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A security guard in a black uniform and helmet stands on the deck of a white boat, holding a rifle. The boat is on a body of water. The background is a blue gradient.

**RECLAIMING THE SEAS:**  
Counter-piracy measures

# Layered response

*David Rider of Neptune Maritime Security gives an update on anti-piracy measures*

Despite concerted efforts by the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** and the **European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR)**, piracy in the Arabian Sea by Somalis shows no sign of abating. In 2011, according to the **International Maritime Bureau (IMB)**, there were 237 incidents attributed to Somali pirates, up from 2010's total of 219. The main difference recently is that the pirates' success rate has dramatically diminished. At the end of December 2010, pirates held 28 vessels and 638 crew for ransom. By comparison, 2011 was nowhere near as fruitful for the pirates, with just 10 vessels held by pirates at the end of December.

The successful hijacking of the Italian-owned *Enrico Ievoli* on 27 December 2011 has been the exception rather than the rule, although there are lessons to be learned from its capture. The main question, however, is why pirates have been so unsuccessful this year, and the answer lies in the layered response to security being adopted by many shipping companies.

Counter-piracy work, as with any military-style operation, succeeds through successful planning and strategy before the vessel has even left port. Competent vessel protection teams (VPTs) should carry out a survey of the vessel in their charge with the Master in order to highlight weak points and areas to be hardened. Traditionally, this involves the laying of razor wire over all areas vulnerable to boarding by hostile forces, adjusting fire hoses in order to aim them at any attempted boarders and the closing and locking of all unnecessary access points. Taking simple, but obvious steps like this adds a further layer of protection over and above the presence of armed guards, who are naturally the final deterrent on board.

But even armed security guards are only one aspect of defence. Equally important is the vessel's citadel; the safe area to which the entire crew can retreat should pirates successfully board. It should be absolutely secure, with provisions and water for the whole crew for several days, portable toilet facilities

*'The citadel should be absolutely secure, with provisions and water for the whole crew for several days, portable toilet facilities and, crucially, communication equipment and the means to control the vessel's engines'*

and, crucially, communication equipment and the means to control the vessel's engines. Yet many merchant vessels fail to properly stock their citadels or indeed have one in the first instance.

The hijacking of the *MV Montecristo* in October 2011 illustrates how essential it is for vessels to be fully prepared for the worst. While the *Montecristo* was successfully rescued by US and UK naval forces within 24 hours of its capture, according to a report in the *Daily Mirror* newspaper, the rescue was in the 'nick of time'. The newspaper stated that when naval forces gained control of the stricken vessel, they discovered that the 11 pirates on board had 'ripped apart steel doors and frames, wrecked the cabins and blasted a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) round through the bridge'. More worryingly, the story also suggested that the gang were poised to break their way into the engine room, where the *Montecristo's* crew and one unarmed security advisor were hiding. Captain Gerry Northwood, of the Royal Navy vessel *Fort Victoria*, told the paper: 'They were close to breaking down the door of the engine room. This was a wild, unpredictable gang. None of us would want to have been captured.'

Clearly, in this case the citadel did its job, but anecdotal stories at the time of the

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*‘Fortunately, EU NAVFOR and NATO forces were close at hand to rescue the Montecristo. That may not be the case in 2012, as participating EU NAVFOR countries face reduced defence budgets’*

hijacking suggested that the *Montecristo*’s crew lacked VHF radio equipment and had to drop a message in a bottle to communicate with their rescuers. If true, it hardly presents an ideal scenario. Fortunately, EU NAVFOR and NATO forces were close at hand to rescue the *Montecristo*. That may not be the case in 2012, as participating EU NAVFOR countries face reduced defence budgets. Swedish General Hakan Syren, chair of the EU Military Committee, said in a *Reuters* article in November that the EU will be short of warships for its counter-piracy mission and is unlikely to fill the gap until March, given economic constraints. General Syren described the shortage as a ‘problem’, but would not go into further detail. Syren said the EU operation, codenamed *Atalanta*, had a normal minimum force requirement of four to six warships, depending on the time of the year, and this would not be met in the period from December until March.

