

# THE YACHT

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The leading magazine for the design, construction,  
management, ownership & operation of luxury yachts

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# report

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# Feel the Force...

... rather than use it



Photo: Corbis

Patrick Estebe is well known to many who attend various seminars. He takes an unusual, controversial, even iconoclastic approach to security. It's very much an intelligence (both mental and informational) rather than force-, equipment- or gadget-based approach. Here, as usual, he questions **the perceived wisdom of how to ensure security in the broader global and narrower yacht context** (he'll even ask the braver question: can it ever truly exist?). It's fair to say his approach requires us to think, though it's far from simple intellectualisation. It is rather, as his working title puts it, "The Wisdom of Security", or perhaps (in lower case) the security afforded by wisdom.

**T**he world of security has evolved rapidly in the last few years. On one hand, we have the implementation of the much-debated ISPS code and some amazing technological developments (motion activated infrared cameras, *et al.*) In the meantime security concerns have grown, not diminished, with the media in their usual manner sensationalising

incidents while many owners become more high profile than they were a few years ago. Thus, many captains and mates wonder whether or not their security system is viable. ("System" here and in what follows does not designate solely equipment but, as in system dynamics, it means all the parameters influencing the security of a yacht).

Addressing the questions I hear most in my workshops/seminars, I have adopted a Q&A format for this article.

*Is there a real security problem for yachts or is this whole issue a lot of foam from politicians, bureaucrats and journalists with very little liquid below it?*

Listening to government agencies or the media, all of them taking terrorists at their words, one gets ‘the sky is falling’ kind of feeling. Terrorists could not wish for a better environment. Any posting from them on the internet and the West starts frantically spending time, energy and cash going into a panic. So reactive have some agencies become that they are seriously considering imposing the AIS on all small boats. In the meantime, seasoned captains and mates, with direct experience and thorough knowledge of some of these ‘troubled’ areas, scratch their heads wondering how it came to that. (There are some excellent reflections on this topic in Allan Watts’ ‘The Wisdom of Insecurity’).

Now this being said, the truth is that there are some formidable challenges in maintaining yacht security. Some parameters such as global warming, overpopulation, energy and water scarcity are way beyond the control of any institution and could lead to a breakdown of the global order, bringing unprecedented security problems. (See, for example, Jared M. Diamond’s ‘Collapse’ and John Petersen’s ‘Out of the Blue’.) Judging from past performance, we know we can count on the powers that be to repeat the mistakes they have made facing other emergencies. (This is not a new phenomenon; see John Mosier’s ‘The Blitzkrieg Myth’ for more on this.) The more a concept fails, it seems, the more likely it is to be tried again with a vengeance using more and more resources, in some kind of a self-imposed Sisyphus curse.

While many are stuck in a self-defeating attitude of institutional rigor mortis with ever-growing bureaucracies, the opposition has grown fitter and tougher (in the way that prey grow smarter and faster due to the success of their predators). Far from being the wild-eyed drooling barbarians depicted by the media, terrorists are in fact ‘wired’, educated, technologically savvy, very mobile, sophisticated and shrewd. About 64% have college educations. (Read counter-terrorism expert John Robb’s book ‘Brave New War’.) Such an enemy has the means to deliver very damaging strikes that could

affect directly or indirectly to some yachts and/or their owners.

As threats evolve, such as the merging of terrorism with organised crime (which includes piracy), it is up to us to evolve accordingly. Is your current security system dynamic enough not only to follow these changes but also anticipate them?

*So how can we prepare for these coming challenges? Do we need more equipment? More guns? More security staff?*

If security were just about equipment, procedures and manpower, Western armies would have been victorious wherever they fought in the last three decades. Western intelligence services would not even know what failure means, and Western police forces would have eliminated all forms of organised crime. But given the egregious and repeated failures of these professionals, who could possibly think of investing more billions, more equipment and more manpower in these juggernauts? If it was about equipment procedures, and manpower, we should have world peace and public order already. Of course these groups or institutions are still screaming for more resources, very much proving John Mosier’s point. So it should be obvious to anyone that there may be more to confrontation resolution than these elements, but

security is a field where emotions almost always dominate reason.

