

News Release



**Allied Maritime
Command Headquarters
Northwood**



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NATO Operation Delivers Severe Blow Against Armed Pirates

Earlier this month, NATO counter-piracy forces delivered a severe blow against armed pirates off the coast of Somalia by arresting 34 suspected pirates. The suspected pirates had previously been observed loading up their mother ships and skiffs with fuel and weapons in order to attack merchant ships further out to sea. In a well-planned operation, NATO warships conducted a night-time strike on the known pirate lairs at sea, close to the coast. As well as detaining the 34 suspected pirates, 34 innocent hostages, who had been held by the pirates, were freed unharmed by the NATO forces.

Recent months have seen an increase in pirate attacks, particularly in the northern Arabian Sea, and with the monsoon season coming to an end, and the weather improving, it was seen as crucial for counter-piracy forces to strike to help prevent pirates getting out to sea to prey on merchant shipping transiting the area.

Over an extended period NATO warships HNLMS Tromp, HDMS Esbern Snare and USS Halyburton, observed the known pirate camps, supported by Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircrafts from the EU Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) and various other counter piracy forces.

On Friday, as part of the focussed operation, crew from NATO warship HDMS Esbern Snare boarded a suspicious whaler and found it to be packed with fuel, AK47 machine guns, a ladder and rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and 3 suspected pirates. The whaler and weaponry were seized by the warship, and after being questioned, the suspected pirates were taken to a nearby beach.

On Saturday HDMS Esbern Snare then approached a dhow that was suspected to be involved in pirate activity. As the Danish boarding team investigated, the pirates started firing at them, who then fired back in self defence. In the fire-fight several pirates were wounded and as a result, a medical team from NATO flag ship HNLMS Tromp was quickly sent to the scene to render medical assistance.

Shortly afterwards HNLMS Tromp spotted another suspect dhow heading for a known pirate camp and as she closed in to investigate, her boarding team was also fired upon. Gunners on board Tromp and the boarding team returned fire, setting fire to the dhow. Ten pirates tried to escape in a skiff, but were quickly captured. When a team from HNLMS Tromp went to the dhow to assist the innocent crew, they found 2 fatally wounded pirates on board. At the same time, a previously pirated merchant vessel - MV Albedo, lifted anchor and headed straight for the NATO flagship.

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After some well-aimed warning shots across her bow, Albedo returned to her anchorage. HNLMS Tromp then escorted the freed dhow and crew to safer waters.

On several occasions during the operation, the NATO warships surveyed the anchorages and the pirate beaches. They will continue to do so for the next few months.

Speaking after the operation, Rear Admiral Hank Ort, Chief of Staff at NATO's Maritime HQ in Northwood said, "This operation has shown the pirates that we mean business and will not tolerate their criminal activities. By conducting this operation close to the shore we have been able to deprive some pirates of a safe passage back to their anchorages and deprive others of the opportunity to go out and attack innocent merchant ships. We are pleased with the success of this operation but we are not complacent as we know there is still much work to be done."

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Background Information:

A news release issued on 3 April 2011 outlined the actions taken by HNLMS Tromp. This news release includes it as part of the overall operation.

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
HDMS ESBERN SNARE - Denmark
USS BAINBRIDGE - United States of America
USS HALYBURTON – Unites States of America
TCG GIRESUN – Turkey

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