



Written by on October 12, 2010

## The 10th Anniversary of the Attack on the USS Cole

Americans remember today the suicide attack by al-Qaeda terrorists on the *USS Cole* in the Yemeni port of Aden, on October 12, 2000. The bombers sailed a small boat near the destroyer and detonated explosive charges, opening a hole in the port side of the ship 60 by 40 feet in diameter. The blast killed 17 crew members and injured 39.

Two al-Qaeda operatives have been named as masterminding the attack on the *Cole*: One was Abu Ali al-Harithi, a citizen of Yemen who was killed by the CIA during a covert mission in Yemen on November 3, 2002.



The other suspected mastermind of the attack was Abd al-Nashiri — a Saudi native who once headed al-Qaeda operations in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf states and reported directly to Osama bin Laden — who was captured in November 2002 by the CIA's Special Activities Division. Al-Nashiri was confined in the military prison in Guantanamo Bay, but (according to a [Wikipedia article](#)) "charges against him were dropped in February 2009 pending the Obama administration's review of all Guantánamo detentions," and "Court filings in August 2010 revealed that the Obama administration is not planning to prosecute al-Nashiri any time soon. 'No charges are either pending or contemplated with respect to al-Nashiri in the near future.' "

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A report from [dailypress.com](#) on October 12 noted: "The Navy on Tuesday marks the 10-year anniversary of the attack on the *Cole* with a ceremony at Naval Station Norfolk. Adm. J.C. Harvey Jr. will speak and members of the *Cole's* extended family will be there."

The article spotlighted Petty Officer 2nd Class Kenneth Clodfelter of Virginia, one of those killed in the attack, who was directly behind the portion of the *Cole's* hull destroyed by the explosion and whose remains were the last to be recovered. The report also interviewed the sailor's father, John Clodfelter, a Vietnam veteran. The elder Clodfelter's father was a World War II veteran, and the family traces its military service to the American War for Independence.

Clodfelter was proud of his son's decision to serve his country in the Navy, and seemed to especially treasure the memory of his son's phone call home a couple of months before the attack, saying:?? "He had gotten to where he really loved what he did." ??But, noted the reporter, "The honor of his son's service has been tempered with frustration — that his killers have never been brought to justice."

"It is unreal," Clodfelter said. "They gave their lives for this country."

A more expansive commentary about our nation's failure to bring the *Cole's* attackers to justice was published by NBC News on the anniversary of the event. The article was headlined "[U.S. failure to retaliate for USS Cole attack rankled then — and now](#)," and also included an interview with John Clodfelter, who told NBC News:



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I just felt, for sure, you know, they're not going to go ahead and just kiss off the lives of 17 U.S. sailors. In fact, they didn't do anything ... to go after those that attacked the *Cole*.

NBC noted that shortly after the attack, President Clinton vowed to hold the terrorists accountable, proclaiming: "You will not find a safe harbor. We will find you and justice will prevail."

However, noted the report, Clinton never retaliated against al-Qaeda, inaction that even some of his own counter-terrorism advisors found frustrating. He later explained away this failure to the 9/11 commission, stating that he was never shown hard proof that al-Qaeda was behind the attack.

The report disputes Clinton's claims, however, quoting Mark Fallon, chief of the U.S. Navy investigative task force:

"Within two weeks we had significant information (that) we felt ... was solid evidence that the attack was linked not only to al-Qaida but to Osama bin Laden." By January [2001], after those confessions were verified in questioning by FBI Agent Ali Soufan, the case against bin Laden and al-Qaida was "rock solid," Fallon added.

Neither does the report give a free pass to the Bush administration, which after assuming power in January 2001, continued to ignore al-Qaeda's role in the *Cole* attack:

Those notes, which include extensive quotes directly from the emails, reveal how [Roger] Cressey [former White House director of transnational threats], who is now an NBC News terrorism analyst, and [Richard] Clarke [the chief counter-terrorism advisor under Clinton who stayed in the same job during the early years of the Bush presidency] repeatedly tried to call the attention of top Bush White House officials to bin Laden's role in the attack to prod them to approve a new, more aggressive strategy aimed at striking back at al-Qaida. But those warnings were all but ignored until the attacks of Sept. 11.

A further quote from Cressey serves as a stern indictment of our nation's failure to react decisively, and even suggested that that inaction contributed to the tragic events of September 11:

"Think about the optics," he said, "You had a billion dollar warship nearly sank, with 17 Americans killed. You had the United States not doing anything publicly about it. Bin Laden and al-Qaida were able to issue a series of videotapes crowing about their achievement. So, if I'm an impressionable young man who aspires to conduct jihad, and I see what al-Qaida did and they weren't held responsible, hell yeah, I'm going to go toward them. And that, in effect, is what happened."

There are several possible explanations for why two U.S. presidential administrations ignored the threat presented by al-Qaeda — as presented by their own security advisors — and took no action to neutralize the terrorist organization before it became more powerful and bold. Might not a special operations strike have dismantled the group, not only preventing the attacks of 9/11, but almost 10 years of subsequent warfare — still with no end in sight?

With Clarke and Cressey having given their superiors more-than-adequate warning, can either Bill Clinton or George Bush plead ignorance? Other possibilities exist, certainly, such as critical intelligence information becoming derailed amidst the bureaucratic labyrinth that our executive branch has become. Another alternative to ignorance or a bureaucratic snafu is that launching the endless "war on terror" was the objective all along, and the attack on the *Cole* — tragic as it was — was deemed to be inadequate to justify such an extreme step, while 9/11 was.

*Photo: This image provided by the U.S. Navy shows damage sustained on the USS Cole after a suspected terrorist bomb exploded during a*



*refueling operation in the port of Aden, Yemen, in this Oct. 12, 2000 file photo: AP Images*



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