

MARITIME SECURITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION SHARING OPERATION CENTRES

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia (SEA) contributes to maritime security (MARSEC) through exchanging information and collaborating.¹ SEA's sea-lanes, maritime choke points and harbours are among the busiest in the world, providing seaborne criminals with a target-rich environment.² According to Greg Clifford, instructor with Indo Pacific Regional Information Sharing (IORIS), "One country's departing threat is another country's arriving threat, thus, countries must work together to coordinate and exchange information. It is critical if you can keep the threat at bay for as long as feasible. Ideally, you want to eliminate the threat at its source. Collaboration is the bedrock of any successful Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) system. It is critical that we move away from just dots on a chart and toward situational awareness. This enables decision-makers to make key judgments when they are most needed".³ In the dynamic and geographically diverse region of SEA, effective information sharing among OPCENs is paramount to address a myriad of complex challenges ranging from natural disasters to transnational security threats.

A new trilateral cooperation framework known as the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (TCA) is one of the mini-lateral security initiatives emerging from Southeast Asia in recent years in order to manage various transnational challenges in the Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Sea between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The question that arises here is the need for Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines to continue with the implementation of the TCA and its way forward, taking into account the after-effect of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit the world before. On the other hand, statistics of incidents of kidnapping, piracy or

¹ Nicholas Regaud, "From the Pacific Fusion Center to the Security Information Fusion Center in the Indian Ocean?", *Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM)*, Strategic Brief-11 (2020).

² Ian Storey, "Piracy and the Pandemic: Maritime Crime in the Southeast Asia 2020-2022," *ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute Perspective*, no. 76 (2022).

³ "How does IORIS support maritime security?" YouTube Video, 0:56, posted by "EU CRIMARO," April 2023, youtube.com/watch?v=VP7BujYwI90.

robbery in the area have shown a decreased in number and even no incidents of kidnapping were reported, which indicates the success of the initiative. With the mechanism in place since 2016, it is fair to ask where it stands and what opportunities as well as challenges lie ahead for it.

SEA is characterised by a convergence of vital sea lanes, diverse cultures, history of geopolitical tensions, and as a place where "the land divides but the sea unites", not just because of how important the sea is to the region's geography, but also because maritime issues are crucial to the stability, security, and very existence of the states that make up the region as well as their relationships with one another.⁴ Consequently, seamless information sharing becomes the linchpin for fostering regional stability, enhancing disaster response capabilities, countering security threats, and promoting collaborative efforts towards economic growth and sustainability. OPCEN deals with "information management" which includes the assessment and planning of operational needs, the information gathering or production distribution, the information sharing and utilisation of resources, which then serve as a nerve centre for crisis management, security coordination, and disaster response.⁵ These OPCENs play a pivotal role in leveraging information and intelligence to make timely decisions that can mean the difference between disaster mitigation and catastrophe, security or insecurity, and order or chaos. As the region continues to experience rapid economic development and urbanisation, the need for efficient and coordinated information sharing becomes increasingly critical to address the evolving challenges it faces.

This study considers the role of OPCEN in SEA, specifically in the area of Eastern Sabah and the Sulu- Celebes seas region. Thus, it will be focusing on the implementation of TCA to combat piracy involving three OPCENs known as the Maritime Coordinating Centre (MCC) Tawau in Malaysia, MCC Bangao in the Philippines and MCC Tarakan in Indonesia.⁶ However, in this paper, the study will use the term OPCEN to represent MCC for standardisation. Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Seas region on the other hand, covers the tri-boundary area of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, which includes Sibutu Channel well known by all seafarer and maritime community.⁷ The study aims to uncover the strengths

⁴ Rizal Sukma and Yoshihide Soeya, "Beyond 2015: ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership for Democracy, Peace, and Prosperity in Southeast Asia". *Japan Center for International Exchange (JIEC)*. Nguyen Hung Son, "ASEAN-Japan Strategic Partnership in Southeast Asia: Maritime Security and Cooperation," *Japan Center for International Exchange (JIEC)*, no. 12 (2013): 214.

