

# Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR NATO-led Arms Embargo against Libya

## June 2011

As of 23 March 2011, NATO warships and aircraft are patrolling the approaches to Libyan territorial waters as part of Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR. Their mission is to reduce the flow of arms, related material and mercenaries to Libya, as called for in UN Security Council Resolution 1973.

The overall operation is commanded by Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard of Combined Joint Task Force Unified Protector. The Maritime Arms Embargo is under the command of Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri from NATO Maritime Command Naples. Political oversight of the operation is provided by the North Atlantic Council at NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

As at 30 May 2011, nineteen ships and submarines monitor and enforce the arms embargo, supported by maritime patrol aircraft and fighter jets as required.

To implement their mission, NATO naval forces can deny transit to vessels entering or leaving Libyan ports if there are reasons to believe that the vessel or its cargo will be used to support attacks on civilians, either directly or indirectly. Any interception and/or denial of passage of vessels is decided on a case-by-case basis against reliable intelligence by NATO military commanders.

NATO is working closely with the International Maritime Organization and commercial shipping industry to mitigate possible disruptions to maritime traffic. Ships aiming to transit through the embargo area of operation are actively informed of the procedures for passage by NATO and required to notify NATO of their cargo and destination as detailed in a Navigation Warning message.

Based on information provided by transiting vessels, including through the ships' Automated Identification System (which provides basic information about speed, position, course and destination), as well as surveillance and intelligence means, NATO verifies the activity of shipping in the region separating out legitimate commercial, humanitarian and private traffic from suspicious vessels that warrant closer inspection.

Suspicious vessels are hailed by radio, and if they cannot give satisfactory information about their cargoes, NATO ships are authorized to intercept them. As a last resort, the boarding teams are empowered to use force to gain access to the vessel to inspect the ship's log, crew list and cargo manifest. So far, all boardings have been unopposed.

If weapons, mercenaries or related materials are found, the vessel and its crew can be denied the right to continue to their destination. As at 30 May 2011, 1093 vessels have been hailed and 60 boarded. Seven ships have been denied transit to or from Libyan ports.

All NATO units are fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to the International Maritime Law regarding Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). NATO ships will do everything they can to respond to distress calls and provide help when necessary.

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