbaric act at any cost.

Another story which was fabricated to misguide international public opinion was the claim by the United States officials that the airliner was not transmitting the appropriate signals. On 3 July 1988 Admiral Crowe claimed that "There were electronic indications on the Vincennes that led it to believe that the aircraft was an F-14 ...".

After information from other sources had made it clear that flight 655 had been transmitting appropriate civilian signals, the Defense Department changed its story, claiming that mixed signals were being transmitted by the aircraft. On 5 July 1988 the Defense Department spokesman, Mr. Howard, said:

"The Iranian aircraft was using its IFF system in two modes. It was squawking on Mode-3 which is used ... for both military and civilian aircraft. It was also sending signals on a military mode, Mode-2."

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At the same time other officials of the same Department were telling another story in the United States Congress. The New York Times of 6 July 1988, quoting Congressman Les Aspin, reports:

"Pentagon officials were not certain whether both sets of signals had come from the civilian aircraft. He said the officials acknowledged under questioning that it was possible that the military signal had come from another airplane." (The New York Times, 6 July 1988, p. A 1, c. 1)

And, finally, discrediting the cover-up story of non-existent or mixed signals, the Washington Post reported in its 6 July 1988 issue:

"The frigate Sides operating near the Vincennes picked up only transmissions from the Airbus' Mode 3 channel, however, and had no indication of transmissions on the military frequency."

Notwithstanding the fact that the Iranian Air Force had no F-14 operations on the morning of that unfortunate Sunday in or around the Strait of Hormuz, it may be noted that military experts well familiar with the F-14 and its capabilities have held that an F-14 could not have presented any serious danger to the USS Vincennes, or any surface target for that matter. F-14 fighters, as should be known most vividly to the Americans who made them, are designed for air-to-air attack and not air-to-surface operations. Quoting an executive in the aerospace industry, The New York Times of 7 July 1988 reported:

"The only thing an F-14 could drop on the ground or water would be a dumb bomb. In aviation terms, a dumb bomb is one that lacks the guidance mechanism of a missile and can hit its target only if well aimed by the pilot in the plane."

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Possibly the most fallacious argument of American officials in justifying their inexplicable crime was the claim that the airliner did not respond to the alleged warnings issued by the warship. In his press briefing of 3 July 1988 Admiral Crowe said:

"A warning was sent on both military and civilian distress frequencies beginning at 10:49 a.m. This procedure was repeated several times, but the aircraft never answered nor changed its course."

While every available evidence, including the transcripts read earlier, shows that the pilot of the airliner did not receive any warning, many have contended that on so short and routine a flight the pilot was not required to monitor the emergency civilian frequency. Furthermore, because the ship failed to identify the target of its alleged warnings, the pilot of the airliner on a scheduled flight should not reasonably be expected to have taken them as directed against himself.

According to The New York Times of 6 July 1988:

"Officials at the International Civil Aviation Organization said the agency calls for commercial airline pilots to monitor the civilian frequency only on flights over long stretches of water or over remote areas like the Arctic.

"The 125-mile flight Sunday over the Strait of Hormuz would not have fit into that category." (The New York Times, 6 July 1988, p. A 11, c. 5)

Let us, against all the odds, for the sake of argument, give credence to the United States claim that the passenger plane did not respond to the warnings given by the USS Vincennes, warnings which after one year of persistent harassment had become routine. However, according to accepted principles of international civil aviation, flights inside the flight information region of a country can be directed

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only by the civil aviation authorities of that country - nobody else. Furthermore, what legal or moral authority sanctions the missile attack against that civilian airliner, which according to established principles was not even required to monitor the frequency?

Also, the amount of effort made by the warship to warn the airliner has been seriously questioned, because, for instance, as the Washington Post of 5 July 1988 argues:

"It was not clear why the ship did not use the same civilian frequency on which the plane's pilot had communicated to Bandar Abbas."

One question that needs to be seriously examined is whether the captain of the USS Vincennes actually warned its target that it intended to shoot, or whether the ship took any other measure to make its intentions clear to its target, or whether, as the evidence suggests, it simply decided to shoot at a target which was admittedly unidentified, at the very least.

Finally, the most awkward American explanation for shooting down a civilian airliner was presented by Admiral Crowe, who claimed that the plane was descending towards the USS Vincennes in a war zone, while increasing its speed of 450 miles an hour.

It is necessary to note that the area where the plane was attacked is well outside the declared war zones of the combatants. This fact is attested to even by Lloyds of London. Furthermore, as the United States Administration, for internal considerations, has declared no area in the Persian Gulf a war zone, the logic of the American justification becomes even more erroneous.

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Moreover, from the standpoint of international civil aviation, the area is not considered a war zone. This claim is substantiated by all existing notices to airmen (NOTAMS). For the same reason even now Amber 1 airway, which passes through the same area, is one of the most active airways in the region, used by tens of carriers, including American, on a daily basis.

