

# Safe as houses

Since the rise of piracy in Somalia, superyacht security has never been so focused upon. This has correlated with the major escalation of Private Maritime Security Companies now offering their services of security. But who has the real experience and means to protect?

**RACHEL REDHEAD REPORTS**



Whether security personnel should be armed is one of the most debated issues

**T**he modern world is perceived as a place of uncertainty, where people's safety and security is paramount. When it comes to the safety of the maritime world, we immediately think of piracy as the main threat. Films such as *Captain Phillips* brings this more into our consciousness even though it has been reported by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) that the number of pirate attacks worldwide had fallen in the first half of 2013. It seems the reduction is due to a number of reasons, including the effort of the new Somalian government.

However, this reduction is concentrated in Somalia with (as of August this year) 10 reported incidents, while Nigeria has experienced 28 reported incidents as accounted by the IMB.

## Threat of piracy

The well known areas of piracy such as the Gulf of Aden, have largely been avoided by superyachts recently as Ian Millen, director of intelligence at Dryad Maritime, states: "The most recent changes have probably been the areas in which superyachts operate. Whilst there are superyachts in the Indian Ocean, Somali piracy has meant that this is a less attractive area for recreational deployments." Piracy has therefore adapted and taken root in the places where the climate is most conducive, with it spreading most widely in West African waters, especially off Nigeria's coast, right up to the Arabian Sea and even the southern Red Sea.

The threat of piracy wherever it develops has led to the rise of Private Maritime Security Companies offering onboard armed personnel for transiting these high risk areas. Whether these security personnel should be armed

remains one of the most debated issues of anti-piracy security as Steven Jones, maritime director of the Security Association for the Maritime Industry (SAMI), expands on: "Whenever the issue of armed guards is debated there has been one unified concern which has emerged, and that is the need for standards, checks and reassurance."

The International Marine Organisation therefore responded back in 2011 by providing guidance and recommendations on the use of privately contracted armed security personnel. That same year British prime minister David Cameron announced that ships sailing under the UK flag will be able to carry armed guards to protect them from pirates.

## Attacks

Whether armed guards are the way forward or not, it is well-known in the industry that no vessel has yet been taken by pirates with

armed guards onboard. This doesn't stop the pirates from trying though, with a 50m Benetti attacked by Somali pirates in 2010, which was deterred by gunshots. The 60m *Linda Lou* (now *Lime Light*) was also threatened in 2010 by Somali pirates off the Gulf of Aden; luckily the Royal Navy were able to interject. Two Alloy Yachts vessels have also come under attack; *Red Dragon* was transiting the Indian Ocean and able to frighten pirates away with the sight of guns in 2008, while the 54m *Tiara* was attacked and robbed by armed robbers the same year off Porto Vecchio, Corsica.

### The other threats

As with all criminality the most common problems are actually the less sensational. Problems such as muggings or violent assault, petty theft, yacht intrusions and burglaries, and today cyber crime all rank highly as the more day to day security threats that a superyacht faces. A newer threat for superyachts has also been added to the list of other dangers, and termed as 'criminal anarchy.' This threat has been highlighted as two yacht owners were killed in recent years, not by pirates but one by terrorists when he left his yacht to go to a restaurant, and the second by a hit man while on his yacht.

"Superyachts have a unique security silhouette — they are high profile, they are attractive, by their very nature and design they attract interest, jealousy, and are definitely prized targets for criminals. Whether from smash and grab 'maritime muggings' through to full scale hijackings,

(proficiency in designated security duties) and PSA (proficiency in security awareness) certification requirements for all shipboard personnel. In fact, superyacht security training is one of the most important means of staying safe at sea as Jones points out: "The officers of the watch are the first line of defence against attacks — and whether it is being alive to the threat, and monitoring positions or machinery more closely it is often only vigilance which saves the day."

Providing crew training should be viewed as a valuable investment and will enable crew to be alert to the possible dangers as well as the methods of staying vigilant and aware for the yacht and guests. That said Patrick Estebe, director of AffAirAction, believes this training cannot replace the need for armed escorts

many superyacht designers and owners to invest more in security systems for new builds and refits."

But not all are ready to be so agreeable as Mark Wood, operations director from Orchid Maritime, explains: "The reality is that we are contacted after a yacht is launched." The danger is that security is considered at the end of a project and seen as an optional extra, rather than as part of safeguarding the yacht and those onboard.

### Secure security companies

"When it comes down to the actual safeguarding, this lies in the hands of the security companies. When I left the yachting industry in 2010, I knew of 12 well established security companies. Having

**We have vetted** a number of PMSCs for employment on our own managed yachts, and have only found a very small number of reliable providers

when cruising in known pirate waters. When it comes to general security yacht crews can, of course, be a prime target themselves in many areas of the world.

### Technology

With all this talk of piracy and onboard armed escorts, you could be forgiven for thinking that the technology developed for security is taken for granted. Armed guards are just one aspect of the security coverage that a yacht can partake in when needed, but the technology required, to alert crew of a security breach when in port or even away from the yacht, should no doubt be seen as necessary in order to deter the threat before it comes to fruition, as Iain Davie, head of sales at MAST Technology, states: "We create an instant awareness of risk before it becomes a threat. Visual and remotely communicated alerts that describe the type and location of the threat allow a rapid and efficient response."

Security systems built into a superyacht from the beginning of design makes for the best security in a yacht as Brian Peterman, CEO of Command at Sea International, explains: "The better we can integrate our security systems into a yacht's systems, the better the end product will be."

