

Combating Piracy

Risk Assessment at Sea

Almost every day the headlines mention acts of piracy. The media are concentrating mainly on the worst kind of piracy, where ships are hijacked and ransom is demanded. Because, lives are at stake and it is the best known kind of piracy. Less sensational cases of piracy such as robbery or theft are also subject under the definitions of piracy according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS). Therefore they are a part of statistics, but they are rarely mentioned. Defined as such are illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends against the crew or the

passengers. Recently SOLAS was amended to increase the focus on maritime security through the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS).

Target Approach

In theory pirates follow consecutive steps; first they select a target, after selecting a target they approach the target with the intention to board and finally they induce criminal acts by means of theft, robbery and hijacking. It is essential to prevent the pirates from approaching and boarding the vessel. When the pirates are on board they might get control of the vessel. Different kinds of criminal acts are undertaken by different



The international community bows to the escalating piracy situation with Navy warships patrolling the Oman, Yemen and Somalian piracy hotspots to discourage, deter, and apprehend the pirates. This preventive protection policy is not 100% efficient, pirates tend to hit and run, or, as the new trend shows, attack on the outskirts of patrolled corridors. Risk assessment at sea by Ferry van de Wal, founder of Mastermind Security

of pirates. Some fishermen become pirates if their fishing nets stay empty and by accident they see a ship nearby, easy to board and badly secured. Other pirates go to sea only with the intention of hijacking a ship or taking a ship for the Phantom Ship Phenomenon (PSP).

Phantom Ship

Taking a ship for the Phantom Ship Phenomenon works as follows: Pirates hijack a ship and force the crew to leave the ship. Sometimes the crew is even killed. Then the ship sets sail to a friendly port where it gets painted and given another name with a temporary certificate. The ship is then offered to the market again to transport cargo. When a high value cargo is transported, the ship disappears, the name is changed again and the pirates repeat the process.

When the potential pirate finds itself in a situation that he can approach and board a ship in open water, than the waters where the ship finds itself in is of influence of their actions. As an example; a pirate in open water cannot get away easily with stolen goods, but a pirate on the pier side can. On the other side, it is almost impossible to hijack a ship pier side, while at open sea it can be done.

Avoiding Conflict

Information on ship movements is easily gathered from the internet or obtained from an accomplice. Targets are selected by observing the ships speed, manoeuvrability, its low freeboard, the flag and the owner of the ship. Pirates know that Russian and Israeli ships are armed, so these are avoided. To continue in their criminal acts the pirates are looking at the means of protection (none, little or invisible), for the absence of armed personnel, the number of crew, the value of the cargo and the accessibility of the ship.

What can be done to prevent pirates from approaching and entering the ship? One of the most controversial ways is to hire uniformed guards or an armed escort ship and armed gangway watches. Other means are, using barbed wire and fencing to barricade entry points, the use of searchlights and fire hoses, keeping a good lookout in the surrounding area and



last but not least direct contact with security forces in the vicinity. Another solution is to have a safe room installed on board and an anti-piracy alarm to alert the crew.

Private Security Guards

Private companies are offering consultancy, training and material for anti-piracy purposes to shipping companies. Still, the use of private security guards holds preference for the



high-risk areas. Material and procedures can get one far but don't stop the hardened pirates with automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenades (RPG). Armed security guards can keep them at an acceptable distance. It was thought by ship owners, that by hiring private security, they would convey the message to the crew and their families that there was real danger, it is currently the opposite. An owner gives a clear signal to the crew, their home ground, his clients and insurance companies that he acknowledges the problem and is responding to it. It is always the question 'armed or not', but so far no ship with armed security has been hijacked.

Misconception

Now with the continuing piracy threats, there is far less ship movement in dangerous waters. As a consequence the odds of getting attacked are higher and therefore investment in security measures must be made. Unfortunately it is difficult to do a cost versus benefit study of private security. The variables of hijacking costs, ransom, loss of time, loss of ship, loss of lives, medical costs, disruption of schedules, cargo damage/loss, increased insurance premiums, loss of reputation etc., can be very diverse. It is controversial to hire private security and it is a misconception to compare private security with mercenaries. A private security contractor is working under a strict protocol with legally tested rules of engagement, with experience in the armed forces and with the knowledge of the use of weapons.

Preventive Measures

If the pirate is engaged on target, there is little influence on the situation. Apparent is the excellence of the preparation and execution of safety procedures. Are all containers closed, nothing of value on deck spaces? Are outside doors closed and locked, the crew in safe room and a distress signal sent? The best advice in this case, if pirates are onboard, they are under great stress, to realize this and co-operate with the



pirates. Somali pirates are known for their drug abuse and can be very unpredictable. If private security is on board, let them deal with the pirates. They are trained to deal with and negotiate with them. When the pirates are finished, they are likely to disembark. The timeline depends on their intentions. With theft, they go unnoticed with little fuss, with hijacking this happens after a ransom is paid. So far all ships are released after a ransom is paid. Never underestimate the problem, the impact that piracy has must not be overlooked.

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Photo courtesy of Mastermind Security and Allied Maritime Command HQ Northwood