



U.S. Sailors conduct maintenance on F/A-18 Hornet aboard USS *Carl Vinson* during maritime security operations

U.S. Navy (Aaron Shelley)

*Sailing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

# Operating Forward, Strengthening Partnerships

By JONATHAN W. GREENERT

**T**he United States is at a strategic inflection point, as described in the new defense strategic guidance *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*.<sup>1</sup> American forces left Iraq last year and are drawing down in Afghanistan. Political transformation is shaking the Arab world. Security threats continue to emerge from those seeking to deny access to the commons and from provocative nations such as Iran and North Korea. At home, we must address the Federal budget deficits and grow the Nation's economy.

This inflection point presents U.S. leaders with both challenges and opportunities. It presents challenges because each of these changes impacts the Nation's ability to pursue its longstanding objectives of economic growth, strengthened alliances and partnerships, defense against direct attack, and promotion of freedom abroad. It presents opportunities because this dynamic period is one in which America may be able to "lock-in" new strategic approaches that improve its ability to pursue objectives over the long term.

Upon taking office as Chief of Naval Operations, I identified what I believe are the key tenets that our forces should apply in developing these new approaches. They are *warfighting first*, *operate forward*, and *be ready*. *Warfighting first* is our fundamental responsibility. The most likely and consequential threats to our security and prosperity today come from regional aggressors who will only be deterred by current, present warfighting capability. *Be ready* acknowledges that our ability to shape the security environment depends on whether we can respond quickly and proficiently to counter aggression or attacks before they escalate. *Operate forward* is the focus of this article and describes how our ready warfighting capability must be employed to pursue our nation's security objectives.

### Operating Forward Today

Operating forward allows naval forces to provide offshore options to deter aggression, influence events abroad, and win conflicts in an era of uncertainty. Our history and current operations both show that operating forward is essential to our national security objectives. As a nation separated from significant threats by two oceans, those objectives are more outwardly focused than they are for other nations, and U.S. military power is most often used to protect and aid allies and partners, as opposed to defending America from direct attack. For example, forward Navy and Marine forces responded to the Great East Japan Earthquake to deliver hundreds of tons of relief supplies and logistics that reconnected affected areas with the rest of Japan. Forward Sailors and Marines on ships in the Mediterranean made the first strikes to defend civilians during the Libyan civil war, and naval forces at sea continue to deliver dozens of sorties each day to support troops in Afghanistan as we reduce our footprint on the ground there.

Maintaining forces forward requires bases and host nation “places” overseas where our ships, aircraft, and Sailors can rest, refuel, repair, and resupply. Some of these places are on the territory of longstanding allies such as Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Italy, Greece, and the United Kingdom. Others are facilities made available by partners including Singapore, Djibouti, and Bahrain or leased

areas such as Guantanamo Bay. These places join our own bases on Guam and in Hawaii and in the continental United States as locations from which our forces operate and can be supported.

Where we establish bases and places is critically important. While our overseas Cold War infrastructure emerged from the need to contain the Soviet Union, our posture today must be driven by enduring objectives and the threats and opportunities of the current strategic environment. These place a premium on warfighting capabilities at the strategic maritime crossroads where our security interests and air, maritime, and cyber transportation systems intersect. These locations—such as the straits of Hormuz and Malacca, Panama Canal, and around the Horn of Africa—are where trade flows are concentrated and where the threat of instability is most likely and consequential. They likewise present violent extremists an opportunity to inflict disproportionate damage upon regional security and the global economy.

Today's fiscal environment will constrain our ability to buy a larger fleet that can rotationally deploy overseas from bases in the United States; therefore, remaining forward at these strategic crossroads requires innovative approaches to operating and manning our fleet. We will depend on strong relationships

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with our allies and partners to host support facilities for our deployed forces to exchange crewmembers and tap into logistics networks. In turn, these allies and partners will depend on American forces to assure access to the air, sea, and cyber commons in their regions and help protect their own interests from aggression. This connection between operating forward and assured access was made plainly evident to the United States in the first conflict after our nation's founding—when we were the victims of aggression from overseas.

