

JLATF WEST

NEWS QUARTERLY

Counternarcotics Program News in the Indo-Asia-Pacific



Border Security in the Golden Triangle

VOLUME 2
ISSUE 1
2016

JIATF WEST

N E W S Q U A R T E R L Y

October - December 2016

Volume 2 Issue 1

Director

RDML Keith M. Smith, USCG

Deputy Director

Mr. Earl Hampton

Chief of Staff

CAPT Edward Eder, USN

Editorial Director

COL John F. Winters, USA

Senior Contributing Editor

Mr. Tom Wood

Copy Chief & Graphic Design

Mr. Shawn Parrish

Editorial Staff

Mr. Richard Shizuru

Ms. Lee-Ann McClain

Mr. Stephen Bower

Mr. Scott Hawman

Mr. Tom Wood

Article Contributors

Mr. Scott Hawman, Mr. Tyler Truby, Mr. Shawn Parrish, Mr. Tom Wood, LCDR Leah Cole, USCG; Mr. James Griego, Mr. Stephen Bower

Foreign Disclosure Officers

Mr. Terrence Honay

Mr. Rodney Thompson

Public Affairs Support - USPACOM

MAJ David Eastburn, USA – USPACOM

MAJ Karolyn Mcewen, USA – SOCPAC

This e-Newsletter was produced by
Joint Interagency Task Force West
Commanders Action Group (CAG)

For questions, comments, or story ideas, please contact

Mr. Shawn Parrish

Ph: 808-477-9758

Email: Shawn.i.parrish2.ctr@mail.mil

JIATF West ATTN: CAG

BOX 64033, CAMP H.M. SMITH, HI 96861-4033

Phone 808-477-9708

Web: <http://www.pacom.mil/JIATFW>

This publication is available for download at:
<http://www.dvidshub.net/publication/570/joint-interagency-task-force-west-newsletter>

Photos on Flickr <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jiatf-w>

All content within this document is unclassified.

Reproduction and distribution of this publication or any of its content is allowed and welcome.



4

JIATF WEST ADDS SCANNING ABILITY TO MAE SAI BORDER CROSSING

JIATF West helps to rebuild the Mae Sai Customs House X-Ray Center and incorporate the border crossings first ever full body scanner.



8

JIATF WEST TRAINED PDEA UNITS SEIZE \$21M IN DRUGS IN 2016

JIATF West, DEA, and INL supported the development of 3 highly skilled narcotics investigation units within the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) that are having success.



10

JIATF WEST'S NEW ASSESSMENTS BRANCH

In September of 2014, JIATF West stood up a new internal department to begin reviewing the effectiveness of all of its activities on an annual basis.



12

JIATF WEST BEGINS BUILDING MASSIVE INDOOR TACTICAL TRAINING CENTER

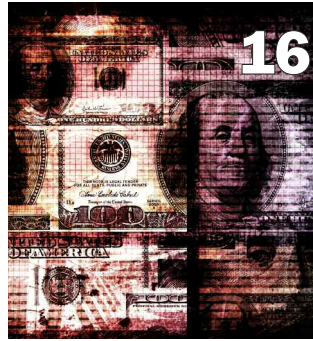
The planned building will provide the Royal Thai Police (RTP) with a large 7200 square meter (about 77,000 square feet) state of the art indoor tactical training facility.



15

BAKER TORCH CNT 17-1 WITH THE ROYAL THAI POLICE

JIATF West conducted the Baker Torch 17-1 Counter Narcotics Training (CNT) event in Lampang, Thailand, from 31 October to 18 November, 2016.



16

HELPING OFAC

Between October and December of 2016 OFAC designated several individuals and business entities as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) with help from JIATF West.



18

THE PACIFIC MARITIME INVESTIGATION COORDINATION FORUM

JIATF WEST and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) hosted a three day forum in Waikiki on the 12th of October, 2016. The forum, called the "Pacific Maritime Investigation Coordination Forum" was the first of its kind.



20

SULU SEA MARITIME SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS

How the Philippine National Police's Maritime Special Operations Unit began and its successes in improving security in the Sulu Sea region.

Cover Photo The border crossing between Thailand and Myanmar between the cities of Mae Sai in Thailand and Myanmar's Tachileik, is crossed by hundreds of people every day; including by smugglers of both people and drugs.
Editorial Photo by Arnold Zimmer, courtesy of 123rf.