Furthermore, it has been suggested by some American officials that since hostilities had occurred there should have been no civilian operation in the air. Regrettably, owing to the American presence, hostilities continue to occur in the Persian Gulf on a routine basis on the surface of the water and at low altitudes. As American warships are scattered all over the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, such confrontations are likely anywhere. However, note should be taken of the fact that the lowest level of the airway was well clear of the altitude of the conflict, which would have allowed civilian operations at the prescribed safe altitude.

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It was shown earlier that, according to American ships in the area, the plane was in fact ascending. Furthermore, it has been shown by the distance flown by the plane in seven minutes that the speed was not more than the normal 320 miles an hour.

The question that needs to be asked is why a warship had positioned itself right at the centre of a civilian airway. Furthermore, it is ironic that, positioning itself right in the middle of an international civil airway, the Vincennes expected the plane to go outside the corridor and not be headed towards the ship.

It has also been claimed by American officials that the shooting down of the airliner occurred in the course of hostilities initiated by Iranian patrol boats. It is a story concocted to justify an act which cannot be explained under any circumstances. A close examination of contentions by American officials with regard to this confrontation clearly shows not only that the American forces initiated the hostilities but they were also engaged in a series of premeditated acts of aggression against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In his letter addressed to the Congress of the United States, President Reagan makes the following observation in this regard:

"On 2 July the Montgomery had responded to a distress signal from a Danish tanker that was under attack by Iranian small boats and had fired a warning shot, which caused the breaking off of the attack. Having indications that approximately a dozen Iranian small boats were congregating to attack merchant shipping, the Vincennes sent a Mark III Lamps helicopter on investigative patrol in international airspace to assess the situation. At about 1010 local Gulf time, when the helicopter had approached to within only four nautical miles, it was fired on by Iranian small boats."

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Let us once again accept President Reagan's story at face value. It is clear that a military helicopter belonging to a unit which was involved in hostilities against Iranian boats was approaching the boats with less than friendly intentions. It had come to within four miles of the Iranian boats, where they were well within the fire range of the helicopter. Furthermore, according to the Sunday Times of 10 July 1988 quoting British Government Communication headquarters:

"the initial confrontation that started the shooting last Monday morning may have been provoked by American helicopters flying into Iranian airspace."

The President of the United States faults Iranian patrol boats for allegedly taking action against clearly identified military helicopters with hostile intent approaching to within four miles of Iranian airspace and even violating it. But in the same letter, he approves and justifies the shooting down of a commercial plane with 290 passengers aboard at a distance of nine miles, again within Iranian airspace.

Using the same convoluted logic, President Reagan continues to justify the attack on Iranian boats as follows:

"As the Vincennes and Montgomery were approaching the group of Iranian small boats at approximately 1042 local time, at least four of the small boats turned towards and began closing in on the American warships. At this time both American ships opened fire on the small craft, sinking two and damaging a third."

If from the American point of view the United States warships had the right deliberately and with clearly hostile intent to approach Iranian boats patrolling within the territorial sea of the Islamic Republic of Iran, why then should the United States Government attempt to justify opening fire on the same boats, which

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were at most guilty of the same behaviour? The clear difference, that one group was operating within its own territorial sea while the other was thousands of miles away from its shores, cannot be overlooked.

It is evident that, from the very beginning of the confrontations, the United States warships had aggressive intent against Iranian patrol boats operating within Iranian territorial sea. The sinking of Iranian vessels, therefore, cannot be considered but as a premeditated act of aggression against the territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Relying solely on information provided by American officials, we have refuted the arguments advanced by the United States Administration designed to present to the world that the shooting down of Iran Air flight 655 and the massacre of 290 innocent passengers were justifiable acts of self-defence. Therefore, what in the world happens to Washington's argument of self-defence? What was the USS Vincennes defending itself against? Against the scheduled flight of an Air Bus jetliner filled with 290 passengers and crew, flying within an internationally recognized civilian airway while ascending to the prescribed altitude? Surely, this is a clear and outrageous illustration of the moral bankruptcy of policy-makers in Washington. It was a terrible, cowardly judgement on the part of the USS Vincennes, which in turn was the result of an arrogant and aggressive policy.

The evidence presented by American officials themselves clearly suggests that the United States forces initiated hostilities on 2 and 3 July 1988 with the clear intention of carrying out unprovoked aggression against the territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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Furthermore, all available evidence suggests that the shooting down of an Iranian civil airliner flying on a scheduled flight known to the United States warships, using an internationally established and published civilian airway and transmitting signals identifying itself as a civilian airliner could not have been a mistake. Certainly, the huge difference in appearance, size, weight and flight pattern between an Air Bus and an F-14, which is almost a fourth of the former's size, would make any claim of mistaken identity absurd. Rather, the course of events during that day clearly shows that the United States warships in the area had clearly aggressive intentions, which resulted in the massacre of 290 innocent people.

