

Norwegian Shipper: Kill Pirates 'On the Spot'

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In this image made available by the Ministry of Defence in London, Thursday Feb. 16, 2011, a naval boarding party from HMS Cornwall guard Somali pirates after their dhow was boarded in the Indian Ocean on Thursday Feb. 10, 2011. The vessel was boarded after was spotted acting suspiciously by a South Korean merchant vessel, the Yong Jin, which made a call for help to the British warship. Five hostages and their fishing vessel were released, and an initial search discovered AK47's, a grenade launcher, rocket propelled grenades and large amounts of ammunition. (AP Photo/Dave Jenkins, Ministry of Defence, ho)

OSLO, Norway (AP) - A Norwegian shipping magnate was strongly criticized Wednesday for suggesting that pirates captured off the Horn of Africa should be sunk with their skiffs or executed on the spot.

"When (piracy) implies a great risk of being caught and hanged, and the cost of losing ships and weapons becomes too big, it will decrease and eventually disappear," Jacob Stolt-Nielsen said in an op-ed in Norwegian financial newspaper Dagens Naeringsliv.

The 79-year-old is the founder of Stolt-Nielsen Ltd, one of Norway's biggest shipping companies. He stepped down as chairman two years ago but still serves on the board.

"Pirates captured in international waters have always been punished by death, often on the spot," Stolt-Nielsen wrote Tuesday, arguing that modern navies should deal with the problem like Roman pirate hunter Pompey did more than 2,000 years ago.

"Not arrest them and say, 'naughty, naughty, shame on you,' and release them again, but sink their boats with all hands," he wrote. "The pirates won't be frightened by being placed before a civilian court."

The article drew sharp criticism in Norway, a seafaring nation known as a peace broker in many of the world's armed conflicts and as the home of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Jacqueline Smith, president of the Norwegian Seafarers Union, described Stolt-Nielsen's views as "barbaric" and said killing pirates could endanger the 700 seafarers now held as hostages in Somalia.

Piracy in the busy shipping lanes off the African nation has flourished since its government collapsed in 1991.

Erik Lahnstein, state secretary at Norway's Foreign Ministry, said basic human rights must apply also to pirates, and noted that "even for the most gruesome crimes, we do not have death penalty in Norway."

Stolt-Nielsen acknowledged that killing pirates could trigger a backlash against crews held hostage. "But you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. This is war and warfare costs lives," he wrote.

The company issued a statement emphasizing that the comments in the article reflected "Mr. Jacob Stolt-Nielsen's own personal opinion."

The company's ships have been exposed to pirate attacks off Somalia's coast and some of them now carry armed guards. Other ship owners have taken similar steps to protect their ships and their crews.

Meanwhile, in Somalia, the bodies of eight pirates killed in a commando raid last month on a South Korean freighter were brought to Mogadishu's airport, said Ibrahim Iman, the airport manager. South Korean commandos raided the chemical carrier Samho Jewelry and freed the crew of 21.

Halima Hassan, a sister of one of the dead pirates, said her brother was innocent and was killed as he was guarding the coast "from illegal fishing vessels."

Also Wednesday, Britain's Ministry of Defense said British sailors freed five Yemeni fishermen held hostage for three months in the Indian Ocean.

The British crew also found and destroyed weapons, including grenades and three skiffs, used to launch attacks, when they searched the pirates' boat last Thursday.

The sailors on HMS Cornwall were alerted by a South Korean merchant vessel which spotted the Somali boat acting suspiciously, the ministry said.

Piracy attacks off Somalia began in retaliation for illegal shipping off the coast, though the piracy industry has evolved into a multimillion dollar business with near daily attacks.

AP reporters Mohamed Sheikh Nor in Mogadishu, Somalia, Hyung-jin Kim in Seoul, South Korea, and Sylvia Hui in London contributed to this report.

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