J IATF West Adds Scanning Ability to Mae Sai Border Crossing

Sitting on the Thai side of the border with Myanmar (formerly Burma) is the town of Mae Sai, Thailand's most northern city in the province of Chiang Rai. Mae Sai is nestled in the Golden Triangle, the mountainous region famous for the production of opium where the borders of Laos, Burma, and Thailand meet. Across the border is the Myanmar town of Tachileik, a border trading town frequented by both Thai and foreign tourists who gain entry at the border crossing by walking across a bridge over the River Sai. Once on the Burmese side, travelers leave their passports with the Myanmar Immigration Office and are free to stay within Tachileik and the surrounding district of Kengtung for up to fourteen days without having to obtain a visa.

According to the United Nations office of Drug and Crime (UNODC), the Mae Sai-Tachileik border is the busiest crossing point between the two countries and an increasingly popular transit point with transnational criminal organizations for illicit narcotics.

Thai authorities estimate that over one billion pills of methamphetamine (called yaa baa, or crazy medicine) are trafficked across the borders of Thailand and Myanmar annually. In addition to the trafficking of meth, other drugs such as heroin and precursor chemicals, as well as human trafficking takes place through both official land check points and informal crossings. The regions porous borders and shallow



A view of Tachileik City, a border town in the Shan State of eastern Myanmar, viewed from atop a hill on the Thai side of the border in Mae Sai. Stock photo by Nuttapong Wannavijid, via www.123rf.com.

JIATF West Adds Scanning Ability to Mae Sai Border Crossing



People crossing the border bridge between Mae Sai, Thailand, and Tachileik, Myanmar. The Mae Sai river's water level runs low during the Northern region's dry season between November and May. Editorial photo by saiko3p, 4 November 2014, licensed under 123rf.com.

JIATF West Adds Scanning Ability to Mae Sai Border Crossing



Thai Customs X-ray Center building in Mae Sai. This building will undergo a renovation and expansion to include a full body scanner to help improve security capabilities at the Thai - Myanmar border crossing. *Photo by Romchat Development Company Limited.*

river crossings between Tachileik and Mae Sai allow for traffickers and migrants to simply wade across the Mai Sae River during the dry season. It is estimated by UNODC that 450,000 migrants are smuggled into Thailand with one-third moving through official check points.

To help support the counter drug efforts of Thai customs and border officials, USPACOM's counter drug task force, Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF West), has undertaken an initiative to help improve security in the northern border region of Thailand.

One component of JIATF West's initiative is to rebuild the Mae Sai Customs House X-Ray Center and incorporate the border crossings first ever full body

scanner. According to Scott Hawman, JIATF West's Base Development Program Manager, the improvements will have a significant impact, "For a relatively small amount of money, we're talking a few hundred thousand dollars, we'll be drastically improving the ability of Mae Sai Customs and Border officials to interdict illicit drugs." JIATF West estimates that approximately 5000 people a day travel through the Mae Sai-Tachileik check point in Thailand.

The project kicked off on 1 December 2016 and includes tearing down the existing building and building a new structure that will include interview rooms, changing rooms, evidence storage, an administrative room, and a

JIATF West Adds Scanning Ability to Mae Sai Border Crossing



Construction crew members gather for a daily safety briefing outside the Mae Sai Customs X-Ray Center renovation project funded by JIATF West in December 2016. *Photo by Romchat Development Company Limited*



full body scanner. The project was first proposed by The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Mr. Steve King, who is the official sponsor. Overseeing the execution of the contract for building is U.S. Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) who awarded the contract to Romchat Development Company Limited. This infrastructure improvement project is expected to be completed mid-2017. □

JIATF West Trained PDEA Units Seize \$21M in Drugs in 2016

In the later part of 2015, JIATF West in cooperation with the DEA, and the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) partnered together to support the development of 3 highly skilled narcotics investigation units within the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA). DEA named the units and the effort the "Supported Drug Units" (SDUs) initiative. The concept called for concise and combined resources to be allocated toward 3 PDEA units and provide enough skills, training, and equipment to effectively investigate leads provided by the DEA and

other international partners. JIATF West's contribution to the SDU program was investigative skills development by utilizing its Counter Narcotics Law Enforcement Development Program (CNLEDP), a contractual based program in which experienced and seasoned expert narcotics investigators are contracted to conduct training and evaluate practical exercises. The training is designed to challenge the student's cognitive investigative skills and resource allocation in a stressful scenario that requires quick decision making.



Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) operatives conduct an inventory of ingredients used in the manufacture of illegal drugs at a factory warehouse in Valenzuela City. ABS-CBN News/File photo.

JIATF West Trained PDEA Units Seize \$21 M in Drugs in 2016

During FY 2016, JIATF West conducted 11 CNLEDP training activities with the SDUs. The training consisted of a four modular programs requiring participating law enforcement agents to attend all four weeks in sequential order. The first module was a Basic Narcotics Investigations course; the second, Surveillance Operations; the third, Undercover Operations; and the fourth, an Advanced Narcotics Investigations course that challenged the agents by requiring them to apply all the skills learned into a cumulative investigative scenario. So far, PDEA's Regional Office 3 has completed all four modules. The unit from the Regional Office of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is also participating in the training program.

PDEA has been very receptive to the courses of this relatively new modular development program. It has been invaluable in assisting PDEA agents in several successful interdictions. According to the PDEA, in 2016 agents that trained under the CNLEDP worked in 18 investigations resulting in the seizures of 193.5 Kilos of methamphetamine (about 426 pounds) and 84.7 kilos of marijuana (a combined estimated street value of nearly 21 million U.S. dollars). The investigations involved three clandestine methamphetamine labs linked to Chinese Drug Trafficking Organizations, and one Filipino owned Marijuana farm; all of which have been located and dismantled. Arrestees included six Chinese, two Taiwanese, one Nigerian (working as a youth soccer coach in Manila), and 41 Filipino citizens. All of the arrested suspects have been linked to International Drug Trafficking Organizations. □

An instructor from JIATF West's CNLEDP program instructs officers from PDEA region 3 during counter narcotics training in October of 2016 . Photo by JIATF West.

J IATF West's New Assessments Branch

In September of 2014, JIATF West stood up a new internal branch to begin reviewing the effectiveness of all of its activities on an annual basis. The new department, called the Assessments Branch, serves to inform the Director and planning staff, as well as inform higher headquarters and partner agencies. The Task Force dedicated two people for initial staffing, Nancy Linn, a Statistician with a strong background in quantitative methodology as the Assessments Officer, and Stephen Bower, a former Operations Planner, and Naval Officer, as the Assessments Chief.

The main product produced by the Assessments branch is the annual Theater Counternarcotics Campaign Assessment (TCNCA). Its purpose is to objectively look at the strategic, operational, and tactical level effects of actions in a deliberate fashion with the intention of making operations more effective achieved through a joint effort of senior leadership, planners, and activity executors.

The report assesses at three levels: the campaign, the operational environment, and the tasks. Derived from Joint Publication-5 (Joint Operation Planning) these three elements correlate to JIATF West's mission, initiatives, and activities. All 100+ annual activities are evaluated against a set group of "Measures of Performance and Measures of Effectiveness", indicating if the Task Force is doing things right and doing the right things, respectively.

The concept of formal assessment from a military or operational perspective is a long held practice, from determining the outcomes of battles to the efficacy of

weapons, warships, or aircraft. The contemporary assessment construct has roots in the Comprehensive Joint Assessment (CJA), a COCOM level report directed annually by Joint Staff to assess a specific topic, allowing the chairman to provide advice to the Secretary of Defense and President and establish plans for everything from personnel matters to operations.

At USPACOM, the Resources and Assessments Directorate (J8) solicits input from all components, direct reporting units, and standing joint task forces to produce the CJA. In

The Assessments Branch Vision is to make JIATF West operations more effective with objective assessments of its strategic initiatives and activities through annual reports, periodic updates, and input to the planning process.

addition to this critical role, the J8 also produces the annual Theater Campaign Assessment, which evaluates USPACOM's efforts in the vast and ever changing environment of the Indo-Asia-Pacific area of responsibility. JIATF West also contributes to this product through a number of indicators and observations pertaining to transnational organized crime, partner nation capacity building

efforts, and other areas in which the task force has visibility or oversight.

