

## **In Search of Maritime Governance Cooperation: A Case Study of the Sulu Celebes Seas**

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### **Abstract**

Compared with the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, the Sulu and Celebes (Sulawesi) seas have been neglected by policymakers working for maritime governance in the region. Formed in 1993, the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP EAGA) hides behind the Mekong subregion when it comes to subregional cooperation within the ASEAN framework. While some policymakers in the littoral states recognized the threats caused by the Abu Sayyaf Group and organized the Trilateral Cooperative Agreement in 2016, they more often depend upon individual countries' efforts to suppress threats. In this chapter, we examine the opportunities and challenges in the Sulu Celebes Seas as a case study to understand the possibility of cooperation in maritime governance in Southeast Asia. We argue that all of the littoral states in the region are interested in and have invested their resources in their capacity for maritime domain awareness, though they have not necessarily coordinated well with each other. We demonstrate that they have developed their capacities in cooperation with external partners such as the United States and Japan. The chapter concludes that capacity building in maritime domain awareness is a common agenda the littoral states can work on together, even though they do not necessarily share policy priorities.

### **Introduction**

Great power rivalry has focused the eyes of the world on Southeast Asia. American Sinologist, David Shambaugh published a book entitled *Where Great Powers Meet* (2020) that referred to Southeast Asia as an arena where the United States and China meet and compete with each other. A major focal point of the great power rivalry, especially in maritime affairs, is the South China Sea. Against this backdrop, some have paid attention to the Sulu and Celebes (Sulawesi) seas (Amling et al. 2019; Chalk 2019; Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict [IPAC] 2019, 2020; Storey 2018). For instance, a senior editor of *Diplomat* observed that the Sulu and Celebes seas dominated the discussion in the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue (Parameswaran 2016). While these experts remind us of the significance of these seas, they have only begun the research on them, leaving room for further studies comparing the Sulu and Celebes seas with the South China Sea.

The Sulu Celebes seas comprise a vast maritime area covering the triborder area between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. In the Philippines, Palawan Island, the

Western Visayas region, the Zamboanga Peninsula of Mindanao Island, and the Sulu Archipelago surround the Sulu Sea. The Sulu Sea is also bordered by the eastern coast of Sabah, Malaysia.

To the south, the Eastern Coast of Sabah, Malaysia; the Sulu Archipelago, Zamboanga Peninsula, and southwestern Mindanao Island in the Philippines; and northern and eastern Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, and the Sangihe Islands in Indonesia surround the Celebes Sea. These seas have rich maritime resources and play a pivotal role in regional trade beyond just the littoral states.

When it comes to subregional cooperation in Southeast Asia, most media coverage has focused more on the Mekong subregion or the growth triangle composed of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. News outlets have rarely discussed the potential of the Sulu Celebes Seas, though ASEAN still maintains the subregional cooperation mechanism of the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), including for the Sulu Celebes seas.

This is partly because the scarcity of people and distance from the capital cities make this region less attractive for the politicians of all three countries (Alming et al. 2019, 24). The Sulu Celebes seas have attracted not trade and investment, but a variety of illicit activities. Luhut Pandjaintan, the Indonesian coordinating minister for maritime affairs and investment, once expressed his concern about the possibility of the area being “a new Somalia” when he observed the rise of piracy in these seas in 2016 (Jensen and Kappor 2016). Aside from conventional crimes such as smuggling and drug and trafficking in drugs, weapons, and human, these seas are also notorious for activities carried out by terrorist organizations such as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and a network of violent extremists including the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). These acute threats prompted the littoral states to organize various regional and domestic institutions to deal with them.