⁵ András Toth, "Information-Sharing Challenges and Issues in Multinational Operations, Part 1," *Land Forces Academy Review* 25, vol. 25 no. 4(100) (2020): 307, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2478/raft-20200037>.

⁶ Kenneth Yeo Yaoren, Rueben Ananthan Santhana Dass and Jasminder Singh, "Maritime Malice in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines: The Asymmetric Maritime Threat at the Tri-Border Area," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague (ICCT)* (2021): 4, <https://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2021.2.01>.

⁷ *Guidance on Abduction of Crew in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and Waters off Eastern Sabah*. (ReCAAP-ISC, July 2019) 2.

and weakness of the OPCENs in SEA. The study also focuses on the activities or initiatives particularly the Trilateral Maritime Patrol (TMP) under TCA and how other regional powers are able to contribute into TCA, having the considerations that the cooperation is limited only to tri-lateral nations. The final part and conclusion examine the outlook of MARSEC, especially in Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Sea region, subsequently to look for a possibility of policy recommendation as a way forward.

The study uses a qualitative method, employing a variety primary and secondary source such as unclassified government strategic documents, published joint statements by ASEAN, any reports or statistics based on International Maritime Bureau-Piracy Reporting Centre (IMB-PRC) or Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia's Information Sharing Centre (ReCAAP-ISC), as well as Malaysia's International Liaison Officer (ILO) in the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) Singapore.

Further, many articles from open-source websites were used. It is also based on semi-structured interviews with experts in the field. The study also includes a SWOT analysis to determine, to compare, and to contrast how OPCENs have traditionally worked in the past in order to understand the opportunities for how they could be improved in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: MARITIME SECURITY BACKGROUND

SETTING THE SCENE

The tri-border region surrounding Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines is a key centre for transnational organised crime and terrorist threats due to its facilitation of the annual cross-border movement of millions of people and ships, it is also plagued by violence, crime, and poverty. It's interesting to note that the nations' defence and military strategists came up with a phrase that would be acceptable to all parties: "maritime areas of common concern". This was due to the present practical and political challenges in determining shared borders.⁸ The three nations established a TCA in 2017 and into 2018 in response to a wave of kidnappings by terrorist organisations in the middle of 2016. This cooperation included maritime and air patrols as well as the establishment of OPCEN in each nation. In order to fight such situations, the security agencies and navies of the different nations in the region mentioned have taken a

⁸ Raymond Jose G. Quilop, "Trilateral Co-operation by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines: Temper Expectations", *Global Asia*, vol. 13 no. 1, March (2018), accessed 10 October 2023, https://www.globalasia.org/v13no1/feature/trilateral-co-operation-by-indonesia-malaysia-and-the-philippines-temper-expectations_raymond-jose-g-quilop.

number of steps, such as coordinating patrols in designated regions through established bilateral or multilateral exercises.

Other multi-cooperation frameworks, which involved various OPCENs in SEA presently the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP). Hence, the plan of implementing TCA itself is to follow in the footsteps of the effective MSP, which decreased instances of piracy and maritime robbery in those seas.⁹ The MSP's success in combating piracy and sea robbery can be seen by the Lloyd's Joint War Risk Committee's decision to drop the classification of the Malacca Strait as a "war-risk area" in 2006, following the MSP members' launch of sea and air patrols in 2004 and 2005 respectively.¹⁰

The tri-border area between Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippines has a long history of maritime violence and piracy and is still known as a piracy hot spot in SEA.¹¹ This reputation is, however, not based on the number of attacks listed in international statistics published by organisations such as the IMB-PRC. Indeed, attacks on larger vessels rarely take place in the waters between Sabah and the southern Philippines, even though petty thefts from larger vessels occur in some ports located in the area. Most pirate attacks in these waters target small vessels such as fishing boats, transport vessels and small passenger ships. These attacks are often violent and are sometimes motivated by political rather than private agendas. Moreover, attacks on vessels are only one type of piratical activity prevalent in this area, with raids on towns and offshore businesses conducted by armed men traveling in boats a frequent security concern in Sabah.

