

**REMARKS BY
ADM. MIKE MULLEN
CHAIRMAN of the JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

TOWN HALL LOS ANGELES

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2008

ADM. MIKE MULLEN: Thank you, Jon, and to all who have participated or participate in making this venue possible now and for the last 71 years. I think it's a great venue. I've known about it, actually – even though I haven't lived here for a while – for a couple of years and I know how booked the schedule is. And I think that's a great indication of health and vibrancy and importance in the country and in the times now, as in previous years.

I'd like to also just say thanks to the high school students and those teachers who are here with them, that you are taking the time to participate – and I hope you do ask some questions – participate in this kind of discussion – public discussion, open discussion, which I think is vital; and also an opportunity for you to learn because you are our future leaders and those days – those of us on in a few years know that those days are not so far away from you. In fact, it's a welcome home to some degree for me because my wife Deborah and I both were born and raised out here. Deborah went to Westlake School for Girls before it was Harvard-Westlake and I graduated from Notre Dame High School, so we're both from the San Fernando Valley.

And I had the pleasure – speaking of high school students – last Friday of going back to my high school and addressing 1,200 high school students in a packed gym that still doesn't have air conditioning after a long time, just before lunch. And I found that they paid attention and they asked some of the most sophisticated, demanding questions of any audience I've ever addressed and I was very encouraged by that and our young people. Last Friday I spoke – a week ago Friday I spoke in New York to a Service Nation conference and it was a several day conference that was packed with young people who are looking to serve, who know there are challenges out there. And seeing them and encouraging them to serve in any capacity, whether it's locally or nationally, and what they want to do and how they want to give and they recognize that these challenges are out there was actually very heartening. And I see that in 2.2 million young people that serve in our military today, active and reserve – their willingness to serve, their willingness to sacrifice.

We have the best military certainly in my 40-plus years of service and they are the heart and soul of our military. And they do extraordinary things for our country, they sacrifice a great deal and in some cases they sacrifice it all to do what this nation asks and demands – asks of

them, and they do it willingly. And you would be proud – and I'm sure you know many of them – proud of them and who they are and what they do and how they represent America around the world.

So I'm delighted the high school students are here. I have a personal passion to invest in our youth. And those here who also do that, I couldn't be more pleased.

We live in a time of great challenges and I'll talk about just a couple of them. And I'll get some questions and answers because I find that often times to be the most important part of any program. And I hope and would encourage you to ask questions. When I came into this job – I actually will be in the job one year on the 1st of October – didn't have any plans to get this job. Actually, when I left here – Southern California – in 1964 to go to the Naval Academy, I had no plans to stay in the Navy and certainly no plans to move to this position, but I feel very privileged to continue to be able to serve.

And I was the head of the Navy for a couple years and expected to do two more years; and for our young people here, you just never know what life's going to bring you. Keep your options open. And I was privileged – I am privileged and humbled to be selected to serve in this capacity at this time, and it is a challenging time.

And as I took over I wanted to focus on a number of things. I think the most unstable, challenging part of the world we live in is the greater Middle East, the broader Middle East; and I bracket this from between Beirut and Tehran, everything in between, and certainly extend that into South Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan. And that's a part of the world that from a military strategy standpoint, a military engagement standpoint, both now and into the future will continue to be an area of priority and great focus with respect to what we need to do. Clearly there's focus on Iraq and there's focus on Afghanistan, but I don't talk about Afghanistan without talking about Pakistan. And indeed I think in that region in particular we need to include not just Afghanistan and Pakistan but the interconnectivity and the importance of India in that region as well. And it's very much a cross-cutting relationship. So all that is there and there are challenges.

Clearly at the top of that list is continued mission focus on Iraq and Afghanistan and we've made some changes recently where the president decided he was going to reduce the number of troops in the next several months in Iraq. And that is tied – and I've been to Iraq a lot – that is tied to the success that we've enjoyed as a result of the surge. And while leadership gets a great deal of credit for the surge, really the surge was brought to its success through the young men and women who serve and sacrifice so much over that period of time. But it is more stable than it's been. The economy is starting to improve. There has been political reconciliation and there needs to be more, clearly, across an entire number of issues. But it is a country in much better shape than it was a year ago and a country with hope where I would argue 12 months ago that hope was really, really on the wane. And being able to do that and reduce the number – and I would hope that in the next many months we would continue to be able to make decisions which will allow us to reduce the number of troops that we have in Iraq.

