



**Beyond Bilateralism:
Exercising a Maritime Security Network
in Southeast Asia**

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Executive Summary

The U.S. 7th Fleet is more powerful and better postured today than it has been at any other point in recent decades. At the same time, an increasingly complex array of transnational threats posed by both state and non-state actors dictates that no single navy can go it alone. This has been clearly demonstrated by recent history, as every modern maritime security situation confronting Southeast Asia has been met with a multinational response. Looking ahead, it is almost impossible to imagine a scenario where the United States would respond to a maritime crisis in Southeast Asia on a strictly bilateral basis. Recognizing that past multilateral responses have been burdened by challenges associated with coordinating diverse forces, the U.S. 7th Fleet is actively seeking to build upon the mutual trust and confidence established through decades of investment in regional partnerships to introduce new multilateral elements into previously bilateral events. Military units need to train on how they will operate and bilateral training alone isn't good enough anymore.

The need to expand the cooperative maritime security network is broadly recognized and clearly reflected in the growing number of multilateral exercises sponsored by ASEAN members, ASEAN-related bodies, and other regional organizations. The United States strongly supports these efforts and 7th Fleet units routinely participate in multilateral exercises. These multinational exercises build trust, increase mutual understanding, and establish baseline procedures for working together during crises and contingencies. They also strengthen the foundations of what Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter recently described as a “Principled Security Network.” However, multinational exercises also suffer from a number of distinct drawbacks. The exercises must navigate policy barriers, sometimes very serious, that can limit the value of the training delivered to units involved. Furthermore, as the exercise sponsors seek to maximize the number of partners involved, the level of training must be aligned to the lowest level of interoperability or naval skill. In bilateral settings, on the other hand, navies can look more easily beyond confidence building to focus on the development of sophisticated skills. Such high-level events are essential to strengthening the readiness of 7th Fleet units and their Southeast Asia partners. Ideally, fleets would gain the advantages of bilateral and multilateral training by simply doing more of both sort of exercises. Unfortunately, fleets are not large enough to just do more.

Seeking to find the optimal balance between cultivating multinational cooperative capacity and developing complex maritime operational skills, the 7th Fleet and its regional partners are increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of their training by selectively introducing multilateral elements into previously bilateral training events. The modernization effort underway within the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise series provides an excellent illustration of this evolution at work. With 22 years of history, CARAT has earned its reputation as the premier United States-sponsored maritime security training engagement in Southeast Asia. However, until 2015, CARAT had also remained strictly bilateral. Under the Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative, CARAT partners are eager to include other Southeast Asian and extra-regional navies into their exercises. At the same time,

the introduction of these multilateral elements is being conducted methodically so that the more complex coordination structures and new capabilities enhance training outcomes without weakening existing value.

Beyond Bilateralism: Exercising a Maritime Security Network in Southeast Asia

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On Dec. 28, 2014, AirAsia flight QZ8501 disappeared from radar above the Java Sea. Quickly thereafter, the Indonesian National Search and Rescue Agency (BASARNAS) was activated to lead an international search-and-rescue operation. The first American ship on scene was USS *Sampson* and she was soon joined by USS *Fort Worth*. Before long, surface ships, aircraft, and search and rescue experts from more than a dozen countries had assembled on the scene. Ashore, in the remote town of Pangkalanbun on Indonesia's Borneo coast, BASARNAS established its crisis response center. Searching a vast sea area with rapidly changing environmental conditions in an urgent effort to find survivors before it is too late, is, in and of itself, a challenging problem. Doing so with a diverse group of forces, united by a common cause; but divided by language, procedures, equipment and expectations made the effort all the more difficult.

The QZ8501 response operation reminded leaders throughout the region that their maritime forces must be better prepared to respond to crisis on a multilateral basis. This need to be better prepared is why, in the words of U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, the United States is "meeting the challenges and seizing the opportunities in the Asia-Pacific, and in particular our growing security network there. Almost all the nations there are asking us to do more with them...bilaterally and multilaterally."² However, neither the U.S. nor regional fleets are big enough to take on large-scale expansion in multilateral training without noteworthy costs to operations, maintenance and unilateral readiness training. Given the magnitude of security challenges facing contemporary maritime Southeast Asia, it is unacceptable to accept such losses. Therefore, naval exercises must become more effective and more efficient.

Naval exercises that are more inclusive and more multilateral while simultaneously advancing sophisticated training provide an important element of the U.S. contribution to what Secretary Carter calls a "Principled Security Network." As he describes this,

Asia-Pacific security network includes but is more than some extension of existing alliances. It weaves everyone's relationships together – bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral – to help all of us do more, over greater distances, with greater economy of effort. It enables us to take coordinated action to respond to contingencies like humanitarian crises and disasters; to meet common challenges, such as terrorism; and to ensure the security of and equal access to the global and regional commons, including vital waterways."³

¹ The views the authors express are entirely their own and do not reflect positions of Pacific Forum CSIS, The U.S. Navy, or any other body.

