

# News Release



Maritime  
Command  
Northwood  
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## Successful start to 2012 for Operation Ocean Shield

The first 13 days of January were busy ones for NATO's counter piracy task force; they successfully stopped and disrupted three separate pirate groups from launching attacks on legitimate maritime traffic. In the first incident on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> January the USS CARNEY acting on intelligence from other counter piracy forces intercepted the Indian flagged dhow AL QASHMI off the south western coast of Oman. Once onboard the dhow the USS CARNEY'S Board and Search Team quickly discovered that all evidence of potential piracy had been disposed of and questioning of the dhow's crew revealed that they had been hijacked with the 9 suspected pirates launching from a different dhow. The 9 suspected pirates were detained. The crew of the AL QASHMI were offered assistance and then allowed to go about their lawful business.

The second incident took place on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January several hundred nautical miles away to the south west and close to the Somali coast when another dhow, this time of Iranian nationality, was identified as a potential pirate mother ship by the Danish warship HDMS ABSALON. ABSALON'S Board and Search Team were quickly dispatched to the dhow under cover of a helicopter before the suspected pirates were able to dispose of potential evidence linking them to piracy and this was subsequently seized along with the 25 suspected pirates.

Early on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January, RFA Fort Victoria along with her embarked helicopter was tasked to intercept a third suspected pirate vessel. A Royal Marines boarding team in fast boats approached the vessel and successfully boarded it. Shortly after the Marines approached, the pirates surrendered moving to the front of their ship with their hands up. A thorough search of the vessel revealed numerous weapons including RPG launchers and machine guns.

This demonstrates NATO's capability to track and stop target vessels by using information from the various maritime counter piracy forces operating in the area.

## Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1)

Overall in January there were 4 attacks all of which were unsuccessful, 9 disruptions and 4 approaches in the Gulf of Aden / Indian Ocean. In addition, 80 suspected pirates were captured by counter piracy forces of which 59 were captured by NATO ships. 29 of them have already been transferred for prosecution with the position of the others under consideration by nations.

In comparison, in January 2011 there were 29 attacks, 10 disruptions, 3 approaches and most significantly 6 ships were pirated.

Rear Admiral Hank Ort, MC Northwood Chief of Staff said, "The reduction in pirate success is directly attributable to military presence and military action. We are not complacent; it is too early to say that we have won the battle of piracy. We know that if the navies go away the pirates will come back. What we can say is that we are making the seas safer for legitimate maritime traffic."

Naval warships have been in the region constantly since March 2009, providing a visible presence and deterrence while conducting counter piracy operations. The number of successful pirate attacks has dropped dramatically since NATO and other task forces started patrolling the sea lanes. In 2009, 45 ships were hijacked in the region; in 2011, 24 ships were hijacked effectively halving the number of ships taken within 2 years.

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#### Notes to Editors

NATO uses the following definitions:-

- a. Hijack – a successful attack when pirates are able to take control of the vessel
- b. Attack - when pirates try to take over the ship (weapons may be fired by the pirates) but in the end they do not gain control of the ship.
- c. Disruptions - when an action taken by a NATO ship causes the pirates to abort an attack. It could be e.g. a helicopter flying overhead or warning shots fired from a NATO vessel.

#### **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 1 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.

## Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1)

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:

TCG Giresun (Flagship) - Turkey  
USS De Wert – USA  
HDMS Absalon – Denmark  
Challenger 640 Aircraft - Denmark

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Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1)