Also, there is a growing need for forces in Afghanistan and we made some decisions recently about sending a Marine battalion – about 6,000 or 7,000 troops – a Marine battalion and an Army brigade and its support structure to Afghanistan starting as early as in November and certainly through the beginning – January and February next year. That is indicative of a growing challenge in Afghanistan. We don't have enough troops there. The commanders there on the ground are asking for at least another 10,000 troops on top of those – on top of the 6,000 that I'm talking about.

In addition to that, we've got a growing threat there. We've got the FATA, the safe haven that exists in Pakistan. Many of you know I've been in and out of Pakistan a half a dozen times since February of this year and it is to develop and both sustain a relationship with their military leadership. That safe haven exists. It's the same safe haven we went into Afghanistan to get rid of and it has now moved to Pakistan. And it will – and we can't – my view, we can't just let it sit and thrive as it is doing right now.

So the fighting is getting tougher. The insurgency is better; it's better in '08 than it – it's more significant. Violence is up fairly dramatically from last year to this year and from – and it was up in '07 from what it was in '06. So we've clearly got to address this but it is not just a military solution, as Iraq has not been. And it won't be in the future because there's an economic part of this as well. And whereas in Iraq you build up – and you have seen them build up – a fairly substantial surplus this year because of the oil revenues and they will continue to do that. In Afghanistan the total revenues this year are about – the entire economy is about \$700 million. It is by some measures the fifth poorest country in the world and if you took Afghanistan and put it in Africa it would be at the bottom of Africa.

So the message there is there's going to have to be a long sustained effort there, certainly from a development standpoint, and it's got to be more than just security. Actually, the Afghan National Army is developing pretty well that a police force is behind and is corrupt and we've got a significant amount of work. When I say “we” I don't mean the United States; I mean the entire international community. There are 42 countries in Afghanistan. It's not just the United States. The international effort to make that happen and to provide the kind of capability for Afghanistan to take care of itself is required as well.

The economic development over time – and it is a country that's never been run by a strong central government. So part of what the future, in my view, must hold is a tribal – a focus on the tribal aspects of Afghanistan and in the FATA as well in Pakistan. And one of the things that I certainly have learned in all this is we don't necessarily understand that really well. And as I did at Notre Dame high school the other day and I do in front of every single audience – and I work hard myself to do this – is to try to understand problems through someone else's eyes, not just see it from the American point of view. We've got to understand that because therein lies an understanding of the problem set and then I think gives us a better idea in what the solution could be.

And so the local tribal aspect of Afghanistan specifically is a very important piece as well. A justice system, a rule of law. A friend of mine – and I would, not necessarily knowing exactly how to do this, but we need good lawyers in Afghanistan and they don't all have to be in the

military. And while I talked about volunteer service for our young people, I also think – I mean, I am – I won't tell you exactly what my age is except I'm sort of a leading edge of the baby boomer group, which pins me down pretty closely. But we've got a lot of baby boomers who are retiring; very capable people who have reaped the benefits of our country, of great times in our country, and who are willing to give of their time and their expertise. And we need to do – we need to create a connection so that challenges like this – I'll use lawyers who will do this for six months or nine months or a year at a time in places like this that can make a huge difference is part of what needs to happen because the rule of law there, their governance system, all those things vastly different from anything that we have.

So there's a governance piece of this, a government piece of this, there's an economic piece of this in addition to the security. We've got to get the security right there; it's a necessary condition. But in place after place after place it is not sufficient. So how do we marry all that up?

Clearly Pakistan – and I'm sure I – I expect I would get some questions about Pakistan – continues to be a challenge, an important ally, country with a significant internal threat, certainly as evidenced by the tragic explosion of a couple of days ago in which 50-plus people died. And we need to keep in our thoughts and on our prayer list the families of those who were lost there a couple of days ago. And yet, again, back to the Middle East, from Lebanon to Iran to Syria to how all of this moves forward and staying engaged on this is going to be, I think, a critical part of our requirements as a country for the foreseeable future.

So that's kind of a quick – and it is pretty rapid – quick coverage of that part of the world.

Secondly – so that was priority one. Priority two was we've got a military that's been incredibly engaged, incredibly successful in their mission. But we're in our sixth year of war and we've asked them to go on deployments that are one – 15-month deployments in the case of the active duty Army; one year in the case of many other of the reserve and Guard; the Marine Corps has been going seven on, seven off and they're only getting as much time as they've been over is how much time they've gotten back.

