



Enhancing Regional Cooperation in Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Piracy and armed robbery is one of the issues closely related to maritime security and in order to tackle this issue, regional cooperation is required as may be the case with other maritime security issues. The ReCAAP is the first regional government to government set up to suppress and combat piracy and armed robbery. Our experiences and achievements over the last 10 years since its inception will be able to provide with one of the good grounds for you to discuss the relevant maritime security and cooperation issues in the region.

This is the scope of my presentation as shown. I would first like to elaborate briefly what we do in accordance to the three key pillars, how the recent trend of piracy and armed robbery situation in the region, in particular the recent abduction of crew for ransom in the Sulu Sea and off Sabah; and lastly our future roadmap.

Way back in the 1990s, there were concerns in piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore – the number of incidents once hit over 200 in the early 2000s. These threatened the maritime navigation, safety of crew, risks in transport of cargo and energy supplies. As a result, there were economic disruptions, loss of life and rise in operating cost, among others. As you are aware, more than 30% of the world trade and half of the world's oil shipments pass through the Straits of Malacca & Singapore. Safe use of sea-lanes is essential to the economic well-being of the countries who are dependent on sea commerce for energy, trade and supplies.

Littoral states responded to the situation on individual and bilateral basis, such as enhancing maritime patrol by individual states and through bilateral arrangements between neighbouring states. Against the escalating situation in the region, the countries in the region discussed about how to tackle the issue from the regional perspective at many regional forums.

The concept of a regional cooperation was first proposed by the former Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi in November 2001, and the ReCAAP Agreement was first drafted in 2002 by the 10 ASEAN countries, with Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea and



Sri Lanka. Eventually on **4 Sep 2006** the Agreement came into force and the ReCAAP ISC was launched on **29 Nov 2006**. To date, we have a total of 20 member countries. Over the past 10 years, we have also established formal cooperation with the industry such as the IMO and several other private organisations, including ASF, BIMCO and INTERTANKO as well as enforcement agencies like the INTERPOL and Information Fusion Centre.

THREE PILLAR OF ReCAAP

The three key pillars of the ReCAAP are Information Sharing, Capacity Building and Cooperative Arrangement. Sharing information on the incidents of piracy and armed robbery is to help improve operational cooperation when responding to incidents. The ReCAAP ISC undertakes capacity building initiatives that enhance the ability of Contracting Parties to respond to piracy and armed robbery. As for Cooperative Arrangements, a variety of organisations have formalised cooperation with the ReCAAP ISC in sharing information, or capacity building programmes.

The first key pillar is Information Sharing, the Objectives are to promote situation awareness, share BMPs, chart trends and patterns and provide analysis for guidance/recommendations. Our primary source of information are the ReCAAP Focal Points and others like Flag & Coastal State, Regional authorities, Shipping communities and our partner organisations. Our information is shared through Periodical Reports, Incident Updates, Incident Alerts, Guidebook and Mobile Apps.

Under the ReCAAP Agreement, each ReCAAP Contracting Party designates a Focal Point to be a point of contact for the ReCAAP ISC. Focal Points have a few roles, these include (1) To manage piracy and armed robbery incidents within its territorial waters and within its jurisdiction; (2) To act as the point of information exchange among the ReCAAP Focal Points and with the ReCAAP ISC; (3) To facilitate its country's law enforcement



investigations; and (4) To co-ordinate surveillance and enforcement for piracy and armed robbery with its neighbouring Focal Points.

The ReCAAP Focal Point network integrates with all 21 Focal Points and one of the main roles of Focal Point is to work closely with law enforcement agencies and the maritime industry. For the reporting of incidents in Asia, you may know that the victim ship is advised to report the incident immediately to the RCC (Rescue Coordination Centre) of the nearest Coastal State so that immediate response could be coordinated by the relevant security forces. The Rescue Coordination Centre would also relay the information to the ReCAAP Focal Point responsible. In addition, the owner and operator are advised to report the incident to the nearest ReCAAP Focal Point directly which in turn informs ReCAAP ISC through an incident report. The multiple source of information sharing not only validates the data but also fills in some details which may have been omitted by either of the sources. The ReCAAP ISC on timely receipt of this reliable information adds value to it in terms of trends and analysis and issues an Incident Alert to all the stakeholders including shipping industry.

10 YEAR TREND

To provide some perspective on incidents of piracy and armed robbery, the ReCAAP ISC evaluates the significance of each incident in terms of two factors. First is the level of violence which includes the type of weapons used, the treatment of crew and the number of pirates or robbers involved. The second is the economic factor which takes into consideration the type of the property taken from the ship. Cases of theft of cash or personal effects are generally less significant incidents compared to cases where the entire ship is hijacked either for the cargo onboard or theft of the vessel. Using these indicators, the ReCAAP ISC classifies all incidents into one of the four categories to determine their overall significance with CATEGORY 1 as VERY SIGNIFICANT, CATEGORY 2 as MODERATELY SIGNIFICANT, CATEGORY 3 as LESS SIGNIFICANT and PETTY THEFT as LEAST SIGNIFICANT. The ReCAAP ISC has also launched a Mobile Apps which the key features



include list of Focal Point details, alerts/report, send spot report and send photographs. This Mobile Apps would facilitate quick information sharing and reporting by industry.

The ReCAAP ISC frequently encountered from the shipping industry victim not reporting incidents of piracy and armed robbery. While we fully understand the various reasons for not reporting the incident that could involve face saving, economic consideration, safety consideration, time and effort consideration; but we would like to emphasise that by timely reporting it will trigger the enforcement processes that draws law enforcement agencies attention to crime which would allow them to better channel resources and justify for build-up of their capacity. More importantly, the timely reporting would provide alert and warning to seafarers for better risk assessment thereby implementing the appropriate protective measures. By not reporting would certainly result in more incidents that would escalate the situation.