Even if one accepts the American contention that this was an accident, that does not reduce the heavy responsibility of the United States. Clearly, in granting such broad authorization to American naval officers in the Persian Gulf, and considering the volatile situation there caused by their presence, the American policy makers were absolutely aware of the inevitability of such tragedies and did nothing to prevent one. Therefore, while the claim of the accidental nature of the tragedy reduces the burden on the officers in the Persian Gulf, it doubles the responsibility of American political and military leaders, who gave the broad instructions. It is necessary to note that, according to first reports, the captain of the ship had received authorization when the airliner was 20 miles away, which further illustrates the arrogant lack of respect of the United States Administration for human life.

Today the Security Council is faced with a tragedy unprecedented in the history of armed attacks against civilian aircraft, a tragedy that can disrupt the freedom of civil aviation in the Persian Gulf and all over the world, a tragedy that has jeopardized the authority and integrity of international norms protecting

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civilian air travel. The Council must therefore pronounce itself in the clearest, most unequivocal terms with regard to this violation of the most commonly accepted norms of international law.

According to Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter, all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. Member States are also in duty bound to refrain from any measure that may endanger international peace and security. Therefore, the atrocity committed by the United States Administration against a civilian airliner in the airspace of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in the internationally established and published Amber 59 airway is a clear violation of the principle of non-use of force in international relations as well as a blatant disregard for the inviolability of the territorial integrity of a State Member of the United Nations.

This criminal act is also a typical example of aggression as stipulated in Article 3 (b) of the Definition of Aggression adopted by the General Assembly in 1974 (General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), Annex). Accordingly the use of armed force by a State against the territorial integrity of another State is considered an act of aggression. It should be recalled that paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) provides that the Security Council should take account of that Definition in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

In addition to those provisions, the United States action is a clear violation of an internationally recognized obligation emanating from the letter and spirit of the 1944 Chicago Convention guaranteeing the security of international civil aviation as well as the safety and regularity of flights and the safety of passengers and crew. Article 44 of that Convention, while enumerating the goals pursued by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for the progressive

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development of matters pertaining to the safety and security of civil aviation throughout the world, also emphasizes the importance attached to the realization and enhancement of flight safety as well as to the facilitation of international aviation. Annex II of the Chicago Convention, which enjoys universal acceptance, underlines the imperative of safeguarding the safety of international civil aviation, and particularly the absolute prohibition of recourse to force against it. The objective of the Chicago Convention to protect international civil aviation against acts of aggression has received widespread support in the international community, which has strongly reacted to any violation of that axiomatic rule of international law.

Earlier instances of attacks against civilian airliners were severely condemned by the international community. The Council and the General Assembly of ICAO also studied the issue and, despite the clarity of relevant rules, measures were suggested to promote the existing rules and regulations in order to prevent any possible misinterpretation of the customary international law protecting civil aviation.

As a result of the efforts made by ICAO, an additional amendment, article 3 (bis), in the form of a separate protocol, was adopted on 10 May 1984 by consensus at an extraordinary session of the General Assembly of ICAO, with the participation of 102 countries. According to paragraph 1 of that new article,

"The contracting States recognize that every State must refrain from resorting to the use of weapons against civil aircraft in flight and that, in case of interception, the lives of persons on board and the safety of aircraft must not be endangered."

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Republic of Iran)

The insistence of the United States on codifying the provisions of article 3 (bis) of the Chicago Convention, which now form a universally accepted part of customary international law, is noteworthy.

The reaction of the international community to such incidents has established a strong precedent according to which the act of the United States Administration in attacking a civilian airliner and murdering 290 innocent people is beyond any doubt a criminal act and a flagrant violation of the rules and principles of international law.

Therefore, the Security Council cannot but condemn the United States for its unjustified shooting down of the civilian airliner of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Anything less than such a clear position of condemnation would be a clear show of disrespect for human life and the innocent passengers, including the more than 100 women and children who were massacred in this tragedy.

(Mr. Velayati, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

A clear position on the part of the international community, and the Security Council in particular, is imperative also from another point of view. In our era many safeguards for the protection of the lives of civilians have approached irrelevance because the international community has failed clearly and unequivocally to condemn violations of those rules and principles. Now that the Security Council is faced with a rather new type of threat against members of the civilian population it needs to take effective measures to prevent the provisions of the Chicago Convention on the protection of international civil aviation from losing their authority. Failure by the Security Council to take effective action against this most vivid manifestation of wanton disregard for civilian lives can never be justified, and would remain as a total disgrace in the history of the Security Council.