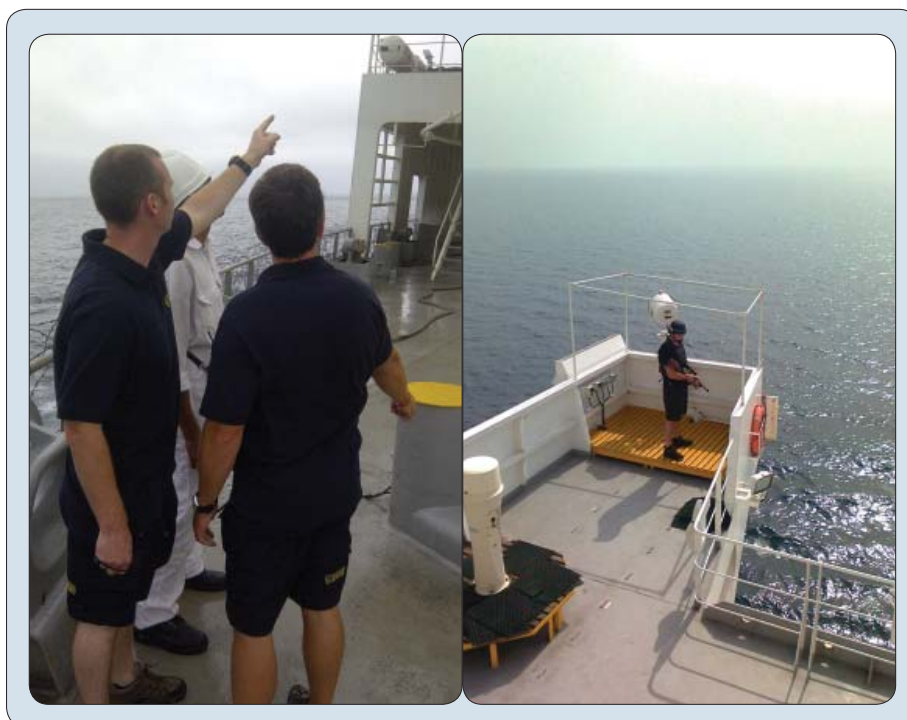
‘The ... commander has a minimum level of both maritime patrol aircraft and ships; and during quite a limited time ... the number of ships is below the red

line,’ he told a news conference after a meeting of defence chiefs of the 27 EU states.

The absence of a guaranteed rescue by the naval task force is highlighted by the case of the *Beluga Nomination* in January 2010. The vessel was attacked around 390 nautical miles (nm) off the Seychelles and the crew retreated to the citadel. The German owners described attempts to rescue the crew as a ‘disaster’, adding: ‘The crew spent two and a half days in a reinforced room but nobody came to help them,’ according to a report on *SomaliaReport.com*. The article continued: ‘Pirates had the time to break into the citadel, which called into question its positioning, but more importantly, whether the enforcement of the area was adequately prepared in light of the distance from any naval force.’

*Best Management Practices 4 (BMP4)* states that ‘the use of a citadel cannot guarantee a naval/military response’, but some industry sources are concerned that citadels are being seen as a cure-all by some companies.

Glen Forbes runs a website, *OCEANUSLive.org*, which collates



piracy information not only from recognised sources such as NATO, EU NAVFOR, **United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO)** and the IMB and the **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP)**, but also from seafarers themselves. During his time in the Royal Navy, Glen and his partner at OCEANUSLive, Ryan Wallace, were involved in the creation of the **Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa**, and he appreciates the value of shared intelligence in the fight against piracy. Forbes shares the general concern many have expressed over what makes for a good citadel and attended last year's symposium on citadels, held by the **Security Association for the Maritime Industry (SAMI)**, where many issues were raised.

'An element that causes concern is the lack of guarantee of military action should a crew find the need to enter a citadel. With the view [from some within shipping associations] that the lack of naval units may mean a delay of upwards of four days to reach the scene, questions were raised on whether it would be better to bolster the armed guards element than establish a citadel, regardless of the layered defence argument,' says Forbes.

The truth is that citadels and armed guards are just two elements of vessel security. They should be combined with use of BMP and – the final link in the chain – shore-based intelligence gathering. A professional maritime security company should have an operations and support centre which not only monitors their VPTs in transit, but also regularly updates them with pertinent intelligence reports for their area of operations. As an intelligent security provider, **Neptune Maritime Security** ensures that team leaders on transit receive regular reports on pirate activity in the high risk area (HRA), while those same reports are also sent to clients in order to keep them apprised of developments. These updates are crucial in order to ensure that all stakeholders have the latest intelligence to hand in order to make decisions on course and speed changes, should the need arise. In

conjunction, we also operate a central information platform with *Intelligence Bank*, which keeps all shipping partners and clients updated with the latest piracy information.

The final layer of security is naturally the presence of armed guards. To date, no vessel with an armed security team has been successfully hijacked by Somali pirates, a fact which EU NAVFOR acknowledges. The simple visible presence of armed guards has often been enough to turn pirates away from a vessel (as a skiff approaches, the guards hold their weapons high above their heads to show that they are armed), although often pirates will attempt to engage VPTs who then fire warning shots ahead of their skiffs to warn them off. Usually, this is enough to cause the pirates to abort their attack and go off in search of less prepared prey.

Which brings us back to the hijacking of the *Enrico Ievoli*. According to military sources, the vessel was not transiting with armed or unarmed guards onboard at the time of its hijacking, nor did it have a citadel in place to protect the crew. As we enter a period of reduced naval activity in the area, shipping companies need to prepare accordingly and by using a layered approach to their vessel security they can mitigate any worst-case scenario. The crew of the *Enrico Ievoli* would no doubt say the same thing, if they were able to.



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