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The Netherlands is a seafaring nation that has long standing relations since the 17th century in trading with countries in Asia, far away from home.

Our port of Rotterdam is the largest port of Europe and the access port to Europe's mainland. We're the 5th largest exporting country and the 7th largest importing country in the world. 40% of our export departs and 70% of our import arrives over sea. 55% of our import is distributed directly to the European hinterland. We have 250.000 people working in the maritime sector. This sector has a total revenue of 21 Billion Euros. Therefore, it is fair to say we make our money at sea. We rely on the oceans for our trade.

Before 1869 the commercial vessels had to go the long way around Africa. Since the opening of the Suez Canal the main trading channel from Asia to Europe is via the Strait of Hormuz. Because of this, the Netherlands put high value in keeping this Sea Line of Communication open.

The Dutch involvement in the battle against piracy was activated in 2008 when the government assigned on 2 occasions frigates to the protection of ships in the UN World Food Programme (WFP). In both cases the frigates also had a Force Protection Team of Marines onboard that was

embarked on the UN ship on the most dangerous part of the route. The increasing number of attacks by pirates caused an international reaction. Later in 2008 Operation Atalanta started, followed by the NATO Operations Allied Provider and Allied Protector, which were renamed to Ocean Shield in 2009.

Since 2011 the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps also provides individual protection to Dutch flagged merchant vessels; the so-called Vessel Protection Detachments. The VPD's take care of the protection of different kinds of vessels. Varying from small tugs to enormous oil platforms. Especially the ships on which the main focus lies, escorting heavy cargo vessels that move slow and have a low freeboard. In 2014 we had conducted over a 100 VPD-operations. In 2015 the Chief of Defence ordered in a directive an increase up to 175 Vessel Protection Detachments per year, of which 11 at the same time.

A standard VPD-team in the Dutch concept of operation consists of 11 soldiers. It has a staff element and a security team. The staff element consists of a commanding officer, his deputy, a communicator and a medical NCO.

The security team consists of marines that stand watch 24/7 in a 360 degrees defensive

circle, manning 4 gun positions. When required however there are tailor-made solutions available. The main tasks for the VPD-team are to secure the vessel as laid down in the Best Management Practices against Somalia Based Piracy (BMD-4), defend the vessel by proportional means and to sustain until support arrives.

Until now the Royal Netherlands Navy has guarded just under 250 merchant vessels since the start of the operation in 2011. In December 2015 the High Risk Area has been constricted which has decreased the number of routes that needed to be secured. However, to prevent a revival anti-piracy operations are still crucial.

The effect of the VPD's is that no Dutch flagged ship with a VPD onboard has been hijacked since. This is of great importance to the shipping companies and the ships crews.

A change in Operation Atalanta in 2012 based on previous experience made the Dutch government decide to use Vessel Protection Detachments for the protection of ships in the World Food Programme. By using an Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment the use of an escort vessel was no longer required.

The challenge in the deployment of VPD's far from the Netherlands is to secure logistics for the VPD's themselves. Therefore the Royal Netherlands Navy has established 6 prestocking locations around the High Risk Area. These locations are Singapore (Sudong), Ile de la Reunion, Oman (Muscat), UAE (Dubai), Egypt (Safaga) and Sri Lanka (Galle). When sailing from South-East Asia towards Suez until now the VPD package is loaded in Singapore. Galle soon will become a full-fledged prestocking location, which makes it possible for the VPD package and complete team to be loaded and unloaded here.

The prestocking locations still require elaborate technical agreements with regards to the storing, maintenance, handling and movement

of medical drugs, weapons, ammunition and personnel in each sovereign nation to and from the prestocking location to the merchant vessel at anchorage.

The Dutch law, as the last remaining in Europe, up till now prohibits the use of Private Security Companies. The Dutch Ministry of Defence has the only mandate within the Netherlands to use force in international waters for the self-defense of its ships. This, in order to avoid renegade situations and unclarity in international laws and legislation.

The Netherlands point of view is that armed Private Security Companies cannot provide safety at sea. 'They have an interest in unsafety, whereas the navy has an interest in a calm sea.'

The use of a VPD covers the liability of the ship's captain as the VPD is bound by Rules of Engagement. This doesn't mean that a Vessel Protection Detachment is just as flexible as a Private Security Company. Vessel Protection Detachments are too big for the smaller merchant vessels. The Vessel Protection Detachments can only debark on one of the prestock locations, where Private Security Companies make use of floating armories at sea. And shipping companies have to pay for the protection by Vessel Protection Detachments which is more expensive than hiring Private Security Companies.

Because of the cost and limited flexibility involved, some Dutch companies have decided to reflag their ships which has negative consequences for the Dutch economy. Others have decided to hire Private Security Companies illegally.

At this point in time, the Netherlands government is working on new legislation, the so-called 'VPD, unless'-law. If it passes, this will in future open the possibility for Dutch flagged ships to hire Private Security Companies when the government is not able to meet the demand.