

SEACURUS BULLETIN

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TOUGH LIFE AT SEA

PIRACY CONFUSION & FEAR | SEAFARER UNEMPLOYMENT | TERROR THREATS TO SHIPPING



With shipping on the cusp of some major industry change, we look at the recruitment conundrum regarding seafarers, the ongoing problem of unpaid seafarers. We also explore the ever more terrifying issues facing shipping, those of maritime cyber security, piracy and terrorism.

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Welcome

> The snow may not quite be falling all around us, but it is definitely beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Mind you, given that in most stores Halloween pumpkins now segue directly into figgie puddings, it seems that the holiday season is a long time coming.

The annual headlong rush to Christmas cannot disguise that we seem to be on the cusp of some major industry change, and in this month's issue we look at the confusion regarding seafarers. Most influential studies have all pointed to a shortage of seafarers, but now it seems we are about to see mass lay-offs and warnings that the lack of crew is a "dangerous myth".

Away from the recruitment conundrum, with an increasing number of vessels of all kinds being laid up, it seems that some seafarers are once again facing a fight to get their wages. According to the Mission to Seafarers, the problem is particularly acute off the UAE. By some estimates, as many as 100 tankers are moored off the coast of Fujairah, some at anchor for many months.

The Mission says that one of the problems is that companies are reportedly ring fencing their "single ship owning entities", and profits from trading tankers are ring-fenced for individual ships and cannot pay standby crews. The problem of unpaid seafarers is set to escalate as a result.

We also explore the ever more terrifying issue of maritime cyber security, and look at the new developments which are on the horizon – as both the IMO and trade associations collectively look to press CTRL ALT DELETE on the whole debate.

With piracy and terrorism also on the agenda this month, we look at why data isn't more useful in the fight to tackle pirates, and assess whether Islamic State terrorists really do pose a threat to shipping, or whether they would just like too.

The year is ending on quite a fascinating point, and we must ask what 2016 set to hold. Well given the issues above it could be a very interesting year ahead. It seems that a number of issues are set to come to the boil – we may see another Somali piracy surge, Asia looks ripe for continued tanker attacks.

While from a safety perspective, the mass laying off of seafarers could well lead to a spiral of stress and fatigue for those left behind – cue a spike in accidents and losses.

As cyber security is set to hog ever more headlines, pressure will likely build on owners to react and to find ways of securing their vessels. If a major cyber-attack on a vessel does occur, then there is likely to be an almost hysterical response in the media.

It also seems that the year ahead is going to be one of rapid and immense change for the eco and environmental side of shipping.

Ports are likely to follow the lead of Rotterdam and introduce incentives for cleaner shipping, but this is likely to also translate into sanctions against those vessels which are not deemed eco-worthy.

With climate talks in Paris set to change the way that many industries work, it is unlikely that shipping will come out unscathed. Even if the IMO primacy debate does stick, it is probable that there will be new and increased pressure to clean up shipping.

So a year of challenges beckons, and that means opportunity – so we wish you all a very merry Christmas and a very prosperous 2016. Thank you for your continued support and we hope you continue to read and enjoy our musings in the year ahead.



Managing Director
Capt. Thomas Brown

SEAFARER UNEMPLOYMENT BECKONS

We seem to be entering something of a confused time for shipping, and this is perhaps most marked when it comes to the issue of seafarers. For years the most influential studies have all pointed to a shortage of seafarers, but now it seems we are about to see mass lay-offs. What does it all mean?

EXPERTS VERSUS ANALYSTS

Mark Charman, CEO of recruitment firm Faststream proudly boasted last month of his ability to assess the mood of the shipping industry via the ebbs and flows of people moving to different jobs. No doubt the level of CVs in, versus the adverts placed give him a vital insight into the “who, what, when and where’s” of maritime recruitment.

Taking this view point, he recently spoke of his bold prediction for 2016. According to Charman, “we’ll see plenty of seafarers without jobs”. He expanded on his vision, “with a declining offshore sector, a flat dry sector and overcapacity in liner we are going to see for the first time in a long time unemployed seafarers”, adding: “The common theme in shipping for the next 12 months is going to be change and there is going to be a lot of it. Many in offshore will struggle to survive”, Charman says, with consolidation all but inevitable.

He was not a lone voice with this doom laden view. Captain Kuba Szymanski, secretary general of InterManager, the association for shipmanagers also said last month, “there is a serious oversupply of seafarers, especially in the offshore sector, but also in the container trade. This means no pressure on salaries and conditions of employment coming from seafarers,” Szymanski says.

The often talked about shortage of sea staff, the InterManager boss says is a “very dangerous myth”. Szymanski is confident shipmanagement as a business is one set to grow, “owners who have decided to relinquish access to sea staff are now heavily dependent on crew and shipmanagers. I can see this trend deepening”.