Table 1. Established Cooperation in SEA

Established Cooperation in SEA	Background	ASEAN Participant	Non-ASEAN Participant
MSP	Co-operative measures to ensure the security of the straits started in 2004.	Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand	Japan and US

⁹ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines Consider Expanding Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols", *The Diplomat* (2022), accessed 17 September 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/indonesia-malaysia-philippines-consider-expanding-sulu-sea-trilateral-patrols/>.

¹⁰ "Fact Sheet: The Malacca Straits Patrol", *Singapore Government Agency Website*, last modified 21 April 2015, <https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2016/april/2016apr21-news-releases-00134/>.

¹¹ Zam Yusa, "Dangerous Waters: Maritime Crime in the Sulu Sea," *The Diplomat* (2020), accessed September 28, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/dangerous-waters-maritime-crime-in-the-sulu-sea/>.

IFC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inaugurated in April 2009. • Aims to facilitate information sharing and collaboration between its partners to enhance MARSEC. • Providing actionable information to cue responses by regional and international navies, coast guards and other maritime agencies to deal with the full range of MARSEC threats and incidents. 	All ASEAN (except only Laos not sending ILO however involved via OPCEN linkages)	Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, New Zealand, Peru, Republic of Korea, UK and US
TCA	Newly cooperative measures established in 2017 due to spike numbers of kidnapping incidents in the area. Mirror the MSP framework	Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines Singapore and Brunei (observers)	-

Presently, there are several well-known organisations that collect and publicly disseminate statistics on piracy and sea robbery incidents in SEA, namely IMB-PRC in Kuala Lumpur, ReCAAP-ISC in Singapore and IFC in Changi Naval Base (CNB), Singapore. The global piracy and armed robbery numbers decreased in 2022. Its latest annual report shows a 13% drop in overall attacks in 2022 compared to 2021. In SEA, 84 incidents were recorded in 2022, slightly higher than 2021 (82 incidents) and the Singapore Strait remains Asia's major source of concern.¹² Nevertheless, on the positive side, no incidents of piracy, sea robbery or even kidnapping for ransom (KFR) have been reported from the Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Seas region since January 2020. This is also supported with the information shared by Malaysia ILO in IFC Singapore, according to IFC Annual Report 2022 and as of September 2023, no incidents related to theft, robbery and piracy at sea (TRAPS) were reported occurred in the area of Eastern Sabah and Sulu Celebes Seas.¹³ Therefore, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) has downgraded the related threat level in the area from “Potentially High” to “Moderate” which indicates that the threat or such incidents are possible to occur but are relatively less severe in nature.¹⁴

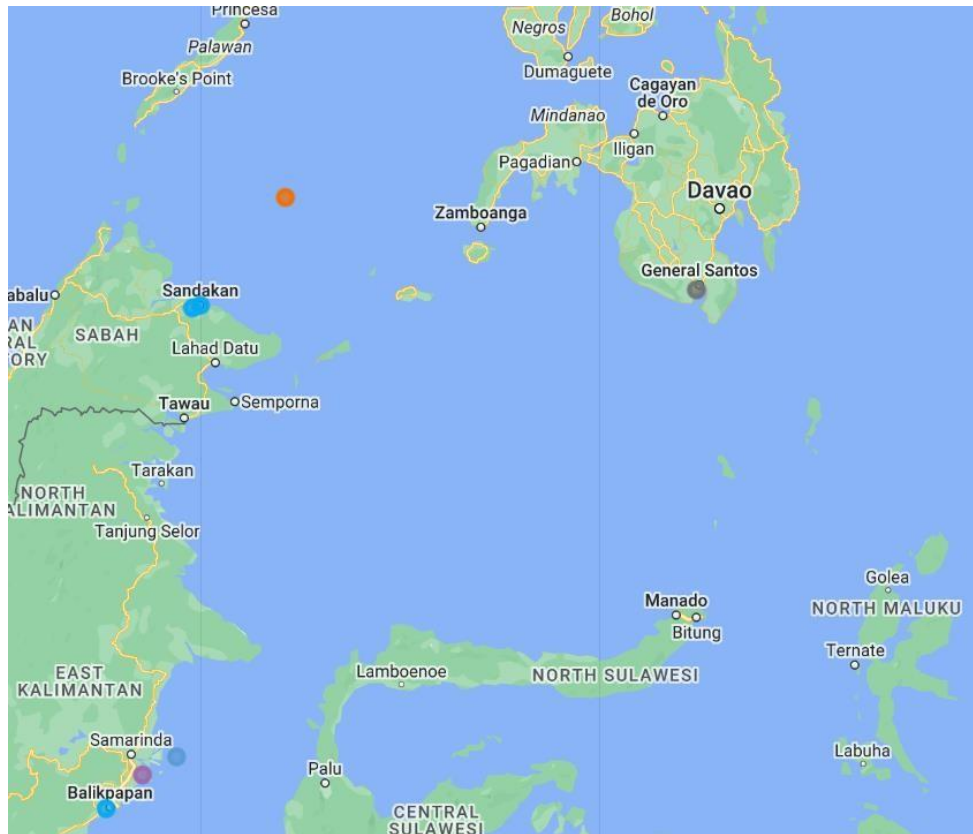
Figure 1. IFC Area of Interest (AOI) Map in the Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Seas 2022-2023¹⁵

