Crew retakes seized ship, Pentagon says

by UPI

MOGADISHU, Somalia -- A U.S. military official said Wednesday the crew of a U.S.-flagged cargo ship has retaken at least part of the vessel from Somali hijackers.

A Pentagon official said the 20-member crew retook the ship that was carrying humanitarian aid but CNN reported it was unclear whether the entire ship or only part of the ship was retaken.

The official said four hijackers boarded the ship, CNN said. The crew had one in custody and the three others attempted to escape.

The Maersk Alabama, based out of Norfolk, Va., was carrying 401 containers of relief supplies, John Reinhart, president and chief executive officer of the Maersk Line Ltd., said during a news conference.

"It was going to Africa for people in need," Reinhart said. "There was no other cargo on the vessel."

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the Obama administration was "closely monitoring the apparent hijacking of the U.S.-flagged ship in the Indian Ocean and assessing a course of action to resolve this situation."

The vessel was traveling to Mombasa, Kenya, when it was attacked about 310 miles off Somalia's coast, the ship line said in a statement.

The seizure of the Maersk Alabama is the latest in a spate of recent hijackings that prompted the U.S. military to issue an alert to mariners that warned of increased dangers in the region.

The latest attacks, which occurred out of the busy Gulf of Aden sea lanes patrolled by U.S. and coalition ships, indicate pirates are changing tactics and looking for ships in the tens of thousands of square miles of open water that lack military patrol vessels, U.S. military officials said.

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