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Department of Defense Strategic Evaluation
of U.S. Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia (2015-2019)
Public Summary

The Department of Defense (DoD) sponsors strategic evaluations of security cooperation programs and activities pursuant to 10 U.S.C. 383 and DoD Instruction 5132.14, “Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise.” The predecessor office to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Partnerships (ODASD(GP)) and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) initiated regional strategic evaluations to measure strategic effects and implications of maritime security (MARSEC) initiatives by the DoD security cooperation enterprise.

DoD commissioned the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), an independent, Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC), to conduct this strategic evaluation of DoD MARSEC efforts in Southeast Asia (SEA). The evaluation, “Evaluating a Competitive Strategy for Maritime Security Cooperation in Southeast Asia,” evaluated maritime security cooperation activities conducted from 2015 to 2019.

This summary, developed by ODASD(GP), provides unclassified primary findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from CNA’s evaluation report.

The evaluation focused on three questions:

- 1 Are partners more capable?
- 2 Are partners working with the United States toward shared objectives?
- 3 Have U.S. efforts increased influence and created opportunities to advance strategic objectives?

Methodology. The goal of this evaluation was to determine whether partner nations (PNs) have advanced their maritime security (MARSEC) capabilities, and in what ways MSC in Southeast Asia supports the strategic objectives of the United States.

CNA applied a formal evaluation framework to five partner nations: Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

CNA scoped its evaluation to these five partners because they have received U.S. assistance over the last five years through the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI), a focal point of U.S. MSC efforts since 2015, but MSC efforts beyond MSI were evaluated. The analysis considered the breadth of U.S. MSC activities in these countries from 2015-2019.

The evaluation examined the strategic impact of MSC through three lenses: capacity building, partnership, and access. The U.S. strategy for MSC is to build capacity for maritime domain awareness (MDA) and information sharing to provide vehicles for the long-term pursuit of U.S. strategy. Thus, the focus of U.S. MSC in Southeast Asia during the relevant time period (from 2015-19) was to build PNs’ abilities to “sense, share, and contribute” to regional MDA. Through these capacity-building efforts, and by working with and through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the extent possible, the U.S. aimed to reinforce its role as the security partner of choice for Southeast Asian nations and, therefore, expand U.S. access and influence throughout the region.

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With this understanding of U.S. strategic objectives for MSC efforts, CNA developed a theory of how MSC activities could contribute to strategic change in a way consistent with U.S. objectives. CNA then developed a logical framework (LOGFRAME) to map out how particular activities and programs should in theory lead to measureable outcomes. The LOGFRAME ties activities (inputs) to measurable objectives (outputs) and aligns those outputs with desired end states (outcomes) that represent foundational conditions of achieving the long-term objective of U.S. strategy. U.S. Indo Pacific Command's 2016 strategy identified objectives to be achieved over five, ten, and twenty years. CNA's theory of change also assumed a long-term effort. To be consistent with that strategy and the correlating congressional intent, CNA focused their evaluation on a five-year goal that emphasizes building capacity to "sense, share, and contribute."

Findings. These country-level findings informed CNA's evaluation of MSC at the regional level, culminating in the key findings and recommendations below.

Indonesia. From 2015-19, Indonesia made small advances in its ability to surveille its maritime domain, particularly through its eager adoption of the SeaVision maritime surveillance tool. Their maritime services during this time were not significantly more capable of sharing MDA information, but establishing the civilian Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (BAKAMLA) may help with domestic coordination. Entering the Trilateral Cooperative Agreements (TCA) with Malaysia and the Philippines indicates Indonesia's desire to address common threats in the Sulu and Celebes Seas. Indonesia's maritime services still face challenges to maintenance and sustainment that limit Indonesia's ability to contribute to regional maritime security. Overall, both Indonesia and the United States emphasize maritime security, which has increased the partnership between the two countries and crated opportunities to further the relationship.

Philippines. Although the United States delivered a considerable amount of equipment to the Philippines from 2015-2019, there was little evidence that this has improved the ability of the Philippine maritime forces to sense the Philippines' maritime domain, largely because Philippine forces have difficulty absorbing new equipment. The premier example of successful MSC with the Philippines was the National Coast Watch Center (NCWC), which allowed most of the country's maritime services to share MDC information to a degree that was previously impossible. Yet, the Philippines remained critically constrained in meetings its own domestic maritime security needs and could make only limited contributions to regional maritime security during the time period of the report. Then-President Rodrigo Duterte's abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) called into question the state of the U.S.-Philippines partnership, although the personnel in the country's maritime forces expressed their belief that the United States is the Philippines' most reliable security partner. Without the VFA, the level of future U.S. access in the Philippines is uncertain, although MSC has created key opportunities for engagement in the past.

