

Nato warships respond to piracy threats off Africa

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A flotilla of Nato warships will make an historic 12,500 nautical mile circumnavigation around Africa in response to rising piracy attacks and drug trafficking, writes Brian Reyes.

Standing Nato Maritime Group 1 will sail from the Mediterranean on August 4 on a two-month deployment to raise awareness of maritime security in African waters.

The mission follows reports of piracy off the Horn of Africa, drug trafficking in West Africa and kidnapping and attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta.

In recent weeks the World Food Programme has expressed grave concerns for the safety of shipping carrying aid to Somalia as a result of acts of piracy in the region.

"We are seeing a worrying trend of threats to maritime security," said Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent, Commander Allied Maritime Component Command, Northwood.

"It is deeply embarrassing in the 21st century that ships carrying corn and maize are being threatened not by missiles but by pirates."

He said Nato maritime forces had a crucial role to play in building Maritime Situational Awareness and monitoring activity in the maritime domain, compiling a picture of the movement of vessels, shipping patterns and activities over a period of time.

The Nato ships will conduct surveillance and 'presence operations' in the Gulf of Guinea and the Horn of Africa.

Intelligence is a key element of providing a secure maritime environment, Nato officials say.

"Energy security in the Gulf of Guinea and piracy off the Horn of Africa are issues that affect all Nato nations," said Rear Admiral Mike Mahon, the US officer in command of the Nato force to Africa.

The mission will include vessels from Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and the US.