I was with a brigade that had just gotten back, part of the surge, down in Fort Stewart, Georgia in June and I was in an audience of about 500 soldiers, senior noncoms who are E-6 and above. And I asked, "How many deployments have you been on?" And I went one, two, three, four deployments. And when I got to four, clearly 40 percent of that audience still had their hands up. And that is four deployments with about as much time back, and there is – in great sacrifice. And they have in these deployments typically lost a significant number of their fellow soldiers and there have been thousands and thousands that have been wounded. We've got to make sure we take care of them.

I visit – part of my time in California we were at the West Los Angeles VA and I want to see because I am – my view of how we need to handle this as a country is to – we've got three big entities in taking care of these people. One is the Department of Defense, two is the Veterans Administration, but the biggest most capable one is the rest of the country. It's the communities throughout our country. So I'm with 20 OEF homeless veterans. So they did one or two tours

and they are in trouble. They're going through various rehabilitation there at the VA. They need jobs. They need to know that they've got a future.

And we should not – one of the things that I swore I would do as much as I could when this war started, being a Vietnam vet, that I would not – if I could. I had no idea I'd be in this job, obviously, because this was 2002. But I would not regenerate a set of homeless veterans like we did and still do from Vietnam. So I need – we all – I need your help locally here to reach out in particular to the VA and particularly to the families of the wounded who are back now, in many cases living in the community. Their American dream is pretty simple; it hasn't changed. They'd like a house. They'd like their kids to go to school. They'd like an income – actually, these days it's two incomes.

Now, the direction that they're going to take to possibly get there has changed, but what we need is I need us – we need to be able to reach out to communities that I know exist. There's a sea of goodwill out there existing. How do you reach them? How do you know they're there and how do you meet their needs, which are in some cases significant? And how do you reach them in a timely fashion?

So that – and it's not just those who are injured. It's also those who have – the families of the fallen, who want to stay connected and who sacrificed – who have done everything our country has asked them to do and sacrificed so much. So I'd ask you to just think about that. I don't have the solution set yet but there's leadership here and certainly listening that in communities throughout the land we need to reach to these people who have given so much.

So I am very concerned about the stress on our force. We've asked them to do a lot. They are incredibly resilient. They have done these – they have participated in these deployments. It's not just the military members; the families have been – they have sacrificed almost as much because it's the families who stay home that – the spouses who raise the kids, who make everything go while their spouse is gone fighting the fight. So the balance between force levels in Iraq, force levels in Afghanistan, and building some time at home, building what we call dwell time; but that is a significantly increased amount of time at home is where we've got to focus. And we're growing the Marine Corps and growing the Army. It's going to take us a while to do that and so it's – and we're not going to have a lot more available capability – battalions or brigades – for the foreseeable future for the next couple years. So we're at a very delicate time in that regard. So the stress on the force, the health of the force, is also a priority for me that we try to constantly balance.

And then thirdly – third priority is what I call the rest of the world. It's a pretty big world. I'm on the edge of the Pacific. I grew up here. I know how important – and I've spent significant portions of my career in the Pacific. It's a huge economic engine for the world. It's going to be more so in the future rather than less. Civility in this part of the world, engagement in this part of the world, having partners and relationships in this part of the world to seek and persevere in terms of achieving stability and sustaining it is also a priority for us.

And I come from a position where I think we are going to continue to be a global power. We're going to be globally engaged and in the end – when I'm around the world in various

countries and run into parents who all have kids and have aspirations for their kids, sort of the universal metric is parents around the world, they want to raise their kids to a better standard of living. They'd like to do it in peace and stability. And so how do we do that? And it's my view we see it from their eyes.

One, it's got to be secure in order to have economies thrive. And these economic engines, whether it's India or Brazil or Europe or the United States or the economy of Russia, those kinds of economies – and China – they're going to drive. They're going to drive I think a realignment in the world, an economic rebalancing, a more multi-polar world, and I think the United States is going to be right in the middle of all that. So the Pacific in particular is an area of focus and how do you reduce risk there?

