



MARITIME COLLEGE
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Maritime College Piracy Experts Lead Piracy Workshop At Institute for Defense and Government Advancement's (IDGA) Maritime Piracy Summit in Washington, DC

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“When it comes to fighting pirates, Merchant mariners have to depend on themselves. National governments, for whatever reason, have not accorded a high priority to pirates and it has become an unacceptable danger.” Those were the words of Dr. Larry Howard, chairman of the Global Business & Transportation Department, at the State University of New York, Maritime College. Dr. Howard made the statement while participating in the Institute for Defense and Government Advancement's (IDGA) Maritime Piracy Summit, held in Washington DC, on September 21, 2009. (Dr. Howard will also address the Maritime Domain Awareness and Counter Piracy meeting in Ottawa, Canada, October 26-29, 2009.)

Fellow Maritime College Professor, Captain Joe Ahlstrom, of SUNY Maritime College's Marine Transportation Department, joined Dr. Howard in leading the workshop at the maritime piracy summit. Captain Ahlstrom is a former captain of the T.S. Empire State VI. During his time as a merchant mariner, Captain Ahlstrom sailed in the Gulf of Aden and other hostile waters.

The two internationally recognized piracy experts led a discussion on the growing dangers of piracy and the threat that mariners face on the high seas. Focusing on the current procedures used in training mariners for the potential danger of pirate attacks, Captain Ahlstrom noted that the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) requires that all mariners who are certified as Vessel Security Officers, Facility Security Officers, and Company Security Officers must receive security training but as of today, no training specifically designed to counter pirates.

One of the questions posed by Captain Ahlstrom at the conference was whether such specific training should be added to the CFR and the curriculums of the State and Federal maritime academies. He also discussed the training that SUNY Maritime students receive in the course of their four years of study. “We provide extensive security training for our students. We want them to be well prepared for the potential threat of a pirate attack,” Captain Ahlstrom stated. The Maritime professors were joined during the morning session by Captain James Staples, a veteran merchant marine master and close friend of Captain Richard Phillips, the Captain of the hijacked Maersk Alabama, who has sailed through the Gulf of Aden and dealt directly with pirate attacks.

“Pirate threats are a serious matter,” Captain Staples said. He told the group that captains must be provided the means to keep their vessels and crews safe and arming the master and officers is a necessary tool in dealing with pirates. Captain Staples noted that in the course of his extensive travels to almost every port in the world, often with small arms on board, he has never yet

encountered a problem with authorities, as long as the weapons were declared and local port procedures were followed.

In the afternoon, the workshop was led by Dr. Howard and Joe Trindal, a consultant from Special Operations Solutions LLC, in Fredericksburg, VA, a private security group.

Lethal vs. non-lethal strategies was the topic as well as the question of how to manage the cultural, political and technical contexts of the pirate problem. Mr. Trindal, a former Branch Chief and Special Agent in Charge of the Inspections & Enforcement Branch of the Infrastructure Security Compliance Division in the Office of the Department of Homeland Security, urged action in fighting the direct effects of piracy. Dr. Howard and Mr. Trindal presented a list of direct and indirect effects of piracy that combined to raise the phenomenon to the threshold of being an unacceptable danger. For example, noted Dr. Howard, the possibility of volatile cargos and sophisticated vessels coming under the control of criminals was a reason sufficient in itself to raise piracy to the level of an unacceptable danger.

Both Dr. Howard and Mr. Trindal examined so-called non-lethal strategies to counter pirates, often based on a cultural premise that non-violent solutions are somehow more ethical or desirable than violent solutions. Mr. Trindal said that a term better than “non-lethal” is “less-lethal,” because given the right circumstances, even a laser designed only to temporarily blind can knock an unsuspecting person off balance and kill him in a chaotic situation. Dr. Howard said that the premise that nonviolent strategies provide more desirable outcomes is false. With emphasis, he said, “witness that violence has repeatedly been successfully employed many times in history to attain strategic goals, witness the success of the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War, the mujahedeen against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and the Americans against the insurgents in the “surge” in Iraq.”

“Non-lethal solutions are most successful in deflecting pirates and putting off a day of reckoning,” said Dr. Howard, “but that is not necessarily a desirable outcome. When things are put off, the problem usually builds into a bigger one.”

Howard and Trindal gave the audience specific recommendations, such as aggressively employing CIA drones against identified pirates. They also underscored the simple message that deflection of an unacceptable danger to another day of reckoning is bad, and self reliance is good.

“Piracy has many ripple effects across the global system,” noted Dr. Howard. Voicing his agreement, Mr. Trindal stated that “successful pirate attacks breed more attacks. Piracy presents an unacceptable danger to mariners, and since governments have not risen to meet the challenge, mariners must learn to be self reliant in their own defense.”

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