

**OPENING REMARKS OF
GENERAL TOMMY R. FRANKS
COMMANDER IN CHIEF
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
25 OCTOBER 2000**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee.

Before I begin my remarks, I would like to express my deepest sorrow and condolences to the families and loved ones of the Sailors who were injured and who gave their lives in the service of our country onboard USS COLE. The military is a special family; this tragedy affects all of us. On behalf of the military family, I want to express our heartfelt appreciation to the members of this body who represented the Senate and House by joining us in Norfolk to pay tribute to those Sailors. I also want to express my sincere gratitude to the American people for their continued outpouring of support for USS COLE, her family members, the United States Navy, and all the members of our armed forces. As you know, the crews of USS COLE and of the other Navy ships, along with the military and civilian personnel who have been sent to Aden to assist, are

taking measures to assure the safety of the ship and its speedy return to the United States.

Several Federal investigations are ongoing in Aden involving representatives from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, and others. An interagency Foreign Emergency Support Team composed of individuals from, among others, the Departments of State and Justice, is in Aden as well. Investigators will gather the necessary forensics and facts. These investigations, as well as ongoing and planned fact-finding and after-action-review efforts, will give us specifics on all the factors surrounding the attack on USS COLE. They will also provide insights as to how the threat we face today has evolved, and how we can best meet this threat in the future.

Recognizing the desire of the Congress and this Committee to be kept informed, the other panel members and I are here to present the facts as we now understand them. Much of our information at this stage is preliminary, and subject to change as new information emerges, both from the investigations and from further analysis of the historical record. Accordingly, what we are able to say at this point is, in important respects tentative, and subject to further refinement as the process continues.

In addition, I need to limit my comments in the open

session to an update on the situation, the reasons for our military presence in the region, U.S. Central Command's (USCENTCOM) missions, our overall relations with Yemen, and the general background of the use of Aden as a refueling site for USN ships. In the interest of the safety of our forces, it is necessary to defer to the closed-session discussion of security assessments and procedures for force protection, and specific details related to USS COLE's refueling stop.

The crew of USS COLE is still manning the ship; only the casualties have been evacuated. I visited the ship and her crew on Monday, 16 October. They are doing an absolutely magnificent job, under the most difficult circumstances. The Captain, Commander Kirk Lippold, and his Sailors have stabilized conditions onboard the ship and continue preparations for returning the ship to the continental U.S. A heavy lift ship, BLUE MARLIN, will transport USS COLE back to the United States with an anticipated arrival date in early December 2000.

Joint Task Force "Determined Response," commanded by Rear Admiral Mark Fitzgerald, is coordinating all recovery and support efforts in Yemen. Participating naval vessels include USS HAWES, USS CAMDEN, and USS DONALD COOK, as well as an Amphibious Ready Group comprised of USS TARAWA, USS DULUTH, and USS ANCHORAGE. These ships remain ready to respond to operational taskings in either the Arabian Gulf or the Red Sea,

as they assist USS COLE and provide essential quality of life support for the crew. The Air Force is furnishing airlift and aircraft security. The Army has contributed transportation and medical assistance, while Marines are providing security.

I must acknowledge the contributions of the many governments and allied military forces that have provided responsive support. The Government of Yemen provided initial medical support and continues to provide security forces to protect U.S. Government officials arriving in the area. France and Djibouti helped with initial medical evacuation and treatment. Royal Navy ships HMS MARLBOROUGH and HMS CUMBERLAND provided damage control and other assistance. We have received expedited overflight clearances, as well as the use of air bases from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar.

Further, I would like to commend the leadership and exhaustive efforts of the U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, Barbara Bodine, who continues to place every embassy asset at the disposal of our on-scene Joint Task Force. Her staff's support, led by the Defense Attaché, Army Lieutenant Colonel Bob Newman, typifies the cooperative team effort that exists throughout the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR).

In order to fully inform the Committee, I believe it is important to describe for you the USCENTCOM area of operations. Our AOR is a large, dangerous, and complex region, consisting of

25 countries, with over half a billion people from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds. The region is historically unstable, yet remains vital to U.S. national interests. It contains vast energy resources, key air and sea lines of communication, and critical maritime choke points. Economic and political disruptions in our AOR have profound global consequences. Sources of instability within the region include hegemony, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and ballistic missiles.

USCENTCOM's mission is to promote and protect U.S. interests and almost 200,000 American citizens in the region; to deter aggression and stand ready to respond to attacks on our forces, our allies, our interests, and generally to conduct military operations; to ensure uninterrupted access to regional resources and markets; to assist regional friends in providing for their own security and regional stability; to promote the attainment of a just and lasting Middle East Peace; to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other transnational threats; and to rapidly deploy joint and combined forces to support the full range of military operations. In carrying out all aspects of our mission, force protection is a high priority, recognizing that our mission, like that of all our military forces, is an inherently dangerous one.