The international community should demand that the United States put an end once and for all to its attempts to justify its inhuman massacre of innocent civilian passengers of Iran Air flight 655 as an act of self-defence. That contention flies in the face of reason, humanity and international law. According to Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, only a State which is subjected to an armed attack is entitled to resort to force to defend itself. In other words, the Charter recognizes that acts of self-defence can be initiated only in response to prior armed attack, and not in response to other breaches of international law. In fact, pre-emptive measures before the occurrence of an armed attack cannot be justified as acts of self-defence; rather such measures can be considered only as a blatant breach of the principle of the non-use of force in international relations. Therefore, according to well established principles of international law, the United States criminal act of attacking a civilian airliner can never be

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justified under the term "self-defence", particularly since the civilian airliner did not even have the potential to launch an attack.

Moreover, by trying to justify this atrocity in the guise of self-defence United States officials are taking a serious step, in allowing others to resort to the same justification in similar incidents. In that event the freedom and safety of civil aviation would become an unattainable dream. The Security Council is therefore duty-bound to reject those arguments, not only because of the available evidence as already suggested but also out of respect for Article 51 of the Charter and out of concern for the freedom of civil aviation.

Taking into account the number of civilian flights in the Persian Gulf, the Security Council is also faced with another challenge. Let us for the sake of argument take the United States story at face value. If the most sophisticated United States warship in the Persian Gulf allegedly failed to distinguish between an Airbus and an F-14, the question that needs to be asked here is whether one should not expect more severe incidents caused by less-sophisticated United States warships in the area. When the most sophisticated United States warship panics over the remote possibility of the existence of an F-14 - which in any case, as we have said, could not pose a serious threat to a surface target - and goes on a shooting spree against an unidentified target, should we not expect less-sophisticated warships to mistake commercial jets smaller than Airbuses for fighter jets probably larger than F-14s? Are we not simply waiting for more tragedies to happen, and for more innocent lives to be lost?

The rules of engagement prescribed to the United States forces in the Persian Gulf by the United States Administration call for taking so-called defensive measures against "hostile" targets before being attacked, a position that flies

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directly in the face of accepted norms of international law, particularly Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. It is important to note that following the criminal shooting down of Iran Air flight 655 the Government of the United States declared in the most arrogant fashion that it was not contemplating any revision of those rules of engagement.

The Security Council has to take immediate measures to compel the United States to abandon this war-mongering and arrogant mentality in the Persian Gulf. Otherwise, similar incidents, even if by mistake, could occur much more often. Certainly, the measures we referred to earlier in our statement would have a temporary effect and should not be mistaken for a treatment for the root cause of tension and instability in the Persian Gulf. Since the very inception of the United States policy of dispatching its largest naval fleet to the Persian Gulf, the international community has witnessed nothing but tragedy, exacerbated tension and increased instability in that volatile waterway.

Officials of the United States Government have loudly declared, since early last year, that the objective of the United States presence in the Persian Gulf was to protect commercial shipping and to maintain freedom of navigation in international waters. That claim is baseless because of the responsibility of the littoral States, and not outsiders, for the maintenance of security; it is unacceptable also because of the results and consequences of the presence of United States forces in the region. It should be added that their presence has not only failed to establish security in the region, but has escalated tension. By themselves, statistics of attacks against merchant shipping in the Persian Gulf clearly illustrate that the policy has been a dismal failure with respect to its declared objectives. The number of ships attacked in the Persian Gulf has doubled since last July, with ever greater intensity and numbers of casualties.

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Republic of Iran)

Indeed, one could not have expected anything else. When a super-Power decides to impose itself in a region on the side of one party to a conflict, it is clear to everyone that it will not be able to protect a principle of international law. The United States policy in the Persian Gulf has in fact been an attempt to allow one side to the conflict to carry out attacks against merchant shipping under the protection of American warships while at the same time trying to prevent the other party from taking legitimate action to defend its vital interests, thereby repeatedly violating the sovereign rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such a policy cannot reasonably be defined as a policy of safeguarding freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf.

Even if one accepts the United States claim for the sake of argument, the large-scale presence of the American forces comprising dozens of warships and destroyers is not proportionate to the intensity of the alleged danger existing in the region. In fact, the stationing of dozens of warships in a limited marine area like the Persian Gulf automatically causes further confrontation and escalation of tension.

If we accept the unacceptable argument of the United States that the attack by the USS Vincennes on the Iranian airliner was a mistake, there immediately comes to mind the question of whether the occurrence of such a tragedy and the victimization of 290 innocent civilians was not the result of the unjustified presence of the American forces in the region. Does continuation of that presence not fill us with foreboding as to the repetition of such tragedies in the future?

I should like at this point to consider very briefly the adverse legal consequences of the American presence in the Persian Gulf.

