

USS Farragut passes by the smoke from a suspected pirate skiff it has just disabled. The vessel is part of Combined Task Force 151, a multinational task force established to conduct anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

# Can naval forces fight piracy alone?

The threat of piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden is on the rise. With naval forces stretched across a huge high-risk area, shipping companies are turning to armed security personnel to protect their vessels. Concerns over their deployment are being addressed with high standards of accreditation for security personnel, as **Peter Cook**, director of the Security Association for the Maritime Industry, explains to Jim Banks.

**W**ith all the romantic images conjured up by the word 'pirate' and the associated tales of bravado and derring-do, it is sometimes easy to forget that piracy is a bloody and violent crime. And it is

a current threat: piracy is a growing risk to merchant and private vessels in many places. At present, around 300 people are being held hostage by pirates, captured from merchant vessels, yachts and dhows.

The high-risk area for piracy is huge, stretching from Suez in the north to 10°S, just beyond Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, and across to 78°E, which passes through the apex of India. The Gulf of Aden and the

area off the coast of Somalia have become notorious hotspots, and towards the end of 2010 there was a sharp rise both in the number of ships taken by pirates and the level of force they used.

Piracy is weather-dependent, with assailants using small skips to mount their attacks, so this trend abated with the arrival of the summer monsoons, but as weather conditions improve the incidence of attacks is expected to increase once more. This, notes Peter Cook, director of the Security Association for the Maritime Industry (SAMI), has got people thinking about how to tackle to problem.

“Naval forces do a fantastic job and there has been great cooperation between Nato, Russian, Japanese, Chinese and other forces, but the high-risk area is enormous,” says Cook. “It a similar size to Europe and it is patrolled by a limited number of ships, which generally travel at only 12mph to economise on fuel.

“If you wanted to be able to have a helicopter over a distressed ship within one hour you would need 83 warships in the area. One solution would be to put more assets there, but the political will among Western governments is not there. Navies are doing the best they can but, of every country that has had a defence spending review, none have increased their naval budget.”

Cook, a former Royal Marine, founded SAMI in May 2011 to represent the private security providers that serve the commercial shipping industry. The need for such an organisation has been growing, as many shipping companies have resorted to hiring armed private security personnel to protect their vessels at sea.

Given that the volume of trade by sea is estimated to increase by 50% in the next ten years, while naval forces could shrink by 30%, private security is bound to have a more prominent presence on both commercial and private vessels.

“The way to resolve the situation is to address issues on shore,” explains

#### Peter Cook

Peter Cook was an officer in the Royal Marines for 24 years and spent a significant part of his career involved in maritime security, including maritime counter terrorism and formulating counter-piracy policies and procedures. He is a founding member of the Security Association for the Maritime Industry.



Cook. “Disorder at sea is a consequence of disorder on land, so you need to address the cause, not the symptom. Somalia, for example, is a failed state. But for now, private security aboard vessels is a useful deterrent. Pirates are criminals, and just like burglars they take the line of least resistance.”

#### Building best practice

Recognising the trend of placing private armed security personnel on ships, the International Maritime Organization’s Maritime Safety Committee has been working to formulate guidance on best practice for ships transiting the high-risk areas.

armed security. There is a rise in the number of ships hiring armed guards, and not one ship with armed guards has ever been taken by pirates. Furthermore, some underwriters are lowering premiums for ships using armed security personnel,” says Cook.

All of SAMI’s members are having to turn away business, such is the rise in demand for accredited security personnel. And it is the accreditation that is vital, as it ensures that private security personnel are vetted and marshalled to ensure they are not likely to use excessive force in any confrontation with pirates.

SAMI has been involved in the formulation of the Maritime Safety

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So far, it has noted that hiring armed security is a valid option, but has stressed that it should not be used as an alternative to its best management practices for deterring piracy.

Recommendations in the best management practices outline measures that make a ship harder to board. These include the use of well-secured razor wire at vulnerable points, the use of hoses to make boarding difficult, using mannequins to make the deck seem busier than it is and the establishment of a citadel or safe room to prevent pirates reaching the crew.

“The first line of defence is to have a full risk assessment and implement the measures in the best management practices. Then, one could consider

Committee’s guidance, originally drafted in May 2011 and then revised in September.

This standard is the basis of the accreditation process SAMI is about to implement, which stipulates that the organisation will examine any company applying for accreditation, looking at its conduct, auditing its headquarters and conducting spot checks of the security teams that are boarding ships.

However, this is just the start of a process that will lead to firmer and more detailed standards for private maritime security personnel. Once they are in place it will be easier for private security contractors to work with the naval forces that already patrol the high-risk area. >>

“So far, the standard only has one paragraph on training and it needs more, so we are working on that,” says Cook. “What is encouraging is the

forces to use their technology to dominate the area more effectively. That would be a better use of naval assets.”

“The rapidly growing demand for armed private security contractors, coupled with their effectiveness, is deterring attacks by pirates, so the main concern is now accreditation.”

level of cooperation we have received from naval forces, despite reticence in some quarters about private maritime security. Staff at the EU Naval Force Somalia (EU NAVFOR) have been very cooperative, and we have a growing relationship with Nato. We need protocols established about how we work together.

“If done properly, the maritime security industry could do point defence on ships, freeing up naval

**In control of standards**

The rapidly growing demand for armed private security contractors, coupled with their effectiveness, is deterring attacks by pirates, so the main concern is now accreditation.

The presence of reliable and well-trained security personnel seem to significantly reduce a vessel’s vulnerability to acts of piracy, but poorly trained guards with guns may cause other problems. Fears that the industry

may attract less scrupulous security companies are well founded, and emphasise the need for more regulation and much tighter standards.

“Processes are developing to minimise the risk of maverick maritime security companies becoming involved,” says Cook. “This is a growth industry and it is becoming more regulated, but I still hear from some shipping associations that have received offers from companies claiming to be able to put armed men on a vessel for only £8 an hour. Fortunately, shipping companies and underwriters are becoming more streetwise.”

The endeavours of SAMI, therefore, are of the utmost importance, but Cook realises that the organisation has a lot of hard work ahead of it. “There are some very complex legal issues to work through,” he remarks, “and we’re not underestimating the challenge ahead.” ■

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### Symtronics Automation Pvt Ltd

S-1, T block, MIDC Bhosari, Pune 411 026 India Tel : 9120 66114556/57 Fax :912027120931  
e-mail : info@symtronicsindia.com Website : www.symtronicsindia.com