

Ships told to go round Cape of Good Hope to avoid danger 4:00AM Thursday Nov 20, 2008

Somali pirates wait at the Kenya Ports Authority police station after being arrested. Photo / AP

MOGADISHU - A major Norwegian shipping group yesterday ordered its more than 90 tankers to sail around Africa rather than use the Suez Canal as Somali pirates seized two more ships.

A Greek bulk carrier and an Iranian cargo ship were hijacked yesterday, days after Somali pirates seized the Saudi supertanker Sirius Star carrying US\$100 million in crude.

The United States and other naval forces decided against intervening in the seizure of the supertanker. The vessel's operators said they were waiting for further contact from the Somali pirates.

Bile Mohamoud Qabowsade, an adviser to the president of Somalia's breakaway state of Puntland, said the Sirius Star was now at the pirate lair of Harardhere, some 300km north of Mogadishu.

The supertanker was loaded to capacity with two million barrels of oil when it was seized along with its crew of 25.

Norwegian shipping group Odfjell SE said it made the decision to divert its ships after pirates seized the Saudi supertanker on Sunday hundreds of kilometres off the coast of Kenya, the most brazen attack yet by Somali pirates.

The Gulf of Aden, off Somalia, connects to the Red Sea, which in turn is linked to the Mediterranean by the Suez Canal.

The route is thousands of kilometres and many days shorter than going around the Cape of Good Hope off the southern tip of Africa.

Meanwhile, eight Somali pirates are being held at the Kenya Ports Authority Port Police station, in Mombasa, after being handed over to the Kenyan authorities by the Royal Navy.

They were arrested, and three others killed, by sailors of HMS Cumberland, as they attempted to hijack a cargo ship off the Horn of Africa. The pirates will be charged in a Mombasa court. AP