The Royal Navy has captured a suspected pirate dhow in the Indian Ocean. A combined force of NATO-led counter piracy assets was successfully deployed to intercept the vessel, known to be operating off the Somali coast. As dawn broke on 13th January 2012, RFA Fort Victoria joined USS Carney to ascertain the identity and business of the dhow, which had been identified as a known pirated dhow operating in the shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean. In a combined show of force, both RFA Fort Victoria and USS Carney manoeuvred towards the dhow, with the intention of encouraging her to comply with the counter piracy forces. This should have been intimidating, given the size of the two military vessels, but the pirates were determined to carry on with their activities. RFA Fort Victoria was tasked to take positive action to disrupt the progress of the vessel. RFA Fort Victoria deployed her Royal Navy Lynx Mark 8 helicopter with Royal Marine maritime snipers who provided various clear warnings to the suspects to stop. Despite these measures, the dhow failed to comply with repeated instructions to stop and verify her intentions. Immediately afterwards, Royal Marines in speedboats approached the vessel and successfully boarded it. The pirates surrendered as the marines safely secured control. 13 Somali pirates were found to be on board together with a selection of weapons. Captain Gerry Northwood OBE Royal Navy, commander of the counter piracy operation on RFA Fort Victoria, said: "This was a well executed operation by NATO forces to locate a known Somali pirate group that was operating in international shipping lanes of the Indian Ocean. An effective boarding was safely executed by the Royal Marine boarding team based in RFA Fort Victoria and this has safely neutralised the effect of the pirate mothership. This firm and positive action will also send a clear message to other Somali pirates that we will not tolerate their attacks on international shipping." Captain Shaun P Jones RFA, Commanding Officer of RFA Fort Victoria, said: "To manoeuvre such a large ship at speed in close vicinity of a nimble dhow takes extreme concentration and skill; my team were never found wanting. The 13 Somalis certainly found Friday 13th unlucky for them!" Captain James Sladden Royal Marines, Officer in Charge of the embarked Fleet Standby Rifle Squadron said: "The moment of going on board the dhow was tense as we knew there were pirates on board who had refused to stop despite our warning shots. Through our weapon sights we could see there were about 13 pirates, mostly gathered in the area of the bridge. We quickly boarded and secured the vessel before mustering the pirates on the bow." NATO has contributed to the international counter piracy effort off the Horn of Africa since December 2008. The mission has expanded from escorting UN and World Food Programme shipping under Operation Allied Provider and protecting merchant traffic in the Gulf of Aden under Operation Allied Protector. NATO has announced its continuing commitment to counter-piracy by extending Operation Ocean Shield to December 2012.

Update 31st January<br />
Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship RFA Fort Victoria - part of NATO's counter-piracy task force Operation Ocean Shield - has handed over 14 suspected pirates to the Seychelles authorities for prosecution. Foreign Secretary, William Hague, said: "We are very grateful to the Seychelles for their agreement to prosecute these suspected pirates. Their commitment to the fight against piracy has helped avoid a situation where these individuals were not held to account for their actions." In a few weeks time the London Conference on Somalia will discuss how the international community can tackle the many problems faced by Somalia, including piracy. Today's agreement on the transfer of alleged pirates demonstrates what can be achieved through international co-operation and commitment." Danish ship HDMS Absalon, another NATO ship conducting counter piracy operations in the Indian Ocean, was also in the Seychelles to hand over four suspected
pirates to the Seychelles authorities.