WHAT IS HAPPENING

While there are flat spots and challenges in most shipping markets at the moment the hardest hit is the offshore sector. According to industry figures over 250,000 employees in different sectors of offshore oil industry were sacked during last 12 months, on the background of low oil pricing and overcapacity in the industry.

Operations on over 1000 oil platforms were suspended and hundreds of people lost their jobs, while many companies started procedures for bankruptcy. The whole offshore sector report loses of 100 billion USD, due to the low oil prices. The expectations are that crude oil price will not increase during the next year, which is expected to increase the number of redundant employees with another 50,000 people. The negative forecasts for the offshore industry have seen cost reduction programs.

The offshore sector is not alone in riding out difficult times. Owners are rapidly laying up containerships as the market slows. The size of the idle fleet will get bigger while rates and profits slide, says Drewry Shipping Consultants Limited. The number of idle container vessels has gained momentum in November and has jumped 52 percent from October, Drewry said in its Container Insight Weekly. Idled ships are defined by Drewry as those which have been inactive for at least 14 days. The crisis weighs heavily on the global container freight market, which continues to be dominated by massive overcapacity, low demand and historically low freight rates. The world’s idle containership fleet swelled to 238 vessels and topped 900,000 TEU.



For some experts, Maersk Line’s decision last month to lay-up one of its 18,000 teu flagships is “good news for the industry”. Other ocean carriers are likely to follow the market leader and mothball more surplus ships. So there may be some alignment of tonnage, and hopefully freight rates can be re-invigorated.

The move to idle the Triple-E vessel followed a profit warning from the Maersk group which lowered its full-year profit forecast for the container division by \$600m to “around \$1.6bn. It blamed freight rates which “significantly deteriorated”, especially on its main Asia-Europe route in the latter part of September and into October. Drewry said Maersk Line’s woes were a “wake up call” for the industry.

NUMBERS FALL BUT COSTS RISE

With freight rates falling or stagnating, naturally costs become a massive issue. According to Moore Stephens’ annual survey they suggest that crew wages, repairs and maintenance, along with drydocking are the costs that are most likely to increase most significantly this year and next.

The respondents, mainly owners and managers in Europe and Asia suggest that vessel operating costs across the board will rise by 2.8% this year and 3.1% next year.

There are a large number of new regulations “biting” everyone, bringing the need for capital expenditure to remain compliant. And while the costs of the most competent seafarers will rise this is precisely because there are rather fewer of them than the best employers would like.

So it seems the decision to pull the plug on projects, or to lay ships up is an attempt to form a pincer movement – reducing costs, while driving rates up. With seafarers seemingly caught in the middle. While it may seem a natural and sensible act to lay off crew, the effects in the long term can really come back to bite.

The industry is still wrestling with the slash and burn policies towards seafarers of the 1990s. There are massive experience gaps owing to the fact that seafarers were simply let go, and they never returned to the industry.

SHORTSIGHTED ON SEAFARING

There are other parts of the industry that will no doubt be rolling their eyes and having flashbacks to previous industry business cycles in which seafarers were shoved down the gangway, and so much experience, quality and expertise departed, never to return.

While Szymanski and Charman are simply reporting back on the harsh reality as they see and feel it every day, it is something which does need managing. Also some sense of cause and effect needs to be explored. The seafarer shortage myth may well exist, but perhaps this is because too many ships are sailing with too few seafarers. Demands such as administration, piracy, cyber security, et al all warrant having extra crew onboard – but they aren’t. The minimum safe manning levels have meant that so many seafarers have become superfluous.

Mind you, there is also a danger in climate v weather debate. Just because the weather is cold doesn’t mean the climate isn’t heating. The same could perhaps be said of seafarer supply and demand. Just a few short months ago an influential study by Drewry Shipping Consultants, categorically stated that the maritime industry will require an additional 42,500 officers by 2019.

So today there may be a glut, but because no one actually manages the supply and demand – in laying thousands off now, we may well be storing up some hellish sized problems as this decade comes to a close.

RISING TIDE OF CYBER THREATS



The issue of maritime cyber security has risen faster through the industry agenda than almost any problem since 9/11 prompted the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. Will this development prove any more effective or welcome?

BIMCO LEADS CHARGE

Attendees of BIMCO's Annual Conference in Hamburg last month heard the latest findings on the potential vulnerabilities of ships to cyber-attacks. In a dedicated cyber session BIMCO and industry experts showed three scenarios showing the possible risks and the methods of prevention for a cyber-attack on ships' systems.

The session was designed for corporate management but also focused on the safety of seafarers and ships. But is the message getting through? There are some doubts though whether shipping has the ways or the will to tackle the problem. While it seems clear that the maritime industry faces very real cyber threats and potentially devastating fallout the industry has been somewhat hesitant to discuss these cyber threats, cyber-attacks and subsequent losses, the reality of cyber-attacks in the maritime industry can no longer be ignored or denied. Accordingly, the industry is on the verge of great change.

