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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDER, U.S. NAVAL FORCES CENTRAL COMMAND
BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
COUNTER-PIRACY OPERATIONS IN THE
U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND AREA OF OPERATIONS
5 MARCH 2009

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Good morning Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McHugh and members of the House Armed Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on our Coalition counter piracy operations in the Central Command area of operation. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the accomplishments that have been made over the past several months and to identify some of the challenges that lie ahead.

My name is Vice Admiral Bill Gortney, and I am the Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command headquartered in the Kingdom of Bahrain. I took command of NAVCENT at the beginning of July, but have been operationally deployed to the region throughout my Navy career. As the NAVCENT Commander, I am the Naval Component Commander for General Petraeus at U.S. Central Command.

I also command two additional organizations. I serve as the Commander of the United States Fifth Fleet – the Navy’s Numbered Fleet Commander. And most importantly in terms of this hearing, I serve as the Commander of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) – an international coalition of more than twenty nations who provide people, ships and aircraft in the region. There are national mandates that limit the participation of some of our coalition partners, but this remains a cooperative, multi-national effort. a coalition of the willing.

As most of you know, acts of piracy spiked in late August – but the recent history of piracy doesn’t start there. Several years ago we started to see an increase in piracy off the east coast of Somalia. At that time, it was routine for merchant vessels to transit along the coast. In response to those attacks, the shipping industry moved the transit lane further off the coast. It worked, and the rate of attacks decreased – returning to just a few per year.

That changed in August, when a new clan of Somali pirates begin to attack ships in the Gulf of Aden – to the north of Somalia. The number of ships pirated went from three to twelve in just a few days. Ultimately, the solution to the problem of piracy is ashore — in Somalia. I focused the Coalition maritime efforts on security and stability prevention

operations at sea that would give the international community time to address the long-term solution.

In late August, as the commander of the CMF – I directed the establishment of a Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA) in the Gulf of Aden. We have had coalition ships and aircraft patrolling the area ever since.

The MSPA was just one part of a Counter-Piracy Campaign Plan developed by my staff. The plan was designed to complement and further the efforts of the Political/Diplomatic and Industrial/Maritime communities. The operational design of the plan was developed with the purpose of outlining our efforts to engage the international community along three primary lanes: Political/Legal, Informational/Industrial, and Military.

We focused our counter-piracy efforts on three main areas:

- International Naval Presence
- Improved Defensive Measures from the Shipping Industry
- International Legal Framework for Resolving Piracy Cases

Since late August there have been significant strides made. To date, we have seen forces from the US, UK, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey and Yemen. Some of these forces operate within alliances such as NATO or EU, some as part of the CMF coalition and some independently representing their own nation's interests. Additional forces from Japan, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Belgium, and Poland are expected to participate in the coming months.

The shipping industry has also been at the forefront. We have seen countless examples of shipping companies, and individual merchant mariners taking proactive measures to serve as the first line of self defense against pirates – these armed criminals operating at sea.

On the operational side of the plan, I initially gave the mission to the Commodore of one of our existing task forces – Combined Task Force (CTF) -150. However, I did so knowing that it was an additional mission for an already busy operational commander.

More importantly, I did so very carefully – because I knew that some navies in our coalition did not have the authority to conduct counter-piracy operations. We will never ask a member of the coalition to be involved in operations that they do not have the authority from their national authority to do.

As a result of the complexity of the operations in that portion of our Area of Responsibility (AOR), I determined that it was necessary and prudent to establish a separate task force with a specific mission and mandate to conduct counter-piracy operations. In early January we established CTF 151 based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1838, 1846 and 1851. The task force was operational by the middle of the month.

Since that time we have had several nations join the task force, and have had formal indications from others who have stated that they will be sending ships and/or aircraft in the coming months. The efforts of CTF-151 are critical to the tactical coordination and deconfliction efforts with all of the international naval forces operating in the Gulf of Aden. We have incredible examples of international cooperation – ranging from personnel exchanges to operational mission coordination to maximize the efficiency of our efforts.

CTF-151 and other cooperating naval forces have encountered approximately 250 pirates: 130 were disarmed and released, 110 disarmed and turned over for prosecution, and 7 are pending final disposition.

