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CITE OSC RESTON VA 705262

WARNING: TOPIC: INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, MILITARY

SERIAL: KPP20090416041029

/***** THIS IS A COMBINED MESSAGE *****/

BODY

COUNTRY: SOUTH KOREA, SOMALIA, UNITED STATES

SUBJ: ROK DAILY: KOREAN UNIT BEGINS CONVOYS OFF SOMALIA (U)

SOURCE: SEOUL THE KOREA TIMES ONLINE IN ENGLISH 1737 GMT 16 APR 09

(U)

TEXT:

By Jung Sung-ki, Staff Reporter: "Korean Unit Begins Convoys Off Somalia" (U)

Internet

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Headline as provided by source.

A South Korean destroyer deployed to Somali waters Thursday began operations aimed at escorting the country's commercial vessels, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said.

Tension is mounting in the region, as pirates have vowed revenge for the thwarting of a recent hijacking by the U.S. navy.

The 4,500-ton Munmu the Great, carrying a crew of 300, started escorting a 12,000-ton South Korean cargo vessel, Pine Galaxy, at 8 a.m. (KST) off the coast of Oman, said Col. Lee Hyoung-kook at the JCS overseas troop deployment bureau.

It was expected to take 13 hours for the destroyer to escort the commercial vessel westward along the 790-kilometer-long Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor to the coast off Djibouti, Lee told reporters.

The destroyer is able to protect up to six vessels at a time but will normally escort one to three ships, he said. About 500 South Korean cargo ships sail throughout the piracy-stricken Gulf of Aden every year, and some 150 of them are categorized as vulnerable to hijacking given their size and speed, he added.

Lee said the recent surge in pirate attacks in the region poses a threat but voiced confidence the South Korean unit is ready to deal with any contingency.

"We have trained with various situations in mind. We're optimally ready," said the colonel.

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Somali pirates recently captured the captain of a U.S. vessel but were killed by U.S. Navy **SEALS** after a tense standoff. The pirates have since vowed to step up their attacks.

Last month, the South Korean Navy dispatched the Cheonghae Unit to the coast off Somalia, the first-ever overseas naval deployment for combat.

The Korean contingent consists of the KDX-II destroyer, a Lynx anti-submarine helicopter, rigid inflatable speedboats (RIBs) and 30 UDT/SEAL forces and an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team among its personnel.

The KDX-II destroyer is equipped with a Mk. 45 127mm gun, Harpoon ship-to-surface missiles, RAM Mk 31 ship-to-air guided missiles, a 30mm Goalkeeper system for engaging sea-skimming anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. The 150-meter-long, 17-meter-wide ship, built in 2003, is able to sail at a top speed of 29 knots.

Description of Source: Seoul The Korea Times Online in English -- Website of The Korea Times, a moderate English-language daily published by Hanguk Ilbo; URL: <http://times.hankooki.com/>

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/***** BEGINNING OF SECTION 2 *****/

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Topic(s): INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL, MILITARY
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