(Mr. Velayati, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

The presence of the United States forces in the region of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman is contrary to the neutrality claimed by the United States Administration in the imposed war. Universally accepted principles of customary international law recognize the rights of belligerent States and prescribes specific rights and obligations for neutral States. For example, a belligerent State has the right to search and visit ships belonging to neutral States on the high seas. Moreover, a neutral State should not act in a manner considered to be siding with one of the belligerent parties.

The presence of the United States warships in the region and their continuous harassment of Iranian naval vessels have imposed certain restrictions on exercise of the universally recognized right of the Islamic Republic of Iran to search and visit ships suspected of carrying goods that would boost the military strength of the enemy. In fact, through its presence and its disturbance of exercise of the right to search and visit ships, the United States has supported the aggressor and violated its neutrality. It is evident that the United States Administration cannot claim unilateral responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The presence of the United States navy in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman is contrary to elementary principles of international relations, namely respect for sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity, as well as the sovereign equality of States, embodied in Articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Charter. The American warships have on more than one occasion, in contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, of 1982, which recognizes the principle of the sovereignty of a coastal State over its territorial sea, entered Iranian territorial sea, thereby violating the sovereignty and territorial

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integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this respect the Islamic Republic of Iran has officially and repeatedly protested against such breaches of international law through the United States Interests Section in Tehran and has circulated its protest notes as documents of the Security Council.

The American warships have on many occasions warned Iranian naval patrol planes as well as search-and-rescue planes and helicopters within the airspace of the Islamic Republic of Iran, preventing Iran from exercising its sovereign right. In violation of the provisions of the Chicago Convention concerning the absolute sovereignty of States over their airspace, the American forces have issued warnings to Iranian planes flying over the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran to keep a 10-mile distance from the American warships stationed near, or even inside, the territorial sea of our country, while such interference cannot occur even over the high seas.

Many instances of the interception of civil airliners have been recorded. To cite one example, in its letter of 28 January 1988 (S/19460) the Islamic Republic of Iran protested the interception of an Iranian passenger flight from Tehran to Dubai by the United States naval forces in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the harassment of civilian airliners, endangering the lives of civilian passengers, has been protested by other countries of the Persian Gulf. According to the Washington Post of 5 July 1988, an American warship in the Persian Gulf intercepted a civilian airliner, demanding that it change its course: "The incident that raised the possibility of a mid-air collision took place June 8 [1988] and prompted a protest by the United Arab Emirates Government to the US Embassy in Abu Dhabi."

Furthermore, American planes have on many occasions violated Iranian airspace to intercept Iranian reconnaissance planes and warn them to change course.

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Republic of Iran)

None of the principles and rules of international law can in any way justify the illegal and forceful action of the American forces in the region unless we accept that in our world today international relations are based on force and that the law of the jungle regulates relations between bigger and smaller nations. Under such circumstances the United Nations Charter as well as various international conventions would be void of their *raison d'être*.

The presence of the massive naval armada of the United States in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman has imposed problems and restrictions on exercise of the sovereign rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran with regard to its right and sovereignty in exploiting the resources of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone.

(Mr. Velayati, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

It is evident that the massive United States military presence has brought the peoples of the region nothing but insecurity, death, destruction, lawlessness, intervention and tension. The safety of shipping lanes and freedom of navigation have been increasingly imperilled; the safety of commercial flights has been endangered; the law of the air has been violated; the law of the sea has been trampled upon; hundreds of innocent persons - men, women and children - have lost their lives; the marine environment has been contaminated; the sovereignty and political independence of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been breached; the peace and security of the region have been threatened; the threat or the use of force has become a means of arriving at illegitimate ends; international rules and regulations relating to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and sovereign equality of independent States as well as the ideal of peace and justice have been vividly transgressed. And all that is the result of the unjustifiable presence of the United States forces and their illegal acts in the region.

While we do not think that the Security Council at the present series of meetings is ready to deal objectively with these blatant acts of aggression by the United States, we simply wish to contend that the inaction of the international community led the American bullies to believe that they could continue such atrocities, relying solely on unsubstantiated, self-serving evidence and not fearing any international public outrage. It is indeed instructive to note that the United States has never felt obliged to present its fabricated evidence to the international community for scrutiny and verification. What is more painful, however, is the fact that such an investigation has never been attempted by this body, which has chosen to turn a blind eye to the blatant acts of aggression committed by one of its permanent members against the territorial integrity of a Member of the United Nations.

(Mr. Velayati, Islamic
Republic of Iran)

It is time that the Security Council took a more serious and objective look at this grave threat to international peace and security, and compelled the United States and other foreign forces to leave the Persian Gulf. Anything less would be a further evasion of responsibility by the Security Council, an evasion of responsibility which could not be forgiven in the present circumstances and after the tragic massacre of the innocent passengers on Iran Air flight 655 last week.