### History's Lesson for a Maritime Nation

Today, the U.S. Navy is the world's preeminent maritime force, but that was not always the case. In the lead-up to the War of

1812, Britain's Royal Navy held that distinction. Our own fleet was not ready for conflict and became bottled up in port early in the war, unable to break the British blockade off the Atlantic Coast. Meanwhile, the Royal Navy and British army wreaked havoc along the mid-Atlantic seaboard, even burning parts of Washington, DC, in 1814. Our nation's young economy suffered as insurance rates soared and imports from Europe and the Caribbean grew scarce.

Soon, however, the fledgling American fleet developed a warfighting focus and engaged the British, winning victories on Lake Erie and in the Atlantic, capturing the interest of the French, and forcing Britain to the negotiating table. However, outside of a determined effort from privateers, the U.S. Navy could not project power away from home, could not control the sea, and could not deter aggression against its interests. These core capabilities of the current maritime strategy were just as important then as they are today. The experience of 1812 focused the Navy over the next century on preventing another aggressor from restricting our trade or isolating us from the sea.

Our navy operated farther forward as our nation's economy grew and, by necessity, became more integrated with Eurasia. In the midst of the world's first wave of globalization, the Great White Fleet sailed from 1907 to 1909, demonstrating America's emerging power and capability to project it globally. This episodic forward operation became more sustained during World War I as our fleet convoyed supplies and forces to Europe and combated German submarines across the Atlantic Ocean. In World War II, the Navy went forward around the world, protecting sea lanes and projecting power to Europe and Africa and taking the fight across the Pacific to Asia. We stayed forward through the Cold War to contain Soviet expansion and provide tangible support to allies and partners with whom we were highly interdependent diplomatically, economically, and militarily. One lesson of history for our joint force is the importance of operating forward to our international relationships, deterrence, and rapid response.

### From Interdependent to Interconnected

Since World War II, our economic interdependence with Eurasia and the Southern Hemisphere expanded through the restoration and explosive growth of global,

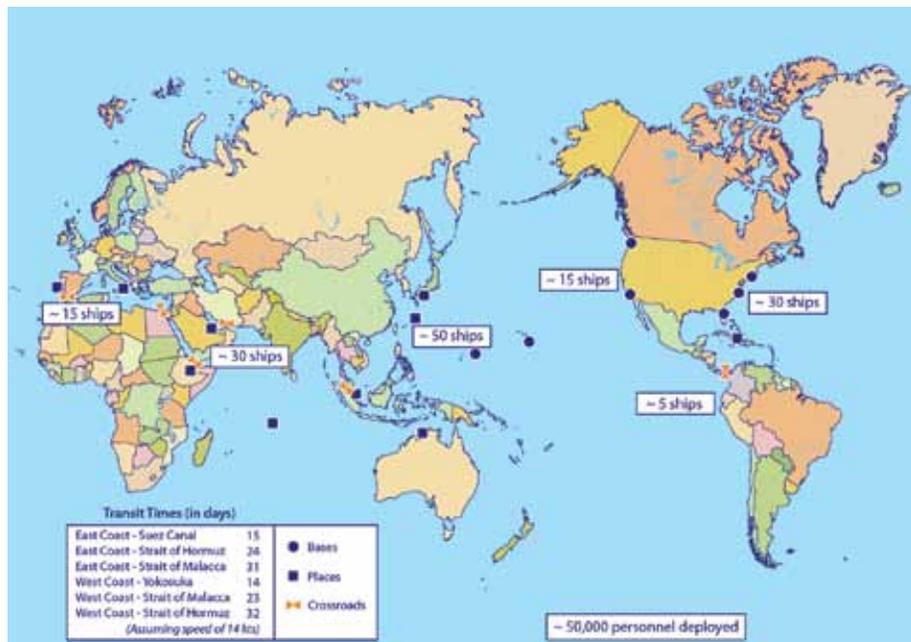
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interconnected systems of trade, finance, law, and information. In the two decades since the Cold War ended, however, economic interdependence evolved into economic interconnectedness. Twenty years ago, we depended on global markets to obtain goods or financial products more cheaply than those we could create in our own country. Today, almost every physical or virtual product is the result of operations in several different countries. In the words of Maersk’s Stephen Carmel, we have interconnected production chains as opposed to just interdependent economies. A Boeing 787 is only about 30 percent made in the United States, while the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago noted recently that an “American-made” Jeep Patriot is only about 66 percent made in America and a “Japanese-made” Toyota Sequoia is about 80 percent made in America. This is not a new phenomenon for major pieces of capital equipment such as these with many subsystems and parts. What is new is that even small items such as loaves of bread are composed of ingredients from up to 14 different countries. A “Made in USA” label only guarantees a minimum of 8 percent U.S. content and usually only a maximum of 26 percent. Since 90 percent of goods by volume and 65 percent by value travel by sea, the international production chains that create goods great and small depend to a large degree upon strategic maritime crossroads.<sup>2</sup>

