This essay is submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements for NSDM. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of Defense.
Piracy has long been an international security problem that nations have dealt with to ensure maritime commerce, trade, and other commercial interest continues uncontested. In the last twenty years, one region of the world – the Straits of Malacca (SOM) – has been an area where traditional fishermen and unemployed seafarers have turned to piracy to support their families and attain a better way of life. However, with nearly 70,000 vessels transiting the SOM yearly, ensuring a safe and uninterrupted passage, are critical for the economies of the US and our Asian partners. The author suggests that to ensure the security of the United States, USPACOM must continue to be vigilant in the Straits of Malacca by helping regional countries develop a multi-layered offensive strategy, including, the development of an anti-piracy national, bi-lateral, and multi-lateral offensive military responses; facilitating a common information picture in countries bordering the SOM; and assisting countries bordering the SOM provide economic alternatives to its unemployed citizens.
Piracy has long been an international security problem that nations have dealt with to ensure maritime commerce, trade, and other commercial interest continues uncontested. In the last twenty years, one region of the world – the Straits of Malacca (SOM) – has been an area where traditional fishermen and unemployed seafarers have turn to piracy to support their families and attain a better way of life. However, with nearly 70,000 vessels\(^1\) transiting the SOM yearly, ensuring a safe and uninterrupted passage, are critical for the economies of the US and our Asian partners. Studies sponsored by the Japanese and Singapore governments estimate that by 2020, 141,000 vessels will use the SOM to move cargo between leading industrialized nations.\(^2\) However, according to the International Maritime Piracy Reporting Centre, piracy has declined in the SOM for the last two years. The investments in resources by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore have resulted in a safer maritime route. That being said, piracy has a tendency to resurge if resources are withdrawn and economies decline. Thus, to ensure the security of the United States, USPACOM must continue to be vigilant in the Straits of Malacca by helping regional countries develop a multi-layered offensive strategy, including, the development of an anti-piracy national, bi-lateral, and multi-lateral offensive military responses; facilitating of a common information picture (CIP) in countries bordering the SOM; and assisting countries bordering the SOM provide economic alternatives to its unemployed citizens.

**Policy Choices for PACOM**

*National, Bi-lateral, and Multi-lateral Offensive Considerations*

USPACOM must continue to encourage nations that border the SOM to continue their unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral naval and air patrols, but also to invest in modern ISR technology. The SOM is a relatively small area to patrol with naval vessels and since 2004, the
governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore (GoIMS) have conducted joint maritime and air patrols to deter and defeat piracy. Besides these patrols, these nations have developed communications links to their respective naval headquarters, established a ship-rider program, and taken steps to identify areas where piracy takes place. These operations have resulted in a decrease in attacks since 2006. Figure 1 provides an indication of the effectiveness of these multilateral efforts. However, these countries have relied on piloted aircraft, which limits time on station (TOS) due to manpower and maintenance constraints. Studies have shown that using unmanned aircraft or UAV allows for extended patrols of ungoverned space, in addition, to cutting down on mechanical problems.

Indonesia, with US help, should be developing their organic UAV fleet. By strategically placing UAV systems at Indonesian air bases (Figure 2), greater TOS could be achieved. These UAVs could be used in a split-operations manner at Operational Commands I & II to ensure coverage of the area of operation. To ensure operations are effective, all three
countries must operate a common intelligence picture so they are able to react to impending threats. Thus, the next recommendation is development of a common information picture to ensure information sharing.

Facilitating a Common Information Picture (Information Sharing)

Developing an information sharing backbone to achieve information dominance (ID) has been a key tenet of the US Chief of Naval Operations for years\(^5\), and investing in a first rate ID system would improve command and control of military platforms belonging to the GoIMS. The current Information Centre located in Singapore is only a repository for historical data, where analysts conduct trend analysis. Establishing an operations center where ISR, naval, and air operations can be planned, current data can be collected, and new missions be tasked would improve responsiveness of these individual platforms. Rather than working separately, synergy can be achieved by combing and multi-echeloning military platforms over the SOM. The US military has the skills and technology to conduct effective intelligence collection and application of timely operational responses. However, in the short term, USPACOM can assist in the SOM by deploying Tactical UAVs, such as the Fire Scout\(^6\) and other leading UAVs currently being developed for use in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In addition to developing a common information sharing platform with accesses and safeguards, USPACOM can help sponsor information sharing working groups, stand-up a permanent information sharing task force, and work with partner nations and industry to ensure that information sharing continues as technology improves. Developing temporary patches for information sharing problems doesn’t usually solve a problem until personnel are assigned to task forces responsible for information sharing. USPACOM should use the US Secretary of
Defense’s ISR Task Force or JIEDDO as templates for dedicating personnel to solve a recurring problem. In addition, this task force would take the lead in working with information sharing commercial vendors, national-level technology centers, and leading-edge technology innovators.

