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**DoD USS COLE  
COMMISSION**

# USS COLE Commission Report

Learning from the  
attack on the  
USS COLE...  
implications for  
protecting transiting  
U.S. forces from  
terrorist attack



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# DoD USS COLE COMMISSION REPORT

9 January 2001

Since the attack on Khobar Towers in June 1996, the Department of Defense (DoD) has made significant improvements in protecting its service members, mainly in deterring, disrupting and mitigating terrorist attacks on installations. The attack on USS COLE (DDG 67), in the port of Aden, Yemen, on 12 October 2000, demonstrated a seam in the fabric of efforts to protect our forces, namely in-transit forces. Our review was focused on finding ways to improve the US policies and practices for deterring, disrupting and mitigating terrorist attack on US forces in transit.

## 1. Overseas Presence since the End of the Cold War

Our review was based on the premise that worldwide presence and continuous transit of ships, aircraft and units of the United States military support the engagement elements of both the National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy and are in the nation's best interest. The US military is conducting overseas operations in a new post-Cold War world environment characterized by unconventional and transnational threats. Operating in this new world exposes US forces to terrorist attacks and requires a major effort in force protection. This major effort will require more resources and, in some cases, a better use of existing resources for protecting transiting units. The net result of our recommendations is a form of operational risk management applied at both the national and operational levels to balance the benefits with the risks of overseas operations. We determined that the "fulcrum" of this balance is usually the Unified Commander-in-Chief's (CINC) Service Component Commander; therefore, a significant number of our recommendations are designed to improve that commander's antiterrorism/force protection (AT/FP) capabilities.

We organized our findings at both the national and operational levels into the five functional areas of organization, antiterrorism/force protection, intelligence, logistics and training.

## 2. National Level Policies and Practices

Conducting engagement activities (including those by transiting forces) in higher threat areas in support of the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy requires completely coordinated priorities, policies and oversight at all levels. The pervasive and enduring threat calls for some adjustments to national level policies and procedures.

### a. Organization

Unity of effort among the offices and agencies in DoD providing resources, policy, oversight and direction is critical to truly gain the initiative over a very adaptive, persistent, patient and tenacious terrorist. This unity of effort extends also to the coordination of engagement activities across US Government agencies, including developing the security capabilities of host nations to help protect US forces and balancing the range and frequency of activities among all agencies.



### **b. Antiterrorism/Force Protection**

In force protection, we identified seven national level policy and procedural improvements to better support AT/FP for transiting units. Five of the seven address additional resources and two address procedural changes. They are covered in the findings.

### **c. Intelligence**

Intelligence priorities and resources have shifted from Cold War focus to new and emerging threats only at the margins. We, like other commissions before us, recommend the reprioritization of resources for collection and analysis, including human intelligence and signal intelligence, against the terrorist. Intelligence production must be refocused and tailored to overwatch transiting units to mitigate the terrorist threat. Furthermore, an increase in counterintelligence (CI) resources dedicated to combating terrorism and development of clearer CI assessment standards is required.

### **d. Logistics**

Logistics practices and policies can impact force protection if imaginatively applied. We believe the current level of Combat Logistics Force oilers is sufficient to support the refueling and logistics requirements of the national strategy. The regional logistics support structure must provide the Component Commander the opportunity and flexibility to adapt operational patterns to minimize exposure to threats.

### **e. Training**

We believe most firmly that the US military must create an integrated system of training that produces a unit that is clearly and visibly ready, alert and capable. To achieve this level of AT/FP proficiency, AT/FP training must be elevated to the same priority as primary mission training. The level of competence with which units execute force protection must be the same level for which primary combat skills are executed; and we must develop and resource credible deterrence standards; deterrence specific tactics, techniques and procedures; and defensive equipment packages.

