ISSUE 6 / MAY 2024

BLUE SECURITY

A MARITIME AFFAIRS SERIES

Coordinating for maritime security: Southeast Asia's evolving institutions
I Gusti Bagus Dharma Agastia, Kasira Cheeppensook, Scott Edwards, Amparo Pamela Fabe

BLUE SECURITY
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The Blue Security Program engages with and facilitates high quality research on issues of critical maritime security across the Indo-Pacific. Bringing together leading regional experts in politics, international law and strategic studies, Blue Security focuses on three key pillars of maritime security: order, law and power.

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Blue Security receives funding support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia.

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YCAPS

The research for this paper was undertaken under the umbrella of the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies (YCAPS). YCAPS is a non-profit organization that promotes the study of strategic, diplomatic, and legal issues affecting the Asia-Pacific Region. YCAPS builds networks between individuals, promotes dialogue, provides world-class educational opportunities, and enables professional mentorship. YCAPS researchers provide fresh perspectives and unique evidence to support senior policy members. Its in-house researchers are particularly strong in the areas of security cooperation, alliance management, and foreign policy analysis and its network holds expertise in the full spectrum of Asia-Pacific international issues.

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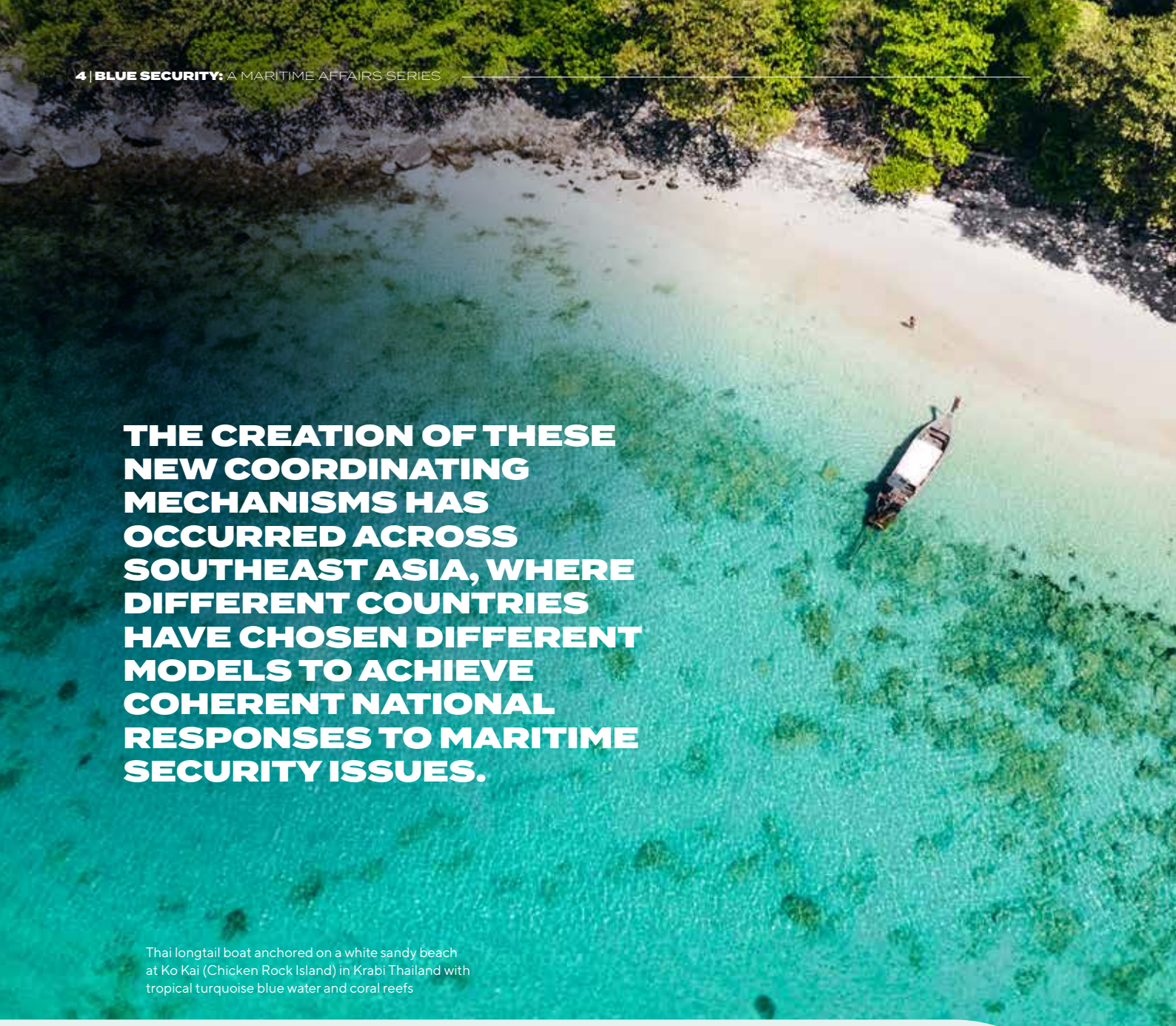


THE CREATION OF THESE NEW COORDINATING MECHANISMS HAS OCCURRED ACROSS SOUTHEAST ASIA, WHERE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES HAVE CHOSEN DIFFERENT MODELS TO ACHIEVE COHERENT NATIONAL RESPONSES TO MARITIME SECURITY ISSUES.

Thai longtail boat anchored on a white sandy beach at Ko Kai (Chicken Rock Island) in Krabi Thailand with tropical turquoise blue water and coral reefs

INTRODUCTION

The complexities of maritime security have led to the global proliferation of domestic structures that aim to facilitate whole-of-government responses through the coordination of existing ministries, departments, and agencies responsible. The creation of these new coordinating mechanisms has occurred across Southeast Asia, where different countries have chosen different models to achieve coherent national responses to maritime security issues. While these have had varying degrees of success, they have yet to be analysed or compared as distinct units. This lack of focus is especially surprising given the renewed effort to understand how different actors are responding to maritime security in the region.

This paper provides a comprehensive and comparative mapping of Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (BAKAMLA), Thailand's Maritime Enforcement Command Centre (Thai-MECC), and the Philippines' National Coast Watch Centre (NCWC). It explores the implications of their structures for their state's maritime security governance and identifies promising practices and ongoing obstacles to coordination. It finds that each structure differs significantly in that they are grounded in different regulatory bases, have different degrees of independence from existing agencies, or have reached different degrees of institutionalisation. Despite overall variation, the findings highlight that they face common challenges to their legitimacy, authority, and problem-solving potential. These common challenges – along with some promising practices enacted to mitigate them – suggest that while there is no one-size fits all solution to maritime security coordination, there are several shared considerations to be made as they continue to evolve.

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S MARITIME SECURITY AGENDA

Maritime security is a vital concern for Southeast Asia. Strategically connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Southeast Asia is one of busiest maritime areas in the world in terms of global trade, economic exploitation, food security, and environmental biodiversity. The region's maritime security agenda is increasingly broad and complex. While there is an ongoing focus on the so-called 'hard' security and defence issues, threats posed to infrastructure and shipping from piracy and terrorism saw a realigning of the maritime security agenda in the early twenty-first century.[1] With piracy largely suppressed, the emphasis is now largely on issues such as illegal migration and human trafficking; the illicit movement of goods; and Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing.[2]

Southeast Asia has become a focal point for these various maritime insecurities. While an in-depth analysis of each issue is not possible in this paper, Southeast Asian states are facing increasingly varied and multi-faceted threats.[3] Each issue impacts sea users and interested parties in different ways, including industries dependent on them for profit, coastal communities dependent on them for livelihoods, and nation states that require secure oceans for broader national goals such as peace and prosperity.[4]

Much of the global attention remains on the ongoing inter-state tensions in the South China Sea,[5] but there are also intra-ASEAN maritime boundary disputes that remain unresolved.[6] These include ongoing disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia and Malaysia and the Philippines – two of the states under study in this paper.[7] Thailand has also seen overlapping claims in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea, though these are largely resolved.[8]

Both Indonesia and the Philippines have also consistently dealt with piracy and armed robbery at sea. While much of the violence has been suppressed, armed robbery at sea remains a consistent threat to regional and global circulation in the Malacca and Singapore Straits, as well as the Sulu and Celebes Seas.[9] Some cases have been linked to terrorist activities, and more direct forms of maritime terrorism has occurred in the Philippines through direct attacks on civilian shipping.[10] The vulnerabilities of other infrastructures such as ports and submarine cables to different threats remains of significance.[11] Threats to shipping and infrastructure are also no longer restricted to physical attacks, as cyber-attacks are emerging as a key consideration in the region.[12]

Criminals and other illicit actors continue to use regional routes of circulation to move goods illegally to and across borders. The closure of land borders saw drug trafficking, for example, increasingly rely on the Western Maritime Route to transfer methamphetamine from Myanmar along the Andaman Sea, off of the coast of Thailand and the Strait of Malacca, to reach other markets across the region.[13] The 2023 Maritime Information Sharing Exercise in Singapore also spotlighted a growing regional trend of dark shipping off the coasts of Malaysia and Indonesia, where ships turn off their AIS to avoid detection so that they can trade in sanctioned oil.