Our security interests are similarly global. The September 11 terrorist attacks shattered the notion that distance alone affords us security. The proliferation of submarines and submersibles, unmanned air vehicles, and electronic warfare systems further highlights how a growing range of potential adversaries can hold our interests at risk both at home and abroad. With interdependent production chains, almost every aspect of American life depends on global systems of commerce and finance. Moreover, our allies and partners, with whom we share extensive economic and diplomatic relationships, depend on U.S. military forces to help preserve regional stability and to assist in the development of their own security capabilities.

With so many concerns prompting a global focus, it is not surprising that many nations see the value of operating forward. The navies of nations such as France, Russia, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom have long been globally deployed. In the last 20 years, they were joined by navies from



**Operating Forward**

India, China, Japan, and South Korea. Many more nations have established regional navies to protect their territory, resources, and people from maritime threats ranging from poaching and trafficking to terrorism and piracy. Some regional neighbors team up to address shared maritime concerns, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore to counter piracy in the Strait of Malacca, or Nigeria, Ghana, and other central African countries to combat trafficking in the Gulf of Guinea.

Our global forward posture and the facilities that support it depend on a network of partnerships overseas. These are described in our maritime strategy *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*: “Expanded cooperative relationships with other nations will contribute to the security and stability of the maritime domain for the benefit of all. Although our forces can surge when necessary to respond to crises, trust and cooperation cannot be surged. They must be built over time so that the strategic interests of the participants are continuously considered while mutual understanding and respect are promoted.”<sup>3</sup> Operating forward alongside allies and emerging partners builds trust and gives us greater understanding of the security environment and the behavioral patterns of competitors and adversaries. Gaining this familiarity and trust takes time. Within our current fiscal constraints, a deliberate, sustained approach to partnerships requires judicious resource management as well as new,

innovative approaches to building partner capacity and security cooperation.

**Implementing a New Strategy**

Innovation and cost-effective approaches to forward operations are hallmarks of the new defense strategic guidance. This emphasis arises from the strategy’s challenges and opportunities, which place a premium on presence in the Middle East and Asia-Pacific while sustaining our alliances in Europe and improving partner capabilities elsewhere. The strategy also states that the “United States will continue to lead global efforts with capable allies and partners to assure access to and use of the global commons.”<sup>4</sup> Maintaining our forward deployed capacity and capability to assure access requires that naval forces increase their cooperative use of partner locations overseas and employ new models for operating and manning the fleet.

The vision for the Joint Force of 2020 outlined in the new defense strategic guidance reflects the emphasis on operating forward, warfighting capability, and readiness of my *Sailing Directions* and our fiscal year 2013 budget submission. The missions outlined in the strategy include deterring and defeating aggression, projecting power despite threats to access, and actively countering terrorists. These and the other missions of the strategy require forward forces with credible warfighting capability. These forces will help deter

attack and control escalation, if attacks do occur, by promptly countering the aggression.