## **3. Operational Level Lessons Learned**

The links between national policies/resources and individual transiting units are the Unified CINCs and their Component Commanders. Transiting units do not have time or resources to focus on a series of locations while in transit, requiring these units to rely on others to support their efforts to deter, disrupt and mitigate terrorist attacks. We think it is the Component Commander who has the operational war-fighting mindset for the region and is capable of controlling the resources to fight the fight and tailor specific AT/FP measures to protect transiting units. Below we identify operational level recommendations in the areas of antiterrorism/force protection, intelligence, logistics, and training for improving AT/FP support to transiting units.



**a. Antiterrorism/Force Protection**

First, we must get out of the purely defensive mode by proactively applying AT/FP techniques and assets to detect and deter terrorists. Second, transfer of transiting units between and within theaters must be better coordinated. Third, a discrete operation risk management model should be adopted and utilized in AT/FP planning and execution.

**b. Intelligence**

Independent transiting units must be better trained and resourced to provide appropriate requests for information to force intelligence organizations to be responsive to the transiter's AT/FP requirements.

**c. Logistics**

While classifying the logistics request and diplomatic clearance request processes is not practical, implementation of the recommendations in this Report is required to mitigate the AT/FP effects of public knowledge of movements.

**d. Training**

Predeployment training regimes must include deterrence tactics, techniques and procedures; deterrence AT/FP measures specific to the area of operation; and equipment rehearsals.

The AT/FP training provided to unit commanding officers and force protection officers and the tools necessary to sustain an AT/FP training program need increased attention.

In summary, we found Component Commanders are the fulcrum of a balance with the benefits of engagement on one side and the associated risks/costs on the other side. Our review suggests there is much we can do to help the field commander reach the proper balance. Taken as a whole, the Commission's recommendations are intended to enhance the tools available to commanders in making this balance.



## Unclassified Findings and Recommendations Summary

### Organization

**Finding:** Combating terrorism is so important that it demands complete unity of effort at the level of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

- *Recommendation:* Secretary of Defense develop an organization that more cohesively aligns policy and resources within DoD to combat terrorism and designate an Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) to oversee these functions.

**Finding:** The execution of the engagement element of the National Security Strategy lacks an effective, coordinated interagency process, which results in a fragmented engagement program that may not provide optimal support to in-transit units.

- *Recommendation:* Secretary of Defense support an interagency process to provide overall coordination of US engagement.

**Finding:** DoD needs to spearhead an interagency, coordinated approach to developing non-military host nation security efforts in order to enhance force protection for transiting US forces.

- *Recommendation:* Secretary of Defense coordinate with Secretary of State to develop an approach with shared responsibility to enhance host nation security capabilities that result in increased security for transiting US forces.

### Antiterrorism/Force Protection (AT/FP)

**Finding:** Service manning policies and procedures that establish requirements for full-time Force Protection Officers and staff billets at the Service Component level and above will reduce the vulnerability of in-transit forces to terrorist attacks.

- *Recommendation:* Secretary of Defense direct the Services to provide Component Commanders with full-time force protection officers and staffs that are capable of supporting the force protection requirements of transiting units.

**Finding:** Component Commanders need the resources to provide in-transit units with temporary security augmentation of various kinds.

- *Recommendation:* Secretary of Defense direct the Services to resource Component Commanders to adequately augment units transiting through higher-threat areas.



**Finding: Service AT/FP programs must be adequately manned and funded to support threat and physical vulnerability assessments of ports, airfields and inland movement routes that may be used by transiting forces.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CINCs and the Services to identify and resource manning and funding requirements to perform quality assessments of routes and sites used by transiting forces in support of Component Commanders.*

**Finding: The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund is a responsive and relevant program designed to fund execution-year emergent and emergency antiterrorism/force protection physical security requirements. To optimize the program, Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund initiatives must be coordinated with Service programming for a commitment of life-cycle costs, and the Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund must fund the transition period.**