In this chapter, we examine the possibility and challenges of maritime order in the Sulu Celebes seas as an important case by which to understand the dynamics of maritime order in Southeast Asia. We aim to reveal the overlapping and independent interests of the Southeast Asian countries by reviewing the development of regional cooperation while scrutinizing the different priorities of each littoral state bordering the Sulu Celebes seas. As keen observers have realized, regional cooperation is always a formidable task; some have suggested that we should evaluate the individual efforts of each member state (Chalk 2019). Recognizing that the littoral states often develop their various maritime capacity in cooperation with development partners or allied partners outside of the region is also important. This chapter reviews the limitations of international cooperation and the search for a common workable agenda via a bottom-up review of the littoral states’

ongoing efforts to mitigate threats and maximize opportunity in the Sulu Celebes seas.

The following is composed of four sections and a conclusion. We review the situation in the regions in the first section. We describe existing challenges facing the regions in the second section. We examine various countermeasures to mitigate these challenges in the third section. We examine the implications of development in the Sulu Celebes seas in the broader context of maritime order and the great power rivalry in the fourth section.

#### 1. Blue economy: What are the stakes for the littoral states?

To appreciate the economic potential of the Sulu Celebes seas, we briefly review the local coastal economy, describing the similarities and differences among the coastal regions facing the Sulu Celebes seas.

Sabah, with a \$5,750 GRDP per capita, is the one of the rich coastal economies in the Sulu Celebes seas. Sabah enjoyed rapid economic growth of 8.2 percent in 2017, but it is a less developed state in the context of Malaysia as a whole, which has a GDP of \$11,800 per capita (Amling et al. 2019, 8). Within Sabah, Sandakan is the largest city along the Sulu coast and an important port for cacao and palm oil exports. While the western coast of Sabah almost dominates oil and gas production, the eastern coast could maximize its potential once the boundaries among Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are settled (Amling et al. 2019, 8). Sabah's economy has enjoyed a booming tourism industry, which contributed to 10 percent of its GRDP in 2017 (Amling et al. 2019, 16). Sabah's booming economy has attracted migrant workers from Indonesia and the Philippines. For instance, in Lahad Datu, Kota Kinabatangan, and Bodgaya Island (all along the eastern coast of Sabah), almost 60 percent of residents are from abroad (Amling et al. 2019, 48).

North and East Kalimantan are provinces of Indonesia whose economies depend on oil and petrochemical industries and the shipping industry (Amling et al. 2019, 9). Thanks to the commodity boom, East Kalimantan enjoyed the highest GRDP per capita among the regions in the Sulu Celebes seas at \$8,500 in 2017. Although some are concerned about declining production and benefits from the oil and gas industries in the last decades, others point out the possibility of new industries involving carbon dioxide sequestration and subsurface storage (Alming et al. 2019, 9). Notably, the Philippines imports 70 percent of the coal it consumes through the Sulu Celebes seas (Alming et al. 2019, 9).

On the opposite side of Borneo are the Northern Sulawesi and Sangihe islands. Their major economic activities are fishing and coconut oil exportation, though these are

not lucrative businesses. People often travel to General Santos City in Mindanao to work in canneries there (Alming et al. 2019, 9). In Central Sulawesi, a boom in nickel production is currently underway (Alming et al. 2019, 16).

Along the central and southern Philippines, major economic activity occurs in Zamboanga City on Mindanao Island in the southern Philippines, as well as Iloilo City on Panay Island in the central Philippines. The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) on the same island has attracted international attention because of its acute poverty and violence. ARMM has only achieved \$580 GRDP per capita, which was the lowest GRDP per capita in the region in 2017 (Alming et al. 2019, 18).

Aside from the economic activities in the littoral states, the seas provide the important public good of shipping routes for international trade.

## 2. Various challenges beyond the trilateral borders

### Illicit trade and fishing

Various illicit trades are rampant in the Sulu Celebes seas. Although illegal barter trades are problematic for law enforcement in the littoral states, trafficking in humans, weapons, and drugs is a grave danger to the people living along the seas. Littoral states and international organizations estimate various loss caused by the illicit trades, though they face difficulties to collect exact numbers of the damage. For instance, the Philippines lost about \$3.3 billion in GDP from 2010 to 2015, Indonesia suffered a loss of \$3 billion in revenue from illegal logging alone, and Malaysia lost \$2 billion in illicit trade, which is equivalent to ten percent of all capital flow to the country (Alming et al. 2019, 39).

