

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON U.S.-ARAB RELATIONS
19TH ANNUAL ARAB-U.S. POLICYMAKERS CONFERENCE

“Arab-U.S. Relations: Going Where?”

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Lieutenant General John R. Allen – Deputy Commander, United States Central Command.

[LIEUTENANT GENERAL JOHN R. ALLEN] Thanks very much for that terrific introduction. It is great to see the cadets and at midshipmen here this morning, from VMI. I had my picture taken with them. I was honored to have that happen, by the way, from the Institute and West Point and the Naval Academy. And we'll see how that West Point-Naval Academy thing goes a little bit later, won't we.

As Dr. Anthony said I was the first Marine Commandant at the Naval Academy. I've been so far the only Marine Commandant at the Naval Academy and my Navy classmates from the class, great bicentennial class of 1976, say that they'll called this the great experiment, and we'll see where that goes.

I would normally get dressed up for a conference like this. It certainly is worthy of a little bit of polish on a morning like today, but I have to apologize to you from the outset that I have to walk straight off the stage to go to the retirement of our great 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps and then immediately into the Change at Command between our great General Jim Conway and our soon to be instituted General Jim Amos.

So with that. [Arabic Phrase] It is truly a pleasure to spend some time with you this morning and to discuss the future of U.S.-Arab relations. Given my profession, my current assignment, my personal experiences, I believe there are few areas of more critical importance to our nation than having a solid understanding of not only where we are but where we see our relationships progressing in the Arab region. Before I begin my remarks this morning and because the Central Command region embraces so much of that portion of the Middle East that is home to our Arab friends I would like to take a few minutes to describe the U.S. Central Command and our area of responsibility.

CENTCOM, as we call it, is both the smallest of the six regional U.S. Combatant Commands and as we're proud to note the one with the greatest number of challenges. Our region embraces twenty countries from Egypt in the west, to Kazakhstan in the north, to Pakistan in the East, to Yemen and the waters off Somalia in the South. It is an area of more than 4,000,000 square miles. Three major economic and geographic choke points: the Suez Canal, the Bab el Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz. And the number of regions, areas in that portion of the world where central governments strain with varied levels of success to extend the writs of their authorities. Sometimes it's called ungoverned or under-governed spaces. But that's really not the issue. It is this straining of the central governments to extend their writ because in those ungoverned spaces there is some form of government. Our region includes 530 million people from at least 22 major ethnic groups who speak 18 major languages and innumerable dialects. They ascribe to four great religions.

The 64% of the known oil reserves and 46% of the known gas reserves, the area is abundantly rich with energy resources but desperately poor in freshwater. It has countries with the highest per capita income in the world, one of them with a per capita income, not quite certain but is somewhere between \$88,000 and \$100,000 per year, but others rank in the lowest five in the world with per capita income of less than \$800 per year.

Regional birthrates are nearly twice what they are in the United States and in 18 of the 20 states in our region, young people between the ages of 15 and 29 constitute over 40% of the population. And economic opportunities for many of them are insufficient, often leaving large segments of the populations of this region with little economic hope.

Central Command is of course overseeing major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as a theater-wide campaign against Al Qaeda and its extremist allies. Overall, though, the Central Command region remains an area in which the most pressing security challenges include transnational extremist groups, and states that pursue destabilizing actions. It is of course but one of the reasons that we keep a very close eye on Iran.

These are the challenges on which we all focus our efforts every day. Recognizing that in some cases there are combinations of transnational groups and states particularly destabilizing actions and projecting those on other states within the region. Indeed the next nexus of the challenges where sovereign states support militia proxies or extremist elements in other countries, that nexus is of particular concern for us. In virtually every country in the region that concern is shared. Not just shared in our region but shared in the adjacent regions and certainly in our homeland today.

However, even while we're concerned with these challenges and continue to carry out two major military operations, building enduring partnerships in the region is a major goal at the Central Command. Helping to increase the capabilities of other nations' security forces to address the challenges endemic the region. Nearly 200,000 U.S. military personnel and tens of thousands of American civilians are delayed into CENTCOM's area of responsibility.