As an illustration of how connectivity is changing, an announcement from ABB, the leading power and automation technology group, shows the way in which the industry is moving. Last month they unveiled a new "Integrated Operations Centre" which allows ship owners to take greater control of their fleet from ashore. From the centre, situated in Norway, ABBs engineers can connect to any vessel anywhere in the world which is fitted with the technology.

Sensors and software onboard the ship send equipment and performance data via satellite which allows ship owners to perform remote troubleshooting

and make informed judgements about the ship's performance and maintenance plan. While such control sounds fascinating and compelling, it comes with dangers that sensors, software and satellite connections allow others to interfere too.

TRENDS IN MARITIME CYBER LANDSCAPE

Just as with maritime crime and piracy, it seems conclusive statistics are very hard to come by. There is currently no definitive data on the scale of the cyber security problem facing shipping, let alone any quantum of losses relating to it. Unfortunately there seems to be two camps currently, those who don't know they have been breached and those who won't tell.

So it doesn't matter what the industry is saying collectively, there is simply no way of knowing the true level of the problem as it currently stands. It should perhaps be remembered that the shipping industry does not have a good track record in the recording, reporting and compiling of data. With issues of under or misreporting elsewhere to think that cyber threats would arrive with a neat, accepted and effective reporting mechanism would be either naïve or foolishly optimistic.

Insurers seem to be leading the charge to capture data, driven by the need for statistics to set premium levels. At the moment there does not appear to be any progress in developing a centralised repository. We can hope that such a system can and will be developed, but there will need to be lessons learned from previous shipping industry weaknesses if it is to work as needed.

Without data it is hard, if not impossible, to plot trends. However, what is certain is there has been an almost exponential growth in coverage of the issue. The number of conferences, publications, articles and discussions have exploded in the past 18 months. The trend of actual attacks or breaches may be obscured, but the fear they have engendered is clear for all to see.

WHAT ARE THE THREATS?

While most cyber security experts get bogged down in technicalities when they start discussing the issue – this highlights the fact that perhaps the biggest threat would have to be ignorance. There is a seeming lack of a coherent industry response to the issue.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has now become embroiled in the move to legislate, and the Round Table of international shipping associations are in the process of producing industry guidelines – which are massively significant and positive strides. However, there is a long tail between guidance, legislation and shipboard or shipping company personnel being better able to deal with problems, or to make sure they do not threaten safety and commerce at sea.

It is vital that owners and officers alike are able to see through the fog of jargon to see where the potential problems sit. The most vulnerable systems for ships appears to be navigation systems – there has been much talk of how easy and cheap it is to buy a jammer which can effectively block or tamper with the GPS signal received on the vessel.

There have also been anecdotal reports of university researchers being able to remotely tamper with signals being received, even managing to allegedly steer a vessel off course. While away from the "remote" attacks – there are many who believe the most likely source of problems is from crew unwittingly introducing a virus into shipboard systems, either by opening email attachments or through accessing USB drives on computers onboard.

ARE WE PREPARED?

In short, it would appear the answer would have to be no. There is no real indication that either threats are fully explored or understood, or that the mechanisms, protective systems and resources are in place to mitigate or counter the threat.

There are efforts to remedy this –and the fact that the industry debate is rumbling on is positive – but there

is such a lot to consider, and so much to be done and we simply do not know how much time there is to get it sorted.

It could be that the virus which will cause a VLCC to ground is already in the tankers' ECDIS, or that the jammer which blocks a Cruise ship's GPS has just been bought online. Or the seafarer uploading pirate movies onto the ship's computer is about to damage the whole vessel's stores database. Or the terrorist group are looking at pictures of ships and ports they want to target. We just do not know!

The current state of maritime cyber security does not sit well compared to its most readily comparable industry, the aviation sector. The structure of shipping does not make it easy to deal with this kind of problem, as it falls somewhere between the two stools of ship and shore. The IT roles onboard are not always well defined, while the IT team ashore are unlikely to have much of a handle on what needs to be done and how at sea.