Whether as a destination, such as the movement of Rohingya refugees to Indonesia and Malaysia, a transit point for other actors to move onwards to Australia, or workers from Indonesia and the Philippines travelling to Malaysia, different groups also continue to travel illegally across regional maritime boundaries for both humanitarian and economic purposes.[14] Human trafficking also takes place on the seas themselves, with forced labour and problematic labour practices endemic in the Thai fishing industry, in particular.[15]

Highlighting the intersections between threats, forced labour is often linked to IUU fishing,[16] which itself has become an increased threat to Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.[17] While much of this is undertaken by non-state actors, the Philippines in particular is facing an intersection of IUU fishing and inter-state tensions as China mobilises its so-called maritime militia within the

Philippines' waters. Additionally, while the impact of IUU fishing on the marine environment has gained the most attention, other forms of environmental degradation are having a worsening impact. The effects of climate change are having severe impacts on the oceans and can intensify the occurrence of maritime criminality[18] or reduce jurisdictional clarity.[19] On a more localized level, various forms of pollution – whether oil pollution from accidents or plastics pollution from illicit dumping – degrade environments and exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities. Southeast Asia's marine plastics pollution rates are among the highest in the world.[20]

The breadth of threats has led to a renewed effort at strategizing responses – a marked recognition of complexity. While only three regional states—the Philippines, Cambodia and Thailand—have some form of distinct national maritime strategy, maritime security increasingly features in broader acts, regulations, national security policies and/or defence white papers. ASEAN has released a Maritime Outlook which, while criticized,[21] reflects that the complexity of governance requires a degree of stocktaking due to the propagation of responses.[22]

MARITIME SECURITY COORDINATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The importance of Southeast Asia's oceans and the inter-linkages between a broad array of threats sets out the need to secure these spaces in a holistic whole-of-government manner. The issues constituting maritime security are not only cross-sectoral, but they are also liminal, taking place across the land/sea boundary. Securing Southeast Asia's seas implicates a range of governmental institutions and departments in the multi-agency, whole-of-government response required. Due to the nature of maritime security, such whole-of-government response requires the coordination and cooperation of not only traditional maritime security actors such as navies, coastguards, and port authorities, but also those terrestrially focused such as police services, labour agencies, and environmental agencies, as well as their respective ministries and departments. Essentially, what has resulted is the need to organise different actors (some of whom have different understandings and priorities) towards the complex goal of securing diverse stakeholders from a host of inter-connected threats.

In Southeast Asia, the relatively new architectures established include Indonesia's BAKAMLA, the Philippines' NCWC, Thailand's MECC, Singapore's Maritime Crisis Centre (MCC), and Brunei's National Maritime Coordination Centre (NMCC). Malaysia, since 2017, has also embarked on a process of establishing a potential Maritime Sovereignty and Security Operating Centre, and established a more ad-hoc National Task Force to secure its maritime borders in response to COVID-19.[23] While some of these are also responsible for traditional coast guard functions in and of themselves, including maritime law enforcement and search & rescue, they also address inter-agency coordination.

Enhancing coordination and ensuring interoperability between these often diverse ministries, departments, and agencies is essential. It allows states to minimise duplication in maritime security activities, different stakeholders to construct a common understanding and minimise contradiction about maritime security itself, and states to overcome resource constraints through the pooling of limited resources and capabilities; and it provides a focal point for international maritime security cooperation. With the multi-faceted nature of maritime security, furthermore, individual agencies are not well-suited to respond to all dimensions of a maritime security issue.

While there is greater focus on these individual agencies,[24] the analysis of these coordination bodies remains relatively superficial.[25] Where more literature is emerging – as is the case of BAKAMLA – it focuses more on their coastguard functions.[26] This omission in maritime security analysis is problematic because the function of coordination differs markedly from other functions. The process of coordinating different agencies and ministries, through a centralized institution and bureaucracy, implies distinct political, social, and material challenges. Promising practices of coordination also markedly differ from promising practices of maritime law enforcement, as different capacities and capabilities are required. This paper will now turn to analysing three of the coordination structures with an emphasis on their coordination function.

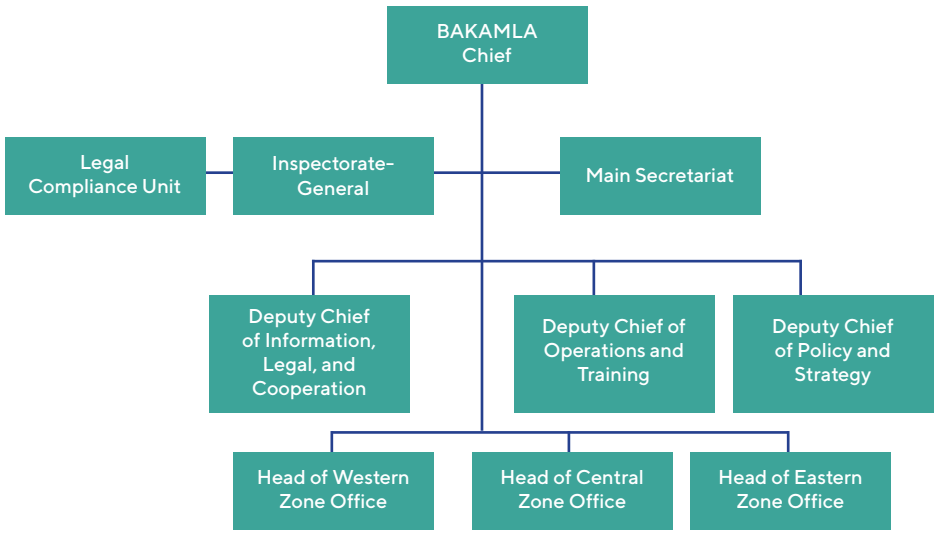
THE INDONESIAN MARITIME SECURITY AGENCY (BAKAMLA)

The Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (*Badan Keamanan Laut Republik Indonesia* – BAKAMLA) was established in 2014 to become a more effective coordinator of Indonesia's complicated domestic maritime security agencies. It replaced the previous Maritime Security Coordinating Board (*Badan Koordinasi Keamanan Laut – BAKORKAMLA)* established in 1972. BAKORKAMLA was replaced due to perceptions of its mandate as weak – able to share information but not having command authority. BAKAMLA additionally serves as Indonesia's de facto coast guard.

BAKAMLA is a non-ministerial organisation that reports directly to the President via the Coordinating Minister for Political, Security, and Legal Affairs (*Kemenkopolhukam*).

Though the agency is primarily civilian in nature, it is headed by a Navy Vice Admiral (*Laksamana Madya*). BAKAMLA's Chief may then recommend deputies to the President and *Kemenkopolhukan.* This has resulted in BAKAMLA's strategic leadership roles being primarily represented by the Navy, with some minor representation of civilians and the Police. BAKAMLA's Chief oversees a main secretariat with three deputies: Information, Legal, and Cooperation; Operations and Training; and Policy and Strategy. BAKAMLA has three areas of operations across the country: the west maritime zone, headquartered in Batam; the central maritime zone, headquartered in Manado; and the east maritime zone, headquartered in Ambon.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS

BAKAMLA was created by Law no. 32/2014 on Maritime Affairs (hereafter 2014 Maritime Affairs Law).[27] The functions of the agency, stipulated in Art. 62, are as follows:

1	Formulate national policy on maritime security and safety.
2	Operate the maritime early warning system.
3	Conduct operations pertaining to safety, surveillance, prevention, and enforcement of relevant maritime laws.
4	Coordinate and monitor sea patrols.
5	Provide technical and operational assistance for relevant agencies.
6	Provide assistance in search and rescue operations.
7	Conduct other duties related to national defence and security.