The Malaysian government loses around \$1 billion in tax revenues due to cigarette smuggling each year (Alming et al. 2019, 40). This is partly because the price gap between Sabah and the Philippines generates an opportunity for illicit trade of everyday commodities such as cigarettes. The generally cheap prices of the products in the cities of Semporna and Tawau in Sabah attract illicit trade from Sabah to the Philippines. In this type of smuggling, a lower price in the Philippines may constrain smuggling activities, as in the case of fuel smuggling (Alming et al. 2019, 44).

The drug trade is international in scope. China plays a major role as an exporter of ingredients and importer of the finished products, although local demand in the three Sulu- and Celebes-adjacent countries is rapidly increasing (Alming et al. 2019, 41). In the case of arms trafficking, the Sulu Archipelago is the focus of attention (Alming et al. 2019, 42).

The illicit trade of endangered species and illegal timber trading are further

challenges for law enforcement authorities in the three countries. Not only local products, but also animals and timber from Africa pass through this region on their way to China (Alming et al. 2019, 43).

Aside from illicit trade, illicit fishing is another serious problem in the Sulu Celebes seas. The Coral Triangle covering the Sulu Celebes seas has been a hotspot for illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) for decades (Alming et al. 2019, 59). Alming et al. (2019) estimate that Indonesia alone has lost \$4 billion in revenue annually to IUU fishing. Shark fishing is an example of IUU fishing in the Sulu Celebes seas. Although Malaysia's shark fishing industry does not officially exist, it comprised almost 3 percent of the global catch from 2000 to 2010. Indonesia shared about 13 percent of the global catch in the same period (Alming et al. 2019, 59).

#### Maritime violence: Sea robbery, terrorism, and incursion

Most Southeast Asian governments have worked to suppress piracy and armed robbery through various mechanisms such as the Malacca Strait Patrol, ReCAAP, the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Center in Kuala Lumpur, and the Information Fusion Centre in Singapore (Alming et al. 2019, 33). They have succeeded in reducing the number of incidents, especially in the Malacca and Singapore straits, yet the littoral states bordering the Sulu and Celebes seas still face challenges to suppressing armed robbery and kidnap for ransom (Alming et al. 2019, 32).

In the Sulu Celebes seas, one major source of violence is ASG, which originally emerged with strong ties to al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden formed al-Qaeda in 1988 and instructed Ustadz Abdurajak Janjalani to form a cell in Southeast Asia. Janjalani was the son of an ulama from Basilan Island in the Sulu Archipelago, a veteran fighter in Afghanistan, and a core member of the Islamic International Brigade, which evolved into the al-Qaeda organization (Abuza 2005, 2). Janjalani exploited the peace talks between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Philippine government and recruited hardliners who opposed the ongoing peace talks. Through his brother-in-law, Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, bin Laden provided Janjalani the financial and technical support to develop the ASG's bomb-making capacity (Abuza 2005, 4–5). ASG was responsible for sixty-seven terrorist attacks resulting in some 136 casualties and hundreds of injuries in the Philippines from 1991 to 1995 (Abuza 2005, 4).

After facing a reduction of financial support from the Middle East in the mid-1990s and the death of Abdurajak Janjalani in 1998, the ASG shifted its activity from terrorism to kidnapping for ransom beyond the national boundary of the Philippines. In April 2000, the ASG conducted one of most notorious kidnapping operations in Malaysia. The

militants attacked a diving resort in Sipadan Island off the eastern coast of Sabah and took twenty-one tourists and resort workers away to Jolo Island. ASG released the hostages only after receiving a ransom of \$16 million (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 13). From 2000 to 2001, ASG killed sixteen people and committed 140 hostage-takings (Abuza 2005, 8).

