

U.S. chief in Middle East quits because of 'disconnect' with Bush over Iran

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'Disconnect': Admiral William Fallon was 'a lone voice' against taking military action to stop Iran's nuclear programme

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The head of U.S. forces in the Middle East has resigned in a row over the threat of military action in Iran.

Admiral William Fallon, who has been head of U.S. Central Command for a year, stood down after a magazine article portrayed him as a fierce critic of the Bush administration's manoeuvring in the Middle East.

His departure came as he was preparing to brief Congress on his recommendations for America's next step in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Defence Secretary Robert Gates announced the resignation last night.

He said the admiral felt that mis-perceptions about differences between his ideas and Bush policy in Iran made it too difficult for him to continue.

An article in last week's Esquire magazine painted Admiral Fallon as a lone voice against taking military action to stop the Iranian nuclear programme.

"I don't know whether he was misinterpreted or whether people attributed views to him that were not his views but clearly there was a concern," said Mr Gates.

"I think this is a cumulative kind of thing. It isn't the result of any one article or any one issue."

In a statement, the admiral admitted perceptions of a "disconnect" with the White House led to his decision.

President Bush paid tribute to his 41-year naval career, praising his "honesty, determination and commitment".

Admiral Fallon took the Central Command post on March 16, 2007, succeeding Army General John Abizaid, who retired.

He previously served as commander of U.S. Pacific Command.

It was often reported that he and General David Petraeus clashed over troop levels in Iraq, a claim the two denied.

But many feel it was an ongoing dispute that simmered below the surface within the Pentagon.

Esquire also noted that the the focus on troop numbers in Iraq was hurting operations in Afghanistan.

Admiral Fallon's second-in-command General Martin Dempsey will take over the post.