



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on April 27, 2009

Cruise Ship Security Team Fights Pirates

"It was as if we were at war," the ship's captain, *Ciro Pinto*, told Italy's national news agency ANSA. "They tried to put up a ladder with hooks. They were climbing up, so we reacted. We started firing. When they saw us firing — we even sprayed them with water with the fire-hose — they gave up and went off."



But that wasn't the end. "They still followed us for about 20 minutes and continued to fire at us," *Pinto* said. The *Melody* then met up with Spanish naval ship *SPS Marques de Ensenada* as it continued its journey through the Gulf of Aden to Jordan on Sunday. Passengers waited in their cabins during the ordeal, which occurred 200 miles north of the Seychelles and around 500 miles off the coast of Somalia.

The 670-foot 36,500-ton cruise liner on a three-week trip from Durban, South Africa, to Genoa, Italy, sustained relatively minor damage including smashed windows and bullet holes in the hull and a lifeboat, according to a report by the French AFP. "There are no injuries," explained *Pinto*, adding, "Only two people with scrapes. Someone slipped, fell. Just a few light scrapes." The ship was carrying 991 passengers and 536 crew members.

The incident is believed to be one of the first times a non-military ship with private security has used guns to prevent a pirate attack. This is partly because ships with arms on board are generally barred from docking at non-military ports. That restriction, of course, is well known to Somali pirates and makes nonmilitary ships tempting targets. But to get around this restriction, some vessel owners are hiring private security firms to board as a ship enters risky waters and then leave when the danger has passed.

There have been recent efforts to allow commercial ships to carry weapons to help deter the increasing piracy. "We shouldn't say that they can't carry guns," explained Republican Rep. Ron Paul of Texas in a video-speech about the Somali pirates where he broached the subject of letters of marque and reprisal, used in America's early years against pirates. "Because quite frankly, I think the companies are capable of dealing with this."

But Andrew Mwangura, head of the East African Seafarers' Assistance Program, disagrees. "There are a number of other methods which can be used to deter the pirates, having weapons on board is dangerous because it raises the stakes for the pirates," he said. "There is a far higher risk that a crew member of a merchant vessel, or a passenger, could die if the pirates feel they must fight harder to win the ship."

Domenico Pellegrino, the managing director of the *Melody's* owner, revealed no regrets over the decision to hire the Israeli security team. "We use them because they are the best," he explained. "And



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we have had a demonstration of that." The team used pistols and a fire-hose to repel the attack.

Pirates are still holding more than a dozen ships and almost 300 hostages, hoping to receive millions in ransom payments. About 20 foreign naval vessels are patrolling the pirate-infested waters, yet more than 10 vessels have been seized just in April. The International Maritime Bureau reports that pirate attacks off Somalia have increased tenfold in the first three months of 2009 when compared to the same period last year.

The only surviving pirate from the recent hijacking attempt of the *Maersk Alabama* has been brought to trial in New York, the first person in over a hundred years to face piracy charges in the United States. If the teen is tried as an adult, he could face life in prison.

This weekend's incident illustrates the point made by Rep. Paul: ship operators need to take responsibility for the safety of their vessels, crews, and passengers. Governments should not stand in the way of this. The successful aversion of a hijacking by simply hiring armed guards should show policymakers the absurdity of forcing ships to sail unarmed into dangerous waters. Hopefully this occurrence will deter future attacks and help change rules that prevent ships from defending themselves.

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