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MEMORANDUM

From: CDR Kirk S. Lippold, USN, Commanding Officer USS COLE (DDG67)

Subj: OBSERVATION OF EVENTS SURROUNDING THE EXPLOSION ONBOARD USS COLE (DDG 67) ON 12 OCTOBER 2000

1. I am Commander Kirk S. Lippold, USN, Commanding Officer, USS COLE (DDG 67). I am a [redacted] graduate of the United States Naval Academy and have served continuously on active duty since commissioning on [redacted]. I reported onboard USS COLE on 14 June 1999 and assumed command on 25 June 1999. The purpose of this statement is to state the facts surrounding events leading up to the explosion onboard USS COLE (DDG 67) on 12 October 2000.

2. COLE was detached on 06 October 2000 by CTF 60 from operations in the Adriatic and the ship began a 21-knot SOA transit to Port Said, Egypt. COLE arrived at Port Said on 08 October 2000, anchored, and made preparations for conducting the Suez Canal Transit.

3. The Suez Canal transit was conducted on 09 October 2000 starting at 0357 and ending at 1511. During the course of the transit, four pilots were embarked. All of them were professional and courteous with varying degrees of competency. When the second pilot embarked, COLE was offered the opportunity to embark vendors to sell local made products and goods. I questioned why we needed to embark them and was ensured that this was a normal procedure and that the company, Charly Brown, was a well known vendor who had done this on many occasions with other U.S. Navy ships during their Suez Canal Transit. I granted permission with the stipulation that they were to be escorted at all times and would only be allowed to sell their wares on the Mess Decks. The vendors debarked the ship at the conclusion of the transit. I had remained on the Bridge throughout the transit and never saw nor met any of the vendors. Upon conclusion of the Suez Canal transit, COLE began a 25-knot transit to Aden, Yemen, to conduct a brief stop for fuel.

4. Prior to and during COLE's deployment, a number of exercises and drills were conducted which prepared COLE for possible operations that might be experienced on deployment. These included both damage control exercises

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as well as force protection exercises. I also took measures to ensure the ship was properly postured and ready to implement force protection measures during deployment. Some of the key actions I undertook included the following:

a. During every underway period during deployment, COLE conducted at least one General Quarters exercise which focused on integrated multiple-hit battle problems. COLE also conducted engineering drills including Main Space Fire drills in preparation for a deployment Machinery Condition Assessment. These drills were scheduled at Planning Board for Training and listed in both the Plan of the Week and the Plan of the Day.

b. Focused Repair Locker training was conducted to ensure the crew stayed trained and the level of knowledge remained high in both general damage control and in CBR defense. These training sessions included training on the Mess Decks with the Damage Control Training Team as well as General Quarters drills. This training was scheduled at Planning Board for Training and listed in both the Plan of the Week and the Plan of the Day.

c. Force protection exercises were conducted inport prior to deployment to exercise the Security Alert Teams and the duty section received training in protection of the ship. These drills were scheduled at Planning Board for Training and listed in both the Plan of the Week and the Plan of the Day.

d. Prior to the George Washington Battle Group's Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX), COLE participated in a Commander in Chief U.S. Atlantic Fleet Force Protection exercise. At the conclusion of the exercise, COLE was specifically commended for the aggressive force protection stance that was maintained throughout the exercise. The message was from Commander, SECOND FLEET - COMSECONDFLT 211445Z MAY 00.

e. Prior to, and during each port visit in the Mediterranean, I reviewed the threat assessment messages and force protection measures that required implementation during the visit. For each port visit I ensured that each measure could be effectively implemented and directed the Force Protection Officer to ensure that the duty section was capable of maintaining the required posture.

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(1) During the port visit to Koper, Slovenia, and knowing the nature of the upcoming operations off the coast of Montenegro, I took a more aggressive stance with respect to force protection and unlike previous ports, I erected water-filled barriers and blocked access to the pier for vehicles. This action was questioned by the local port authorities and the military liaison officer since it had not been conducted by previous ships, but I remained adamant that the barriers must remain in place. The local authorities did not demand their removal.

f. In preparation for COLE's entrance into the Fifth Fleet Area of Operations (AOR), I made at least one 1MC announcement to the crew about our need for increased force protection. The fact that we would now be operating in a theater where the threat was much higher and the possibility of direct action being taken against the crew and ship was a real possibility, and was specifically addressed.

