

News Release



Maritime
Command
Northwood
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Ref: OOS 2013 / 01

8th January 2013

NATO and EU Work Together to Disrupt Pirate Group

Late on Sunday 6th January, the NATO warship, USS Halyburton and the FS Surcouf from the European Union naval task force worked together to disrupt a pirate vessel which is believed to have attacked a merchant ship earlier in the day.

A Panama-flagged merchant vessel was en route from Salalah in Oman to Mombasa in Kenya when it was approached by a suspected pirate skiff with six people on board, off the eastern coast of Somalia.

While the crew assembled in the ship's safe room from where they broadcast a distress message, the on-board armed security team took up position and exchanged fire with the suspected pirates.

As a result of the reaction of the security team, the suspected pirates moved away and with no personnel injured and only minor superficial damage to the ship, the merchant vessel continued its transit to Mombasa.

While the attack was underway, the Commander of the NATO counter piracy task force, Rear Admiral Antonio Natale from the Italian Navy, tasked the USS Halyburton, which was in the vicinity, to proceed towards the suspected pirates position.

Within a few hours, Halyburton with the support of a German Maritime Patrol Aircraft and the FS Surcouf, then located and detained 12 suspected pirates on board a motor whaler, that appeared to be acting as a 'mothership' together with one smaller skiff.

"With such a large area of operation, the cooperation of the whole counter piracy community is an essential pre-requisite. Today, we demonstrated yet again that we work best when we work together" – said Rear Admiral Antonio Natale commenting after the event.

The pirates are currently detained on board the FS Surcouf.

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 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.

NATO Allies agreed on 19 March 2012 to extend Operation Ocean Shield for a further two years until the end of 2014.

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:

- ~ **ITS SAN MARCO** – Flag Ship (ITALY)
- ~ **HDMS IVER HUITFELDT** (DENMARK)
- ~ **USS HALYBURTON** (UNITED STATES)
- ~ **TCG GOKOVA** (TURKEY)

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