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Eight Somali pirates killed as South Korea rescues freighter crew

Navy commandos storm ship hijacked in Arabian Sea, and officials say all 21 crewmembers safe after operation

Justin McCurry
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South Korean commandos secure a boat used by Somali pirates after the rescue of all crew members aboard a chemical ship hijacked in the Arabian Sea. Photograph: Yonhap/Reuters

South Korean navy commandos today rescued the crew of a freighter hijacked in the Arabian Sea last week, killing eight Somali pirates and capturing another five.

Officials in Seoul said all 21 members of the crew - 11 Burmese, eight Koreans and two Indonesians - were safe after the rescue mission.

"Our special forces stormed the hijacked Samho Jewelry ... and freed all hostages," Colonel Lee Bung-woo, a spokesman for the joint chiefs of staff, told reporters in Seoul.

"During the operation, our forces killed some Somali pirates and all of the hostages were confirmed alive."

The captain of the Samho Jewelry was shot in the stomach by pirates during the rescue operation, but Lee said his injuries were not life-threatening.

In a brief televised statement, the South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak, said: "We will not tolerate any behaviour that threatens the lives and safety of our people in the future."

Pirates seized the 11,500-tonne chemical carrier as it sailed from the United Arab Emirates to Sri Lanka last weekend.

A South Korean naval destroyer chased the freighter for days before the five-hour pre-dawn rescue mission was launched 800 miles off the north-east coast of [Somalia](#).

The destroyer began its pursuit after Lee said "every possible measure" should be taken to free the crew.

Lee - who was criticised for his response to [North Korea's attack on Yeonpyeong island in November](#) - declared the rescue mission a "complete success".

Incidents of piracy have prompted several countries to step up patrols in the area in an attempt to secure shipments of oil and other products.

Last week's hijacking came two months after the Samho Dream, an oil supertanker owned by the same shipping firm as the Samho Jewelry, was freed seven months after being seized.

The pirates claimed they had received a record ransom of \$9.5m (£6m) in return for the vessel's release.

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