5. During the transit period from the Adriatic to Port Said, and then from the end of the Suez Canal transit to Aden, Yemen, the ship conducted a daily Operations/ Intelligence/Arabian University training on the Mess Decks. All key Bridge and CIC watchstanders were required to attend, including most E-7 and above personnel. During these briefings, the threat levels for the Fifth Fleet region were discussed in detail.

6. Prior to any port visit, COLE was required to submit a force protection plan for the port. This plan, called an Inport Security Plan (ISP), was submitted to our Immediate Superior in the Chain of Command (ISIC). In this message, I would list what force protection measures would be implemented in the port based on the threat assessment and threat condition.

a. The message used as a reference for both the THREAT CONDITION and THREAT LEVEL for Aden, Yemen, was a Navy Criminal Investigative Service Foreign Office, Bahrain, message NAVCRIMINVSERVFO MIDDLE EAST BAHRAIN 081641Z SEP 99, SUBJ: THREAT ASSESSMENT AND SECURITY OVERVIEW - ADEN, YEMEN (U). It is classified SECRET, but contains information a number of threats in the area.

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b. The ISP for Aden, Yemen, was submitted to Commanding Task Force 50 (CTF 50) by COLE via naval message: USS COLE 071856Z OCT 00.

c. The threat assessment for Aden, Yemen, determined this port to be a threat level of HIGH.

d. The threat condition for the region, based on Fifth Fleet direction, was CONDITION BRAVO.

e. At the time the ISP was submitted, COLE did not know what berth we would be assigned nor did we know what area of the harbor it would be located in. Based on our lack of this information, I submitted a message that would comply with all required provisions and would adjust them as appropriate based upon circumstances once were knew both the pier COLE would be berthed at and the area of the harbor the ship would be located.

f. In a message to CTF 50 - USS COLE 071856Z OCT 00 - COLE proposed implementation of all THREATCON LEVEL ALPHA measures: 1-25, and all THREATCON LEVEL BRAVO measures: 1-62. THREATCON BRAVO measures included all THREATCON ALPHA measures. Since I did not know any of the port information, I recommended no deviations be incorporated in the message. No other ships were scheduled to be inport with COLE; therefore no coordination was required. Additionally, since the stop was only a brief stop for fuel (BSF) I did not require any coordination prior to arrival with any host nation authorities.

g. USS COLE's ISP was approved by CTF 50 via naval message: CTF 50 102230Z OCT 00. There were no recommended changes to our proposal.

h. Prior to COLE's arrival in Aden, a naval message from Director, Naval Criminal Investigative Service (DIRNAVCRIMINVSERV 082100Z OCT 00) was received which approved a new methodology for classifying terrorist threats. The message reiterated policy direction from the Assistant Secretary of Defense - Special Operations Low Intensity Conflict (ASD-SOLIC) and created the new terrorism threat level methodology for use by the Department of Defense. The new methodology employs four terrorism threat levels: HIGH, SIGNIFICANT, MODERATE, and LOW. This message also listed the New Level and Old Level

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country threat levels. Yemen had been reclassified from HIGH to SIGNIFICANT - a decrease in threat level.

The ASD-SOLIC policy was Threat Level HIGH based on the last NCIS-ATAC Force Protection Summary message. The policy change from ASD-SOLIC and promulgated by NAVCRIMINVSERV lowered the requirements for force posture. On 11 October 2000, LT [redacted] (USS COLE's Force Protection Officer) discussed with me the potential for reduced force protection requirements. After a brief discussion, we both agreed that the force protection measures, as required by THREATCON BRAVO, would remain the same. Our situational awareness was centered around a threat level of HIGH vice SIGNIFICANT, since this would leave us at a higher readiness posture upon entering Fifth Fleet and Aden, Yemen.