The term assessment generally means to estimate or evaluate the nature, quality, or ability of something. People are constantly making conscious and subconscious assessments everyday about their environment and the results of their actions in order to maximize gains, remain safe, or achieve some other purpose. At JIATF West, the purpose of assessments is to objectively look at the strategic, operational, and tactical level effects of actions in a deliberate fashion with the intention of making operations more effective to achieve our mission. □

J IATF West Begins Building Massive Indoor Tactical Training Center

On the 21st of December, 2016, U.S. Ambassador Glyn Davies traveled to the central region of Thailand to attend the ground breaking ceremony of a new indoor tactical training center in town of Nong Sarai, located in Nakorn Rajchasiima Province. The building project is being funded and managed by USPACOM's counter drug task force, Joint Interagency Task Force West in support of Royal Thai Police counter drug efforts, and in partnership with the U. S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

The building project is a joint effort between members of the U.S. Embassy's

Law Enforcement Working Group (LEWG) and the Royal Thai Police – Police Education Bureau.

The ceremony included a tour of the RTP Central Tactical Training Center, a tree planting ceremony, and remarks by Ambassador Glyn Davies.

“The United States has been, and will remain, a strong partner in fostering the joint law enforcement relationship between our two countries. Projects such as this will serve as the cornerstone of this relationship for years to come,” said Ambassador Davies.

The three million dollar construction cost is being fully underwritten by JIATF West. On 28 September 2016 NAVFAC awarded the project to Civil 9 Construction & Architecture Co. Ltd.; the expected completion date is 28 June 2017.

J IATF West

has had a long and cooperative partnership with the RTP since it first began providing counter narcotics training in Thailand back in 1994. To date JIATF West has conducted over 160 training missions that have provided training to over 8000 police officers in Thailand. □



Computer drawing of JIATF West's latest infrastructure project to support law enforcement counter drug efforts; a 7200 sqm indoor tactical training center for the Royal Thai Police in Nong Sarai, Thailand.

JATF West Begins Building Massive Indoor Tactical Training Center



Participants of the ground breaking ceremony for a new tactical training building for the Royal Thai Police, 21 December 2016, State Department Photo.



U.S. Ambassador Glyn T. Davies, takes part in a tree planting ceremony at the ground breaking ceremony for a new police training building funded by JIATF West in Nong Sarai, Thailand, on 21 December 2016. - Photo by Imjai Hirunmas.



Tactical equipment used by the Royal Thai Police on display at the Police Tactical Training Center in Nong Sarai — Photo by Thomas VanDenBrink, 21 December 2016.

Baker Torch CNT 17-1 with the Royal Thai Police

JIATF West conducted the Baker Torch 17-1 Counter Narcotics Training (CNT) event in Lampang, Thailand, from 31 October to 18 November, 2016. The training was with officers from the Royal Thai Police (RTP) Region 5, Chiang Mai who often work in support of narcotics suppression. Approximately 40 officers attended the four week long training event.

JIATF West Task Force Representative, Mark Everson, participated in the opening and closing ceremony.

JIATF West has had a long standing relationship with the Royal Thai Police since the very first CNT event in 1994. Baker Torch 17-1 is the 168th training event between JIATF West and the RTP. □



Members of the Royal Thai Police Region 5 practice handling mock detainees during a demonstration as part of a two week counter narcotics training event held in Lampang, Thailand in November of 2016. — Photo by Mark Everson.

Working with the Office of Foreign Assets Control

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), through the use of authorities under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and other laws, uses sanctions as a tool of U.S. foreign policy to target groups and individuals, in addition to foreign governments, that threaten national security. These economic sanctions include individual country sanctions as well as targeted sanctions to combat terrorism, international narcotics traffickers, transnational criminal organizations, and those engaged in activities related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

To assist U.S. persons in complying with their legal obligations under a variety of U.S. financial sanctions programs, OFAC publishes, updates and maintains an integrated and comprehensive list of designated parties that U.S. persons generally cannot deal with and whose assets U.S. persons must generally freeze and report. Collectively these designated parties are called "Specially Designated Nationals" or SDNs. When a person or company receives this designation their assets are blocked and U.S. persons are generally prohibited from conducting any business with them (Treasury.gov).



