

SSAS – What happens when you push the secret button?

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What happens when you press the secret button?

When a ship is under pirate attack it can send a distress message using its secret button (officially called the Ship Security Alert System or SSAS). However, a potential weakness of the SSAS regulations is that security alerts are required to be routed only to the Company Security Officer and the Flag. This means you had better hope that your company security officer A) has his blackberry on him B) His battery is charged C) he is sober. Otherwise the management of your distress will suffer.

But even if he receives the call, it will likely take time for him to gain the situational awareness needed to respond to your crisis. Once he does, is he experienced and familiar with the protocols of the military and coast guard assets in your region?

SSRS, a company based out of the UK, has a new security service that has the potential to really make a difference. The idea (and implementation!) is simple; you add their company's contact information to your SSAS device and they are immediately notified in the event you press the button. Here is a flow diagram for us visual learners:

Once they receive your call they quickly go to work calling the military assets in the area of your ship. Having established relationships with the likes of MARLO and MSC-HOA command, and in having your vessel specific information in hand, they can properly start the ball rolling on a response to your incident.

Here is the official information from the company's website:

Pole Star was approached by flag administrations and EUNAVFOR command to develop a solution that could improve response time to pirate attacks and provide real time tracking of ships under attack.

The result is SSRS, which includes MSC-HOA command in any SSAS alert transmissions, enabling the naval forces in the Gulf to check the validity of the alert, assign the nearest naval asset and provide a fast response to pirate attacks.

SSRS enhances the existing SSAS procedure which is already mandatory for all commercial vessels and fitted to 50,000 ships. Most SSAS can be programmed to transmit position reports automatically and all are able to send a security alert message via satellite.

SSRS is designed to work with existing SSAS systems, requiring no hardware installation and minimal software intervention. Users need only add the address of MSC-HOA to their SSAS alerts.

The costs (\$500 per ship per year) are borne by the ship owner since they benefit from reduced risk.

SSRS Delivers

- Time for the Naval Forces in the area to respond and affect the attack, or in the event that the attack was successful, potentially stop the ship reaching the protection of the coast;
- Confidence in the knowledge that the initial SSAS alert location information has been automatically routed to the appropriate Naval Co-ordination Centres;
- Validation. The company security officer is copied on all alerts sent to the Naval Co-ordination Centres (providing a clear incentive to validate the authenticity of the alert);
- Cost-effectiveness. The SSRS service is an open system with which all existing SSAS units are compatible. There is no capital expenditure requirement and low operating costs – \$500 per ship per year;
- Ease of use. The www.ssrs.org user interface allows straightforward company registration and vessel subscription;
- Procedural extension. The defined SSRS methodology is easily integrated into existing ISPS Ship Security Plan and Best Management Practice procedures.

While I have not used the service myself, the idea certainly makes a lot of sense. You can find contact information for the company [HERE](#).