¹² Annual Report 2022. Information Fusion Centre (IFC, 2022) 8-12.

¹³ Annual Report 2022. Information Fusion Centre (IFC, 2022) 46-47.

¹⁴ Update of ReCAAP-ISC Advisory - Cases of Abduction of Crew from Ships in the Sulu-Celebes Seas. (ReCAAP- ISC, September 2022) 2.

¹⁵Malaysia ILO in IFC, September 2023



DEFINITION - SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

Piracy or sea robbery or KFR or any other acceptable terms related to criminal activities on seas are an actual threat not just to the maritime industry, but also to the safety of all seafarers and the environment. A successful attack and subsequent kidnapping of the crew might result in considerable financial loss due to delays in shipment delivery, including the possibility of the total loss of cargo value, as well as payment of ransom and related costs namely the insurance rates resulting in higher expenditures for the sector. Piracy has long been defined as a universal crime and under international law, any state may prosecute pirates.¹⁶ In certain perspectives, whether or not acts qualified as piracy in international law depended both on their location and on their nature. According to Article 100 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), it specifies the duty to cooperate in the suppression of piracy. The location refers to whether it is within the territorial waters or high seas, which comprise maritime areas beyond 12 nautical miles.

Nature refers to the act of piracy, which in Article 101 of the UNCLOS is defined to include "any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft".

¹⁶ Carolin Liss and Ted Biggs, *Piracy in Southeast Asia: Trends, Hot Spots and Responses* (Routledge, 2017), 121-122.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDY

OPCEN IN TCA

Traditionally, the OPCEN in TCA has undertaken various activities to enhance MARSEC and cooperation among the participating countries. Firstly, Trilateral Maritime Patrols (TMP). The TCA initiated TMP known as the INDOMALPHI patrols in 2017. These patrols involve coordinated efforts by the navies and coast guards of the three countries to conduct joint patrols in the Sulu-Celebes Sea. The aim is to enhance surveillance, deter criminal activities, and respond to security threats in the region. Secondly, the OPCEN facilitates the exchange of intelligence and information among the participating countries. This includes sharing information on maritime security threats, suspicious activities, and other relevant data. By sharing intelligence, the TCA aims to improve situational awareness and enable timely responses to potential threats.

Next, The TCA conducts joint exercises and training programs to enhance the operational capabilities of the participating countries. These exercises focus on areas such as maritime interdiction, search and rescue, and information sharing and, by practicing together, the TCA aims to improve coordination and interoperability among the forces involved. On the other hand, the OPCEN plays a crucial role in coordinating crisis management and incident response efforts. In case of any maritime security incidents or emergencies, the OPCEN helps assess the situation, mobilise resources, and coordinate the joint response of the participating countries. This ensures a coordinated and effective response to security threats.

HOT PURSUIT IN TCA

The hot-pursuit case is related to addressing piracy and armed robbery against ships in the tri-border area between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. TCA had an existing framework or Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on hot pursuit through joint statement on 22 June 2017 to allow a better and effective coordination between OPCEN.¹⁷ It has improved communication and information exchange among the three OPCENs.