The Treasury Annex building, located across the street from the U.S. Department of the Treasury headquarters on the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Madison Place NW in downtown Washington, D.C., houses the Office of Foreign Assets Control. The building was designed by noted architect Cass Gilbert, and construction completed in 1919. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

— Creative Commons Photo, 19 September 2009.

Working with the Office of Foreign Assets Control

Between October and December of 2016 OFAC designated several individuals and business entities as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) with help from JIATF West. Intelligence Analysis support from JIATF West helped OFAC vet and validate the need for the designations allowing for sanctions to be placed on the businesses and individuals involved. Assets within the United States held by the individuals and business involved were blocked (as well as assets held on behalf of them by other U.S. persons).

October OFAC designations included four individuals and nine entities with ties to the Altaf Khanani Money Laundering Organization (MLO), a group that first received a designation for sanctions in 2015. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, The Khanani MLO engages in third-party money laundering by transferring funds to financial institutions on behalf of drug traffickers and TCOs worldwide.

In December OFAC sanctioned a syndicate of the Japanese Yakuza criminal network called the Yamaguchi-gumi. Specifically, OFAC designated two entities and three individuals: the Kobe Yamaguchi-gumi, three of its key executive members – Kunio Inoue, Osamu Teraoka, and Takashi Ikeda – and its core clan, the Yamaken-gumi, pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13581, an order signed by former President Barack Obama on 24 July 2011 containing legally binding provisions granting sanctions for anyone assisting or interacting with a TCO.



According to the Department of the Treasury, the Yakuza is involved in money laundering and drug trafficking in the U.S. It also has relationships with criminal affiliates in Asia, and Europe where it uses companies as fronts to launder money and hide its illicit proceeds. Legitimate industries typically used by the Yakuza include construction, real estate, and finance (Treasury, 2016).

Yakuza syndicates are composed of groups tiered in a pyramidal structure, where the head family is comprised of members who are bosses of second-tier groups; the senior executives of second-level groups are in turn bosses of third-tier groups and so forth.

In the Treasury Department's 30 December 2016 press release acting Director, John E. Smith said, "Today's designation is part of the Treasury Department's collective efforts to target the Yakuza." "This action reflects Treasury's ongoing commitment to protect the U.S. and international financial systems from the malign influence of TCOs and to expose persons who are supporting them or acting on their behalf."

According to James Griego, JIATF West's Chief of Operational Intelligence, JIATF West has been helping OFAC with research and analysis of potential targets for designation since 2009. □

Treasury, U. D. (2016, 12 30). Treasury Department Targets New Yakuza Syndicate . Retrieved 01 25, 2017, from Treasury.gov: <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0694.aspx>

Pacific Maritime Investigation Coordination Forum

JIATF WEST and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) hosted a three day forum in Waikiki on the 12th of October, 2016. The forum, called the “Pacific Maritime Investigation Coordination Forum” was the first of its kind with leading counter narcotic law enforcement and policy makers from several partner nations.

The purpose of the forum was to attempt to identify mechanisms to assist in coordinating counter narcotics operations in the South Pacific. The forum evaluated related issues critical to law enforcement investigations

and activities in the Oceania region. Attending the conference included representatives from partner nations including United States, Australia, Canada, French Polynesia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

JIATF West’s Director, RDML Keith Smith, USCG, attended and gave opening remarks. Presentations were given by representatives from each country during the three days of meetings.



Participants of the 2016 Pacific Maritime Investigation Coordination Forum in Waikiki, Hawaii.
—12 October 2016, Photo by Shawn Parrish.

Pacific Maritime Investigation Coordination Forum



JIATF West hopes to break new ground in enhancing the multilateral information sharing and targeting in the region by forming a working group called the Six Pacific or “6-PAC” based off of the number of countries participating.

Participating agencies included Australia’s Federal Police, Border Force, and Border Command; New Zealand’s Customs, and National Maritime Coordination Center; French Polynesia’s Customs, and French Armed Forces Polynesia; the United Kingdom’s National Crime Agency, and Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre Narcotics (MAOC-N). U.S. Interagency partners included the U.S. Coast Guard’s District 14, and Maritime Intelligence Fusion Center Pacific (MIFC PAC); U.S. Pacific Command; the Drug Enforcement Agency, Homeland Security Investigations, Pacific Fleet, and JIATF South.

