



NEPTUNE
P2P GROUP



CRUISE SHIPS – SECURITY THREATS AND MITIGATION

INTELLIGENCE REPORT – NOVEMBER 2021

CRUISE SHIPS – SECURITY THREATS AND MITIGATION

INTELLIGENCE REPORT

26 November 2021

Introduction

As Cruise Liner vacations begin to return to pre-Covid numbers, the security risks associated with their operation will increase exponentially. By the end of 2021 there is expected to be cruise capacity for over half a million passengers to be dispersed worldwide in over 320 ships, albeit down by 10% from pre-Covid figures. The cruise industry is economically and geographically focussed with 10 companies controlling more than 60 percent of the market. The bulk of this traffic is concentrated in the Caribbean (46%), followed by the Mediterranean (21%) but with major new terminals being planned in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the threats are now global. Cruise vessels vary considerably in size with passenger capacity ranging from less than a hundred up to several thousand, the Symphony of the Seas for example can carry a maximum of 6,680 customers which could present a significant target for those with criminal intent. In the past, cruise ships have been the target of terrorist attacks and other maritime criminal activity, this report looks at the threats and how the cruise liner industry protects both its assets and customers from a variety of global maritime dangers.

What are the Threats?

What makes a cruise ship and passengers a potential target?

Fundamentally, these vessels present an attractive target to a variety of terrorist and criminal organizations, cruise ships cater to large numbers of people who are confined in a single space making them ideal for assaults intended to maximize civilian casualties which has been the hallmark of Islamic terrorism in the post 9/11 era. The ships are highly iconic in nature and reflect the type of western materialism and affluence which Bin Laden inspired extremists are opposed to. The fact that an overwhelming majority of passengers on cruise liners are from a western (Christian) background, means that indiscriminate attacks can be carried out with little or no risk of negatively affecting wider Islamic interests.

Piracy although in abeyance, is still a viable possibility and the rewards for a pirate gang to be gained from seizure of a cruise ship would be significant. A successful attack against a major ocean-going vessel would almost certainly result in global recognition of the incident and thus gain the perpetrators maximum media coverage. Although not a terrorist attack, this was demonstrated in the November 2005 with the pirate attack on the Seabourn Spirit off the coast of Somalia which made the headlines on most western television and news outlets. Generating this type of publicity is critical to terrorist and criminal groups, it demonstrates operational capability which is vital for attracting recruits and boosting the morale of existing or potential affiliates.

The threats are not just confined to when the vessel is at sea, In 2015, passengers from two cruise ships moored in the Port of La Goulette, Tunisia, were the target of a militant attack on the Bardo National Museum resulting in 21 deaths. Deadly attacks on tourists in Egypt have also taken place, most notably in 2015 when a bomb was detonated on a bus full of tourists visiting Saint Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Desert. A thorough risk assessment of the potential risks to ships passengers is essential and consideration made to the possible employment of local security providers.

Potential threats to ships underway:

- **Hijacking** of a cruise ship and its passengers: Similar to the Achille Lauro attack in 1985 where a cruise ship is boarded and commandeered while the perpetrators hold and potentially injure or kill passengers if their demands are not met.
- **Sinking a ship using a waterborne IED:** Primarily used against military targets, a small boat loaded with high explosives could be rammed into a ship and detonated.
- **Anti-ship mines:** Floating mines are known to have been deployed in conflict zones, most significantly in the waters around the Red Sea coast of Yemen. These mines constitute a viable threat if they were to drift into commercial shipping lanes.
- **Pirate attack and Boarding:** Similar to the pirate attack on the Seabourn Spirit in 2005, perpetrators attack a ship from small boats using Rocket Propelled Grenade launchers and automatic weapons in an effort to slow the ship down to allow a boarding. If they are able to board the ship, passengers and crew are held for ransom.

"A successful attack against a major ocean going vessel would almost certainly result in global recognition of the incident"

- **Aerial Drone Attack (UAV):** Recent incidents including a lethal attack against a commercial ship in the Arabian Sea, have highlighted the possible use of aerial drones as a terrorist weapon or use as a threat to extort money from shipping operators.



THE MOTOR OF A ROCKET-PROPELLED GRENADE (RPG), SHOWN AFTER STRIKING THE SEABOURN SPIRIT

Potential threats to ships and passengers while in port:

- **Bombing onboard a ship:** A bomb is planted or activated by a suicide bomber who boards a ship and detonates a bomb in an effort to kill or injure passengers.
- **Incidents during passenger excursions:** As described previously, passengers can be exposed to potential danger during excursions ashore, while cruise operators will carry out risk assessments prior to a ship's visit, there still remains the real possibility of the passengers being targeted in certain areas on the world.
- **Petty theft and crime:** Cruise liner passengers are often the target of local pickpockets and petty criminals, briefing of the risks is essential before passengers venture ashore.
- **Cyber Attack:** A Data breach in which a malicious actor steals personally identifiable information after accessing company IT systems. This is particularly attractive to criminals due to the large number of passengers whose details they could potentially access.

“The main advantages for cruise ships over other types of ships are their speed and size, a cruise ship travelling at 20 plus knots is unlikely to be boarded successfully”

What are the likely consequences of an attack?

