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# THREAT OF GLOBAL TERRORISM

Kim E Petersen, president of SeaSecure LLC, asks, what is the true risk of terrorism to cruise ships, and what is the industry doing to mitigate that risk?

Intelligence services have reported evidence that international terrorists are shifting their sights from aviation to the maritime sector. With the dramatic increase in security measures arrayed against the terrorist threat to airlines following the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, ships and seaports are being viewed by terrorists as prime targets in their next campaign. The attack on the French oil tanker *Limburg* in 2002 underscores the vulnerability of shipping in general.

## Terrorist motive

Terrorism is a macabre theatre. The intention of the terrorist is to focus the spotlight of world attention on their issue of concern. Without diplomatic powers, standing armies and navies, or large PR budgets, extremists will rely on terrorism as an alternative and increasingly sophisticated political instrument. While terrorists almost always prefer to attack an enemy government (in the form of their leaders, military, or police), government institutions typically have the wherewithal to protect their people and assets. Terrorists naturally shift their sights to a more accessible pool of victims, targeting civilians or businesses.

For example, the attack on the *Limburg* off the coast of Yemen was not directed at France, or even the ship's owners: the attack was launched to cripple the economy of Yemen by scaring away commerce – a tactic that worked well given the paucity of ships that were willing to risk sailing to Aden and paying the associated war risk insurance premiums.

When looking at a world map, it becomes strikingly clear that US-declared state sponsors of terrorism (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Cuba, North Korea,



On 7 October 1985, the *Achille Lauro* was hijacked as it headed towards Egypt

Sudan, and until recently, Libya), along with other states with potential terrorist problems, are often situated on strategic bodies of water close to key shipping lanes or coastal routes. Many are destinations for cruise ships, offering exotic landfalls on faraway itineraries. If terrorists are prepared to attack naval ships and commercial tankers, it may be assumed they will attack cruise lines.

At first glance, cruise ships appear tempting targets for terrorists, and there is historical precedent for their being attacked. Hijackings have occurred off South America, Egypt, Singapore, Greece and Cambodia. The most notorious were the seizures by terrorists of the cruise ships *Santa Maria* and the *Achille Lauro*.

## Santa Maria

In 1961, Henrique Carlos Malta Galvao, a former general in the army of the Portuguese dictator Antonio Salazar, planned the hijacking of the cruise ship *Santa Maria* as a means of discrediting both the Salazar regime and General Franco's rule over Spain. Galvao recognised the sensation that would be created by taking prisoner such a large number of international hostages – including Americans. The attendant publicity, coupled with the protective shield

afforded by so many innocent passengers, made the *Santa Maria* appear an ideal target.

One of the factors that has insulated cruise ships from hijackings of the sort common on aircraft, for example, is the problem associated with controlling so many crew and passengers. For this reason, Galvao initially planned to place over 100 of his men onboard the ship, each arriving as a passenger with weapons checked in their luggage (there were no security screening checkpoints then). After taking control of the ship, Galvao had planned to sail to Angola – a Portuguese colony at the time – where his men had would then stage a military coup.

One of the factors that has insulated cruise ships from hijackings is controlling the many crew and passengers

Galvao had planned the hijacking down to the minutest detail, including the intention for the hostage ship to send false telegrams to the ship's owner giving the impression that all was well and that delays were being experienced in making the next port, all the while steaming for Africa.

Much like al-Qaeda today, Galvao and his fellow terrorists were methodical and patient. They put the *Santa Maria* under surveillance for several months, taking careful note of security protocols and the logistics of crew and passenger embarkation and disembarkation. Sketches and photographs were compiled, along with publicly available details regarding the ship's general arrangement plan. A comprehensive target folder was created for the final execution of the hijacking.

When the plan was finally put into effect, only 24 of Galvao's Portuguese and Spanish rebel gang managed to board the ship in Curaçao. Security was so poor that some of the hijackers managed to stow away rather than board as passengers. Shortly after midnight, the terrorists went into action and commandeered the bridge. A valiant struggle by the crew resulted in the tragic death of the third mate, Nascimento Costa, along with the wounding of three other crew. But Galvao's men had successfully taken control of the ship and all 600 of its passengers. After

diverting to St Lucia where the vessel hove to, the injured were taken ashore by lifeboat into the port of Castries. The *Santa Maria* then departed with ample food and water, and over 1 500 tonnes of fuel, enough to travel 5000 miles in any direction.

As it was the early 1960s, the USA did not yet have a coherent policy regarding acts of terrorism. Through repeated radio messages to the outside world, Galvao desperately sought to characterise his action, not as piracy, but rather as the political act of insurrection. When the Portuguese government requested assistance for what it categorised as an act of piracy, the US government initially balked, along with the UK, both determining the hijacking to be a 'political act'. The fact that there was no small amount of antipathy towards President Salazar by both governments undoubtedly influenced their reluctance to act. However, the USA did dispatch warships and aircraft to search for the *Santa Maria*.

