SAFETY IN HRAs - CAN YOU OUTRUN PIRACY?

Is increasing the speed of a vessel at risk of piracy the best use of your resources? It is common practice for vessels transiting past the East and West Coasts of Africa to increase speed, all in an attempt to outrun pirates.

The thinking behind this is typically "the less time I spend in the danger zone, the less risk I am at." However, take a moment and apply this mentality to other dangerous tasks; does it mean that the quicker you do it, the safer you are? Probably not.

Pirate skiffs are known to routinely reach speeds of 25kn in favourable sea conditions. Now, compare that to the speed of a Suez Max which averages at 10kn and we can see that there is no chance of simply outrunning the threat - at best it is a delay tactic and a costly one at that.

Now, we could argue that the majority of tactics adopted, such as the use of razor wire, are all delay tactics. So, if we're only delaying risk, why not try and challenge that ethos with a mindset of 'prevent' instead?

The average cost of a Suez Max increasing its speed by a mere 2kn costs on average around $3,500 a day, while at the same time pumping an extra 39% of CO_2 into the atmosphere (source: eu.oceana.org).

Now let's say that a pirate skiff approaches from 1 nm and is cruising at 18kn; if we were to increase our speed up to 12kn, it will simply take the pirates 2.5 minutes longer to reach their closest point of approach (COP) to us.

Consider that in this scenario, our Suez Max has been in the HRA for three days, steaming ahead with its extra 2kn. It will have cost us an estimated $10,500, just to buy an extra 150 seconds before the risk has finally caught up with us.

Now, let's have a look at container vessels for a moment. Because they go so fast that there is no way pirates can hijack them, right?

The crew of the MSC Mandy would argue otherwise.

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Back in January 2019, six crew members were kidnapped and held for ransom after their vessel was boarded by pirates whilst transiting through the Gulf of Guinea. The estimated cost for a container vessel speeding up by 2 knots is around about $6,000 daily. That's $6,000 wasted every day for every container vessel thinking they can simply outrun the risk.

But what if we could plan ahead, and in doing so, reduce the risk of a boarding to as low as it possibly could be? What if we try to deny a pirate boarding rather than simply delay it? Wouldn't this be a better use of resources?

What if in doing so we could save a vessel tens of thousands of dollars every week in fuel costs, while reducing our Co2 emissions at the same time? Surely that's got to be worth considering, maybe even investing into?

Ship Captains, Shore-based Company Security Officers and HSQE managers are very knowledgeable, but they do not specialize in the modus-operandi of regional piracy groups. We however, do - we work with all types of shipping lines in order to find the best practice that suits their ships, their trading patterns and their crews.

Whilst best management practice is great as a guide, it should only be used as a guide. A bespoke approach to each vessel is critical in making sure that you have mitigated the risk to as low as possible for each passage.

There is nothing wrong with seeking some extra guidance when it comes to ensuring the safety and security of your vessels; it costs nothing (if you come to ARX Maritime) for some advice on how to best mitigate your risk.

You can't outrun risk, but with the right knowledge and correct tactics you can certainly mitigate it.