

ReCAAP's Successful Model for Regional Cooperation: Combating Piracy in Asia

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Introduction

The **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia (ReCAAP)** is a regional initiative that came into force on September 4, 2006 with cooperation amongst members (contracting parties) as a central idea. The model remained instrumental in curbing the growing trends of piracy and armed robbery in the region effectively.

Occasionally, ReCAAP is termed as a unique organization. In what sense is it unique compared to other Inter-Governmental bodies? This can be summarized in three key words starting with 'S' i.e. *small, slim and soft*. First, *small* - our information sharing center is manned by a small number of staff i.e. only 16 personnel compared with 700 at the IMO. And, our annual budget is also small - USD 2 million including all administrative expenses as compared with IMO's annual budget of USD 80 million, approximately. Next, by *slim*, we mean that we have no patrolling vessels, no reconnaissance airplanes and no arms. In other words, we don't have hands and legs, we only have information through a computerized network system, called IFN. Thirdly, by *soft*, we mean that we do not impose legally binding duties, nor law enforcement on our members respecting their sovereignty. We expect and encourage them to act voluntarily.

Then, how has this peripheral regional center attained achievements, with a limited number of staff, a limited budget and in the absence of physical means? The number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in our region has now gone down to less than half from its peak, which amounted to more than 300. Accordingly we are recognized as a model of regional cooperation to be emulated by others.

ReCAAP started functioning with 14 Asian member countries, which were subsequently joined by four European countries, followed by Australia and recently the United States of America on September 22, 2014. More countries outside the region such as France have also shown interest in joining ReCAAP.

Key Feature of the ReCAAP Mechanism

Creation of a Focal Point: Under the ReCAAP Agreement, each ReCAAP signatory designates a Focal Point to be a point of contact. This focal point has several important roles, such including:

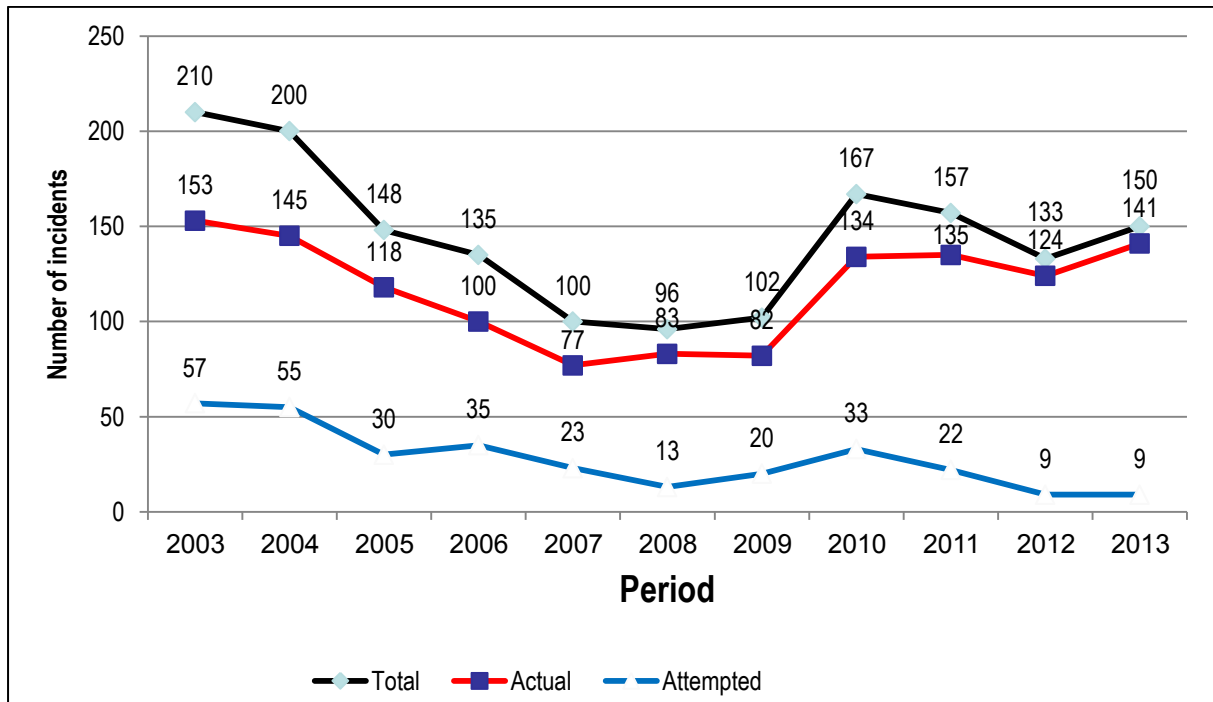
- To manage piracy and armed robbery incidents within their territorial waters and jurisdiction;
- To act as a point of information exchange among the ReCAAP Focal Points and with the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC), our Headquarters;
- To facilitate respective country's law enforcement activities; and
- To co-ordinate surveillance and enforcement for piracy and armed robbery with neighbouring focal points.

In short, the aim is that all the stakeholders of the Contracting Parties are coordinated through a designated focal point, and the piracy information received allows actual rescue instantly and smoothly.

