

News Release



**Allied Maritime
Component Command
Headquarters Northwood**



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NATO AND MARITIME PARTNERS VISIT BEIJING AND STRENGTHEN GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST PIRACY

LONDON: Naval officers from NATO's Maritime Command in Northwood, North West London returned from Beijing this week having attended an international maritime co-operation counter-piracy meeting hosted by the Chinese Ministry of Defence. The meeting, which was also attended by officers from EU Naval Forces (EUNAVFOR) and the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) based in Bahrain, together with military representatives from Russia, Japan, India and Pakistan was seen as real progress in the forging of closer co-operation between navies around the world to protect merchant ships from pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and the Somali Basin.

The last 18 months have seen a significant increase in piracy in the waters off Somalia. Ships ranging from small yachts to large oil tankers have been targeted by Somali pirates who are often equipped with small arms and rocket propelled grenades.

At the Beijing meeting all the nations acknowledged the importance of sharing information on pirate activity in the region. China also expressed their willingness to evolve their warship patrols in the Gulf of Aden from independent escorts of merchant ships to the more joint patrols currently undertaken by NATO, EUNAVFOR and CMF. These task forces work together to patrol the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) – a sea area 492 miles long and 12 miles wide that all mariners are recommended to use when transiting the Gulf of Aden.

The Gulf of Aden is an area of immense strategic importance to the trading nations of the world. Some 22,000 merchant ships pass through the region each year, carrying around 8% of the world's trade, including more than 12% of the world's oil, and finished goods from the

Far East in to Europe. NATO's counter-piracy mission off Somalia is codenamed Ocean Shield and since the NATO ships arrived in the Gulf of Aden last year they have made a significant contribution to deterring and disrupting pirate attacks.

Notes to editors:

For Media enquiries please contact:

NATO Chief Public Affairs Officer – Lt Cdr Jacqui Sherriff MBE RN

+44 (0)1923 956763

+44 (0) 7747 008508

<mailto:pio@manw.nato.int>