7. The force protection level briefed to me and subsequently covered with the crew via both the OPS/INTEL/Arabian University forum and in discussions with the crew on the 1MC. I specifically addressed my concerns about force protection at the OPS/INTEL/Arabian University while enroute to the Suez Canal transit. During this meeting, I covered a number of readiness issues.

a. COLE's readiness for entering the Fifth Fleet AOR. We had trained and been tested during recent Adriatic Operations. We could now be confident that we were ready to enter a theater where the threat of attack was a very real possibility.

b. The fact that while our guard may have been up while operating in the Adriatic, it did not carry with it the level of tension and require near the readiness posture for defense of the ship. I addressed our force protection posture for both underway and inport, specifically addressing the need to be vigilant and don't trust anyone. I spoke of our need, now more than before, to maintain the integrity of the buddy system. It wasn't that many our allies in the region didn't have our interests at heart, but there were elements in their society that disagreed with them and would use violence to make a statement.

c. The Executive Officer followed up my statements at the OPS/INTEL/Arabian University by addressing the crew on the 1MC. He specifically covered a number of issues.

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a. The ongoing and escalating conflict between the Israeli's and the Palestinians

b. The affect these rising tensions might have on surrounding Arab countries, including those we were scheduled to visit in Fifth Fleet

c. An explanation of why liberty had been curtailed in Bahrain

d. The explanation that personnel must remain clear of the AN/SPY-1D decks during the Suez Canal transit, since we would be transiting with the radar radiating to ensure we could respond to an airborne threat. This weapons configuration is not standard for this type of transit due to the proximity to land, but the perceived increase in a possible threat to COLE drove me to continuously radiate during the transit.

e. The fact that Egyptian vendors would be onboard the ship and would require continuous escort throughout the Suez Canal transit.

8. On 11 October 2000, the Assistant Force Protection Officer routed the THREATCON Measure Implementation Plan (from the C5F SUPP) which I approved. Since we didn't know what the pier configuration would be, I approved implementation of all measures for THREATCON ALPHA and THREATCON BRAVO. At the time of approval, and since I assumed worst case from a force protection posture, there were no random or waived measures. After mooring in Aden, Yemen, the following THREATCON ALPHA and THREATCON BRAVO measures were not implemented for the reasons indicated:

THREATCON ALPHA

MEASURE	REASON FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION
6. Post qualified armed Pier and Pier Entrance sentries	Due to the configuration of the fueling dolphin, no brow was put down onto the pier; however, an armed quarterdeck watch was established and access could be controlled by the quarterdeck
8. Issue night vision	USS COLE was not expected to

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devices to selected security personnel	remain inport after dark, therefore goggles were not issued. Goggles were available
10. Coordinate Pier/Fleet Landing security with collocated forces and local authorities	No other ships were inport requiring coordination and due to the location of the pier and length of visit, no local authorities needed to be consulted
12. Establish unloading zones on pier away from ship	There was no cargo to be loaded on the ship at this port
13. Deploy barriers (400 foot standoff)	Configuration of the fueling dolphin did not require deployment of barriers since no vehicles other than boats could gain access to the dolphin
14. Post signs in local language	Since Aden Port Control controlled access to the refueling dolphin, signs were not required. Also, no visitors were expected other than husbanding agent
15. Inspect vehicles entering pier	No vehicles other than boats had access to the refueling dolphin
17. Liberty boats make security tour around ship	Liberty was not authorized for Aden and no liberty boats were contracted for use
22. Rig hawsepipe covers and rat guards on lines, cables and hoses	COLE's anchor was left at the dip and due to the short time period of the visit, it was deemed not necessary to install these devices
24. Conduct security drills	Due to the length of the visit, a drill was not deemed

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	necessary due to the potential disruption to refueling operations

