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SECTION 1 OF 2

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WARNING: TOPIC: CRIME, MILITARY, URGENT

SERIAL: AFP20090414532008

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

**BODY**

COUNTRY: SOMALIA, UNITED STATES, GREECE

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION: NATO

SUBJ: **SOMALI PIRATES HIJACK FOUR VESSELS SINCE US NAVY RESCUE OF  
AMERICAN CAPTAIN (U)**SOURCE: PARIS AFP (WORLD SERVICE) IN ENGLISH 1320 GMT 14 APR 09  
(U)

TEXT:

News Agencies

OSC Transcribed Text

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NAIROBI, April 14, 2009 (AFP) - **Somali pirates** seized two more ships on Tuesday, brushing off their losses from deadly rescue operations and throwing down the gauntlet to US President Barack Obama after he pledged to curb piracy.

It brought to four the number of vessels taken since the US navy operation on Sunday which saved an American skipper but led to the deaths of three pirates, upping the stakes in the dangerous waters off the Horn of Africa.

The MV Irena, a 35,000-tonne Greek-operated merchant vessel flagged in Saint-Vincent and the Grenadines, was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden, the European Union's naval mission in the area said. Its 22 Filipino crew is believed to be safe.

"It's a Greek ship, it was seized early today," Andrew Mwangura, from the Kenya-based East African Seafarers Assistance Programme, told AFP.

Hours later a NATO spokeswoman said a second freighter, flying a Togolese flag, had been seized by pirates off the Horn of Africa, the 10th hijacking in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean since the

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start of the month.

"I can confirm that a second cargo ship, the Sea Horse has been seized," said spokeswoman Shona Lowe from NATO's Northwood maritime command centre in England.

She could not provide details on the numbers or nationalities that had been aboard the ship nor how many remained in danger. The pirates attacked the vessel "on three or four skiffs," she said.

Mwangura said the owners of the Greek ship had another vessel, the 64,000-tonne Maltese-flagged Panamax Anna, attacked in the area on Monday.

The vessel "was attacked by six pirates in a boat in the Gulf of Aden on Monday, 110 miles (177 kilometres) north of Bosasso (Puntland) but escaped," he said.

On Monday, the head of the group that seized the US ship Maersk Alabama vowed to retaliate for the deaths of three pirates in the military operation which rescued an American captain held on a lifeboat over the weekend.

"The American liars have killed our friends after they agreed to free the hostage without ransom... this matter will lead to retaliation and we will hunt down particularly American citizens travelling our waters," Abdi Garad said by phone from the pirate lair of Eyl.

"We will intensify our attacks even reaching very far away from Somalia waters, and next time we get American citizens... they (should) expect no mercy from us."

The captain of the US ship was saved when Navy Seals fired three shots, one for each pirate, bringing an end to the high-seas drama which prompted Obama to call for renewed vigour in anti-piracy efforts.

"I want to be very clear that we are resolved to halt the rise of piracy in that region," he said on Monday.

According to sources close to the pirates, French ships were also prime targets following the rescue of the Tanit yacht in which one hostage was killed, together with at least two pirates.

French commandos had already launched rescue operations in two previous cases over the past year, killing and capturing pirates.

So far **Somali pirates** have never executed hostages and sought to release ships in exchange for ransoms.

International Maritime Bureau (IMB) head Noel Choong backed the tough approach against the pirates, whose relentless attacks have

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disrupted one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes.

"We support the robust response against the pirates," he told AFP.

But he admitted that revenge attacks were a risk.

"It may spark retaliatory action by the pirates. It may increase violence against the ships and crew members," Choong said.

All observers agree that piracy can only be eradicated with measures to end the chaos inside Somalia, where close to two /\*\*\*\*\* BEGINNING OF SECTION 2 \*\*\*\*\*/

decades of war and lawlessness have made piracy one of the few viable businesses.

The latest releases and hijackings bring to at least 18 the number of ships being held by **Somali pirates** and to more than 250 the number of crewmen held hostage.

Following a surge in attacks in 2008, which saw close to 50 ships being seized and millions of dollars paid in ransom money to the pirates, naval powers upped their response.

Up to 20 ships -- operating under US, EU, NATO and national commands -- can be off the coast of Somalia at any given time.

Most of them patrol shipping lanes in the Gulf of Aden, where maritime traffic bottlenecks in and out of the Red Sea, leading pirates to attack vessels further out at sea in the Indian Ocean.

Description of Source: Paris AFP (World Service) in English -- world news service of the independent French news agency Agence France Presse

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