# Enhancing Information Awareness between Public/Private Stakeholders

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## Introduction

The NATO Shipping Centre[1] has developed solid working relationships with a diverse group of international organizations (IO), non-governmental organizations (NGO), shipping organizations, companies and navies. These relationships and the exchange of information rely on a foundation of trust, cooperation and mutual respect, which have been created over time. This global maritime community of interest coalesced to fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa, Gulf of Aden/Indian Ocean and Somali Basin. Yet despite this growing exchange of information and the successes that have been realized, there are several issues and tensions which remain, and at times restrict the flow of information.  Included are issues such as:

- a different lexicon between groups;
- a complex operating environment; concerns over proprietary data;
- public - private business models;
- and the wide range of information sources.

A combination of these issues has created inconsistencies with respect to the reported number of hostages and ships that are currently under pirate control.

## Why are the Public – Private Stakeholders not seeing the Same Picture?

The difference in lexicon is an issue that can be difficult to overcome. What is a suspicious approach to one organization may be an attack to another. For example: a captain sees two boats approaching his ship at high speed, four personnel in each boat. Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) fire warning shots at approximately 800 yards, the boats then alter course and head for shore. How should this incident be classified? Is it an approach, a probe, suspicious activity, or legitimate fishing activity? Recently such a report was received and it appears to have been an incident in which PCASP fired on Eritrean naval boats. In such a complex environment where even fishermen carry AK-47 assault rifles, it is

difficult to discern potential pirates from fishermen or small boats moving people and goods across the Gulf of Aden.

Now add a fleet of several thousand merchant vessels which have been transiting from the Arabian Gulf to the Indian subcontinent and up and down the eastern coast of Africa for hundreds of years - the pervasive dhows. One common denominator of all dhows is vulnerability to pirate attacks as they have a low freeboard, are slow moving and are not fast in maneuvering. Combine these characteristics with limited communications and you have a good vehicle for pirates to board and exploit. It is with dhows and small local fishing vessels where there is a divergence in the statistics of piracy. Furthermore, these statistics are not just numbers; they are sailors and merchant marines who have been subject to extremely stressful conditions during their hijacking experience. Some have paid the ultimate sacrifice, dying in captivity. Dhows are not normally supported by large multinational corporations with comprehensive insurance policies to back the negotiations, and therefore these vessels and personnel can languish for long periods of time during negotiations. Exact information pertaining to an incident can often be difficult to confirm. Details such as name, date, time, location, number of crew, and follow on events are difficult to obtain.

For military organizations that rely on the precision of details and facts, these smaller vessels represent an issue that, up to now, has been difficult to overcome. The fidelity of information is not as exact or readily available, yet the human suffering is real. The timely passage of information is critical. When information is late, the opportunities to find and apprehend pirates are greatly reduced. With each passing minute, the area of probability and the search area grow larger. A reluctance to share what private companies consider to be proprietary information can make further analysis difficult. Reporting in accordance with Best Management Practices for Protection against Somalia Based Piracy (BMP4) provides all the necessary data for follow-on analysis. The NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) understands the individual companies' concerns and has worked very hard to build mutual trust. To mitigate this concern, the NSC acts as an honest broker and guarantees that the information provided in confidence will not be shared with other commercial companies. At the same time, the NSC is able to receive these important details, which provide insights into pirate activity, tactics and movements.
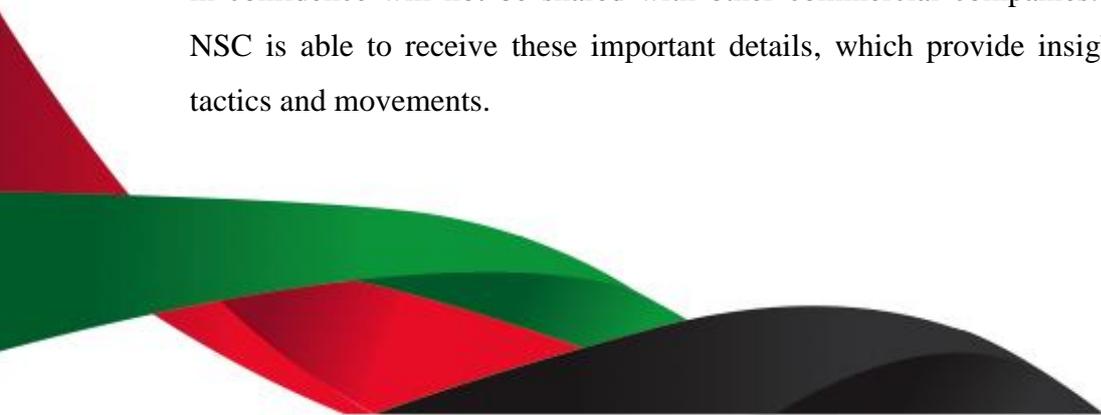
**Public / Private Stakeholders – Is Free Exchange of Information a Realistic Option?**

Information exchange, cooperation and development of commonly shared knowledge on methods to deal with piracy and maritime crime are working very well between the alliances and navies involved in counter-piracy. NATO, EUNAVFOR and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) are coordinating and cooperating on all levels and are achieving unity of effort. The Shared Awareness and De-confliction (SHADE) conferences have been introduced to establish coordination and deconfliction with independent deployers, such as China, India, Japan, Russia, South Korea and Malaysia. Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) are also synchronized through an Air Coordination Element. To have such a large number of navies deterring and disrupting piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean is virtually unprecedented and it is regarded as a major achievement, setting a great precedent for future Maritime Security Operations. Cooperation with the regional navies, coast guard organizations and port states is also improving.

