

News Release



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NATO Ships Step Up Visits to Assist Somali Villagers

NATO's counter piracy task force continues to operate along the Somali coast as much as possible, engaging with local and regional seafarers, meeting elders and conducting medical visits using landing craft deployed just offshore. The aim is to expand the reach and effect of the counter piracy effort and prevent pirate action groups putting to sea.

Over the last few days NATO's ships, HNLMS ROTTERDAM, USS HALYBURTON and HDMS IVER HUITFELDT have been busy conducting visits to local skiffs and dhows. These visits allow exchange of information that will further the counter piracy effort. It also allows NATO to explain what its ships are doing in the region as well as detailing ways in which information regarding pirate activity can be reported.

In addition, ROTTERDAM conducted yet another successful local leader engagement, followed by medical assistance on board a landing craft off coast Quandala. Over the course of a few hours, the medical team of Rotterdam saw as many as 45 villagers. Main medical complaints were related to the poor quality of water in Quandala resulting in stomach problems and diarrhoea. According to the villagers the local wells and waterworks have been severely damaged by the heavy rains over the last few weeks.

"I sense a growing trust and understanding from the villagers. We obtain information that will allow us to make distinctions between pirates and local people going about their legitimate business. All this will contribute to a further reduction of the freedom of movement of the pirates in these coastal

regions. And that will ultimately bring back to maritime security that is vital for international, regional and local shipping alike,” stated CTF 508, Commodore Ben Bekkering.

The amount of pirate action reported this season in the waters off the coast of Somalia is significantly lower than that reported in previous years. Naval patrols and best management practices on merchant ships are clearly a factor in reducing the number of successful pirate attacks and hijacks. However, it is also the effect of the containment operations that are visible off the coast that discourages pirates from going to sea in the first place.

From 1 December Northwood Headquarters which is the operational HQ for Operation Ocean Shield, officially became host to NATO’s new Maritime Command. The change is a result of a larger programme decided at NATO’s 2010 Lisbon Summit aimed at making NATO’s command structure more efficient and effective. Throughout the whole of NATO positions are being trimmed from 12,000 HQ personnel to around 9,000 and reducing the number of NATO HQs from ten to six, in the largest re-structuring since the end of the Cold War. The new Maritime Command will report directly to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium.

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