

Jan 23, 2026

Department of Defense

STRATEGIC EVALUATION: SECURITY REVIEW

Department of War Strategic Evaluation

Strategic Evaluation Public Summary: Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Capacity Building with Indonesia and the Philippines

The Department of War (DoW) sponsors strategic evaluations of security cooperation (SC) programs and activities pursuant to 10 U.S.C. Section 383 and Department of Defense Instruction 5132.14, Assessment, Monitoring, and Evaluation Policy for the Security Cooperation Enterprise. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Security Cooperation (ODASW(SC)) initiated a strategic evaluation of maritime domain awareness (MDA) capacity-building efforts from 2020 to 2024 in Indonesia and the Philippines to measure their strategic effects, assess their progress, and determine their implications.

The DoW commissioned the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), an independent, Federally Funded Research and Development Center, to conduct this evaluation, entitled *“Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Capacity-Building Evaluation: Indonesia and the Philippines.”* This summary provides an unclassified overview of CNA’s report.

Research Questions and Approach

The MDA capacity-building evaluation addressed four questions:

1. To what extent have U.S. MDA capacity-building efforts over the past five years contributed to the selected partner nations’ ability to sense activities taking place in their waters?
2. To what extent have U.S. MDA capacity-building efforts enhanced the selected partners’ ability to share information with the United States and other partners in the region?
3. What factors have influenced progress toward or away from building selected partner nations’ MDA capacity?
4. What best practices and lessons learned from these U.S. MDA capacity-building efforts can improve the planning, design, and implementation of maritime security (MARSEC) SC in the region and elsewhere?

To address these questions, CNA structured its evaluation around four dimensions: timeline (2020–2024), thematic focus (the “sense” and “share” components of the U.S. MARSEC framework which includes “sense, share, and contribute”), country (Indonesia and the Philippines), and strategic level. It then designed a five-part approach. First, it established a 2020 baseline of each partner nation’s capabilities and developed a logical framework (LOGFRAME) for each country. Second, CNA conducted research to identify the planned and actual programmatic inputs, outputs, and outcomes for the SC programs. The CNA study team supplemented this research with in-country data collection and semi-structured discussions with relevant stakeholders. Third, CNA evaluated the capacity-building efforts in each country to determine progress. Fourth, CNA drew on this analysis to identify common themes and key factors that influenced progress toward or away from building MDA capacity. Fifth, CNA identified best practices for building MDA capacity in the Philippines and Indonesia and provided a series of recommendations.

Findings: Evaluation Questions 1 and 2

Indonesia. Since the baseline in 2020, Indonesia has made substantial progress in fielding sensors and collections assets across air-, shore-, and sea-based platforms to monitor maritime activity and threats. However, despite this progress, Indonesia's data integration, intelligence generation, and intelligence analyst training capabilities remain limited. To fully leverage its incoming data streams, Indonesia must address these limitations.

Over the past five years, Indonesia has made notable progress in both its domestic and regional information-sharing capabilities. Although challenges remain, Indonesia's MARSEC agencies actively share information among themselves and with regional partners, even if they do not always use institutionalized channels. This progress in information sharing capabilities serves as an important success story for U.S. SC and represents an area of strength for Indonesian MARSEC agencies.

The Philippines. The Philippines continues to face sensing and information-sharing capability challenges that constrain its ability to monitor activities within its exclusive economic zone. Despite ongoing efforts to enhance surveillance, its antiquated surveillance network and limited patrol assets present challenges to achieving optimal situational awareness.

During the evaluation period, the Philippines demonstrated developing capabilities in domestic and regional information sharing. Gaps remain in information-sharing policies, and its secure communications infrastructure. The Philippines signing the 2024 General Security of Military Information Agreement marks a key step toward facilitating deeper bilateral information sharing in the coming years.

