



Beware of pirates

Mark Hankey gives some advice on how to pick the right maritime security company

‘Hello mate, where’s the map’ – whilst ashore this could be a perfectly reasonable request, afloat it doesn’t engender confidence from a master or crew. Over the last few years there has been an explosion of security providers in the maritime domain, and ship owners, operators and managers face a raft of issues every day as they struggle to navigate the minefield of this specialist requirement and ensure they hire well trained, quality personnel to address their needs.

It is really easy to set up a maritime security company these days; all you need is a mobile phone, website and pool of manpower (trained or otherwise). The question is what differentiates the good companies from the bad?

The first thing a ship owner ought to look for is an indication that the company is legally registered in the country it claims to be operating in, and this company registration should be supported by a telephone number (not a mobile or cell), a formal address and ideally solid marketing collateral such as a website and brochure. You should not proceed any further until you are satisfied that the company has legal standing.

As professional mariners you don’t have to be told about the plethora of insurance and liability issues that arise when placing personnel on board vessels. If

the company you select is not insured for professional liability, employer liability, business travel, medical and personal accident then you should walk away as you may be opening yourselves up to potential costs, and at worst litigation. Many companies will ask you to add their personnel to the vessels existing Kidnap and Ransom (K+R) cover – this is often cheaper for all in the long run.

Once this hurdle has been jumped it is worth finding out if the company can provide any form of references from former clients, flag registries or other accredited bodies. If these are not forthcoming then walk away immediately.

If you have satisfied yourself that the company exists, is covered by insurance and have former clients then it’s now a good time to look at the personnel they will be potentially deploying to your vessel. You wouldn’t dream of employing anyone without looking at their CV and it is crucially important to do so in this case. CVs should have a series of key competences, which include:

- An unblemished military record
- A criminal record check
- Demonstrable knowledge of the maritime environment
- Evidence of specific marine based commercial security and counter piracy training



In addition you should ask for evidence of their ability to professionally mentor masters and crews – there is nothing worse than a security professional coming on board your vessel and destroying any morale on board with tales of guns, pirates and fire fights! They should be able to work with the command or senior management team on board in order to provide appropriate guidance and training packages that are delivered in a sensitive but professional manner to get the best out of all.

The next area that needs to be looked at is the issue of weapons. If you are contemplating placing armed teams on board your vessels you need to be mindful of a whole host of issues that could land you in a lot of trouble. Firstly you need to get permission from a range of key stakeholders including (but not limited to) flag, insurer, owner, charterer, master and so forth. You will also need to satisfy yourself that the proper licences are in place for ports of embarkation and disembarkation – failure to do so could lead to potential port state control actions.

Processes need to be in place before weapons even come on board, for example approval needs to be sought for specific Rules of Engagement – it is worth noting that this is a very complex issue, which is fraught with potential exposure to risk.

Where will the weapons be stowed? How will they be maintained? How will their carriage interface with the existing safety plan? All these issues will need to be addressed. You finally need to reassure yourself that the personnel operating the weapons are fit to do so, you should ask when they last fired a weapon, what training they have had.

In summary today's maritime security world is full of pirates of another kind trying to make a quick buck. A quick search of the internet will lead to evidence of this – make sure that you do your due diligence and avoid becoming a victim of another type of attack. ❖

Mark Hankey

Mark Hankey is head of marketing at Maritime & Underwater Security Consultants (MUSC). MUSC specialises in counter piracy and ship security, unexploded ordnance disposal, port and supply chain security, high-risk shore-end cable-lay, underwater pipeline security, and maritime and ISPS training courses. It provides maritime security in some of the world's most challenging environments; complex and high-risk projects are the company's speciality.

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