RENDEZVOUS (RV) AT SEA

Under the TMP activities, warships from the participating countries conduct rendezvous (RV) at sea as well as coordinated patrols. These patrols aim to secure the regions as well as

¹⁷ Hadyu Ikrami, "Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines-Cooperation In Combating Maritime Crimes: Lessons From The Malacca Straits Patrol and The Role of ASEAN" (14th ASLI Conference, Manila, Philippines 18 May, 2017).

the trilateral maritime borders for all three countries involved. The patrols have been successful in deterring armed robbery at sea and other maritime threats in the region.¹⁸ Ongoing efforts are being made to further develop and expand the trilateral mechanism, despite the challenges that may arise.

DEPLOYMENT OF LIAISON OFFICER (LO) IN TCA'S OPCEN

The deployment of a TCA LO in the OPCEN plays a crucial role in enhancing communication and coordination among the partner nations. The presence of an LO from each participating country in the OPCEN facilitates effective information sharing and collaboration in various areas, such as maritime patrols and security operations. Overall, the deployment of TCA LO in the OPCEN enhances communication, coordination, and cooperation among the partner nations. It contributes to the effectiveness of maritime patrols, security operations, and other collaborative efforts aimed at ensuring maritime security in the region. Nevertheless, these initiatives are still in the progress.¹⁹

Therefore, some of the effectiveness of deployment of LO in TCA OPCEN may not been achieved. The deployment of LO aims to optimise communication between the partner nations. Each country sends an LO to the OPCEN of the TCA, allowing for direct and efficient communication channels. On the other hand, the liaison officers facilitate the exchange of information and intelligence among the partner nations. They act as a bridge between their respective countries' command centres, ensuring timely and accurate sharing of relevant data, situational updates, and operational plans. The presence of LO in the TCA OPCEN as well strengthens cooperation and coordination among the participating countries. It enables real-time coordination of activities, joint decision-making, and the implementation of effective strategies to address maritime threats and challenges as well as plays a vital role in facilitating seamless communication and coordination during these patrols.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The OPCEN in TCA plays a crucial role by facilitating communication, coordination, and information sharing among the participating countries. The specific role and responsibilities will

¹⁸ Kenneth Yeo Yaoren, Rueben Ananthan Santhana Dass and Jasminder Singh, "Maritime Malice in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines: The Asymmetric Maritime Threat at the Tri-Border Area," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism-The Hague (ICCT)* (2021): 8, <https://dx.doi.org/10.19165/2021.2.01>.

¹⁹"Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Meet Malaysia and Philippine's Defence Minister, Discussion on Maritime Cooperation", *Ministry of Defence Republic Indonesia Website*, last modified 28 March 2022, <https://www.kemhan.go.id/2022/03/08/menhan-prabowo-bertemu-menhan-malaysia-dan-filipina-bicarakan-kerja-sama-keamanan-maritim.html>.

depend on the nature of the organisation or agency running it and the regional challenges it faces. During the Defence Services Asia (DSA) 2022 conference in Kuala Lumpur, three defence ministers discussed potential methods to strengthen parts of the TCA, including the possibility of expanding TCA membership to include other SEA countries.²⁰ It's essential to note that SEA, particularly in the area of Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Seas is a diverse region with varying geopolitical, environmental, and security concerns, so the functions of OPCEN in TCA may differ significantly from one country to another. As of today, although there was no piracy or KFR incidents occurred, the OPCEN linkages and cooperation between trilateral nations still engaged effectively with the success story of current incidents involving 11 Malaysians rescued in waters off Tawi-Tawi.²¹ Overall, we can summarise that the OPCEN in TCA serves as a vital coordination and communication hub, enabling efficient information sharing, joint operations, crisis management and capacity building efforts among Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Table 2. Roles of OPCEN in TCA

Roles of OPCEN in TCA	
Communication Hub	OPCEN serves as a central communication hub for the TCA, ensuring efficient and effective flow of information between Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. It acts as a focal point for exchanging intelligence, operational updates, and situational reports.
Coordination of Joint Operations	OPCEN facilitates the coordination of joint maritime security operations conducted by the three countries. It helps in planning and organising joint patrols, exercises, and other cooperative activities. OPCEN ensures that the operations are well coordinated and synchronized among the participating countries.
Information Sharing	OPCEN enables real-time information sharing among the TCA members. It acts as a platform for sharing intelligence, surveillance data, and other relevant information related to maritime security threats. This information exchange enhances situational awareness and enables timely and informed decision-making.