ASG demanded not only ransom money, but also the release of al-Qaeda bomb-maker Ramzi Yousef, which confirmed the linkage between ASG and al-Qaeda (IPAC 2019, 2). Because of the linkage between al-Qaeda and ASG, as well as American casualties in the ASG's kidnap-for-ransom enterprise, the US government provided the Philippine military with \$284.86 million in aid from 2002 to 2004 (Abuza 2005, 9). Meanwhile, the ASG accelerated its bombing operations throughout the Philippines, including the brutal bombing of the *SuperFerry 14*, which killed 116 people in Manila Bay in 2004.

ASG was once supported by bin Laden and cultivated interdependent relations with the MILF, though MILF has not admitted its ties with the two groups (Abuza 2005, 23–4). Another important connection ASG cultivated was that with JI, which established paramilitary organizations. These were the Laskar Mujiheddin and the Laskar Jundullah in the Maluku Islands and Sulawesi, respectively (Abuza 2005, 32). Abuza (2005, 32) points out that the link with JI strengthened ASG's sectarian violence, unlike MILF, which does not always promote sectarian violence.

Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir gradually formed JI in the mid-1990s (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 8). They were associated with al-Mu'min, a radical *pesantren* in Central Java, but moved to Malaysia to avoid persecution under the Suharto regime. JI divided its Southeast Asian and Australian operations into four regional groups (*mantiqis*) and designated areas for them, including Sabah, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Southern Philippines as the Regional Group III. Regional Group III served as a major logistical cell to procure equipment, including explosives, and formed ties with insurgent groups in Mindanao (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 8). JI maximized its networks in Mindanao and smuggled explosive materials for the 2002 Bali bombing from Mindanao (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 14).

Most security experts have asserted that JI used the MILF camps in Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, which are both on the island of Mindanao. Abuza (2005, 40) further argues that JI used the existing ASG bases in Tawi-Tawi. After the 9/11 attacks, ASG became JI's loyal partner, while the MILF leaders had not yet recognized their ties with JI, even calling JI "a 'virus' that is targeting their youth" (Abuza 2005, 39; see also Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 9).

Supported by US Special Forces, the Philippine military assassinated ASG leaders,

including Khadaffy Janjalani in 2006. However, Janjalani's death did not result in a decline in terrorism, but rather in the rise of kidnap-for-ransom schemes in 2008 and 2009 (IPAC 2019, 2). After the death of Janjalani, the ASG split into two groups of criminals, one based on Basilan Island and the Zamboanga Peninsula, the other on Jolo Island (IPAC 2019, 3). In their operations, the attackers abduct the hostages and bring them to undisclosed locations on land while they negotiate ransom. Because the hostages are taken to unknown locations, the attackers do not suffer much risk to obtain their ransoms (Alming et al. 2019, 34–5). In a detailed study on kidnapping by the ASG, IPAC (2019) concluded the kidnappings did not represent well-planned, organized terrorism, but rather “a well-entrenched industry, with deep roots in local clan politics” (18).

The ASG maximized its social media usage to threaten hostages' family members, and actually beheaded six hostages from 2014 to 2019 (Alming et al. 2019, 35). In the same period, twenty-six kidnappings occurred, and eighty-five crews were taken as hostages. Most hostages were taken from tugboats (32) or fishing vessels (30), whereas others were taken from bulk carriers and other types of vessels (Alming et al. 2019, 35). Coal shipments became easy targets for nonstate actors, especially because the perpetrators apparently realized that coal companies readily pay ransoms (IPAC 2020). Indonesia actually suspended its coal shipments to the Philippines in 2016 due to security concerns (Alming et al. 2019, 9). In April 2016, ASG attacked a foreign merchant vessel for the first time and abducted fourteen Indonesian crew members, then increased its attacks on vessels and boats from Indonesia after it apparently received ransom money despite the Indonesian government not recognizing the payment (Alming et al. 2019; IPAC 2019). As of January 2019, forty-five of the eighty-three hostages had been released, sixteen had been rescued, seven escaped, nine died, and eight were still held in captivity. Hostages are kept as captives for almost five months on average. In terms of the hostages' nationalities, Indonesians made up 41 percent, Filipinos 23 percent, Vietnamese 16 percent, Malaysians 12 percent, and others eight percent (Alming et al. 2019, 35).

