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GOVERNMENT ACTION:
UK responds to piracy threat

Tackling piracy

Henry Bellingham, the Minister whose brief includes Africa, outlines the UK Government's counter piracy initiatives

One of the most important duties of a Government is to protect its citizens, both at home and abroad. Piracy off the coast of Somalia is a direct challenge to this duty, and as Minister for Africa, I am acutely aware of the impact pirates have on the UK's security, prosperity and the lives of British people.

That impact is felt most in the Gulf of Aden. As the second busiest trade route in the world with 23,000 ships transiting it every year, it plays a key role for UK shipping and trade. The protection of this shipping route has been our key objective and there have been no successful hijacks of UK flagged commercial vessels since September 2010. But we realise too that the success of international operations in this region has displaced pirate attacks into the wider Indian Ocean. As of November 2011, nine ships and 245 hostages currently remain in pirate hands. So far this year there have been a total of 120 attempted pirate attacks; an increase on attempts last year.

We need to do all we can together to protect ships and their crews from attack. As the Prime Minister announced in October, the UK will allow the use of private armed security on UK flagged ships, and the Government is working with partners to take this forward responsibly. We are doing this because there is no doubt that private armed security provides significant protection. No ship carrying armed security has yet been hijacked and in situations where the military was not involved, nine out of ten failed attacks in the last few months were repelled by armed security.

The industry is playing an important role too. No successful pirate attacks have occurred against ships that fully comply with the shipping industry's self-protection measures, *Best Management Practice*. The latest update, *Best Management Practice 4*, is impressive and I am grateful for efforts – including increasing efforts by the insurance industry – to press for maximum compliance.

But we must not underestimate the ingenuity of pirates. It remains hard

to predict where they will focus their efforts. Our approach needs to be flexible and responsive. We must continue to provide our partners in the region with the resources they need to respond to these threats. This Government strongly supports a more robust response to piracy and we are glad to see the **Royal Navy**, the **EU Naval Force Somalia** and **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** leading the way. The Royal Navy is operating alongside other navies, sharing information and coordinating operations on a scale and with an openness that has never been seen before and will continue to have a presence in the region for some time to come.

This unprecedented co-ordination extends beyond the military sphere through the **Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia**. This unique political, military and industry body, made up of more than 50 countries and 25 organisations from the European Union (EU) to the Arab League, can make a real difference and we are playing a leading role in it. It is a strong embodiment of collective political will; a clear recognition that this issue affects all of us and the interests of our nations.

There is much for this international community to do. There are now over 1,100 Somali pirates held in custody in over 20 countries, including three key pirate leaders and financiers. This Government is clear that pirates must pay for their actions. We want more pirates detained, tried and imprisoned in the region, ideally in Somalia itself. We know this is what regional partners want too. Where there is evidence, and the possibility of conviction, we do not want to see pirates caught and released. The UK is undertaking groundbreaking project work on prisons, prosecutions and transfer agreements to make this happen, in conjunction with **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** in Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania, the Seychelles and Somalia. And I was pleased to announce in my speech in October to the **British Chamber of Shipping** that the UK will providing a further £2.25 million (\$3.5 million) to support UNODC's excellent

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work, as well as supporting a new maritime intelligence and information coordination centre in the Seychelles to tackle pirate financiers.

Ultimately, the long-term solution is in Somalia itself. We are now focusing on projects to provide genuine alternatives to piracy and to underline the harsh reality of being a pirate. One third of pirates never come home when they go to sea. This is a message we need to get out, and by committing £2 million (\$3.1 million) to community engagement and economic development in coastal regions of Somalia we will be helping to build alternatives to piracy. We are supporting prison building too. Imprisonment in Somalia is the most sustainable solution so the recent pledge by the Seychelles government to transfer prisoners tried in the Seychelles to Somali prisons is an important step forward. By working with the Somali government, and

international partners, we are producing long-term solutions that address the long-standing problems.

This is why the UK is hosting an international conference on Somalia next year. The conference is aimed at delivering a new international approach to Somalia. We need to take urgent action to improve the situation in Somalia. In the last months, tens of thousands of Somalis have died of famine. Somalia poses significant threats to international security, as a base for terrorists and pirates who threaten the security and prosperity of people around the world. This can't continue. The international community needs to tackle the underlying causes of these issues at the root. This will require engagement at the highest level with closer cooperation and a clear plan for tackling Somalia's problems.

It is also clear that piracy and armed robbery at sea is a rising concern off West Africa. The recent **United Nations (UN) Security Council** Resolution (UNSCR 2015) reflects our concerns and those of the international community and countries in the region. Yet again governance and law enforcement are critical, as is industry self-protection. But I am encouraged that we are applying to West Africa the lessons we have learnt from the East. Together with the **Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF)**, we are helping develop a Maritime Trade Information Sharing Centre for the Gulf of Guinea, which draws on the information sharing and early warning expertise from the Indian Ocean and will help tackle this growing problem.

Despite the progress we and our partners are making across East and West Africa, piracy remains one of the biggest threats to modern day commerce. Safe maritime trade is essential to the UK, not least as trade is fundamental to building the new and better economy that this Government is determined to achieve. This Government is determined both to be tough at sea, and through the *London Conference on Somalia* next year, to lead international efforts to tackle the root causes of piracy and build a sustainable solution on land.

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