

# 10 Years of Fighting Pirates in Asia

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By Prakash Panneerselvam



Image Credit: [U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brian A. Stone/Released](#)

As ReCAAP marks its 10th anniversary, a look back at the achievements.

By Prakash Panneerselvam for The Diplomat

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This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) Information Sharing Center (ISC) in Singapore. In those ten years, ReCAAP ISC has grown into a true multilateral organization comprising 20 nations across globe working toward the safety and security of the maritime commons. Information sharing and confidence building measures between law enforcement agencies have made a tangible contribution to anti-piracy efforts; ReCAAP ISC has achieved a great deal in reversing the rising trend in piracy incidents in the region.

ReCAAP ISC came into existence due to increased incidents of piracy, armed robbery, and hijacking of ships in Southeast Asian waterways. Launched in November 2006, ReCAAP ISC was officially recognized as an international organization in January 2007. At that time, it was a major diplomatic challenge for Southeast Asian countries and extra-regional powers to establish a multilateral forum primarily to share information related to piracy incidents in the region. ReCAAP ISC's adherence to jurisdictional rights exercised by the littoral states adds value to anti-piracy efforts, and makes operations transparent to all ReCAAP signatories.

## Key Features of ReCAAP ISC

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The ReCAAP framework enables the sharing of information using the “ISC Focal Points Network,” contributing to the success of anti-piracy activities. Each ReCAAP signatory designates a Focal Point to be point of contact for the ISC. Generally, maritime law enforcement agencies of signatory countries served as ReCAAP Focal Points. Designated ReCAAP Focal Points [have major responsibilities](#), including managing piracy and armed robbery within their respective country's territorial waters or waters within their jurisdiction; acting as a point of information

exchange with the ISC; facilitating their home country's law enforcement investigations; and coordinating surveillance and enforcement activities aimed at countering piracy and armed robbery with neighboring Focal Points.

ReCAAP ISC, as the central monitoring unit, collects information from one Focal Point and shares with the rest of the Focal Points to enhance the countries' capabilities to conduct anti-piracy activities. The role of ReCAAP ISC is to ensure that detailed information reaches all levels through the ISC Focal Points Network without delay. At the same time, Focal Point work to integrate law enforcement agencies with the other maritime industries.

The ISC Focal Points Network performs as a web in collecting and sharing information. Moreover, ReCAAP ISC allows any contracting party to request another contracting party to take appropriate law enforcement action; such a request shall be made directly to the other party. [The agreement](#) obligates all signatories "to prevent and suppress piracy and armed robbery against ships," including arresting perpetrators, seizing ships used for piracy, and rescuing victims. These features enable each nation to be confident in coordinating anti-piracy activity.

## Achievements

ReCAAP ISC's coordination with law enforcement and shipping companies has encouraged ship captains to report piracy incidents to the ISC. The recent case of the oil tanker *Hai Soon 12*, which was hijacked with 21 crew members on board, was a classic example of how the Focal Points and ReCAAP ISC work to defeat the pirates. The Kiribati-registered tanker *Hai Soon 12* was reportedly hijacked by a group of armed pirates on May 8, 2016 near Singapore. Upon receipt of the information, ReCAAP ISC alerted Focal Points to be on the look out for the hijacked tanker. Based on the shared information, on May 9 the [Indonesian Navy intercepted the \*Hai Soon 12\*](#), arrested all the pirates on board and freed the crew.

The *Hai Soon 12* incident demonstrated the significance of information sharing and coordination of ReCAAP ISC with Focal Points. International Maritime Organization (IMO) numbers, possible routes for pirates to escape, and assessments on previous incidents shared via the information sharing network helped ReCAAP Focal Points and respective countries to initiate their own anti-piracy operations. In addition, ReCAAP conducts exercises, training programs, workshops, and regular meetings as a part of confidence building measures. These initiatives together help to build confidence among ReCAAP members to further pursue anti-piracy operations.

Despite strong initiatives, however, the region remains vulnerable to piracy and armed robbery. In 2015 alone, there were 200 reported incidents in the region. In 2016 between January and July, a total of 47 incidents were reported; this represents a significant decrease compared to January-July 2015, [when 126 incidents](#) were reported. Pointing out the emerging trend in the region, Don Pramudwinai, Thailand's minister of foreign affairs, [speaking on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of ReCAAP ISC](#), says the situation would have been even worse without ReCAAP ISC. For example, he notes that severe incidents such as hijackings, cargo theft, and kidnapping crews for ransom have declined over the years as the result of effective coordination through ReCAAP ISC. Andrew Tan, chief executive of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), [notes that](#) "it may not be possible to completely eradicate such incidences" but government can work to "minimize them instead."

## Sailing Ahead

The ReCAAP ISC framework was not only instrumental in curbing piracy incidents in the region, but also played an important role in laying the foundation for the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC). In 2011, ReCAAP ISC joined hands with the IMO in setting up the DCoC ISC. [It is noteworthy to point out that](#) the DCoC emulates ReCAAP in many ways, including governance, creation of the secretariat, and the decision making process. The new partnership between DCoC ISC and ReCAAP ISC allows members to share piracy information across as wide an area as possible.

The ReCAAP ISC framework has also convinced political leaders that the only effective way to deal with piracy and

armed robbery is through cooperation. Since territorial sensitivity is one of the major concerns in the region, the future success of ReCAAP ISC lies in maintaining its neutrality in the regional affairs so that this cooperation can continue.

In conclusion, no nation, not even ReCAAP ISC, has all the resources necessary to combat piracy in the region. The most effective means to put an end to the menace is through cooperation and information sharing between regional and extra-regional powers. As an international organization, ReCAAP ISC has played a pivotal role in bridging the gaps in information sharing between nations and helps in coordinating between different agencies dealing with maritime safety and security.

*Prakash Panneerselvam is Post-Doctoral Associate at the International Strategic and Security Studies Program, National Institute of Advance Studies, Bengaluru, India.*