Conducting mostly multilateral operations these run the gamut from extensive counterterrorism and counter insurgency operations with a number of like-minded nations to active counter piracy, counter narcotics, counter human trafficking operations both at sea and ashore, but just as importantly we are engaged in stability and support engagements with the fragile governments. And in humanitarian and disaster relief operations throughout the region, Pakistan comes to mind immediately in that tremendous flood that has in many ways changed the political dynamic.

You may be thinking that this doesn't sound like the domain of the military, indeed the differences between some up the traditional functions performed by the military and our State Department those traditional activities of State and Defense have in fact narrowed over the last decade. Consequently we remain in very close coordination and in cooperation with our State Department colleagues not only in this town but also in the embassies throughout the region. We work very closely with host nations government agencies while conducting military exercises, as many as 40 a year in our region and coordinating substantial security assistance efforts throughout the region.

Now with such a large number of potential topics to discuss this morning I'd like to discuss the close ties that CENTCOM and by extension the United States enjoys within the area of operations and the hard work that we have committed to ensuring that these relationships remain vibrant and strong.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging my admiration of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. Your tireless work has done more than stabilize and improve the vital understanding of the larger American population regarding the contribution of Arab-Americans. It's done more than that. It has also improved our understanding as a nation of our Arab brethren in the Middle East.

I served in and out the Middle East region for much of my career, but found my life changed dramatically after my service in Iraq's Al Anbar Province for a brief period in 2006, for all of 2007 and a part of 2008. As you may recall this period was during the darkest days in the violence in Iraq, and while we were in Al Anbar we sought to empower the Arab population there, to resist the ravages of Al Qaeda's onslaught. During this time I was personally in motion traveling throughout the desert along the Euphrates engaging with the Sheiks, meeting with political and business leaders and doing so not only in Ramadi and Fallujah and Baghdad but also in Amman and Doha and Dubai.

The counterinsurgency battlefield on which we fought spanned not just Al Anbar, not just Iraq, it spanned the region. Without exaggeration I can tell you that during my time in Al Anbar I grew to deeply respect the people of the ancient Arab tribes arrayed along the great Euphrates River and in the western desert.

Specifically, I came to admire their resilience, their spirituality and their faith. I came to respect their courage and almost without exception their uncommon fighting capabilities. In the end I would come away from the experience a changed man. Changed for the better, for my exposure and my immersion in the Arab culture of Al Anbar.

That admiration continues today in my current duties. I am completing my 40th year of service in 2011. These will have been the best, the most formative experiences of my career. All this colors my dedication to our relationships in the region. Our relationships with the Arab states in CENTCOM's area of responsibility.

So this gathering, the Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference and our hosts the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations has posed the question Arab-U.S. relations going where?

So we're all clear CENTCOM is not a policymaking entity. Certainly the command participates in policy formulation when we're invited by the policy community but CENTCOM's role is primarily the operationalization of policy. It is here where perhaps on the ground in the Arab Middle East, where part of the answer can be found to where Arab-U.S. relations are headed. While there are many and constant challenges, frankly I'm personally optimistic.

Without hesitation I can tell you that CENTCOM's previous Commander Gen. David Petraeus and it's current Commander Gen. James Mattis are dedicated to forging the closest possible relations with our Arab friends and partners in the region. The many years of service those men had given to the region have led to the same conclusion. CENTCOM remains committed to the security of our Arab partners in the region and through our military to military relationships we seek to deepen and improve Arab-U.S. relations with virtually every Arab state in the Middle East.

This isn't a recent phenomena. Relations have been improving for years under the noted leadership of a succession of CENTCOM commanders. One of them, in particular, is here with us this morning General Joe Hoar, who did so much to facilitate this gradual, substantial improvement, a function of constant and constructive engagement and it has underwritten and it has reinforced a clear U.S. policy goal to enhance US relations with the Arab world.

While there are sometimes truly formidable challenges in our relations on the whole the military to military relationship reflects commonly shared security goals. Aspirations for the region also reflect a growing concern over the rhetoric and actions of Iran, particularly over its nuclear program.

Arab-U.S. relations have evolved dramatically since the period of Operation Desert Storm, following September 11, 2001 and including regional support to Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. Against this backdrop and in the aftermath of OIF, now operational New Dawn in Iraq, we are in active conversations with our friends and partners about what the U.S. regional posture should look like in the Gulf, and in the Middle East over the long term.