Please understand my nuances here. I am not making a Luddite argument; like everyone else I appreciate how electronic warning devices have improved life on board. Indeed, night vision capability, for example, is so useful, that it would be a big mistake not to use it;

budgets allowing. Similarly a lot of electronic equipment and cameras free up crew, especially on an ISPS vessel where surveillance and access control would otherwise take a lot of manpower.

As regards equipment, I would draw a parallel between security equipment and navigation equipment (which has also seen remarkable improvements). No one would think of doing without navigation aids, but no one would ever think (well, hopefully!) that navigation problems are solved due to the presence of this equipment. The occasional yacht landing on a reef reminds us of the truth that nothing can ever substitute for qualified captain, officers and crew. It is useful to look at your security guy(s) from the same perspective.

“ *This protection business has so many caveats for owners, captains and managers to identify that it can become a new problem instead of a solution.* ”

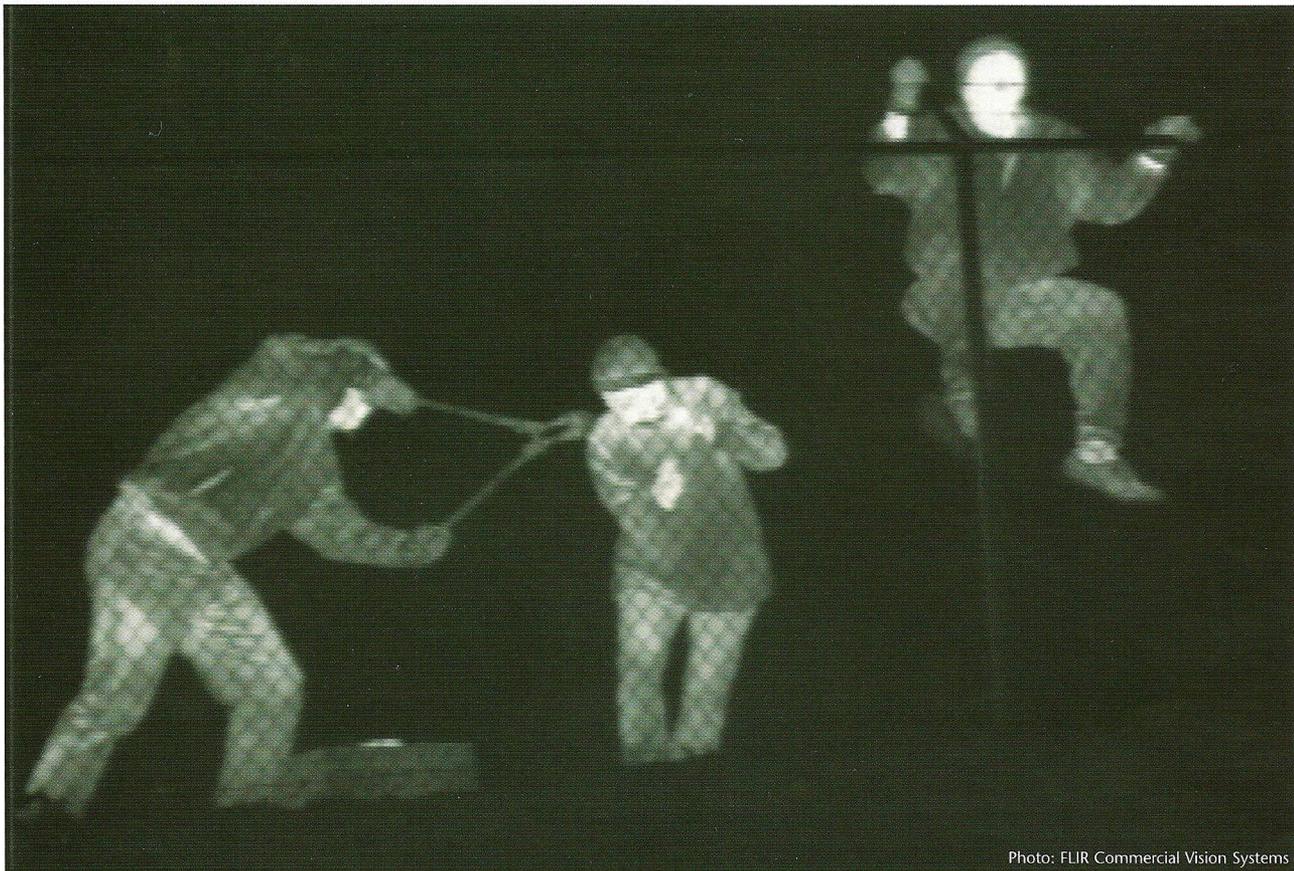


Photo: FLIR Commercial Vision Systems

The question of guns had started to become boring when recent developments made it tricky and paradoxical: regulations on the good guys have become much more strict and enforced more seriously, while the opposition uses them more and more.