Key discussions of the forum centered on how to manage interdiction operations to coordinate military and law enforcement assets from territories (within and adjacent to the areas of responsibility) to ensure that everyone can comply with policies, directives, rules of engagement, and legal requirements of the host territory.

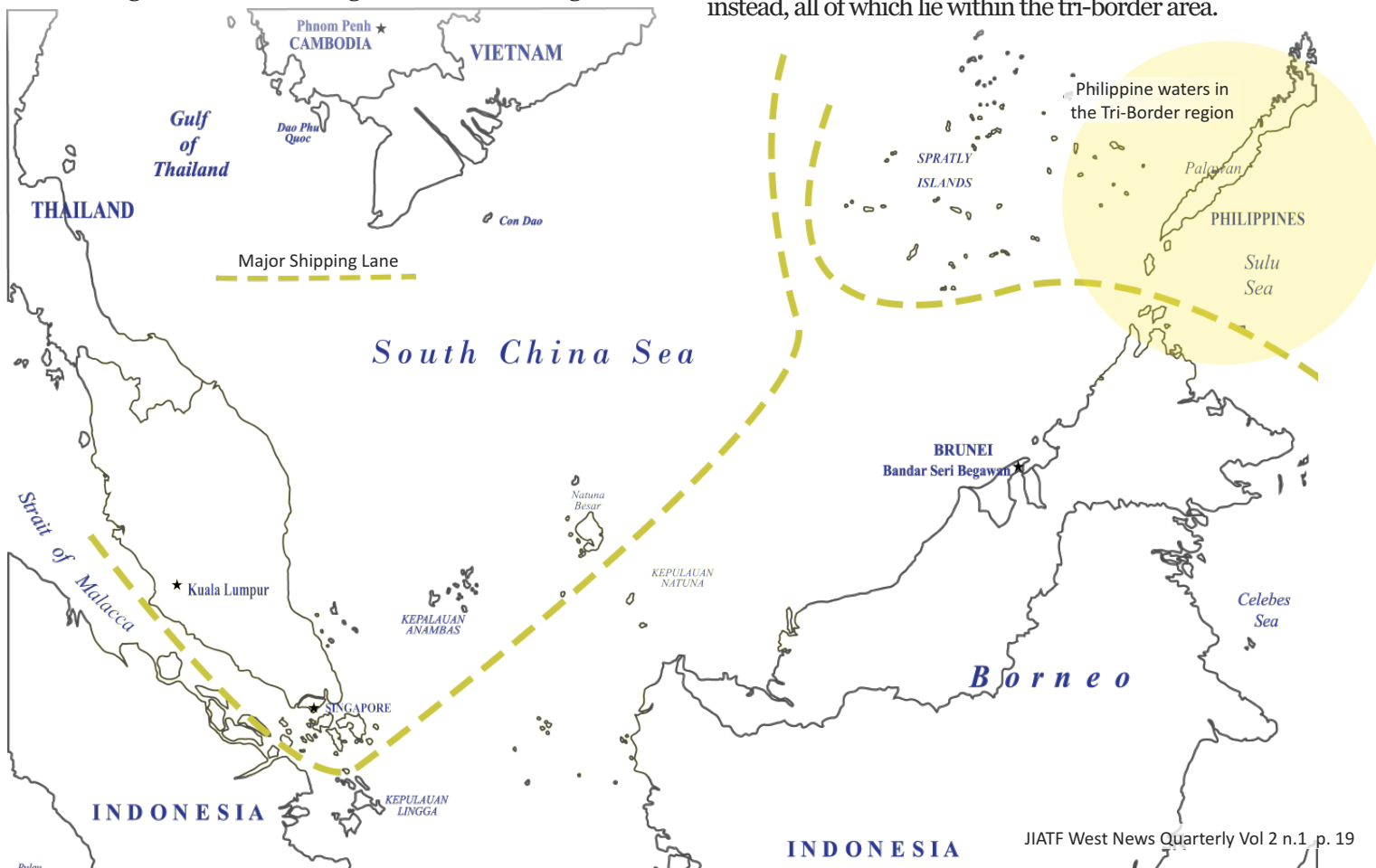
According to JIATF West’s Task Force Representative to Oceania, U. S. Coast Guard Lieutenant Commander Leah Cole, “The way ahead is to enhance multilateral information and investigations sharing by constructing a shared vessel of interest and targeting language and process, and support communication on post-seizure case prosecution efforts.” “These efforts are highly beneficial between QUAD partners specifically due to shared advanced capabilities in the region as well as the breadth of law enforcement Attaché investigative work.” □