But simply put the U.S. will not depart the region. Indeed we are committed to its long-term political and economic stability. We are committed to the sovereignty of our friends. We are committed to the free flow of commerce and energy resources, not just in the region, not just for the region, but for the global economy.

Our presence over the long term will be an unambiguous emblem of U.S. commitment to the stability of the region. As we discuss America's long-term posture in the Middle East all of these factors particularly the sovereignty of our friends and their political and economic stability and viability will figure prominently

Now to give purpose to these close relations and provide for increased capacity and interoperability with our partners we have undertaken the development of a regional security architecture, designed to serve as a construct within which our partners may strengthen national and regional defense capabilities. This is done by building networks of systems, and activities that enhance regional security and stability. Over the past few years we've worked closely with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula as well as others of our regional partners to develop this constant, this construct for addressing common security challenges.

It is important to note, at the outset, that participation in the regional security architecture is a sovereign decision of each participant. There are no treaties. There are no binding formal agreements. It is simply a common sense security apparatus put into action. Here's how it works.

Theoretically the architecture's core focus involves protecting and improving our mutual defense capabilities, strengthening our bilateral cooperation, developing interoperability and even achieving regional and multilateral capabilities. Practically the regional security architecture is made up of an array of major activities, the centerpiece of which is the shared early warning system and the growing and increasingly potent integrated air and missile defense network in development with our Gulf and regional partners.

Our nations' efforts have developed with several intents, and nations' is plural with an apostrophe. To resist coercion and to deter aggression. To counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and related technology. To combat violent extremism and terrorism. To counter piracy and illicit trafficking including the tragedy of human trafficking. To defend lines of communication including economic trade. To secure borders and infrastructure. To provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and to conduct both the preparation for and if necessary the execution of the consequence management. A lot of activity.

In support of this growing security architecture many countries in the region actively participate in an extensive array of ground, maritime, aviation and special operations exercises each designed to respond to different types of known and emerging threats. These major bilateral and multilateral exercises, as I said before, about 40 per year, known as Bright Star, Eagle Resolve, Iron Falcon, Shamal and our newest regional exercise Eager Lion,² strengthen each participating countries ability to maintain security inside in its own borders, protect critical infrastructure and create or enhance interoperability with the United States forces and regional militaries as a joint undertaking particularly in deterring regional aggression. The partnerships that have evolved from these activities have contributed directly to improving our overall effectiveness in ongoing multilateral operations and security initiatives.

Ultimately the net outcome of these efforts has the establishment and the refinement of mechanisms and capabilities which, while valuable in coordinating activities in one area, such as encountering piracy and smuggling, frequently provide enhanced capability and flexibility to address crises in other areas. Often for example, the progress made in generating cooperation for one set of issues will have symbiotic effects elsewhere. Such as disaster relief capabilities improve a nation's abilities in consequence management, thereby promoting greater individual and collective capabilities.

Now in conjunction with the efforts already mentioned, CENTCOM through the Department of Defense has also all worked hard to increase significantly the numbers of personnel from the region attending programs such as the International Military Education and Training Program, you know it as IMET. This program in case you not familiar with that facilitates the attendance of foreign military, usually officers, at U.S. military schools. The benefits of the IMET program, which is ultimately, a strategic investment in ideas and people, is that it allows us to better understand each other. It increases our friendship and in crisis enhances coordination and interoperability. My own view is that this increase of our own exposure to our Arab friends at U.S. schools, has been nothing but good for the U.S. military and I believe because of that, for the region. We will continue to endeavor to increase the quotas wherever and however we can.

Another aspect of the regional security architecture, one that is boosting significantly the individual and collective capabilities of regional Arab militaries is the development and proliferation of centers of excellence, which focus U.S. and regional expertise in key capability areas, for example, in special operations, in air warfare, in integrated air and missile defense, in command and control and maritime security and in others.