Findings: Evaluation Question 3

In examining each country case, CNA identified several factors that facilitated or hindered progress in building MDA capacity. These factors did not always affect outcomes in the same way or to the same degree in each country. For example, ongoing interservice silos persist in both countries. However, these silos and interservice rivalries are much deeper in the Philippines than in Indonesia. In Indonesia, interservice silos and rivalries *used to* be a significant constraining factor for domestic and regional information sharing, but significant progress has been made in overcoming these issues in recent years (silos persist but at lower levels). In contrast, service and planning silos within the Philippines *continue to* have a notable and negative effect on progress toward deeper information sharing.

| Factors Contributing to Success | Indonesia | Philippines |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| In-country MARSEC advisor | ✓ | |
| Ongoing People's Republic of China (PRC) maritime territorial threats in the South China Sea incentivizing development of MDA capabilities | ✓ | ✓ |
| Non-PRC maritime threats incentivizing MDA capability development | ✓ | |
| Active naval modernization and investment plans by partner nation government | ✓ | ✓ |
| SC efforts focused on designated priority areas | ✓ | ✓ |
| Limiting Factors | Indonesia | Philippines |

UNCLASSIFIED

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| SC inputs delivered to units outside the mutually agreed-upon areas | ✓ | |
| Inputs from many donor countries present interoperability and sustainment challenges | ✓ | ✓ |
| Delays and challenges induced by COVID-19 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Inconsistent prioritization of MARSEC by partner nation government | ✓ | |
| Persistent stovepipes in communication and coordination between MARSEC agencies | ✓ | ✓ |

Findings and Recommendations: Evaluation Question 4

CNA identified the following best practices, lessons learned, and related recommendations:

Personnel and Relationships. Having an in-country MARSEC advisor is critical for building relations, maintaining institutional knowledge, and achieving programmatic success.

- Recommendation: Priority countries for maritime SC should have an in-country forward advisor to support program implementation. The Philippines stands out as a priority country that would benefit from an in-country advisor. This position should be based out of the U.S. Embassy and filled by someone able to remain in-country for an extended period, rather than rotating out after a short assignment; to support an extended deployment, this role should be filled by a civilian or contractor. The goal is to enable the advisor to build long-term, trusted relationships with partner nation forces. Although these forward advisor positions are currently funded through the Maritime Security Initiative, they do not necessarily have to be limited to this funding authority.

Progress is more likely when the United States gets buy-in from the right defense officials, which are different in each partner nation, given each country's unique internal dynamics.

- Recommendation: The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) J5 should work with the MARSEC forward advisors, when applicable, to identify the offices and the level of engagement needed to get the appropriate approvals. This engagement may involve developing a short country-specific reference guide that outlines the stakeholders necessary for different types of project approval across the partner nation's security and acquisition ecosystem.

Equipment. Equipment is not always delivered to the mutually agreed-upon areas.

- Recommendation: The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) should collaborate closely with the U.S. Embassy Military Groups, the U.S. implementing agencies, and the partner nation to ensure that equipment ultimately reaches units focused on the designated priority areas. If equipment needs to be delivered to units in a non-priority area for internal reasons within the partner nation, the U.S. Military Group and other cognizant United States and partner nation stakeholders should identify a plan to ensure that it reaches the ultimate destination in a timely fashion and is integrated with the appropriate systems.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Partner nations have not consistently utilized the Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange System (CENTRIXS) program beyond scheduled exercises, raising concerns about the efficient allocation of resources and program viability.

- Recommendation: The USINDOPACOM J5 and J6 should assess the CENTRIXS program's overall efficacy periodically for ally and partner information-sharing and by conducting a cost-benefit analysis. If underutilization persists, resources should be reallocated to pilot alternative or supplemental communication platforms that are better aligned with partner nations' operational needs, ensuring that the system remains relevant and effective in supporting U.S.-partner nation information exchange.

Advising and Training. Advising and training are the most effective when targeted at operators, not senior flag officers or political leaders.

- Recommendation: Provide and prioritize security cooperation technical training courses for ally and partner civilian operators and non-commissioned officers.

Partner nations often have limited resources and absorptive capacity. Determining which program to pursue requires an understanding of the trade-offs between marginal benefit and marginal cost.

- Recommendation: USINDOPACOM should collaborate with in-country MARSEC personnel to identify when a country's capabilities have reached a "good enough" threshold. Identifying this point can support more effective resource allocation by allowing the command to consider shifting efforts toward areas where limited investments yield high marginal benefits.

SC Planning. U.S. Military Group personnel in both Indonesia and the Philippines raised challenges to long-term funding for sustaining SC programming.

- Recommendation: ODASW(SC) should consider working with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs to explore legislative options to secure extended funding timelines for the International Security Cooperation Programs account. Multiyear funding would support longer-term SC implementation.

UNCLASSIFIED