Additional duties were specified in Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah*; PP) no. 13/2022. The expected outcomes are listed in Presidential Regulation no. 59/2023 (or the National Policy on Safety, Security, and Law Enforcement in Indonesian Waters):

1	[BAKAMLA] Coordinates relevant ministries and agencies in international forums related to maritime security and law enforcement.
2	Formulates, in coordination with other agencies, a national patrol plan encompassing joint, coordinated, and independent patrols.
3	Conducts joint training with relevant agencies every six months.

Indonesia coast guard a.k.a bakamla RI logo on the ship

ACTIVITIES

Coordination remains a core function of BAKAMLA, and additional duties stipulated in the 2014 Maritime Affairs Law and PP 13/2022 essentially position it as an agency responsible for "coordination-plus". This includes interagency capacity-building, conducting its own patrols, and acting as a focal point for international coast guard cooperation. BAKAMLA's coordinating function is best exemplified in its routine interagency coordination meetings.

A major milestone in promoting domestic coordination and improving maritime domain awareness is the establishment of the Indonesian Maritime Information Centre (IMIC) as part of BAKAMLA's duties to manage a national maritime database. The IMIC provides a publicly accessible database of "maritime vulnerabilities" (*kerentanan maritim*) occurring in Indonesian waters. These vulnerabilities include blue crime (e.g., IUU fishing, trafficking, etc.), in addition to issues Indonesia is particularly vulnerable to, such as fuel siphoning, navigational accidents, and natural disasters.

BAKAMLA has been active in developing international links. As a "trusted partner" of Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs,[28] it has a strong degree of independence when it comes to acting as a focal point for international cooperation. Examples include their efforts to establish an ASEAN Coast Guard Forum and meetings about the South China Sea, as well as their involvement in exercises and visits with their counterparts in other countries.

CAPACITY

In conducting these functions, BAKAMLA is equipped with 32 vessels, which includes a 110m offshore patrol vessel (OPV) which serves as its flagship; three 80m OPVs; six 48m OPVs; and 22 smaller boats including rigid inflatables and catamarans. These armaments are a major upgrade compared to its predecessor, which did not possess its own equipment or armaments.

As of 2022, BAKAMLA has 1,201 personnel. Only 941 personnel are native to BAKAMLA, while the remaining ones are seconded from the Navy (157), Air Force (4), Army (1), National Police (6), and other government agencies. The distribution of BAKAMLA personnel based on area of operations can be seen in the table below.[29]

Operational area	Personnel
BAKAMLA Headquarters, Jakarta	494
Western Zone BAKAMLA Office, Batam	108
Central Zone BAKAMLA Office, North Sulawesi	74
Eastern Zone BAKAMLA Office, Maluku	70
On-board BAKAMLA vessels	455

For FY 2019, BAKAMLA's total budget was around 30 million USD, of which around 10 million USD was allocated for maritime security operations. BAKAMLA's budget saw a sharp increase following the passing of PP no. 13/2022.

In FY 2022, BAKAMLA's final budget reached around 50 million USD, of which around 30 million USD was allocated for maritime security operations.[30] No budgetary increases are expected in FY 2024 except for an 8 percent increase in personnel wages.[31]

SUCCESSES

BAKAMLA has managed to carry out its "coordination-plus" activities as it has received strong degrees of executive support, specifically from the President and his current cabinet. Strong political will has been translated into a budget, which – while it falls far short of the requested IDR 4.3 trillion – is still relatively strong.

Executive support, as well as strong links to other departments such as Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has enabled BAKAMLA to assert their independence from the Indonesian Navy and develop their legitimacy over potential domestic rivals, such as the Ministry of Transportation's Sea and Coast Guard Unit (KPLP) or the navy.

CHALLENGES

A perennial material problem for BAKAMLA is its limited operational funds and assets, which continues to limit its ability to undertake all of its functions.

Beyond material considerations, BAKAMLA has a difficult time coordinating due to a number of issues which speak to its legitimacy and authority. Rather than bringing different actors together, the Indonesian maritime security context remains contested between different actors. In part, this stems from legal challenges that BAKAMLA faces, and which have resulted in its weak position relative to more established maritime security agencies.

This has led BAKAMLA to emphasise its own identity as a coastguard, despite overlap and duplication resulting from regulatory fragmentation. While BAKAMLA is referred to as the Indonesian Coast Guard, the designation lacks a strong legal basis. This can be traced back to the 2008 Navigation Law (Law no. 17/2008 on Navigation), which mandates the creation of a Sea and Coast Guard (SCG). The SCG would answer directly to the President, and a Minister would oversee its daily operations. Unfortunately, the SCG was never properly formed as the necessary implementing regulations were never passed, leading to a legal vacuum. This resulted in a schism between BAKAMLA and KPLP, both of which view themselves as the legitimate coastguard. KPLP views itself as the coastguard as it oversees navigational safety, which is consistent with the mandate of the 2008 Navigation Law. BAKAMLA's claim is based on the more recent 2014 Maritime Affairs Law, which specifically designates BAKAMLA as the main interlocutor for maritime law enforcement in Indonesian waters. However, the absence of a specific implementing regulation weakens the claims of both agencies.

There have been efforts to close the schism between BAKAMLA and KPLP – and improve coordination in general – through regulatory reform. BAKAMLA was formed by mandate of a Presidential Regulation (Peraturan

Presiden), which is weaker than a Government Regulation (Peraturan Pemerintah) in the Indonesian legal structure. Some experts have pointed out that BAKAMLA should, at a minimum, be formed by a Governmental Regulation, as it would provide a stronger legal basis for its jurisdiction and authority.[32] Instead, the government moved to revise the 2014 Maritime Affairs Law, alongside other regulations on maritime security. Since 2021, the Regional Representative Council (DPD) has proposed a revision of the 2014 Maritime Affairs Law to clarify BAKAMLA's role. Furthermore, a draft bill on maritime security (*RUU Keamanan Laut*) had been proposed since 2016. In 2022, the Coordinating Minister for Political, Security, and Legal Affairs, Mahfud MD, stated the draft bill on maritime security would be revised as an omnibus bill. It would amend 24 regulations on maritime security simultaneously, which would strengthen BAKAMLA's position in the maritime security hierarchy, and possibly provide it with investigative authority – something it currently lacks.[33] Both bills, however, have yet to be deliberated by the House of Representatives.

The weak regulatory framework makes it difficult for BAKAMLA to corral the agencies it is supposed to coordinate, many of which are engaged in turf wars over jurisdiction. This is demonstrated in BAKAMLA's inability to effectively coordinate ship inspections at sea. As different agencies have different jurisdictions within ports, territorial seas and contiguous zones, merchant vessels often face multiple stoppages, which interrupt the flow of maritime commerce and impose higher costs.[34] Moreover, BAKAMLA itself has become embroiled in these turf wars, rather than being a neutral coordinator. Twelve different maritime security agencies need to compete for limited resources. Paradoxically, allocating additional duties to BAKAMLA made it yet another agency vying for the state's limited resources.

If BAKAMLA were to become the de facto coast guard as it is currently heading towards, other agencies with similar functions would have to be subsumed under it. In June 2023, the results of an interagency coordination meeting led by the Coordinating Minister of Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Pandjaitan, decided the BAKAMLA and KPLP were to be merged into a single coast guard.[35] A similar proposal involving the merger of BAKAMLA, KPLP, and Marine Police was floated in 2020 by then-BAKAMLA chief, VADM Aan Kurnia, but was met with fierce resistance.[36] So far, details on the planned merger are scarce. However, whether it remains on the government's agenda depends on the upcoming Presidential transition in late 2024.

Contestation can also arise due to the different priorities that exist. Through its coordinating function BAKAMLA is authorised to coordinate patrols with other agencies such as the Navy, MMAF, the National Police, and KPLP. However, even with these provisions, there are simply not enough vessels to reliably patrol Indonesian waters on a regular basis, which can intensify contestation as agencies attempt to prioritise within their sphere rather than work to a coordinated common good. Regulatory revisions, especially the draft omnibus bill, are expected to roll back the operational authority of other agencies (with the primary exceptions being TNI-AL and Police); this would make BAKAMLA a "single door" in preventing blue crime in Indonesian waters. In practice, this would allow civilian agencies to focus on policymaking instead of operating their own vessels, thus solving jurisdictional overlap.[37] Alternatively, BAKAMLA's patrol focus could be roll-backed for the organization to focus exclusively on increasing its authority to coordinate sea patrols in Indonesian waters. This may be practically implemented by attaching BAKAMLA officers to the offices of other maritime security agencies to oversee and direct sea patrols in person. While this would reduce its budgetary burden, this approach may still be met with bureaucratic resistance from the other established agencies, as it could be seen as infringing upon their organisational practices and operational space.