The Navy is working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Congress to increase its forward warfighting capabilities by establishing Forward Deployed Naval Force (FDFNF) destroyers in Rota, Spain, and forward stationing littoral combat ships (LCS) in Singapore and additional patrol craft in Bahrain. When part of the FDFNF, ships, aircraft, crews, and their families all reside in the host nation, such as Japan, South Korea,

traditionally manned warships. We are studying the possibility of expanding the concept of rotational crewing to additional ships, such as DDGs and SSNs, but the complexity of those platforms limits their abilities to be manned by rotating crews without significant investments in shore training infrastructure—such as we do with our existing ballistic missile and guided missile submarines.

Day-to-day presence in strategically important regions is the most effective method to build trust among allies and

operations to access for the joint force, stating, “Geography, particularly distance, arguably determines the access challenge more than any other factor, as military power has tended to degrade over distance.”<sup>25</sup> By operating forward, we mitigate the tyranny of distance and improve our ability to assure access. Partnerships also figure prominently in assuring joint access per the JOAC: “The employment of forces in engagement activities often years prior to a crisis may be critical to success by encouraging willing and capable partners.”<sup>26</sup>

### Operating Forward at the Maritime Crossroads

On any given day, more than 50,000 Sailors are under way on 145 ships and submarines, 100 of them deployed overseas. They are joined by more than 125 land-based patrol aircraft and helicopters, 1,000 information dominance personnel, and over 4,000 Naval Expeditionary Combat Command Sailors on the ground and in the littorals, building the ability of partners to protect their people, resources, and territory. We focus this deployed presence on the strategic maritime crossroads, where conflict is both most likely and most consequential.

Threats directed by Iran toward our regional partners and international shipping through the Strait of Hormuz require warfighting capability forward in the Arabian Gulf, through which 20 percent of the world’s

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Spain, or Italy. In contrast, forward stationing keeps the ships or aircraft overseas while crews rotationally deploy overseas from their home stations in the United States.

Our fleet’s evolution over the next decade will improve the ability to remain forward and implements the defense strategic guidance’s emphasis on innovative, low-cost approaches to partner-building activities. Our fleet will be about the same size it is today (285 ships) in 2017, and will grow to about 300 ships by 2019. The mix of ships in the future fleet, however, will provide many more ships well suited to partnership and cooperation activities. The LCS, joint high speed vessel (JHSV), Mobile Landing Platform (MLP), and the Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) will allow us to provide combatant commanders more forces for operations such as counterterrorism, countering illegal trafficking, counterproliferation, and humanitarian assistance/disaster response (HA/DR). In turn, they will free up higher-end destroyers (DDGs) and nuclear submarines (SSNs) for deterrence and power projection missions in other theaters.

These new platforms also will employ new manning and operational models that will keep them forward more of the time. The LCS will join our mine countermeasures and patrol coastal (PC) ships in employing rotational crews that live in the continental United States and deploy overseas to meet their forward stationed ships. This model provides more than twice the forward deployed time per ship as traditional manning models. As support ships, JHSV, MLP, AFSB, and our existing Combat Logistics Fleet ships employ civilian mariner crews and embarked military detachments. These ships deliver two to three times as much forward deployed presence as

partners and to be in position to assure access and influence events as part of the joint force. Operating forward can be viewed as an element of Phase 0, shaping the environment and setting the conditions for subsequent action in a contingency. It follows that forces already present in a particular region are capable of sending a more nuanced message than forces perceived to be rushing to the scene of a crisis.