² Ashton Carter, Remarks on "America's Growing Security Network in the Asia-Pacific," Council on Foreign Relations, New York, New York, April 8, 2016.

³ Ibid.

In Southeast Asia, the prime example of what the U.S. 7th Fleet is doing to support this progress has been the careful introduction of multilateral elements into the Cooperation and Readiness Afloat Training (CARAT) exercise series. Under the Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative, multilateral elements are being introduced into the exercises carefully and deliberately so that they become more effective and efficient by testing more complex coordination structures, strengthening partnerships, and advancing the sophistication of the skills they develop.

Maritime Southeast Asia: a complex security environment

There is only one way to describe the security landscape in Southeast Asia: its complex.

Front and center of regional concerns are the assertive Chinese military and paramilitary activities in the South China Sea, including the ongoing island-building campaign taking place in internationally contested waters. The contentious interactions between fishing boats and Chinese paramilitary forces in these waters place further strain on relations in the region. The irresponsible actions of the North Korean regime also have immediate impacts on Southeast Asian security, trade and commerce. For example, the March 4, 2016 seizure of a North Korean ship by the Philippines Coast Guard, conducted in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions, shows that the reckless choices being made in Pyongyang are creating resource requirements for Southeast Asian maritime security forces. These destabilizing state activities are driving expansion of naval cooperation in the region because mutual trust and confidence will be essential foundations for future stability. Furthermore, interoperability and cooperation must be enhanced because maritime security in Southeast Asia is also undermined by the threats posed by non-state actors.

In the last 15 years, maritime-savvy terrorist groups such as the Abu Sayyaf Group have been rolled back by the actions of the regional governments. However, as the recent spate of attacks against sailors and high-profile executions of hostages have demonstrated, these threats have not been eliminated.⁴ The rise of ISIS, the emergence of its Southeast Asian affiliates, and the return of fighters from the Middle East threaten a rejuvenation of these groups' capabilities.⁵ Similarly, maritime piracy has been addressed by states across the region, but has not been eradicated and there has been a recent spike in the number of reported attacks in the South China Sea.⁶ Other human activities, including the trafficking of people, narcotics and weapons, further undermine regional security. Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing is another security threat of colossal consequence causing irreversible damage to the maritime environment, especially to coral reef ecosystems.⁷ According to Indonesian President Widodo, IUU fishing is a

⁴ "Abu Sayyaf hostages in Philippines make video plea," May 4, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36200438>

⁵ Joseph Chinyong Liow, "The ISIS Threat to Southeast Asia: An Assessment," RSIS Commentary, No. 099, April 29, 2016. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16099-the-isis-threat-to-southeast-asia-an-assessment/>

⁶ Sam Bateman, "Is Southeast Asia Really a Piracy Hotspot," *The Interpreter*, 4 Aug 2015. <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/08/04/Is-Southeast-Asia-really-a-piracy-hot-spot.aspx>

⁷ "A study by the UN Environment Programme in 2004 cited the high concentration of coral reefs in Southeast Asian seas – 34 percent of the world's coral reefs, despite occupying only 2.5 percent of the total ocean surface." <http://www.rappler.com/world/specials/93371-cirss-commentaries-environmental-turn-south-china-sea-disputes>

matter of vital “food sovereignty” that costs Indonesia alone more than \$24 billion per year.⁸ If current activities continue, regional fisheries will almost certainly collapse.⁹ The resulting food shortages, unemployment and anger of local populations will almost certainly become a major and immediate source of instability. Given the complexity of the situation, it will take multinational and interagency cooperation, working together ashore and at sea, to overcome the array of man-made and natural threats to peace and stability in maritime Southeast Asia.

Rebalancing: a larger and more capable U.S. 7th Fleet

Considering the mammoth proportions and dire implications of these security threats, it comes as no surprise that maritime security continues to be a central element of the U.S. government’s strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. For the U.S. 7th Fleet, comprised of the U.S. Navy’s operational forces operating in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, the rebalance has arrived in tandem with significant development of operational capability as reflected in improvements to both the quantity and quality of U.S. forces. The March 2, 2016 arrival of USS *Barry* into the 7th Fleet area of operations exemplifies both trends. *Barry* brings the total number of Aegis-equipped warships permanently assigned to the Fleet’s Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDNF) to its highest level ever. These FDNF ships work alongside an increasing number of ships deploying to the Western Pacific from their homeports in Hawaii, California and Washington State. Because she is outfitted with the newest and most sophisticated version of the *Aegis* combat system, *Barry*’s arrival also exemplifies U.S. naval planners’ decisions to bring the best, most advanced platforms to Asia.¹⁰ Similar changes are taking place on the waterfront in Sasebo Japan, where the modern and ultra-capable USS *Green Bay* replaced the older USS *Denver*. The U.S. Navy’s newest class of surface vessels, Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) have been operating from Singapore since 2014 and the number of LCS in Southeast Asia is set to grow in the next few years. Modern *Spearhead*-class Expeditionary Fast Transports, such as USNS *Millinocket*, are also adding new capacity to the 7th Fleet. Beyond the surface force, the introduction of the tremendously capable P-8 maritime patrol aircraft, growth in numbers of submarines forward deployed to Guam, and modernization of the air wing associated with the forward-deployed aircraft carrier also exemplify the 7th Fleet’s growing strength.

