

Security insight

Old sea dogs can learn new tricks

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► **When piracy off the coast of east Africa** started to grab the headlines in 2008/09, commercial shipowners' calls for warship protection were rebuffed by politicians and admirals saying, "This is a merchant navy problem and they need to find a solution."

The commercial shipping industry's round table of international shipping associations pulled together and, in September 2009, published best management practice (BMP) guidelines for ships transiting the pirate-infested waters off the coast of Somalia.

Piracy is a dynamic crime, so as lessons were learnt from the hundreds of attacks, both successful and unsuccessful, the guidelines evolved and were revised several times until *BMP 4* was published in August 2011 and distributed across the commercial fleet. *BMP 4* is a comprehensive document that provides pragmatic guidance on a range of topics from basic planning processes and preventative measures for shipping companies and masters, including details of high risk areas, how to run risk assessments and outlines of typical pirate attacks, and what to do in the event of military action, as well as post incident reporting. It also covers advice on selecting armed guards and the practicalities of establishing citadels.

Second nature

Over time, BMP measures became second nature for seafarers transiting the Indian Ocean. As time passed after the last successful attack, in May 2012, there was an understandable concern that piracy was perceived to have diminished and about whether seafarers would remain as diligent and

proactive in implementing the guidelines.

From a timely recent survey that was carried out by independent security brokerage company ASKET there is clear evidence to show that many of the critical lessons learnt from just a few years ago are still clearly remembered today. More than 200 seafarers, company security officers, coalition forces, and privately contracted armed security personnel took the survey in the second half of last year. It comprised 26 multiple-choice questions

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that comprehensively examined every facet of *BMP 4*.

Almost all respondents who took the survey scored more than 60% and a significant proportion scored more than 80%. While the number of armed guards being used may be decreasing slightly, the recent flurry of piracy activity in the first half of 2017 seems to have motivated seafarers to be well versed in these important counter-piracy skills and drills.

Emma Mitchell of ASKET told SAS, "A spike of piracy incidents in the Indian Ocean and west Africa last year and the successes by pirates when BMP was not implemented correctly led our team to design the *BMP 4* quiz ... as a free resource for company security officers, bridge officers, watchkeepers, and vessel crews, allowing them to test their own knowledge and revise on best practice for their voyage in a bid to keep them safe."

She went on to say, "The quiz includes questions relating to the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code, *BMP 4*, reporting procedures, watchkeeping, use of armed guards, and rules for the use of force."

As the increase in attacks last year demonstrated, complacency is our worst enemy, she concluded. This quiz acted as a useful and timely reminder of key lessons painfully learnt.

The success of *BMP* across the shipping industry has also convinced the round table of shipping associations and other industry organisations that *BMP* is a winning formula that could be applied to the fight against global maritime crime.

A new 'global *BMP*' that covers piracy around the globe is in its final stages of drafting and should be published later this year, so there may be even more new tricks for old sea dogs to learn and accomplish as maritime criminals become more devious and audacious. ☑

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