Malaysia. From 2015-19, Malaysia marginally increased its capacity to sense maritime activity, especially using SeaVision, but it lacked a complete picture of its maritime territories. Internally,

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Malaysia's maritime services shared MDA information on an ad hoc basis, and they shared only limited information with neighbors. Malaysian maritime forces demonstrated some operational proficiency and contribute to the Malacca Strait Patrol and the TCA, although their ability to contribute to regional maritime security remained limited by readiness issues. Malaysia's activities to promote maritime security aligned with those of the United States, and the MSC activities appeared to have advanced this partnership. MSC also enhanced U.S. access to Malaysian personnel and facilities by creating opportunities to engage senior leaders on matters of importance to them and to demonstrate the value of cooperation with the United States.

Vietnam. From 2015-19, Vietnam continued to have difficulty monitoring its vast maritime space. Its use of SeaVision was limited, allowing it to sense only a fraction of the challenges facing it. Vietnam lacked the internal infrastructure to facilitate domestic MDA information sharing, and there was little evidence that their willingness and ability to share information with neighbors had increased from 2015-19. Hanoi had increased the size of its fleet, however, including making significant acquisitions of U.S. vessels (a Hamilton-class cutter and Metal Shark patrol craft), although the United States had little opportunity to observe the proficiency of Vietnamese personnel to operate these vessels and contribute to maritime security. Partnership with Vietnam was nascent during this time, given the recent history of military relations with the United States, but maritime security was a driving agent of cooperation. Access in Vietnam was extremely limited because the government strictly controls interactions with foreign militaries, although some Vietnamese personnel seemed to interpret these restrictions liberally in order to facilitate interactions with the United States.

Thailand. From 2015-19, Thailand had taken significant steps to improve its MDA, but its ability to sense its maritime domain was still limited because it lacked intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms and sensors. Its greatest advancement was establishing the Maritime Enforcement Coordinating Center (Thai-MECC), which facilitates domestic information sharing, through it shared information externally on only a case-by-case basis during this time. Thailand's efforts to contribute to its own maritime security generated several notable success stories since 2015, but its ability to completely control its maritime domain was still developing. U.S.-Thai partnership has suffered in general since the 2014 coup d'état and subsequent U.S. sanctions. Since 2014, the Royal Thai Navy has pursued a closer relationship with the People's Liberation Army Navy. U.S. access to Thai personnel and facilities had traditionally been strong, although the recent expansion of Chinese influence in the country may pose challenges in the future, as illustrated by the Thai decision to purchase Chinese submarines.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

Partner Nation Capabilities

Conclusion. Across the region, PNs made small but significant advancements in their capabilities from 2015-19. However, note that the scope of this evaluation was limited. The first

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investments were made in fiscal year (FY) 2016, but only began being implemented in FY 2017. Also, the results of FY 2019 were incomplete at the time of data collection.

- **Recommendation.** U.S. Indo Pacific Command, in coordination with the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should maintain – and if possible expand – the emphasis on MSC in Southeast Asia, though any expansions should align with the emphasis that PNs place on reforming their own maritime security sectors. Supporting the PN national interests that correspond to U.S. interest will reinforce the status of the United States as the security partner of choice.

Conclusion. U.S. efforts have been important for developing our partners' MARSEC capabilities, particularly MDA capabilities, from 2015-19, but they were not the only factors at play, nor were all efforts equally successful or effective. Some efforts, such as the Philippines' NCWC, would have been impossible without U.S. assistance. Yet, some U.S. MSC efforts, such as the Philippines' aerostat, did not have the desired effect. Unsuccessful efforts were often the result of pushing solutions without appropriate coordination with country teams, instead of working closely with PNs to determine their needs.

- **Recommendation.** Security cooperation officers (SCOs), supported by U.S. Indo Pacific Command, should lead the coordination with PN governments to avoid pitfalls that diminish the strategic effectiveness of U.S. MSC efforts. Such pitfalls often result from efforts that have not been well coordinated with the country teams.

Conclusion. Regional navies play an important role in MARSEC, but key PN capabilities are being developed by their coast guards and other domestic and law enforcement maritime agencies. Although DoD framed many of its efforts in terms of great power competition at the time of this study, this framing is counterproductive in Southeast Asia and risks focusing MSC too narrowly on navy-navy ties. The primary concern of Southeast Asian PNs is the defense of their maritime economic interests, which is a domestic capability. Navies have tended to assume responsibility for maritime patrol because most coast guards in the region are relatively young services with limited capacity and capabilities. However, partly with the support of the United States and its allies, this is changing.

- **Recommendation.** U.S. Indo Pacific Command, Pacific Fleet, and Regional Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODCs) should work closely with the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of State, and other U.S. government agencies to ensure that PN entities with stakes in regional MARSEC are engaged and resourced to succeed.

Conclusion. There is widespread regional will to improve MARSEC capabilities, which continues to offer a strategic opportunity for MSC efforts. Clear signs of PN willingness to take ownership of their own maritime security often underlay these nascent advances.

- **Recommendation.** U.S. Indo Pacific Command, the Pacific Fleet, and Security Cooperation Officers (SCOs), in coordination with DSCA and ODASD Security Cooperation (now ODASD Global Partnerships), should continue to emphasize the

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development of MDA and information-sharing capabilities, which PNs have demonstrated interest in pursuing and which are critical to advancing maritime security capabilities more broadly.

