

PLAYING WHACK-A-MOLE WITH SOMALI PIRATES

I questioned yesterday whether the raid to free Jessica Buchanan would help or hurt efforts to free an American freelance journalist who was captured on Saturday close to where Buchanan was being held.

Then there's the American freelance journalist **taken hostage** Saturday from the same area, Galkayo, from where Buchanan was kidnapped last October.

Several local leaders in Galkayo had just returned from trying to secure the release of another American, a freelance journalist who was kidnapped last week in Galkayo. He remains in captivity in Hobyo, a pirate den on the Somali coast, because the pirates holding him refuse to let him go without a hefty ransom.

I would suggest his presence raises questions about what the ultimate goal for the raid was. Was it just Buchanan's rescue, or the journalist's, too?

Reuters **quotes** a local leader, currently negotiating for the release of the journalist, as saying that 12 helicopters remain on the ground.

"About 12 U.S. helicopters are now at Galkayo. We thank the United States. Pirates have spoilt the whole region's peace and ethics. They are mafia," Mohamed Ahmed Alim, leader of the Galmudug region, told Reuters.

He was speaking from Hobyo, a pirate base north of Harardheere, where he said he was negotiating the release of an American journalist seized on Saturday, also from Galkayo.

It turns out I was right. The pirates holding the journalist have moved the journalist three times since the Buchanan rescue.

"Holding hostages in one place is unlikely now because we are the next target," [Somali pirate Hassan] Abdi said, referring to the raid in a phone conversation with The Associated Press. He expressed concern that the U.S. had pirate informants.

"It wasn't just a hit and run operation, but long planned with the help of insiders among us," Abdi said, noting the soldiers had struck at the time when the pirates were least on their guard.

The gang has moved an American kidnapped on Saturday in the northern Somali town of Galkayo three times in the last 24 hours, he said.

I'm curious, too, about Abdi's claim we had informants from within the pirate group. Remember DOD claimed we took no captives from the pirates, but other sources said we took 3-5 captives back to Djibouti.

The AP story goes on to predict that pirates will increasingly keep their captives at sea, in mixed-nationality groups, to make such raids harder.

So I guess my suspicions yesterday were correct—this raid may do little to solve the pirate problem.