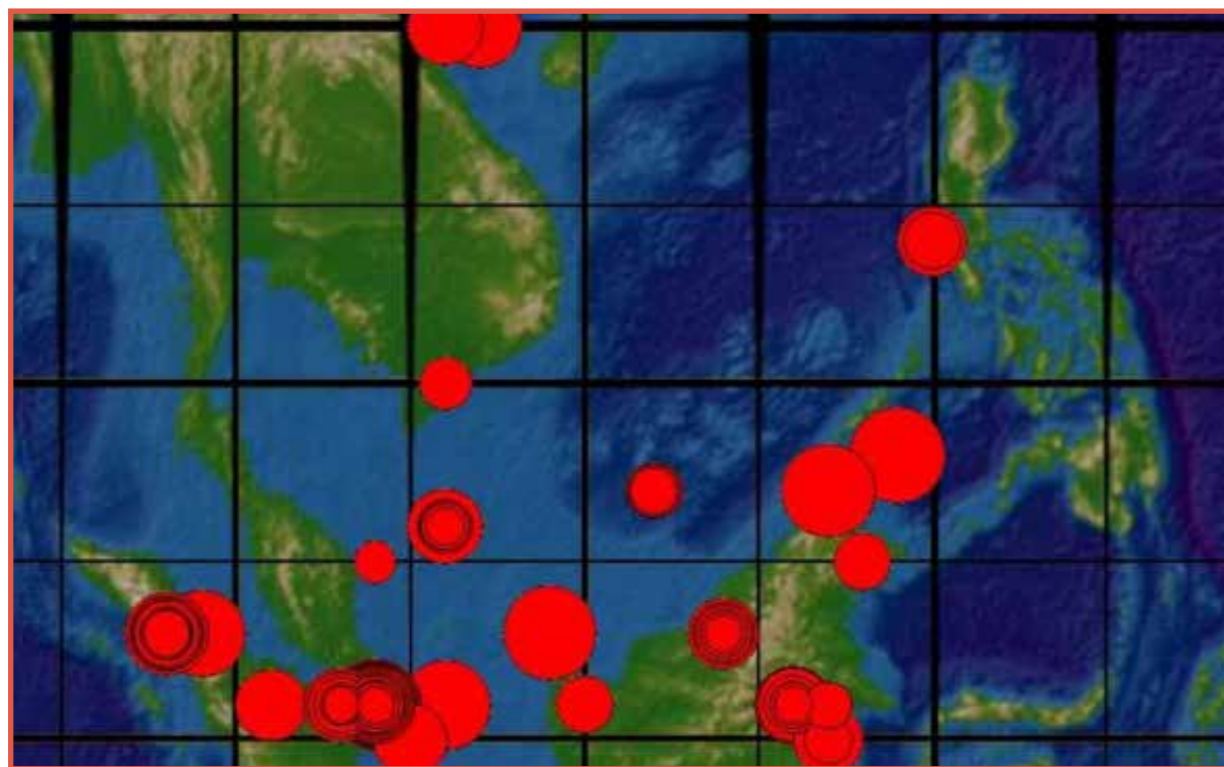
WHAT NEXT?

Awareness and vigilance are obvious needs for the shipping industry. So maritime focused cyber security training is needed, but this is not mandatory and is not even recognised by many, if any, flag States. As such it is not easy to demonstrate the value of the courses.

Having officers onboard who are aware of the potential problems and how to monitor and react is key. As such there are increasing calls to make cyber security training a mandatory requirement – and similar to physical security, it should come in a rising form – addressing those who just need to be aware, through to those with designated cyber security duties, and through to a Shipboard Cyber Security Officer.

Sadly this role, if it ever exists will likely be lumped into the existing duties of some poor already overworked officer. However, as more and more vessels become increasingly technically sophisticated, then this would warrant either a new role, perhaps in keeping with the old Radio Officer role. It seems that a "Communications and IT" officer could be useful.

There is a long way to go to address these issues, but at least the debate seems to be growing in volume – hopefully answers can be found, because the potential consequences of failure are almost too horrific to contemplate.



PIRACY CONFUSION AND FEAR REIGN

The issue of maritime piracy reporting emerges every time one of the reporting bodies releases its latest data. The responses range from bemusement to disinterest, terror to action. Rarely though has a body seemingly undermined its own figures.

UNDER REPORTING ADMITTED

According to the International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) Piracy Reporting Centre "only one incident of an actual attack" was reported from the Gulf of Guinea for Q3 of this year with the disclaimer that "the real number is believed to be considerably higher".

The IMB report for the first nine months of 2015 states 190 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships have been "officially counted" around the world. A clear admittance that there is a whole parallel security universe in which things happen, but we simply do not know about.

A fact which seems to back up the recent call for Standardised Piracy Reports by BIMCO. The trade

association is developing a new reporting code designed to eliminate inconsistencies that currently produce significant differences in global statistics for piracy and hijackings.

The criteria for recording incidents ranging from hijackings to attempted thefts currently varies for several of the organisations that report and collate statistics. The variation is particularly acute in South East Asia where recent publication of maritime crime figures has led to organisations producing notably different views on how bad the problem is. Accurate crime figures are vital if a proportionate response is going to be possible, and so it is clear that action is needed.

LATEST DATA

The latest monthly report from Asian anti-piracy organisation ReCAAP shows that while incidents were down recently, the total for 2015 is on pace to exceed last year's 187 attacks. There have already been 174 attacks so far this year. The year got off to a very busy start, with attacks up 25 percent in the first three months of 2015. The majority of the reported incidents occurred in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS).

Statistically speaking older vessels are usually considered to be more vulnerable to pirates. So it was something of a surprise last month when two almost brand new Nordic MR tankers were among the thirteen ships that came under attack in Asia. The two ships were attacked by armed robbers within 24 hours.

No crew members were harmed. The 50,000 DWT North Supreme was boarded by three robbers, while the ship was anchored at Belawan in Indonesia. The robbers, who were allegedly armed with long knives, threatened the crew as they approached them on the ship. The captain managed to alert the crew and raised the alarm. The assailants fled empty-handed.

