

News Release



**Allied Maritime
Command
Headquarters
Northwood**



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One Year On NATO Remains Vigilant in Gulf of Aden

London: Today marks the first anniversary of NATO ships in the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy. Five NATO ships arrived in the Gulf of Aden on 24th March 2009 as part of NATO's counter piracy mission, Operation Allied Protector. Their aim was to disrupt and deter the piracy that was rife in the Gulf of Aden at that time. A year later our ships are still there but with an enhanced operational aim and with notable successes achieved.

Rear Admiral Hank Ort, (NLD N) Chief of Staff at Northwood said;

“This last year has been a busy one for NATO ships in the region. We have, together with our maritime partners, actively disrupted and prevented pirate attacks on innocent vessels.. Since the NATO mission began, there has been a significant drop in successful piracy incidents in the Gulf of Aden. Whilst I am pleased with what we have achieved, we cannot be complacent and must remain vigilant.”

90% of global trade by volume is carried by sea with 50% of the world's containers passing through the Indian Ocean. The Gulf of Aden sees over 22 000 ships per year transiting through on their way to countries all over the globe making it an important route for trade.

In March 2009, NATO's Standing Maritime Group arrived in the Gulf of Aden to conduct a counter piracy mission, Operation Allied Protector. Earlier this month, NATO nations agreed to extend Operation Ocean Shield until the end of 2012.

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They immediately made a difference with one of their ships, USS Halyburton disrupting a pirate attack against the yacht Grandezza in the Gulf of Aden on 28th March.

Piracy continued but the presence of NATO warships made it much more difficult for the pirates to achieve their goal of seizing ships between July and the end of December 2009, there were no successful hijacks in the Gulf of Aden.

In August 2009, NATO enhanced their counter piracy mission, with a new operation, Ocean Shield. While at-sea counter-piracy operations continued to be the focus, a new element of regional-state counter-piracy capacity building was developed which aims to assist regional states, upon their request, in developing their own ability to deal with piracy activities.

NATO's success in disrupting piracy has continued throughout the year; one example of this involved the Turkish frigate, Gediz. In September 2009, TCG Gediz disrupted an attack on the MV Handy V. The attack was abandoned when the pirates saw the Gediz approaching. Sailors from TCG Gediz boarded the skiff and found equipment relating to piracy. Some of the crew smelled of gunpowder and had weapon discharge on their clothing.

In 2008 there were 33 ships pirated in the Gulf of Aden, in 2009 this dropped to 19.

A more recent example involved the Danish frigate Absalon. On 5th February, HDMS Absalon responded to a call from MV Ariella that indicated she was under attack by pirates. A skiff fled the scene when Absalon's helicopter approached. Specially-trained forces from Absalon boarded the MV Ariella, secured the vessel and handed back control to the crew after a search revealed no pirates on board.

We continue to build on these successes. Within the last two months, with enhanced cooperation from our maritime partners we have expanded our operation into the Somali Basin. We have been able to prevent pirate attack groups from leaving the waters around the Somali coast to go and attack merchant vessels in the Somali Basin.

Ends

Notes to editors

1. The NATO Task Force 508 conducting Operation Ocean Shield is one out of three coalition task forces operating in the fight against piracy. TF 508 consists presently of five ships:

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HMS CHATHAM (Flagship - Royal Navy)
USS COLE (US Navy)
TCG GELIBOLU (Turkish Navy)
HS LIMNOS (Greek Navy)
ITS SCIROCCO (Italian Navy)

2. NATO has two Standing Maritime Groups which undertake their counter piracy mission. Each Group will normally spend four months at a time in the region.

3. Background: At the request of the UN in late 2008, NATO started to provide escorts to UN World Food Programme vessels transiting through the Somali Basin. This operation has now been succeeded by Operation Ocean Shield, which as well as deterring and disrupting pirate activity additionally offers training to regional countries in developing their own capacity to combat piracy activities.

4. NATO is conducting counter-piracy activities in compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions (1816, 1838, 1846, 1851 and 1897) and in coordination with other international actors including the European Union.

5. So far in 2010 there have been 4 ships pirated in the Gulf of Aden and 4 pirated in the Somali Basin.

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