Pirate capacity has been further impacted by the seizure or destruction of 28 pirate vessels, and the confiscation of the pirates' tools of the trade, including: 133 small arms,

28 Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), 51 RPG projectiles, and 21 ladders/grappling hooks.

Ultimately, piracy is a problem that starts ashore and requires an international solution ashore. We made this clear at the outset of our efforts – we cannot guarantee safety in this vast region. Our role in preventing some of these attacks is only one part of the solution to preventing further attacks. Historical precedent can be found in our nation's encounters with the Barbary pirates.

We have been successful not only in our Coalition efforts, but in communicating and coordinating with other naval forces deployed to the region, as well as working with the merchant shipping industry to share lessons learned and best practices.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of the Sailors, Marines, Coast Guard personnel and civilian Navy mariners under the command of Rear Admiral Terry McKnight – the CTF-151 commander. They have truly made a difference.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for inviting me to appear here today and I will be happy to answer your questions.

Executive Summary:

Piracy is a threat to the security of all nations and ultimately requires an international solution ashore. The U.S. Navy leads a Coalition of nations sending ships and aircraft to deter maritime pirate activity, enabling the shipping industry time to implement self-protection measures and the international community to establish a legal framework to hold pirates accountable for their actions.

Ultimately, the solution is in Somalia — assuring security and stability, enacting the rule of law and eliminating the conditions that breed pirates.

The proactive measures being taken by a considerable number of merchant vessels are exactly what we have been recommending. We have been working closely with the commercial shipping industry and the International Maritime Organization to recommend best practices and leverage lessons learned to employ reasonable self-protection measures. We applaud the efforts that the industry has undertaken.

The following is a comprehensive overview of our Coalition, the problem of piracy, and the measures we have undertaken in the maritime environment to help prevent the problem.

1. BACKGROUND ON THE COMBINED MARITIME FORCES (CMF)

The Combined Maritime Forces is an international coalition consisting of more than 20 nations. Coalition maritime operations are structured along geographic and operational areas of responsibility.

- **CTF 150** conducts Maritime Security Operations (MSO) southeast of the Strait of Hormuz and in the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea to the Suez Canal, and portions of the Indian Ocean.
- **CTF 151** was established to conduct counter-piracy operations throughout the CMF area of responsibility. Currently, these operations are focused in the Gulf of Aden with an aim of creating a lawful maritime order and maintaining security in the maritime environment.
- **CTF 152** conducts MSO in the international waters of the Arabian Gulf, and complements the security activities of Gulf Cooperation Council nations in their own territorial waters.

2. PIRACY BACKGROUND

The piracy problem emanating from Somalia has grown from the economic, social and political strife that has gripped that country since the mid-1990s. With a government powerless to stop illegal fishing and dumping in the waters off Somalia, local Somali fisherman began taking it upon themselves to deal with the problem by capturing what they perceived as illegal fisherman. The country has no national level military organization.

During recent years, the Darod and Hawiye clans in Somalia have taken to piracy as a means of conducting this sort of 'vigilante' justice as well as to supplement their livelihood by capturing larger, ocean going boats and ships. With the amount of traffic in the Gulf of Aden (GOA) and the ease with which the pirates were able to seize ships, the Darod clan pirates dramatically increased their efforts to capture larger merchant vessels in order to obtain larger ransoms. These clans operate along more than 1800 miles of Somalia coastline.

This increase in activity sharply spiked in August of 2008, prompting greater international interest. The capture of ships with dangerous military cargo like Motor Vessel FAINA and supertankers like the SIRIUS STAR prompted a greater international naval response.

3. THE STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Piracy impacts less than 1% of shipping. More than 33,000 vessels transit the Gulf of Aden annually, and in 2008 there were 122 attempted attacks, of which 42 were successful and 80 unsuccessful. While this is statistically small, even one attack is too many, and threatens confidence in the safety and reliability of international sea lanes.

To put the challenge into geographic perspective, the area involved off the coast of Somalia and Kenya as well as the Gulf of Aden covers more than 1.1 million square miles, roughly four times the size of Texas.

Of 15 pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden in late 2008, at least 10 involved ships operating outside the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) recommended traffic corridor or failing to employ recommended self protection measures, making them more vulnerable to a successful attack.