Underpinning the 7th Fleet’s growing capacity to contribute to the whole-of-government U.S. rebalance to Asia is the trust and confidence that comes as a by-product of decades of persistent naval presence and sustained maritime partnerships in the Western Pacific. Since the end of World War II, throughout the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and into the post-Cold War era, the U.S. Navy has consistently plied the waters of Southeast Asia, strengthening regional security, fostering navy-to-navy relationships, and investing in partnerships. A perfect example of a longstanding U.S. partnership building activity is the CARAT exercise series. Since its inception in 1995, this annual exercise series has built interoperability, capability, and capacity between the U.S. Navy and its bilateral partners. Beginning with six partner nations (Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Brunei) the series originally consolidated

⁸ “Indonesia Declares War on Illegal Foreign Fishing Boats,” *The Jakarta Globe*, Nov 18, 2014.

⁹ Marina Tsirbas, “South China Sea Fisheries on Verge of Collapse,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, Apr 15, 2016. <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/south-china-sea-fishing-needs-to-be-internationalised-20160414-go6pcq.html>

¹⁰ *Barry* equipped with *Aegis* Baseline 9.C. USS *Barry* public affairs, “USS *Barry* to Join Forward Deployed Naval Forces in Japan,” Jan 12, 2016. http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=92683

disparate naval exercises into a single larger and more efficient event with each partner Navy. Since then the exercises have grown increasingly more sophisticated as the number of partners has also increased to ten. Vietnam became involved in a CARAT-like event called Naval Engagement Activity (NEA) in 2010, and in 2011 the CARAT series grew to include bilateral exercises with Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste. After more than twenty iterations, CARAT has cemented its position as the United States' premier maritime security training engagement in Southeast Asia. Every year, the 7th Fleet and its partners use CARAT as an opportunity to conduct their most sophisticated training.

It is these enduring partnerships and alliances that have paved the way for a modernization of cooperative defense agreements such as the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the governments of the Philippines and United States, and agreements with the Government of Singapore to forward deploy the U.S. Navy's newest combatant, the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) to Changi Naval Base and fly maritime patrol aircraft from Singaporean air bases on a rotational basis. Through this lens, the U.S. Navy's contribution to the rebalance can be regarded as a noteworthy upgrade to its longstanding support for regional maritime security capacity and capability building. Still, despite the enlarged capabilities and capacity, the 7th Fleet cannot answer the challenges of Southeast Asia's complex security environment. It can only be a part of a larger endeavour, supporting regional efforts that involve closer cooperation among partners.

Multilateral maritime security cooperation: the shared solution

The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, 2013 Typhoon Haiyan, 2014 disappearance of MH370 and 2015 AirAsia 8501 tragedy all triggered multinational maritime responses. In all of these cases, among the toughest challenges facing the response force was the effective sharing of information and coordination between the responding navies and their diverse partners. Looking forward, it is almost impossible to envision a maritime crisis that would trigger a strictly bilateral response between the United States and a Southeast Asian partner. Therefore, complex coordination required between multilateral forces should be a focus of training. After decades of bilateral exercises and training, we know how to communicate and coordinate one-to-one. However, adding just one or two partners complicates communications and decision making exponentially.

The 7th Fleet is clearly not alone in this view. Whereas twenty years ago there were only a few multilateral training events in Southeast Asia's exercise calendar, that agenda is now replete with a menagerie of multilateral exercises and large maritime defense diplomacy events. Providing a few current examples, Australia organizes *Kakadu*, Indonesia hosts *Komodo*, the U.S. brings together regional navies at Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT), Singapore organizes a Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS)-sponsored exercise in conjunction with the International Maritime Defence Exhibition (IMDEX), and Malaysia provides a WPNS-sponsored training event at the end of the Langkawi International Maritime Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA). Similarly, more and more Southeast Asian maritime forces are joining the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise. RIMPAC is hosted by the United State every other year off Hawaii and California and is the world's largest maritime exercise. The United States also organizes Pacific Partnership, now in its eleventh year, a mission that enhances

comprehensive maritime cooperation across a broad spectrum of multinational military and civilian agencies in partner nations across the Indo-Asia-Pacific. In addition, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) sponsors Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HADR) exercises and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+) backs training events, the most recent of which was the groundbreaking Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism Field Training Exercise (ADMM+ MS & CT FTX) in May 2016 hosted by Brunei and Singapore. These large multinational exercises are invaluable as they build trust and confidence, construct norms of cooperation, establish baseline procedures and lay foundations for stronger regional security architectures.

