

Private security guards not encouraged for ships in Persian Gulf



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Shipping companies sailing through the Middle East Gulf were being urged to avoid having private armed security guards onboard as the risk of escalation in the region rose, industry associations say.

An advisory issued by leading shipping associations warned against using private armed guards in the critical areas.

“The use of force against threats recently encountered in the Gulf of Oman carries significant risk and has the potential to escalate security situations to the detriment of the safety of ship and crew,” the advisory said, adding that “the use of unarmed maritime advisors to assist with onboard security and watch-keeping is sensible”.



Guy Platten, secretary general of the International Chamber of Shipping, said there were stringent restrictions on the use of armed guards in the Gulf, whereas there was approval by flag states for their deployment off Somalia.

“The message is, do not use private armed guards in these waters – it is not advised,” he told Reuters.

While it was still possible for ships to sail through the Strait of Hormuz with private armed guards on board, few ports in the Gulf allow ships carrying weapons to enter. Jonathan Moss, head of transport and shipping with law firm DWF, said that “the legal implications for insurers and vessel owners are widespread. Breaches of rules bring about significant financial penalties, adverse reputational issues and in some cases custodial sentences.”

Mark Gray, co-founder of British company MNG Maritime, which runs a UK regulated floating armoury about 26 nm from the coast of the UAE, said that UK security companies that were licensed to carry and move firearms in the region were restricted to counter-piracy activity.

“Any British security company that uses those firearms ... to counter the forces of a state like Iran would be in breach of that licence and therefore breaking the law,” he said, adding that “armed guards are not the solution – all you need are more eyes and ears looking at all sides of the ship

especially the rear when passing through those waters.”

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