Despite an increasing international footprint, international coordination is scattered among the twelve maritime security-related government agencies, often with overlapping authorities and jurisdiction. As an example, the KPLP, which operates under the Maritime Transportation Directorate of the Ministry of Transportation (*Kemenhub),* is officially empowered to handle matters of coordination and liaison with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). In navy-to-navy interactions, the Indonesian Navy usually serves as the main point of contact; and in blue crime, this role is played by the National Police, Customs, and Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF). Although BAKAMLA spearheaded the recently-established ASEAN Coast Guard Forum, its lack of capacity and authority to corral other maritime security actors means it only serves as a point of contact, with little means to follow through with its programs.

BAKAMLA has been actively working to prove its operational capacity as the main maritime coordinator and relatively newest maritime security agency in Indonesia. So far, it has contributed positive developments to coordination. However, BAKAMLA's effectiveness is severely impeded by its vast mandate, material shortcomings, and shaky legal position.

THAILAND'S MARITIME ENFORCEMENT COMMAND CENTRE

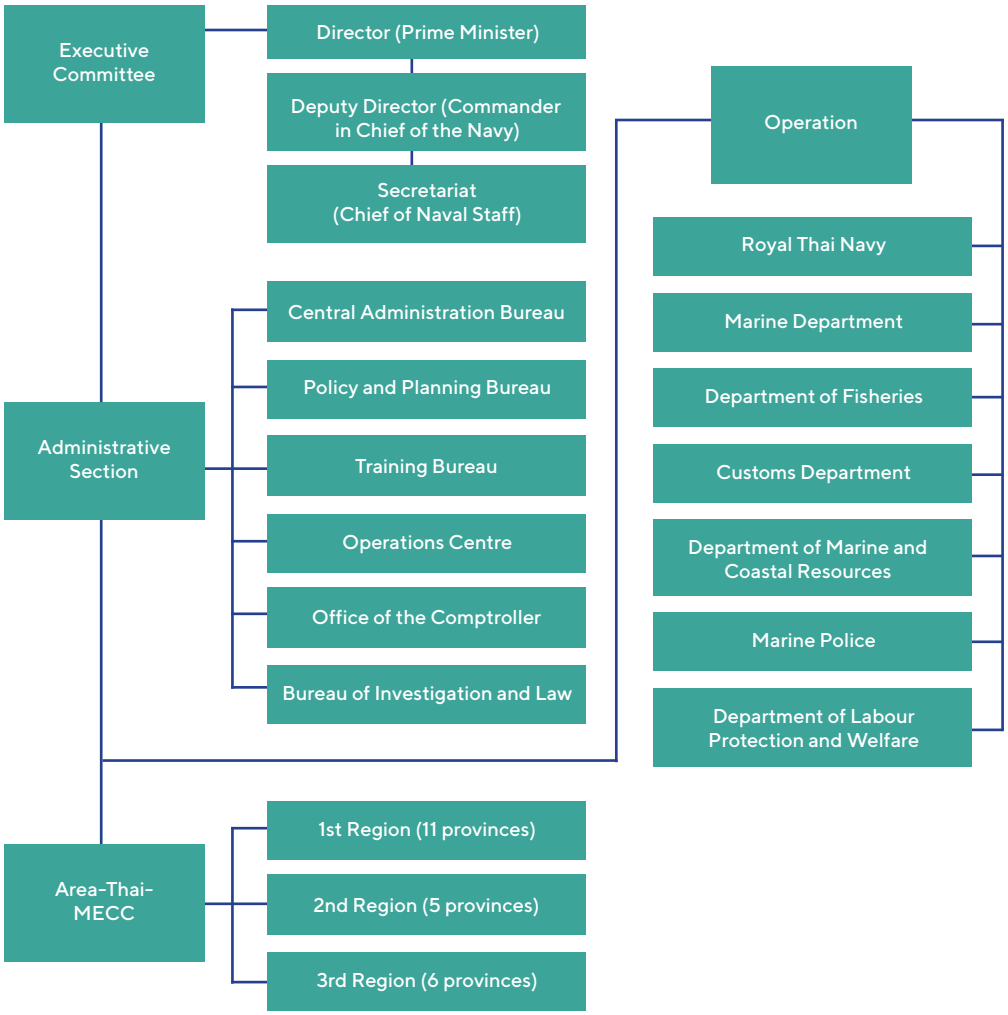
Police coast guard motor boat moored at sadeng beach pier, Secured by anchor and rope to a dock bollard. Police ship anchored in a harbor.

Thailand's maritime sector falls primarily under the supervision of the Royal Thai Navy and Thai Marine Police Division under the Central Investigation Bureau. The Thai Marine Police Division is also responsible for fresh water, coastal areas, and rivers, despite the Navy having regional bases along the Mekong River. Complexities arise in coordinating these agencies in overlapping zones of responsibility. The relatively new Thai Maritime Enforcement Command Centre or Thai-MECC was established in 2019 to address these complexities, though it developed from the voluntary Maritime Enforcement Coordination Centre established in 1996. While this also had coordination functions, the evolution to a command centre emphasised centralising command and institutionalising a clearer structure of maritime responsibilities.[38]

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Thai-MECC is under the supervision of the Office of the Prime Minister and reports directly to the Prime Minister, who also acts as Thai-MMECC director.

The Commander-in-chief of the naval forces serves as deputy director, and the Chief of Staff of the Royal Thai Navy serves as secretary-general of Thai-MECC. Other members of the board of directors involved are those who have responsibilities for maintaining Thai national maritime interest, namely the Director-General of Marine Department, the Director-General of Department of Fisheries, the Director-General of Customs Department, the Director-General of Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, and the Commissioner of Marine Police Division. This leadership reflects the six departments Thai-MECC is expected to coordinate, namely the Royal Thai Navy (RTN), the Marine Police, the Marine Department, the Department of Fisheries, Customs, and the Marine Coastal and Resource Department.[39] Thai-MECC has three regional bases to coordinate resources and manpower from relevant parties, including the Department of Labour Protection and Welfare.



MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS

Thai-MECC was established by the 2019 National Maritime Security Conservation Act, which defined Thailand's national maritime security interests broadly as those deriving "from marine activities or any other interest in maritime zones no matter directly or indirectly to contribute to utilities in every area such as security, economics, societies, science and technology, resources, or environment".[40] "Marine activities" range from merchant marine, fisheries, tourism, and maritime conservation to disaster relief.

Thai-MECC's mission involved coordinating and integrating the relevant agencies. To this end, according to 2019 National Maritime Security Conservation Act, Thai-MECC would plan, supervise, coordinate, command and support the operations of relevant government offices in maintaining national maritime interest. It would also monitor and evaluate threats to national maritime interest and report to the committee on policy regarding national maritime security conservation.

It should be noted here that the National Security Council (NSC) also has a department of maritime security under the clusters of strategic mission and specific security supervision. The NSC prepared the National Maritime Security Plan (2023-2027) with the goal of implementing the 2019 National Maritime Security Conservation Act. The National Maritime Security Plan established the expectation that Thai-MECC would coordinate regional bases in maritime activities and fill gaps in command during situations or emergencies that require pooled resources or multi-agency operations.

Although both departments of maritime security under the NSC and Thai-MECC were tasked with monitoring worrying trends and threats, the NSC views itself as a strategic planner, with Thai-MECC's mandate being the supplementation of local intelligence towards the common goal of maintaining national security.

Thai-MECC is also tasked with following international norms and standards, such as the SDGs in maritime security provision. The Policy and National Plan on National Security (2023-2027) – of which the 4th plan encompassed conservation of maritime security and maritime national interest – highlighted both comprehensive security and human security, with the National Maritime Security Plan (2023-2027) also highlighting comprehensive security (with an implied focus on human security).[41]

The plan additionally assigned Thai-MECC as the "key host" in integrating and driving forward the strategy to ensure Thailand would improve its maritime security and build up maritime awareness, highlighting a leadership role.[42] Thai-MECC should also drive forward a maritime think tank in cooperation with the academic sector and play a role in planning strategy in sea power and ocean governance.[43]

ACTIVITIES

Based on the National Maritime Security Plan (2023-2027), Thai-MECC was expected to develop Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) to connect information databases and develop shared tools for other agencies such as One Marine Chart, Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), and the marine governance division.[44] MDA is perceived as the highest priority given it serves as a foundation for other tasks.[45] In normal situations, Thai-MECC would be monitoring the areas that each designated office was responsible for. It currently undertakes this through the Maritime Information Sharing Centre (MISC). MISC not only gathers and collates information from the different agencies' information platforms, but also has staff tasked with analysis, evaluation and dissemination of information in order to increase Maritime Domain Awareness.