As regional security cooperation frameworks have developed, so too has the 7th Fleet's contribution in support of an increasing number of regional bodies. In recent years, the 7th Fleet has actively supported the United States' enhanced engagement with ASEAN and participation in the East Asia Summit, essential features of the U.S. government's rebalance to Asia.¹¹ In fact, as the U.S. government has focused on ASEAN's center stage role as a key partner positioned at "the heart of Asia-Pacific's architecture," the 7th Fleet has been fully cognizant that the maritime security agenda is central to developing an ASEAN Security Community.¹² In 2013 the Aegis cruiser *Chosin* participated in ADMM+'s inaugural Maritime Security Field Training Exercise.¹³ At the May 2016 ADMM+ MS & CT FTX, the 7th Fleet was represented by the Aegis destroyer USS *Stethem*, a P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, Navy SEALs, and staff officers who performed exercise control and international force coordination duties. During that exercise, the ADMM+ navy ships sailed together as a multinational maritime security task force from Brunei, conducted operations in the South China Sea, and concluded the event in Singapore.¹⁴

Although most welcome, growth in the multinational maritime training exercise calendar comes at a time when the complex security environment also requires that navies conduct more operations at sea and invest more resources to the maintenance required to ensure their forces' mission readiness. In sum, demands for navies' resources, especially ships' time, are growing more quickly than growth in fleet capacities. Therefore, these new opportunities to engage are creating similar conversations in maritime headquarters across Southeast Asia – "Are there things we can consolidate to make room for emerging priorities and new commitments?" Unfortunately things are not so simple. The simple consolidation of events would likely yield an unacceptable loss of training value. Experience has demonstrated that a disadvantage of large multinational exercises such as those sponsored by WPNS and ADMM+ is that when too many training partners are brought together, differences in political sensitivities, security policy considerations, equipment, and operational procedures can limit the complexity or realism in

¹¹ Daniel Russel, Assistant Secretary of States, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "ASEAN and America: Partners for the Future," remarks, San Francisco, Commonwealth Club, July 28, 2014 <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/07/229872.htm>.

¹² J.N. Mak, "Unilateralism and Regionalism: Working Together and Alone in the Malacca Straits," in *Piracy, Maritime Terrorism and Securing the Malacca Straits*, p. 134

¹³ Peter Walz, "Chosin Unites with World Navies for an International Exercise," Oct 3, 2013. http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=76942.

¹⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran, "US Deploys Spy Plane, Destroyer to ADMM-Plus Exercise in Brunei and Singapore," *The Diplomat*, May 4, 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/us-deploys-spy-plane-destroyer-to-admm-plus-exercise-in-brunei-and-singapore/>

training scenarios and the sophistication of skills exercised. As a result, when the premium is placed on inclusion, multilateral exercise planner must dilute the training value in order to accommodate the greater number of partners.

Large events that include a wide range of partners have important roles as confidence building measures, opportunities to improve familiarity, and foundations for regional security architecture. However, they are typically not the best venue to advance cooperation in areas of sophisticated skills. In contrast, bilateral training can be tightly tailored to focus on higher order skills, but can underplay the complexity of the multinational coordination and the challenges associated with real-world operations. Seeking an optimal solution that respects the value of multilateral exercises while preserving opportunities for advanced training, the 7th Fleet has been working closely with its partners to update and improve its training and exercises in Southeast Asia.

Networking cooperation: building efficiency and effectiveness with the right partners in the right places

After internally deliberating on the operational requirement for improved training, 7th Fleet leaders consulted with partners, sought to understand their needs and concerns, and then found areas of common benefit. These conversations made it clear that the regional navies share a view that the growing list of large multilateral events plays an important role and that they also place great value on the training currently conducted in bilateral events with the United States. They also recognize that, no matter how well it might be crafted, a large multilateral exercise will never replicate the tailored advantages of bilateral training events such as CARAT. As a result, while there is a desire for more multilateral training, there is no appetite for a U.S.-sponsored 'SEATO Redux at Sea' or a 'Southeast Asia RIMPAC.' Reflecting on these insights, a deliberate approach has emerged that will introduce multilateral elements into many traditionally bilateral activities in Southeast Asia without changing the fundamental nature of those engagements. Introduction of the multilateral element is being carefully implemented to ensure that the sophistication of the skills or interoperability exercised is not degraded.