Some attribute various governments' countermeasures to the reduction of the kidnap-for-ransom problem after 2017. Others point out that the kidnapping cases decreased simply because ASG shifted the focus of its activities from kidnapping to besieging Marawi City in Mindanao. In the five-month siege during 2017, the ASG apparently looted \$50 million from the city and did not need to take additional risks at sea (Alming et al. 2019, 36).

Aside from crime and terrorism at sea, the Sulu Celebes seas are part of an area of unsettled claims by the three countries. The Philippine government has not abandoned its claim over Sabah. A self-proclaimed sultan of Sulu, Jamalul Kiram III, organized violent

actions against Sabah in 2013. In February 2013, the Royal Sulu Army suddenly invaded Lahad Datu, Sabah, and exchanged fire with the Malaysian security forces there. At first, the Royal Malaysian Police negotiated with the Sulu army, but they failed to stop the fighting and instead organized a joint force with the Malaysian Armed Forces to combat the Sulu army. In the battle against the invaders, the Malaysian security forces killed sixty-eight and prosecuted thirty Royal Sulu Army members (Raman and Hashim 2020, 88). The incursion led to mass displacement, deportations, and the voluntary return of more than fifty-two thousand Filipino migrants in Sabah to the Philippines as of May 2019 (IPAC 2020, 14). Although the Philippine government condemned Kiram III for his conduct, it has not officially withdrawn its claim over Sabah. For instance, Philippine Foreign Secretary Theodolo Locsin tweeted that Sabah was not in Malaysia, which created a controversy between Manila and Kuala Lumpur in 2019 (Esmacruel and Tomacruz 2020).

In addition to tensions between Malaysia and the Philippines, another unsettled dispute exists between Malaysia and Indonesia. However, though these unsettled claims have made trilateral cooperation complex, knowing the three countries found a way to collaborate with the others is important.

### 3. Regional and individual efforts to address the challenges

#### Regional cooperation

The littoral states along the Sulu Celebes seas have developed various cooperative mechanisms to mitigate the threats in the region.

In terms of resource management, the regional governments designed the 2003 Sulu–Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion Conservation Plan, which they updated in 2009 and supplemented with the 2010–2012 Comprehensive Action Plan (Alming et al. 2019, 62). They also inaugurated the Tri-National Committee for the Sulu–Sulawesi Marine Ecoregion in 2006. In the Coral Reef Triangle, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste agreed to the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security in 2009.

Most notably, ASG's 2016 attack against an Indonesian vessel prompted the governments of the littoral states, especially Indonesia, to take new initiatives to combat violent extremism. On May 4, 2016, the Indonesian government hosted a meeting of foreign ministers and the heads of defense of the three countries and issued a joint declaration. They agreed to increase naval patrols and enhance communication and information exchanges among them, and they organized a cooperative mechanism



modeled after the Malacca Straits Patrol (Storey 2018, 3).

It took an additional thirteen months to launch the actual Trilateral Maritime Patrols in June 2017 (Storey 2018, 2). One major issue under debated was a common understanding on the map in this triborder area: the Philippines and Malaysia did not settle on the issue of the Philippines' claim on Sabah, and the Philippines and Indonesia did not clarify the boundary around the Sangihe Islands. However, after several discussions, the governments agreed to a provisional map, which they use only for the purpose of patrols (IPAC 2019, 8).