The main strategies listed include activities of capacity building to manage maritime crimes such as piracy, smuggling, human trafficking and irregular migration, as well as the sustainable and balanced use of the sea under the blue economy. Thai-MECC plays a key role in capacity building and training primarily through seminars and exercises – which it perceives as a key means of coordination[46] – as well as working with relevant agencies to strengthen cooperation on safeguarding navigation.

When situations arise, Thai-MECC can ask ships within its areas of responsibility to manage the crisis, regardless of the office the ships primarily belong to. A recent case of counter-IUU fishing against the vessel 'Uthaiwan' off the coast of Phuket showcased how having clear roles and authority allows for greater efficiency.

Coordination activities are also extended to international cooperation. This is especially centred on exchanges and joint training, where Thai-MECC has key responsibilities. Prior to the establishment of Thai-MECC there was no 'Single Maritime Point of Contact', something which regional agencies have been advocating for. Now, however, it is able to act as a representative for Thailand's maritime security interests, and is working increasingly closer with regional agencies such as Indonesia's Maritime Security Agency (BAKAMLA), Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), and Vietnam's Coast Guard.

CAPACITY

Thai-MECC is still in the process of capacity building regarding its own employees and resources, including its own ships. Currently, Thai-MECC requires that its personnel, who come from six government agencies (the Royal Thai Navy, Thai Marine Police Division, Marine Department, Department of Fisheries, Customs Department, and Department of Maritime and Coastal Resources) and others, shall take turns performing duties for the Thai-MECC for a period of 1-2 years per rotation.[47]

SUCCESSES

Despite working with limited capacity, Thai-MECC's strong point lies in pooling and sharing know-how, hardware, and networking. The ability to reach these coordination goals has been strengthened by Thai-MECC's recent structural change. Previously, coordination was seen to be limited by continuing competition between the different agencies within Thai-MECC. While those at the centre considered themselves committed to the core tasks of the organisation (rather than merely their own agencies' agendas), some complaints were made that commitment was not always sincere from those further away from the centralised structure. By centralising the command hierarchy and reducing ambiguity and overlapping jurisdiction, this inter-agency competition has been somewhat overcome, and there is less space to disagree openly over who has jurisdiction.

On the ground, Thai-MECC further attributes some of this success to the fact it develops multidisciplinary teams within each of the regional MECCs centred around Port-in Port-out (PIPO) controlling centres.[48] These multi-agency teams have broad legal authority and the required capability due to "appropriate budget allocation and clear policy guidelines".[49] Apart from key agencies mentioned in the previous section, Thai-MECC has also collaborated with local administrative offices, and especially provincial governors.

This delineation of authority extends to potential overlaps with the NSC. The NSC looks after national security policy in strategic issues such as South China Sea (albeit Thailand is not a claimant), Land Bridge (pros and cons), naval bases, and geopolitical issues, while Thai-MECC currently has limited roles in operational activities in designated areas. Its collaborative work with other relevant agencies, however, could be useful in implementing a rapid response to illicit activities at sea. For example, the NSC possesses no ships but can guide Thai-MECC when it comes to strategic issues that could impact Thai maritime security interests. Thai-MECC would then relay the message to regional agencies it works with to ensure a streamlined management.

CHALLENGES

There are high expectations for Thai-MECC, but the organization in its current configuration is relatively new and is limited in several ways.

First, there have been some limitations in manpower and expertise. A number of those working for the organization had to be transferred from other agencies, mainly from the navy. Civilians are to gradually be employed to fill up the positions available. The leadership remains primarily from the Navy, however. While the Prime Minister chairs Thai-MECC, it is the Deputy Director who is tasked with commanding the agency. The Deputy Director is the Royal Thai Navy's Commander in Chief, while the Navy's Chief of Staff forms the secretariat. The three Thai-MECC areas are directed by the commander of the naval area command. As a result, in terms of overall understanding on maritime security, there is a bias towards its military aspects.[50] There has been a learning curve concerning the deepened and broadened definition of security, especially human security. It is interesting to see how Thai-MECC can work to preserve Thai maritime security and interests within international norms and standards such as sustainable development and human security, a mandate it cannot ignore from the Thai Policy and National Plan on National Security, but one that stands at odds with its militarized culture.

Second, the transferred bureaucrats are not quite clear on the organization's mission and roles.[51] One of the reasons is because Thai-MECC is not a coast guard in the traditional sense. Rather, it was intended to function similarly to the Thai Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), "but looking after the waters".[52] This limits the Thai-MECC's autonomy somewhat, and creates barriers to identity building of its own because it primarily works on integrating the capabilities of other agencies, while lacking its own resources.[53]

Third, this has a potential impact on its coordination function. There are concerns from the civilian agencies within the organisation that it is becoming too militarized due to the dominance of the Navy and the declining civilian role. This is occurring in a context of wider concerns about the increasing political dominance of the Armed forces in Thailand, making accountability and holistic approaches potentially difficult. While Thai-MECC is civilian, it still primarily operates with seconded Navy personnel.

Even though Thai-MECC was tasked to be the driver for a number of Thailand's key security goals, the organization still possesses limited capabilities to realize them, with the Navy retaining a powerful position and coastguard functions. It is unclear as to whether this will impact negatively on cooperation in the future, if other agencies do not feel they are being engaged with meaningfully as equal partners holding shared interests.

Right: Payang fishermen catch fish at Sukaraja beach which has a very serious problem with rubbish disposal and trash management

PHILIPPINES NATIONAL COAST WATCH CENTRE (NCWC)

The National Coast Watch Center (NCWC), an organization under the Philippines Coastguard (PCG), serves as the national maritime single point of contact for maritime security coordination. The NCWC is an inter-agency maritime surveillance and coordinated response facility established through Executive Order 57, signed by President Benigno Simeon Aquino III on September 6, 2011. It was established as a coordinating and implementing mechanism in a whole-of-government approach to address current and future maritime safety, security, and environmental protection challenges in the Philippines.[54]