One venue for these discussions was the first-ever Southeast Asian Fleet's Commanders' Roundtable hosted by Vice Admiral Robert Thomas, then Commander 7th Fleet, while his command ship, USS *Blue Ridge*, was visiting Singapore's Changi Naval Base in May 2015.¹⁵ During this event, Vice Admiral Thomas solicited thoughts from the other fleet commanders, described his desire to move ahead together along paths valued by all, and pledged that he would not allow any changes to result in any loss to training value. Talking with media on the sideline of that event, Captain Ronald Oswald, the 7th Fleet's Assistant Chief of Staff for Theater Security Cooperation explained, "Looking back at [the region], even a couple of years ago things were different, but recent discussions with our partners about trilateral and multilateral exercises have been very positive."¹⁶ The second Southeast Asian Fleet Commanders' Roundtable was co-hosted by Admiral Thomas' successor Vice Admiral Joseph Aucoin and the Republic of

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzSocIHpPFQ> and <http://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/world/phl-japan-us-hold-talks-to-enhance-defense-cooperation/ar-AAgxtSa?li=AA9X5pk>

¹⁶ Kelvin Wong, "U.S. 7th Fleet to expand multilateral exercises with Southeast Asian navies," *HIS Jane's Defence Weekly*, May 5, 2015

Singapore Navy Fleet Commander Rear Admiral Lew Chuen Hong on March 19, 2016. It featured a larger group of participants and an elaborate agenda of shared maritime security concerns. Similarly, on March 5, 2016, VADM Aucoin hosted the first ever trilateral staff talks with officers from the Philippines Navy and the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force aboard USS *Blue Ridge* while making a routine port visit to Manila. Admiral Aucoin described these talks as “a tangible example of the unified commitment of our countries to the stability and security of this region.”¹⁷

The targeted multilateral carat initiative

One of the approaches being pursued has been dubbed the ‘Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative.’ First suggested by VADM Thomas at the May 2015 Fleet Commanders’ roundtable, this initiative retains the tailored training value currently enjoyed by bilateral CARAT exercises, while introducing valuable multilateral elements. Adding specifically selected multilateral elements to CARAT improves training value by introducing more realistic coordination structures, adding complexity, and expanding opportunities to involve the forces that best match the objectives. While speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the U.S.-sponsored multilateral Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise, Rear Admiral Charlie Williams, Commander of Task Force 73, located in Singapore, explained, “There is a great opportunity in this region to take advantage of the already-existing individual exercises between many of the countries, and come together to multilaterally affect better interoperability and better training at sea.”¹⁸ Under the Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative, the 7th Fleet and its regional Navy partners can employ two different approaches to select and introduce multilateral elements into a CARAT exercise. These are illustrated in Figure 1.

The first approach is for the two partners to mutually agree to invite a third party to the previously bilateral exercise. The third party would be selected based on common training objectives and the value its assets will contribute. The third parties could be other CARAT partners or extra-regional partners selected for their high-level of interoperability or operational acumen. These extra-regional players can leverage their high-levels of interoperability with the U.S. to ‘plug and play’ within CARAT with sophisticated forces and add immediate training value. Specifically, the 7th Fleet is seeking to capitalize on the already high-levels of interoperability enjoyed with allied nations such as Australia, Japan, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The practical benefits of this sort of cooperation are clear as they would raise the bar by adding more realistic coordination architectures and new, highly capable forces without risking any degradation in training value

The second approach is to create a multilateral CARAT phase by introducing a trilateral “overlap” between bilateral CARATs. Such multilateral phase presents opportunities for the three or more navies to train together in less-sensitive areas, typically areas such as HADR, anti-piracy, and search and rescue (SAR), while preserving more sensitive training for bilateral phases. This is possible because the types of activities conducted in the separate CARAT events

¹⁷ Kevin A. Flinn, “USS Blue Ridge Arrives in Manila, Strengthens Old Ties.” March 4, 2016
<http://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/010542>

¹⁸ Tang Chee, Send, “US’ rebalancing ‘brings better training possibilities,” *Today Online*, Oct 25, 2015.
<http://www.todayonline.com/world/americas/us-rebalancing-brings-better-training-possibilities>

across the region, from Bangladesh to Timor-Leste, share many similar objectives. A typical CARAT exercise includes a shore phase with symposia and subject matter expert exchanges and about a week at sea with units conducting everything from simple communications drills to missile firings and advanced Anti-Submarine Warfare. Targeting similar activities across two or more CARAT partners and agreeing to conduct those multilaterally allows for the addition of sophistication and realism while consolidating somewhat duplicative events. Fortuitously, those areas with the lowest barriers to multilateral training are the same areas where multinational cooperative action will be most likely. Overlapping bilateral exercises allows for the surface and air assets of all three partners to be re-invested in operations, unit-level training, and maintenance activities, or re-allocated to meet the growing demand signal in other regional exercises. Over time, as trust and confidence grow the multilateral phase may be expanded to include more training areas.