*Recommendations:*

- *The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund should be increased to cover the period prior to which a Service program can fund the remaining life-cycle costs.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to establish a formal link to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Combating Terrorism Readiness Initiative Fund to ensure that initiatives receive a commitment for follow-on programming.*

**Finding: More responsive application of currently available military equipment, commercial technologies, and aggressive research and development can enhance the AT/FP and deterrence posture of transiting forces.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Services to initiate a major unified effort to identify near-term AT/FP equipment and technology requirements, field existing solutions from either military or commercial sources, and develop new technologies for remaining requirements.*

**Finding: The Geographic Commander in Chief should have the sole authority for assigning the threat level for a country within his area of responsibility.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense direct that the Geographic CINCs be solely responsible for establishing the threat level within the appropriate area of responsibility with input from DIA.*
- *Secretary of Defense coordinate with Secretary of State, where possible, to minimize conflicting threat levels between the Department of Defense and the Department of State.*
- *Secretary of Defense designate an office or agency responsible for setting the threat level for Canada, Mexico, Russia, and the United States.*



**Finding: AT/FP will be enhanced by improvements to the THREATCON system.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense change the term “THREATCONs” to “Alert States,” “FP Conditions,” or some other term.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the CINCs and Services to give Component Commanders the responsibility and resources to direct tailored force protection measures to be implemented at specific sites for in-transit units.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct that the AT/FP plan and the particular measures that are triggered by a specific THREATCON be classified.*

**Finding: The CJCS Standing Rules of Engagement for US forces are adequate against the terrorist threat.**

- *Recommendation: Make no changes to the SROE.*

**Finding: We need to shift transiting units from an entirely reactive posture to a posture that more effectively deters terrorist attacks.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the CINCs and Services to have Component Commanders identify proactive techniques and assets to deter terrorists.*

**Finding: The amount of AT/FP emphasis that units in-transit receive prior to or during transfer between CINCs can be improved.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the CINCs and Services to have Component Commanders ensure unit situational awareness by providing AT/FP briefings to transiting units prior to entry into higher threat level areas in the gaining Geographic CINC’s AOR.*

**Finding: Intra-theater transiting units require the same degree of attention as other transiting units to deter, disrupt and mitigate acts of terrorism.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct Geographic CINCs and Component Commanders to reassess current procedures to ensure that AT/FP principles enumerated in this Report are applied to intra-theater transiting units.*

**Finding: Using operational risk management standards as a tool to measure engagement activities against risk to in-transit forces will enable commanders to determine whether to suspend or continue engagement activities.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the CINCs to adopt and institutionalize a discrete operational risk management model to be used in AT/FP planning and execution.*

**Finding: Incident response must be an integral element of AT/FP planning.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Geographic CINCs to identify theater rapid incident response team requirements and integrate their utilization in contingency planning for in-transit units, and the Services to organize, train, and equip such forces.*



## ***Intelligence***

**Finding: In-transit units require intelligence support tailored to the terrorist threat in their immediate area of operations. This support must be dedicated from a higher echelon (tailored production and analysis).**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense reprioritize intelligence production to ensure that in-transit units are given tailored, focused intelligence support for independent missions.*

**Finding: If the Department of Defense is to execute engagement activities related to the National Security Strategy with the least possible level of risk, then Services must reprioritize time, emphasis, and resources to prepare the transiting units to perform intelligence preparation of the battlespace—like processes and formulate intelligence requests for information to support operational decision points.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Services to ensure forces are adequately resourced and trained to make maximum use of intelligence processes and procedures, including priority information requests and requests for information to support intelligence preparation of the battlespace for in-transit unit antiterrorism/force protection.*

**Finding: DoD does not allocate sufficient resources or all-source intelligence analysis and collection in support of combating terrorism.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense reprioritize all-source intelligence collection and analysis personnel and resources so that sufficient emphasis is applied to combating terrorism. Analytical expertise must be imbedded, from the national, CINC, and Component Command levels, to the joint task force level.*
- *Secretary of Defense reprioritize terrorism-related human intelligence and signals intelligence resources.*
- *Secretary of Defense reprioritize resources for the development of language skills that support combating terrorism analysis and collection.*

