Laying up vessels – a security perspective

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Whilst the phrase 'credit crunch' is synonymous with today's society, there may be sound of crunching steel occurring more often as vessels scramble to be laid up in the anchorages of the world. A lack of global trade has resulted in many ships (especially container vessels) being put to bed until the pendulum of business moves upwards again. So what are the security considerations involved in laying up a vessel? Maritime & Underwater Security Consultants (MUSC) view there are three:

- The Environment
- Personnel and crew
- Physical factors.

The Environment

Location, location, location is one of the mantras of the now beleaguered estate agents – the same is true when looking for a safe place to store your vessel. Cheap and secure anchorages in the Far East – especially in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia are reportedly rapidly filling up, making it harder for a ship to find a secure location. Environmental factors which need to be taken in to account include local crime rate, incidents of piracy in the relevant waters as well as a country's propensity for terrorism related activities. Last year over 110 ships reported experiencing a piracy event when berthed alongside or at anchor. In light of the increasing social upheaval this is set to rise. Another problem with protecting a vessel at anchor is there is no clear delineation (other than on a chart) of where a port boundaries lie, this makes it difficult to police effectively.

Personnel and crew

The management of personnel during a vessel's lay up is also a key security factor. If the vessel is a 'hot lay up' vessel (i.e. still manned with a smaller crew but capable of being moved with reasonable notice) then there will be more people around to help safeguard the ship's perimeter. If the vessel is a 'cold lay up' then there is a strong chance that the tiny crew of watch keepers on board will not be able to protect the vessel appropriately. In addition, as with everything in life, you get what you pay for. Poorly paid watch keepers doing a boring and repetitive job are not likely to be the vanguard of security the vessel needs. Adequate vetting will help ensure that you get the right people for the job.

Physical factors

There are some physical security methods which can be put in place by owners which will deter, deny and delay potential thieves, terrorists or pirates. These 'hardening' techniques are cheap and effective and capable of offering a visible deterrent to those who wish to steal from their multi-million pound asset.

In summary when laying up a vessel a multitude of guidelines have to be followed, insurers, classification societies and flag states all stipulate guidance which will keep the owner or manager busy for weeks. Remember to assess the suitability of the site, safety of the crew and vessel, and above all remember to take steps to protect your asset with suitable security measures.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

MUSC is a leading international maritime specialist providing risk consultancy services across the wide range of transport, borders and supply chain. MUSC also has an unrivalled first-hand reputation in anti-piracy and the disposal of underwater ordnance.

Through membership of the ICTS Europe Group, MUSC provides access to a wealth of specialist experience and resources in other transport sectors.

MUSC offers risk mitigation services to national authorities and commercial operators. These wide-ranging services are bespoke and are delivered using sophisticated database techniques: allowing risk assessments of complex environments including national borders (sea and land), industrial areas such as ports, and transportation modes such as shipping.

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