

News Release



Allied Maritime
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NATO warship intercepts pirate mother ship and frees 15 hostages

London: Last week, a fully equipped pirate action group heading from the Somali coast into the Indian Ocean was intercepted and disabled by the American warship USS BAINBRIDGE, part of NATO's task force supporting Operation Ocean Shield, NATO's counter piracy mission. When hailed to stop by the USS BAINBRIDGE the pirates surrendered to the NATO warship without any shots being fired. Subsequently the crew of the dhow comprising 15 hostages were released.

Tasked with a surface search mission along the Somali coast to suppress pirate action groups and prevent them from putting to sea, the crew of USS BAINBRIDGE observed a suspicious dhow as she headed out to sea under the cover of darkness. Maintaining a strategic distance so as not to alert the suspected pirates to her presence the USS BAINBRIDGE followed the dhow until it was well off the coast of Somalia. At first light with the ship's Seahawk helicopter providing air cover a boarding team from the US warship approached the dhow.

On sighting the naval forces approaching their dhow the pirates quickly surrendered and USS BAINBRIDGE was able to establish communications with the master of the vessel. The Pakistani master claimed to have been pirated over six-months ago and his vessel used as a mother ship to attack merchant ships.

During a search of the dhow to ensure that all pirates were accounted for the boarding team found fifteen Pakistani crewmembers and seven Somali pirates on board as well as seven fully loaded AK47 assault rifles, two Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers, seven grenades, and several ammunition canisters as well as ladders and grappling hooks used to climb aboard ships that are to be attacked. The pirates confirmed that they had replenished the day before with ten barrels of fuel. This tied in with earlier observations by the NATO warship which had seen several dhows at the pirate camp exchanging fuel barrels with small skiffs.

All of the pirate paraphernalia and weapons were safely disposed of by the boarding team. Meanwhile, the crew of the dhow were given medical checks and sufficient diesel fuel to finally return to their homes after being held captive for so long.

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Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2)

Background Information:

NATO has contributed to the international counter piracy effort off the Horn of Africa since December 2008. The mission has expanded from escorting UN and World Food Programme Shipping under Operation Allied Provider and protecting merchant traffic in the Gulf of Aden under Operation Allied Protector. In addition to these activities and as part of the latest mission, Operation Ocean Shield, NATO is working with other international bodies to help develop capacity of countries in the region to tackle piracy on their own.

Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 is permanently assigned to NATO. It is a multi-national Naval Group that provides the NATO Alliance with the ability to quickly respond to crisis situations anywhere in the world. A capable, stand-alone task group and one of four standing maritime elements that form a flexible core around which NATO can build a larger force to meet a wide range of missions that will include non-combatant evacuations, consequence management, counter terrorism, crisis response, embargo operations, etc.

NATO has announced its continuing commitment to counter-piracy by extending Operation Ocean Shield to December 2012.

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:

- HNLMS TROMP (Flagship) - Netherlands
- USS BAINBRIDGE - United States of America
- HDMS ESBERN SNARE - Denmark
- TCG GIRESUN – Turkey
- USS STEPHEN W GROVES – United States of America
- P3 Orion Maritime Patrol Aircraft - Portugal

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