

# USS COLE

**Situation:** Suicide bombers attack US Navy destroyer with water-borne IED.

On 12 October 2000, terrorists maneuvered a small boat alongside the USS Cole as it refueled in Aden harbor. Seconds later an IED exploded tearing a large hole in the hull of the USS Cole. While heroic actions by the crew saved the vessel, 17 US Navy sailors died and 39 were seriously wounded.



Terrorists considered the USS Cole a symbol of American power and policy in the Middle East. The attack, perpetrated by terrorists with ties to Al Qaeda, was in response to US policies and actions interpreted as anti-Muslim and pro-Israeli.

The attack on the USS Cole illustrates the ability of terrorists to monitor and assess US military operations and identify vulnerabilities in processes and procedures. The attack also demonstrates the ability to develop new terrorist tactics, techniques, and procedures in response to specific environments.

If you observe a possible vulnerability, bring it to the attention of your leadership. Be alert to activities that could indicate a threat.



On the morning of 12 October 2000, the USS Cole entered the port of Aden for an estimated four hour brief stop for fuel. The USS Cole, a 505-foot Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer with a crew of 293, was in transit from the Mediterranean Sea to the Arabian Gulf to support United Nations Security Resolutions involving Iraq.

The Port of Aden, and adjacent harbor, poses significant force protection challenges. The area is U-shaped and allows unfettered visibility of the entire harbor from several onshore areas. The area contains extensive

rocky areas that provide numerous coves, inlets, and places to construct docks. Every day numerous, and almost identical, small fishing vessels crisscross the port area.

The Port of Aden had been a refueling stop for US Naval vessels for almost two years prior to the attack on the USS Cole. Since January 1999, the US Navy used the port for 27 refueling stops and conducted two port visits and one logistical visit. Prior to 12 October 2000, all previous port visits had occurred without incident and there was no intelligence indicating a specific threat in the Aden area. Upon arrival in the port, the crew of the USS Cole implemented standard force protection measures and raised the THREATCON to BRAVO, uncovered the .50 caliber machine guns, and set augmented watches. The sentries were instructed to keep unauthorized boats away from the vessel and to inspect arriving crew boats.

An attack can occur anywhere at any time. Even if there is no specific threat at a location or history of prior terrorist activity you should exercise vigilance and report suspicious activity.

Entry into the port proceeded without incident until a small boat with two men and a child approached and pulled alongside the USS Cole. The occupants attempted to board the USS Cole via a Jacobs's ladder that had been lowered to accommodate the harbor pilot. The crew responded by raising weapons and the occupants retreated to their boat and left the area. It is not certain, but many believe the approach of the boat was an attempt to gauge US responses to potential threats.



Refueling operations began at the floating refueling station at about 10:30 a.m. Shortly thereafter an additional boat, believed to be accompanying arriving crew boats that had already been cleared, approached the USS Cole. The boat approached the center of the vessel; the occupants stood and waved to USS Cole crew members, and then detonated their explosive device.

Terrorists often test security response times and procedures through actions that appear to be innocent. Suspicious activity in the area of a vessel or an installation should be reported to security personnel.



The terrorist boat exploded at 11:18 a.m. The blast tore a 40-by-40 foot hole in the USS Cole's half-inch reinforced steel plated hull. The vessel's interior also suffered massive damage; vessel bulkheads imploded, two lower decks were driven upward toward the surface deck, fuel lines ruptured, an engine room flooded, and power throughout the vessel went out.

Immediately the crew of the USS Cole responded by employing training and natural leadership skills. Two simultaneous efforts began; one to save the vessel from sinking and one to save the lives of wounded crewmembers. Survivors used their extensive vessel egress training to exit the ship and bring wounded to safety. A makeshift triage center was established on the stern of the ship and Navy corpsmen treated the wounded.

To save the vessel from sinking, crewmembers improved the efficiency of onboard water pumps. At extreme risk to individual safety, torches were used in areas contaminated by fuel and oil to cut holes in the vessel hull slightly above the waterline. Hoses were then run out through the lower holes, as opposed to the interior of the vessel, to improve the efficiency of the water pumps. All activities to save the vessel and crew took place in extremely dangerous circumstances, with sporadic communications, and limited direction from vessel officers.

Be prepared to respond quickly to an attack and leverage any first aid or emergency response training you have had. If you are in an isolated area, be prepared to respond independent of your chain of command.

Preparations for an attack against a US Naval vessel in the Port of Aden began several months prior to the arrival of the USS Cole. In preparation, Al-Qaeda operatives rented an apartment overlooking Aden Harbor to conduct surveillance of standard port operations and standard operating procedures of US Naval vessels entering the port.



A fiberglass boat was purchased in Saudi Arabia, moved to Yemen, and modified with a false bottom to conceal explosives. The Terrorists constructed a wall of corrugated metal around the area where they worked to conceal their activities.

Unknown at the time was a previous attempt in the Port of Aden to attack the USS The Sullivans using the same tactics. However, the bomb constructed for the attack was so heavy that the boat sank under its weight on the way to the target. The terrorists learned from this failure and used heavy steel to direct the blast in the second attempt. This allowed for the construction of a smaller device made of C-4 equivalent to 700 pounds of TNT.

Terrorists learn from failed operations and improve tactics, techniques, and procedures. Be aware of prior attacks in your area and be vigilant for signs of similar operations. If you notice activity that corresponds to a prior attack, alert security personnel immediately.



Several individuals were identified as suspects and indicted for the USS Cole bombing. Jamal Ahmed Mohammed Ali al-Badawi, was a key al-Qaeda operative in Aden and helped obtain safe houses and the boat used in the attack. Al Badawi was arrested, sentenced to death, and then escaped from Yemini custody. The Government of Yemen has since dropped charges against al-Badawi in exchange for his promise not to carry out future terrorist operations. Abd al-Muhsin al-Taifi, wanted in connection to the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, was also linked to the attack on the USS Cole.

The attack on the USS Cole cost the lives of 17 US Navy personnel and seriously wounded 39 more. The cost to repair the USS Cole totaled more than \$250 million. The costs in terms of lives lost and equipment could have been

substantially higher if not for the actions of the crew. A commission established to investigate the USS Cole bombing determined that force protection measures employed when entering the Port of Aden were not sufficient and better planning, training, and coordination with host nation and US authorities were needed.

After extensive repairs, the USS Cole returned to service in November 2003.