While they still have difficulty implementing standard operating procedures for cooperative mechanisms, Storey (2018) noticed two events that prompted the policymakers to finalize the discussion: Philippine President Duterte's remark about possibly inviting China to patrol the Sulu Celebes seas, and the Marawi Siege in Mindanao. Indonesia and Malaysia opposed the idea of foreign forces intervening in security affairs in Southeast Asia and reaffirmed the necessity of cooperation because of the intense fighting in Marawi City after May 2017.

The three governments finally agreed to the Trilateral Maritime Patrol in June 2017 and established maritime command centers in Tawau, Sabah, Tarakan, North Kalimantan and Bongao, and Tawi-Tawi (Alming et al. 2019; Storey 2018). The three countries also launched the Trilateral Air Patrol in October 2017 (IPAC 2019, 14). Next, they organized the Contact Group on Maritime Crime in the Sulu and Celebes Seas in August 2018 in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Alming et al. 2019, 34). Modeled after the Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia, the Contact Group in the Sulu and Celebes Seas aims at sharing information, capacity building, and other coordinating functions (Alming et al. 2019, 82). The Trilateral Cooperation Agreement is impressive, especially in light of the existence of unsettled territorial disputes (Alming et al. 2019; Storey 2018).

Experts have not evaluated the impact of the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement highly, however. For instance, IPAC (2019) points out the law enforcement agencies of the three countries, as well as the Armed Forces of the Philippines, played roles that were more important in suppressing ASG's various illicit activities. Storey (2018) also attributes the improving security environments to the Philippine government's actions, especially after the Marawi Siege. For instance, during the Marawi Siege, the Philippine Coast Guard formed a recommended transit corridor for safe passage of ships from Zamboanga to Davao, and the Department of Transportation created a national registration system for all Philippine vessels. Following these arrangements, the Philippine government created a ship reporting system that required commercial vessels

to submit prior notification before entering the safe passage zones. In addition to these measures, the Philippine central government apparently pressured local political leaders to cooperate with itself to suppress kidnap-for-ransom activities (Alming et al. 2019, 36).

Moreover, the Armed Forces of the Philippines launched a campaign against ASG and killed the Basilan-based ASG leader, Isinilon Hapilon, on October 16, 2017. ISIS leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi had named Hapilon as the amir of ISIS in the Philippines, and Hapilon apparently received financial support from ISIS (IPAC 2020, 8). Basilan Governor Hadjiman Hataman-Salliman succeeded in persuading one hundred and twenty-three ASG combatants to surrender their arms and join a rehabilitation program as of January 2018 (IPAC 2020, 8).

#### Efforts by the littoral states

The Philippine government strove to suppress the ASG, but sought international cooperation to organize its campaign. The Philippine government engaged in a military campaign it called Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines in cooperation with the United States from 2002 to 2014. The 1,300 American soldiers first landed in Zamboanga City in January 2002 as a part of joint military exercise with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (Robinson, Johnston and Oak 2016, xv). Then, about five to six hundred American soldiers were present in the Philippines on average until the end of the campaign in 2014. The US Forces, especially the Special Operations Forces first focused on Basilan and trained advised Philippine Special Forces, especially to create the Light Reaction Battalion and also promoted the civil military operations to cultivate the confidence to the military from the local residents. In 2005, the Joint Special Operations Task Force moved its headquarter from the US Embassy in Manila to a Philippine military base in Zamboanga and intensified their activities in Jolo Island. The US government combined the military assistance with development assistance such as Growth with Equity in Mindanao project totaled \$ 180.9 million from 2002 to 2012 and assisted the Philippine military campaign against ASG and JI in its 14-year long mission in the Philippines (Robinson, Johnston and Oak 2016, 18).

