

LONDON

ISPS – ONE YEAR ON

A good turn out of around 70 members and others from London's shipping community joined a panel of enforcers, owners and mariners at an Evening Seminar aboard HQS Wellington on 6 July. The Seminar was to examine the first year of the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The audience could not have been aware just how pertinent their deliberations would become, taking place as they were, on the eve of the worst ever terrorist attack on London's transport system.

A weighty panel had been assembled, with enforcers represented by *Phil White* - MCA's Head of Maritime Security and *Paul Levey* – Head of Policy at TRANSEC, the government's security authority at Dept of Transport. Owners views were put forward by *Brian Parkinson* of the International Chamber of Shipping, following a long day at the IMO, and finally but far from least as far as the audience was concerned, *Captain Terry McDowell* a serving Master with FT Everards, represented the seafarer. As the port operator's enforcer, Paul Levey had also been asked to look after their corner, but ports and their Port Facility Security Officers (PFSOs) were well represented from the floor, among an audience that also included Company Security Officers (CSOs), consultants, trainers and sea-going mariners including some Ship Security Officers (SSOs). The forum was ably kept on track by the Chairman, *Philip Wake*, Chief Executive of the Nautical Institute.

The speakers presented the view from each corner with questions being taken by each of them. Phil White of the MCA, set the scene by explaining the UK government structure for Maritime Security and the co-ordinated approach to the issue, between the MCA and TRANSEC. To implement ISPS, the MCA's enforcement role had been extended from safety, to incorporate security of cargo ships, leaving TRANSEC with its longstanding responsibility for ports and passenger vessels, as well as overall control of security for the transport system. The logic of MCA's new security role was illustrated in one of the many controversial areas the code has produced, that of balancing integrity of escape routes, with security from uncontrolled access. It would seem the MCA is taking a pro-active approach here, sharing the often imaginative solutions required for example, to secure a machinery space escape hatch with a lock and key from above, without hindering its use for escape from below. Questions to Phil included the nature of inspections on passenger ships (carried out on behalf of TRANSEC) and how performance can be measured. The latter question is always difficult to answer in the security field, especially with such a volatile threat, but it certainly seems the UK government has done a sound job of implementing ISPS, both afloat and ashore. Unfortunately there is less consistency abroad, with some countries failing to do more than tick a series of boxes, with little or no effort to ensure effectiveness or police compliance.

As Phil and Paul had co-ordinated their presentations, the latter was able to set out the wider government view in the light of UK, EU and IMO policy. The implementation of ISPS was explained, along with some common problems and misunderstandings. Some in the industry enjoy welcome dividends as a result – such as reduced crime in port areas, lower risk of stowaways, and less pilfering. Questions made it clear that some in the audience felt that ship's efforts to secure themselves were often

undermined by lack of security in ports. A point frequently made by Paul during the debate, was that security could aim at reducing a threat but not realistically at its removal.

Although Brian Parkinson's view was from owners, it included issues dear to seafarers, such as problems getting ashore - some countries demanding visas to collect stores or take the draughts! Also port-based officials taking a '*don't you know who I am*' approach to gangway ID requests, while from the same source there is no shortage of inspections to check ISPS compliance. Brian's work at the IMO put him in a good position to update the audience on potential developments and ongoing work to rectify some early snags with ISPS. He said that the message from the chamber to the security conscious world of post 9/11, was that shipping was part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Terry, speaking for seafarers, won support from members in the audience with some sharp observations and indeed objections, to the way the code as impacted upon seamen's lives. Extra work for an already overworked crew, frequent increase in hassle when going about legitimate business, being treated as a threat or like criminals, certain ethnic backgrounds or names being singled out by authorities – and at in spite of all this, a seaman feels no more secure when he finally hits his bunk! He had also noticed public access to berth areas, while crew are asked to show passports to get through a main gate – showing UK passports at a UK Port! Terry also had a problem with AIS - its introduction speeded up on security grounds, but whose security? AIS may make certain coastal states feel safer, but the mariner does not find it comforting to be constantly transmitting data that pirates and terrorists would find very useful in selecting and locating their targets.

When the debate was opened in full to the floor, AIS was an early topic, particularly as its information is so easily available on the Internet. Although the well-known UK provider of this service is careful about vetting those who subscribe to it, it was noted that anyone could set up an AIS receiver and obtain local data, while other web sites may not be selective about who benefits. The information is often already in the public domain however, as operators frequently provide it, especially in liner trades.

The theme of secure ships but less secure ports recurred during the evening, with the panel agreeing that this was a major weakness that potentially compromised ISPS. Until all states undertook to effectively ensure ports maintained genuine compliance, there will be damaging weak links in this global security system. Training of PFSOs in particular was also discussed, along with that of CSOs and the requirement to encourage frequent dialogue with both each other and their seaborne counterparts.

The meeting had set out with some questions, so at the close the Chairman sought verdicts from the assembled company:

Are we achieving the aim? This drew a mixed response, serving mariners the most sceptical, government and consults perhaps more optimistic. But it is still early days for ISPS - a global security system needs global implementation.

Are security and safety in conflict? A Less than overwhelming verdict was achieved here. There are certainly ways of resolving the conflicts, but only with careful thought and constant vigilance to avoid compromising safety.

Is ISPS helping or hindering the Mariner? Hindering! The only overwhelming verdict of the night! It could probably be modified, if mariners saw ISPS helping their own security, as much as it provides for coastal states, some of whom treat seafarers as part of the problem, not part of the solution.