The Case for Seamless Vessel Security

It all begins with the onboard security team.

By Captain Jeffrey L. Kuhlman

Assaults on vessels have resulted in numerous shipboard security measures designed to safeguard ships, their cargoes, crews and passengers while at sea or berthed. Unfortunately, most of the measures being developed are directed toward the piracy issue and, in particular, Somali piracy. But the real threat is much broader than that and the defensive requirements much more complex.

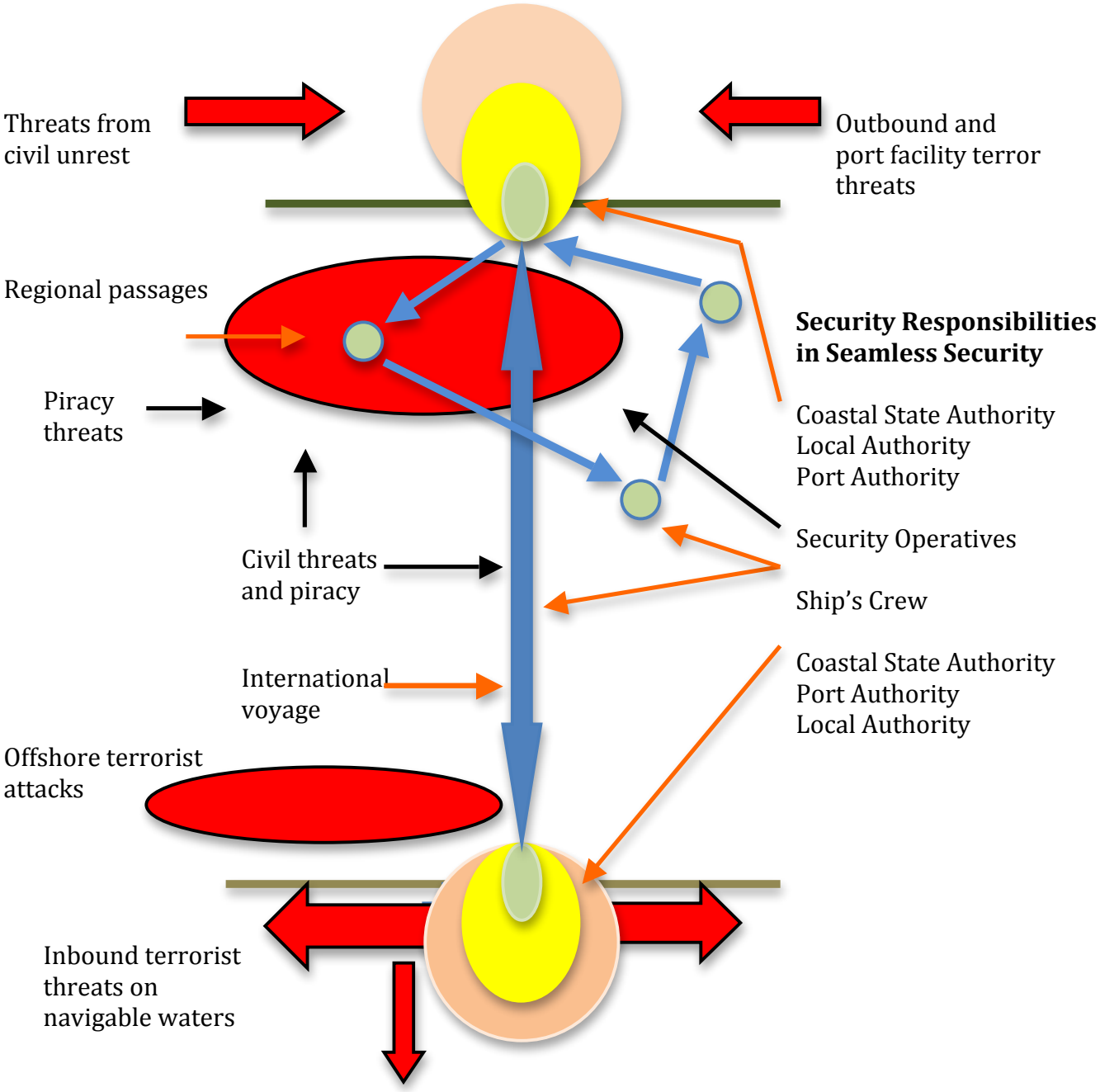
Modeling Seamless Security

The figure below displays the need for "seamless security," meaning the provision of security consistently and without break from port to port or facility to facility. Dangers include piracy, terror, civil unrest and civil threats. Often the threats are regional. Off the coasts of Africa the issue is piracy. The U.S. is most concerned with terrorism. Central and South America, parts of Europe, and the South Pacific face civil unrest. Civil threats such as contraband, bombs and stowaways are issues everywhere. Seamless security deals with all of these.

The model was established using the West African ports of Lagos, Nigeria, and Luanda, Angola. Both have busy import/export and oil production operations. The model also incorporates two representative U.S. ports – Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and The Port of Newark in Elizabeth, New Jersey. These ports are subject to extreme terrorist threats that could result in grave loss of infrastructure and life. Each also provides access to multiple inland population centers via rivers, sounds, and the Intracoastal Waterway.

The red areas in the figure represent different threat areas and types. Threats from piracy and terror loom throughout the African coastal regions from organizations like MEAN and Al Shabab. The high-risk waters for waterborne terrorist attacks off the U.S. coast extend as much as 450 nautical miles offshore. This is a region much too great for the U.S. Coast Guard to watch effectively.

Seamless Security Model



Seamless security requires close interaction between the ship's security team and supporting authorities. In the seamless security model, there are three primary providers, represented by the beige, yellow, and light green areas. Beige is local law enforcement. Yellow represents the port's security operations. Light green is the vessel crew and operator.

