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# YACHTING SECURITY'S TRIPLE



MENTION SUPERYACHT SECURITY AND THE FIRST ISSUE THAT USUALLY COMES TO PEOPLE'S MIND IS PIRACY. BUT IT'S NOT NUMBER ONE, IF IT EVER REALLY WAS.

BY BRANSOM BEAN

**O**NCE UPON A TIME, LIFE WAS SIMPLER with just the threat of a paparazzi's telescopic lens, and with the use of laser "paparazzi zappers" like those reportedly used aboard *M/Y Eclipse*, the issue was easily solved. However, in one of the ironies of the 21st century, more owners are viewing their yachts not just as a luxurious escape from the madding crowd, but as a moveable fortresses, a place of escape when the shooting starts, not to mention a nice pile of mobile equity to escape currency controls. But some things even a superyacht cannot escape.

"For too long, security has focused on CCTV systems, night vision cameras and, more recently, some armed guards hired on the cheap," says Patrick Estebe of *AffairAction*. "The industry should observe that world peace is not happening and that means yacht owners will have to depend on their security to survive."



### Etymology In A Post 9/11 World

In security, there are “issues,” “threats” and “vulnerabilities.” Brian Peterman was a U.S. Coast Guard Admiral, special assistant to the U.S. President for Borders and Transportation Security and member of the National Security Council staff. He now is head of Command At Sea International, a company providing “head-of-state-level security for luxury yacht owners.” He first points out that, strictly speaking, there is a difference between the meaning of the words *threat* and *vulnerability*, but etymology aside, the effects can be the same.

“Threats are external; a vulnerability is internal,” says Peterman. In a way then, vulnerabilities leave you open to threats, and threats, then, should be considered in terms of consequence and probability.

### So, Where Have All The Pirates Gone?

Not so long ago, piracy was on every seafarer’s mind and with good reason. Vessels were being hijacked almost every day. More than stolen cargoes and personal effects, there were daily images of hapless crew, some in very uncomfortable situations and sometimes dead.

The booty was not gold doubloons from the Spanish Main, but ransom money, millions in ransom money, very little of which went into the pockets of the guys wielding the AK-47s and RPGs. But in the summer of 2014, piracy was actually “low probability/high consequence” in Peterman’s terms. In other words, it’s not likely to happen, but when it does, it’s really going to ruin your day.

Superyachts have some tasty attractions that VLCCs and containerships probably don’t, like artwork and cash. Then there are the owner, charterer, family and guests themselves.

“Is it easier and more profitable to board a tanker or a

superyacht with a multimillionaire aboard,” observes Ken Hickling, president of the International Superyacht Society.

“Despite the fact that a superyacht continues to be a highly visible, easily boarded and very attractive target, the last act of piracy against a so-called ‘superyacht’ was in 2008 when Somali pirates seized *Le Ponant*,” observes Ed Hill, former Royal Marine sniper and now managing director of Intrepid Risk Management.

All that’s not to say that the piracy threat has disappeared just because it’s dropped precipitously in the waters from the Gulf of Aden to Zanzibar thanks to an international naval effort that sees U.S. men-of-war working alongside Iranian Navy ships.

“It’s held behind a dam there, but we need to keep an eye on it,” Hickling says. “As incidents decrease, governments may be tempted to take their foot off the pedal.”

In fact, other locations are now stealing the headlines. That global chokepoint, the Straits of Malacca, is still a problem, and piracy is no stranger to waters off the Seychelles and the Maldives. There are almost constant incidents off Nigeria, but then sunny Lagos is hardly a superyacht destination. “For now, piracy is not a problem because a superyacht has the option of where to go,” Hill says.

Andrea Pezzini, a former Marine and founder and CEO of Floating Life, points to waters off the coast of Brazil, in a place ironically known for the tranquility and purity of nature.

“The problem, of course, is not the Med. Actually, we are always concerned when we have a yacht entering or leaving the Amazon,” he says. “There are lots of places for small, fast boats to hide on its shores.”

Unrecognized boats racing toward a yacht could be guests, people wanting a closer look at a superyacht or men in balaclavas not coming for cocktails. At least one yacht crew thought they had overslept, collectively waking at noon with headaches, only to discover that the real reason for their protracted slumber was not fatigue or adult beverages enjoyed the night before, but the effects of gas pumped into the yacht as they slept by the same people now long departed with wallets, credit cards, smartphones/tablets, silverware and artwork, even if they couldn’t get the safe open. In the end, the threat of attack is everywhere.

On August 11, 2013, 43-year-old Fabrice Vial collapsed on the aft deck of his 37-meter yacht *Team Vit* peacefully anchored in Porto Vecchio, Corsica. A single bullet entered his back, passed through his body and disappeared into the sea. Why someone needed to kill the owner of Couach Yachts was a mystery.

In the end, the threat of attack is everywhere. Less dramatic, but more universal and certainly a higher probability is common petty theft. For that, the issue is access control...another hint at the number one issue.

