

One killed, 15 Abducted in Pirates' Attack Off Nigerian Waters

Emmanuel Addeh in Abuja
with agency report

Turkey yesterday sought to rescue members of a container ship after pirates attacked it off the coast of Nigeria, killing one person and kidnapping 15, according to the Turkish and Azeri governments and state media.

Reuters reported that three crew remained aboard the Turkish vessel, called Mozart, after the attack on Saturday in the Gulf of Guinea.

One crew member, an Azeri, was killed during the incident and 15 were kidnapped by the pirates, Turkey's state-run Anadolu agency said, while the ship, abandoned by the pirates and now headed toward Gabon's coast as at yesterday, initially

had a full crew of 19.

Turkish media cited Istanbul-based ship owner Boden company as saying the owners and operators of the vessel were abducted at gunpoint and had been headed to Cape Town from Lagos. Boden was not immediately available.

Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan, spoke twice by phone with one of the captains who remained on the ship, Furkan Yaren, his office said, adding that he directed officials on the rescue mission for the other kidnapped personnel.

Anadolu cited Yaren as saying he was "cruising blindly" toward Gabon with only the ship's radar working. It was to arrive yesterday morning.

Yaren was also cited as saying the pirates beat crew members and left him with an injured leg while another still aboard the ship had shrapnel wounds.

Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister, Jeyhun Bayramov, confirmed on Twitter the death of the Azeri crew member in the "pirate attack" on the Turkish ship.

The vessel last reported its location about 200 kilometres (125 miles) south of Lagos, according to the MarineTraffic website. It was to have arrived in South Africa a week later.

Bloomberg also reported that the Liberian-flagged M/V Mozart was sailing from Lagos, to Cape Town in South Africa when it was attacked Saturday morning

100 nautical miles (185 kilometres) northwest of the island nation of Sao Tome and Principe.

Turkey's maritime directorate said the crew initially locked themselves in a safe area but the pirates forced entry after six hours.

During the struggle, one crew member aboard died. It identified the victim as Farman Ismayilov of Azerbaijan, the only non-Turkish crew member.

After kidnapping most of the crew, the pirates left the ship in the Gulf of Guinea with three sailors aboard, state-run Anadolu news agency said.

According to reports, the pirates disabled most of the ship's systems, leaving only the navigation system for the

remaining crew to find their way to the port.

The Gulf of Guinea, off the coasts of Nigeria, Guinea, Togo, Benin and Cameroon, is the most dangerous sea in the world for piracy, according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB).

Maritime security consultancy Dryad Global described the attack as "an exceptional incident for both its severity and distance from shore." Last year, boardings in the waters off West Africa rose to 18 from 13 in 2019, the London-based firm added.

Mevlut Cavusoglu, Turkey's foreign minister, said he had spoken to the senior officer remaining on the Mozart, Yaren, and that the morale and physical condition of

the sailors aboard was good.

"We are continuing coordinated negotiations for the release" of the abducted sailors, he said, adding that "the pirates have yet to make any response."

"The owners and operators of the M/V Mozart, which was hijacked at gunpoint in the Gulf of Guinea, have regretfully confirmed that one of its crew has been killed and others abducted," Istanbul-based Boden Maritime said.

Cavusoglu spoke to his Azerbaijani counterpart to offer condolences and said the body would be transferred when the Mozart reaches port.

In July 2019, 10 Turkish seamen were kidnapped off the coast of Nigeria. They were released less than a month later.

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