This mission supports America's National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy by "Shaping the international security environment, Responding to threats and crises, and Preparing for an uncertain future." We shape that environment through ongoing operations, military-to-military contact, engagement, and the building of relationships in accordance with the Prioritized Regional Objectives provided by Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). USCENTCOM's military-to-military contacts and the relationships we establish are key to promoting stability and reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Yet, as this Committee knows, conflict continues in this region. USCENTCOM has responded to regional crises on 23 occasions since it was formed on 1 January 1983. Operations have included the re-flagging of Kuwaiti tankers, DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, RESTORE HOPE in Somalia, VIGILANT WARRIOR in Iraq, the Khobar Towers explosion in Saudi Arabia, embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, DESERT THUNDER, and DESERT FOX. On the 12th of October, the day USS COLE was attacked, 21,790 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines were conducting operations in the region. These troops, along with 27 ships and 214 aircraft, were involved in operations such as Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, the enforcement of No-Fly and no enhancement zones in Iraq; Maritime Intercept Operations, which limit illicit oil smuggling by Saddam Hussein through the

enforcement of the United Nation Security Council resolutions concerning economic sanctions; and Operation DESERT SPRING, which includes forward presence in Kuwait.

In terms of engagement, our strategy, which is aimed at creating stability, maintaining access, building coalitions, and deterring aggression, is developed in concert with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Services, other unified commands, and host nations. We coordinate policy development, engagement planning, and execution with the Department of State, and, in fact, with the Ambassador and country team in each AOR country. USCENTCOM engagement activities include, first and foremost, current operations, as well as combined exercises, security assistance, combined training, combined education, military contacts, humanitarian assistance, and other activities that I, as the Commander in Chief, designate. This level of activity mandates maintaining access to facilities and building strong relationships with regional leaders. On the 12th of October--the date of the attack on USS COLE--engagement activities were ongoing with 13 countries in the USCENTCOM region, and ranged from Operation DESERT SPRING in Kuwait, to delivery of Excess Defense Article (EDA) patrol boats in the Seychelles, to exercise EARLY VICTOR in Jordan.

Our military presence in the AOR is not, of course, only or even primarily, for engagement. Our air, sea, and land forces are there to deter aggression--by Iraq or anyone else who would threaten our critical national interest--and, if necessary, to conduct effective, powerful military operations to respond to attacks. USS COLE was, in fact, proceeding to join the Carrier Battle Group in the Gulf that forms a key part of our immediate ready force in the region.

Yemen plays a part in this overall effort and our ability to operate in the region. It controls the eastern side of the Bab al Mandeb choke point at the southern end of the Red Sea, and is geo-strategically positioned approximately 1400 miles south of Suez and 1400 miles southwest of the Strait of Hormuz.

Let me examine briefly the evolution of our engagement with Yemen. In 1990, Yemen re-unified into one nation comprised of the former South Yemen, known as Peoples Democratic Republic of Yemen or PDRY and North Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic). After this re-unification, Yemen was removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism because South Yemen ceased to exist. Despite historical instability, the united Yemen was not put on the terrorism list because of measures the new Yemen government was taking to break ties with international terrorism and expanding security cooperation with neighbors.

In 1990, Yemen's open support for Saddam Hussein during DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM left it diplomatically isolated from its Arab neighbors and the U.S., and resulted in a cutoff of U.S. aid. Although U.S. Forces involved in Operation RESTORE HOPE in Somalia used Aden facilities for staging in December 1992, there was very little activity from a military-to-military perspective until after the Yemen presidential elections in 1993. In early 1995, the U.S. Government authorized the commercial sale of aircraft parts to Yemen, and over the course of the next year, talks were held to improve military-to-military relations, and an International Military Education and Training (IMET) program resumed. The U.S. provided \$50,000 in assistance in 1996, most of which was used for English language training.

In April 1997, an Interagency Working Group, chaired by the State Department, discussed the direction and strategic objectives of U.S.-Yemen policy. It focused on potential initiatives to improve bilateral relations, and recognized Yemen's role in the region. This Interagency Working Group reaffirmed the importance of continued United States Government engagement with Yemen. Later that month, USS HALYBURTON (FFG-40), a fast frigate, conducted the first port visit to Aden by a U.S. warship since before 1969 when relations with what was then South Yemen were broken-off.

During 1997, a humanitarian de-mining program was started, a small-scale Joint Combined Exchange Training program was conducted, several senior-level visits took place, and IMET was continued. These activities, appropriately notified to Congress, were coordinated within the Interagency Working Group, and then executed by USCENTCOM in coordination with the U.S. Ambassador and Yemen Country Team.