Providing Economic Alternatives

One of the main issues with the increase of piracy across the world, especially in the SOM is the lack of employment for young working age males, so developing economic solutions on the land is a policy issue that PACOM must advocate with regional countries. According to the Roderick Chia, the coastal communities along the SOM have felt the negative downturn of Asian market crisis, weak state development, marginalization of maritime communities, and official corruption. These human security issues have impacted the coastal communities, forcing fisherman to resort to piracy. Some lines of operations or economic alternatives that USPACOM can advocate are the following:

- **Job creation for coastal community**: USPACOM can work with host nations and partner nations to provide young males with jobs so they have an income to feed their families and improve their sense of worth. Giving these communities a
positive outlook on how host nation governments care about their welfare can help stop piracy.

- **Access to education**: USPACOM can work with USAID and host nations to fund the building of schools, recruitment of caring teachers, access to vocational and post-secondary education, and assistance in post-education employment. Studies have shown that a better educated population will rely less on illegal activities.

- **Support anti-corruption initiatives**: USPACOM can work with partner nations to identify corruption at the local level and replace them with well-paid officials. These replacement officials need to be educated and monitored to ensure they also don’t follow their corrupt counterparts.

- **Establish Fishing Policies**: USPACOM can work with partner nations to ensure there is no illegal fishing by foreign vessels, fishing limits are enforced, and native fisherman are given priority in fishing areas. Protecting the income of native fisherman can also aid in decreasing economic inequality among coastal communities.

- **Equipping with 21st Century Fishing Standards**: One of the major problems with coastal community fishing is their inability to maximize their time out on the ocean. USAID can seek the support of fishing experts who understand how to make fishing profitable for coastal communities. Rather than using rudimentary technology for harvesting, processing, and shipping fish, coastal communities need assistance in developing their own 21st century fishing processing procedures.
Conclusion

USPACOM’s area of responsibility exceeds all the other Combatant Commands, and while PACOM is not currently engaged in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the issues they face are many. One of the issues that has received less attention but is still a critical and explosive issue is piracy. The SOM has historical been an area where coastal communities have turned to piracy to supplement their income during times of economic downturns. However, in the last five years, piracy has decreased in the SOM as a result of increased collaboration between regional countries bordering the SOM.

As piracy is an issue that concerns leading shipping companies and is critical to US economic security, USPACOM must be ready to tackle piracy should it reemerge in the SOM. But why wait? USPACOM should engage and encourage regional nations to improve their surveillance of the SOM with the latest ISR and military platforms, invest in developing information sharing technologies and protocols, and develop economic solutions for the indigenous coastal communities. Improving all three areas will help to ensure the safety of shipping vessels that transit the SOM for years to come.

Recommendations for Policy Implementation and Further Research

USPACOM should immediately establish a SOM initiatives team (SIT) that brings experts from the US government and international community to dissect the policy, funding, oversight, and legal issues associated with these recommendations. Further, it would allow the Commander, USPACOM to understand the views of senior DOD and congressional leaders, regional country leaders, and the rest of the SOM communities of interest.


6 Ibid, CNO, p.2. In this strategy, the CNO states that the US Navy must be the forefront of deploying vertical tactical UAVs to areas of the world that need this capability. Using the Fire-Scout in the SOM can proof beneficial for anti-piracy operations.


8 Ibid, JIEDDO and the ISR Task Force have an streamlined acquisition process that promotes private industry to develop solutions to COCOM gaps. Using this rapid fielding process, both organizations can field technology to COCOMs within 12-15 months.

9 Ibid, Chia, p. 4.