Some argue that instead of being an afterthought, security systems are increasingly being considered at an earlier phase of the build process as Davie agrees: "The threat of piracy is well reported and has prompted

returned in 2013, I find there is an uncountable number of now termed PMSCs [private maritime security companies], offering their services to superyachts. It overwhelmed me, so for any owner or captain it certainly becomes a chore to find out who in this specialised field is actually experienced in onboard security," as Estebe highlights: "When you embark an armed escort it could be very relevant to know for sure how much combat at sea experience these armed people really have. There is no way to know how one will actually react when being shot at until it happens."

Adrian McCourt of Watkins Superyachts adds: "We have vetted a number of PMSCs for employment on our own managed yachts, and have found a small number of reliable providers in a sea of woeful dross."

Estebe agrees that only a small amount of security armed escorts have been trained in combat at sea as he warns: "People hiring these companies should question a company's credentials. A lowering of standards has occurred with the amount of security companies entering the field." This is a whole new worrying area of security breach for a superyacht and in effect could cancel out all the work an operator may do to combat any of the security issues above. Therefore in the pages overleaf SB has vetted and handpicked some of the best known and accredited superyacht security companies on the market today. 

Photo: MIRS



### Trained guards can detect threats early

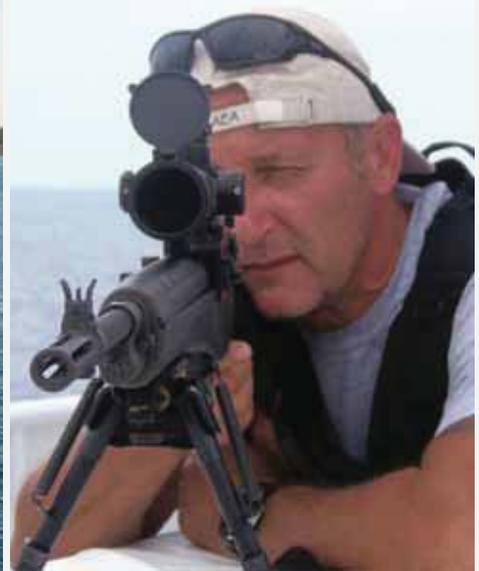
there are very few pirates, terrorists or felons who would not be interested in a superyacht," explains Jones.

### Training

One measure used to protect those onboard for general safety and security can of course be training of the crew and with the PDSD



A good PMSC will develop an onboard strategy around the client's need



PMSCs must have experience of gun use

## AFFAIRACTION | The first superyacht security firm

**AFFAIRACTION'S EXPERTISE IN** superyacht security lies in anticipating events and crises; its methods are proactive rather than responsive, emphasising avoidance over reaction. The company achieves this means of security through several techniques, such as an international network of people on location, that keeps it alert to early indications of trouble. The company also believes strongly in designing tactical solutions for a yacht from the start with its clients, as president Patrick Estebe explains: "A comprehensive strategy or security concept should encompass the owner's profile, the yacht's type, cruise areas, and the crew profile. It is always much easier to start at the construction of the vessel as a few modifications can make a big difference and widen the future operational options."

It is Estebe's philosophy of security that has had a major imprint on the approach that AffAirAction takes. With a background in the French *Infanterie de Marine*, experience as a skipper, commercial diver and pilot, firearm instructor and martial artist, Estebe understands not only the pressures of real-life crises but also has the means to deal with them. Add to that 25 years of experience in the world's most dangerous ocean hotspots and it is understandable that Estebe believes in more than qualifications and certificates: "It is difficult to discriminate the real and the fake; the professional wrestler looks just as

mean and as intimidating as the martial arts fighter, yet one is real and hiring the wrong one for security could be in the category of mistakes that one makes only once."

As principal trainer at AffAirAction, Estebe teaches yacht crew to be more aware of their surroundings and to pay attention to detail. The style is less physical and reactive to allow for a very security conscious yet relaxed atmosphere for guests and owners. This kind of crew training is for general yacht security as Estebe emphasises: "The training of the crew is an indispensable cornerstone but it is not meant to take care of the vessel in case of a pirate attack; this is a job for professional escorts." When it comes to pirate attacks, AffAirAction's team of former navy

commandos (who have each trained in actual combat), take on this serious threat.

Piracy however is not the only threat that superyachts should be concerned with as Estebe enlightens SB: "While piracy may be a serious threat to shipping and transiting yachts, the current threat to yacht owners is of a different nature. Pirates can be easily dealt with; no yacht or ship that had a professional armed escort has been successfully attacked by pirates. Two yacht owners were killed, but not by pirates; one of them by terrorists when he went ashore, and the second by a hit man while on his yacht. Fabrice Vial had no known ties with organised crime, yet his assassination has the hallmark of a professional hit."

This new threat in yacht security has been termed as 'criminal anarchy', although Estebe maintains that there is no cause for panic as a yacht (surrounded by sea) is automatically safer than land-based dwellings when it comes to this danger.

What is potentially more alarming is the amount of companies now advertising themselves as superyacht security experts and Estebe believes there has been a lowering of standards with the amount of companies now entering the field: "There have never been so many special forces. What is the real, authentic experience of the teams embarking on ships and yachts? Has every one of them seen actual combat?" Estebe continues: "It is one thing to be proficient with firearms at the gun range, it is an entirely different question to have actual combat experience." 

### VITAL STATS

- **Company:** Fort Lauderdale-based AffAirAction has been offering its security services to superyachts, resorts, and marinas since 1988. Based on a relaxed holistic approach with keen attention to any given situation and the human element involved.
- **Specialist areas:** Maritime security, armed yacht/ship protection, personal and corporate training, intelligence, crew training and executive protection.
- **Web:** [www.affairaction.com](http://www.affairaction.com)