

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY
PDASD(ISA) COULTER TO THE HASC ON MARCH 5, 2009

Good morning Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McHugh, and members of the House Armed Services Committee. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to discuss counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. My name is Michael Coulter and I am the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. My office provides defense policy guidance for Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

In a moment, I'll introduce Vice Admiral Gortney, the naval commander of our military operations in the Gulf of Aden. He will go into the details of our efforts to combat piracy but before he does, I would like to take a brief minute to outline how we see piracy in the broader policy context.

Throughout our history, we have depended on maritime highways for a global transportation system that delivers goods and materials around the world. The concept of unimpeded sea lanes underpins the very meaning of an effective national security strategy...a strategy primarily based on global engagement and to protect and sustain the global, inter-connected, economic system through which we maintain our way of life. Today, freedom of access means the awareness and control of the entire spectrum of the maritime domain to ensure its access to good actors and deny its access to bad actors. From experience, we have come to learn that no one nation can single-handedly secure every ocean and every waterway around the world. And because the oceans play an indispensable role in the safety, security, and economic stability of the international community, all nations have a vital interest in ensuring that the maritime domain remains secure and open for the free and legitimate use of all.

For these reasons, the recent uptick in piracy in the Gulf of Aden has caused like-minded leaders in industry and government to unite to discuss what can be done, collectively, to unhinge and defeat the scourge of piracy. We, along with a number of other countries and international organizations, have now committed additional resources to this task. As you will hear from VADM Gortney, we are partnering together with traditional Allies, and with new partners, to achieve international interests. We will, in our collective effort, use the seas to unite and not divide.

The shaping function of this mission must be interagency as well as international. Only some of the tools required to shape the security environment, and to reach

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into the ungoverned sea spaces, reside in the U.S. or international navies. The root causes of piracy reside on land. The absence of a strong government in Somalia remains the single greatest challenge to regional security and provides freedom of action for those engaged in piracy along the Somali coast. We are therefore reaching out to interagency participants with their tools and even further into the private sectors. The net beneficiaries of these efforts in the international community must also be proud and robust contributors.

The Defense Department co-chairs with the State Department an interagency Counter Piracy Steering Group that addresses the full spectrum of anti- and counter-piracy efforts, from piracy prevention, to interruption and termination of acts of piracy, to ensuring the accountability of pirates. The Defense Department is also supporting the State Department through the recently-established Contact Group on Counter-Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, an international forum that is encouraging countries with a direct interest in countering piracy (including flag and crew States) to provide counter-piracy forces, track piracy financing, and accept custody of and prosecute suspected pirates when apprehended.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you again for this opportunity to appear before you today. Now, let me introduce and turn things over to Vice Admiral Gortney. Following Vice Admiral Gortney's comments, I would be happy to take any questions.