

# Winston S. Churchill Seizes Illicit Weapons from Two Dhows off Somalia



A Sailor assigned to the guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81), in accordance with international law, boarded a stateless dhow off the coast of Somalia and interdicted an illicit shipment of weapons and weapon components, Feb. 12. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Louis Thompson Staats IV

INDIAN OCEAN – The guided-missile destroyer USS Winston S. Churchill (DDG 81) seized illicit shipments of weapons and weapons components from two stateless dhows during a maritime security operation in international waters off the coast of Somalia, Feb. 11-12, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command / U.S. 5th Fleet Public Affairs said in a Feb. 16 release.

Churchill's Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) team and embarked joint service Advanced Interdiction Team (AIT)

discovered the illicit cargo during a flag verification boarding conducted in accordance with international law and in international waters.

The cache of weapons consisted of thousands of AK-47 assault rifles, light machine guns, heavy sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and crew served weapons. Other weapon components included barrels, stocks, optical scopes and weapon systems.

The original source of the weapons has not yet been identified. Churchill located the dhows and provided more than 40 hours of over watch and security for the ship and its boarding teams throughout the two-day operation.

The dhow crews were provided food and water before being released.

"We are proud of the combined efforts of the AIT and Churchill crew members for executing dynamic and demanding boardings," said Lt. Travis Dopp, assistant AIT leader aboard Churchill. "We are proud to have a positive impact on the safety and security of coalition forces by interdicting shipments of lethal aid."

The seizure of the illicit weapons by Churchill was conducted as part of the U.S. Navy's regular maritime security operations in the region. These routine patrols are performed to ensure the free flow of commerce for legitimate traffic and to disrupt the transport of illicit cargo that often funds terrorism and unlawful activity.

"This joint team [Army, Navy and Coast Guard] on board Churchill came together to successfully execute this operation over the course of two days in the Indian Ocean. These operations prevent nefarious actors from illegally spreading their lethal aid," said Cdr. Timothy Shanley, commanding

officer of Churchill.

Winston S. Churchill departed Norfolk, Virginia, Aug. 10 for a regularly-scheduled deployment to maintain maritime security and ensure the freedom of navigation in critical waterways.

U.S. 5th Fleet, headquartered in Manama, Bahrain, conducts joint and naval operations in order to support regional allies and partners and U.S. national security interests in the Middle East.