

# News Release



**Maritime  
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## **NATO Warship HNLMS Rotterdam frees hijacked dhow**

In the early morning of the 13th of August, the boarding team of HNLMS Rotterdam disrupted a suspected pirate group before they could launch an attack on a merchant ship. The decisive action was the result of a daylong operation of ships and patrol aircraft from NATO and EUNAVFOR.

The search for the suspected pirates started five days ago, when Bossaaso port authorities reported a possible hijacking of a dhow. Two days later, the EU Naval Force unit Lafayette located the dhow. A visit showed that the suspected pirates had transferred to another vessel, the Bourhan Nour. That dhow was located another day later by another EU Naval Force unit, FGS Sachsen.

It became clear the suspected pirates were bound for Somalia, apparently ready to give up their plans. Commodore Ben Bekkering, Commander of NATO's counter piracy mission, Operation Ocean Shield explains what action was taken; "To us it seemed highly unlikely that the pirates would want to return to Bossaaso. The authorities there make no secret of their intentions to eradicate piracy. However, to the east of Bossaaso two hijacked ships are still held by the pirates, who seem to be present in the nearby villages as well. We expected the pirates to go there, possibly asking help from their colleagues. We therefore decided to station Rotterdam off the coast, deploying her landing craft in a number of locations, effectively blocking any retreat from or support of the dhow. As expected, the dhow entered the trap. It was then up to Rotterdam."

"For the pirates it must have been a strange site. Not just Rotterdam and FGS Sachsen from the EU Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR) following closely, but also a helicopter and few landing craft ahead making the coast almost impossible to approach," explains Captain Huub Hulsker, Commanding Officer of HNLMS Rotterdam. "There was not really anywhere for them to go. Obviously, the main thought is always for the safety of my crew and that of the crew of the dhow. But the situation was clear and some strict orders and two warning shots later, the suspected pirates surrendered. The boarding team was on board and in control of the vessel within the next 20 minutes. A grateful dhow crew, an impressive first action of my whole team early in my deployment and six suspected pirates detained on board, awaiting further decisions - this is a result that counts."

“It is clear that the pirates are experiencing increasing pressure”, says Bekkering. “If they make it to the open sea, they find it increasingly difficult to stay undetected and find opportunities to attack merchant vessels. That can be credited to a broad international effort and the effective coordination between many participants. In this case, NATO and EU worked closely together. The fact that Rotterdam could execute the last step had everything to do with the team effort that preceded it.”

NATO is working alongside EUNAVFOR, Combined Maritime Forces and individual nations to fight piracy. By joining forces, counter piracy efforts are more effective and can achieve more than any one ship, navy, organisation or country working alone.

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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 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.

Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 is permanently assigned to NATO. It is a multi-national Naval Group that provides the NATO Alliance with the ability to quickly respond to crisis situations anywhere in the world. A capable, stand-alone task group and one of four standing maritime elements that form a flexible core around which NATO can build a larger force to meet a wide range of missions that will include non-combatant evacuations, consequence management, counter terrorism, crisis response, embargo operations, etc.

HNLMS Rotterdam, flagship of NATO task Force 508, continues her patrol within Operation Ocean Shield, the NATO-contribution to the international counter piracy effort in the waters around the Horn of Africa. The ship has 350 people embarked, from all services and from 8 NATO-countries.

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:  
HNLMS Rotterdam (flagship) The Netherlands  
USS Taylor (United States of America)

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