A MOBILE PHONE CAN BE AN  
**OPEN WINDOW** TO ALMOST EVERYTHING  
ON BOARD. "AND IF A CREWMEMBER  
GETS MUGGED ASHORE, AND THE  
MUGGERS STEAL THE CELL PHONE..."

I.T.

### The Joys Of Modern Technology

A big factor in the growth of the superyacht industry is that modern communications mean you can run your affairs, the business kind of course, on board — gin and tonic in one hand, smartphone in the other, as the Footsie 500 slides silently by on a monstrous screen.

"Internet technology (IT) is a real biggie," says Peterman, "and good satellite connectivity just compounds the problem."

All of these advances in communications through the Internet, like Pandora's Box, come with a plethora of issues of their own, despite the fact that most yachts have robust firewalls.

"The problems with IT are underestimated at two levels; the first is that most crew will pay no attention to IT people's warnings about the dangers of IT from an IT perspective," observes Estebe. "The second is that many in IT themselves underestimate the commitment and creativity of people they are up against."

A mobile phone can be an open window to almost everything on board, Peterman suggests. "And if a crewmember gets mugged ashore, and the muggers steal the cell phone...."

If there's just one network on board, everyone potentially shares access to the information. In the case of public figures, a prominent politician or titan of industry, the value of this information can easily exceed that of a Van Gogh and is much easier to remove.

Regulators don't require a smartphone on a yacht, but the International Maritime Organization (IMO) requires Automated Identification Systems (AIS) aboard international vessels of 300 gross tons or more and all passenger vessels. Here, the threat is the information about the yacht that the AIS is broadcasting to the world — general details, her destination and how fast she's moving.

But why not just steal the whole yacht? In the last 12 months, GPS spoofing has reared its head as easily obtained hardware can "confuse" the yacht's navigational systems to believe it's somewhere else by "bending" the GPS signal. A less-than-vigilant bridge team, concentrating only on the big screens and not "looking outside" may not notice until it's too late. "Classically, mariners were always taught to navigate using all of the resources — sextant, binoculars, radar [and] fathometer," Peterman says.

### The Envelope, Please

The biggest issue from any perspective is the crew. "It's really a lack of security awareness and absence of a security culture amongst the crew," Hill says.

Yacht crew, by definition, are young, and given that, for many, it's a short-term adventure rather than a life career, thus presenting the image of a soft target. It doesn't help that, especially when chartering, yacht crew are incredibly busy, making security somewhat of an afterthought. "After all, yacht crew are not selected for their security talents," says Peterman.

Having crew visible, acting aware and challenging people coming aboard sends a strong message about the accessibility of the yacht and the greeting you can expect if you go aboard uninvited.

To create and maintain this culture of questioning vigilance requires training. And this training no longer is optional, which only adds to this issue.

From July 1, 2015, a date already extended due to the global logistical challenge of organizing it, all seafarers in vessels over 300 tons must have security awareness training. Those involved in some activity

affecting security require more, and one crewmember must be a trained and certified as a Ships Security Officer, or SSO.

At the moment, educational institutions providing this training are struggling with capacity, something only expected to get worse at the end of this year's Mediterranean charter season.

So some training companies, like Intrepid, are offering onboard packages where instructors come and live aboard if necessary to get the job done. Online security training is also available, although flag states have differing approaches to it. Overall, this, of course, comes with those now infamous words *Port State Control* and their meaning: making sure that yachts visiting a port comply before they are allowed to leave.

Of course, legally mandated security training is only the beginning. Equipment, such as CCTV, lighting and radios must be regularly tested...the quality of that effort is naturally dependent on the crew performing it. Ongoing training and drills must become more regular and creative. Instead of watching a video and signing a card that you that the training was completed, scenario training is more effective.

"Vigilance means asking, 'Why are those people over there taking so many pictures?'" says Hill. "It also means looking into what visitors are bringing on board and questioning what that package is doing over there."

Crew also need to understand why this culture must be maintained while ashore. "If a potential assailant knows there are a total of twelve individuals [that] make up the crew of a yacht and they count ten individuals ashore in a bar wearing t-shirts with the name of that yacht, they know only two crew are aboard," says Peterman.

While everyone agrees that security awareness is better than before 9/11 and the resulting ISPS in 2004, not everyone agrees on the biggest threat. "The weakest point and hence the biggest issue is the crew," says Hill.

Estebe is convinced, however, that the biggest issue is what amounts to an unholy alliance — the merging of piracy, organized crime, technology and terrorism as happened in the Mumbai attacks that went on to kill a well-known superyacht owner.

"Pakistani commandos got funding from organized criminal gangs, hijacked a boat to get to India, used online data as well as satellite phones during the executions to identify their victims; this merging is giving life to a criminal anarchy that will threaten the entire system. Yachts can be the best safe havens for their owners, but only those with the insight to make sure they are." Sleep tight. **DW**