**Finding: Service counterintelligence programs are integral to force protection and must be adequately manned and funded to meet the dynamic demands of supporting in-transit forces.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense ensure DoD counterintelligence organizations are adequately staffed and funded to meet counterintelligence force protection requirements.*





**Finding: Clearer DoD standards for threat and vulnerability assessments must be developed at the joint level and be common across Services and commands.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense standardize counterintelligence assessments and increase counterintelligence resources.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct DoD-standard requirements for the conduct of threat and vulnerability assessments for combating terrorism.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the production of a DoD-standard Counterintelligence Collection Manual for combating terrorism.*

## **Logistics**

**Finding: While classifying the diplomatic clearance and logistics requirement process may improve the operational security of transiting units, it is not practical due to the commercial nature of the process.**

- *Recommendation: None. Implementing proactive AT/FP measures identified in this report mitigate the effect of public knowledge of US military ship and aircraft visits.*

**Finding: The combination of the Combat Logistics Force and the Department of Defense worldwide logistics network is sufficient to meet current operations and has the collateral benefit of supporting the engagement component of the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy.**

- *Recommendation: None. The current level of Combat Logistics Force oilers is sufficient to support the refueling and logistics requirements of the national strategy.*

**Finding: CINCs/Component Commanders can enhance force protection for transiting forces when the Component Commanders are included in the logistics planning and contract award process.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Services to update respective logistics doctrine to incorporate AT/FP considerations for transiting units.*

**Finding: Local providers of goods, services, and transportation must be employed and evaluated in ways that enhance the AT/FP posture of the in-transit unit.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct the Defense Logistics Agency and the Services to incorporate AT/FP concerns into the entire fabric of logistics support.*



## **Training**

**Finding: Military Services must accomplish AT/FP training with a degree of rigor that equates to the unit's primary mission areas.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to develop rigorous tactics, techniques, and procedures with measurable standards for AT/FP training and develop training regimens that will integrate AT/FP into unit-level training plans and pre-deployment exercises.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to elevate AT/FP training to the equivalent of a primary mission area and provide the same emphasis afforded combat tasks in order to instill a force protection mindset into each Service.*

**Finding: Better force protection is achieved if forces in transit are trained to demonstrate preparedness to deter acts of terrorism.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to develop and resource credible deterrence standards, deterrence-specific tactics, techniques, and procedures and defensive equipment packages for all forms of transiting forces.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to ensure that pre-deployment training regimes include deterrence tactics, techniques, and procedures and AT/FP measures specific to the area of operation and equipment rehearsals.*

**Finding: DoD must better support commanders' ability to sustain their antiterrorism/force protection program and training regimens.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to publish a single source document that categorizes all of the existing AT/FP training literature, plans and tactics, techniques, and procedures for use by the Services (on both classified and unclassified versions) (short term).*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consolidate and develop a single repository for all AT/FP lessons learned. This database should be accessible to unit commanders in the classified and unclassified mode (long term).*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to continually update training tools, capture lessons and trends and aid Commanders in sustaining meaningful AT/FP training programs.*

**Finding: DoD and Service guidance on the content of AT/FP Level III training must be more definitive if commanders at the O-5 and O-6 levels are to execute their AT/FP responsibilities.**

- *Recommendation: Secretary of Defense direct more rigorous Level III AT/FP training requirements for each Service.*



**Finding: Service Level II AT/FP Training must produce a force protection officer capable of supervising unit training and acting as the subject matter expert for the commander in transit.**

*Recommendations:*

- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to establish more rigorous training standards for unit-level Force Protection Officers.*
- *Secretary of Defense direct the Services to increase the emphasis and resources devoted to producing qualified Force Protection Officers through Level II training.*

**-END-**

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