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Pirates attack Indian navy, hijack two more ships

Separate gangs of pirates have hijacked two more ships near Somalia, while a third attacked an Indian navy ship, before being destroyed by return fire.

Pirate ships have been roaming the Gulf of Aden, where modern-day buccaneers have captured several ships in the past few months. Just yesterday, two separate groups captured a Thai ship and an Iranian cargo vessel. Forty crew members from the two ships were also captured.

In total, various groups of pirates have control of 17 vessels along with their 300 crew members. The captured ships include a Ukrainian ship carrying weapons and a Saudi supertanker with a US\$100-million-load of crude oil.

A Canadian vessel is among a multinational coalition that patrols Horn of Africa, but that has not stopped the spate of hijackings. Retired Vice Admiral Peter Cairns told CTV's Canada AM on Wednesday that the problem is a global issue that needs to be addressed through increased international co-operation. Cairns, who is currently the president of the Ship Building Association, said more countries need to get involved in what is becoming a major problem not just in the waters off Somalia but in other areas of the world as well.

"Our navy cannot deal with it by itself. It has to be an international effort, and that is what has been lacking," he said. "You need to have significant intelligence. You need to have navies to step in at the right time to prevent these." Cairns also noted that the pirates have been propped up by some of Somalia's poorest people.

"There is backing by a lot of people to support these pirates because that is one of the major source of income that some of these regions of Somalia have -- in fact, the only source of income," he said.

Ahmed Hussen, the head of the Canadian Somali Congress, said piracy has become a "huge

industry" in Somalia, an impoverished nation which has had a broken federal government for nearly two decades. He told Canada AM from Ottawa that the piracy problem has been exacerbated by the failure of international intervention in the country. He said the country has had to deal with "decades of neglect" and "inefficient peace plans." That has left "a lot of militiamen with not much to do," he said.

The Indian ship that was attacked on Tuesday was part of the multinational coalition force patrolling the region. The Indian navy said pirates fired on their ship, the INS Tabar, when they were stopped for a search. The Indian vessel fired back, destroying the pirate ship. The navy ship then chased a pair of speedboats, but the pirates escaped. One of the speedboats was later found abandoned.

The Gulf of Aden is one of the world's most important sea routes. It connects to the Red Sea, which allows the most direct access to the Mediterranean by the Suez Canal. But now, at least one European company has ordered its ships to take a longer route round the southern tip of Africa to avoid pirates.

"We will no longer expose our crew to the risk of being hijacked and held for ransom by pirates in the Gulf of Aden," Terje Storeng, president and chief executive of the Norwegian shipping giant Odjell SE, told The Associated Press.

Source: CTV.ca News Staff, Wednesday November 19th 2008

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