Sulu Sea Security Developments

The tri-border region of Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, hosts some of the world's most important shipping lanes as well as unparalleled ecological wonders. The region contains the Sulu Archipelago, a chain of islands in southwestern Philippines that is famous for its abundant marine life and natural beauty. Some of Southeast Asia's most pristine beaches and coral reefs can be found in this extremely bio-diverse area including the Tubbataha reef, containing more species of coral, fish, and marine animals than any other comparable area in the world.

The ecological and cultural significance of this region is

matched by its strategic significance as a gateway between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Further south, the Strait of Malacca is one of the world's busiest waterways and is the shortest sea route for oil between the Persian Gulf and Asia. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the Strait of Malacca is the world's second largest choke point for the transit of oil, with over 15 million barrels transiting through every day (compared to the Strait of Hormuz with 17 million per day). And when a tanker exceeds the maximum depth of the Malacca Strait the only choice is to detour south to the Lombok Strait, Makassar Strait, Sibutu Passage, or Mindoro Strait instead, all of which lie within the tri-border area.



Sulu Sea Security Developments

Despite an abundance of natural resources, the region faces significant challenges to governance and prosperity. Substantial cultural differences across ethnic groups can cause tensions that spill over into violence. Stemming in part from economic challenges, a growing population, and pressures on natural resources caused by illegal fishing and poaching from outsiders, the area has developed a well-earned reputation for lawlessness and violence.

Illicit trafficking of all kinds is highly prevalent throughout the region. Trafficking of contraband goods, narcotics, weapons, and even people helps fuel instability.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's (UNCTAD) report Review of Maritime Transport 2016 the number of piracy and robbery acts against ships reported to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in the Strait of Malacca and Singapore had the highest number of incidents reported in 2015 with 134 out of the 303 reported followed by 81 in the South China Sea.

The rugged terrain of the islands found in the shared waters of Indonesia and Malaysia off the island of Borneo helps terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah to train, sustain and grow in relative safety. The Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, in the Sulu Sea, is home to other militant groups including the Abu Sayyaf group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. By taking advantage of the region's porous borders these groups have been able to train, sustain and operate with relative impunity throughout the region.

Militant and criminal activity has created a reality of kidnapping for ransom, piracy, and terrorist attacks, directly impacting the day to day lives of the people of the region. The result is an increased disruption of legitimate fishing and trade flows that is prompting Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines to all consider new ways to collaborate on security concerns in the area.



Members of the Philippine National Police Maritime Special Operations Unit conduct a mock Visit, Board, Search & Seizure (VBSS) during a demonstration in Honda Bay — 16 September 2015, photo by Jerry Bouts

Sulu Sea Security Developments

Within Philippines territory, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have been heavily engaged in combating these internal security threats for a number of years. U.S. support has helped the AFP make a significant impact in stabilizing the region, so much so that the Philippine government is now well established in an effort to transition to primarily a civilian law enforcement led security effort. The United States is supporting this transition through a variety of efforts, helping the Philippines to normalize security and governance throughout the region. This effort has not been without risks and challenges. In January of 2015, 44 Philippine Special Action Force Police Officers tragically lost their lives in the pursuit of a high value terrorist target on the island of Mindanao.

To help the Philippine government develop a civilian law enforcement group that is capable and prepared for the challenges of the southern region, USPACOM's counter drug Task Force, Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF West) began providing training and infrastructure support to the PNP's counterdrug efforts.

Beginning in 2007 JIATF West, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice International Criminal Investigative Training and Assistance Program (ICITAP) began working with the Philippine National Police Maritime Group (PNP-MG) to establish a Special Boat Unit or SBU to operate and provide law enforcement services throughout the Sulu Sea.

To support the SBU, JIATF West built boat maintenance and operations facilities while ICITAP, using funding provided by the U. S. State Department's International Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL), oversaw the construction and delivery of six state-of-the-art patrol craft. In addition to investing in infrastructure, JIATF West also provided yearly training in maritime law enforcement, operations, and small craft maintenance.