Conclusion. The absorptive capacity of Southeast Asian PNs for MSC remains a challenge. Partners need to plan, budget and secure national-level approval to commit resources towards the successful integration of U.S.-funded systems and platforms. These processes can take years.

- **Recommendation.** DSCA, in close coordination with U.S. Indo Pacific Command, Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODCs), and Security Cooperation Officers (SCOs), should continue to use the Institute for Security Governance and other building partner capacity resources to help develop the professional skills of PN leaders, particularly in the areas of budgeting and planning.

U.S. MSC Processes

Conclusion. From 2015-19, the Pacific Fleet, as U.S. Indo Pacific Command's executive agent for MSC, has consistently employed a program of MSC-related activities authorized under Title 10, U.S. Code and exercise coordination that adheres to the competitive strategic objectives identified in 2015. These efforts do not represent the whole of MSC efforts, however, and CNA found evidence that other DoD efforts are not always coordinated or well communicated with the geographic Combatant Commander (CCMD) or with country teams. Recent coordination mechanisms have improved this condition, and they continue to evolve.

- **Recommendation.** DSCA and Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODCs), in coordination with U.S. Indo Pacific Command and OSD, should adopt a service-oriented paradigm of security cooperation that emphasizes PNs as customers, rather than beneficiaries, of U.S. security assistance. In great power competition, our partners do have choices; the United States needs to make it easy for them to choose the United States.

The Strategic Value of MSC

Conclusion. MSC activities advanced the image of the United States as a credible security partner in Southeast Asia from 2015-19, but missteps have the potential to undermine this progress. Regional partners have long been skeptical of the reliability of the United States as a partners. Security cooperation not only builds PN capacity but also contributes to U.S. credibility as a security partner. Providing capability in a way that undermines U.S. credibility is counterproductive to achieving strategic objectives.

- **Recommendation.** The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs (ASD-IPSA), DSCA, U.S. Indo Pacific Command, and the Pacific Fleet should recognize that for strategic purposes, MSC efforts are as much about building and maintaining relationships as they are about improving PN capabilities. Working with partners to identify and address their security needs is likely to do more to establish the U.S. position as the security partner of choice than any system or platform. U.S. Indo Pacific Command and the Pacific Fleet should focus on the long-term objectives of MSC

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while emphasizing daily interactions. Credibility is achieved through persistent engagement, deliberate planning, clear communication with partners, and consistent messaging.

Conclusion. Considerable evidence supports the theory that education and exchanges promote U.S. partnerships and access, and their absence makes a difference for years to come. Across the board, PN officials who had participated in such programs cited the benefits of participation, including professional development, skills and knowledge gained, and positive exposure to the United States. In contrast, two suspended military contacts have had long-term impacts on U.S. partnership and access. In Indonesia, the so-called “lost generation” demonstrates more skepticism and reluctance to engage in U.S. security cooperation efforts than the younger generation that has come of age since military relations were reestablished. A similar phenomenon emerged in Thailand among officers impacted by sanctions imposed after the 2014 coup d’état.

- **Recommendation.** Functional Security Cooperation (SC) agencies, such as ODASD Security Cooperation (now ODASD Global Partnerships) and DSCA, should continue relying on the expertise of regionally-focused entities, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs (OASD-IPSA), U.S. Indo Pacific Command, the Pacific Fleet, and regional Offices of Defense Cooperation (ODCs), to interpret geopolitical developments and their impact on MSC efforts. DSCA, ODASD Security Cooperation (now ODASD Global Partnerships), and Security Cooperation Officers (SCOs), in coordination with U.S. Indo Pacific Command and the Pacific Fleet, should expand coordination with other U.S. government agencies, especially the Department of State and the U.S. Coast Guard, in order to maximize the efficiencies and impact of MSC in Southeast Asia.

Evaluation Results. In accordance with Department of Defense Instruction 5132.14, “Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise,” the Department is applying recommendations and lessons learned from this evaluation to make adjustments to policy, programs, and resource allocation decisions, including the following:

- **Implementing Recommendations.** The Department has developed an internal action plan in coordination with primary stakeholder organizations to consider and implement useful recommendations of this evaluation. The design as well as review of ongoing security cooperation efforts in the region is informed by findings and recommendations of this report, including updates of security cooperation planning and programming. Additionally, the return on investment determined by this evaluation will inform SC resourcing considerations for MARSEC-related efforts in the region.
- **Contributions to the SC Performance Management Framework.** DoD disseminated the evaluation report’s findings across the Department to support learning. CNA’s initiative design documents, to include theories of change, logic frameworks, objective trees, and indicators for case studies have served as tools for the planning and design of future

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maritime-related activities. Content of the evaluation will be entered into a security cooperation activity database. Additionally, findings will be incorporated into the design and implementation of ongoing monitoring activities in the region to validate future planning requirements connected to country-specific MDA and MARSEC objectives.

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