

IKE SKELTON, MISSOURI, CHAIRMAN
JOHN SPRATT, SOUTH CAROLINA
SOLOMON P. ORTIZ, TEXAS
GENE TAYLOR, MISSISSIPPI
NEIL ABERCROMBIE, HAWAII
SILVESTRE REYES, TEXAS
VIC SNYDER, ARKANSAS
ADAM SMITH, WASHINGTON
LORETTA SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
MIKE MCINTYRE, NORTH CAROLINA
ELLEN O. TAUSCHER, CALIFORNIA
ROBERT A. BRADY, PENNSYLVANIA
ROBERT ANDREWS, NEW JERSEY
SUSAN A. DAVIS, CALIFORNIA
JAMES R. LANGEVIN, RHODE ISLAND
RICK LARSEN, WASHINGTON
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
JIM MARSHALL, GEORGIA
MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO, GUAM
BRAD ELLSWORTH, INDIANA
PATRICK J. MURPHY, PENNSYLVANIA
HANK JOHNSON, GEORGIA
CAROL SHEA-PORTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JOE COURTNEY, CONNECTICUT
DAVID LOESACK, IOWA
JOE SESTAK, PENNSYLVANIA
GABRIELLE GIFFORDS, ARIZONA
NIKI TSONGAS, MASSACHUSETTS
GLENN NYE, VIRGINIA
CHELLIE PINGREE, MAINE
LARRY KISSELL, NORTH CAROLINA
MARTIN HEINRICH, NEW MEXICO
FRANK M. KRATOVIL, JR., MARYLAND
ERIC J.J. MASSA, NEW YORK
BOBBY BRIGHT, ALABAMA

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS

JOHN M. McHUGH, NEW YORK
ROSCOE G. BARTLETT, MARYLAND
HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, CALIFORNIA
MAC THORNBERY, TEXAS
WALTER B. JONES, NORTH CAROLINA
W. TODD AKIN, MISSOURI
J. RANDY FORBES, VIRGINIA
JEFF MILLER, FLORIDA
JOE WILSON, SOUTH CAROLINA
FRANK A. LGBIONDO, NEW JERSEY
ROB BISHOP, UTAH
MICHAEL TURNER, OHIO
JOHN KLINE, MINNESOTA
MIKE ROGERS, ALABAMA
TRENT FRANKS, ARIZONA
BILL SHUSTER, PENNSYLVANIA
CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS, WASHINGTON
K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, TEXAS
DOUG LAMBORN, COLORADO
ROB WITTMAN, VIRGINIA
MARY FALLIN, OKLAHOMA
DUNCAN HUNTER, CALIFORNIA
JOHN C. FLEMING, LOUISIANA
MIKE COFFMAN, COLORADO
THOMAS J. ROONEY, FLORIDA

ERIN C. CONATON, STAFF DIRECTOR

April 14, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I want to congratulate and thank you for your strong leadership with regard to the hijacking of the M/V MAERSK ALABAMA and the subsequent rescue of Captain Richard Phillips. Your consistent engagement played a crucial role in the safe return of a brave American. This event only highlights the fact that America will not stand for this type of criminal behavior and is prepared to do whatever is necessary to protect our people and our interests.

Despite the successful result of this recent incident, the problem of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia remains. The international effort, particularly Combined Task Force 151, has succeeded in thwarting a number of these attacks; however the overall number of successful hijackings has continued to rise. We have learned from past and present examples that the only way to deal with these criminals is to seek them out in the coastal safe havens where they are operating. Whether you look at the days of the Barbary pirates where the pirates were eventually defeated ashore in Algiers or the recent example in the Straits of Malacca where the combined forces of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore worked together to secure their waters. In both of these examples, the victory over the pirates came when they were denied safe havens ashore.

In Somalia, we are seeing the result of a failed state that does not have the capacity to deal with the criminals who are operating with impunity within coastal cities. In the long term, the international community will need to address the conditions contributing to Somalia's instability. Only a state with the full range of governmental functions will prevent these attacks in the future. I would like to understand at the nearest opportunity what options the administration is considering for dealing with this long-term challenge.

President Obama

April 14, 2009

Page Two

Establishing a working government in Somalia is undoubtedly the best solution to the problem of piracy in the region, but as I said, this is the long-term solution. We still must address the current problem: how to stop the attacks in the short term. I encourage you to pursue these pirates beyond the waters we are currently patrolling and into the safe havens where they are operating. Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution requires no less. Furthermore, established authorities such as United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1846 and 1851 have expanded the ability of international forces to conduct counter-piracy operations within Somali territory. This does not have to be a large operation. In most cases we already know the cities in which they are operating and often even the names of those organizing the attacks. Pirate attacks and rhetoric have only become more brazen in recent months and cannot be allowed to continue.

Until a long term solution to the lack of governance in Somalia is found, the only way we can sufficiently protect our interests in the region is by seeking out the criminals who are responsible for these attacks and hijackings and bring them to justice. I have long warned about the threat of international piracy and the consequences of allowing it to go unchecked. I would like to discuss with the appropriate members of your national security team the options the United States and our international partners should be considering for stemming these attacks and dealing with the longer-term issues of governance and stability in Somalia. I look forward to working with you to make progress on this critical issue.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ike Skelton", with a small dot at the end of the signature.

IKE SKELTON
Chairman

IS:pn