

**STATEMENT OF
MICHAEL A PERRY, CHIEF ENGINEER
MAERSK ALABAMA**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION AND
MERCHANT MARINE INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY,
AND SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND
TRANSPORTATION**

**HEARING ON
“PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEES: PROTECTING OUR
SHIPS, CREWS, AND PASSENGERS”**

MAY 5, 2009

Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Member Thune, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to come before you to discuss measures that will protect our ships, crews, and passengers. My name is Michael Anthony Perry and I was the Chief Engineer on board the MAERSK ALABAMA on April 8th, 2009 when it was attacked by pirates off the coast of Somalia. I am the latest in a long line of proud U.S. Mariners. My grandfather was a sailor in the U.S. Navy and my father was U.S. Merchant Marine throughout World War II. Attaining the rank of Lieutenant Commander, I served in the U.S. Navy for 23 years and received a meritorious commissioning in 1989. I am a member of the Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA) and have been a licensed U.S. Merchant Marine since 1995.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude toward my fellow colleagues aboard the MAERSK ALABAMA including my fellow licensed

engineers, deck officers, and crews. Their skills, training, and bravery were integral in maintaining the highest possible level of safety and security. Further, the leadership and determination demonstrated by Captain Phillips attests to his strong character. Second, the personnel at Maersk and Waterman Steamship Corp. handled the situation with the highest level of class and professionalism. From the moment they knew the vessel had been boarded to the moment I arrived home, I knew that me, my fellow crew members, and our families were their top priority. Finally, it goes without saying that the Administration, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Navy operated with the skill and expertise that they have proven to possess time after time.

The views that I express in my testimony are my own and I hope that all sectors of the industry will be considered and included when forming a comprehensive policy to address the issue of piracy. Through my years of service at sea, I hope to offer a firsthand account for you to take into consideration.

As demonstrated by the incident involving the MAERSK ALABAMA, when called into action, U.S. government military personnel are the best

equipped and most able to provide security to U.S.-flag vessels. They possess the training, weaponry, and authority to provide the security needed in order to address an immediate threat. Further, it is the obligation of the American government to protect the vessels that fly the U.S.-flag, carry U.S. mariners, and transport U.S. cargo. Military escorts or detachments should be implemented as part of a comprehensive international plan to combat piracy.

Unfortunately, we have seen that the pirates' methods have become more sophisticated and unpredictable. This, coupled with the increase in pirate attacks, has made the issue more urgent. Having a large freeboard and maintaining speeds above 15 knots is no longer sufficient to ward off attacks. Also, the utility of traditional "hardening" measures such as fire hoses has decreased due to advancing techniques used by the pirates. Rather, our government must step up and act now to ensure that the U.S.-flag vessels that operate in these waters have the force protection necessary to protect the vessel, its cargo, and crew. As demonstrated by the attack on the LIBERTY SUN, the pirates are no longer solely interested in a financial transaction. They are willing to use deadly weapons and that put the crews, cargo, and vessels in immediate danger. On Friday, May 1st,

a Portuguese warship reported stopping a pirate attack against an oil tanker involving explosives. This type of attack would be disastrous. The pirates have clearly raised the stakes.

While carriers are implementing new, advanced hardening measures more must be done in order to minimize or eliminate the threat posed by piracy. I recommend that straightforward procedures be put in place should the pirates be able to board a vessel in the future. A well-trained watch team can spot danger far in advance which, coupled with strengthened piracy procedures, would help to minimize the risk to the vessel, the cargo, and, most importantly, the crew.

The crews aboard U.S.-flag vessels are highly trained and have specific roles and responsibilities when at sea. Simply "arming the crew" would place an undue physical, mental, legal, and moral burden on the crew. Arming the crew should only be considered as part of a larger comprehensive strategy and only then as a last resort.

I am very proud of my colleagues aboard the MAERSK ALABAMA.

Although the crew was able to survive the incident relatively unscathed, the

threat posed by armed pirates was very real. In fact, Captain Phillips was taken hostage and spent five days aboard a life boat with an AK-47 in his back. Due to the heroic actions of the entire crew however, the pirates were at no point in control of the vessel. Going forward, strong preventative measures must be enacted in order to protect the lives of U.S. Merchant Mariners. In the short term, this can best be accomplished through military escorts and/or detachments.

The long-term comprehensive solution calls for a response both at sea and ashore. The root causes of piracy must be addressed internationally.

There are hundreds of mariners being held hostage aboard pirated vessels across the world and the U.S. Government's resources alone are not enough to fix the problem.

Every mariner aboard the MAERSK ALABAMA deserves credit for the safe return of the ship and crew and I look forward to sailing with each and every one of them in the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