Latin America is another area. Now, I grew up here. I was trained to look east and west. I have deployed east and west my whole life. We need to focus, my view, more on the north and the south. Two of our biggest trading partners live right here and certainly extend south of Mexico to the huge economic engine as well. And I didn't even talk about Africa and the challenges that Africa brings to the world; not just to the continent, to the world, which many of us would like to see certainly mitigated and reduced and go away as rapidly as possible. And that's in this global world. So there's a lot of us – and the military can only and is only a part of this.

One of the advantages of our military is we're out and about. We're in these countries. We meet these people. We can establish relationships, sustain relationships over time as long as we're able to do that. And right now, back to sort of this being a third priority, my focus is on the Middle East. My resources are in great part concentrated there and it increases the long-term risk of my ability – of being able to engage in other parts of the world. It doesn't mean I'm not doing it, but I'm not doing it to the level that I could, obviously, if we didn't have those commitments.

Underpinning all this is the fact that I think somebody mentioned we're having an election here shortly, a time of great concern from the military perspective. As a senior military advisor to the leadership in this country – to the president and political leadership in this country – it's a time of transition and we're in it. And if you take – if you go back and map out four months before January 20th to one year after January 20th since 1961 and you look at the number of major incidents which occurred since 1961, it's pretty extraordinary. Now, you overlay that with what's going on in the world right now and the terrorist threat that we have, the other challenges in various parts of the world.

I approach this very conservatively and I'm working from the standpoint of trying to understand what could possibly happen here: one, try to prevent it; and two, tragically if something happened over the next 12 months or so – this isn't just about now to November 4th or November 4th to January 20th. It takes an administration, any administration, a good six months to a year to get their feet on the ground and really be running. And those – the new administration and the time between now and then is something we all need to stay focused on and there are an awful lot of people who are staying focused on. But it is a time of transition and a time of change for us as a nation as well, and that's very much on my mind.

So those are a few thoughts. I'd much rather at this point take questions, so I'll open it up to what's on your mind.

MS. GOODMAN: If you will wait just for the microphone to come over to you, that will be great.

Q: Okay. My name is Alex Cahem and I'm from North Hollywood High School and my question is, with the rising prevalence of unmanned drone use will the military be more willing to incur monetary costs in fighting wars now that human – the cost of human lives can be virtually eliminated?

ADM. MULLEN: No, I don't think so. I mean, I don't exist to fight wars; that's not my mission. Certainly if I am given direction – and it's been this way for a long time – by the president, and really by the American people, to get into a conflict – if that's the direction, I want to win. That's a big part of what I do for a living. But what I also do for a living is prevent wars and certainly that is a much better outcome than being in a fight. And so my focus is on obviously being able to do both those things since I'm in a fight right now.

I think we will have our system – there will be more and more unmanned systems – actually, unmanned aviation, unmanned ships or remotely operated vehicles, there'll be – and under the water; all different mediums, on the land, in the air and above and under the sea. But I don't see technology replacing all of our people. It's been very – and I think for our force in the future we've got to have a balance.

I'm not somebody – I'm someone that believes you can't – I don't want to bet all of my capability on one number because we're not very good at predicting when things are going to occur or where they're going to occur. What does seem to be going on is a significant number of – significantly more frequent number of events which occur in this – the most challenging time, certainly in the 40 years that I've been doing this. So I think we have to have a balanced force and I think at the core of that I believe are our people, and there's nothing – in the end there's nothing that's going to replace them in mass for us to have an effective military in the future.

And I think we've got to have – we've got to figure out as a country how we're going to invest – what's the right investment for the future with respect to the military? And this year's budget – I think the '08 budget is \$515 billion. You add the supplemental money that's on top of that to fight the war and it's over \$700 billion. When you look at all that, whether you agree with that or not, it's about 4.5 percent of our gross domestic product. And the question is, what kind of security do you want to have in this very challenging and dangerous world and how much do you want to invest in that? I am one that believes we have to invest about that – make that kind of investment in the world in which we live right now and do it in a balanced way.

I'm also very much aware there are other challenges that our country has in Social Security and Medicaid and Medicare. And there's no free lunch here; there's not an infinite amount of money out there and we've got to make that balance right as well. So it's a very

demanding time with respect to how we invest, the challenges that we have, how much do we want to do, what's our strategic appetite in what is clearly a very, very demanding world?

Q: Hi, Mike. Can you hear me?

ADM. MULLEN: Yeah.

Q: Question regarding Afghanistan and also investment. You mentioned earlier that 42 countries were involved in the activities there. My question is, what percentage of the responsibility and burden, both financial and military, is being borne by the United States?

