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OUR FOOLISH WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Statement of HON. RON PAUL OF TEXAS

- The West has been at war with the Muslim world for over a thousand years. In this century, the British led the charge prior to World War II. Since that time it has been the United States. Although the British remain close allies of ours in intimidating the Muslim world, it is the military strength of the United States that assumes the burden of responsibility for the policy. It is justified by claiming a right and need to protect "our" oil.

- For over a thousand years the West has dominated the Middle East. During these thousand years resentment has continued, but for obvious reasons it is now being directed toward America. No one should be surprised when our ships become vulnerable and are actually blown up in the Middle East.

- If the U.S. understood the history of this region it would see the total folly of anchoring a war vessel in an enemy port. This lack of understanding of history and respect for religious beliefs of the area, in combination with our foreign policy of aggression and empire building, leads to arrogant foreign military intervention, not only in the Middle East, but around the world as well.

- It is clear that we are not in the Middle East for national security reasons but instead to protect powerful commercial interests. This assures we protect oil supplies for the West, and provides us with an excuse to keep the military industrial complex active.

- To put this in a proper perspective, consider how Americans, or especially Texans, would feel if the Gulf of Mexico were patrolled and protected by warships of a foreign power, say the Russians. What would we then think if that same power patrolling the Gulf built air bases in Texas and Florida with our government's complicity with the argument that this was necessary to protect "their" oil and with our government's complicity? This would anger many Americans and this anger would be directed to both the foreign occupiers of our territorial waters and our own government that permitted it. Yet this is exactly what has been happening in the Persian Gulf region. For religious, historic and sovereignty reasons, the Muslim people harbor great resentment toward us.

- As a consequence of the USS Cole incident, our Navy has recognized the great danger we face in this region. This has forced us to avoid sending any more naval vessels through the Suez Canal. The ongoing conflict cannot end peacefully as long as we pursue this policy of folly.

- The Cole disaster was needless and preventable. The loss of this vessel and the

senseless deaths of 17 Americans were a consequence of a policy that has led to a lack of military readiness for our country, while increasing the danger to all Americans and in particular our servicemen in that region. It's positively amazing that with a military budget of \$300 billion we do not have the ability to protect ourselves against a rubber raft, which destroyed a \$1 billion vessel. Our sentries on duty had rifles without bullets and were prohibited from firing on any enemy targets. This policy is absurd if not insane. It is obvious that our navy lacks the military intelligence to warn and prevent such an event. It is incapable even of investigating the incident, since the FBI was required to try to figure out what happened. This further intrusion has only served to increase the resentment of the people of Yemen toward all Americans.

- But the Yemenis never will cooperate with our CIA and FBI agents, many of whom already have been forced to retreat and return to the States. Our insistence on invading Yemen to search for all those involved will only make our precarious situation in the Middle East worse.

- Our policy in the Middle East cannot possibly be successful. It's obvious there will be an inevitable conflict between our support for the moderate Arabs- which antagonizes the Islamic fundamentalists of this region- and our special treatment for Israel. It is clear that the powerful financial interests of this country want to use our military force to protect their commercial and oil interests in this region, while there will always remain powerful U.S. political support for the State of Israel. The two sides never will be reconciled by our attempt to balance our support by giving help to both sides. This is exactly opposite of being neutral and friends with both sides. The one reason why this confrontation is going to continue is that 75% of known oil reserves are now owned by Muslims around the world.

- Our current foreign policy does nothing more than stir the flames of hatred of both sides, clearly evident as we witness the daily fighting between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Growing influence of the radical Islamic fundamentalists will allow them one day to overthrow the secular moderate puppet regimes supported by our government.

- As the world becomes less stable due to currency, trade and other economic reasons, this region will become even more volatile. We should expect higher oil prices. Hatred toward America will continue to escalate, and United States security will continue to be diminished due to the threat of terrorist attacks. All the anti-ballistic missiles in the world will not be able to protect us against attacks such as the Cole suffered or from the nuclear and biological weapons that can be brought into this country in a suitcase.

- The greatest threat to our national security is our own bad policy. Our policy has continued to permit our own military technology, developed by our taxpayers, to get into the hands of our so-called allies as well as our potential enemies like China.

- The turmoil in the Middle East is now spilling over into Indonesia, a country made up of 17,000 islands and very vulnerable to political instability, especially since its currency and financial crisis of a few years ago. Indonesia is the world's fourth largest nation, with the largest Muslim population of any country. Hatred toward the West, and especially America, due to the Middle East policy, has led to Christian persecution in Indonesia. The embassy is now closed, and American ambassador Robert Gelbard has been recalled after his life was threatened.

- Our many failures in the last fifty years should prompt us to reassess our entire foreign policy of interventionism. The notion that since we are the only superpower left we have an obligation to tell everybody else how to live should come an end. Our failure in Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, and the Middle East, and our failure yet come to in Bosnia and Kosovo should alert all Americans to this great danger. But no, we instead continue to expand our intervention by further involving ourselves in yet another sovereign nation. This time it's Columbia. By sending more weapons into the region we continue to stir up this 30-year civil conflict. And just recently this conflict has spilled over into Venezuela, a major force in South America due to its oil reserves. The Foreign Minister of Venezuela, angered by U.S. actions, recently warned that "any ship or boat which enters the Gulf of Venezuela, of whatever nationality it may be, will be expelled." Our intervention in many of these regions, and especially in South America, has been done in the name of the drug war. But the truth is it's serving the interests of the companies who own the oil rights in this region, as well as those who produce the weapons that get sent into

these regions.