The second pillar of the ReCAAP is “Capacity Building”. Even though the system regarding information sharing is established, whether it effectively functions or not is heavily dependent upon those who operate the system. Therefore, with a view to enhancing the ability of officials concerned of the Contracting Parties to respond to incidents of piracy and armed robbery, the ReCAAP ISC has conducted various Capacity Building activities. For example, once every year, we hold a meeting for senior officers of Focal Points and Capacity Building Workshop for operational staffs of Focal Points respectively. Another initiative which started 3 years ago was the cluster meeting. This is purported for contributing to the smooth flow of information in three entities, taking the occasion of one meeting, namely, among various government agencies concerned of a Contracting Party, between the government agencies and the private industries in the country, and among Focal Points of neighbouring countries.

Third pillar of the ReCAAP is Co-operative Arrangement. ReCAAP ISC’s nature as an inclusive International Organisation creates the opportunity for it to position itself as a specialist agency for facilitating cooperative arrangements not only amongst Contracting



Parties, but also with governmental and non-governmental organisations that have an interest in combating piracy and armed robbery in Asia. As no two organisations or agencies are identical in their quest to counter piracy and armed robbery against ships, the Centre could amongst Contracting Parties and partner organisations explore projects, in which the ReCAAP ISC taps the knowledge and experiences of Contracting Parties and other entities which share the ReCAAP ISC's objectives.

SITUATION UPDATE

Let me now move to the recent trends of the incidents of piracy and armed robbery in our region. First, the general trends of the incidents in our region for the past ten years. The number of incidents fluctuates over the years but it is lowest in 2016 with year-on-year comparison. Majority of incidents are CAT 4 incidents with more CAT 1 incidents during the last three years.

There has been an improvement in the situation of piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia in 2016; with a 65% decrease in number compared to the same period in 2015. A total of 59 incidents were reported during January-September 2016 compared to 169 reported during January-September 2015. The decline in the number of incidents reported during January-June 2016 was most evident in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS). Other improvements were reported at ports and anchorages in Bangladesh and Vietnam. The number of incidents involving hijacking of tankers for oil cargo theft continues to decrease, with two reported during January-September 2016 compared to 12 incidents during the same period in 2015. However, of concern were seven CAT 1 incidents involving the abduction of crew for ransom off eastern Sabah and southern Philippines; and two CAT 1 incidents involving the hijacking of ships for oil cargo theft.

The most recent oil siphoning incident was the hijacking of *Ever Ocean Silk* towing *Ever Giant* that occurred on 25 Oct 16 where more than 10 perpetrators boarded approximately 60



nm north of Bintulu, Sarawak, East Malaysia. They came in a speed boat armed with parangs took away ship's communication and navigation equipment as well as crew's personal belongings; and siphoned 2,499 metric tons of palm oil from barge. Owner reported incident to Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), and the tug and barge were located next day off Tanjung Kidurong, Sarawak. The crew was safe on board and Investigation is still ongoing. Although there were high number of incidents occurred in 2015, there were also several successful arrest made. In 2015, there were arrests made by the regional law enforcement agencies where the perpetrators were involved in the incidents of Rehobot and Sun Birdie in Jan 15, Orkim Harmony in Jun 15 and Joaquim in Aug 15.

The more concern in the region now is the incidents occurred off eastern Sabah and southern Philippines. The ReCAAP ISC is concerned with the spate of incidents involving the abduction of crew from ships while underway in this area which occurred since March 2016. There have been eight incidents from Mar to Oct 2016 and two special reports have been published by the ReCAAP ISC to provide situation awareness and advisory the shipping industry. Generally, the modus operandi of the perpetrators involved in the eight incidents was fairly similar, the target was the crew, and not the ships nor its cargo. In two incidents (*Brahma 12* and *Serudong 3*), the tug boats were abandoned after the perpetrators abducted the entire crew.

The latest incident in Oct 16, was the incident involved a Korea flagged vessel Dong Bang Giant 2 which was boarded by six armed perpetrators on 20 Oct 16 southeast of Sibutu Island, Philippines. The perpetrators abducted the Korean ship captain and Filipino 2nd Officer, the rest of remaining crew was safe on board. The ReCAAP ISC has worked closely with the Korea and Philippine Focal Points in immediate sharing of this incident to all Focal Points, Information Fusion Centre, Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM), MMEA and Indonesia Coast Guard (BAKAMLA). The Philippine Coast Guard also directed the Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao (CGDSWM) to take immediate action while Korea Focal Point worked with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who is monitoring the situation. The ReCAAP ISC raised Incident Update to provide Situation awareness &



development, reiterate advisory to shipping industry and continue to monitor development. More importantly, advisory was issued to ship masters and crew to exercise extra vigilance while transiting the area; and report to the Operation Centre in the Philippine Coast Guard District Southwestern Mindanao for monitoring and immediate response in any eventualities.

FUTURE DIRECTION

In conclusion, ReCAAP has gone a long way since its implementation ten years ago and has proven as a good model of a regional government to government cooperation to address the problem of piracy and armed robbery through information sharing, capacity building and cooperative arrangement. The ReCAAP ISC would remain dynamic to counter the problem through close cooperation with contracting parties with support from the maritime industry. Moving forward, the ReCAAP ISC has charted a Roadmap for the ReCAAP ISC to become a “Centre of Excellence” for information sharing by 2020. The key components in the Roadmap includes Improving Information Sharing Structure, Strengthening rapport with maritime community, Cooperation with law enforcement agency, Expansion of memberships, Cooperation with other stakeholders and Increasing profiling effort and publicity for co-branding.