²⁰ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines Consider Expanding Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols", *The Diplomat* (2022), assessed September 17, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/indonesia-malaysia-phillipines-consider-expanding-sulu-sea-trilateral-patrols/>.

²¹ Julie S. Alipala, "11 Malaysians rescued in waters off Tawi-Tawi," *INQUIRER.NET* (2023), accessed September 17, 2023, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1752333/11-malaysians-rescued-in-waters-off-tawi-tawi>.

Incident Response and Crisis Management	In case of any maritime security incidents or emergencies, OPCEN plays a crucial role in coordinating the response efforts. It helps in assessing the situation, mobilising resources, and coordinating the joint response of the participating countries. OPCEN facilitates crisis management and ensures a coordinated and effective response to any security threats.
Analysis and Assessment	OPCEN conducts analysis and assessment of maritime security challenges in the region. It monitors trends, identifies emerging threats, and provides strategic recommendations for addressing these challenges. OPCEN helps in identifying gaps and areas of improvement in TCA's operations and capabilities.
Capacity Building and Training	OPCEN supports capacity-building initiatives within the framework of TCA. It assists in organising training programs, workshops, and knowledge sharing sessions to enhance the capabilities of the participating countries in maritime security operations. OPCEN facilitates the exchange of best practices and expertise among the member countries.

SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT analysis is used in order to identify, to compare the strength, weaknesses, opportunity and threats of TCA. In this study, the term challenges is to be used to replace the word threats. Overall, TCA has strengths in enhancing MARSEC, promoting cooperation, and adopting a holistic approach. However, it also faces challenges related to the archipelagic terrain and resource constraints. TCA provides opportunities for improved surveillance and intelligence sharing, as well as the potential for strengthened regional cooperation. It should be mindful of the evolving security landscape and geopolitical tensions to ensure its continued effectiveness. The SWOT analysis for TCA can be summarised as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. SWOT Analysis for TCA

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced MARSEC: TCA has strengthened the maritime security capabilities of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines by conducting joint maritime and air patrols. This has helped in deterring and responding to maritime security threats in the region. • Cooperation and Coordination: TCA promotes cooperation and coordination among the three countries, facilitating information sharing, intelligence exchange, and capacity building. This collaborative approach enhances the effectiveness of maritime enforcement efforts. • Holistic Approach: TCA emphasises a holistic and comprehensive approach to address maritime security challenges. By considering various aspects such as surveillance, deterrence, and response capabilities, it provides a well-rounded strategy to combat threats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archipelagic Terrain Challenges: The archipelagic terrain in the region poses challenges for locating and apprehending individuals involved in security threats. TCA aims to overcome these challenges, but the complex geography can still be a limitation in some cases. • Resource Constraints: Limited resources and funding may impact the full implementation of TCA. Adequate allocation of resources is crucial to ensure the sustained effectiveness of joint patrols and other cooperative activities.
Opportunities	Threat (Challenges)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology: TCA may look in the use of Sense- Making Tools by IFC. • Full-Spectrum Capacity Building: Initiate or Expand Dialogues on Cross Domain Awareness and Capacity Building Measures (CBM). • Enhanced Surveillance and Intelligence: TCA provide an opportunity to improve surveillance, intelligence gathering, and sharing mechanisms. By leveraging advanced technologies and information networks, the three countries can enhance their situational awareness and response capabilities. • Strengthened Regional Cooperation: The success of TCA can serve as a model for other countries in the region to establish similar cooperative arrangements. This can lead to broader regional cooperation in addressing maritime security challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolving Security Landscape: The security landscape in the maritime areas of common concern is dynamic and constantly evolving. New threats and challenges may emerge, requiring TCA to adapt and adjust its strategies accordingly. • Geopolitical Tensions: Geopolitical tensions in the region can impact the effectiveness of TCA. It is important for the participating countries to maintain strong diplomatic relations and address any potential conflicts that may arise.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Will there be any opportunity for policy recommendations in the future? It is fair to mention that TCA itself is limited to these trilateral nations, and such involvement of any other parties is not to be entertained.

