



Nexus Consulting Group

Securing Your Future Throughout the World

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Vetting an Armed Maritime Security Firm

10 questions to ask any potential security firm, from a security firm

With the IMO and flag states opening up vessels to more and more armed details, many start-up firms are trying to portray their experience and size as being much larger and more experienced than they really are.

Recently it came to Nexus' attention that one security firm claiming experience since 2009 had taken photos from Nexus operations posted on our web page and photo-shopped them claiming they provided the team.

We don't hide our teams faces, because we really are Nexus and we really are doing the work.



Nexus team on-board APL Balboa



Start-up firm Photoshop of Nexus team

"(company) was one of the first companies to provide armed guards over two years ago onboard US flagged vessels and continues to set the standard for armed security providers within the industry." - **Ask for proof.**

Any security firm should easily be able to provide direct contact for the every CSO they worked for... If they can't, GO ELSEWHERE!

Please find 10 simple questions you need to ask any potential or current security provider.

Vetting an Armed Maritime Security Firm

10 questions to ask any potential security firm, from a security firm

In recent months, we have seen the number of firms offering armed security details grow from 6 in 2009 to 100's in 2011... With the sheer volume of firms, how do you tell which firms are established, vetted firms and who the cowboys are? These ten simple questions should help any shipping company looking to contract armed security details quickly weed out those less reputable firms.

1. Does the security company protect any vessels from their own flag state?

"Oh, we don't focus on our flag-state vessels because insurance is too high"

If you're being contacted by a US security firm that doesn't provide armed details to any US firms, there should be a huge red flag raised. Remember all legal authorities for a security firm originate within their home country. If a security firm can't get work in their own country, a shipping firm should be very hesitant to do business with that firm.

2. Where is their insurance good?

"We have £5,000,000 of coverage... (oh, but it's only good within UK territorial waters... Oh, also, we aren't allowed to operate within UK territorial waters... so, yea, our insurance ... isn't)"

Make sure the coverage a firm claims to have is good where YOUR vessels operate and where YOU'RE headquartered. Not many firms can obtain world-wide coverage in high-risk areas. Make sure yours can.

3. How do they export their weapons?

"We use a third party exporter overseas for "ease" of operations."

If your security provider can't obtain weapons export licenses within their own state, be very hesitant. You could be breaking international law by facilitating an illegal transaction.

4. Has the security firm changed names recently?

"After our unarmed security team jumped off the ship, we decided for marketing reasons to change our name."

If a firm has provided services in the past two years under any other name than their current name, unless a merger occurred, most likely the firm has had some issue which precludes them conducting business under past name(s). Make sure yours doesn't!

5. What was their stance on armed details just a year ago?

"2009... there is no need to have armed security on a ship, our unarmed teams will defend your ship fully with just our team and LRAD's..."

Do a quick Google search and see if any of the principals have been on record in the past few years advocating unarmed details. If a security firm didn't believe in armed security a year ago, how well educated can they be on the topic of armed security now? Make sure your firm isn't a "flavor of the month" firm.

6. What flag-states have cleared the firm for work?

"We have licenses to work in countries X, Y and Z..."

Ask them for these licenses. Very few countries actually issue licenses, most issue specific, single trip clearances or formal working agreements. Most of the flag-states issue trip-specific authorizations, and any security firm actually doing work should be able to provide these.

7. What weapons do they utilize?

“You only need a shotgun to scare the pirates away, and it’s much less hassles for the shipping company with them.”

An RPG is effective up to 927m. If the security firm can't keep that weapon outside of effective range, you haven't secured your vessel and crew. .308 caliber or higher is needed to be effective at ranges of 800m or greater. Firms should at least, and at VERY least, be armed with semi-automatic rifles of 7.62 (AK) or 5.56 (M4) or higher. Firms that don't use these weapons either don't understand the threat or worse, can't provide these services and attempt to short-sell you on your needs.

8. Does the security firm retreat to the citadel when the bullets start to fly?

“Pirate skiff at 3 miles... Let me in, please!”

If your security firm isn't prepared to fully defend your vessel and crew, you have conceded the ship. Ask at what point your firm advocates the team retreats to the citadel. Many retreat as soon as the pirates shoot.

9. What P&I clubs have vetted them?

“We have all the insurance you need.”

And they may... But if your P&I club hasn't vetted or at least accepts reciprocity from other P&I clubs, none of the insurance may matter.

10. Finally, and most important -Ask for prior CSO's from firms they have covered and contact them.

“We've covered 100's of vessels already.” “Great, can you put me in touch with those CSO's so we can verify...” “Oh, ahhh, well, ya see...”

Don't take our word for our experiences... ask for references. We all have non-disclosures, but if a CSO isn't willing to speak to another CSO about their satisfaction with a particular security provider, it's most likely because there isn't satisfaction or worse, never even a team on those vessels.

Nexus Consulting Group of Alexandra (Nexus Consulting), a veteran-owned, private security company based in the Washington, DC area. Nexus Consulting currently provides full-scope security services to U.S. and international shipping firms and ship management firms.



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