

Blackwater Plans Effort Against Piracy – [The Wall Street Journal](#)

By August Cole

Private security firm Blackwater Worldwide began holding meetings in London on Tuesday with potential clients for a new business venture -- protection from pirates.

The Moyock, N.C., firm, which has grown rapidly through State Department security work in Iraq, has been courting shippers and insurance firms about protecting ships in pirate-infested waters. It's meeting with more than a dozen firms this week and hopes to drum up its first contract.



Neil Rabinowitz/Blackwater

The McArthur can carry helicopters and inflatable boats.

There have been almost 100 attempts this year to seize ships off East Africa, fewer than half of which were successful, according to the U.S. Navy. On Nov. 30, two skiffs harassed an Oceania Cruises Inc. ship passing through the Gulf of Aden. Eight shots were fired at the cruise liner, which evaded the boats, according to the Miami-based company.

A chemical tanker in the Gulf of Aden was seized by pirates last week, and earlier in November pirates grabbed a Saudi tanker loaded with \$100 million of oil, which is still being held.

Navies from the U.S., India, Russia and Europe, including the British navy, have stepped up their patrols off the coasts of Somalia and Kenya and in the Gulf of Aden, but don't have the resources to protect all of the vessels that ply those waters. On Tuesday, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution supporting a European Union naval mission to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia.

The U.S. Navy is warning that ships need to be ready to fend for themselves in an area four times the size of Texas. "We've made a lot of recommendations that range from keeping ladders up on the ships' sides to putting professional security teams on board," said a Navy official.

The pirates, often armed with automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades, have lured ships with false distress calls and even attempted assaults with fast-moving boats, according to reports from the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre on recent attacks.

Blackwater already has a ship it says could be deployed abroad to scare off or even challenge pirates: the 183-foot McArthur, which the company bought in 2006. It can carry two helicopters as well as rigid-hull inflatable boats favored by naval commandoes, and 30 guards in addition to a

crew of 15. Blackwater's database of contractors includes former Navy SEALs and Coast Guard personnel.

"Its primary goal would be one of deterrence, that's the idea here," said Blackwater spokeswoman Anne Tyrrell. The company would prefer to keep its guards aboard its own ship because of legal uncertainties. "We would be allowed to fire if fired upon; the right of self-defense is one that exists in international waters," she said.

Blackwater's push to land its first antipiracy contract is part of a strategy to build its business outside its State Department security work in Iraq, which brings in between \$300 million and \$400 million a year. There are growing concerns in the security industry that costs and legal risks in Iraq could skyrocket because, under a new agreement, foreign contractors there are set to lose their immunity from local law next year.

Shippers are wary of hiring combat-ready contractors to defend their oil tankers or cargo vessels because of liability issues and because pirates may be tempted to shoot first if they see armed guards. Kristi Clemens, president of security firm Aegis LLC, says it could even end up raising insurance rates.