After the ship's location had been established by the US Navy, negotiations for the release of the passengers and crew increased. Galvao resisted surrendering but quickly found that the ship would have to land somewhere to take on water bunkers after the *Santa Maria's* officers had turned on every fresh water tap, depleting all the drinking water onboard. After 11 days, the hijackers had little choice but to turn over the ship to Brazilian authorities in the port of Recife on 2 February.

#### Achille Lauro

Terrorism was at its peak in the Middle East during the 1980s. The conflict between Palestinian liberation forces and Israel saw an ever-increasing toll on innocent civilians. The Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), one particularly violent faction, had desperately tried to bring weapons into Israel, where they had planned to conduct attacks against the civilian population. However, Israel had effectively cordoned off the land routes, making the smuggling of gunmen and their weapons near impossible. A terrorist team conducting surveillance on cruise ships found that security was extremely lax with virtually no screening of any kind performed on passengers bound for Israel. Abu Abbas, the leader of the PLF, approved a plan to have four operators bring weapons onto the *Achille Lauro* in Egypt and a few days later disembarked in Ashdod, where they would conduct an armed assault.

On 7 October 1985, four heavily armed terrorists boarded the ship in Alexandria, Egypt, bound for Israel. Unfortunately for them, soon after sailing, a cabin attendant entered their shared cabin expecting the occupants to be at dinner. Instead, he found four men hunched over AK47 assault rifles and ammunition spread across the room. Having been discovered, the terrorists had little choice but to seize the ship as a means of negotiating their way to safety. With some 100 passengers onboard, many elderly Americans, the hijackers demanded the release of 50 Palestinian prisoners being held in Israeli prisons. Infamously, they executed a disabled 69-year old US tourist named Leon Klinghoffer, throwing his body and wheelchair overboard.

After two days of negotiations with the Egyptian government, the hijackers were promised safe passage to Tunisia in exchange for the release of the passengers and ship. President Reagan ordered that the EgyptAir plane carrying the terrorists be intercepted by Navy F-14s and forced to land in Sicily. The Italian government refused to hand over the suspects, choosing to try them in an Italian court. While long sentences were handed out, by 1991 all of the



terrorists were paroled or managed to escape while on 'leaves of absence' from prison. Abbas, the mastermind of the hijacking, was tried *in absentia* and remained free until US Special Forces captured him in Baghdad after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. He died while in custody having never been brought to trial.

#### Lessons learned

While the *Santa Maria* hijacking did little to interrupt the steamship business, the *Achille Lauro* had a much greater impact. Public concern about terrorism in the Mediterranean Littoral resulted in many cruise lines shifting their business to the Caribbean. The Mediterranean cruise industry took several years to recover while business in the Caribbean Basin skyrocketed. But the lessons of the *Achille Lauro* incident were not lost on industry executives. Working in partnership with the US Coast Guard and the IMO, a series of regulations, protocols and industry best practices were instituted.

Passenger ship companies have long understood their vulnerability to a host of potential maritime crimes – terrorism, criminal attack, theft of goods and services, stowaways and fraud. However, unlike some other travel industries, such as airlines, the cruise industry is wholly dependent on its status as a refuge from the stresses of everyday life. To preserve that image, considerable effort and resources are employed in the protection of maritime operations. But in the pursuit of an environment that is both secure and alluring to its passengers, security must coexist with operational and logistical considerations that can be daunting. To meet this goal, cruise lines have instituted security programmes that address a range of threats and make extensive use of metal detectors, X-ray machines, explosives detectors, and narcotics detection equipment. In the past, X-ray equipment was provided by the larger ports to visiting cruise ships.

No longer content with being at the mercy of port operators, modern cruise ships now carry all the security equipment onboard to ensure self-sufficiency regardless of where they may visit. This is particularly important for those vessels that travel on exotic itineraries where security infrastructures are meagre at best.



The attack on the oil tanker *Limburg* underscores the vulnerability of shipping to terrorism

#### New security measures

As with ports, access controls are perhaps the most fundamental and important considerations in ship security programmes. In 1996, a significant milestone in cruise ship security took place with the development of the Automated Personnel Assisted Security Screening vessel access control system – a high-speed, interactive, photo identification and access control solution specifically designed to provide tracking, screening and identification of passengers and personnel. The system enables passenger and crew identification and verification in less than one second and tracks their exit and entry at all ports of call. First pioneered by Princess Cruises, it is now standard equipment on most of the major cruise lines.

Security personnel onboard cruise ships include a security officer and several security watchmen (or ratings). The security officer is often an ex-UK Royal Navy Master-at-Arms, the military equivalent of a ship's head of law enforcement. Their subordinates are frequently recruited from the former ranks of the Nepalese Gurkhas, the much renowned warriors that have served the British Crown for over 100 years. As well as the experience they bring with them, there is often additional training in counter narcotics, anti-piracy and anti-stowaway procedures.