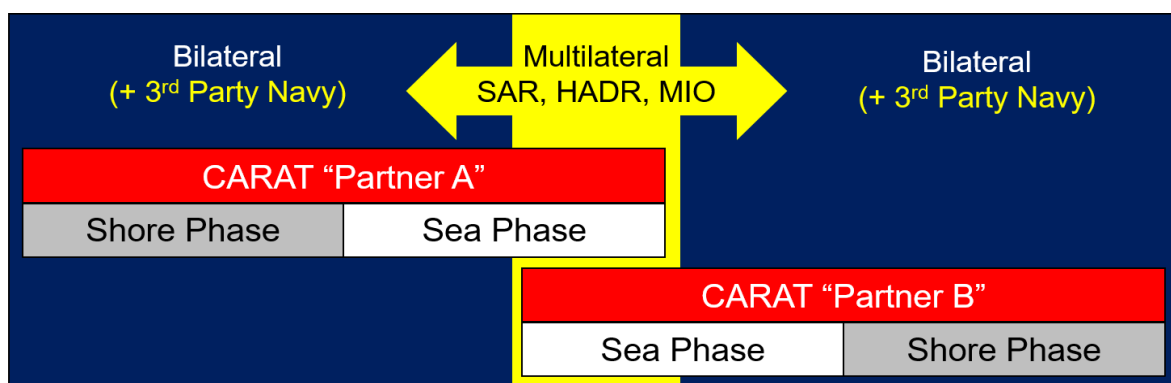


Figure 1: Overlapping traditionally bilateral exercises at the intersection of shared security concerns, allows for greater efficiency and effectiveness of training.

Multilateral CARAT partners are carefully being selected to guarantee that they add value to the training and strengthen progress toward the existing bilateral objectives. Those additional partners will therefore share geographic proximity or common training objectives. For example, one could envision a future CARAT event involving the United States, Bangladesh and the Philippines, because both Bangladesh and the Philippines are already cooperating closely with the U.S. Navy as they integrate ex-U.S. *Hamilton*-class cutters and AW-109 helicopters into their fleets. Alternately, two neighboring Southeast Asian partners may find it more effective and efficient to conduct some events trilaterally because they recognize that forces of nature, drifting vessels, lost aircraft, and criminals do not respect political boundaries.

Some observers have suggested that the development of multilateral CARAT events could be misunderstood as somehow aimed at forming a coalition that deliberately excludes China.¹⁹ That is simply not the case. The United States has clearly demonstrated the value it places in building global cooperation with the Chinese Navy by training together with it in exercises such as those sponsored by the ADMM+, ARF and WPNS. The U.S. Navy also invites

¹⁹ The feedback was received by the authors in several venues including roundtable discussion hosted by the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore (March 15, 2016), the Joint Open Seminar on Freedom of Navigation and Maritime Capacity Building conference hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs and Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta (March 29, 2016), and a maritime shared awareness workshop hosted by the Daniel K. Inoué Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu (16-19 May 2016).

Chinese participation in RIMPAC. These events provide ideal venues for building trust, confidence and the foundations for operational cooperation across the region. In contrast, inviting Chinese participation in a CARAT would run contrary to the tenants of the Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative because neither the 7th Fleet nor its Southeast Asian partners currently enjoy basic levels of interoperability with the Chinese Navy. Thus, including the Chinese Navy in a CARAT would decrease the training effectiveness and erode the premium value placed on those events. Given the importance of this training, it seems unlikely that any Southeast Asian Navy would want to take their CARAT exercise down such a path, in the near future. Naturally, this calculus could evolve over time.

The Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative is well underway with a number of pathfinding multilateral elements having been included in CARAT 2015. For example, the Royal Australian Navy observed CARAT Philippines, United Kingdom Royal Marines observed CARAT Indonesia, Portuguese and Australian forces had roles in CARAT Timor-Leste, and the Royal Brunei Navy observed CARAT Malaysia. These events enabled the 7th Fleet and its partners to learn lessons about the practical implementation of the Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative understand the nuanced complexities of adding new partners to well established events, and solicit feedback from all those involved. The most important takeaways from the 2015 experiences were a general concurrence regarding the value of this approach and the emergence of a shared assessment that the initiative's integral flexibility will ensure that the value of the exercises will be improved.