Located and distributed across the region these centers of excellence, some built and some to be built are increasingly upping the game of the U.S. with our partners. With interoperability our goal the centers are and will continue increasingly to play vital roles in the region and will permit states to come together as an individual or collective level for combined training that is simultaneously of high quality, cutting edge and economical. There are other powerful aspects of the regional security architecture, aspects I could discuss this morning I'm afraid that time won't permit.

This morning I have spoken about relationships and cooperation, and how we the U.S. Central command are forging partnerships both bilaterally and multilaterally as a means of responding to common security challenges, concerns and threats. As we built the regional security architecture we've done so mindful of the ancient history and the sovereign and celebrated pride of the Arab people and their governments. One lesson we may draw from the tapestry of the sweep of great history of our Arab peoples is that when various elements of the region have interacted and worked together the sum has evolved to be far greater than the parts.

This is in fact a bit like the effect of the spread of one of history's great mathematical discoveries the Arab invention of the notion of zero. It was an invention which all, including the West, gained enormously as it was shared. We hope the kinds of combinations under way today and the military to military cooperation will create further opportunities to enhance not just the region but the remaining portions of the world.

At gatherings such as this there will be inevitable debates over our policy. This region is a beset with crises. It has known little peace during much of the last century and precious little of it in this one. It will be tempting in that context for policy, both ancient and contemporary, to be blamed for the situations we all are facing in this region today.

But if we are looking for bright lights, if we're seeking examples of cooperation where policy has in fact given birth to encouraging trends I suggest that the regional security architecture and its component parts, is evidence of the direction of the Arab-U.S. relations, today and over the long term.

With this in mind I'd like to emphasize that the security efforts being pursued by our Arab partners are facilitating not just a regional but a global security environment that enhances, it increases confidence among neighbors, improves deterrence and mutual defense and enhances security and stability.

These are global returns on the investments of our friends. U.S. Central Command is honored to work closely with our Arab partners as we address common security challenges and we have done, as we have done frequently of late, as we encourage our Arab friends, the Arab states of the region to embrace and to help shape the increasingly capable Iraqi security forces.

Much can be done within the context of the RSA in conjunction with our partners to bring Iraq into this strong security relationship. We can all acknowledge that much remains to be done in the formation of the government in Iraq, however knowing the Iraqi people as I do I am optimistic over the long term and how this will turn out. And we would encourage our Arab

friends now to embrace and as they can enhance Iraq's security capabilities. Such a step as that would undoubtedly benefit the entire region as we continue to draw down American formations under operation New Dawn.

When I started my comments I told you that we were the smallest of the U.S. combatant commands but with the greatest number of challenges and that is certainly true. I've never seen the bottom of my inbox. However we experience throughout our area many success stories reflecting close long standing relationships, dedicated regional partners who are intimately involved in our many efforts to set the strategic stage to support our common cause.

So on behalf of the 200,000 U.S. service members and the tens of thousands of Americans civilians serving in CENTCOM I want to thank you for your participation in this important conference.

And again thank you for the opportunity to visit with you this morning. [Arabic phrase]

[Dr. John Duke Anthony] Thank you very, very much for a well presented, well thought out, well organized and well articulated presentation. This is one of the finest we've had from a serving military officer in the history of these conferences.

The General has agreed to take a question and it has to do with the Horn of Africa area and the distinction between the newer command of Africa Command and particularly with regard Somalia and piracy as well as Yemen. These are weekly and sometimes daily, in the news and if he would elaborate on this.

The Yemen side of it and the many proposals to enhance the defense and security part of our relationships some even more than a billion dollars that people are talking about. But from a Yemen perspective the more fundamental massive and pervasive, human needs that impact security and stability, have to do with the country's and the population's economic and social means, which may be beyond Central Command's purview. But would invite your comment nonetheless.

Secondly with regard to it that piracy issue it costs, according to one source, \$50,000 for each transiting of that area in insurance costs and this is an enormous effect to one of your missions which is to protect the economic interest not just the political and the social stability there. 50,000 dollars in insurance, which goes to the bottom line of the shipping company and the international oil companies there. And related tucked into that is what if there is a fiscal budgetary congressional cut in the overall defense allocations appropriations. How will that affect your mission including AFRICOM in this Horn of Africa area of Yemen, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, they are all wrapped into that one question about the Horn of Africa, General.