The new defense strategic guidance emphasizes the need to assure access to the global commons and to retain the ability to project power despite threats to access. The new Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) highlights the importance of forward



Admiral Greenert takes questions from Sailors at All Hands Call

U.S. Navy (Devon Dow)

U.S. Navy (John Lill)



USS Hampton surfaces during Composite Training Unit Exercises

oil passes each day. The joint force there relies on rotationally deployed Carrier Strike Groups and Amphibious Ready Groups as well as forward stationed PCs, mine countermeasures, and aircraft at facilities in Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In the near term, we plan to forward station three additional PCs in Bahrain and over the next decade will send LCS to replace our minesweepers there. To the southeast in Jebel Ali, we have another place where we are able to conduct repairs and rest our forces, from the smallest ships up to our largest aircraft carriers. Our forward posture in the Arabian Gulf enhances cooperation with nations in the region. For example, USS *Whidbey Island* and the 22<sup>d</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted Iron Magic 12, a bilateral amphibious exercise, with UAE forces last November and December. Also, in the ultimate “offshore option,” our aircraft carriers will continue to provide 30 percent of the close air support missions support operations in Afghanistan from the Arabian Sea—a percentage that will likely

grow as we continue to shrink our footprint on the ground there.

The Asia-Pacific has been a focus of the Navy for more than seven decades. About 40 percent of the world’s trade passes through a strategic maritime crossroad at the 1.7-mile wide Strait of Malacca, and the region is home to five of our seven treaty alliances. Today, trends in trade and energy flows are increasing interest in the South China Sea and in the

region.”<sup>7</sup> The Navy’s presence in the Asia-Pacific will increase over the next decade as new platforms such as JHSV, LCS, and MLP enter the fleet. This evolution will be accompanied by greater cooperation, interoperability, and information-sharing as we strengthen our network of security partnerships through forward naval operations.<sup>8</sup>

On any given day, about 50 ships are deployed in the Asia-Pacific region, supported

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maritime capacity of Southeast Asian nations. The Asia-Pacific will continue to be a top priority as President Barack Obama stated in announcing the new defense strategic guidance: “We will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region. Our relationships with Asian allies and key partners are critical to the future stability and growth of

by facilities in Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, as well as our bases on the island of Guam. Half of these ships are based in the region under the FDNF construct, including the aircraft carrier USS *George Washington*, nine cruisers and destroyers, four amphibious ships, and three SSNs. Our readiness and relationships in the Asia-Pacific are a function

of the nearly 170 exercises and training events that we conduct in the region, such as Talisman Sabre, which last year brought together 18 U.S. and Australian ships and more than 22,500 sailors and marines for a series of events from maritime security to amphibious assault. Last December, exercise Kilat Eagle brought together forces from Malaysia with USS *Makin Island* and Marines from the 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit to improve proficiency in conducting HA/DR, peace-keeping operations, and countering weapons proliferation. In February of this year, the multinational combined joint exercise Cobra Gold 2012 brought together some 20 nations in Thailand to improve interoperability across a range of operations, the largest such event in the Asia-Pacific region.

We plan to forward station LCS in Singapore over the next several years, increasing our presence by rotating crews and avoiding about 3 weeks of transit time to the region. The first operations of an LCS from Singapore will occur in early 2013 and will be followed later with forward-stationed ships. The offer of Singapore to host LCS is an excellent example of a partnership that has deepened from occasional logistics support to a full-time operational relationship. To the south in Darwin, Australia, we are developing options to provide amphibious lift to support the rotational deployment of Marines there as the President announced last November. We are continuing to work with the Marine Corps and U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) to refine the operating concept for these forces and make the best use of this new location. USPACOM is also working with other countries in the region such as the Philippines to use their port and air facilities to support ongoing counterterrorism and maritime domain awareness operations.<sup>9</sup> Each of these places involves a small footprint ashore. The return on investment in enabling our forward operations, however, will be large.

Our naval forces in Europe operate adjacent to strategic maritime crossroads at the Suez Canal in the east and Strait of Gibraltar to the west. Through these chokepoints flow the majority of Europe's oil and much of its exports and imports. Although many are noting a shift in our focus to the Asia-Pacific in the coming years, our operations in Europe will remain steady in the near term and increase over the long term with the entry of LCS and JHSV into the fleet. Over the next 4 years, we plan to move four



Hospital Corpsman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Jacob Emmott awarded Silver Star by Admiral Greenert

U.S. Navy (Matt Dickinson)