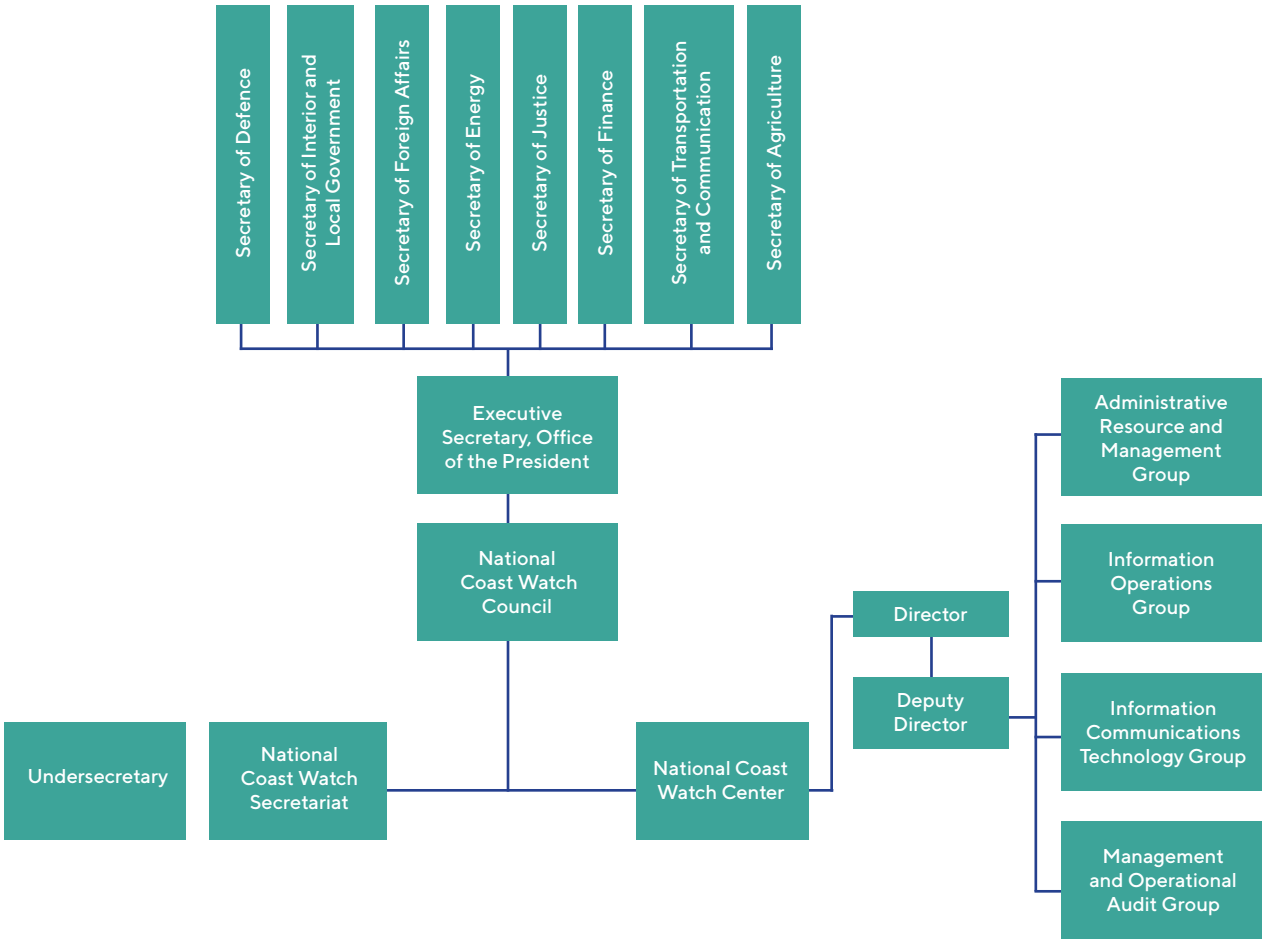
The National Coast Watch Center is a successor to Coast Watch South, which was an initiative that emerged in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines in the immediate post-9/11 era. The latter was focused on counterterrorism in the tri-border area of the Sulu and Celebes seas and was meant to provide information on threat contingencies to the Philippine Navy. The NCWC was established as a separate organization placed within the PCG to act as 'an electronic maritime eyes and ears capability' for monitoring the Philippines' maritime space and to foster coordination among key stakeholders that have roles in that realm. The Center is an initiative of the Philippine government and is supported by the US government through the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), which provided financing for the construction of the building facility; the latter became operational in 2018. The PCG is the 'backbone' of the NCWC, providing the staff members and the funding.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The National Coast Watch System (NCWS) is composed of a council (the executive body), a secretariat (which is responsible for policy), and the center itself (where intelligence collection, fusion, assessment, and dissemination take place).

The National Coast Watch Center works with 10 government agencies: the Philippine Coast Guard, the Philippine Navy, the National Prosecution Service of the Department of Justice, the Bureau of Customs, the Philippines National Police—Maritime Group (PNP-MG), the Bureau of Immigration, the National Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, and the Philippine Center of Transnational Crime.

The National Coast Watch Council, usually referred to as NCWC, is the center of the System. It formulates and promulgates policy guidelines, is chaired by the Executive Secretary, and is composed of the following member agencies: Office of the President, Department of Transportation and Communications, Department of Agriculture, Department of Justice, Department of



Finance, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of National Defense, and the Department of Energy.

The President has overall power and control, and as provided for by Section 11 of Executive Order No. 57, the National Coast Watch Council shall submit annual reports to the President on the operations of both the National Coast Watch Council and the National Coast Watch Center. After several meetings of the NCWC agencies and in consultation with the country's defense allies, the Office of the President directs either the PCG or the Philippine Navy to implement the appropriate action.[55]

The National Coast Watch Council Secretariat (Secretariat) functions as the main support for the Council, while the National Coast Watch Center (Center) is the main implementation unit of the system, acting as the principal organ that enacts and coordinates maritime security operations in accordance with the strategic direction and policy guidance issued by the Council.

MANDATE AND FUNCTIONS

NCWC's mandate comes from Executive Order No. 57,[56] which established the NCWC on September 6, 2011. The NCWC mission is as follows: "To perform as the central inter-agency mechanism for a coordinated and coherent approach on maritime issues and maritime security operations in order to enhance governance of Philippine maritime and oceans interests."[57] Further, it is tasked with coordinating maritime security operations and helping the country protect its maritime boundary against transit by violent extremists. The agency falls under the PCG to implement and coordinate maritime security operations in accordance with the strategic direction and policy guidance to be issued by the National Security Council.

Pursuant to Executive Order No. 57, the primary functions of the NCWC are the following:

1	Gather, consolidate, synthesize, and disseminate information relevant to maritime security.
2	Develop and maintain effective communications and information systems to enhance inter-agency coordination in maritime security operations.
3	Coordinate the conduct of maritime surveillance or response operations upon the request of a member agency or when an exigency arises.
4	Plan, coordinate, monitor, evaluate, document, and report on the conduct of maritime security operations.
5	When so authorized by the Council, coordinate cross-border and multinational maritime security operations.
6	Coordinate support for the prosecution of apprehended violators.
7	Conduct periodic assessments on maritime security.
8	Conduct regular activities to engage all maritime stakeholders in various forums, seminars, workshops, and other activities.
9	Coordinate and facilitate training activities and exercises of members and support agencies of the Council to enhance coordination and interoperability in the NCWS.

The Republic Act No. 10668, known as the National Coast Watch System Act of 2015,[58] further establishes the National Coast Watch System (NCWS) to enhance maritime domain awareness and coordination among relevant government agencies, such as the Department of National Defense (DND) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The DND and AFP issue directives and guidelines to ensure the defence and security of the Philippines' maritime territories. These directives may include provisions for enhancing maritime domain awareness in the West Philippine Sea.

The NCWC also performs the role of Crisis Management Office of the Chairperson for human-induced threats within and adjacent to the Philippine maritime borders.[59]

ACTIVITIES

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is undertaken by the National Coast Watch System, which consists of nine stations. The National Coast Watch Center through the PCG (maritime vulnerabilities), PNP Maritime Group (drug and weapons smuggling), and BFAR (IUU fishing, wildlife smuggling and marine pollution) gather information. An initial analysis is included with the information. Then, information is relayed to the Executive Secretary through the National Coast Watch Center Secretariat. There are also maritime regional coordination centers in Palawan and Cebu that focus on illegal fishing and illicit trafficking, respectively. The NCWC played a significant part in the PCG's deployment of five navigational buoys in critical areas of the West Philippine Sea, with each of them bearing the image of the Philippine flag. These buoys are capable of gathering data about movements in the area,[60] and it was at an NCWC regular meeting that the PCG broached the idea of deployment.

NCWC additionally provides maritime domain awareness training and capacity-building activities to enhance the skills and knowledge of maritime law enforcement agencies, local government units, and the private sector. On the 10th and 11th of August 2023, for example, the National Coast Watch Center, with the support of the EU CRIMARIO II project, organised a large-scale interagency Tabletop and Field Training Exercise in Manila. During the two days, personnel from 10 national agencies operated together in a simulated and real environment to address and solve a complex situation involving ships suspected of illegal drug trafficking and goods smuggling on the way to Manila.

The NCWC conducts maritime surveillance operations, including aerial and sea patrols, to monitor the country's territorial waters and exclusive economic zones.

NCWC additionally shares information with international partners, such as through the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), Information Fusion Centre, and International Maritime Organisation, as well as neighbouring countries through BAKAMLA and Thai-MECC.

CAPACITY

The NCWC has a total staff of 84, which includes 48 staff who were added to cover the NCWC's expanding workload. In terms of capacity building, a select few NCWC staff are sent to the Daniel K. Inouye Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies for maritime security training. The NCWC staff also undergo training in search and rescue (SAR), aids to navigation (ATON), marine pollution/ oil spill combating (MARPOL/OSC), and maritime law enforcement (MARLEN) through a Japanese Technical Cooperation project.