In light of the level of attacks in the region, ReCAAP ISC has published a guide for tankers operating in Asia aimed at helping prevent piracy. The Guide for Tankers Operating in Asia against Piracy and Armed Robbery Involving Oil Cargo Theft was prepared as a result of the continued occurrence of oil cargo theft but is also relevant to other vessel types. The new guide makes a number of recommendations for both offices ashore and the ship master and crew. Information and reporting is key, as is an effective reporting regime. The ship should adopt best practices in anti-piracy efforts and other relevant elements of BMP 4.

AFRICA REWAKENS

West Africa has recently sprung into life once more – as late this month a team of pirates in two boats boarded the Cyprus-registered ship "Szafir" and kidnapped her captain and four crewmembers, including other officers. The Cyprus-flagged vessel was en route from Antwerp to Port Harcourt with a load of cranes.

Somalia too seems to have witnessed some resurgence of the piracy problems which blighted the Indian Ocean for so long. According to press reporting Somali pirates successfully attacked an Iranian and a Thai fishing vessel in 24 hour burst of activity. While there were another two unsuccessful attempts in November too.

Mind you, there have been a flurry of recent reports which seem to suggest that fighting has taken place between the hijacked Iranian crew and pirates. It is understood at least 4 of the Somalis are confirmed dead and at least 5 others are missing after the Iranian crews overcome their captors.

There has been much talk in recent months that Somali pirates would be likely to re-emerge. Based on the fact that provocation from foreign fishing fleets could be the stick that pokes them back out to sea. But also the fact that a number of pirates have recently been repatriated, and a couple of years of spending may be leaving some pirates a little light in the wallet.

UN KEEPS FIGHT ALIVE

Thankfully given the possibility of hijackings again off Somalia, the United Nations has managed to maintain its course – and will keep up the fight against piracy in the region. Earlier last month the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in New York re-authorised the international naval action in fighting piracy off the coast of Somalia, stressing that "while the threat from Somali pirates has declined, it still remains a matter of grave concern."

The UNSC highlighted the important role played by ships from the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield, but noted that the primary responsibility lies with Somalia, a country torn apart by 25 years of strife. The latest resolution and the agreement to maintain a presence also contained wording which urged flag, port and coastal states to cooperate in prosecuting perpetrators, and proposed specialized anti-piracy courts.

With the changes to the Indian Ocean High Risk Area (HRA) about to take effect, Lloyd's Market Association has once again voiced its uncertainty as to the effect on the market. It has been suspected that the reduction in area size may not result in reduced insurance costs due to the assessment of insurance risk being dependent on such a wide and varying range of factors. It would perhaps also seem that a reduced area could arguably concentrate activity, and so the threat level will rise in the new designated HRA.

With Somali pirates seemingly begin to re-emerge, the shrinking of the HRA may prove little more than a pencil on chart exercise. Vessels in the area will still need to be extra vigilant, the warships will still be patrolling, and underwriters are not seemingly feeling overly warm and fuzzy about the whole exercise. The more things change, the more they stay the same, as they say.

TOUGH LIFE AT SEA

Last month saw a raft of tragic human tales from the shipping industry, as news of a number of seafarer deaths emerged. Some were from suicide, while other lives were claimed by confined space entry. Working and living onboard ship is a challenge we should never underestimate.

SPIKE IN CREW DEATHS

The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) last month claimed that it has seen a huge “spike in deaths of seafarers on ships”. They put this growth in the sad and terrible statistics down to an increase in the rate of suicide at sea.

The union is watching closely for the results of forensic tests on “Yangtze Oasis” and have been monitoring a number of other investigations with interest. In a statement last month they said, “We get a lot of cases where people are reported missing over the side of ships”.

They then went on to criticise insurance companies, who they claim are too quick to say that such cases are suicide. Whatever the tragic truth of these kind of deaths, it certainly hammers the message home that life working at sea is a perilous and difficult task.

Working onboard comes with hazards too, and last month two crewmen died after ignoring safety warnings to rush to the aid of a stricken crewmate in the hold of their ship and were then suffocated themselves. An inquest heard the mate and safety officer of the “MV Sunitis”, would have collapsed

“within seconds” because oxygen levels had been severely depleted by the freshly-sawn timber cargo and later died. It was unclear as to why anyone was entering the space before it was vented,

HAZARDS AND STRESSES

So here we see two very different faces of seafaring – one, perhaps, the result of stress, loneliness and isolation, the other a terrible and avoidable accident. One of the key factors which joins them is depression.

Could seafarers be not only taking their own lives, but also making fatal errors due to stress and fatigue? Major medical studies have long confirmed that depressed workers are more accident-prone as depression interferes with concentration and focus. Indeed it has been found that patients with depression have shown impairments in functioning that were comparable to or worse than those of patients with medical disorders.