ADM. MULLEN: A significant percentage is being borne by the United States, yet – Afghanistan has received a great deal of focus in the last 12 months. It has become much more visible and I think rightfully so because there are serious challenges there. And NATO gets pushed around pretty hard because they haven't contributed. Yet, in the last year or so NATO has actually moved its force levels up from 20,000 to 30,000, as we've moved ours up from about the same as well. There are countries in NATO who are actually very much in the fight and a few years ago they weren't and we are very dependent on their participation in this.

But we also need this – we need an investment across – I've got to grow the Afghan army. And it's a very poor country; it doesn't have the budget to do that. So there's a significant requirement for us to just literally provide money to help the Afghan government do things like pay for its ground footing, pay for its military as it grows over the next several years. And we've asked for assistance there as well.

Underpinning – and I talked about the challenges. One of the things I didn't mention in Afghanistan is we have got to figure out how to get at the poppy problem. There's a huge problem. There's no clear answer. This is not – this is one that is difficult in whatever country we're talking about, but in fact the profits from that crop are feeding the fight. And the extension of that is they're killing Americans and killing our coalition partners and killing Afghan soldiers and citizens.

And we have got to figure out – and when I say this the next question is, okay, so what's your answer? I don't have an answer. There are a lot of smart people out there that we really need to bring together to have a plan. And there's different views on how to do this. What I see from a military standpoint is I see that piece as part of what is fueling this fight. And that doesn't mean – and the only – the other only thing I would mention about that is when we do away with that crop we better be there with another crop for that farmer to grow so that that farmer can feed his kids and raise them up, as opposed to – if we just take the first step, all we've developed without some kind of viability, we've developed someone who becomes another insurgent.

So there's a lot of focus that needs to happen there and all of us, the international community, I think can do better than we've done to this point with this particular challenge.

Q: Could you speak a little bit about Georgia and the Crimean Peninsula?

ADM. MULLEN: Any particular part? I think that what Russia did and when she did it surprised us. And there are those that can Monday morning quarterback this thing and say it shouldn't have been a surprise. That's okay. But it really did surprise us. That they have taken a step to acknowledge the independence, support the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is a significant step that the vast majority of the international community is pushing back pretty hard on.

I was most – I mean, last week I mentioned being in Pakistan. But before that I was in Bulgaria at a meeting of all my counterparts from NATO and there is great concern on the part of those who live close by the Baltic states, the former Soviet empire states, about what all this means. I don't think we have it all sorted out that clearly. I think it's very important at this point that Russia comply with the agreement that they signed up to in terms of what President Sarkozy in France and the EU has led to and that the president that Prime Minister Putin and President Medvedev have agreed to; that's a really important start. And that we have to have – I believe we've got to have a relationship with Russia. I don't think we should discontinue engagement on a military side because that relationship is going to be very important for the future.

And I think clearly that Georgia, who has been a friend and has been devastated by, obviously, this invasion, is somebody we need to continue to support as well. And NATO is doing that and as a member of NATO we do that. So there are an awful lot of concerns about this.

I think still people scratching their heads as to what it means long term. A lot of discussions that surround energy dependence or independence tie to where Russia is and contracts and commitments that countries, particularly in that part of the world – in Europe – have made with them and what does that mean long term? So there's probably more unknown about what it means than there is known right now. But I think we need to approach this in a measured way and do it in a way that recognizes we have mutual interests with Russia: weapons of mass destruction; proliferation; there are possibilities for how we deal with Iran, specifically; there are energy issues obviously as well.

So there's a tremendous amount of mutual overlap that we I think need to continue to figure out how to work together. That doesn't mean we're going to agree on everything we're doing, but I think we need to stay engaged military to military, certainly; and then – actually, I mean I think we need to do broadly across our country because they're an important player in that part of the world and they're an important player globally. I think they will be.

Q: Admiral, given the priorities you've laid out and the challenges that will come to whoever is the new administration, what do you see as our options and our best strategy respecting the nuclear challenge in Iran and North Korea?

ADM. MULLEN: I have publicly argued for an engagement with Iran, a dialogue with Iran, as part of the overall strategic approach, and do to do that from a position of strength – a position of certainly military strength. But it's not just the United States. I think the

international – and the international community has. We need to continue to do that. I worry a great deal about Iran with nuclear weapons.