These experiences set the stage for the introduction of more complex multilateral elements into CARAT 2016. A major milestone, the first ever trilateral CARAT event, took place between the bilateral phases of CARATs Malaysia and Philippines on June 4 and is shown in Figure 2.²⁰ Malaysian Joint Force Headquarters Chief of Staff Rear Admiral Dato' Mohammad Adib Abdul Samad described this landmark event by explaining, "This year CARAT also created a new chapter by moving into a new maritime segment from bilateral into multilateral where Malaysian Navy, US Navy and the Philippines Navy will share information and maritime domain awareness to address trans-border crime and illegal activities."²¹ The multinational CARAT training force conducted a coordinated tracking, surveillance, and boarding exercise of a suspected hijacked merchant vessel, played by USNS *Montford Point* in the Sulu Sea. Supported by a U.S. Navy P-8 maritime patrol reconnaissance aircraft, ships at sea and naval operations centers ashore shared information to build a Common Operational Picture, a fundamental building block for any cooperative maritime operation. With this major milestone successfully accomplished, regional maritime partners state that they are looking forward to additional and more complex multilateral elements during the remainder of CARAT 2016 and into the future.

²⁰ For more detail see, "U.S., Philippine, and Royal Malaysian Navies Conduct CARAT," *Asian Journal*, June 4, 2016 <<http://asianjournal.com/news/u-s-philippine-and-royal-malaysian-navies-conduct-carat/#sthash.0cAiZdzD.dpuf>>

²¹ "528 from 9 Nations take part in Navy Exercise," *Daily Express*, June 02, 2016, <<http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=110305>>

Conclusion

The Targeted Multilateral CARAT Initiative is just one of the fresh approaches the 7th Fleet is taking to network its cooperative endeavors in Southeast Asia. SEACAT is being similarly expanded and modernized. The navies of Bangladesh, Cambodia, and the coast guards of the Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia and the United States are likely to be first time participants in 2016. The Sri Lankan Navy may also begin observing SEACAT. Similarly, the maritime components of the 2016 maritime joint exercises *Cobra Gold* and *Balikatan* in Thailand and the Philippines respectively included new milestones for regional relationships. For example, in 2016 India participated *Cobra Gold's* in amphibious training for the first time while two Japanese destroyers and a submarine joined *Balikatan*. Still, the advances being made in CARAT are perhaps the clearest representation of what is truly new. Trust in the strength of U.S. partnerships, the confidence built over time by regional cooperation, and the shared desire to be more effective and efficient are driving multilateral elements into previously bilateral operational relationships. The resulting cooperative networks are fundamentally altering the dynamics of the 7th Fleets' theater security cooperation in Southeast Asia. Similarly, advancing U.S. maritime security cooperation from its outdated hubs-and-spokes legacy to a model of networked cooperation is helping strengthen relationships between partners and thereby solidify the foundations of a principled maritime security community in Southeast Asia.

Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) cooperative training exercise between U.S., Malaysia, and Philippines Naval Forces in the Sulu Sea

03 - 04 June 2016

FIGURE 2



U.S. and Philippine Navy watchstanders use CENTRIX to build a Common Operation Picture (COP) at Puerto Princessa Ops Center, Philippines



Combined U.S. and Philippine Navy boarding teams conduct Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) of USNS MONTFORD POINT in Sulu Sea



Combined U.S. and Malaysian Navy boarding teams conduct Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) of KA BUNGA MAS 5 in Sulu Sea



U.S. and Royal Malaysian Navy watchstanders use CENTRIX to build a Common Operation Picture (COP) at Sandakan Naval Base, Malaysia



