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LETTER DATED 31 OCTOBER 1988 FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I.
OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the text of an interview conducted by the West German magazine Der Spiegel on 19 September 1988 with Vilayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Iranian régime, which displays a good deal of the empty arrogance of that régime.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sabah Talat KADRAT
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex

Der Spiegel: The cease-fire prevails at the front, but the peace negotiations between Iran and Iraq have come to a complete standstill. Is there a danger that fighting might break out again in the near future?

Vilayati: We hope that the talks will lead to a definitive solution to the conflict, but the outcome depends on the good intentions of the other side. In any event, we want peace.

Der Spiegel: Khomeini has cautioned the Iranians against the foolishness of believing that the fighting is over.

Vilayati: He wished to remind our people to remain on the alert while we are still at the beginning of the peace process. The cease-fire does not, moreover, mean an end to the state of war, and Imam Khomeini only said that we must take the part of caution until we go beyond the cease-fire.

Der Spiegel: Does that not also show his concern at the fatigue that can be seen in the ranks of the Iranians?

Vilayati: Our people does not, of course, want the acts of aggression to flare up again. We want a lasting peace in order to reconstruct our country; but we also want a just peace.

Der Spiegel: The peace talks have come to a standstill with the eternal dispute on the demarcation of the boundaries on the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq wishes to clear the waterway, which is its only outlet to the Persian Gulf, from the wreckage of ships in order to reopen the port of Basra. Why do you refuse to agree to that?

Vilayati: What you call the "Shatt al-Arab" is called by us the Arvand Rud. Iraq is a State that entered history only at the end of the First World War, so how can the dispute concerning the Arvand Rud have been a matter of many centuries?

Der Spiegel: Because the Iranians were previously at variance with the Turks on the demarcation of the boundaries, and because Basra has been one of the greatest Arab maritime commercial centres for more than a thousand years.

Vilayati: The Ottoman State also engaged in many border wars in south-eastern Europe. The dispute concerning the territory in Mesopotamia, that is to say between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which is today called Iraq, is one of the most important topics in our contemporary history. For most of the time, at least parts of that country were subject to Persia. Today, you can still visit the remains of palaces constructed in the time of the Persian Sasanid dynasty, close to Baghdad. If the Iraqis wish to go back to the history books, then they are welcome; we accept the challenge.

Der Spiegel: The Iraqis claim that it is their historical right that the entire Shatt al-Arab waterway should be subject to Iraqi sovereignty and that the Iranian boundaries should therefore be located on the left bank of the river.

Vilayati: Our position is clear. The boundaries follow the thalweg line, and the agreement was to that effect in the Algiers Accord. Saddam Hussein signed that Accord in person.

Der Spiegel: Under the weight of military pressure, as he himself said shortly afterwards, because the Shah was at that time supporting the Kurdish insurgents. And Saddam Hussein announced the abrogation of the Accord to the Iraqi Parliament a few days before the outbreak of the Gulf war.

Vilayati: The Accord is in force, and its denunciation by one party has no effect. I personally inquired about the matter, before the cease-fire came into effect, with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar himself, in New York and he gave me his full assurances that the United Nations recognized that the Accord was in force.

Der Spiegel: You may perhaps be correct from the legal point of view, but the régime in Baghdad believes that it has won a victory in the military confrontation with Iran.

Vilayati: The Iraqis have a feeling that they are in a stronger military position, but that feeling is deceptive. Eight years ago, they also believed that it was possible to achieve victory in the war within two or three weeks. Now they are making the same mistake. Our people has not changed, and it remains determined to defend its national interests. The location of the boundaries, whether on land or at sea, is a red line as far as we are concerned, and with respect to that we have nothing to concede or negotiate.

Der Spiegel: If the Iranian fighting morale was as high as you claim, then how do you explain the many defeats that you sustained in the weeks preceding the entry into force of the cease-fire?

Vilayati: War has its own rules, and in the midst of a long struggle such as this there are always peaks and troughs. We decided the last battle at Kermanshah in our favour, and we drove out the invaders.

Der Spiegel: Will the dispute concerning the Shatt al-Arab be kept alive for this reason: that possession of the waterway will be a symbol indicating the side that won the war?

Vilayati: The basic problem, certainly, is that Saddam Hussein wishes to demonstrate his victory in the war to his people. Why is it that we should have to pay that price? After eight years, he must settle his debt to his people with regard to the reason for which he undertook to initiate this war, one of the longest and most ferocious wars in modern history, and must claim complete sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab for himself as a sign of his victory. He will be making a mistake even in dreaming of that.

Der Spiegel: When your Government agreed to the cease fire, Khomeini said that it was a matter of swallowing a cup of deadly poison. In fact, the war aims had previously been very far-reaching, namely to bring down the Government in Baghdad,

to punish Saddam Hussein and to change the balance of power in the Persian Gulf. None of those goals was achieved.

Vilayati: Certainly it was not easy for us to agree to enter into negotiations with a régime that imposed upon us a war that involved copious losses, and we naturally hoped that the international community would punish Saddam Hussein. But that does not mean that our military situation is bad, since difficult moments arise in any war.

Der Spiegel: An oil industry destroyed by bombing, hundreds of thousands of dead, but no victory; will not the Iranian people also pose questions to its Government concerning the point of those great sacrifices?

Vilayati: Our people is very patient and very experienced. The history of our civilization goes back to ancient times, and it embraces many wars and invasions. Our people know fully how to overcome a situation such as this.

Der Spiegel: What is Iran's chief task in the post-war period? Is it economic reconstruction or the rearmament of the armed forces?

Vilayati: These are twin tasks, and there is no division between them. Even the Federal Republic of Germany first engaged in economic reconstruction after the war, to be quickly followed by the formation of a new military force. That does not mean renouncing rearmament, and we only wish to ensure our ability to defend our sovereignty, our resources and our national dignity.

Der Spiegel: For reconstruction, your country will need foreign assistance. Will you open up more to the West in the future and perhaps even restore relations with the United States of America?

Vilayati: That is a difficult subject. The United States of America has opposed the Islamic Republic from the outset, an opposition that reached its peak recently in the downing of one of our civilian aircraft over the Persian Gulf. That demonstrated the negligence of the Americans, but they have not admitted it, and they have not apologized. Can apologizing for the deaths of 300 civilians be so difficult? Do you expect us to establish contact with the Americans despite all that?

Der Spiegel: The fears aroused by Iran in the West, and even in the neighbouring Arab States lie in the hostile attempts made to export the Iranian revolution outside the country. Are you prepared to renounce that in future?

Vilayati: We shall continue to export the revolution, that is to say our culture. The Western States do the same thing, since they export their civilization, ways of thought and values with the assistance of the mass media and the universities where foreign students are educated. For example, the West constantly stresses to other States the need to respect human rights.

Der Spiegel: For you, this is an attempt to impose their culture?

Vilayati: Do you believe that human rights represent absolute values? And do they not express within themselves particular points of view or a particular judgement? Likewise, every cultural milieu seeks to export its values, not by violence but only in a peaceful manner. We shall behave no differently with respect to our Islamic revolution.