According to study by Victor Huang, US Naval War College, in his paper entitled “Building MARSEC in SEA: Outsiders Not Welcome?”, he mentioned that, “such efforts as these have no impact on foreign-power rivalries or international law, and they demonstrate the ability of the littoral states to police their own waters and airspace under initiatives limited in scope and purpose”.²² While according to Rahul Mishra, a senior lecturer at the Asia – Europe Institute at the University of Malaya, Malaysia, where he heads the European studies program, he mentioned that, “amid debate on initiatives such as the Quad and AUKUS, Malaysia and Indonesia are looking for alternative security frameworks based on cooperative principles in line with ASEAN’s aversion to notions of collective security”.²³ By and large, it is the possibility for other regional power to collaborate by using the concept of “crawl, walk and run”. This may be the biggest challenges. On the other hand, these would include the initiatives to enhance the relationship in order to grows over the year from discussion or meeting, sending an observer, involvement of assets in coordinated patrol and exercise so called and perhaps, to re-look into policy for recommendations. It may or may not happen as it definitely will take times when we are looking into opportunity of other regional power, specifically to shape a new mechanism or framework or perhaps, “TCA Plus” might be other possibilities of a new MARSEC outlook in the future, particularly in the area of Eastern Sabah and Sulu-Celebes Sea.

According to the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) 2023, Australia is looking forward to supporting regional initiatives in order to promote information sharing and cooperation on maritime security. On the other hand, Australia may offer technical assistance to build capacity and training within countries in the region in order to help them improve their maritime security capabilities and working together with countries in the region to develop common operating procedures for information sharing and cooperation on maritime security. By working together,

²² Victor Huang, “Building Maritime Security in Southeast Asia: Outsiders Not Welcome?” *Naval War College Review* vol. 61 no. 1 (2008): 98-99.

²³ Rahul Mishra and Peter Brian M. Wang, “Middle-power security agreements help maintain regional maritime order”, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) The Strategist* (2022), accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/middle-power-security-agreements-help-maintain-regional-maritime-order/>.

Australia and other countries in the region can improve maritime security in SEA and ensure the safety and security of the region's sea lanes. As of today, looking at the Australian well-established bilateral relationship between the three nations, there might be a possibility to explore for a new framework and eventually it might become a new MARSEC outlook.

WHO TO LEAD?

In order to reflect the “So what?” and “Why does this study matter to your country?” component of this research – it appears that regional and multilateral cooperation is necessary to address shared threats today. To note, Malaysia faces ‘non-traditional’ security threats, which can potentially undermine the country’s stability. Such threats normally emanate from non-state actors. In connection to this, piracy/sea robbery issues are now confronting Malaysia which are impacting the economy, particularly the maritime community’s activities like fishery, tourism as well as the flow of sea-trade and shipping insurance. In fact, “Would that be something that Malaysia needs to lead on?” Hence, it will reflect to the policy itself and according to Foreign Policy of the New Malaysia 2019, Malaysia will also consider very seriously becoming party to international frameworks that will help the country address these problems more effectively.

Therefore, it is imperative for Malaysia to step up an effort in order to cooperate with relevant international partners to address these problems. Even while there are many challenges that limit our capacity to form alliances and improve collaboration, we must let them act as obstacles to us from establishing the foundations of operational success needed to work together at sea. We will always have more in common with one another as sailors and mariners than with those who have never experienced life at sea. Every chance we have, we must cooperate to build a shared understanding that will enable us to collaborate easily throughout the actual operations our national leaders provide us. Our capacity to succeed will be determined by the proficiency of each individual unit, common practices, integrated technology, and comprehensive interoperability training we have already carried out, which will be supported by the unifying message of our leaders.

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