Thus far in 2009 there have been 26 attacks on merchant vessels, with 4 ships being successfully pirated. We believe that the international naval presence, coupled with the efforts of the merchant mariners and the shipping industry – aided in some cases by the weather – has had an impact on the success rate of these pirate attacks. The following are snapshots of piracy in 2008 and thus far in 2009.

2009 Daily Piracy Events Snapshot as of 04 MAR [NAVCENT AOR]

- 26 piracy events
- 4 successful [15 % of the events]
- 22 unsuccessful [85 % of the events]
- 7 suspected pirates currently held by CTF-151
 - ⇒ 0 suspected pirates turned over for legal prosecution
 - ⇒ 9 released based on lack of evidence, positive identification
- 7 ships currently pirated
- Approximately 123 merchant mariners being held hostage

2008 Piracy Events Summary [NAVCENT AOR]

- Estimated 33,000 ships transit the Gulf of Aden annually
- 122 piracy events [0.37% of overall traffic]
- 42 successful [0.13% overall / 38% of the events]
- 80 unsuccessful [62% of the events]

4. COMBINED MARITIME FORCES EFFORTS TO COUNTER PIRACY

The Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA)

Our initial response following the August 2008 spike in successful pirate attacks was to establish a presence in the Gulf of Aden using ships and aircraft already working in the region under the command of Combined Task Force 150. We created a Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA) to enable warships to work in concert with each other to protect vital shipping in the GOA.

Merchant mariners are being encouraged to transit through the patrol area via Notices to Mariner messages and broadcasts over VHF radio. They have also been asked to share information with naval forces and with their fellow merchant mariners.

Coalition ships are in the area as part of our continual presence in this region. While they have conducted routine operations in the area in the past, the establishment of the MSPA focused efforts to prevent destabilizing activities in the region, while the IMO works the long-term international efforts.

The MSPA was not designed as a specific geographic area, but rather it was established as a moveable area placed atop the existing internationally recognized transit corridor.

This enabled the limited number of warships to protect a greater number of merchant vessels by concentrating them in numbers and in proximity. The MSPA has since proven to be an effective method of de-conflicting the many international warships that are now patrolling the GOA.

Ultimately, the solution to piracy is ashore, and involves removing the conditions which have enabled the pirates to operate with impunity from safe havens along more than 1800 miles of Somali coastline. The designation of the MSPA was originally intended as a near-term effort to allow the international political community time to establish a proper long-term legal framework for dealing with pirates. We also placed a significant emphasis on working with the merchant community identify and implement effective self-protective measures.

Combined Maritime Forces Counter-Piracy Campaign Plan

In order to assist and further the efforts of the Political/Diplomatic and Industrial/Maritime communities, CMF developed a counter-piracy campaign plan. This plan's operational design was developed with the purpose of outlining our efforts to engage the international community along Political/Legal, Informational/Industrial, and Military lines.

We focused our counter-piracy efforts on three main areas:

- International Naval Presence
- Improved Defensive Measures from the Shipping Industry
- International Legal Framework for Resolving Piracy Cases

Most importantly, we articulated that all of these areas must be addressed – none will be successful by itself.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

We have worked closely with the merchant shipping industry to share the lessons learned and best practices to help merchant mariners more effectively provide the first layer of defense against pirates who would target their vessels.

Some merchant mariners have clearly listened to our recommendations and lessons and have employed reasonable self-protection measures that discourage pirates from attempting to take their vessels. These measures have ranged from proactive lookouts and evasive maneuvering to using charged fire hoses to fend off attackers.

However, we have also recommended that shipping companies embark professional security teams to protect their ships, cargo, and crews. Security teams, whether they employ non-kinetic or kinetic means of deterring pirates add an important layer of defense measures to the equation. We don't have any indications that the pirates are going after specific targets – they are going after the easy targets.

The Establishment of Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151)

As noted in the introduction, we established Combined Task Force 151 in early January 2009. CTF 151 has been exclusively focused on conducting counter-piracy operations in the Central Command area of responsibility.

Following a growing international naval response, CMF determined that counter-piracy operations required the establishment of a stand alone task force. CTF-151 was formally established on 1 January 2009, and an initial core staff began to work with the staff of CTF-150 to develop the framework for the new task force. The task force became fully operational in the middle of January.

