

Press Statement



Allied Maritime
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NATO action frees hostages and defeats pirates

London: Recent disruptions of several Pirate Action Groups by NATO forces within the Somali Basin have freed a significant number hostages from captivity and denied the pirates their motherships.

By careful co-ordination of his available forces Commodore Michael Hijmans, NLD (N) NATO's Commander of its Counter Piracy task force was able to seize the initiative and engage known pirate motherships. NATO was then able to disrupt them by either forcing their surrender or removing their capacity to attack merchant ships by the destruction of their attack skiffs.

In the most recent pirate disruption on 16th May the USS BAINBRIDGE was tasked to investigate a report of a pirate attack by the MSC Ayala. The Ayala was well prepared and had good self protection measures in place to deter the attack and the pirates broke off. The BAINBRIDGE however was by then in the area and quickly located the dhow which had launched the attack and observed ladders being thrown into the sea. The US ship questioned the crew over VHF radio and initially they tried to deceive them by denying that they were pirates but then changed their story and agreed to leave the ship in their attack skiff. Once clear of the dhow it was observed that the skiff was unseaworthy and the pirates were themselves then rescued by the BAINBRIDGE. The dhow, which had been hijacked four days previously, was cleared and then allowed to go about her lawful business on the high seas.

In two other separate incidents last week the American ship USS STEPHEN W GROVES and the Danish ship HDMS ESBERN SNARE and both encountered armed pirate gangs actively hunting for targets of opportunity.

During an engagement between the USS STEPHEN W GROVES and the Taiwanese fishing vessel Jih Chun Tsai 68, a known pirate mothership, shots were exchanged before the pirates surrendered. Subsequently a boarding team from the STEPHEN W GROVES was able to access the fishing vessel where they found 4 dead and 2 injured people. The dead were identified as the master/owner of the fishing vessel and 3 pirates and the injured were 2 of the pirates. The surviving pirates have been returned to Somalia. The event is under review to determine how the fatalities occurred and no additional information is available at this time..

Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2)

When the HDMS ESBERN SNARE approached a suspicious dhow she was fired upon without warning and returned fire in self defence while manoeuvring to increase the distance between the ships for safety. After the pirates surrendered ESBERN SNARE sent her armed boarding team to the dhow to secure it and assess the situation. The boarding team discovered 4 dead pirates and 10 with injuries of varying degrees of seriousness as well as 14 uninjured pirates, none of the 16 Iranian hostages of the dhow's crew was hurt. The injured pirates were transferred to the ESBERN SNARE for medical treatment along with the remaining pirates. The freed hostages have been repatriated to Iran.

Speaking today Rear Admiral Hank Ort NLD, Chief Of Staff at MC Northwood said of the task force's successes "This has been a busy week but through these actions we have clearly demonstrated the resolve of NATO to press home the advantage we have of disciplined crews, excellent support from our maritime patrol aircraft and co-ordination with other international counter piracy forces to suppress piracy. We are sending the message that piracy is a criminal activity that the international community will not tolerate. Of course we are very concerned about the decision by pirates to open fire on our forces and the loss of life is very regrettable which is why we investigate the circumstances on every occasion."

----TEXT ENDS----

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 MPRA - Portugal

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