

Statement

of

Admiral William J. Fallon

(United States Navy, Retired)

Robert E. Wilhelm Fellow

Center for International Studies

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, distinguished members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to appear before you today to testify about “Engaging with the Muslim World.”

It was my great honor to serve and often represent U.S. interests in the world during more than four decades of service in the U.S. Navy. During that time I had many opportunities to interact with people from Muslim majority countries and to understand the high value of frank and mutually respectful relations between people.

During the past four years in particular, while serving as Commander, U.S. Pacific Command and Commander, U.S. Central Command and most recently at the Center for International Studies at MIT, I have participated in many matters of high interest to the U.S. and other countries around the world. These interactions in Muslim countries have often been difficult due to a combination of negative perceptions, policies and bureaucratic issues.

I believe that engaging the Muslim world is of great importance to us for demographic, geostrategic, security, economic and military reasons. First, more than 1.5 billion people representing almost ¼ of the world population claim Islam as their faith. These people inhabit countries around the world but are concentrated in an area from North Africa through the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia. This area includes many of the most troubled and security challenged zones of conflict, as well as key sources of raw materials, especially oil and gas. These lands also front many of the critical maritime choke points, through which flows the majority of world commerce.

Many Muslim majority nations have historically shared good relations with the U.S. Others like Indonesia and Pakistan with checkered relations in the past are currently high priorities for engagement. As you are well aware, since the attacks of September

11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, negative perceptions based on insecurity have clouded relations between America and Muslim nations worldwide. The causes of these frictions are many, several predate 9/11, and include U.S. policies during the Cold War, recognition of and close relations with the State of Israel and the large U.S. military presence in the Middle East. The U.S. has oft stated and compelling rationale for its actions but the combinations of these and other factors have contributed to rising tensions. Recent large scale U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have intensified the situation and mutual distrust has become pervasive. Of course the catalyst for this bad feeling is the terror activities of a relatively small number but deadly cadre of Muslim violent extremists. And this intense security concern is a critical reason why engaging the Muslim world is so important.

With the start of a new Administration in Washington, the substantial improvement in the situation in Iraq and the global reverberations of the financial and economic crises, I believe we have a grand opportunity to reengage the Muslim world to our mutual benefit. Although each of the three factors I have chosen to highlight are very difficult, they each offer the potential to help us reshape the recent situation.

There is great anticipation and expectation for change and positive developments with the advent of the Obama Administration. Emotional expectations are high worldwide.

The improving security situation in Iraq, the drawdown of U.S. troops there, and increasing cooperation between countries in the region should improve the overall atmosphere in the Middle East. The reduced levels of violence, the return of displaced

persons and increasing political competence of the Iraqi government are neutralizing what was only recently, a very negative factor in the region.

Although the current economic and financial crises are causing global impacts which are detrimental to many, the very scope and scale of the problems mandate intense international cooperation to resolve this gives us all an opportunity to work very closely together, to demonstrate concern, compassion and take positive steps to remediate the causes and address the effects of the crises.

I would suggest a number of steps to improve relations with Muslims.

- First would be to listen to their side of the issues and be willing to visit with them and discuss the challenges. Messages are important and President Obama sent a good signal with his recent interview on the Al Arabiya television network.

- Demonstrating our interest in peace and stability with the majority of like minded Muslims by engaging in the Middle East peace process and outreach initiatives across the world, puts action to words. The early designation of Senator Mitchell as Special Envoy is commendable.

- Lending a helping hand, as we are doing in many countries to assist the less fortunate with economic, health, education and security issues.

- Demonstrate, by simple acts of respect and kindness at our U.S. points of entry in treating people the way we want to be, and they should expect to be, treated.

- Fix the bureaucratic process and embarrassing delays in the visitors VISA program for people coming into this country for meetings, conferences and other exchanges.

- Most of the things that make a difference in relations between people come down to issues of trust. We build trust by personal engagement and treating people with respect. In my experience this entails little risk and works well with a majority of people.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views. I stand ready to address any questions you may have.