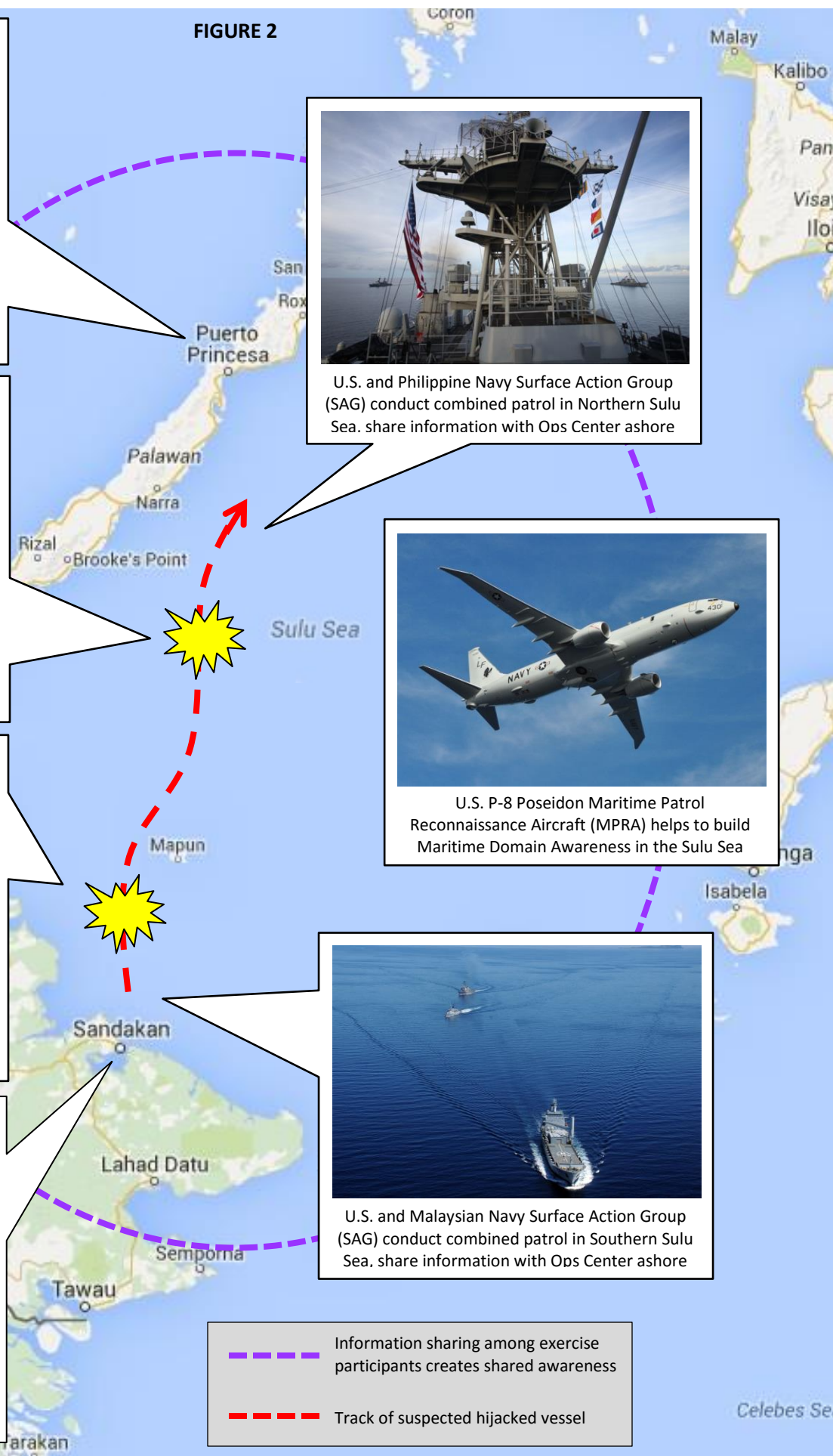
U.S. and Philippine Navy Surface Action Group (SAG) conduct combined patrol in Northern Sulu Sea, share information with Ops Center ashore



U.S. P-8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) helps to build Maritime Domain Awareness in the Sulu Sea



U.S. and Malaysian Navy Surface Action Group (SAG) conduct combined patrol in Southern Sulu Sea, share information with Ops Center ashore



- Information sharing among exercise participants creates shared awareness
- Track of suspected hijacked vessel

About the Authors

Commander John F. Bradford currently serves the Regional Cooperation Coordinator for the U.S. 7th Fleet and as an adjunct fellow at The Institute for Contemporary Asian Studies, Temple University, Japan Campus. He maintains an active research agenda focused on Asian security with special attention given to maritime issues and cooperative affairs. His written work can be found in publications such as *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *Asia Policy*, *Asian Security*, *Asian Survey*, *Naval War College Review*, and *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* as well as in online outlets and stand-alone volumes published by leading international think tanks. John received his BA in Asian Studies and Government from Cornell University. During his undergraduate experience he also earned a Certificate of Indonesian Studies from Malang State University in Indonesia and trained as an exchange midshipman onboard the Royal Malaysia Navy's KD *Rahmat*. As an Olmsted Scholar, he studied in the Department of Political Science at Gadjah Mada University in Indonesia and completed an MSc (Strategic Studies) from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore. At RSIS, he was awarded the UOB Gold Medal as the top student in Strategic Studies.

Commander Greg R. Adams serves as the Assistant Chief of Staff for Theater Security Cooperation for Commander, Task Force 73 in Singapore. He has served on several ships and staffs in the Western Pacific and has been involved at all levels of planning and execution of the exercise series CARAT and SEACAT. His description of his experiences as the U.S. Liaison Officer ashore in Pangkalanbuun during the multinational search and rescue for AirAsia flight QZ8501 was featured in *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* and he published more recently on Navy.Live where he wrote about the multilateral merits of the exercise SEACAT in 'SEACAT: A Southeast Asian Multilateral Powerhouse'. He holds an Associate of Arts in Indonesian Language from the Defense Language Institute, a BS in Oceanography from the U.S. Navy Academy, and Masters of Art in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore and in National Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College. In 2013, he became a U.S. Navy Foreign Area Officer specializing in the Asia-Pacific region.