In the midst of Operation Enduring Freedom – Philippines, the policymakers in Manila conceptualized Coast Watch South in 2006 to enhance maritime domain awareness by establishing a focal point of interagency coordination among the navy, police, coast guard, intelligence office, and other related civilian agencies (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 21). From its inception, the Philippine navy chief, Vice Admiral Mateo Mayuga, sought international cooperation in this attempt and presented the concept at the International Maritime Security Symposium at Johns Hopkins University in Maryland in

September 2006 (“Coast Watch South” 2018). In December of the same year, Commodore Giovanni C. J. Barcardo referred to the navy’s maritime surveillance system as “Coast Watch South” at a workshop of experts from the Philippines and Australia in Makati, Manila (“Coast Watch South” 2018). While the Philippine government committed to establishing twenty offshore platforms for surveillance and interdiction, the US government provided financial support to make four platforms in the Sulu Archipelago (Rabasa and Chalk 2012, 22–3). The Benigno Aquino administration reorganized Coast Watch South, establishing the National Coast Watch Center (NCWC) to cover the entirety of the Philippines in 2011 (Republic of the Philippines 2011). The NCWC has since played an important role in enhancing the maritime domain awareness of the Philippines—not only in the Sulu Celebes seas, but also in the South China Sea.

Aside from cooperating with the United States, the Philippine government recently enhanced its cooperation with the Indonesian government to conduct a series of coordinated patrols called “Corpat Philindo” (Alming et al, 2019; Kusuma and Anwar 2020). The two countries had signed the Border Patrol Agreement and the Border Crossing Agreement in 1975 and used them as legal frameworks for the recent joint patrols (Kusuma and Anwar 2020, 1121). For the joint patrol, the navies of Indonesia and the Philippines used patrol units based in Manado and Davao, respectively, to guard the border, build mutual trust, and improve interoperability of the two units (Kusuma and Anwar 2020, 1121). From 2016 to 2020, the two navies conducted seven joint patrols (Kusuma and Anwar 2020, 1123). They have focused on the border areas in the Nusa Utara Islands in Indonesia and Balut Island, Philippines, in the Celebes Sea, where people often cross the border for economic purposes (Kusuma and Anwar 2020, 1125). To enhance the effectiveness of the joint patrol, they can increase the number of joint patrols, mobilize maritime patrol aircraft, and coordinate patrols with naval units in neighboring naval bases in Tarakan, North Kalimantan, and Zamboanga in Mindanao to cover the entire Celebes Sea (Kusuma and Anwar 2020, 1130).

Meanwhile, the Joko Widodo (Jokowi) administration in Indonesia did not necessarily share priorities with the Philippine government, although Jokowi declared the Global Maritime Fulcrum in 2014 and released Presidential Regulation No. 16 on Indonesian Sea Policy in 2017 (Morris and Paoli 2018, 17). In a study of Indonesian maritime policy, Morris and Paoli (2018) identified IUU fishing and piracy as the two major threats to Indonesian maritime agencies and pointed out the Sulu Sea as one of four priority areas for patrolling. The Indonesian government banned all foreign vessels in its territory and destroyed three hundred vessels owned by actors caught violating the ban, which reduced the foreign fishing in Indonesian waters by 90 percent since 2014 (Alming

et al. 2019, 60).

Before declaring the Sea Policy, President Jokowi declared his intention to sink any boats engaging in IUU fishing in November 2014. In the same month as Jokowi's statement, the Indonesian Minister for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Susi Pudjastuti, implemented her policy (Resosudarmo and Kosadi 2018, 373). The Indonesian government set up its Presidential Task Force to Combat Illegal Fishing (Satgas 115) in October 2015 to address IUU fishing and established the FishFORCE Academy of Indonesia to enhance specific knowledge of fishery laws among lawyers (Alming et al. 2019, 64). From October 2014 to August 2018, the Indonesian government sank 488 ships, including 272 Vietnamese ships, ninety Philippine ships, and twenty-five Indonesian ships (Madjid, Widodo, and Samudro 2019, 192). The local economies of North Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, and North Maluku were the most affected by the anti-IUU fishing operations. For instance, the head of North Sulawesi's Bitung District publicly accused the anti-IUU fishing operations of leading to a decline in fish production and rise in unemployment in Bitung (Resosudarmo and Kosadi 2018, 375, 378).