Notwithstanding the human impact an attack against a cruise ship would have, the risk of significant damage or loss of the ship itself could incur direct damages totalling several million dollars. With some of the newest cruise liners costing as much as a \$500 million to build, the potential economic consequences of terrorist attacks to cruise ship operators is eye watering. The resulting financial impact could include compensation for injuries, loss of life, increased security and insurance costs, with injury compensation alone, expected to be in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars. The insurance liability for such incidents can be in part, mitigated against by the implementation of pro-active and regulatory security measures, however, the liability rules do not change the underlying valuation of loss of life in connection with an attack. It is far better to absorb the increased security costs and prevent an attack, viewing it as an investment against potentially crippling compensation claims.

Reputational loss in the aftermath of an attack is another factor to be considered, although a company may do everything in its power to prevent a security breach the stigma attached to an operator from say, a terrorist incident, may well be as damaging as the tangible results. Although non-maritime, examples such as the explosion over Lockerbie of Pan Am flight 108 in 1988 where the airline was charged with a failure to implement FAA recommended security screening and baggage measures, eventually led to the collapse of the airline. The disappearance and destruction of two Malaysian Airways flights in 2014, although not proven to be terrorist related, affected the reputation and perhaps most importantly, consumer confidence in the airline, to the extent it had to be rebranded after the company was left technically bankrupt through loss of passenger revenue.

What can be done to mitigate the risk of attack?

The risk of terrorist attacks on cruise ships can be viewed from the point of threat, vulnerability and consequence. By complying with and employing recommended security protocols with monitoring and defensive equipment, the effect of these three components can be reduced to an acceptable level.

Commercial ships can employ a wide range of defensive measures and there are scores of counter piracy/terrorist systems on the market ranging from laser beam systems, light emitting equipment that dazzle assailants to electric fencing, razor wire and bespoke barriers deployed on the side of the ship. Many of these ‘ship hardening’ systems and devices are not suitable for use in cruise ships where the use of razor wire for example could present a danger or be aesthetically undesirable for fare paying passengers.

The use of unarmed and armed private security guards capable of firing back at aggressors can provide both protection and visual reassurance to cruise ship passengers while helping the operators safeguard their assets. Cruise ships generally have higher standards of anti-piracy measures than those followed by many other merchant vessels, but the precise measures will depend upon a particular company’s policies and their assessment of the risk.

The main advantages for cruise ships over other types of commercial ships are their speed and size. While this alone may not prevent a ship having an encounter with small craft that could have pirates aboard, a cruise ship travelling in excess of 20 knots is unlikely to be boarded successfully.

What are the counter measures that cruise can ships deploy?

Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD)

LRAD is a non-lethal device which uses a pain inducing sound beam to drive away attackers. This sonic weapon produces a high-pitched noise that is higher than the tolerance level of an average human being. LRAD was first used in commercial ships but has been adapted for use in cruise ships.



LONG RANGE ACOUSTIC DEVICE (LRAD)

Counter-Drone Devices (UAV)

There are several commercially available systems that can detect and jam incoming UAVs, some can be adapted for maritime use. Their effectiveness depends largely upon the technical sophistication of the UAV that is being used against a target but they are proven to be effective against most commercially manufactured drones and are deployed extensively in naval vessels and at airports, worldwide.

Surface Surveillance Radar

Small boat intrusion detection systems are commercially available, these specialist systems can be used to warn the ship of the approach of small waterborne threats that a normal ship's radar may miss. Utilising complex radar systems coupled with processors specifically designed for tracking and identification of small targets, these systems are able to detect and signal an alarm against any potential threat approaching the ship.

Armed and Unarmed Security Personnel

Simply put, having armed security on board is very successful. No cruise ship or commercial vessel has ever been hijacked while having an armed team on board. A team of armed guards allows defence of the vessel if other ship

protection measures fail and provides peace of mind to the crew and passengers. Some cruise companies are more prepared to use guards than others, some are adverse to the potential impact of having weapons onboard and creating alarm amongst the guests. Reputable Private Maritime Security Companies work closely with national and international security and law enforcement authorities around the world to ensure safety and best practice is adhered to.

Neptune P2P Group comment:

As the demand for cruise vacations grows, so inevitably will the risk of a major maritime security incident. According to the industry, pent-up demand has already led to a huge surge in bookings in 2022 and 2023. Cruise operators are looking further afield at more varied and adventurous destinations, the use of smaller 'high end' vessels specialising in 'Expedition Cruising' is on the rise but small and adventurous also equates to more risk both at sea and ashore. Future events such as the 2022 Soccer World Cup in Qatar, where it is reported that the organiser intend to use up to five cruise ships as floating hotels, could also present a significant target. As it re-establishes itself in the post-Covid era, the cruise industry must be wary not to cut costs and drop its [maritime security] guard in an effort to recover lost revenue. The threat has not gone away or diminished, in fact in some regions it has grown but by ensuring established, internationally recognised guidance is followed, the cruise industry can emerge stronger from a period of uncertainty, while remaining focussed on the health and safety of its guests and crew.



NEPTUNE
P2P GROUP



PROTECTION BY PREVENTION

Head Office – UAE

Office 1404, JBC 2
Cluster V, Jumeirah Lake Towers
Dubai
PO Box 644854
United Arab Emirates
Tel +971 (0) 44 215 507

UK Office Manchester

Delphian House
Riverside
New Bailey Street
Manchester M3 5FS
United Kingdom
Tel +44 (0) 161 837 6220

French Office - Paris

6 Rue D' Armaille
75017
Paris
France
Tel +33 (0) 176 340 336

Email: info@neptunep2pgroup.com

Website: www.neptunep2pgroup.com

Follow us