Like many command decisions, the presence or absence and type of firearms on board has to be taken on a case-by-case basis. Security personnel are becoming a permanent fixture of yachting – from crew members becoming Ship Security Officers after a three-day course, to the various bodyguards, contractors, even Ghurkas or other experts embarked occasionally or permanently on board. A new crowd not always quite as reassuring as it should be has boarded the industry.

This protection business has so many caveats for owners, captains and managers to identify that it can become a new problem instead of a solution. There are already many stories about security ‘specialists’ – from the funny to the scary – that I do not need to expand on here. I will simply offer a few guidelines to enable owners and crew to distinguish between the hay and the straw.

The biggest issues I have with many of the security contractors is that they are highly predictable and often have a tendency toward trying to prove to the world (or maybe themselves?) that they can win this one, of course, in yachting they are instead paid so that nothing happens and there isn’t one to win.

An issue captains should be aware of is to what decision level security staff were trained in the past; if they only worked at the team level, no matter how good they may be, it was still someone else making the decisions. That means that while they are on your vessel, they will have to take initiative at a strategic level without commensurate experience.

Keep in mind here that your opposition is likely to have graduated from college, and have survived operations against them lead by the same type of operative you have hired. Mostly these warrior types are good against organised crime, good matches for goons who are but pale imitations of themselves. Their limitations against unconventional adversaries, however, have become evident in the stories we see in the media with distressing frequency.

A special mention should be made about the real Special Forces veterans who will hopefully have been trained to rely on more than their five senses and have developed a strong sixth sense. They are a pleasure to work with, but there are far fewer of them around than advertised.

*So what does it take to truly offer security to our owners or guests? Is there a better way to ensure security?*

Certainly there is a better way. But, if I simply lay it out to you, it will be just one voice among others. Instead, I suggest that we explore what that way could be together.



*If we could anticipate instead of constantly react we would be in the right direction*



First, let's consider that cliché about awareness of surroundings. That should not require any effort; if it means keeping your guard up continually, then it means you will burn out after a few hours just like keeping watch all night in the Channel. Is there a way to be secure 24/7 instead of a few hours or moments at a time? Could there be a better, more instinctive way that would allow personnel both to relax and to be attentive? Could it even be that being more relaxed would create awareness in a better, deeper way?

This relaxation can only happen if we have enough peace of mind at the start, and this can only happen if we know for a fact that we will be warned of impending danger. Is this possible? Can we detect intent? Those who attend my workshops have a few paradigm shifting experiences in this area. Look into it for yourself and you will find more than you have been conditioned to believe.

Second, is there a way to systematically see the truth about what is going on around us? Is there a way to see both the forest and every single tree? Is there a way to know whether this guy is a yacht watcher or an intelligence hunter? We are not conditioned that way, but can we tell the difference between an innocent passer by and one carrying a concealed weapon?

Third, let's look into what to do. We certainly agree that

every procedure has a counter procedure. Many claim that 'thinking outside the box' will bring the right action. They fail to see that those of us not in straight jackets can only think based on our knowledge and experience. Can we think without thinking? (See Malcolm Caldwell's 'Blink'.) Can we come up with an action that cannot possibly have a counter measure because it never existed before? An action that would not be a reaction due to conditioning or thought but the result of a deep insightful observation?

Certainly if we could anticipate instead of constantly react we would be in the right direction, akin to having the whites all the time on the chess board.

Is it possible to turn the tables all the time? If we could observe attentively enough, yet remain relaxed enough to allow us to get a 'feel' instead of a prejudice, and come up with the right action we would be further down the way and in the right direction.

There is indeed a better way. But you do not have to take my word for it; you may indeed keep going the old fashion way of thinking in terms of physical security, equipment, procedures and man power. You may go all the way and transform your yacht into an advance-frigate and achieve the same security the USS *Cole* had.

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