There are those who come to me and say, “Hey, Mullen, it’s inevitable. So figure it out and what are you going to do after they get them?” I think Iran with a nuclear weapon in that part of the world continues to destabilize a part of the world that’s already very unstable. In addition to being a state, Iran is a country that sponsors terrorism – to Hezbollah, to Hamas. They do this in a network. They are actually working with the Taliban against the coalition in who was their archenemy – in Afghanistan. And so they continue to work that metric work and it is, I think – as best I can tell, their strategic goal is to essentially be the power and influence in that part of the world.

So the unintended consequences of them achieving nuclear capability are pretty severe. I worry a great deal about a country whose hegemonic ambitions are stated, who threaten the country of Israel – a very close ally of ours – routinely with elimination, annihilation. Those words are of great concern to me. So I think we as an international community have to figure out – continue to figure out. We’re working it all pretty hard right now and I think a new administration is going to have to do that as well. And I am concerned – I think that needs to be front and center for any new administration because of the proximity and the timing and the kinds of things that we worry about with respect to developing that capability.

Q: Admiral Mullen, my name is Colonel Duganiser. I’m a retired reservist – medically retired as of November of last year on my last mobilization. I have a question I need to ask you. For my heart and my experience – (inaudible) – with all those people you called out as having made sacrifices. There are a lot of soldiers who are going to – excuse me, service members – who are going to be injured in the next year who are going to go through the military disability system. A prediction of about 20,000 soldiers are going to be going through that process.

I know you in your career have provided outstanding leadership for caring for your sailors but you’ve got a lot of service members now out there who are having to deal with a morally corrupt bureaucracy that is penny-pinching on them and their sacrifices. And I’d like to know what kind of personal leadership have you been involved yourself with, as well as the other chairmen – excuse me, the chiefs – to correct that moral compass so the penny-pinching bureaucrats don’t weigh the cost of war on those who have made those sacrifices with their pain and injuries.

ADM. MULLEN: If you asked me a question about the United States Navy right now I probably would have to call the Navy and ask the question to get an answer because I have not spent much time with the Navy. For the last year that I’ve – almost a year – that I’ve been in this job I have spent my time almost exclusively with the Army and Marine Corps in how they fight, obviously, in the fight, as well as the results of that fight.

So I came here this week through Fort Bliss, for example, spent a period of time with the Sergeants Major Academy, which is about 1,000 senior noncoms in the Army and actually 30 or 40 other countries. And one of the things I talk about is the life – not just talk about, but I listen to them about what’s going on, what’s important.

Deborah and I – and believe me, I would not be here without the incredible support of my own family that's been able to sustain our continued service over many, many years. We've always focused on families as well as sailors in the Navy. Believe me, I focused for the last year on soldiers – on all service members – because this fight is not unique to any service. I do believe our ground forces – they're clearly sustaining the brunt of the injuries and not just the physical injuries but the entire issues of PTS – post-traumatic stress – traumatic brain injury, whether it be mild or severe. So we have spent a lot of our time in that system. And if there's one thing that anybody in that system talks to us about that's injured – family members, et cetera – it's time. And how fast – can we make the clock move as rapidly as possible in a way that will allow us to both heal and get on with our lives?

That's why I talked earlier about this vision in the country. We have a system in our country that moves from DOD to VA, out into the community. And it sort of says thanks for doing all you've done. I hope it goes well in the next system. You're done or continue engaged with the VA; you move out to your community; we hope it goes well. That's not acceptable to me. We've got to have a system that reaches to the community, back to the sea of goodwill and connects the needs that we have because they've sacrificed so much. And we have a system too often that's a peacetime system. And we've been at war now six years and we've got procedures and policies we must change. We have a system that focuses on disability; we need to focus on ability and potential, back to the American dream view of those who sacrifice so much. And it's a big system and I don't want to make any excuses for it. It takes too much time to make the kind of changes that we need to have made overnight. And it is bureaucratic, particularly the disability compensation.

And it was, again – each meeting I have with those that who are injured – and families of the fallen. Deborah meets with spouses of the fallen everywhere we go and their desire to be connected and their description of the bureaucracy, particularly right when it occurs, is something that we need to continue to break through – push hard to break through.