Furthermore, as the Islamic Republic of Iran has been suggesting for a number of years, the United Nations should take effective measures to ensure the freedom of civilian navigation - and now civil aviation - in the Persian Gulf and to prevent the spread of the imposed war to other countries of the region. I submitted a concrete proposal for regional security as long ago as May 1986. That proposal merits serious and constructive attention by the United Nations and the countries of the region if the aim is to prevent further escalation of the volatile situation in the Persian Gulf. That approach was based on the commonly accepted principle that regional security in the Persian Gulf is dependent on mutual understanding between the countries of the region and should be achieved only by those countries themselves and without any foreign interference.

The Islamic Republic of Iran also called, long before the dispatch of the United States forces of aggression, for the prevention of acts of hostility in the Persian Gulf. However, the sole consideration of the United States was, and continues to be, the imposition of pressure against my country. Also, the Islamic Republic of Iran has responded positively to proposals for the prevention of acts of hostility in the Persian Gulf made by the Secretary-General and others. Such efforts should be continued, independently of the efforts by the Secretary-General to achieve the implementation of his plan.

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Republic of Iran)

If the worst military attack against a civilian airliner in history is not utilized by the Security Council as the strongest means of strengthening the existing rules of international law for the protection of civil aviation; if the Security Council, motivated by political expediency, leaves any escape route for the culprits to evade the consequences of their crime; and if the United Nations and other relevant international bodies fail to respond adequately to the serious concerns of international public opinion following this tragedy, then I must announce with the greatest sadness and regret that there will be an ever-increasing threat to every civilian passenger, young or old. All of us would then pay a heavy price. Today it is the Islamic Republic of Iran; tomorrow it may be another country.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the Vice-President of the United States of America, the Honourable George Bush, on whom I now call.

Mr. BUSH (United States of America): Thank you, Mr. President, for the warm welcome you extended to me here and when you received me in the Office of the President. I am pleased that the Security Council is being presided over this month by the representative of a country with which my own has very cordial relations. I am confident that your diplomatic skills will ensure the successful outcome of this debate.

With your indulgence, Mr. President, I should like to salute a former colleague, with whom I served in the United Nations many years ago. I am speaking, of course, of the former Ambassador of Peru and now the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. All of us round this table have great respect for his efforts to enhance world peace.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

I have come here today to represent the United States, at the request of President Reagan, because of the importance of the issues at stake - not just the terrible human tragedy of Iran Air 655, but the continuing conflict between Iran and Iraq and its implications for international commerce in the Persian Gulf.

Having been the United States representative in this body, I know what a grave responsibility the Council bears and the good it can do when it acts with realism and wisdom. We are in urgent need of realism and wisdom now.

Iran has for one year been rejecting and disregarding a solemn resolution of the Security Council. For years it has been berating this body. And now Iran comes here with reckless, intemperate charges against my country. But, on balance, I expect it is good that the Foreign Minister has appeared here today, for perhaps this body can now serve as the catalyst for ending the bloodshed and bringing peace.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

The Persian Gulf is a region of vital importance to the United States and the economy of the world. American and European forces - not just American - are in the Gulf with the support of the States of the area to meet a vital need: to help ensure the unimpeded flow of oil and to keep neutral commerce moving in the face of a very real threat to innocent shipping. This is our legal right.

Iranian mines, deliberately sown, have disrupted innocent passage and damaged unarmed merchant vessels and a United States naval ship in international waters. The small boat attacks of Iran on non-belligerent merchant ships continue unabated. These actions are in blatant violation of international law and of the United Nations Charter. They give the lie to the assertions that Iran supports freedom of navigation in the Gulf.

We have increased the size of our forces from traditional levels to protect United States flag shipping and to assist other neutral vessels under unlawful attack when they request assistance. Five European navies in addition to our own - a total of some 43 ships - are now in the Gulf to counter Iran's reckless behaviour towards neutral ships engaged in lawful commerce. I am proud of our leadership in meeting this challenge.

Together we have made it clear that we will keep the Persian Gulf open, no matter what the threat. I am here to reaffirm to those who depend on us and to those who would threaten us that we will not alter this course.

The critical issue confronting this body is not the how and why of Iran Air 655, which I will discuss. It is the continuing refusal of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to comply with resolution 598 (1987), to negotiate an end to the war with Iraq and to cease its acts of aggression against neutral shipping in the Persian Gulf.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

The victims of Iran Air 655 are only the most recent casualties of a brutal and senseless war that has brought immense pain and suffering to the people of both sides.

Iran long ago could have accepted, and can still accept, an honourable end to the war. As a first step, Iran should declare its readiness unequivocally to comply with resolution 598 (1987) - today, for the first time, right here, now, before this body. It can act now to end the unspeakable sacrifices that the people of both Iran and Iraq are being asked to make. What possible objective could be worth the human suffering and pain, the hundreds of thousands of casualties and the economic devastation that the war has caused on both sides?