Arguably, the Malaysian government took the most focused approach toward maritime threats in the Sulu and Celebes seas by establishing a special command to deal with the security threats there. The Malaysian government established the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) and the Eastern Sabah Security Zone to cover ten districts on the eastern coast of Sabah (Raman and Hashim 2020, 89). The ESSCOM aims to coordinate the operations of the military, coast guard, and police to mitigate threats to Sabah's eastern coast. In addition, Sabah's local government established the 2012 Anti-Fish-Bombing Committee to mitigate blast fishing and fishing using poison (Alming et al. 2019, 61).

#### 4. Maritime domain awareness: A focal point of different strategic interests

*Capacity building* became a buzzword among American policymakers in the context of the global war on terror (Silove 2016). The US government established naval cooperation training programs with the littoral states, such as the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) program in 1995 and Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) in 2002 (Storey 2018, 5).

Aside from these two programs, the Obama administration started the Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative, which the Trump administration renamed the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative and expanded (Storey 2018, 5). Under the Maritime Security Initiative, the US government committed \$425 million for capacity-building efforts in Southeast Asia and designed various programs to enhance maritime domain

awareness in the region (Jackson et al. 2016; US Department of Defense [DoD] 2015). For instance, the DoD sent technical experts to Indonesia and supported reform initiatives in defense planning, defense strategy, and budget development and execution systems and processes (DoD 2015, 27). The DoD committed \$42 million to upgrade the Malaysian maritime surveillance system composed of eight coastal surveillance radar stations, twenty-eight small boats, and more (DoD 2015, 27). The United States also committed \$19 million to build capacity for the Philippine NCWC from 2013 to 2017, as well as funds for the Philippine radar system (DoD 2015, 27).

Meanwhile, Japan supported the littoral states by equipping them with medium and large patrol boats and high-speed boats, as well as eleven coastal radar stations in the Sulu Celebes seas (Storey 2018, 5). The Japan Coast Guard has sent technical experts to maritime law enforcement agencies through the Japan International Cooperation Agency and has conducted training exercises with them. Japan provided radar systems along the coastlines through official development assistance (Alming et al. 2019, 73).

## Conclusion

While we cannot find robust regional institutions dealing with various challenges in the Sulu Celebes seas so far, each littoral state has addressed maritime problems based on their individual concerns. The Philippine government engaged in a military campaign against ASG with much attention to the maritime dimension of ASG's activities and established Coast Watch South. The Indonesian government carried out controversial measures against IUU fishing through its Satgas 115. The Malaysian government established ESSCOM as a special arrangement to address security concerns in the eastern part of the island of Sabah.

Among the diverse strategic interests of littoral states and external stakeholder states, maritime domain awareness is a focal point around which actors have invested their resources the most. Most notably, the Philippines reorganized Coast Watch South into the NCWC and strengthened it. Satgas 115 and ESSCOM enhanced the maritime domain awareness of Indonesia and Malaysia, respectively. Thanks to an increased number of patrol vessels, airplanes, and radar stations, governments in the region have enhanced their maritime domain awareness in the Sulu and Celebes seas. External stakeholders have provided material support as well as opportunities for training and exercises as part of capacity-building support, but have not imposed their strategic interests on the littoral states. The littoral states do not necessarily share strategic interests or priorities for resource allocation. To maximize the enhanced capacity, they should recognize their different strategic interests while appreciating the concord of strategic

interests in the Sulu and Celebes seas.

By definition, international cooperation efforts affect regional order, especially if they work well. More interestingly, the regional order depends on the littoral states' capacity-building efforts for two reasons. First, capacity building has contributed to the littoral states' abilities to broaden the room for maneuvers in maritime governance. Second, the littoral states have closely worked with development partners. Nevertheless, the Sulu Celebes seas present many opportunities and challenges. The mere fact that the littoral states and their external partners have invested in maritime domain awareness shows the necessity of appreciating the understudied dynamics of maritime order in Southeast Asia.

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