

Salty Sea Dog

Profiteering from Piracy at Sea

Governments in areas bordering the region where pirates operate have been quick to latch onto the fast buck syndrome says **Captain Michael Howorth**

I have made many statements on the subject of piracy in the past. Among them was one used by an International Television station that said, "It is only a matter of time before pirates move from pilfering cargo ships to attacking super-yachts cruising near Somalia." I also said, "Many pirates do not yet appreciate the importance and potential value of these yachts or perhaps more importantly the people they carry."

My comments were no sooner on the World Wide Web than my telephone began to ring. Security companies sought my help endorsing their products and Captains thanked me for drawing attention to the facts. Along with the praise I received, I was also attacked by a couple of yacht brokers angry with me for even mentioning the words piracy and superyacht in the same sentence. They claimed that I would scare the customers away from chartering yachts. One even suggested that I was profiteering from piracy lining my own pockets by letting pirates know that these yachts are out there.

They were obviously completely missing the point. My remarks were aimed at stopping owners taking yachts though the Gulf of Aden without thinking carefully about it and taking advice from experts on how to do it safely. As for me profiteering from the plight of yachts so attacked then I suggest people look again, because, governments of countries in the area are already doing that very well themselves.

Lock & Load

The British Government has just made it legal for British flagged yachts to carry security guards armed to the teeth with weapons. As they do so, other governments are looking at ways they can profit from that by employing money making schemes and seeking ways to exploit the distress already caused by pirates who prey on ships and yachts going about their lawful business in the waters off Aden and Somalia.

National custom and immigration services in countries from Egypt to Oman are already preventing the transit of safety and security equipment (guns to you and I) by personnel travelling through airports on their way to provide protection services to vessels about to transit the pirate infested waters. Now the Djibouti Government have implemented a procedure where



these anti piracy security teams arriving at Djibouti are required to register with a company called Djibouti Maritime Security Services, a government appoint liaison service.

Pay Up

Under a new law passed by that government all private security firms, which have personnel transiting Djibouti for the purpose of providing security for merchant ships or super yachts need to have a special license. Fees for these are set at US\$ 15,000 per month, US\$ 80,000 for 6 months and US\$ 150,000 for 1 year. These are time-based fees that do not specify the number of people or number of transits they make.

Weapons can only be hired from the Djibouti Armed Forces after paying a rental charge.

Where security persons are carrying their own weapons, these have to be stored with the Army and attract the payment of a storage charge. Djibouti Army person will then, for an additional fee, escort these teams outside Djiboutian territorial waters and hand over the weapons.

If a vessel enters Djiboutian waters, the Master has to declare if any arms on board, their names and quantity and these will be inspected on the vessel's arrival, stored on the ship under armed guard and checked again prior departure. All services are provided at an extra charge.

The cynic in me sees these acts as money generating initiatives by a government not bent on guaranteeing that only credible security companies operate from their waters. They are instead, ensuring they maximise profit from the piratical trade and lining their own coffers.

I am even aware of anti piracy security teams having had their life jackets confiscated by over zealous officials anxious to make a quick buck by selling them onto the local market.