THREATCON BRAVO

MEASURE	REASON FOR NON-IMPLEMENTATION
27. Review liberty policy	No liberty was authorized for Aden, Yemen.
30. Remind personnel to lock and inspect vehicles before entering	No vehicles were on the refueling dolphin, nor were any rented for the visit
31. Designate picket boat crew, have on a 15 min alert status	COLE was moored starboard side to and the RHIBs were not lowered and used while inport. The security risk of having the boats in the water on 15 min. alert was deemed a greater risk than leaving them in the skids for the short length of the visit
32. Place armed brow watch on pier	Due to the location and configuration of the refueling dolphin, along with its controlled access, the minimal manning of the dolphin with only the refueling crew, and the fact that no brow had been put across, an armed quarterdeck watch was deemed sufficient security
33. Restrict vehicle access to pier and discontinue parking on pier	No vehicles were on the refueling dolphin, nor were any rented for the visit
45. Conduct pier searches	Due to the configuration of the refueling dolphin, and the fact that no brow had lowered, all areas on the pier were visible and could be observed

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	from the ship
56. Lay out fire hoses	Due to the configuration of the refueling dolphin, and the fact that no brow had been lowered onto the dolphin, access to the quarterdeck was considered secure enough that fire hoses were deemed not necessary
57. Obstruct helo landing area	Due to the short duration of the visit, the flight deck had not been completely blocked since all lines and line handling equipment was still laid out
60. Implement additional measures for high risk personnel	No high risk personnel were expected to visit the ship

9. On 11 October 2000, the Force Protection Officer and I met concerning Weapons Posture and Conditions of Readiness for CTF 50 upon entering Aden, Yemen. We agreed to remain at the level delineated in CTF 50 111800Z OCT 00 with the following exceptions:

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10. A Navigation Brief for entering Aden, Yemen, was held at 1900 11 October 2000. During the course of the brief, the point was brought up about which side COLE would moor. I stated that the ship would moor starboard side to so that in the event we needed to get underway in a hurry, we could axe the lines, get underway from the pier and leave Aden as quickly as possible. During this portion of the Navigation Brief, the point was raised that when USS DONALD COOK had conducted their BSF in Aden approximately two months prior

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to our arrival, the pilot had wanted them to moor port side to as well. The CO had to be very adamant that he would not moor in that configuration and after a heated discussion with the pilot, DONALD COOK was allowed to moor starboard side to. I noted that it was obvious they had had the same security considerations that we had and that we were making the correct decision by mooring starboard side to. There was complete agreement by all attendees that this was the preferred method for mooring.

11. On the morning of 12 October 2000, I arose around 0400 in preparation for entering port early. Our scheduled arrival time at the pilot pickup point was 0700. The XO had scheduled Sea and Anchor Detail for 0545. I arrived on the Bridge at 0534 and remained there until Sea and Anchor Detail was called away at 0549. Once the detail was manned and ready, I had the Tactical Communicator contact Aden Port Control to see if the pilot pickup time could be moved up to accomodate a 0630 pilot pickup time.

Aden port control had poor communications via Bridge to Bridge and kept claiming that COLE was weak and unreadable. We tried both installed and hand-held means of communication to no avail. After numerous tries, at about 0645, Aden Port Control gave the ship permission to meet the pilot and enter port at 0730 - a delay of thirty minutes from the original schedule. Since the ship was only 0.5 miles from the pilot pickup point, I ordered the ship to slow to bare steerageway and conduct maneuvers as necessary to avoid shoal water and remain in the vicinity of the pilot pickup point.

At approximately 0730, the pilot boat was seen in the inner Harbor and was making its approach to the pilot pickup point. Aden Port Control contacted COLE and told me to enter the channel into the port. I did not proceed into the harbor. I did not want to go into those restricted channel waters without the pilot embarked and decided to remain near the pilot pickup point until the pilot had embarked.

Although I did not enter the entrance channel, I began to point the channel and set the restricted maneuvering doctrine at 0736. At 0746, the pilot embarked COLE and was escorted to the Bridge. After I met him, he engaged in little conversation and requested a cup of hot tea to drink. I proceeded into the channel and into port at 5

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knots. During the course of the initial transit, the pilot informed me that the ship would be going port side to the pier. I told him I had requested and had been approved for a starboard side to the fueling dolphin berth. He stated that the ship must go port side to due to the fueling dolphin configuration. I did not discuss the situation again for a few minutes then I approached the pilot again and stated that I must go starboard side to the dolphin due to my fueling configuration. He again explained that I must go port side to and I questioned him as to why. He stated that the pier connection would not reach back aft if I were starboard side to the pier. I quickly explained to him that I could take on fuei forward on the starboard side, therefore, I could accomplish both his goal of refueling the ship with a short refueling hose and I could go starboard side to the fueling dolphin. It was only after this explanation that the pilot relented and he agreed to let the ship moor starboard side to the fueling dolphin.