[General Allen] That what was masterful, I have to tell you. In that one question I have I think six requirements. Very well done.

First, let me talk for a bit about AFRICOM. AFRICOM is our newest of the combatant commands, led by Gen. Kip Ward. We shared for some period of time a number of states and in

October of '08 those states in the Horn of Africa moved from CENTCOM region to the AFRICOM region for the purposes of U.S. military planning and engagement and so on. When we are at our best in our relations between combatant commands, the boundaries that people draw on maps actually blur. We talk to AFRICOM every day, not just about the security challenges but about the security opportunities. We never miss an opportunity to partner with AFRICOM in developing the capacity of the states in the Africa command, but on those occasions where they are our shared security concerns, we also may partner with AFRICOM in the shifting of forces across the region, primarily naval forces and often associated with piracy.

Piracy is a major concern and I'll shift to discussing the Horn of Africa and particularly Somalia. Somalia of course has in many respects lost the capacity to extend a writ of government virtually anywhere in that country. As a result of that there are large what you would call ungoverned areas and in many at those areas there are predatory elements that are conducting piracy in the Gulf of Somalia, the Gulf of Aden and in the Indian Ocean. In fact some of the abilities of these pirates to get deep into the Indian Ocean has been quite startling, actually.

The good news is that the international community is embracing the issue of piracy and countering piracy and from the lanes that have been established for secure transit of maritime traffic coming out of the Bab el Mendeb passing through the Gulf of Aden and into the larger Indian Ocean there are often navies of as many as 10 to 15 countries operating in close cooperation with each other, in close cooperation with the United States to provide for secure passage.

However, there will be occasions depending on the conditions of the sea state and the time of the year and the direction of the monsoon, etcetera, when the pirates will have success in closing on and confronting a particular ship. In that regard the Fifth Fleet of the United States Navy has dedicated not a small amount of time with the maritime industry, talking about certain best practices that could be embraced by the maritime industry and by ships in particular to provide for their security, such things as barbed wire along the gunwales. The moment that you see an unidentified small boat approaching going to maximum speed, varying your course and in fact hiring armed security crews. Where we have seen best practices exercised we have seen the rate of piracy to be very low.

Meanwhile, the ships of our friends from Europe and Asia and from the region and the United States have done a pretty significant job we think. It's not always successful but it has made a difference in reducing both the rate of piracy and the success of piracy. So we take that to be a very serious mission even though we are facing probably more austere times with regard our budget, we don't anticipate any reduction in the attention that both CENTCOM and AFRICOM will pay to this particular issue because it is about the global economy and it is about providing for freedom of navigation which is a central mission of our great Navy and we will continue to embrace that.

With regard to the Horn of Africa in general and Yemen. We view Yemen as a friendly state. We have close relations with the government there, President Saleh. We have worked very diligently at Central Command to do what we can with Yemen, to assist Yemen in its efforts in counter terrorism. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula has emerged as a threat organization,

violent extremist organization with significant reach and we know that Yemen seeks to deal with that terrorist threat. We are working closely with Yemen not just in the area of counterterrorism but seeking to help Yemen create greater capacity and capability within its conventional forces to provide a security environment in which we can do the next important point that you mentioned a few moments ago, Doctor and that is to provide for real development in that country.

The State Department led by Ambassador Feierstein, who's recently arrived in Sanaa, has a long-term development program which is intended to provide Yemen the assistance that it needs in conjunction with other states in the region who are all actively engaged in supporting Yemen to provide for development, to provide for improvements in agriculture, in water management and in doing so, and you won't be able to do so until the security environment is such that it can provide for the initiation and completion of these projects, we are working closely with Yemen, Yemen's Armed Forces to improve that capacity.

We don't attach a dollar figure to it yet, it's an annual allocation of funding. At some point we may discuss a long term program, but for now as we continue to develop plans we're working it one year to the next. And so we seek to be helpful to Yemen and we seek to assist Yemen in dealing with its terrorist problem and in doing so create the conditions for long term development in cooperation with and in support of our great country team in the Embassy in Sanaa and Ambassador Feierstein.

So I think I hit most of your points

[Anthony] Yes you did. Please join me in thanking General Allen.

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