

BBC

WORLD SERVICE

19/02/2012

Italy India pirates diplomacy illustrated despatch

india and italy are at diplomatic loggerheads over an incident in the arabian sea last week. indian authorities have taken into police custody two marines from an italian navy team who were protecting an italian oil tanker from pirates. the indians accuse them of opening fire upon two indian fishermen in a boat off the coast of kerala, killing them. the italians claim that their military personnel fired warning shots into the air, fighting off a presumed attack by pirates. As the incident took place in international waters the indian authorities have no jurisdiction, the Italians argue. david willey reports from rome.

the incident occurred last wednesday and the indian authorities instructed the captain of the italian oil tanker "Enrica Lexie" to put into the port of Kochi where two italian marine sharpshooters were taken ashore for questioning. Italian diplomats and officials from the defence and justice ministries in rome are already in new delhi for talks with the indian authorities to try to defuse the crisis. but the discussions have so far stalled according to an italian foreign ministry spokesperson.

italian shipowners last year followed the example of many other european nations and decided to allow Italian naval and military personnel on board to protect their cargo vessels, bulk carriers, and oil tankers from pirates. Paolo d'Amico is President of the Italian shipowners association CONFITARMA.

actuality Paolo d'Amico

I have to say I have to say Italy has been extremely reactive to this problem, we have had great help from our government and from our parliament. We have protection teams from the navy. they are very efficient and we are very happy with them because they give us in case of accident - and as you know we are living one now - we have a certain type of protection being an institutional force and not a private company.....

Italian shipowners prefer to use their own navy protection teams rather than private contractors to ward off pirate attacks, Mr d'Amico plans to tell an international shipping conference in Athens on Monday. International piracy threatens not only to marginalise the Mediterranean, he says, but to damage the economies of both developed and emerging countries.

David Willey BBC News Rome.