The training provided by JIATF West alternated between counterdrug and maritime law enforcement skills leveraging the expertise of U.S. personnel to provide advanced training and more importantly to develop PNP Officers as instructors to support their own long term training requirements.



PNP MSOU members practice small boat maneuvers during a culmination event during JIATF West organized counternarcotics training in August of 2013.

Sulu Sea Security Developments

The PNP Maritime Group Special Boat Unit was renamed in 2014 to what is today the Maritime Special Operations Unit or MSOU. The MSOU is leading the way in law enforcement capability with over 250 officers providing patrol capabilities along a 560 mile arc of the Sulu Sea.

To date, JIATF West has organized over twenty counter narcotics and maritime law enforcement training events and helped build seven maritime police outposts and stations in the Sulu Sea region. Over 900 officers of the PNP and the Philippine Coast Guard have expanded their own skills through these efforts. The development of PNP officers as instructors for their own training, as well as the JIATF West investment in a Law Enforcement Training Center on Palawan, means the PNP owns their future and can develop their own training programs to sustain the force in the long term.

During a JIATF West Maritime Skills Training event with the MSOU in December of 2015, SrA Michael

Connors, USAF, of American Forces Network Pacific interviewed Police Superintendent (Psupt) Osmundo Dupangan Salibo, Chief, 2nd Maritime Special Operations Unit. “This kind of training really improves our interoperability with other agencies involved in the region” said, Salibo. Psupt Salibo has been in charge of the PNP MSOU 2nd Unit since December of 2012.

To date, the Philippine National Police Maritime Special Operations Unit is credited with over 400 arrests and 22 criminal vessels seized for forfeiture. They are also credited with the seizure of criminal contraband and assets valued at over two million USD. The success of the MSOU goes far beyond thwarting drug smugglers and terrorist groups. The joint training and infrastructure projects have generated numerous ancillary benefits to the environment and people in the region. There have been 298 rescues at sea of people in distress, as well as ongoing disruption of illegal fishing and poaching of sea life.



Police Superintendent Osmundo Dupangan Salibo, of the Philippine National Police - Maritime Group, right, with RDML Keith Smith, Director JIATF West, during a visit to the Maritime Special Operations Unit Boat Facility in Honda Bay, Palawan, Philippines — 16 September 2015, photo by Jerry Bouts

Sulu Sea Security Developments

From 2013 to 2014 the MSOU helped support the Philippine National Police Maritime Group with the seizure of endangered wildlife including the rescue and capture of approximately 900 sea turtles and over 9000 marine turtle eggs. In 2015 the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) presented the Asia Environmental Enforcement Award to the PNP Maritime Group, Police Senior Superintendent Jonathan Ablang, and Superintendent Osmundo Salibo, in the Combating Wildlife Crime category.

The efforts of the Philippine Government, with help from JIATF West, ICITAP and INL, to develop this highly skilled Maritime Special Operations Unit is the result of their commitment to maintain security in the Sulu Sea.

According to former Director of Operations at JIATF West, CDR Jeffrey Scudder, USN, “These successes don’t happen overnight. It takes a long term programmatic commitment. We have had a great relationship with the Philippine Government and Philippine National Police Maritime Group that has made this effort possible. JIATF-West and the U.S. interagency will continue to work alongside our Philippine Law Enforcement counterparts to meet the challenges and threats of the future.” JIATF West is optimistic about the future in the Sulu Sea and we hope to continue to work alongside Philippine Law Enforcement counterparts to meet the challenges in the region. □



Members of the Philippine National Police Maritime Special Operations Unit help release an endangered sea turtle back to the Sulu Sea. The turtle was rescued off of the seized Chinese fishing vessel, the Qiongqionghai, apprehended by the MSOU in May of 2014 — Photo courtesy of the PNP Maritime Group, Puerto Princesa Palawan



Philippine National Police (PNP) Maritime Group members during a training scenario as part of JIATF West counterdrug exercises in Puerto Princesa, Philippines, Aug 6, 2014. (U.S. Air Force photos by Staff Sgt. Christopher Hubenthal)

JIATF West
ATTN: Commanders Action Group
BOX 64033,
CAMP H.M. SMITH, HI 96861-4033
Phone 808-477-9708
www.pacom.mil/jiatfw