

# US threats in response to bombing of American ship in Yemen

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**14 October 2000**

The US government responded with threats and vows to retaliate in the wake of an apparent suicide bombing attack on a US Navy vessel in the port city of Aden in Yemen on Thursday, which left 7 sailors dead, 10 missing and presumed dead and 33 wounded. The USS *Cole*, a 505-foot vessel carrying a crew of 350, was attempting to refuel at the time of the blast. The ship was reportedly heading for anti-Iraq sanctions duty in the Persian Gulf. A small boat assisting in mooring the vessel allegedly triggered the explosion.

A Navy spokeswoman reported Friday that a team of ordinance disposal experts had examined the damaged hull and determined conclusively that the blast was caused by an external source.

On Friday a bomb was thrown at the British embassy in Aden, causing a huge explosion, but no injuries. Britain is widely resented not only for its role as the ally and accomplice of the US in the Middle East, but as a former colonial power.

Bill Clinton ordered US ships in the region to pull out of port and put US embassies on alert throughout the world. He told the press, "If, as it now appears, this was an act of terrorism it was a despicable and cowardly act. We will find out who was responsible and hold them accountable." Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said the US would not be "cowed" by the attack, but would take measures to defend itself. "It does not mean we can crawl into an ostrich-like mode. We are eagles," she declared.

Presidential candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush echoed each other's words, pledging to defend American interests. In a speech in Milwaukee Gore promised retaliation if the sailors aboard the *Cole* had been victims of a terrorist attack. Bush declared that it was a moment "for our nation to speak with one voice." He told reporters: "I hope that we gather

enough intelligence to figure out who did the act and take the necessary action. There must be a consequence."

Yemeni officials initially expressed skepticism that the explosion in the *Cole* was the result of a bomb. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh visited injured US sailors in a hospital and declared, "I don't think it's a terrorist attack." He insisted his country harbored no "terrorist elements." Yemen has become a more frequent refueling stop for US Navy ships since a December 1997 decision by Washington to open up contacts and improve relations with the country. Four ships are known to have refueled there this year.

American authorities were said to be investigating a report from London indicating that an organization calling itself the Islamic Army of Aden, also known as the Aden-Abyan [a region of Yemen] Army, was claiming responsibility for the attack on the *Cole*.

The American media wasted no time in painting Yemen as a hotbed of terrorism. AbcNews.com posted a story, "Terror presence in Yemen," asserting that the country "is considered a safe haven for international terrorist groups by U.S. government authorities." The article asserted that Saudi financier and anti-US Islamic fundamentalist Osama bin Laden had "a strong presence in the predominantly Muslim country and is known to have sent terrorism trainers and previously issued threats against U.S. military forces there."

Bin Laden's forces were blamed for attacks on US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. The US military subsequently launched punitive air raids on Afghanistan and Sudan. Certain news stories noted that the USS *Cole* was preparing to enforce sanctions against Iraq and suggested that Saddam Hussein might have been behind the blast.

The apparent suicide bombing in Aden takes place in

the context of the continuing violence in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The shooting down of Palestinians by Israeli security forces has enraged masses of people in the region. The US is viewed as the sponsor and defender of the Zionist regime. Yemen, along with most other countries in the Middle East, has been the scene of anti-Israeli and anti-American demonstrations in recent days. According to news reports, pro-Palestinian rallies have been nearly a daily occurrence.

That the *Cole* was refueling in Aden is bound up with the ongoing effort of Washington to foster closer relations with the bourgeois Arab regimes, as part of the so-called Middle East peace process. The Saleh regime has made considerable efforts to demonstrate its willingness to assist the US. The Yemeni government has cracked down on fundamentalist groups, executing the leader of the Islamic Army of Aden after the organization kidnapped 16 Western tourists in December 1998.

US Defense Secretary William Cohen told a Pentagon news conference that “given the nature of this particular situation” it would have been “very difficult if not impossible to protect against this type of incident.” In reality, the American effort to police the globe—its ever-increasing recourse to military intervention—leaves US forces extremely vulnerable, as was dramatically exposed in the attack on the USS *Cole*.



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