

CSI

STORMY OUTLOOK?

PMSCs LOOK TO THE FUTURE

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Standard bearer

Ian Millen, Chairman of the SCEG's Maritime Security Working Group, profiles the organisation's role in setting and upholding standards within the maritime security industry

The Security in Complex Environments Group (SCEG) was established in January 2011 within ADS, the premier international trade association for the UK's Aerospace, Defence, Security and Space industries. Placement within this association followed ADS winning a competition run by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to find an industry partner for the UK government for the regulation of British Private Security Companies. The government's original focus was in the land domain and on the development of the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICOC).

In the autumn of 2011, the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, announced that armed guards were to be allowed onboard UK flagged ships and turned to the SCEG to widen its brief to cover the maritime domain as well. The Prime Minister's announcement was set against the backdrop of the fast-growing maritime security industry that had been established to counter the scourge of Somali piracy in the High Risk Area (HRA) of the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean. UK-based companies, offering highly experienced, former servicemen, were supplying a significant proportion of these guards. Long before Cameron gave the green light for armed guards on UK flagged vessels, shipowners and charterers were already embarking men with guns to protect their vessels in transit, and former British servicemen were in particularly high demand. The maritime armed security industry was, however, unregulated, with many stories of some suppliers operating

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on the edge of or beyond the law. Accounts of teams throwing weapons and ammunition overboard before arrival at destination ports to avoid port and law enforcement scrutiny were common, and profit margins were high enough for such illegal and unprofessional practices to be economically viable.

The SCEG's attention quickly turned to the regulation of the UK-based, maritime security industry, building upon its experience in doing the same kind of work in the land environment. The organisation focused on the promotion of professional standards, supporting the UK government in the regulation of companies which operate in the sector, as well as providing a conduit for the companies themselves to engage indirectly with decision makers in Whitehall and beyond. The SCEG already had greater influence than the sum of its parts when it turned its attention to the maritime sector, proving its worth as a body that represents the views of its membership to the UK government on a whole range of issues from firearms control and licensing to the development of training and standards. The SCEG conduit also provides members with a helpful insight into UK government thinking, helping to manage expectations and enabling the industry to plan in a meaningful way.

The SCEG provides a forum for both sides to exchange views and assist each other in tackling a plethora of issues that cut across several government departments and a complex legal framework, especially when it comes to areas such as firearms legislation and floating armouries. The SCEG also works with the industry and government to improve regulatory processes, such as the issue of trade control licences and the process for vetting Privately Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) working onboard UK flagged ships.

Although the SCEG represents UK-based industry, it also has multinational clients and has an international outlook to both support these clients and to understand the complex international environment in which the industry operates. SCEG members play an important role in all international initiatives on standards, and the organisation engages with national associations such as the UK Chamber of Shipping and international associations such as the Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS).

Beyond the shores of the United Kingdom, the SCEG has enjoyed much wider international visibility, in particular because of the organisation's contribution to the

development of ISO/PAS 28007. The SCEG has played a leading role in focusing UK company efforts to achieve this international standard, contributing to the development of the standard and assisting all parties involved.

ISO 28007 was developed to provide guidelines for certified companies deploying PCASP onboard ships. It had its origins in the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) MSC Cir 1443 (Guidance for PMSCs), issued in May 2012. This set the scene for the development of the internationally recognised standard with the SCEG drawing upon its experience in the land domain, where it worked closely with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the development of PSC1.

ISO 28007 sets a benchmark that helps shipping industry operators assess PMSC against one another, whatever the country of origin. Accreditation to the standard means that a company has proved its processes from the board to the embarked team leader and all of the embarked operatives, as well as every activity in the company's office and supply chain. For successful certification, the company must address compliance issues, legal and regulatory, as well as every element contained in the standard. A company will not be accredited to the standard unless it can demonstrate good controls across the business, as well as consistency in operating systems, monitoring and feedback to top management on performance. A framework for continuous business improvement is also a key feature, which leads to a mentality of continuous improvement and increasing levels of customer service and satisfaction.

ISO certification is all about reducing the risk of a critical event happening. A certified company will have a fully audited security management policy and codes (ethics, code of conduct, and so on), and security plans and procedures. Potential risks will have been assessed and actions taken to eliminate, reduce or control them. If after all of this, something does go wrong and a PMSC is faced with a legal case, the fact that an accredited independent third party has audited the company's security management system should demonstrate that they had controls and procedures in place to meet legal and regulatory requirements. From the shipping client's perspective, the use of an ISO accredited PMSC should bring consistent and reliable services, as well as the comfort of knowing that the PMSC has been through an extremely rigorous process to get certified in the first place. The PMSC would also be subject to follow-on surveillance audits, so

the focus on quality does not simply end with certification. In short, everyone involved in the placement of an ISO 28007 accredited PMSC should be confident in the fact that the service will be delivered as contracted.

The SCEG has earned its place at the top table of the UK-based maritime security industry and has proved its influence in the international arena. Standards have improved hugely since the early days of maritime armed guards, but it would be wrong to suggest that the industry is uniformly good. The narrow profit margins of the shipping industry are increasing pressure on the maritime security industry to reduce costs, which in turn can lead to cutting corners and reducing overall standards. Whether it is reducing the number of guards or using less well trained and experienced personnel from cheaper sources of labour, the driving down of standards is never a good thing. It is an unfortunate fact, that driving for the bottom price could result in those that do things properly losing out to those that do not.

High quality PMSCs that are prepared to put the time, effort and money into achieving standards like ISO 28007 will continue to lead the market in quality and reliability, but will face challenges from those who either pay lip service to standards or ignore them altogether. After all, ISO 28007 is not a mandatory standard, but the more ship operators and P&I clubs that see the benefits and demand it as a minimum requirement, the more the industry will drive out poor practices.

The bottom line is that it does not get much more serious than embarking guys with guns to defend a ship against other guys with guns. When things go wrong – and they always will – the shipping industry needs to ask itself whether it wants to have highly trained professionals with testing standards to keep ships' crews safe and vessels out of the hands of pirates. Alternatively, does it want the cheapest, minimum solution that will keep the accountants happy, but possibly fail in the face of adversity through poor practice, lack of training or faulty equipment?

 Ian Millen was elected by SCEG members to the role of MSWG Chairman in January 2014. Outside of SCEG, he is the Chief Operating Officer of Dryad Maritime, a specialist maritime operations company.

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