One of the things that I am privileged to be able to do in this job is I get a microphone and I get exposure to make sure that all can see and hear what's actually going on so we can continue to do what we need to do in order to take care of those who sacrifice so much – wounded, fallen across the board. There have been improvements with respect to time; soldiers have told me that. But we still have a long way to go. I mean, I know we have a long way to go.

I've had this discussion with my Israeli friends – and back to sort of what I talk about the United States has these three sectors. In Israel when you take control of a unit and transfer the flag into command, the last thing – as it was described to me – you do is you sign signature accountability for every member of that unit from the time the unit was commissioned 60 years ago to now for families of the injured and fallen and members as well. And then you are inspected – in your command you are inspected as an accountable item to make sure you're taken care of. That's a little different than how we do it. And I'm not saying we should do that. I'm not saying it should be that system. But I am saying we should have that kind of effect on the people who sacrifice so much.

And I'm open. I mean, I've got a card here. You've been through the system. I've got an e-mail address. I actually read my own e-mail and I answer my own e-mail. And if you've got ideas, please don't hesitate to lay them out.

Q: Sir, one quickie.

ADM. MULLEN: So I – and I can do that. To the degree that I'm in charge of DOD – I'm the chairman. I understand all that. But if you have suggestions I mean, I run into soldiers who are in the system – who have been in the system and then discharged and now working in the VA. They're working in the VA because they know how challenging it was. So those who have been – go through – the system, we're looking for ideas. And I don't mean we don't have any, but we're looking for ways to improve it and there is an appetite for that right now that hasn't existed for a long time.

Q: What are your thoughts about the role and importance of a hearts and mind strategy overall and for the military?

ADM. MULLEN: I think the – what I talked about earlier about seeing it through other people's eyes and I talk about the tribal aspect of this. One of the biggest challenges we have in this kind of work there, the kind of work there we're in, is differentiating the locals who are not insurgents from the insurgents. And too often – and recently we've had some tragic examples – where we kill – where innocent civilians are killed. And every time we do that we set ourselves back fairly dramatically. We've seen that – wherever its' been. And that is the essence of in the end what I would call hearts and minds. If we don't win the hearts and minds, we – the big we; this isn't United States, this is the big we – if we can't do that, we can't win hearts and minds, we can't succeed.

MICHAEL HARRIS: Hello. My name is Michael Harris and I'm from North Hollywood High School. Stereotypically there's a friendly rivalry between the military and the intelligence community. So my question to you is how do you see the CIA's role in the war on terror and how do you think that a policy should be changed as the front of the war on terror moves out of Iraq and into other countries?

ADM. MULLEN: I'm not – actually, not that there wouldn't be certainly some in DOD and CIA that see it as you describe with respect to rivalry or turf, however you want to describe it. And this is always a challenge in big bureaucratic organizations. But I have – I work very closely with Mike Hayden, who is the director of CIA, and so do an awful lot of my people from – my intelligence people. And it's not just – when I say “my,” I mean there's a joint staff group but there's an intelligence apparatus on the military side that is right down in the fight. And I see an awful lot of collaboration. And I'm not a CIA expert. Some day when I'm retired I'll go back and kind of read history and see how it was, but everyone tells me it is much collaborative than it's been. And I think it needs to be.

I think Admiral McConnell who is the director of National Intelligence, has provided a great hand at organizing multiple intelligence agencies and being able to focus them all on the

same fight in ways that we weren't able to do before. I mean, that's from my perspective and I consider myself a customer of that because I depend on intelligence at every level, whether it's intelligence in space or human intelligence on the ground, in the fight; or human intelligence on the ground where there isn't a fight and we don't want to have a fight.

All of that is working – I mean, we certainly have our challenges, but it's working much better than it has in the past by everybody's accord, at least as it gets fed to me. But it doesn't mean we don't continue to have challenges. We need to be much more transparent and that's very difficult when you're talking about classified information. We need to be – there needs to be a constant, constant pressure on further integrating the intelligence world with the operations world and we need to lead that. And we need to understand – I didn't grow up in the intel world. I've got to understand – just like I talked about being in some country and seeing it through some other country's eyes, I've got to spend time understanding how the intel world sees the world as well. And in a leadership position I'm responsible to do that and then try to bring them together.

Q: I'm Davie Yonsmith from View Park Prep High school and I have a question. I have a question, what are your views on the genocide in Darfur and what can we as U.S. citizens do to for it? And if the whole situation in Sudan is tied to the situation in the Middle East.

