



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
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JAN 19 2001

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
UNDER SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE  
DIRECTOR, DEFENSE RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING  
ASSISTANT SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE  
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ASSISTANTS TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
DIRECTOR, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT  
DIRECTORS OF THE DEFENSE AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Assessment of Accountability Arising from the Attack on USS COLE (DDG-67) on  
12 October 2000

Combating terrorism, including the protection of our forces serving around the world, has long been a primary concern of the Department of Defense. In the aftermath of the attack on Khobar Towers in June 1996, the Department established a formal combating terrorism program and took significant steps to improve force protection efforts worldwide. We have made vast improvements in force protection measures since the Khobar Towers bombing.

To date, our focus has concentrated on land-based installations, which have, in fact, been made substantially more secure. Our adversaries, however, have concentrated on vulnerabilities in areas where we have not sufficiently focused our attention. Our challenge now is to identify those aspects of force protection that have not been the focus of our efforts, and to address those vulnerabilities.

U.S. forces face hostile, determined and clever terrorist adversaries, who will concentrate on our weaknesses rather than our strengths. In this instance, none of us in the chain of command fully appreciated the danger that our in-transit naval forces faced from a water-borne threat in restricted waters, such as during a port call or refueling stop. As a result, our nation suffered a terrible tragedy. We cannot allow such "seams" in our force protection efforts to develop or to remain. We must recognize that there will be instances when we will have no actionable intelligence alerting us to an imminent attack. It is incumbent on all of us, both in the operational chain of command and in the military departments, to concentrate on all aspects of the terrorist threat and all the capabilities of a determined foe who will seek to take advantage of our vulnerabilities.

I have reviewed the Navy Judge Advocate General's Manual (JAGMAN) Investigation (including the accompanying memorandum from the Secretary of the Navy) and the Crouch/Gehman (COLE Commission) report into the circumstances surrounding the attack on



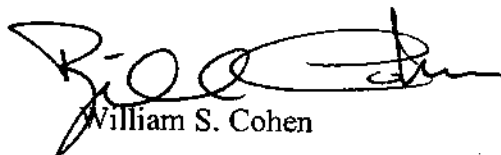
USS COLE (DDG-67) on 12 October 2000, and I have received the advice of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. By memorandum dated January 9, 2001, I have directed the Chairman to review the recommendations of the COLE Commission concerning force protection and to provide his advice on implementation of those recommendations. With respect to the issues of accountability addressed in the Navy's JAGMAN investigation, the Chairman and I concur with the findings, opinions and recommendations of that investigation, as modified by the endorsement of the Chief of Naval Operations, as well as the views of the Secretary of the Navy.

Both the JAGMAN investigation and the COLE Commission make clear that force protection was indeed a priority issue both at the shipboard level and above. Nonetheless, all of us who had responsibility for force protection of USS COLE -- including the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Navy, the Chairman, the CNO, CINCCENT, CINCLANTFLT, COMUSNAVCENT, and CTF-50, as well as the Commanding Officer of USS COLE --did not do enough to anticipate possible new threats.

We must seek to identify, in advance, the potential vulnerabilities where a determined adversary is most likely to strike. In this case, the fact that prior refuelings in Aden had proceeded without incident may have given rise to complacency about the threats faced by in-transit ships like USS COLE. An attack of this sort, although unprecedented, should not have been a surprise. Commanders at every level should continually test and probe every aspect of our force protection plans, including the assumptions underlying those plans, in order to identify the "seams" that make us vulnerable to terrorist attack. That is our fundamental obligation to our service personnel, whose dedication and courage are proven on a daily basis, and to their parents, spouses, and other loved ones, who look to us to protect them when they go in harm's way.

One other aspect of this incident deserves specific mention -- namely, the extraordinary professionalism and heroism of the COLE's Captain and crew in the aftermath of the attack. As the CNO noted, the crew's heroic actions saved the lives of many shipmates and saved the ship.

Finally, I join the endorsers of the Navy's JAGMAN investigation in paying tribute to the seventeen men and women of USS COLE who made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country. Their performance of duty was in the highest tradition of the U.S. Navy, and their sacrifice a vivid and somber reminder of the traditions and heritage of the United States Armed Forces. I extend my deepest sympathy to each member of every family whose loved ones were lost or injured in this act of terrorism. Our nation shall not forget their sacrifice, and we will not rest until all the perpetrators are identified and held accountable.



William S. Cohen

cc: CNO  
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