DDGs with ballistic missile defense (BMD) capability to an existing facility at Rota, Spain, under the FDNF model. We will base these ships forward to avoid the 15-day transit to the Mediterranean and maintain them in a higher state of readiness than ships deploying from the United States. As a result, one forward-deployed DDG can provide the presence of five rotationally deployed from U.S. homeports. When not conducting BMD missions, these ships will be available to perform other missions and exercises with North Atlantic Treaty Organization Allies and regional partners. For example, operating forward from Rota will allow more frequent training with the Spanish navy, with whom we share the *Aegis* weapon system and a history of combined operations. The Navy's forward presence at Rota is complemented by longstanding use of facilities at Naples, Gaeta, and Sigonella, Italy, and at Souda Bay, Greece. Recent operations off the coast of Libya highlight the value of being able to sustain our ships and aircraft from these locations.

Our engagement with European allies is not only to address European security. As some of our most capable partners, the navies of Europe are essential to our combined capability at the world's most challenging crossroads. We plan on British and French help clearing mines from the Strait of Hormuz if Iran chooses to deny free passage through that chokepoint. Several European navies contribute to coalition counterpiracy operations

around the Horn of Africa and in the Arabian Sea. Moreover, European partners deliver much of the training capability that we bring to Africa Partnership Station operations in East and West Africa.

Occupying a unique location on the African continent, the port of Djibouti and airfield at Camp Lemonnier provide places for our forces to refuel and resupply while conducting operations in the Red Sea and around the Horn of Africa. Approximately 20,000 merchant ships pass through the Gulf of Aden each year, en route to or from the Suez Canal.<sup>10</sup> The Navy is engaged with over 20 international partners to combat piracy and safeguard the free flow of commerce at this strategic maritime crossroad. As events in Somalia and more recently in Yemen illustrate, the ability to provide a range of offshore options in this volatile region is essential to both U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Central Command. In the Gulf of Guinea, we use a combination of amphibious ships, high speed vessels, frigates, and support ships as mobile sea bases for Africa Partnership Station deployments that conduct maritime security and interagency engagement activities with partners in West and Central Africa.

In our own hemisphere, the port and airfield at Guantanamo Bay provide a vital link to Latin America and the maritime crossroad around the Panama Canal. Today, we maintain about five ships in the region to counter illegal trafficking as part of Joint

U.S. Navy (Walter M. Wayman)



F/A-18 Hornet lands aboard USS *John C. Stennis*

Interagency Task Force–South. The widening of the canal over the next several years and expected increase in merchant traffic to U.S. ports will increase the importance of naval operations in the region.

History has shown that navies usually do not win wars on their own—but they can certainly lose them. This is important to keep in mind as we develop the Joint Force of 2020. America’s global interests demonstrate that we need a global Navy. We will have to balance the need to be efficient in operating forward with the need to be ready and effective with the warfighting capability that we deliver. Through the judicious use of bases and places at the strategic maritime crossroads and strong relationships with our partners and allies, we will remain able to deter and defeat aggression and respond to crises—the hallmarks of a global Navy. **JFQ**

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Presidential cover letter to Department of Defense (DOD), *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: DOD, January 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Carmel, “Globalization, Security, and Economic Wellbeing,” presentation to the International Seapower Symposium 20, Newport, RI, October 19, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Navy, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Seapower*, October 2007, 10, available at <[www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf](http://www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf)>.

<sup>4</sup> *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> DOD, Joint Operational Access Concept (Washington, DC: DOD, January 17, 2012), 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Patrick M. Cronin and Robert D. Kaplan, “Cooperation from Strength: U.S. Strategy and the South China Sea,” in *Cooperation from Strength: The United States, China and the South China Sea*, ed. Patrick M. Cronin, 21–23 (Washington, DC: Center for New American Security, January 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See Craig Whitlock, “U.S. Seeks to Expand Presence in Philippines,” *The Washington Post*, January 26, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See “Factbox: The Dangerous Gulf of Aden,” Reuters, November 3, 2008, available at <[www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2008/081103-gulf-of-aden.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2008/081103-gulf-of-aden.htm)>.