In addition to terrorism, piracy is a real problem in some regions of the world, most significantly Indonesia, the Bay of Bengal, the African East Coast and the southern entrance to the Red Sea, and South America. While most cruise ships are not particularly vulnerable due to their size and speed, small cruise ships with a low freeboard and cruising speed could be victimised.

The standard anti-piracy measures recommended by the Maritime Security Council include the use of anti-piracy screens or fencing along lower decks; the continuous patrolling of decks by crew; the use of overside lighting to illuminate approaches to the ship; radar installed on the transom of the ship to reveal small craft that may attempt to approach from the 'blind' spot directly aft; charged water hoses to repel boarders; steaming in convoy with other ship; travel by daylight

whenever possible; and ready communication with the Kuala Lumpur Anti-Piracy Center.

### International maritime security regulations

When the US warship *Cole* was attacked by al-Qaeda suicide bombers in the port of Aden, the maritime community held its collective breath. Shipping officials opined at how naval vessels and not commercial shipping were clearly the focus of terrorist interests. And so it seemed until late 2002 when the *Limburg* was viciously attacked in a similar manner as the *Cole*, as it sailed along the southern coast of Yemen. Not only had the terrorists underscored the vulnerability of shipping, they also sent a wake-up call to the industry: everything at sea is now at risk.

Fortunately, shortly following the attacks of 11 September 2001, and well before the *Limburg* attack, the United Nations' International Maritime Organization had been spurred to action by an alarmed and proactive US Department of Transportation. Threatening unilateral actions against shippers and ports of concern, the IMO moved at unprecedented speed and, in December of 2002, promulgated a far-reaching and comprehensive set of regulatory mandates that have become international standards for maritime security: the International Ship & Port Facility Security Code. The ISPS Code went into effect on 1 July 2004 and is directed at an estimated 60,000 ships, 120,000 crew, 20,000 ports, and 100,000 port facilities worldwide. It is for this reason that a quiet whirlwind of activity is presently taking place in the oceans and harbours of the world, not unlike what happened in the cruise industry following the *Achille Lauro*.

The ISPS Code takes a risk mitigation approach to addressing the security vulnerabilities of both ships and ports. Ships engaged in international voyages and over 500 gross tons in size, and seaports that receive ships engaged in international trade, along with some other special-type ships and ports, are subject to the provisions of the Code. Each must undertake a security assessment, which must be developed into a comprehensive security plan. This plan must address: how deficiencies identified in the assessment will be corrected; the role of company personnel in the performance of security functions; actions to be taken in the event

of a security incident; action plans that the ship or port must take under any of the three security levels that everyone in the maritime world will have to work under; liaison activities between the port and its security stakeholders, such as law enforcement, tenants, and shipping companies; training and exercises that are now compulsory; and a severe requirement for documentation for everything done associated with ISPS Code compliance for purposes of external auditing.

Furthermore, both the shipping companies and the ports are now obliged to appoint security personnel within their organisations. Like the cruise ships have been doing for years, shippers must have a company security officer to manage fleet security obligations, as well as a ship security officer onboard each vessel. Similarly, the ports must designate a port facility security officer that will serve as the security point-of-contact for the port, as well as oversee the execution of all ISPS-mandated security activities.

There is also a requirement for specialised security equipment for use onboard ships, such as a duress alarm for signalling in an emergency, and a transponder that transmits a ship's name and location – similar to commercial aircraft. While the CSOs and PFSOs are individually responsible for completing their security assessments and plans, most turn these daunting tasks over to one of the few expert consulting companies that specialise in maritime security.

All of this is, naturally, subject to verification by governmental authorities. For the shipping community, those countries that offer registries for ships (commonly referred to as flag administrations) are each responsible for validating and certifying ships within their registry as being compliant. Ports, on the other hand, must be assessed by their government and certified to have met all of the requirements of the ISPS Code.

The enormity of complying with the ISPS Code is a complaint heard from virtually every corner of the maritime industry – with the quiet exception of the cruise industry. While cargo shippers and port authorities are, in many cases for the first time, addressing security as a primary concern, the cruise lines have had it relatively easy. Having tackled security head-on over the past two decades, companies such as Carnival Cruises and Royal Caribbean set an exceptionally high standard for security that others are now emulating.

### Model of security

Post-11 September, the risk of terrorism is fast evolving, particularly as the terrorist threat migrates from aviation to the maritime sector. However, cruise lines have created effective – and costly – security operations that have become models for other segments of the maritime industry. And in almost 20 years since the *Achille Lauro* hijacking off Egypt, the security record for cruise ships is unsurpassed, making true the promise that an ocean cruise is one of the safest vacations in the world. ●

### Biography

Kim E Petersen is the president of SeaSecure LLC and the executive director of the Maritime Security Council, which represents 70 per cent of the world's shipping. He is the former director of security for Princess Cruises and Renaissance Cruises. He has held senior staff positions with former US Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and Alexander Haig. SeaSecure is widely recognised as a global leader in maritime security and risk management.