So just like illness, the effect of stress can take a very real and terrible toll. “High-hazard” occupations are of particular concern, and working onboard ship is definitely one of those. High stress levels directly relate to depression and the effects can be both debilitating and devastating.



FATIGUE TOO

While mental health issues may sometimes be overlooked, one of the most serious and recognised problems facing the maritime industry is fatigue. Again, this is another issue which can be prompted or exacerbated by stress, distress and the mental state. Fatigue is a recognised and serious medical concern. It can be called different names, tiredness, exhaustion, lethargy, and listlessness. In essence though, it means a person cannot continue functioning at their normal levels of physical ability.

The problem of fatigue itself is a symptom, it is a sign that something is going on which is damaging the physical and mental wellbeing of the sufferer. At sea this is likely to be over work, lack of sleep with loneliness, isolation and perhaps even depression thrown in.

The challenges of being at sea and of feeling disconnected from those at home can be draining and demoralising, and as such can be a leading cause of fatigue. Many industry bodies and much research have long warned about fatigue. Just last month a report by the U.K. Confidential Reporting Programme for Aviation and Maritime (CHIRP) stressed that one area that appears to be difficult to address is seafarer's fatigue management.

The life pattern at sea for months and months can wear down anyone, and lead to impaired performance and diminished alertness. These have a significant impact on shipboard operations and personal safety.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMS

A typical working day for seafarers consists of many long hours, and it is such a relentless schedule that it is the main cause of high stress levels, causing employees to make sometimes dangerous mistakes or leading to serious health problems.

A new study by MARIN in Holland has set about understanding stress at sea and the effect on seafarers and safety. Stress is a response from your brain and body to external factors, for example your job - and life at sea contains many such factors.

While the latest publication from The Nautical Institute (NI), “Human Performance and Limitation for Mariners”, builds on a concept first introduced in the aviation industry that was responsible for a massive reduction in accidents. It is one thing to look at performance, but all too often people shy away from recognising it as only one part of the equation. The limitations of seafarers need to be understood and accepted too.

The performance and limitation concept will, the NI claims, enable seafarers to make the best use of their physical and mental abilities in the challenging shipboard environment. Launching the book in Manila last month, Captain Robert McCabe FNI, the Institute's President, said “It will give mariners insights into physical and psychological difficulties they may face.” One of these challenges is fatigue, which is often implicated in casualty reports. Which brings us full circle, tiredness and stress can kill and all too often it seems they probably do.

TERRORIST THREAT TO SHIPPING

While the past few years have seen shipping acutely aware of the security threats posed by pirates, it has appeared that the terrorist “bogeyman” has receded a little into background. Now though, as the so called Islamic State (IS) is on the rampage, questions are being asked about just how secure and protected ships are.

FRENCH FALLOUT

Following the tragic attacks by IS on Paris, it seems that the threat of attacks on all parts of the civilised world seem possible, if not likely. With Brussels going into lockdown, it has been seen that the fear of terror is as potent as any bullet or bomb.

With planes and trains all believed to be targets of the terrorists, there were also those who believed that cross-Channel ferries are facing an increased risk of terrorist attack in the wake of the atrocities. British Ministers last month highlighted how passenger ferries were a weak link in Britain’s defence against Islamist terrorists, amid fears they could hijack a ferry in the Channel and commit slaughter before security forces could reach it.

Prof Anthony Glees, director of the Centre for Security and Intelligence Studies at the University of Buckingham has called for the introduction of sea marshals – armed officers – to be introduced on ferries, as well as on trains, to protect passengers in the event of a terrorist attack.

The fear factor has not been confined to Europe. Last month sniffer dogs were called in and Melbourne’s Station Pier was evacuated after a possible bomb scare onboard a cruise ship.

No suspicious object was found but sniffer dogs responded to a scent while patrolling at the Pier, Melbourne’s main passenger shipping terminal.

The authorities responded as the ferry the “Spirit of Tasmania” and Dutch-registered cruise ship the “MS Noordam”, were berthed at the Pier at the time.

MIXED MESSAGES

Earlier this year – back in February and March, there was much fuss in the media, as it was believed that IS was planning to attack ships in the Mediterranean.

The terrorists were perceived as a threat to shipping owing to the unstable situation in Libya at the time. Security experts specialising in Africa and Middle East affairs, warned that terrorists could mount attacks using small boats to carry out piracy or suicide missions, particularly aimed at passenger vessels or large yachts. Though, thankfully the threat which peaked in the summer did not transpire.

Now as the winter waves cascade around the Mediterranean, it seems such a threat is unlikely to come around for months at least. So given the barrier to hitting out at sea, it has been claimed that IS’s next high profile objective could be the newly expanded Suez Canal. According to researchers at the University of Portsmouth, the shipping industry routinely issues reassuring messages but they claim that behind closed doors concerns are very real.

In a recent article, Peter Cook, the CEO of the Security Association for Maritime Industry (SAMI) warned that “the security of the Suez Canal is now on a knife-edge.”



As Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen continue their fall into lawlessness, experts and analysts believe the odds are stacking against Egypt and the stakes are getting higher for the world. One commentator stated that, “The murderous attacks in Paris were another reminder that the threat of IS to our globalized economic system is real and must be confronted”.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

While it would be all too easy to put the 2+2 of IS together and get attacks on shipping, is the terror group likely and, more to the point, capable of mounting such raids? Last month a Dryad Maritime report stated there is no positive evidence that Islamic State has the capability to conduct a successful attack on commercial shipping, despite its stated intent to do so, according to an assessment of maritime security in the Mediterranean.

IS propaganda has recently proclaimed the “closure of shipping lines because of the targeting of Crusader ships and tankers” as a tactical aim. That aim may be wholly predictable, but attacking shipping is not as easy as it sounds.

Dryad assesses that in order to successfully attack a merchant ship offshore, the terrorists would need to operate small speedboats from a mothership in

order to be able to sustain operations at over 200 nautical miles from base.

According to the report, analysis of available overhead imagery of the ports assessed to be currently under IS control in Libya suggests that the numbers of these types of vessel are limited.

REALITY CHECK

Even if IS did have the vessels it would need to strike out against shipping, that alone would not necessarily be enough. They would also then need some level of at least rudimentary training to be able to handle their craft at sea.

Lest we forget, Somali pirates were always extremely hardy and skilled seafarers – hence their rapid deployment and multiple high profile, astonishing successes. For IS to take some hate filled former IT executives from south London or north Belgium and make them into a maritime fighting force, well that may be something of a stretch, for now.

So instead of facing suicide vessels or attack craft, far more likely would indeed seem to be a bomb smuggled onto a ferry or cruise ship, or some random rocket propelled pot shots from the bushes alongside a port or in the Suez Canal.

NEWS ROUNDUP

THESE ARE THE OTHER HEADLINES AND STORIES WHICH CAUGHT OUR EYE LAST MONTH

Tackling Stowaway Threats: The UK P&I Club warned that stowaways continue to pose a major, and potentially expensive problem for shipowners. “With the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and the media attention this continues to receive, it is often easy to forget that the problem of stowaways is still a very real problem for shipowners,” says UK P&I Club Claims Executive Amanda Hastings. “The majority of these stowaways are finding more creative ways in which to board ships.” “In addition to conducting thorough stowaway searches...additional precautions may need to be taken due to ship design,” notes Ms. Hastings.

<http://goo.gl/dv8vPA>

Shipping Anti-Corruption Drive: BIMCO launched an anti-corruption clause for charter parties. The new clause will give owners and charterers a contractual platform for cooperative action to resist demands for illegal payments from port officials and others. Angus Frew, Secretary General of BIMCO, said: “BIMCO recognises the importance of a united approach by the shipping industry towards stamping out corruption in the ports and places where the world’s merchant fleet trades. “Use of the clause is entirely voluntary – it has been developed for owners and charterers who want to combat corrupt practices in ports”.

<https://goo.gl/Mgc0KF>

Bad Maintenance Causing Damage: A new report from The Swedish Club shows that incorrect maintenance and repair continues to be the most frequent cause of main engine damage – a trend which has continued unabated since the Club began monitoring the issue nearly ten years ago. Main Engine Damage investigates more than 1,000 Hull and Machinery claims relating to over 5,400 vessel years of statistics and its findings make interesting reading.

<http://goo.gl/LRqU09>

Norway Signs Forced Labour Convention: Norway has become the second country, after Niger, to ratify the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention. The move is significant as ILO binding instruments generally provide that an adopted protocol comes into force 12 months after being ratified by two member states. Following the Norwegian Government’s action, the new framework to fight forced labour and modern slavery will come into force on 9 November 2016. “Norway’s ratification will help millions of children, women and men reclaim their freedom and dignity. It represents a strong call to other member States to renew their commitment to protect forced labourers.” said the ILO.

<http://goo.gl/XrTxzr>

Consider Treatment of Stowaways: The UK P&I Club has issued advice saying that international human rights standards should be observed when dealing with stowaways. The U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention of Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic (FAL) Convention all apply. “Shipowners should take care to ensure that stowaways are not subject to degrading or inhumane treatment whilst on board, and should be provided with water, food, clothing, medical treatment (if required) and accommodation.” U.K.-based charity Human Rights at Sea welcomes the UK P&I Club’s clear message.

<http://goo.gl/VmCdpl>

Seafarers Lying About Health: There are times when a seafarer might be evasive about the truth. Faced with the prospect of rejection, they may not admit to past medical conditions during their pre-employment medical check. There’s a chance they will get away with it because in many countries, including the Philippines, there is no central database that documents medical history. But seafarers are in demand, particularly those with experience, those in senior roles and those who, having reached their forties and fifties, are more likely to have health issues. Medical care companies are therefore devising pre-screening solutions that benefit both seafarers and owners.