A particularly horrifying aspect of the Iran-Iraq war is the increasingly routine use of chemical weapons. Who can forget the pictures of entire families lying dead in the streets of their villages, innocent of anything, yet killed in this savage way?

This use of chemical weapons must stop. Let me make a special appeal here today for all nations to eliminate such warfare. Who can sleep at night after seeing that picture of a mother covering the body of her child with her own body in trying to protect that child from the horror of invisible, insidious death?

On behalf of the President and the United States Government I went to Geneva in 1984 to submit a draft treaty before the United Nations Committee on Disarmament to ban all chemical and biological weapons. I am well aware that there are difficult verification problems associated with banning those weapons, but this must not deter us from seeking an end to that monstrous kind of warfare.

The United States was the first nation publicly to condemn the use of chemical weapons in the war as a blatant violation of the Geneva Protocols. We fully support Security Council resolution 612 (1988), which demands an immediate end to

(Mr. Bush, United States)

chemical warfare by both parties. No country should think it can use chemical weapons with impunity.

We here in the Council have a special responsibility to help bring this war to an end. Almost a year ago, on 20 July 1987, the Council responded to the hopes of the world with the unanimous adoption of resolution 598 (1987). The United States played a leading role in the adoption of that resolution. Its provisions are familiar. It provides a comprehensive framework for an immediate end to the war.

Resolution 598 (1987) had a unique, mandatory character. In adopting that resolution the members of the Security Council knew exactly what they were doing in ordering an immediate end to the conflict without the agreement of either party.

Almost a year has passed and the bloodshed continues unchecked. The time has come for action to bring this war to an end.

I call today on both sides to accept an immediate and comprehensive permanent cease-fire - on land, on sea and in the air. Let that be the first step in the full implementation of resolution 598 (1987), leading directly to prompt withdrawal to international borders, return of all prisoners of war and establishment of an impartial body to look into responsibility for the conflict. Let that stop the bloodshed. Let that pave the way for an enduring peaceful solution.

I had the privilege of meeting this morning with the Secretary-General to commend his tireless efforts to end the war and to promise our strong support for his mediation efforts. I urge the members of the Security Council - and particularly its permanent members - to do likewise, and to make clear that they will not support efforts to delay the immediate implementation of resolution 598 (1987) in all of its provisions.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

We must not lose sight of one basic fact: Iraq has declared its readiness to comply with resolution 598 (1987) as a basis for a settlement, and Iran, regrettably, has not. Instead of expressing willingness to comply with the resolution and negotiating its implementation in good faith, Iran has played for time and manoeuvred for diplomatic advantage - and the Iranian people have paid a very heavy price.

We respect Iran's right to air its grievances. But Iran cannot have it both ways. Iran cannot simultaneously complain to this body and yet defy it.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has refused to say plainly and clearly that it will comply with the mandatory decision of the Security Council. Iran must not be permitted to choose those provisions of resolution 598 (1987) it likes and to ignore the others. Nor can Iraq be permitted to rest on verbal adherence to resolution 598 (1987), while avoiding co-operation with the Secretary-General in finding practical ways to implement the resolution.

As an aside, I cannot help but note how often the representatives of Iran quote United States newspapers. I had forgotten this, having been gone from the United Nations for a long time. Perhaps coming from a country not blessed with a vigorous, competitive free press and free political system, Iranians do not understand that in this country you can find columns or comments to support any point of view you want.

As for the matter at hand - the unfortunate destruction of Iran Air 655 - many of the circumstances do remain unclear. Our own military investigation is under way. We will co-operate with any investigation that is conducted by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and we trust that the Government of Iran will do the same. We want all the relevant facts to be brought to light as quickly as possible, and those members who are familiar with our system know that they will be brought to light as quickly as possible.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

One thing is clear - that the USS Vincennes acted in self-defence. This tragic accident occurred against a backdrop of repeated, unjustified, unprovoked and unlawful Iranian attacks against United States merchant shipping and armed forces, beginning with the mine attack on the USS Bridgeton in July 1987. It occurred in the midst of a naval attack initiated by Iranian vessels against a neutral vessel and subsequently against the Vincennes when she came to the aid of the innocent ship in distress.

Despite these hostilities, Iranian authorities failed to divert Iran Air 655 from the combat area. They allowed a civilian aircraft loaded with passengers to proceed on a path over a warship engaged in active battle. That was irresponsible and a tragic error.

There are three ways for Iran to avoid future tragedies: keep airliners away from combat; better still, stop attacking innocent ships; or, better yet - the best way - through peace. And the Security Council offers the best hope of peace right now.