SUCCESSES

The NCWC has had several coordination successes, including the inter-agency apprehension and prosecution of IUU fishers. One reason for its success is that each government agency is focused on their respective mandates, which reduces competition and contestation.[61] Another explanation is that the NCWC does not exercise command over forces, units, or elements of an agency; rather, it provides a process and a conduit for multi-agency coordination and planning to facilitate selection, coordination, and integration of operational effort among the participating agencies for effective mission accomplishment. In sum, the level of participation, involvement, or support that agencies provide to the NCWC rests at the discretion of the support agencies. The NCWC coordinates the pooled capability and capacity through the conduct of regular inter-agency planning conferences.

Another success comes from the NCWC's overcoming of institutional silos. The NCWC brings together a variety of Philippine government agencies responsible for protecting the nation's coasts and maritime resources. The NCWC,

Aerial View of a Shipwreck on the Shore of West Beach Pangandaran Made as an Illegal Fishing Monument by Minister Susi Pudjiastuti

as the primary inter-agency coordinating centre for maritime security operations during peacetime situations, carries out its mission by providing a venue and structure for the various agencies to coordinate their efforts and maximize their capabilities in the areas of surveillance, maritime domain awareness (MDA), planning and coordination, and detection, response, and recovery.

The NCWC's contribution to the development of national policies, strategies, and plans related to maritime security and safety is another measure of success. This includes providing expertise, recommendations, and insights based on its analysis of maritime threats and trends to guide policy decisions and resource allocation.

Finally, the NCWC has successfully worked with non-state actors – elevating a whole-of-government response to a whole-of-system response. The NCWC can engage with the International Seafarers Action Center and the Philippine Inter-Island Shipping Association for maritime security, for example.

CHALLENGES

Harmonization within the NCWC remains a challenge.[62] Generally, surveillance is the responsibility of the military; however, approximately 80 percent of the NCWC's work is non-military. Thus, there is a need to harmonize relations to ensure the NCWC can meet the needs of its non-military partners despite an ongoing military dominance.

This is exacerbated by the fact that there are several priorities that need to be simultaneously tackled. Apart from the Coast Guard, the NCWC is expected to assist the different agencies with their own priorities. Maritime counter-drug operations and drug enforcement remain the main ones, but there can be difficulties in addressing other priorities as they emerge.

There remains a great need to carry out basic institutional building in the Philippines, particularly with the PCG and the police. The Navy views the PCG as inferior, despite the fact that from an institutional perspective, the PCG has a more holistic understanding of what needs to be done in the maritime space. For example, the national task force in the West Philippine Sea is more cohesive than those in the NCWC. They meet on a weekly basis and this is perceived as a reason that those in the task force have established closer personal bonds enabling them to informally share information. Through these relationships, the habit of sharing information and knowledge evolves, and personal relationships are developed which ultimately helps problem-solving potential.[63]

In addition, the overlapping mandates and command structures of the NCWC, the PCG and BFAR highlight redundancies that continue to hamper maritime law enforcement. The BFAR was established under Fisheries Law RA 8550 to protect Philippine fisherman rights and interests at sea, as well as to police illegal fishing activities within the Philippine EEZ. [64] The BFAR maintains its own mandate, command, fleet, personnel, and rules for use of force. The BFAR signed a memorandum of agreement with the PCG to coordinate operations, and PCG personnel frequently man BFAR vessels during patrols, but there are ongoing redundancies.

A stark example of a bureaucratic impediment of the NCWC is the constant replacement of the NCWC Executive Director: in a span of three years, this role was replaced three times. On a few occasions when the PCG Commandant retires, a new NCWC Director is usually appointed. On one occasion, a former PCG Commandant, Joel Garcia, was appointed as NCWC Director after his retirement. This practice of changing the leader of an inter-agency institution tends to either disrupt or impede the implementation of policies, programs, linkages and connections that are essential for a stable, well-functioning maritime monitoring and response system.

There are also material limitations to the work of the NCWC, particularly revolving around the allocation and management of their resources. Section 1, Chapter 5 of its Inter-Governmental Rules and Regulation limits the annual line item budget to fuel costs, travel requirements, and workforce salaries. As a result, there is a general perception that the NCWC faces a shortage of qualified personnel.[65] However, a recent positive development is that for 2024, the PCG expects to have additional funding for the NCWC from the Philippine Congress. Congressman Emigdio Tanjuatco III enquired if the House's decision to realign PhP1.23 billion (USD22.2 million) of the Confidential Funds for agencies securing the West Philippine Sea had been completed; as a result, the PCG made a procurement list for additional equipment and assets. [66]

In short, while there has been successes in maritime security coordination, inter-agency cooperation demands closer relations and the NCWC could do more to facilitate this.

COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The case studies demonstrate that problems and opportunities of maritime security coordination are often context dependent, and there is no one-size-fits-all form of coordination structure. However, there are common themes and considerations to be made when assessing the performances of such structures. While analysing the actual impact of successful coordination can be extremely difficult, analysing the processes through which they seek to meet their goals can be an important dimension of performance assessment. Process outcomes focus on effort, efficiency, and skill, which are easier to gauge. The process outcomes can be broadly categorised as boosting legitimacy (in order to have the social authority and skills to coordinate) and enhancing problem-solving potential (through effective delegation and the leveraging of pooled resources towards maritime insecurities).

When assessing the challenges to these processes, we can turn to Gutner and Thompson, who developed a matrix of internal/external and social/material limitations to such processes.[67] The challenges identified in the above sections are summarized and categorized in the table below, though it is worth noting that these overlap and interact in significant ways.

	Internal		**External**	
Problems posed to:	**Legitimacy & Authority**	**Problem-solving potential**	**Legitimacy & Authority**	**Problem-solving potential**
Social	Incoherent organizational culture & identity	Lack of independent leadership	Overlap with other mechanisms & Agencies	Lack of consensus on a problem
	Too strong an independent identity		Lack of political will	Competing norms
	Deficient leadership		Variated Executive Support	
			Lack of soft regulatory frameworks	
			Lack of international recognition	
Material	Bureaucratic self-interest	Inadequate staffing and/ or expertise	Lack of hard regulatory frameworks	Incoherent mandates
		Inadequate budget	Competition over Resources	Lack of prioritization

LEGITIMACY AND AUTHORITY

In each country, we see socio-political problems inherent in the creation of new bodies guiding diverse actors in such a complex issue as maritime security. They both have impacts on other dynamics and are sometimes grounded in external material realities.

The most pertinent is an overarching problem of legitimacy and authority relative to the agencies and bodies that the different structures are established to coordinate. Without perceived legitimacy, agencies and departments are reluctant to delegate authority to the coordinating body – especially when there are perceived overlaps in the work they are expected to carry out. This is exacerbated by the fact that all these coordination mechanisms are relatively new, especially in relation to traditional providers of maritime security such as the navies. These traditional biases can sometimes belie a more objective recognition of the contribution different agencies make to maritime security provision. While the Thai-MECC is new and faces some of these problems, it is primarily underpinned by the Royal Thai Navy, which helps mitigate some problems of legitimacy. Others are either formally separated from traditional agencies, as is the case with BAKAMLA, or are primarily supported by agencies seen domestically as minor, as is the case of the NCWC. NCWC's legitimacy, for example, is intertwined with the legitimacy of the PCG – an agency that is perceived as inferior by the PN despite their significant contribution to maritime security, and one that is also required to develop a perception of authority itself. This is an ongoing process, and efforts are being made by Philippine officials to help the PCG project assert more authority in the implementation of maritime law enforcement functions. This can occur through an increased budget for procuring more physical assets and to recruit more researchers for MDA functions.[68] While the Royal Thai navy has seemingly bought into Thai-MECC and imparts a degree of authority, other coordination structures are not able to derive legitimacy in the same manner. As seen in some cases above, without such legitimacy coordination structures can find it difficult to establish themselves and guide the relations of agencies they are expected to coordinate.

Such a problem suggests the need for some sort of other external source of authority to impart legitimacy and encourage other agencies to delegate to the coordination body. Across these examples, there are two further potential external (yet domestic) sources of authority that are present in varying degrees: executive support and legislative mandate. As it stands currently, all coordination bodies enjoy strong executive support and can derive levels of authority from that. Ongoing concerns revolve around how stable such a basis is without being embedded in a coherent and harmonized legislative framework. BAKAMLA's fraught position in the maritime security hierarchy, for example, cannot be secured because there is a lack of certainty over whether President Joko Widodo's successor would continue their support. Executive authority cannot consistently mitigate the lack of hard legislative resolutions ensuring BAKAMLA's place, the overlap of soft regulatory mechanisms such as strategies, or the contradictory hard legislative resolutions giving authority to different bodies including the KPLP.

