

# News Release



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## Operation Ocean Shield Hosts Royal Visitor

Operation Ocean Shield, NATO's counter piracy mission welcomed the Crown Prince of the Netherlands, His Royal Highness Prince Willem-Alexander earlier this week. He spent two days onboard HNLMS Rotterdam, NATO's counter piracy flagship where he met staff and crew and where he was updated on the current counter piracy effort. He was accompanied by the Netherlands Chief of Defence, General Tom Middendorp, and the Chief of the Military Household, Major General Henk Morsink.

During his stay, the Prince not only met with and talked to many of the crew, he also participated in a number of activities. Being a keen aviator, he conducted some deck landings with the embarked Cougar helicopter, joined divers during a short dive and saw some of the new equipment in use by the marines on board. Most of all, he acquired firsthand experience of counter piracy operations from Rotterdam's crew. In addition, he had the opportunity to talk to the international task force staff who are embarked on the flagship. They come from seven different nations and are a very practical example of the co-operation and co-ordination which exists within NATO.

The visitors were impressed by Rotterdam's capabilities and the achievements of the crew in counter piracy to date. After an intensive 36 hours on board, the company returned ashore by helicopter.

The Task Force is NATO's contribution to the international counter piracy effort and is led by the Dutch Commodore Ben Bekkering. In order to create a lasting solution in the fight against piracy, the mission is also aimed at building regional maritime capacity.

The Task Force currently consists of ships from the Netherlands and the United States and a patrol aircraft from Denmark. In the next months, more ships from other NATO nations will join this task force adding to its capability.

## **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:  
HNLMS Rotterdam (flagship) The Netherlands  
USS Halyburton (United States of America)  
Challenger Maritime Patrol Aircraft (Denmark)

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