

Operation Ocean Shield

March 2012



Mission: Since August 2009, NATO warships and aircraft have been patrolling the waters off the Horn of Africa as part of Operation Ocean Shield. Their mission is to contribute to international efforts to counter maritime piracy while participating in capacity building efforts with regional governments. Operation Ocean Shield cooperates closely with other naval forces including US-led maritime forces, EU naval forces and national actors operating against the threat of piracy in the region. On 19 March 2012, the North Atlantic Council extended the operation until the end of 2014.

Legal Mandate: NATO mission is in full accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions relating to Somali-based piracy. UNSC Resolution 2020 (November 2011) renewed the call on states and regional organizations to take active part in the fight against piracy off the coast of Somalia. With the consent of Somali authorities, the resolution also mandates taking “all necessary means to repress acts of piracy and armed robbery within the territorial waters of Somalia”.

Command and Control: NATO’s highest decision making body, the North Atlantic Council provides political guidance for the operation. Command and Control is exercised by the NATO military chain of command, with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe having delegated operational command to Maritime Command Headquarters in Northwood in the United Kingdom.

Participating Nation: All Allies contribute to the mission, either directly or indirectly, through NATO’s command structures and common funding. NATO Allies provide ships and maritime patrol aircraft to NATO Standing Maritime Groups, which in turn assigns a number of ships, on a rotational basis, to Ocean Shield. As at 15 March 2012, five Allies (Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, the United States and Turkey) provide naval assets to the mission, supported by maritime patrol aircraft. Around 800 personnel are currently deployed as part of the mission.

Area of Operation: NATO naval forces operate off the Horn of Africa, including the Gulf of Aden and the Western Indian Ocean up to the Strait of Hormuz. An area greater than 2 million square miles or approximately the size of Western Europe. With the consent of Somali authorities, NATO vessels may enter the territorial waters of Somalia. Operations on Somali land are not part of the NATO mandate.

Process: NATO vessels conduct intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions to verify the activity of shipping off the coast of Somalia, separating out legitimate maritime traffic from suspected pirate vessels. Commercial ships that are transiting the area are monitored and in many cases escorted to ensure their safe passage. The shipping industry is in regular contact with NATO and the other counter piracy operations through the NATO Shipping Centre, where pirate activity can be reported and shared to prevent attacks and enhance situational awareness of the maritime environment. NATO ships also actively pursue suspected pirate ships to prevent them from staging attacks. NATO boarding teams can board a suspect vessel to determine if pirates are on board. NATO vessels can also use force to stop a pirate vessel or intervene in a hijacking. Any detained pirates will be transferred as soon as possible to designated national law enforcement agencies. In addition NATO, along with its partners, has been working with the maritime community to ensure that both merchant ships and crews are aware of Best Management Practices 4 (BMP 4) which gives advice on how to protect vessels against pirate attack.

Deterrence and Disruption

In January 2012 there were four pirate attacks all of which were unsuccessful. In addition, 80 suspected pirates were captured by counter piracy forces of which 59 were captured by NATO ships. 29 of them have already been transferred for prosecution with the position of the others under consideration by nations. In comparison, in January 2011 there were 29 attacks and six ships were pirated.

Pirate Attacks 2008 – 2012 (March)

Location	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 (until 15 Mar)
Somali Basin	8 hijacks 11 attacks N/A	26 hijacks 58 attacks 15 disruptions	26 hijacks 68 attacks 88 disruptions	4 hijacks 52 attacks 52 disruptions	0 hijacks 1 attack 4 disruptions
Gulf of Aden	33 hijacks 42 attacks N/A	18 hijacks 67 attacks 47 disruptions	12 hijacks 33 attacks 56 disruptions	1 hijacks 29 attacks 21 disruptions	0 hijacks 3 attacks 3 disruptions
Arabian Sea	N/A N/A N/A	1 hijacks 5 attacks N/A	7 hijacks 31 attacks 3 disruptions	19 hijacks 48 attacks 23 disruptions	3 hijacks 3 attacks 8 disruptions
Total		45 hijacks 130 attacks 62 disruptions	45 hijacks 132 attacks 147 disruptions	24 hijacks 129 attacks 96 disruptions	3 hijacks 7 attacks 15 disruptions

Legend:

Hijacks: Pirates are able to take control of a vessel

Attack: Pirates try to take over a ship but do not succeed.

Disruption: NATO action causes the pirates to abort an attack.

Pirated vessels: As at 15 March 2012, pirates are holding 8 ships with an estimated 212 hostages.

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