The information available to Captain Rogers, the captain of the Vincennes, indicated that an Iranian military aircraft was approaching his ship with hostile intentions. After seven - I want the Council to be sure to understand this - seven unanswered warnings, the captain did what he had to do to protect his ship and the lives of the crew. As a military commander, his first duty and responsibility is to protect his men and his ship, and he did so.

The wild allegation by the Iran side that the attack on the airliner was premeditated is offensive and absurd.

The United States has never willfully acted to endanger innocent civilians, nor will it ever do so. I ask the Council to contrast that with the willful detention in inhuman conditions of Americans and others held hostage against their will. One course is civilized and the other barbaric.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

I can also assure the Council that we will not risk endangering innocent civilians - purposely endangering them is the charge levelled here today. But I can also say that the United States will never put its military in a dangerous situation and deny them the right to defend themselves.

We are all accustomed by now to hearing irresponsible charges from the Iranian Government. There have been many egregious statements concerning this incident. The bottom line in all of this is that the Iranians can make accusations; they can, if they want to, throw 14-year-olds into battle in a bloody war. That is their business. But when they attack innocent shipping and place mines in international waters that is the business of all who value freedom. But the answer - I keep coming back to it - is the business of this Council; it is peace.

I will not dignify with a response the charge that we deliberately destroyed Iran Air 655. I honestly feel that Iran knows better. The Foreign Minister knows that this tragedy was an accident. He also knows that, by allowing the civilian airliner to fly into an area of an engagement between Iranian warships and United States forces in the Gulf, Iran, too, must bear a substantial measure of responsibility for what happened.

I call on Iran today to reroute civilian air traffic away from areas of active hostilities. Yesterday the United States representative at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) meeting advocated an investigation by ICAO into the Iran air incident and immediate consideration of appropriate measures to ensure the safety of civil aviation in the Gulf.

The terrible disaster of Iran Air 655 fills our hearts with sorrow - American hearts, the hearts of the 14 countries represented around this table. I am sitting next to the representative of Yugoslavia, six of whose countrymen were killed. Of course we feel badly about it; of course we have compassion; of course we care.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

Our reaction to this tragedy transcends political differences and boundaries. As Americans, we share - you cannot be an American if you do not share - the grief of the families of the victims, whatever their nationality, and that includes the innocent citizens from the Islamic Republic.

It is that strongly felt sense of common humanity that has led our Government to decide that the United States will provide voluntary, ex gratia compensation to the families of those who died in that crash: a prompt reaction from a President and a country that feel something deeply, feel compassion for those who innocently lost their lives.

We make this offer strictly as a humanitarian gesture, not as a matter of legal obligation, but out of a sense of moral compassion, reflecting the value that we place on human life. We hope that compensation will ease the pain a little of those who have suffered a loss, even as we recognize that there is nothing we can do, nothing we can say, ever, to bring back the loved ones to the families.

In the case of the Iranian victims, we will take appropriate measures to ensure the money flows directly to the families, not the Government. We will provide none of these funds to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Indeed, we will provide no compensation until mechanisms are in place to ensure that the money goes where it should - to the families of the victims.

The time has come - indeed, the time is long past - for us to rededicate ourselves to the cause of peace. The Iran Air tragedy should reinforce our determination to act. It should remind those who would prefer to ignore the human cost of the Iran-Iraq war and the threat it poses to the security of the Persian Gulf - those who find reasons to delay rather than reasons to act for peace - that their complacency carries a heavy price.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

We - my country, the United States of America - have one over-arching goal in the Persian Gulf. That goal is peace, and peace means cessation of the killing and a definitive end to the war. Peace means total freedom of passage through the Straits - total freedom of ships to sail without risk in international waters. Peace also means nations living without fear of threats or intimidation from their neighbours.

To this end, we will continue to defend our interests and support our friends, while remaining steadfastly neutral in the war. And as long as this conflict continues we and other Western nations will work to contain the threat to freedom of navigation and peaceful commerce in a waterway that is absolutely vital to the economies of the world. Our naval presence is welcomed by peaceful nations. It is a threat to no one. But we will respond firmly if we are threatened.

The implementation of resolution 598 (1987) would enable the United States to return to the modest naval presence in the Gulf we have maintained for more than 40 years, with the support of the Gulf States. We look forward to that day.

(Mr. Bush, United States)

But make no mistake: until that day, we will do whatever is required to maintain freedom of navigation in that vital area of the world, and to take whatever actions we must to protect our forces there. We will not let down our friends and allies. We will not be intimidated by reckless attacks or terror. Our commitment to freedom and peace demands this and nothing less from the United States of America.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Vice-President of the United States of America for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

There are still a number of speakers on my list. In view of the lateness of the hour, I intend to adjourn the meeting now. The next meeting of the Security Council to continue the consideration of the item on its agenda will take place at 10.30 a.m. tomorrow, Friday, 15 July 1988.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.