ADM. MULLEN: I think we're living in a world that is more and more linked. So in that regard there certainly are connections between Sudan and the Middle East. I think it's a question that needs to constantly be asked because of the genocide and loss of lives. It needs to be made visible. It isn't being completely ignored. We should be mindful of the fact, certainly here in the United States, that these are sovereign countries as well; that there are unions, alliances, agencies who are responsible for their own continent; African – the African Union is one. There's another – a couple of agencies who are responsible.

But from the position of us as a country – and I think many of them – we should sustain our concern and outrage and we have got to figure out internationally how to get at that, literally as lives are being lost as we stand here today. I can go into answers that are not very acceptable in terms of organizations unable to meet the needs there and yet your question – I think you've got a – all of us need to keep this question front and center until we figure out an answer that's better than the one we have right now which is unacceptable.

Q: Will Pakistan support NATO's role in the Afghanistan border with Pakistan?

ADM. MULLEN: That actually is a – that's actually a question for NATO to answer. I mean, I don't want to completely dodge this but 26 countries in NATO, two new members coming in – Albania and Croatia here in the not too distant future. Every single country gets the ability to say no. One no essentially stops the institution.

Now, those rules are rules that I think we need to examine for their relevance in the world that we're living in. And I don't want to go farther than that; I'm going to get in trouble in the policy world. But I think given the numbers right now and given the challenge that for – and I believe that – I talked about being in Bulgaria and spending – or maybe I didn't. But I spent half a day in Afghanistan, half a day in Russia and Georgia. And at the heart of the Afghanistan

discussion is the commitment on the part of NATO countries to make a difference there. And there are differences in how various countries – all of whom are democracies, oh by the way – look at this challenge. At a very high level I believe how NATO handles Afghanistan in the long run is a significant answer to NATO's relevance not just now but in the future.

Q: Assuming for a moment that the surge proves effective in Iraq and we're able to stabilize the situation there, if later down the line it destabilizes and, say, civil war breaks out or, in the worst case, Iran invades or something like that, how committed is the United States to redeploying troops to the area, in effect engaging in another war to preserve the stability there?

ADM. MULLEN: You hit me right at the heart of hypotheticals, which I don't spend a lot of time on, and also decisions that get made by the civilian leadership of this country. And at a very high level I do believe that the American people vote on this stuff. And that's at – so the answer to your question is how much the American people – what decisions or how the American people look at whatever the future decisions might be.

I go back to predictability and balance in our force. It wasn't too long ago that I heard Secretary Rumsfeld answer a question about the future, predictability, this way, that when Mr. McNamara was testifying for confirmation – before the Senate Armed Services Committee for his confirmation of Secretary of Defense there wasn't a question on Vietnam. When Mr. Cheney was testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee for the same job, Secretary of Defense, not question one about Iraq. And when Mr. Rumsfeld was up there doing the same thing recently, not a question about Afghanistan. Speaks a lot to our ability to predict, which has been pretty poor.

What I do believe is that – back to this dangerous world – there will be continued requirements for military engagement both on the peace time side and that we will – we are living in a time of what many of us believe, and I believe, are consistent conflict. It's difficult, however, to know exactly where and exactly when.

MS. GOODMAN: This will be the last question.

Q: Hi. I'm Moheme Banerge from – also from North Hollywood High School. I was wondering what is militarily the importance of India as you said? And also, do you see the insurgence involved in the Kashmir conflict in – having any effect on U.S. foreign policy or our soldiers that are currently deployed in Pakistan?

ADM. MULLEN: I think the Afghanistan-Pakistan-India relationship, not just now but in the past and what that means for the future, is one that we've got to both understand and engage, that India is a vital country in that part of the world. And I give Mr. Singh and President Musharraf a great deal of credit for bringing down the tensions on the Kashmir border. There has been a recent spike in incidents there. There is a growing concern that that isn't particularly Pakistan under the change – in the time that they are right now facing, that the recent spike might be sustained, which I think could be very dangerous.

So I think that we as a country need to continue – and, actually, the international community – need to engage all of those countries in a way that creates stability, not instability. And that there are relationships which are growing between, in particular, the United States and India, which I think are very healthy and growing at a very rapid pace. And I think we need to continue that, whether it's economics or military or diplomatic, across the full spectrum.

MR: Ladies and Gentleman, please help me thank Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the United States, Joint Chiefs of Staff.