

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on Piracy
April 30, 2009

I join the Chairman in welcoming our first panel to the Committee. Captain Phillips' leadership and bravery during and after the pirate assault on his ship have been justifiably praised around the world. His dramatic rescue by the Navy has again demonstrated the skill and courage of our sailors.

This is the only committee in the Senate where both the Chairman and the Ranking Member have served in the Navy, so we come to this topic with some understanding of the Navy's historic mission. Piracy is not a new issue for our country. Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution gives Congress the power to "define and punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas," one of the few crimes named specifically in that document. What is new and vexing is the rapid increase in piracy and extortion targeted at shipping off the coast of Somalia. I look forward to the insights of our second panel, which will address our government's interagency anti-piracy strategy.

These pirates, like all others before them, are motivated by profit. Their targets, in one of the most heavily trafficked seas in the world, are plentiful and soft. The payoffs are huge, running into the millions of dollars in a region where the average per capita income is less than two dollars a day. So far, piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia has been largely a non-lethal activity. Ashore, in lawless Somalia and its disputed territories of Somaliland and Puntland, pirates have sanctuary from prosecution. The tools of their trade, small arms, skiffs and longer-range fishing trawlers, are plentiful, as is the supply of poor young men willing to become pirates. Many villagers in the region are sympathetic to the criminals, viewing them as modern day Robin Hoods who spread their loot and don't harm their hostages.

Ending piracy in the region will require multilateral cooperation. This cooperation must include military coordination, but it must also involve the governments of proximate nations and the shipping companies, who must change their practices and procedures. And while military means may be necessary, it is important to understand that the root cause of this problem is the breakdown of law and order in Somalia, which is what allows the pirates to operate from shore with impunity. This underscores a point that I and other members of this Committee have long made - the existence of failed states directly threatens the national security interests of the United States. Failed states exist as potential safe havens for terrorism, drug and arms trafficking, and piracy. Failed states can destabilize surrounding nations, spawn tribal or sectarian conflict, and intensify refugee flows.

President Obama and Secretary Clinton, like President Bush before them, have emphasized that development must be an important pillar of our foreign policy. The Senate this year, in agreeing to fully fund President Obama's budget request for international affairs, also recognizes that if we don't sustain the long term investments necessary to prevent failing states and to reduce the poverty that can spawn instability and extremism, we run the risk of paying a far higher price down the road.

I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.

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