Positive examples of private/public cooperation include the collaborative production of "BMP4"[2] and "Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for protection against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea region." The NSC and other naval organizations contributed to the development of these documents. This collaboration was recognized as the right thing to do in order to help communicate ways to counter pirate tactics and procedures. Furthermore, the BMP series of publications provided guidance to ensure a timely passage of information.

Despite these successes, there are areas where the exchange of information can be improved. Within the public domain, these include agreement on common definitions of what constitutes a piracy related incident, quality of reporting and method for validating reports, and the ability to track ongoing events and provide closure on the release of personnel and vessels.

Another challenge that requires attention involves private companies trying to sell their analysis, where competitive issues surrounding the cost of information, marketing, ensuring a client base and turning a profit must be factored into their decisions. There is a tension between public good and safety and these companies might potentially lose clients and revenue if the information is provided in an open and free forum.

Also, NATO, EUNAVFOR (MSCHOA), International Maritime Bureau (IMB) and others are publishing their information and analysis and distributing it free of charge on their respective web-pages. Furthermore, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) is recognized as the primary 24/7/365 point of contact in the Indian Ocean/Gulf of Aden for reporting acts of piracy. This organization has the capability to immediately alert naval forces in the area, and UKMTO has analysts who are experienced and capable of putting the reports in context.

Another relatively new phenomenon is the acceptance of Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) onboard vessels. PCASPs have been effective, though their presence can further complicate the passage of information due to the increasing size of the chain of reporting. Many of the Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSC) have their own operations centers. The initial report of any attack or activity will then be reported to the PMSC, followed by the shipping company and then, possibly UKMTO. Some companies share information and analysis with public actors, but this cooperation needs to be significantly improved in order to ensure an accurate depiction of the piracy activity in the Gulf Of Aden/Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, the public/private information exchange works in most cases and in particular when life and health is threatened. However, there is room for improvement between public/public and public/private information exchange, and all parties need to recognize this fact.

**What are the consequences of Public – Private Stakeholders not seeing the same picture?**

The basic assumption is that under-reporting will lead to a reduction in threat awareness, while over-reporting will possibly result in over-sensitivity within the shipping industry. Without being provided with all the information, analysts are unable to accurately review the actions, and therefore unable to detect development of patterns, training and tactics. Furthermore, without such analysis it is impossible to make accurate predictive assessments on current and future pirate activities. The most serious consequences of delayed reporting of a piracy incident or, worse, no reporting, is the lack of warning and awareness for other

vessels. These vessels are therefore not able to take actions to protect the ship and crew from potential attack. MSCHOA and IMB issue Navigational Warnings (NAVWARN) based on piracy incidents. Furthermore, NATO Shipping Centre calls ships within a certain radius of an incident and advise those vessels to circumnavigate the reported pirate action group location under the "See and Avoid" concept. Without timely reporting, UKMTO is unable to pass information to naval ships in the area and the pirates are then free to continue threatening vessels and sailors.

## Conclusions

Countering piracy and maritime crime is about safeguarding people and ensuring the freedom of navigation and trade. To counter piracy efficiently, all parties need to share information in a timely manner. For the most part, this is being achieved. As the 2012 annual report of Oceans Beyond Piracy concludes, piracy and maritime crime in the Indian Ocean, Horn of Africa and Gulf of Aden is decreasing. This is the result of a collective effort between public and private stakeholders at sea, ashore in Somalia and throughout the larger region.

All actors engaged in maritime security have the same goal; to contribute to improved maritime security and the prosecution of those involved in maritime crime. The key contribution that public and private stakeholders can offer is improved exchange of information, thereby enabling the most efficient use of scarce resources in order to protect the sailors and ships. The next phase is transitioning from the current successes and providing the regional nations with the organic capacity to maintain regional maritime security.

## Endnotes

[1] NATO Shipping Centre (NSC) is located in Allied Maritime Command, Northwood, UK. NSC is the primary, permanent point of contact for the Shipping Community for the exchange of information between NATO's military authorities and the Shipping Community. NSC is contributing to establishing Maritime Situational Awareness which is a prerequisite for informed military decisions and for being able to act as advisor to merchant shipping regarding potential risks and possible interference with maritime operations.

[2] The BMP4 signatories includes some of the main organisations that NATO Shipping Centre is working with; The Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), The International Group of P&I Clubs (IGP&I), International Maritime Bureau (IMB), International Maritime Employers' Committee Ltd (IMEC), International Association of Dry Cargo Ship-owners (INTERCARGO), InterManager, International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (INTERTANKO), International Shipping Federation (ISF), International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), The International Parcel Tankers Association (IPTA), The Joint Hull Committee (JHC), Joint War Committee (JWC), The Oil Companies Marine Forum (OCIMF), The Society of International Gas Tanker and Terminal Operators (SIGGTO), The Mission to Seafarers and The World Shipping Council.