Continuing into the harbor, COLE stayed at 5 knots until well into the eastern harbor entrance when the pilot requested the ship speed up. I increased speed to 10 knots until into the inner basin to the northeast where I made up only the forward tug. The forward tug was made up through the bullnose. Once into the center of the basin, I began a port twist, with the assistance of the two tugs, to turn the ship and get it positioned prior to being pushed into the fueling dolphin. Once turned around, the forward tug was cast off and both tugs commenced slowly pushing the ship into the fueling dolphin.

Due to the short length of the fueling dolphin and the configuration of the bollards on the pier, lines 1 and 6 were passed via small working boats to mooring buoys off the bow and stern of the ship. These boats made their approach to the ship approximately 0830. Each of these line-handling boats were small craft with a dirty white hull, open cockpit, inboard motor, and about 25 feet in length. They were manned by a 3-4 man crew on each boat. Both lines tended fore and aft, respectively, vice the normal configuration of being perpendicular to the ship. Lines 2, 3, 4, and 5 were made up to the dolphin with lines 2 and 3 on the same bollard, and lines 4 and 5 made up to two separate bollards aft.

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The ship passed its first line to the fueling dolphin and was moored at 0849. For the next twenty-five minutes I struggled with the pilot and the tugs to get the ship settled out alongside the dolphin. I needed to be in a position where the ship was resting on the two large fenders along the dolphin while also minimizing the distance to fueling hose had to run to be connected to refueling station 3. The pilot became very agitated and impatient about the mooring process and I explained to him that every time his tugs would pin me next to the dolphin, if they did not continue to push or they pushed off center, it would cause the ship to move. Consequently, the ship would move forward or aft about 10-12 feet every time. Finally, at about 0925, the ship had all lines doubled and I secured from restricted maneuvering at 0927. The pilot was then escorted off the ship and COLE secured from Sea and Anchor Detail at 0930. Prior to his departure, I confirmed that COLE would have the same pilot for getting underway.

12. After the pilot was escorted off the ship, I proceeded down to my cabin. Approximately 0945, the Supply Officer approached me and recommended that the ship take a garbage barge alongside to dump trash. I did not want to take the barge alongside since we were only going to be inport for a short period of time and I did not see any need to spend the money. A few minutes later, I was again approached by both the Executive Officer and Supply Officer who stated that the garbage barge was exceptionally reasonable ($150.00 USD) and that it would also accept all of the ship's plastic waste. Given the minimal fees, I relented and agreed to accept the garbage barge alongside for the disposal of trash. I do know when the barge was made up alongside, nor do I know when it departed.

13. Approximately 1005, the Main Propulsion Assistant, LTJG [redacted] approached me get permission to take on fuel. I looked at the refueling checklist and noted that the Engineer Officer had not signed the list. I sent the MPA away and told him that I wanted the Engineer Officer to sign it first, before I signed it and granted permission to commence refueling. Approximately 1030, the MPA returned with the inport refueling checklist, I signed it, asked if we were ready in all respects to commence refueling, to which he replied yes, and then I signed the inport refueling checklist and granted permission to commence refueling.

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14. I spent the next forty-five minutes reviewing message traffic and reading my e-mails. During this time, the XO and I discussed the schedule for the afternoon and I expressed my desire to get out of port as soon as feasible. The XO went to check with the Engineer concerning the pumping rate. When he returned, he stated that the refueling rate was much faster than anticipated. In fact, the rate had to be slowed down to avoid overpressurizing the tanks. Based on the pumping rate from the Engineer, the XO estimated that it would take about two hours to finish refueling and that the ship would be ready to get underway shortly after securing from lunch.

15. I was sitting in my cabin when the explosion occurred at 1118.

Kirk S. Lippold

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Commanding Officer
USS COLE (DDG 67)
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