Establishing CTF-151 cleared up the lines of command. Not all nations participating in CTF-150 had national authorization to conduct counter-piracy operations. This allows coalition nations who have a national mandate to conduct counter-piracy operations to join CTF-151, and those nations without such authority to operate with CTF-150 or CTF-152 with their pre-established Maritime Security Operation mandates.

U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Terence “Terry” McKnight commands Combined Task Force 151.

Counter-piracy operations exemplify the basic principals of the Navy’s Maritime Strategy, including: Forward Presence, Deterrence, Sea Control, Power Projection, and Maritime Security.

Tactical and Operational Coordination and Deconfliction

As other nations and organizations like NATO and EUNAVFOR began to send ships to combat piracy, we quickly identified the need to coordinate and tactically de-conflict the efforts of the various task forces. It was imperative from an operational risk management perspective as well as an efficiency of mission perspective. Our forces took the initiative to share unclassified tactical and operational level information with any and all forces in the region conducting counter-piracy operations. The reality is that the vast majority of the material is unclassified.

Direct tactical and operational coordination with NATO and EU forces has led to successful interdiction and capture of suspect pirates, enabled the safe transit of otherwise vulnerable shipping, including World Food Programme ships, effective monitoring and intelligence gathering, as well as enhanced communication among an diverse international naval presence in the Gulf of Aden. To date, forces from the US, UK, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey and Yemen have conducted counter-

piracy operations. Some of these forces operate within alliances such as NATO or EU, some as part of the CMF coalition and some independently representing their own nation's interests. Additional forces from Japan, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Belgium, and Poland are expected to participate in the coming months.

All are in communication with CMF and with each other at some level, and there have been zero safety incidents resulting in injury or death of friendly forces due to lack of effective communication and coordination.

Since implementation of our campaign plan, a number of remarkable positive steps and effects have been achieved. The deployment of the naval forces from all of the nations identified above is a clear indication of the importance of maintaining security in the sea lines of communication.

Shared Awareness and DE-confliction (SHADE) Working Group

CMF has also established SHADE to ensure the various naval forces are working in concert. This is a staff-level group of officers from the various operational headquarters who meet regularly to ensure the naval forces conducting counter-piracy operations are coordinating effectively. The products from this group include the establishment of the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC), and the incorporation of the Fleet Exercise Web (FEXWEB), which is an unclassified internet-based information sharing forum, similar to a chat room. FEXWEB is hosted by the European Union Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) headquarters in Northwood, UK.

Our initial track record

CMF and other cooperating naval forces have encountered and disarmed approximately 250 pirates: 130 were released, 110 turned over for prosecution, and 7 are pending final disposition.

Pirate capacity has been further impacted by the seizure or destruction of 28 pirate vessels, 133 small arms, 28 Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), 51 RPG projectiles, 21 ladders/grappling hooks, 12 cell phones, and 4 GPS devices.

Despite these results, pirate capacity and number of attempts per month by the pirates have not been significantly reduced. Until the mid- to long-term goals of removing safe havens ashore are achieved, the military presence will be required to be robust. CMF will continue to pursue all elements of the campaign and will continue to seek cooperation, coordination, and de-confliction from all participants.

5. THE COSTS OF COUNTER-PIRACY OPERATIONS

U.S. Navy units operating as a part of Combined Task Force 151 are units already deployed to the NAVCENT / FIFTH Fleet Area of Responsibility. Total costs of the task force's counter-piracy operations from its establishment in January through 19 February 2009 are estimated at \$1.5 million. These costs include flight hours, steaming days, and supplies.

6. ADDITIONAL ASPECTS OF COUNTER-PIRACY OPERATIONS

The following sections provide additional information on issues related to piracy and CMF counter-piracy operations.

M/V FAINA – From Attack to Release/Humanitarian Support

The Motor Vessel FAINA was attacked off the coast of Somalia on September 25th. The roll-on/roll-off (Ro-Ro) ship is Belize flagged and operated by "Kaalbye Shipping Ukraine." While the ship initially had a crew of 21, the ship's captain reportedly suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after being taken hostage. The pirates refused all requests to

turn over the Captain's remains. The ship's remaining crew included 17 Ukrainian citizens, as well as two Russians and one Latvian.

