

House Armed Services Committee

Chairman Ike Skelton

Opening Statement

Hearing on Piracy on the High Seas

March 5, 2009

"Today the committee meets to hear testimony on the challenge of piracy on the high seas and U.S. government efforts to deal with this challenge. Joining us today are: VADM William Gortney, Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, Mr. Daniel Pike, Acting Principal Director in the Office of African Affairs within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Stephen Mull, Acting Undersecretary for International Security and Arms Control for the State Department and Mr. Karl Wycoff, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. We thank you all for being with us today.

"If we had called such a hearing two years ago, many might have wondered why. Until recently, piracy seemed a thing of the past—part of the stories we tell our children or part of the history lessons about the Barbary Pirates or Blackbeard. Recent events in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia, however, make this very much a current and important issue for American national security.

"Piracy fits in the spectrum of low intensity conflict with threats like terrorism and cyber warfare. These threats are all fed in part by globalization, which radicalizes significant numbers of people who feel alienated and disenfranchised, and who seek to undermine the security and prosperity of those they hold responsible. At the same time, globalization can spread the reach and impact of these kinds of attacks across the world, including to the homeland. They are certainly more than just a cost of doing business.

"The United States has always been a seafaring nation. Our ability to project power globally is critically linked to our presence on the seas, the strength of our Navy, and our commitment to keeping the lanes of trade and communication open. The maintenance of free trade and free passage of vessels are crucial components of our national security. And at a time when we remain dependent on foreign energy supplies, the free movement of international shipping is very much a national lifeline.

"So it is disturbing to see the trends of the last several years. While piracy incidents have come down in other critical chokepoints like the Straits of Malacca due to the concerted efforts of neighboring states, incidents in the Gulf of Aden have exploded. In 2008, there were 293 attacks worldwide with 111 of them occurring in the Gulf of Aden or the East coast of Somalia.

"The international community, led by the United States, has taken some key steps and I commend you for it. First, Combined Joint Task Force-151 has brought together naval forces of our allies and has sparked support for the mission from friends as diverse as Russia and China. It has helped focus the attention of many

nations in pursuit of our joint interest in maintaining free movement of vessels in the Gulf of Aden.

“Second, the efforts of the Kenyan government through agreements with the United States and the United Kingdom should be applauded as a promising way to ensure greater prosecution and to raise the cost of doing business for these pirates.

“Third, the international shipping community—working with the Combined Joint Task Force—has made some progress in improving and disseminating their best practices.

“More must be done, however, and quickly. My own view is that the international arrangements coordinated by Central Command should be made more formal, more institutionalized. We need an international counter-piracy league under the auspices of the United Nations. What is clear to me is that the United States must remain a leader in these efforts. But at the same time, we know that neighboring nations must get involved and the collective weight of the international community must be felt in this regard.

“We know too that there will be no lasting solution to the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden until Somalia’s failed state is addressed. I fear that the situation on the ground in Somalia will be repeated in other failed states and in states with vast areas of ungoverned territory within their borders.

“Piracy could not exist on this scale and with this level of brazenness if there was effective governmental control of that nation. I look forward to the witnesses’ thoughts on what can be done to influence Somalia’s stability and, in the absence of such stability, what additional steps can be taken to curb piracy in that region.

“The issue of piracy is a complex one. Like issues of economic instability and global climate change, it is a non-traditional national security issue, while at the same time reminding us of the historic persistence of this problem. Piracy goes to the heart of core American national security and economic interests.

“It also demonstrates that any solution must be both multi-faceted and multi-national—coordinating the world’s naval powers, the United Nations, the international shipping community, and the nations that neighbor Somalia. I am confident that today’s hearing will lay some of the options for addressing this issue on the table.

“Now, before I turn to the witnesses for their opening statements, let me turn to the Ranking Member, Mr. McHugh, for any remarks he would like to make.”