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Comment on relaxation of arms rules on British flagged ships

Commenting on British prime minister David Cameron's pledge to more effectively protect ships against pirates, including by relaxing rules on carrying arms, ITF general secretary David Cockroft said:

"Somali-based piracy has been allowed to become so successful, savage and wide-ranging that seafarers' and seafaring organisations' worries about armed guards have had to be set aside. However, guards can never be anything but a supplement to the sorely-tried existing naval presence, which is now trying to cover an entire ocean.

"The ITF, like the International Shipping Federation and International Chamber of Shipping, would like to see on-vessel detachments made up of the ship's flag state forces whenever possible."

He continued: "Sadly no move is without risks. Pirate gangs are making fortunes out of their crimes. It is easy for them to reach for heavier and heavier weapons and turn to obscene levels of violence to counter defensive measures."

"We welcome David Cameron's interest in maritime affairs, but we also have to warn him that the current defence cuts are likely to compromise the Royal Navy's ability to fight piracy."

ITF seafarers' section chair Dave Heindel added: "What's an open secret is the yawning gap in flag state responsibility. While some nations and their armed forces are doing an amazing job, others are shirking their responsibilities."

"Until more countries are prepared to patrol, arrest and prosecute, and to take the fight to the pirates and their bases – which are often fuel dumps and facilities in plain view right on the beaches – the world will continue to be held to ransom, and innocent seafarers to risk imprisonment, torture and, ultimately, death."

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