Among the visits by senior officers in 1998, were two by Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (USNAVCENT), VADM Fargo. Initial discussions of fueling operations at the port of Aden took place with the Ambassador and Yemeni officials during these visits. Subsequently, VADM Fargo sent a Defense Energy Support Center Fuels Team to survey Aden as a possible refueling site, and USCENTCOM's Joint Security Directorate (JSD) performed an assessment of vulnerabilities on the port of Aden in May 1998. Normal contracting procedures were used by the Defense Energy Support Center and Naval Regional Contracting Center in 1998 and 1999 to secure fuel and service contracts for ships stopping in Yemen. These contracts provided refueling and other logistics support to U.S. Navy ships in transit through the USCENTCOM area. Navy ships began making brief stops for fuel (BSF) at Aden in January 1999, first on a "cash basis," and then under fuel storage and bunkering contracts that were in place by June 1999. I will address the process that led to making Aden a

refueling port and to its operation as such in greater detail in the closed session.

The decision to go into Aden for refueling was based on operational as well as geo-strategic factors and included an assessment of the terrorist and conventional threats in the region. As you know, the Horn of Africa was in great turmoil in 1998. We had the continuing instability in Somalia, the Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, an ongoing war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and an internal war in Sudan. Also, in December 1998, we conducted strikes against Iraq for non-compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions. As of December 1998, 14 of the 20 countries in the USCENTCOM AOR were characterized as "High Threat" countries.

Djibouti, which had been the Navy refueling stop in the Southern Red Sea for over a decade, began to deteriorate as a useful port because of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war. This war caused increased force protection concerns for our ships, as well as congestion in the port resulting in operational delays. The judgment at this time was that USCENTCOM needed to look for more refueling options, and Aden, Yemen was seen as a viable alternative. Since the U.S. Navy began refueling operations in Aden in January '99, Navy ships have conducted 27 brief stops for fuel (BSF), two port visits, and one logistics replenishment visit. At the time the refueling contract was signed, the

addition of Aden brought the number of ports available in the USCENTCOM AOR to 13. Selection of which of these ports to use for a specific refueling operation involves careful evaluation of the threat and operational requirements.

The terrorism threat is endemic in the AOR, and USCENTCOM takes extensive measures to protect our forces. I will cover our assessment of the threat and our force protection posture in response to that threat in general in open session, and will provide specifics in the closed session. The threat situation was monitored regularly in Yemen and throughout the AOR. The intelligence community and USCENTCOM consider this AOR a High Threat environment, and our assessments of the regional threat and the threat in Yemen were consistent in their evaluation. We had conducted a number of threat assessments in the port, and throughout the area. However, leading up to the attack on USS COLE on 12 October, we received no specific threat information for Yemen or for the port of Aden that would cause us to change our assessment. Had such warning been received, action would have been taken by the operating forces in response to the warning.

Let me now provide some details on the transit of USS COLE, beginning with her deployment from Norfolk on 8 August after being certified to deploy by Commander, SECOND Fleet. The trans-Atlantic crossing lasted until 20 August, when she began

to conduct operations in the Mediterranean Sea. These operations along with several port visits lasted from the 20th of August until the 9th of October, when USS COLE transited the Suez Canal in order to conduct maritime operations in the northern Arabian Gulf in support of enforcement of United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

In view of the pending 3,300-mile movement from the Suez Canal to the Northern Arabian Gulf, it was clear that she would be required to refuel. It is U.S. Navy policy that an Oiler not accompany a single ship during transits, so the decision was made that USS COLE would conduct a brief stop for fuel (BSF) in Aden, Yemen.

The operational requirement to refuel necessitated the development of: 1) a force protection plan for the refueling operation at Aden; 2) a logistics request for husbanding services at the port; and, 3) a USNAVCENT request for the necessary Diplomatic Clearances.

USS COLE met these requirements, and she continued her journey down the Red Sea entering the port of Aden on 12 October. She was moored to the starboard side of the refueling dolphin at 0849 (local Yemen time). At 1000, the Refueling Alignment was verified and, at 1031, Refueling Operations began. At 1118, the attack occurred.

I will be able to answer with confidence the most important and pertinent questions regarding execution of responsibilities and adequacy of procedures when on-going investigations and fact-finding efforts are completed. Each process and procedure is under review. We will identify strengths and weaknesses of our operations and force protection capabilities, and use the results to improve our ability to operate in USCENTCOM's high threat environment.

CONCLUSION

As I have previously stated in testimony before this committee, "Our men, women, DoD civilians, and Diplomats in the region are under constant observation, and, in some cases, being stalked, everyday, 24-hours-a-day, because the terrorist threat in this region is very real." The loss of life of any U.S. serviceman or woman in the USCENTCOM AOR is my responsibility, and I take that responsibility very seriously. Whenever there is an incident or act that causes loss of life, we gather the facts, and we take the actions necessary to minimize the risk of it happening again. I am committed to that end.

The investigations concerning USS COLE are proceeding, and I will not speculate on the outcome. I will say that USCENTCOM will continue to perform its missions within this vital region. Executing these missions has always entailed risk, and it will continue to do so. I will mitigate that risk in every way I

can, but I will never be able to totally eliminate it.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am prepared to answer your
questions.