For the more than four months that the ship was pirated, the U.S. Navy maintained a visual watch over this ship as it was anchored just off the Somali town of Hobyo. Assigned ships included the cruiser USS Vella Gulf (CG 72), the destroyers USS Howard (DDG 83) and USS Mason (DDG 87), and the Military Sealift Command's USNS Catawba. Operational support of FAINA was a U.S. Navy-only (vs. Coalition / CTF 150/151) operation, and there were no Coalition naval vessels taking part in this specific mission. This was due to the fact that U.S. ships were under national tasking.

The Norfolk-based destroyer, USS Mason (DDG 87) provided humanitarian assistance support to the crew of the M/V FAINA following the ship's release by Somali pirates. A medical corpsman from Mason checked on the health of the crew, and found them to be in good health. The remains of the ship's Captain were also repatriated.

The U.S. Navy fleet ocean tug USNS Catawba (T-ATF 168) provided logistics support to M/V FAINA and her crew – including fuel and water. USNS Catawba is one of four 226-foot-long fleet ocean tugs operated by the Navy's Military Sealift Command.

Days later, the Captain of the FAINA sent thank you letters to the Captains and crews of the U.S. Navy vessels that had kept watch over the ship. The letters were signed by members of the FAINA crew. Copies of those letters are included at the end of this document.

The Supertanker SIRIUS STAR

On November 15, 2008 the very large crude tanker Sirius Star was attacked more than 450 nautical miles southeast of Mombasa, Kenya. The ship is flagged in Liberia, owned by the Saudi Arabian-based Saudi Aramco, and operated by Vela International. The crew

of 25 includes citizens of Croatia, Great Britain, the Philippines, Poland, and Saudi Arabia.

The attack on the Sirius Star set several precedents:

- The ship was the largest pirated in this region: more than 300,000 metric tons, almost three times the tonnage of a Nimitz class aircraft carrier
- It was attacked more than 450 nautical miles southeast of Mombasa, Kenya
- The ship has a freeboard of approximately 10 meters (33 feet)

This SIRIUS STAR attack occurred amid a decrease in the rate of successful pirate attacks on merchant vessels off the coast of Somalia.

The ship was released early on the morning of January 10th, after payment was made via an air drop.

Memorandum of Understanding with Kenya

The United States is consulting with the Government of Kenya about the transfer of suspected pirates for purposes of prosecution in Kenyan courts. However, we're not yet in a position to say where prosecution might take place. There are many possible venues, including the states associated with the victims of these attacks.

Piracy is a universal crime under international law and many states have implemented domestic legislation criminalizing piracy. Moreover, Kenya and the United States have entered into an MOU under which Kenya would prosecute pirates that had been interdicted by U.S. forces.

We are grateful to Kenya in this regard, and want to stress that regardless of where the prosecution takes place, the United States believes that all the affected states must play a role and share the burden in bringing suspected pirates to justice.

Legal Authorities for Holding Suspected Pirates

The legal authority to hold pirates on board a Navy ship is customary and conventional international law, coupled with the recent United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Piracy in Somalia (UNSCR 1816, 1838, 1846, 1851). It is customary international law that every State may seize pirate ships and arrest persons suspected of piracy; they must use "warships, or military aircraft or other ships and aircraft clearly marked and identifiable as being on government service and authorized to that effect" to do so. The persons can be held on board the vessels until appropriate arrangements can be made to move them ashore to an appropriate jurisdiction. There is no standard time period requirement.

The suspected pirates have the right to be treated humanely. The pirates' rights with respect to alleged offenses depend on the country that agrees to take them for prosecution. Since piracy is a universal crime, all countries have the right to prosecute them. Whether a particular country has taken steps to create a domestic legal regime for prosecution of piracy and what limitations that regime may have is a separate issue.

We have a number of Somali translators aboard our vessels. We also have basic communication cards with pictures that aid in the communication process.

The task force commander's staff assembles evidence and forwards the material to the legal staff of the Combined Maritime Forces / NAVCENT. The materials will be reviewed, and a recommendation will be made to the Commander, who will determine whether to pursue prosecution or release the individuals. We have embarked security personnel - to include the Naval Criminal Investigative Service - who are experienced in evidence collection and processing.

