

News Release



**Allied Maritime
Command
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NATO SAILORS REASSURE SEAFARERS – GULF OF ADEN

For NATO Commanders, their counter piracy mission, Operation Ocean Shield, is not just about deterring and preventing pirate attacks. It is increasingly about gathering piracy information and reassuring innocent seafarers that they can be safe on the high seas.

NATO boarding parties, made up of sailors and marines are routinely conducting maritime security assurance visits to small vessels operating in the Gulf of Aden. These friendly meetings aim to allay concerns that local seafarers may have about their safety and to reassure them that naval vessels are patrolling in the area. Where necessary the navies will provide water and food to these small dhows.

NATO's aim is that the assurance visits will help Somalis recognise that there is a viable employment alternative to piracy.

Royal Marine Boarding Team leader, Captain Chris Beesely RM said 'Interacting with local seafarers not only help encourages them to get back to sea but it also helps us get a better understanding of their pattern of life. That means we can quickly identify if something is different from the norm and react accordingly.'

The Commander of the NATO Task Group, Commodore Steve Chick of the UK Navy said,

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“The combined efforts of NATO, other organisations such as the EU Naval Force, Combined Maritime Force, and not least, the Puntland authorities have led to a steady drop in piracy incidents in the Gulf of Aden over the last year. We are keen to see innocent seafarers feeling safe enough to return to their trade at sea. Many have been frightened away by the pirates and the boarding parties are doing much to provide a message of reassurance”.

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:

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

2. 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.

3. 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.

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