

FAO/NORWAY GOVERNMENT COOPERATIVE PROGRAMME – GCP/INT/648/NOR¹
REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON
FISHERIES MONITORING, CONTROL AND SURVEILLANCE
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POINTS TO REMEMBER IN CONNECTION WITH ARMED BOARDINGS

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Detection

All possible sensors should be used to produce valid evidence of the violation. Knowledge of the different sensor's accuracy, as well as the quality of the sea chart, is vital to create a confident case and fair hail. It is particularly important to understand the weakness of a GPS position (with a potential error of 100 m) plotted on an old sea chart. In a recent case, the chart was from 1951, with a minimum possible error of 0.5 to 1 n mi.

Approach

Approach always from leeward. An approach from windward, especially for a smallish vessel, will result in drifting onto the target vessel and may significantly reduce manoeuvring capability and safety, thereby distracting attention away from protection of the boarding party and from actions on the vessel to be boarded.

Although sometimes it appears easier to board directly from the primary patrol vessel, this places the patrol vessel and possibly the boarding party in a potentially sensitive position with respect to safety and retaliation by the crew of the vessel being boarded. Even in calm waters, use of only one vessel reduces the security implicit in being able to watch activities on both sides of the vessel being boarded. It is always advisable, if possible, to use the primary patrol vessel in a stand-off position for protection, and board the boarding party from a boarding craft.

It is advisable to ensure that the boarding party has been briefed as to the order in which they are to board the target vessel, in order to avoid confusion and unnecessary commotion during the boarding.

Once the target vessel has been boarded, the primary patrol vessel should stand off, but in a position close enough to ensure the safety of the boarding crew.

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Boarding

If the firearms to be carried cannot be strapped tightly to the chest (velcro, etc.) or strapped to the back to ensure that the officer carrying the weapon has both hands free for boarding, then perhaps a review of the type of weapons is in order. A proliferation of weapons being passed and swung in all directions during the natural confusion of boarding lacks professionalism and creates a safety concern, especially if safety catches have been released prior to boarding.

The first objectives of the boarding party should be to control the situation in a calm and professionally competent manner. Even where the boarding is a routine investigative operation, it is recommended that the first team aboard secures the boarding area and await the full party in this area, before moving to other areas.

It is strongly recommended to move the crew to an assembly point, preferably within view of the bridge, by using words and motions, but not by touching or hitting the crew. This is for safety reasons, as the prime time for a vessel being boarded to counter a boarding is in the first few minutes, by creating maximum confusion as a prelude to overpowering the boarding party. It is for this reason that quiet, professional motions to indicate the move to the assembly area is recommended, with the firearms kept beyond the reach of the crew, thus minimizing possible retaliation and use of concealed weapons by the crew of the vessel being boarded. Violent or hysterical behaviour by the boarding party is unnecessary and can cause a panic reaction and aggravate the situation. It is therefore important to stress that, unless threatening conditions evolve, the crew of the vessel being boarded should be kept at a safe distance from the firearms until safely searched, and disarmed if necessary.

Further, the assembly of the crew in sight of the bridge permits the boarding party leader to isolate the vessel master in the bridge area and still maintain visual contact and communications with the boarding party while the body search is being conducted. Maintaining strict and controlled communications and contact with all members of the boarding party is essential for the safety and operations of the boarding party.

It is recommended that the vessel master be identified and isolated as soon as possible, and possibly utilize him on the helm, not throttles, as a safety precaution, under guard and with a second, back-up officer. This maintains vessel safety in all sea conditions, occupies the vessel master's hands in full view of the boarding officers, and permits questioning in an isolated position where he cannot influence the crew's responses.

After the vessel crew is assembled, the boarding party should divide into teams of two persons to conduct a body-search of the crew, with at least two officers remaining on guard. Positioning of the back-up person during the body search procedure is especially important in order to ensure that the individual being searched cannot use the officer conducting the search as a shield. The back-up officer for the search should remain back and well to one side, allowing an unobstructed view of the search procedure and ready and able to protect the fellow officer. The reserve two-person team should concentrate on the actions of the rest of the crew and on activities in their area.

Following the search of the assembled crew, the teams should split: one two-man team guarding the crew, and another two-man team conducting a search of below-decks areas for possible other crew members. **It should be remembered that the below-decks check should never be done by one officer alone, as a lone officer cannot be adequately protected. He could possibly be overpowered, and a firearm thereby in the hands of an unknown member of the crew. Always conduct these below-decks searches in teams of two.**

Inspection

It is not until after the search of the vessel is complete that the boarding party leader can then determine the level of control required with respect to the crew, e.g., they can release their hands from their heads, etc. It is important to maintain visual and physical communications between the team guarding the crew and the party leader.

It is best to have a fixed check list of activities for an inspection, and to carry these out in a standard manner for each boarding, e.g., check vessel licence against vessel plate; check all logs (catch and processing where applicable); measure mesh; estimate species and quantity of catch in hold; inspect previous inspection reports; etc. Failure to maintain these standards and carry out all checks can result in critical information being lost during the inspection; information that **cannot be retrieved later** for prosecution purposes.

Weapon safety is critical at all times while on the vessel, especially if safety catches are released. It is therefore necessary to remember and carry out strict weapon safety procedures.

When the inspection is complete and if no further action is to be taken, a copy of the inspection report should be signed and given to the vessel master. This will provide a record for any future inspection. A duplicate copy should be forwarded to the relevant offices responsible for fisheries licensing, etc.

If further action is to be taken, this should be taken in accordance with predetermined check lists, and a video recording made of actions and visual evidence for possible court proceedings.

Disengaging

Safety of the boarding party is very critical at this stage, as the boarding crew tend to relax, and caution can easily be lost in this final phase of the boarding. Full and active vigilance must be maintained at all times.

The boarding party should have a controlled and orderly disembarkation from the vessel, in reverse order from the boarding pattern. Disembarkation should also be from the leeward side, for safety. Again, transfer from target vessel to patrol vessel should be by small boarding vessel, under the protection of the primary patrol vessel. Weapon safety is also critical at this stage, and safety catches should all be checked as on during this stage, with the exception of the covering team. The covering team as they disengage are themselves covered from the patrol vessel.

General

At all times it should be possible to conduct a boarding operation in an orderly, professional and courteous manner. There should be no need for shouting or excessive noise if the boarding is conducted in a professional manner. It is necessary that the vessel being boarded sees that the boarding team is very much in control of the situation, and hence not a team to be disobeyed.

All communication between the patrol vessel and the boarding party should be done over appropriate radio channels. Screaming out orders from the top bridge of the patrol vessel

creates an unnecessary stress factor; one that reduces the safety of the boarding party as well as creating a less professional image of the operation.

boarding party. This will help ensure that any boarding operation will be conducted systematically, thoroughly and confidently, with proper concern for the safety of the boarding team throughout the operation.