

# Modern Day Piracy and Techniques for Safety on the Sea.

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[Photo by Suki Finnerty]

With what seems like a daily increase in reports of piracy there are many questions and concerns about how to increase security for vessel owners, their guests, Captain and crew. Many countries have released guidelines for vessels traveling in High Risk Waters (HRW), and it is a good idea to review and become familiar with these governmental releases. What you will find is that there are some similarities that may prove beneficial to you as you adapt your Vessel Security Plan (VSP) to fit our current environment.

**Have an Adaptable VSP:** You should really start with a realistic risk assessment. Captains must be completely aware, and very clear of what the owner's expectations are if suddenly the vessel and the occupants are slung into the midst of danger so that the risk assessment and VSP can be created properly and not merely put together to meet a maritime law, insurance requirement, or industry standard. The owner must be aware of the VSP so that when action is taken they are not caught off guard. Sometimes I have found that even before this can take place the owners must be educated or informed on many of the realities of the open sea and the area's in which they travel. Furthermore, they need to be made aware of the vessels capabilities and the crew's capabilities. More importantly the Captain needs to request the necessary items to be prepared and reach an agreement with the Owner on what actions will be taken. There is no room for smoke and mirrors here. Honesty is the best policy. Sometimes the best way to get to the point of the matter is to simply ask if the worst case scenario takes place are you (the owner) willing to risk your life and the lives of everyone aboard by negotiating with or appeasing criminals or terrorists. The answer should be a simple "yes" or "no". If the answer is "No" "I refuse to be a victim" then you have a good foundation to build a solid yet adaptable VSP.



**Use Technology to Bolster your VSP:** Many Captains' use their radar to assist them with unwanted boardings by setting the alarm for a certain range and setting the sensitivity to pick up vessels breaking that range. Not a bad start. Some may utilize the radar in conjunction with a night watch schedule, also a good practice if your watch is trustworthy. HTSG recommends both of these practices, but with the added modern day technology of thermal imaging. Mr. Ferretti opined years ago that thermal imagery is an accessory that should be on every motor yacht in the very near future. Thermal imagers allow the user to see in complete darkness or daylight, through fog, smoke and even rain. With these capabilities and depending on the sensitivity and specifications the user could potentially see a man overboard during the day or night from over a mile away. You can see debris floating in the water. You can come into port earlier or later to get to

your destination sooner, because you can navigate marina's as if it were daylight with no need to rely on the spot light to assist you. If necessary you can navigate completely blacked out to flee from approaching boats. Most importantly



with thermal imagery camera's you can instantly identify the threat level of an approaching boat. Being able to identify threats from a distance in the night can save you priceless minutes when implementing your VSP. You need the answers immediately. Is it a passing fishing boat or a boat full of armed pirates? Is it time to pull anchor and run or do you quickly arm yourself and crew? Without thermal imagery giving

you this instant feedback you will likely wait until the boat is close or alongside you. At this point it is too late to avoid an unwanted boarding. This is usually when appealing, negotiating, and God forbid pleading begins.

**Use Professionals for your Security needs:** There are a number of companies that offer protective services for the maritime environment. Each of these companies have different methods to meet your security needs. Some are more innovative than others, Some more flexible than others, some come with more assets and toys at a higher price than others, but all are well worth the money opposed to the loss of life and/or millions of dollars in assets. Professionals will virtually instantly make you and your vessel a hard target, which means the bad guys go after someone else. In essence they are your sheepdogs.

**Get real Training from Security Professionals:** Depending on the size of your vessel and your wallet you may not be able to hire Security Professionals for your protection. A Portion of HTSG is geared towards training the captain and crew in the techniques to avoid unwanted boarding's. This is usually when the question of weapons onboard comes up. There is much more to vessel security or defense than fighting and weaponry. True vessel security training should encompass training with the Captain and crew on topics such as mind set, demeanor, awareness, presence, confidence, discipline, then perhaps get into practical lessons on weaponry, empty hand strikes, control techniques, and close quarter battle. By adding reality based training, you will be successful in an essential element of survival called stress inoculation. The Captain and crew will have rehearsed the execution of their VSP in a controlled yet realistic role-player scenario so that the first dry run is not the real life and death situation.

**Don't Underestimate the Probability of Danger:** For crime to occur there has to be opportunity and motive. I am a firm believer that when at sea the opportunity is great the motive is plentiful and the risk is minimal. As our times and global economy change so has the rate of crime at sea. If you study societies lacking in laws and their inability to enforce them you will see that security rapidly becomes a personal and essential task. You can not expect or count on law enforcement or the military to help you, especially in foreign countries and remote ports of call. If you go to a number of different ports and arrive with an expectation that the law enforcement has the same deterring effect on crime as in the U.S. or other westernized countries you are sadly mistaken and even worse, you're putting yourself at risk through your way thinking. I think families should err on the side of caution and at sea have a firm belief in "Semper Paratus". Don't let your denial cripple you. Don't find comfort in saying it will never happen to you, instead ask yourself realistically if you and your crew are truly prepared if it does. The human

mind is very powerful. Our brains want to do whatever it can to make us feel good. By allowing this to happen you trap yourself with perhaps unwitting denial. Despite great survival instincts we as modern day politically correct humans will ignore our intuitions and walk right into a bad situation that we could have avoided if we had listened to our instincts. What you may find interesting is looking at why we do this. The truth is we very rarely have the luxury of confirming our instinctual alarms. Think about it. If we get a bad feeling about walking down an alley and stop and go another way, nothing bad happens how do we know if our instinct was correct? Unfortunately, when we do realize our instincts or gut feelings were correct we are already immersed in some sort of toxic situation we have no training on how to address.



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