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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**ALLEGED SOMALI PIRATES INDICTED FOR ATTACKS ON NAVY SHIPS**

NORFOLK, Va. – Federal grand juries in the Eastern District of Virginia have returned two separate indictments charging 11 men from Somalia with engaging in piracy and related offenses pertaining to attacks on two Navy ships. The indictments charge separate attacks by separate groups on the U.S.S. Nicholas and the U.S.S. Ashland.

Neil H. MacBride, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia; George Venizelos, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's New York Field Office; Alex J. Turner, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Norfolk Field Office; and Mark Russ, Special Agent in Charge of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) in Norfolk, made the announcement.

“Since the earliest days of this country, piracy has been a serious crime,” said U.S. Attorney MacBride. “Piracy threatens human lives and disrupts international commerce. When pirates attack U.S. vessels by force, they must face severe consequences.”

“The Naval Criminal Investigative Service provides unique forward deployed law enforcement capabilities to the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy,” said NCIS Special Agent in Charge Russ. “This case demonstrates the working relationship between uniformed military forces and NCIS – which is a civilian agency – and our federal partners to ensure cooperative security and stability across the maritime domain.”

The two indictments were returned earlier this week and remained sealed until the defendants made their initial appearances before a magistrate judge in Norfolk.

According to the first six-count indictment returned on April 20, 2010, five men – Mohammed Modin Hasan, Gabul Abdullahi Ali, Abdi Wali Dire, Abdi Mohammed Gurewardher, and Abdi Mohammed Umar – left Somalia in search of a merchant ship to pirate. They allegedly used two smaller vessels loaded with assault weapons and a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) that served as attack boats, along with a larger ship full of supplies.

This indictment alleges that on March 31, 2010, Hasan, Ali, and Dire boarded one of these smaller vessels and set out to pirate and plunder what they believed to be a merchant ship. Ali and Dire each allegedly carried an assault weapon, and Hasan allegedly carried an RPG. The indictment charges that they opened fire on the ship, which they later discovered was the Nicholas.

The remaining two individuals charged in the indictment – Gurewardher and Umar – remained onboard the large ship to maintain that ship during the alleged attack.

In a second five-count indictment, six men – Maxamad Cali Saciid, Mohammed Abdi Jama, Jaamac

Ciidle, Abdicasiis Cabaase, Abdirasaq Abshir and Mahamed Farraah Hassan – were charged with piracy-related offenses involving the U.S.S. Ashland on or about April 10, 2010.

All 11 men were charged with piracy, which carries a mandatory penalty of life in prison. In addition, the indictment also charges them with the following:

- Attack to plunder a vessel, which carries a maximum of 10 years in prison.
- Assault with a dangerous weapon in the special maritime jurisdiction, which carries a maximum of 10 years in prison.
- Conspiracy to use firearms during a crime of violence, which carries a maximum of 20 years in prison.
- Use of a firearm during a crime of violence, which carry a mandatory minimum of 10 years in prison and a maximum of life in prison if convicted of one count. The five men charged in the indictment involving the U.S.S. Nicholas face two firearm counts, which would carry an additional minimum of 25 years – to equal 35 years – in prison if convicted of both counts.

The U.S.S. Nicholas is an Oliver Hazard Perry class frigate homeported in Norfolk, Va. The U.S.S. Ashland is a Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship homeported in Little Creek, Va.

This investigation was conducted by the FBI's New York Field Office and Norfolk Field Office and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

The prosecution is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin L. Hatch and Joseph DePadilla, from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia.

The public is reminded that an indictment only contains charges and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/vae>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov> or on <http://pacer.uspci.uscourts.gov>.

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