

News Release



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Italian Navy Assumes Command of NATO's Counter Piracy Mission

Earlier today in Djibouti, Rear Admiral Antonio Natale, assumed command of Operation Ocean Shield, NATO's counter piracy mission from Cdre Ben Bekkering (Royal Netherlands Navy) who has completed a successful 6-month deployment in the region. After a short port visit, the flagship will commence counter piracy patrols off the coast of Somalia.

Pirate attacks off the Somali coast, one of the world's busiest shipping areas, have dramatically decreased this year – three years after NATO and the European Union began conducting naval patrols there. Naval patrols, armed security guards and best management practices on merchant ships are often stated as the reasons for the reduced number of pirate attacks and hijacks, however, to discourage pirates from going to sea in the first place the task force is moving into the coastal waters of Somalia. This has allowed them to engage with local and regional seafarers, these visits to dhows and their crews are a key instrument in this containment off the coast as they deter pirates, and reassure local villagers and fishermen.

NATO Maritime Command's Deputy Commander, Vice Admiral Christian Canova, said "We are containing them, we are succeeding, but piracy is not eradicated and we cannot afford to be complacent. It is encouraging that shipping companies notice a difference and feel safer, but pirates are still in Somalia,"

NATO is working alongside EUNAVFOR, Combined Maritime Forces and individual nations to tackle acts of piracy. By joining forces, counter piracy efforts are more effective and can achieve more than any one ship, navy, organisation or country working alone.

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.

NATO Allies agreed on 19 March 2012 to extend Operation Ocean Shield for a further two years until the end of 2014.

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:
ITS San Marco (flagship) – Italy
USS Halyburton – United States of America
HDMS Iver Huitfeldt - Denmark

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