

## Danish frigate kills four pirates in Gulf of Guinea engagement

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Less than a month after beginning patrols in the Gulf of Guinea, Danish frigate **Esbern Snare** killed four suspected pirates and took four others into custody. The incident was the first involving the newly arrived international presence in the region.

Danish Defence ministry Forsvaret reported that on Wednesday November 24th the Esbern Snare, which had been sailing to Tema, Ghana, responded to reports of increased risk in the area. It dispatched its helicopter to undertake surveillance. The crew of the helicopter reportedly came across “a fast-moving motorboat with eight suspicious men on board in an area with a number of merchant ships.” On board the boat, the helicopter crew could see a number of the tools associated with piracy, including ladders.

During the evening, Esbern Snare was close enough to launch a fast-moving boat with its detachment from the frogman corps with orders to board the suspected pirate boat. The ministry reported that the Esbern Snare called the pirates to halt so that the Danish soldiers could get on board. When the pirates did not react, the Danish forces fired warning shots and the pirates then opened fire on the Danish soldiers.

A brief firefight ensued. No Danish soldiers were injured, but five pirates were hit before the gun battle ceased. The Danes then boarded the pirate vessel and found that four of the pirates were dead and one was wounded. The remaining three surrendered.

Security consultancy Dryad Global Maritime said that “the incident involving the Danish Navy and the death of four pirates represents a key milestone in the evolution of piracy within the Gulf of Guinea”. It added that “in the short-term, pirates continuing to target commercial vessels operating within the Gulf of Guinea are unlikely to be significantly deterred from conducting such operations in future as a result of this activity. However, this incident shows the Danish government’s intent to have an enforcement impact in the region.”

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was visiting the the region and had been scheduled to visit the frigate today. Speaking to reporters in Ghana, she said that the Danish vessel had likely prevented a pirate attack against a merchant ship.

The Esbern Snare had previously been deployed on security missions in East Africa. It departed Denmark at the end of October for a six-month deployment to the Gulf of Guinea. It was in anticipation of the Prime Minister's visit that Forsvaret put the vessel into operation to develop an understanding of ship traffic in the region. The captain explained that they were learning about the level of activity "to establish a picture of what is normal and what is abnormal." He said that there was likely illegal fishing, as well as vessels that sell fuel to the illegal fishermen, and probably are also a number of smugglers.

Forsvaret said that the vessel was working to "clarify where the risk of pirate attacks is greatest, and where the Esbern Snare must therefore position himself to prevent pirate attacks or, if they do occur, be able to intervene as soon as possible." They are also observing merchant vessels in the area to determine the ones at the highest risk from pirates.

The Danish force plans to remain on patrol in the region until April 2022.