



defence

Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEFENCE STATEMENT

Date: 25 April 2012

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE, ANTI-PIRACY

Unknown to the public at large, a major anti-piracy operation took place off the East coast of our neighbouring SADC countries during the past week. The South African Navy ship the SAS Drakensburg played a major role in this operation.

It all started off with an unsuccessful pirate attack on a Filipino merchant vessel last Friday at the Northern end of the Mozambican Channel. At about the same time, the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre in Dar Es Salaam raised concern regarding the safety of a South African owned yacht, the Dandelion, en route from the Island of Mayotte to the Mozambican port of Pemba.

By Sunday, the Tanzanian Navy had requested the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to assist in search efforts.

The SAS Drakensburg, with anti-piracy assets onboard, was already conducting patrol duties in the Mozambican Channel at that time. This SANDF operation is part of an inter-governmental agreement between South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania to safeguard SADC sea lanes from piracy and has seen SA Navy ships constantly deployed in that area for the past year. The South African ship immediately commenced with a search for the missing yacht with the assistance of its embarked helicopter.

During the Monday morning, the French aircraft located the suspected pirate mother ship off the Tanzanian coast and moving in a Northerly direction.

The pirate mother ship, with a skiff in tow, was identified as the Sri Lankan fishing vessel Nimesha Duwa which was captured by pirates on 9 November last year.

At midday on Monday, the South African yacht was located off Pemba having been delayed after suffering technical difficulties. The operation now changed from a Search and Rescue mission to a piracy interdiction operation.

By Monday afternoon, the Tanzanian Navy had provided permission to the SANDF to conduct anti-piracy operations within its territorial waters and the hunt was on.

During the next 24 hours, an intensive search was conducted by the SAS Drakensburg and its SAAF helicopter along the cluttered Tanzanian coast. European and Tanzanian vessels were closing in from the North. Unfortunately, poor weather conditions hampered the search effort. However, the plan remained for the SAS Drakensburg to

force the pirate vessels to escape to the North into the waiting arms of the Tanzanian forces.

By midday on Wednesday, the concerted pressure of the search efforts had forced the pirates to split up and the skiff with 5 suspected pirates were located on Songo Songo Island and subsequently arrested by Tanzanian authorities.

Wednesday evening saw units from four different countries closing in on the estimated position of the pirate mother ship. The Spanish warship got there first and managed to capture the vessel by 20h30. Seven suspected pirates were apprehended and the six long suffering Sri Lankan crew members were finally freed.

The SAS Drakensburg spent Wednesday night in the area to assist Tanzanian forces if so required. The suspected pirates have by now all been handed over to the Tanzanian authorities who will now start with the legal minefield of prosecuting them for crimes committed in International waters.

In the end, it seems clear that a loud message has gone out that SANDF forces, as part of SADC armed forces, will not allow illegal activities within SADC waters. It is also clear that the Tripartite agreement between South Africa, Mozambique and Tanzania, and the subsequent deployment of SADC forces to safeguard our sea lanes, is paying off dividends in ensuring the safety of our seafarers and their precious cargoes. To the sailors and air crew of the SAS Drakensburg, the operational planners of Chief of Joint Operations and all others involved; we salute your valiant efforts!

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