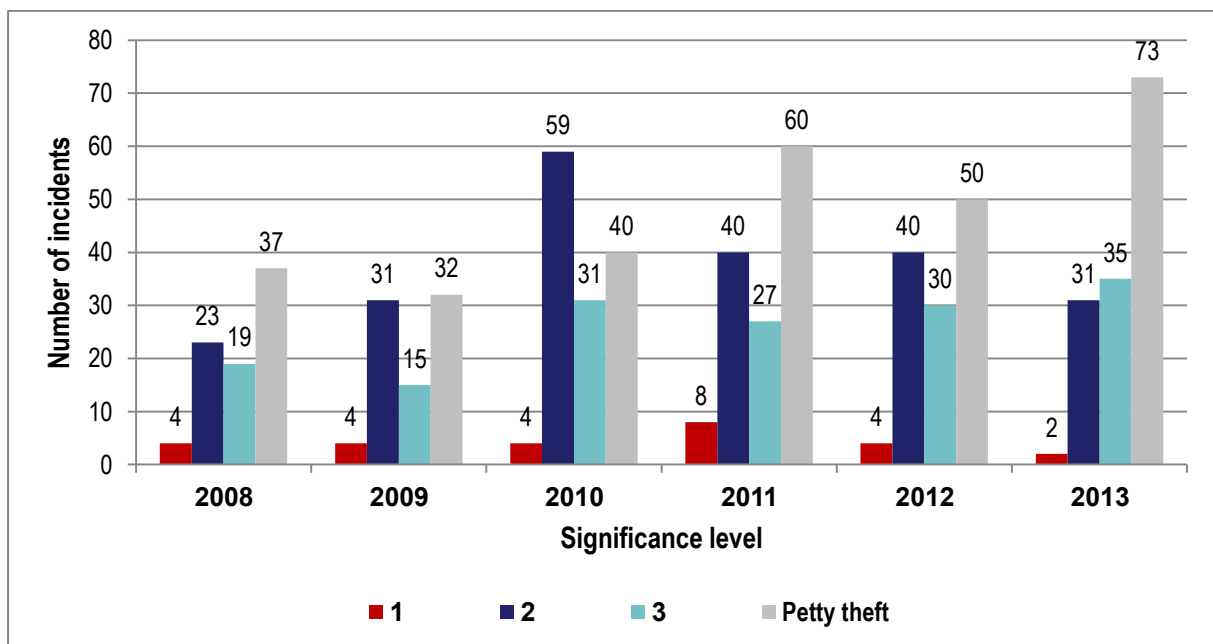
How We Share the Information

The 'communication' system used by ReCAAP is a web-based secured network on a 24/7 basis, called Information Network System (IFN). When a focal point sends out an Incident Report to ReCAAP ISC, it is shared instantaneously via a secured web based Virtual Private Network with all other focal points, by default. ReCAAP ISC later generates an incident case and evaluates whether it requires an Incident Alert. All reports are assigned unique numbers and stored in the IFN system for data mining and analysis.

The Improvement of the Situation in Asia



The above diagram illustrates the evolution of incidents in our region based on actual inputs received by the IMO and the ReCAAP ISC, since early 2000. While there are ups and downs, the general trend has been headed in the right direction.



Although attention often goes to the quantitative aspect of the issue, we have to analyze incidents from the qualitative dimension as well. For example, even when both are the exact

piracy incidents, the meaning of hijacking and the meaning of petty theft is very different. ReCAAP has introduced an analysis system consisting of both quantitative and qualitative factors in addition to improving quantitative trends in our region. There has been a qualitative improvement of the situation in our region. It is clearly evident that incidents of a severe nature, such as hijacking and kidnapping in our region have become less and have been replaced by incidents of less severe nature such as petty theft.

Contribution of ReCAAP to Other Regions

Among others, the ReCAAP model has acted as a foundation stone in the making of the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC). The fact is duly acknowledged in the DCoC's Preamble, mentioning, "Inspired by the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia adopted in Tokyo, Japan on 11 November 2004."

ReCAAP ISC was involved with IMO in lots of activities assisting DCoC ISCs setup and its development. At the high-level meeting in May 2014 in London, DCoC has embarked on a new stage. At the start of this new stage, it is noteworthy that DCoC has emulated again the governance of the ReCAAP model, such as creation of the secretariat, the governing council and the decision making procedures.

Key Elements for Our Mechanism to Function

In our view, if the ReCAAP model were to serve as a model, first and foremost comes the willingness of the contracting parties to abide by the agreement; this remains the main driving force behind the achievements of ReCAAP. Without political will, our system would have not functioned. Besides, regular capacity building activities laid a strong foundation in building trust amongst focal points and ReCAAP ISC. Furthermore, there were self-sufficient law enforcing agencies within the majority of our contracting parties, which enabled timely and effective use of information disseminated by ReCAAP.

Conclusion

The ReCAAP model has already been emulated can be reproduced in the future so long as key elements behind ReCAAP's success are reproduced; namely, willingness of the contracting parties, constant capacity building activities and self-sufficient law enforcement entities in the respective region. On top of that, the maritime community on the one hand and

law enforcement agencies on the other should take shared responsibility. The key messages are, in light of the nature of the issue, namely transnational crime, no one agency, organization or country can combat, suppress and eliminate piracy and armed robbery against ships alone. There is a need for coordinated responses, such as cooperation, collaboration and collective working together.

This article was commissioned by the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA) on behalf of the fourth United Arab Emirates Counter Piracy Conference, '**Securing State Recovery: Sustaining Momentum at Sea, Confronting Instability on Land**', organized by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with global ports operator DP World, held in Dubai on October 29-30, 2014. The opinions expressed in this paper are the views of the author only, and do not reflect the opinions or positions of the conference organizers. Content may have been edited for formatting purposes.

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