

U.S., Partner Nation Task Force Respond to Commercial Vessel Distress Call



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This weekend, the USS Mason and partner nation naval vessels responded to a distress call from the commercial shipping vessel M/V Central Park, which had been boarded by five armed individuals while in transit in the Gulf of Aden near Yemen, said the Pentagon press secretary.

“[The Central Park] was boarded by these five individuals. They attempted to access the crew cabin,” Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said this morning during a meeting with the Pentagon

press corps. "The crew, essentially, [was] able to lock themselves into a safe haven. These individuals attempted to access and take control of the ship."

The crew of the Central Park issued the distress call on the evening of Nov. 26. The distress call was responded to by the USS Mason, allied ships and associated aircraft which are part of Combined Task Force 151. That task force conducts counter-piracy missions.

After the arrival of the USS Mason and partners with CTF 151, task force personnel demanded the release of the Central Park, Ryder said. The five armed individuals then disembarked the vessel and fled in a small boat.

"After the five individuals fled, the Mason sent out a visit, board, search and seizure team on the water that stopped the small boat. They detained the individuals, and then ... the VBSS team boarded the Central Park and cleared the vessel," Ryder said, adding that the Central Park crew was found to be safe following the incident.

While the identity of the five armed attackers was not yet confirmed at the time of the morning news briefing, Ryder said initial indications are that the individuals are Somali. All five are currently being held aboard the USS Mason.

Hours later, early in the morning of Nov. 27, Yemen time, two ballistic missiles were fired toward the general location of the Mason and the Central Park.

"Initial indications were that two ballistic missiles were fired from Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen, toward the general location of the Mason and the Central Park," Ryder said. "The missiles landed in the Gulf of Aden, approximately 10 nautical miles from the ships. It is not clear at this time what they were targeting."

Ryder said that neither the USS Mason nor the Central Park

were damaged by the missiles and that the Central Park is now back under power and on its way.