



Home Office

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*Dear Mr Gibson*

**Maritime security: floating armouries and training**

I am writing to you regarding two issues relating to the policy of armed guards operating in the high risk area off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean.

**Floating armouries**

The first of these is in respect of floating armouries. I understand that since the summer the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has been issuing export licences to UK private maritime security companies (PMSCs) to use and operate non-UK flagged floating armouries. This means that section 5 authorisation under the Firearms Act 1968 is not needed for the weapons stored, even though this would be a requirement if the company were operating on land. However, the position relating to the authorisation of floating armouries under a UK flag is still outstanding.

I know that you are keen to have clarification on the government's position. I have considered the situation carefully and I wish to bring the floating armoury practice under the authority of UK law. I recognise that doing so may bring other risks in terms of ensuring compliance and regard for any conditions set. I would look to your Group to help us manage this.

I propose to regularise the situation by issuing section 5 authorities (for prohibited weapons) under the Firearms Act 1968 to Home Office registered UK PMSCs who apply to operate a UK-flagged floating armoury. My intention is to create a broad regime to enable the armouries to be used by UK PMSCs operating on ships of any flag. This would mean the firearms of any UK PMSC could be stored on board the armoury regardless of the flag state of the ships they operate on.

This is not without risk. I therefore propose to move forward on a pathfinder basis for 12 months during which the situation will be kept under review. I have asked my officials to put advice to me after ten months so that I can make a decision on

whether to renew the authorities granted and continue the operating regime at the end of the pathfinder period. I would be grateful for any assistance that SCEG could provide in terms of feedback from the PMSCs involved as this will be important in helping us understand the impact and effectiveness of the regime.

I have also asked my officials to work with you and colleagues across government to scope how far we might be able to introduce a more formal compliance regime in the future working with the recently established International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers Association, which monitors compliance against the code itself.

By allowing floating armouries to operate under the UK flag we will be able to ensure that UK weapons are being stored aboard vessels of the highest standard and that we are able to have greater oversight over the situation as a whole. However, there are some issues still to be worked through in terms of implementation so I must make it clear that my agreement is subject to satisfactory resolution of these outstanding points.

### **Training for maritime armed security guards**

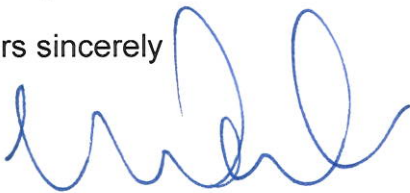
The second issue that I am writing to you about is the training of maritime armed guards. As you know, the Home Office does not currently allow firearms training with prohibited weapons for private security purposes. However, this is a position which reflected the situation before the Prime Minister introduced the policy of armed maritime security guards in late 2011 to undertake protection duties in the high risk area.

I consider that as we are authorising armed guards to work aboard UK-flagged ships there should be provisions for their training within the UK which meet the appropriate standards set out by your organisation. I suggest also that evidence of the provision of appropriate training for these guards should be a pre-requisite for the authorisation of a floating armoury.

I therefore propose to extend the section 5 authorities of UK PMSCs enabling them to train their Home Office-approved guards in the UK. This will be subject to finding appropriate training locations and providers. I appreciate that allowing PMSCs to extend the training regime to non-Home Office approved armed guards working aboard non-UK flagged ships would be beneficial from both commercial and safety points of view. However, given the high risk already involved with this training, I view it as essential that the policy is limited in the way I have set out. My officials will be in touch to discuss further.

My view is that these steps will support UK trade in the security industry without creating undue risk.

Yours sincerely



**Norman Baker MP**  
**Minister of State**