A final form of external legitimacy comes about from international recognition – particularly from similar agencies in other countries and international organisations. Each of the coordination structures above have become the foci of international maritime security cooperation. This has a problem-solving rationale. Thai-MECC, for example, is the point of contact for the Southeast Asian Maritime Law Enforcement Initiative, and this is seen as 'strengthening mutual support to better enhance maritime law enforcement'.[69] Beyond this, however, by

Royal Thai Navy ship name Bhumibol Adulyadej at Sattahip Naval Base, Chonburi Thailand.

becoming a partner of choice for international affiliates, coordination structures can derive legitimacy through the recognition they garner as the (naturally perceived) appropriate partner. An example is the NCWC's working with the EUCRIMARIO, which positions it as the MDA authority in the Philippines. Going further, BAKAMLA's efforts in establishing an ASEAN Coastguard Forum can be understood as a reflective legitimation strategy, as it is a forum in which BAKAMLA has established itself as the primary partner despite domestic contestation. This is also closely linked to funding. BAKAMLA enjoys a significant amount of support in grants not just from the USA, but also Japan. The agency's ability to attract international funding may support their claims to legitimacy domestically.

An issue that does arise is that legitimacy granted by some external source can undermine internal sources of legitimacy, which in some cases may be of greater importance. Coordination structures are expected to coordinate a broad variety of agencies and departments, which themselves can have competing interests and differing perspectives. It follows, then, that a coordination structure requires some degree of (at least perceived) independence, so that it is seen as a neutral or non-political entity that stands above this contestation and political struggles between agencies. By deriving legitimacy and authority from agencies the way NCWC and Thai-MECC do (at least in part), there is a risk that other agencies they are designed to coordinate do not see them as independent and cannot separate the function of the coordination structure from their primary benefactor. Some concerns from civilian agencies of the militarization of Thai-MECC are an indication of this, and it is likely to create obstacles in long-term cooperation if there are degrees of resentment at the lack of independence. Essentially, the question becomes how a structure whose intentions or interests are suspected can develop trust and habits of cooperation between different agencies and bodies. A degree of trade-off is arguably required – balancing between linking to external sources of authority to be seen as legitimate in the short term, whilst at the same time being perceived as independent enough to coordinate stakeholders with different (and sometimes conflicting) interests, which is important in the longer term.

This is made particularly difficult as independence, and therefore internal sources of legitimacy, is in some cases undermined by a lack of coherent organizational culture and identity. As shown in the case of Thai-MECC, a lack of resources and confusion from the transferred bureaucrats over its role are significant barriers to identity building, which further limits independence. These cases show, however, that a need to balance exists here, too. While Thai-MECC and NCWC have struggled to forge a coherent organizational culture and identity independent of their supporters, BAKAMLA has in some ways seen

Dragon Boat Challenge. Coast guard rescues people in a boat.

the greatest success. The evolution of BAKAMLA towards a de facto coastguard has seen it create a strong independent identity and organizational culture separate from the armed forces and existing MLEAs. Yet, this has also undermined its relatively neutral role, because with the strengthening of its own identity comes a much more centralized bureaucratic self-interest. BAKAMLA has its own agendas and interests that it pursues due to the role it sees itself as having – and at times this comes at the cost of those it is meant to coordinate. The other structures are not completely free from this. It generally follows that any bureaucratic entity will have material interests to pursue, but the expansion of BAKAMLA's identity and organizational culture towards being the de facto coastguard has particular implications for its external relations, as it intensifies material conflicts that can also reduce its legitimacy. While trade-offs exist in terms of independence externally, internal processes of identity building will impact strongly on perceived neutrality. This can be worsened when there is deficient leadership.

PROBLEM-SOLVING POTENTIAL

Coordination structures' problem-solving potential comes about through their actual abilities to coordinate collective action. This process outcome is impacted by its legitimacy and resultant authority, but there are broader factors of delegation to be considered.

One of the more pertinent problems in maritime security is the breadth of issues it incorporates. There is often no coherent consensus on the problem of maritime security and how it should be responded to. The most obvious divergence is the competing prioritisation of different issues. As demonstrated above, the coordination structures studied are responses to problems as diverse as illegal fishing, piracy, terrorism, forced labour at sea, and environmental pollution. Many existing agencies do not focus on maritime security holistically, but are primarily interested in one facet of it. This is dependent on context, but the starkest example is likely Thailand's Ministry of Labour, who is primarily (if not only) interested in the human trafficking occurring in Thailand's waters. As such, coordinating bodies have to mediate conflicting prioritizations. This is flagged as a problem in two of the above examples, with Thai-MECC focused on overly militaristic ideas of maritime security, and the NCWC finding it challenging to prioritize given the breadth of their mandate.

Going beyond this, however, is that even within different issue areas, there are different types of problematizations and resultant responses that exist. If we take IUU fishing as an example, one of the main differences between the responses are the perspectives on the nature of the issue and the resulting problematization. Some agencies and actors see it as an issue of fisheries management, which leads to technocratic responses of measurement and surveillance, while others see it as an issue of security or law enforcement that requires criminal investigation and interdiction. There has been mixed success in balancing these demands. While the NCWC has managed to breakdown institutional silos to some degree, this is challenging for Thai-MECC, who are having to implement human security responses despite their (relatively conflicting) militarized make-up. This suggests the structure of the coordination bodies themselves plays an important role in what delegation ultimately looks like. Thai-MECC is more oriented around command, which has led to operational success, whereas the NCWC does not have this function and is therefore able to negotiate between different perspectives for a holistic approach. This derives from the NCWC's ability to directly access the Office of the President, which gives it an ability to bring together more coherent inter-agency plans of action to solve issues with relevant implementing agencies.

Actual coordination can be further undermined by incoherent mandates and a lack of strategy from above. In each of these cases, on the surface there are relatively clear mandates and some degree of strategy, but as shown particularly by BAKAMLA and Thai-MECC, at times these are either too broad or they conflict with other strategies. A lack of harmonization not only makes it difficult to focus on the one facet when they have so many roles to play, but can further exacerbate problems of prioritization. This puts a heavy emphasis on internal leadership to direct the work of the coordination structure; yet, this poses problems of its own. As highlighted in the above cases, not only is independent (or sometimes consistent) leadership often lacking, but they are not supported by sufficient levels of budgeting and staffing. Each of the coordination structures has budgetary concerns, but some also suffer from a lack of institutional expertise. This both limits the impact they can have on solving the problem of maritime insecurity, and also reduces the epistemic authority the structures can draw upon to induce partners to delegate tasks.

One key activity to resolve some of these contestations and challenges is MDA. Not only can it provide information more effectively, but it can also help forge a common understanding of the oceans and the problems occurring. A collective understanding can help coordination because a problem becomes understood as a common problem, not something relevant only to its respective silo. Across the coordination structures, all have made significant progress when it comes to MDA. This seems to be an essential measure of performance, given in all cases MDA has underpinned the broader functions. Sharing information, for example, is often seen as an important precursor to trust-building and epistemic authority, which would lend itself to the outcome of coordination. There is variation, however, in how the information is shared and the extent to which it actually helps eliminate siloing. The civil-military divide again becomes one of the starkest examples. Both BAKAMLA and the TNI-AL collect data on the maritime domain, and the different focuses they have, as well as the lack of sharing mechanisms, means silos are reinforced. The NCWC's problems of harmonizing military data with civilian needs further highlights that even when information is shared, this may not go far enough to make it actionable. MDA is just as much about analysis and interpretation – including from the public sphere – as it is about information gathering and sharing.[70] Efforts to share to broader communities, allowing a more collaborative analysis, is so far lacking in each of the cases.

Coordination structures in the region are making important progress in providing maritime security. Successes in the above cases suggest an institutionalisation of these bodies is important, as the process has provided sharper mandates, sounder expertise, and clearer structures for coordinating the diverse actors and viewpoints required to address the complexity of maritime security. The process is not yet complete, however, and there are ongoing challenges. Many of these relate to the legitimacy of the agencies themselves, unavoidably tied to political and epistemic contestations. Addressing the civil-military divide is an example they all have in common, but this analysis has shown that these contestations are multi-faceted and context-dependent. Overcoming these will be essential to achieve coherent understandings of maritime security and coordinate action more effectively to provide it.

COORDINATION STRUCTURES IN THE REGION ARE MAKING IMPORTANT PROGRESS IN PROVIDING MARITIME SECURITY.

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