The foundation of seamless security is the shipboard security team, a cadre of vetted and properly trained members chosen from a vessel's crew**.** The team handles all security issues onboard as they arise. Its responsibilities include arriving or departing passengers and cargo as well as the security of the vessel in accordance with the Ship's Security Plan. At sea or at berth, the shipboard security team is the primary provider for all issues, regardless of type or region.

The various local law enforcement agencies and port authorities support the shipboard security teams. They are responsible for the safety of goods transiting to and from the port and the community as well as the security of the port facility, cargo, passengers, and human resources within the port area. Local law enforcement provides a broad scope of capabilities outside the port area and often in direct cooperation with the port authority.

It may be advantageous, on a regional basis, for a vessel to employ maritime security operatives. While working onboard, assigned to and under the oversight of the ship's security team officer, they may be able to maintain their right to self-defense as part of the ship's crew. The combination of an active team of security operatives and a properly trained ship's security team and crew can be a formidable defense against any threat.

Mariners must be trained – and prepared – to provide security to their vessels when no other support is available or viable. Law enforcement officers must likewise be trained to carry out their duties in a marine environment as they often become disoriented shortly after entering the first watertight door. Port authorities around the world usually work well with vessel masters for security although many of their personnel are undertrained and there is reluctance in some ports to provide dockside security when needed. We are aware of ports along the West Coast of Africa which refuse to sign Documents of Security and have no authorized security plan. Private maritime security operatives, of which there are many

"shooters" available, must be taught to work in a maritime environment, which is highly regulated and in which "shooting" is *not* the preferred response. All four levels of security are needed, but only the shipboard security team is available 100 percent of the time.

Training for seamless security requires an environment in which all can share their experience, knowledge, and education. The fused structure enables participants to learn from one another and form useful relationships and meaningful understanding of differing perspectives and job requirements. A mutually supportive security environment is the result. Trainers with these capabilities are few and must be nurtured by the industry. Castle Shipboard Security Program provides this kind of training.

Why Seamless Security Is So Important

While attacks can come at any time, an effective seamless security program can remediate the vast majority of threats before they become attacks. Pirates know that only a few flag states are willing to authorize adequate defensive measures on their vessels at sea. They also know that some coastal states interfere with the ability of the vessel's crew and/or security operatives to protect their vessels when in territorial waters. They further know that many mariners have not been adequately trained in vessel defense. The training requirements of the ISPS Code, which may have been adequate several years ago, are obviously not adequate today. Judging by the growth of what has now become a viable global industry, piracy is still, unfortunately, tolerated by some communities and commercial interests.

We must, however, recognize that the greatest threat to our civilian population is terror. We have seen maritime terror in the past in such incidents as the *USS Cole* and *Achille Lauro*. Terrorists today are typically fanatical, but they are not blind or ignorant. They know the potential of using any size vessel as either a weapon in itself or as a delivery system. The latter provides the greater danger. Terrorist operatives linked to Al Shabab, Al Qaeda, Hamas and others presently reside in many American cities and are hatching plans for both domestic and foreign attacks.

Offshore facilities must also be placed on our list of high-risk targets. Terrorist factions, we can be sure, have watched the television reports of the distress caused by the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The *Bonga* rig was

attacked off the coast of Nigeria two years ago and suffered millions of dollars in damages.

Nigerian MEAN militants attacked Shell's *Bonga* facility 120 km offshore on June 19, 2008 (photo from Internet).

The *Piper Alpha* platform, North Sea, 1988 (photo from Internet).

Rig operators must pay greater attention to their facilities' defense. There may be a need for integrated training of stand-by vessel crews and local law enforcement officers. As good a job as it does, the U.S. Coast Guard is currently hard pressed and may not be able to provide much more than guidance to offshore security personnel. Private sector personnel, working closely with local law enforcement, could soon provide a high level of protection for the offshore environment.

Enabling Seamless Security

To be effective, vessel defense must be capable of mitigating any foreseeable attack regardless of type or source. For this reason, a real

commitment to seamless security is needed. Technology is a great asset, but it is not enough. Because they are the only ever-present component, security teams comprised of vetted crew members are the foundation of seamless security. To this foundation we can add private maritime security operatives when transiting dangerous waters. The threat of global terror requires the fused security anchors of shipboard security, local law enforcement, and port security at both ends of a passage, within the port areas and among the various suppliers. Properly done, there should be relatively little additional cost compared to the current cost in lives and infrastructure of a terrorist attack or the paying of ransoms, whether it be $65,000 for a captain kidnapped in Nigeria or over $6 million for a vessel held in Somalia.

Personnel should be properly equipped consistent with their roles. Their vessels should likewise be prepared. Many considerations are entirely up to the operator and flag state. We recommend, for instance, that mariners generally *not* be armed. However, the access to and use of firearms by a trained security team may be necessary to defend against a terrorist attack when the lives of crew members and other innocent parties are at stake.

Attaining the goal of seamless security is a matter of training and committing resources pragmatically and adequately. Every defensive capability not specifically restricted in SOLAS or the ISPS Code must be utilized by qualified personnel. Just as the ship security team is the foundation of seamless security, training is the foundation of security and defensive capability.

Rhetorically speaking, what more need be said to make seamless maritime security an international goal? **– *MarEx***

Captain Jeffrey L. Kuhlman is the originator of the Castle Shipboard Security Program in association with Nova Southeastern University and the Sig Sauer Academy. He holds degrees in business and education and currently writes and lectures about vessel security and defense. He is a Vietnam veteran with an extensive military and Merchant Marine background.