Each situation is likely to be different. If the vessel they were operating was determined to be sea worthy, suspected pirates may be returned to their vessel -- without their

weapons. If their vessel is not sea worthy, we will make arrangements to ensure they are safely repatriated.

Safe and Humane Treatment for Suspected Pirates

Currently suspected pirates are housed onboard USNS Lewis and Clark in two separate converted storage facilities. Each Suspect Pirate is given a foam mat and blanket, as well as coveralls and shoes. They are provided three meals per day, allowed to shower, and issued fresh clothing every other day. Navy medical personnel evaluate their health daily. They are handled with the utmost of care and monitored by United States Marine Corps security personnel who are trained in handling these situations. Our trained Somali translators have been invaluable to facilitate communication

The Presence of International Navies and Their Missions

EU – Operation ATALANTA

As noted previously, our coalition forces work closely with a number of international naval forces deployed to the region to conduct counter-piracy operations. In accordance with Resolutions 1814 (2008), 1816 (2008) and 1838 (2008) of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the EU decided to conduct a maritime military operation to contribute to the deterrence, prevention and repression of acts of piracy and armed robbery off the Somali coast and in the broader area.

UNSC Resolution 1838 (2008) of 7 October 2008 commends the ongoing planning process towards a possible EU naval operation and urges States that have the capacity to do so to cooperate with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia in the fight against piracy and armed robbery at sea. The UN Security Council also urges States and regional organizations to continue to take action to protect the World Food Programme (WFP) maritime convoys.

The EU has publically stated that it is very concerned by the recent proliferation of acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea against vessels off the coast of Somalia, and by the serious threat it poses:

- to the prompt, safe and effective delivery of humanitarian aid to Somalia,
- to international navigation and the safety of commercial maritime routes, and
- to fishing activities conducted in conformity with international law

In the deployment of its forces, the EU has reaffirmed its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia. The eradication of piracy in the region will only be achievable through the restoration of peace in Somalia. To this end, the EU acts within a comprehensive approach to achieve a lasting settlement of the Somali crisis, covering its political, security and humanitarian aspects.

7. CONCLUSION

The risk of being pirated is statistically small, but we can not overlook the impact that it has on stability and security in the region.

The ultimate solution to the problem is ashore, and will be hard to solve. The U.S. Navy and our international Coalition partners are committed to maintaining a presence in the region. We will continue to prevent destabilizing activities such as piracy in the maritime domain, while the larger international community works to improve the conditions ashore in Somalia.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the committee and stand ready to answer any questions the members of the committee may have.

Viktor Nikolsky
Captain, M/V FAINA
Indian Ocean
February 2009

Dear Captain Mark Genung and the crew of USS VELLA GULF,

On behalf of myself and the crew, I wish to show my sincerest appreciation for all the support VELLA GULF has shown us during our four months of captivity under the Somali pirates. Our liberation would not have been possible without your constant presence. It is difficult for me to express my feelings towards you and your crew. Our lives were spared because you were here to protect us. You gave us the strength to endure the hardest of times. We will keep VELLA GULF and her crew in our hearts and prayers forever. We wish you a safe journey home and good health for all your days. Thanks for everything you have done.

Your friend,



Viktor Nikolsky
Captain, M/V FAINA

Crew of M/V FAINA:

[Handwritten signatures of crew members]

Viktor Nikolsky
Captain, M/V FAINA
Indian Ocean
February 2009

Dear Captain Charles Rodriguez and the crew of USNS CATAWBA,

On behalf of myself and the crew, I wish to show my sincerest appreciation for all the support CATAWBA has shown us during our four months of captivity under the Somali pirates. Our liberation would not have been possible without your constant presence. It is difficult for me to express my feelings towards you and your crew. Our lives were spared because you were here to protect us. You gave us the strength to endure the hardest of times. We will keep CATAWBA and her crew in our hearts and prayers forever. We wish you a safe journey home and good health for all your days. Thanks for everything you have done.

Your friend,



Viktor Nikolsky
Captain, M/V FAINA

Crew of M/V FAINA:

[Handwritten signatures of the crew members]