



## THE CRITICAL ROLE OF MARITIME SECURITY IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

After a hiatus of several years where piracy and other state-backed threats across swathes of the global commons and national littorals had appeared to be on the wane, events over the last fifteen months have brought the requirement for coordinated maritime security back into sharp focus. Although Houthi efforts to disrupt shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are probably the most well-known, viewing this group's actions as the marker for the myriad other threats facing global supply chains in the maritime environment risks both over simplifying "threats," and potentially over-engineering mitigation methodologies appropriate elsewhere.

Hard-earned lessons around the generic and specific nature of maritime security will inevitably have been forgotten as corporate institutional memory fades, and budgets are refocused elsewhere. Any renewed emphasis on maritime security must also be considered alongside the growth in dynamic new threats not even considered only short years ago. Simply put, this is now a far more complex environment than previously.

### UNDERSTANDING: THE KEY ENABLER?

Regardless of where, how and when activity across global supply chains takes place, ensuring access to an understanding of threats and risks, including some that haven't even been considered, is certainly the most critical enabling activity across all global logistics. This is particularly critical within the maritime environment to ensure a more profitable bottomline. The depth of knowledge and expertise required is often, but not always, best delivered via a trusted outsourced partner who has the subject matter expertise and international connections to deliver nuanced maritime security, specific intelligence assessment and appropriate security mitigations.

On-going conflicts in the Middle East and Russia's attack on Ukraine have both been significant catalysts in the development


of capabilities that can now be turned against global supply chains. State actors are now increasingly using proxies and others who can do their bidding in an unattributable manner, but often with covert state-backed support in the form of cyber effects, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), including access to satellite technology, electronic eavesdropping and artificial intelligence, and logistics. All this can turn what may have previously been thought of as "simple" pirates or opportunist criminals operating around port facilities into potentially very significant threats. The capabilities to mount attacks are further magnified at a local level through the use of novel, but increasingly effective technologies, with commercial drones being the most noteworthy and potentially significant, both to conduct surveillance and also to mount attacks, without appropriate security measures to defeat them.

Because of this, the maritime security industry needs to be increasingly focused across the logistics chain that begins elsewhere, i.e., at the factory floor or a distribution warehouse, which becomes the industry's responsibility on its journey and remains under observation and care until it has left the port. Simply focusing on the situation whilst at sea is no longer sufficient to counter the threats and risks that are faced by deeply interconnected global supply chains; some part of which will inevitably be a target of various actors and adversaries.

### THE MARITIME SECURITY: WHAT NEXT?

This short article needn't explain the well-established relationships and organizations between the industry and its clients, nor list all those groups who enable this. But the maritime security industry is probably better integrated into the needs of its client base than many others, all honed over years of prescient threats from the mid-1990s until the late 20-teens. At its zenith, the "Best Management Practices to Deter

Piracy and Enhance Maritime Security" (BMP Series) has become the globally recognized guide designed to help vessels owners and Masters mitigate the risk of piracy and other maritime security threats. Each iteration of BMP reflects lessons learned from real-world incidents, evolving threats, and advances in maritime security practices. The BMP are very good but are in danger of not keeping up with rapidly evolving threats, particularly where geopolitics and state-based threats need to be considered. This means experts within the industry are more necessary than ever to translate a pragmatic interpretation of the threat as it actually exists, via their access to a refined and effective intelligence picture to then ensure the delivery of an entirely effective end-to-end security plan.

The days of armed and unarmed guards no longer providing close protection security on vessels transiting across the world's oceans are still probably years away. But these individuals will increasingly be the forward sensor for a sophisticated intelligence and security ecosystem, able to harness technology to ensure their vessel is as safe as it can be from multiple threats; and can share insights with and from other vessels, including with allied naval flotillas in the highest risk areas. Informing dynamic routing advice to boardrooms and the Master of each vessel and acting as the anchor to global trade in an increasingly complicated and dangerous world. 

### About the Author

*Cliff Thoburn MBE is head of intelligence at RMI Global Solutions, security and intelligence specialists that monitor and assess global risks using a bespoke risk management methodology. Thoburn has more than three decades of expertise gained in the U.K.'s government intelligence environment. With extensive experience delivering security and resilience solutions for critical national infrastructure, including the U.K.'s energy sector, he provides insight into threat mitigation. His particular interest is in the emerging risks posed by unmanned aerial and surface technologies, which are reshaping security challenges, and how to mitigate threats for RMI's clients.*



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