<http://goo.gl/m1D1uK>

Tanker Crews Wait for Cash: With many large tankers on standby storing oil instead of transporting it, there are knock on effects for crew wages. According to an article about the Mission to Seafarers stepping in to assist seafarers, the problem is particularly acute off the UAW. By some estimates, as many as 100 are moored off the coast of Fujairah, some at anchor for many months. One of the problems is that companies are reportedly ring fencing their “single ship owning entities”, and profits from trading tankers are ring-fenced for individual ships and cannot pay standby crews. The problem of unpaid seafarers is set to escalate.

<http://goo.gl/MLXKMC>

New Way of Managing Shore Leave: The ITF Seafarers’ Trust is launching an enhanced version of its free Shore Leave app – the first app designed to help seafarers looking for reliable transport when in port. Shore Leave only needs to be downloaded once, and after that all the contact details of seafarers’ centres’ all over the world are stored in the user’s smartphone and accessible offline, anywhere, anytime. It also includes all the contact details for ISWAN Seafarers Help, the 24/7 helpline for seafarers. Kimberly Karlshoej, Head of the Trust said: “The new version of Shore Leave allows seafarers to rate the centres and to leave comments”.

<http://goo.gl/bLXwWe>

World Maritime Day 2016 Theme: The IMO Council has endorsed a proposal by Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu to adopt “Shipping: indispensable to the world” as the World Maritime Day theme for 2016. Sekimizu said the theme would provide an opportunity to focus on the critical link between shipping and global society and to raise awareness of the relevance of the role of IMO as the global regulatory body for international shipping. “The importance of shipping to support and sustain today’s global society gives IMO’s work a significance that reaches far beyond the industry itself,” Sekimizu said.

<http://goo.gl/u2nBZb>

ICS Fights Back on Environment: The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) has issued a rebuttal of environmental group statements on shipping’s emissions performance, arguing that the industry is already delivering reductions in excess of governments’ commitments to cut carbon. In an exchange of views ahead of next month’s UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, the ICS cites a reduction of “more than 10%” in ship CO2 emissions that has taken place between 2007 and 2012, despite continuing growth in maritime trade, and a reduction per cargo tonne-kilometre of “around 20% in the past 10 years”.

<http://goo.gl/WoYgsz>

MORE NEWS...

Emissions Sniffing Drones to Launch: Europe is turning to a new tool to catch ship operators skirting pollution limits: emissions-sniffing drones. It is the latest sign of how civilian drones are finding a widening array of commercial uses. The European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Space Agency are hoping to cooperate in tracking pollution from ships.

<http://goo.gl/hmPO80>

Ship Pollution and Humans: New data presented by researchers at Lund University and others in the journal *Oceanologia* shows that the air along coasts are full of hazardous nanoparticles from ships, posing a greater threat to human health than previously thought. According to the research, almost half of the measured particles stem from sea traffic emissions, while the rest is deemed to be mainly from cars but also biomass combustion, industries and natural particles from the sea. "Nanoparticles can be hazardous to our health as they, because of their small size, can penetrate deeper into the lungs than larger particles", Lund University said in their statement.

<http://goo.gl/WVVWJF>

Port Discount for Eco Ships: The Port of Rotterdam has announced that its discount programme for "clean ships", known as the Environmental Ship Index (ESI), will be renewed. "Ships which score 31 points on the index receive a 10 percent discount on the ship section of the port tariff. This discount is doubled if ships have relatively low nitrogen emissions," explained the Port of Rotterdam. "This means that a ship must score at least 31 points on the NOx emission section of the ESI." Overall, the port has increased tariffs for ocean-going vessels visiting Rotterdam by 0.5 percent for next year, a figure it says is equal to half of the inflation rate over the past year.

<http://goo.gl/1Elx1t>

ICS on US Ballast Mess: The ICS says last month's announcement that the International Maritime Organization's (IMO's) Ballast Water Management (BWM) Convention is set to be put into force next year will do nothing to solve "extreme difficulties" that remain in the U.S. around water treatment equipment. "There is still great uncertainty with respect to the more stringent United States approval regime for treatment equipment, which started to be enforced in January 2014," states ICS. ICS explains that the U.S. requires all vessels discharging ballast in U.S. waters use a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) approved treatment system, but notes that no systems have been approved yet.

<http://goo.gl/JSTuWF>

IMO Session Opens With Fresh Challenges: The 29th session of the IMO Assembly opened this week at IMO Headquarters in London. More than 1,000 delegates from IMO Member States, international governmental and non-governmental organizations were present to hear Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu outline some of the Organization's major achievements. He singled out the adoption of the mandatory Polar Code as a historic milestone in IMO's work to protect ships, seafarers and passengers in Polar waters and the fragile environment itself. He also highlighted the adoption of the new mandatory code for ships fuelled by gases or other low flashpoint fuels, the IGF Code.

<http://goo.gl/RJkQgL>



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