

News Release



**Allied Maritime
Component Command
Headquarters Northwood**



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HMS CHATHAM FORCES RELEASE OF PIRATED DHOW

An Indian flagged dhow, the VISHVAKALYAN, which had been seized by Somali pirates and used as a pirate mother ship has been intercepted by the NATO warship HMS CHATHAM in the area to the East of the Gulf of Aden. The Royal Navy frigate, which is part of NATO's counter piracy Operation Ocean Shield, spent three days shadowing the vessel, exerting pressure on the Somali pirates on board until the mother ship ran out of fuel and was forced to stop. Stricken and overwhelmed by the warship which closed to the point of bringing the mother ship alongside, the pirates were directed to leave the VISHVAKALYAN under the shadow of HMS CHATHAM's close range weapons and Royal Marine marksmen. They then fled back to the Somali coast in a smaller skiff, leaving the dhow and her crew unharmed.

It is believed that the dhow had been used to mount an unsuccessful attack against at least one merchant ship over the preceding days, before she was intercepted by HMS CHATHAM. In response to the night time attack on 6 Apr, the NATO warship diverted to the scene and launched her Lynx helicopter which quickly located the suspect dhow. HMS CHATHAM closed their position and this initial action was sufficient to ensure that the pirates could not continue with their mission.

As HMS CHATHAM approached, it became clear that the personnel on board were carrying a variety of weapons including Rocket Propelled Grenades and AK47 rifles. The action taken by the warship, her helicopter and fast boats with Royal Marines embarked, over the three days, left the pirates no option but to comply with NATO's demands and peacefully abandon the dhow.

The Master and fourteen other crew members of the VISHVAKALYAN were extremely relieved to be released and grateful to HMS CHATHAM, who provided them with medical assistance, water and fuel to allow them to proceed towards their next port.

Commander Simon Huntington, HMS CHATHAM's Commanding Officer, said "We have actively disrupted a group of pirates who had hijacked this dhow, taking the crew hostage, and they were obviously intent on seizing a larger merchant vessel and its crew, for criminal means. I am extremely pleased that due to the actions of my Ship's Company, HMS CHATHAM quickly found and intercepted them, forcing them to abort their mission;

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but what is most rewarding for all of us involved in this operation, is that we have secured the release of this dhow and her crew unharmed and without the need for an escalation in violence.”

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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 to 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 has recently announced its commitment to Operation Ocean Shield has been extended to December 2012.

The NATO Task Force consists of 5 ships from Standing NATO Maritime Group 2. These are:

HMS CHATHAM (Flagship) – UK
USS COLE – US
TCG GELIBOLU – Turkey
HS LIMNSO - Greece
ITS SCIROCCO – Italy

At sea NATO is working closely with other partners including EU Maritime Force, Combined Maritime Force as well as other navies, including China, Japan, India and Russia.

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