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## **Gonzales Nomination Draws Military Criticism; Retired Officers Cite His Role in Shaping Policies on Torture**

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A dozen high-ranking retired military officers took the unusual step yesterday of signing a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee expressing "deep concern" over the nomination of White House counsel Alberto R. Gonzales as attorney general, marking a rare military foray into the debate over a civilian post.

The group includes retired Army Gen. John M. Shalikashvili, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The officers are one of several groups to separately urge the Senate to sharply question Gonzales during a confirmation hearing Thursday about his role in shaping legal policies on torture and interrogation methods.

Although the GOP-controlled Senate is expected to confirm Gonzales to succeed Attorney General John D. Ashcroft, some Democrats have vowed to question him aggressively amid continuing revelations of abuses of military detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The letter signed by the retired officers, compiled by the group Human Rights First and sent to the committee's leadership last night, criticizes Gonzales for his role in reviewing and approving a series of memorandums arguing, among other things, that the United States could lawfully ignore portions of the Geneva Conventions and that some forms of torture "may be justified" in the war on terror.

"Today, it is clear that these operations have fostered greater animosity toward the United States, undermined our intelligence gathering efforts and added to the risks facing our troops serving around the world," the officers wrote, referring to the Bush administration's detention and interrogation policies.

Although it stops short of directly opposing Gonzales's nomination, the three-page letter contains sharp criticism of his decisions related to military legal issues and argues that he is "on the wrong side of history."

"Repeatedly in our past, the United States has confronted foes that, at the time they emerged, posed threats of a scope or nature unlike any we had previously faced," the letter reads. "But we have been far more steadfast in the past in keeping faith with our national commitment to the rule of law."

In addition to Shalikashvili, other prominent signatories to the letter include retired Marine Gen. Joseph P. Hoar, former chief of the Central Command; former Air Force Chief of Staff Merrill A. McPeak; and Lt. Gen. Claudia J. Kennedy, the Army's first female three-star general. Several, including Shalikashvili, supported the failed presidential candidacy of Democrat John F. Kerry.

Richard H. Kohn, a military historian at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who specializes in military-civilian affairs, said the letter is extremely rare, if not unprecedented.

"I don't know of any precedent for something like this," Kohn said. "A retired group of military officers bands together to virtually oppose a Cabinet nominee? And a non-military one? It is highly unusual, to say the least."

A number of other groups are gearing up this week to criticize or oppose Gonzales's nomination. The American Civil Liberties Union -- which has forced the release of hundreds of pages of records documenting apparent abuses in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay -- said in a news release yesterday that the Senate should sharply question Gonzales about detainee issues as well as his close ties to President Bush.

Another organization of liberal religious leaders plans to release a letter today calling on Gonzales to "denounce the use of torture under any circumstances."