



## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND FRICTION IN MARITIME SECURITY OPERATIONS

**Date:** November 18, 2024

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### KEY EVENTS

On November 18th, 2024, Commander Jason Kelshall presented *International Cooperation and Friction in Maritime Security Operations* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the challenges of combating illicit maritime trade, transnational organized crime, and environmental crimes within the framework of SEACOP VI.

### NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Cmdr. Kelshall's presentation explored the multi-faceted challenges of maritime security in the Caribbean, emphasizing illicit trade, systemic corruption, and public safety. He introduced SEACOP VI as a project working with authorities across partnered countries to fight transnational crime and enforce border security, promoting regional cooperation and capacity-building. Cmdr. Kelshall also discussed "friction" as a key concept, referring to the difficulties and inefficiencies that occur in international collaboration as a result of conflicting goals, misunderstandings, and a lack of coordination between different institutions — highlighting inefficiencies in coordination and legal frameworks.

### BACKGROUND

#### Presentation

SEACOP, which is funded by the European Union (EU), has played a vital role in regional and global initiatives to combat criminal networks, especially those based in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The project's main goal is to

strengthen nations' capacity to fight against transatlantic-based illegal marine commerce, which includes organized crime, drug trafficking, and environmental crimes. Enhancing collaboration and the exchange of marine intelligence, strengthening regional enforcement frameworks, and developing long-lasting systems that can function on their own in the future are the main goals of SEACOP. With operations across 32 nations, the initiative has already significantly improved the ability of maritime enforcement organizations in the target areas. Implemented by the French government through Expertise France in collaboration with FIIAPP, the Spanish public management agency, SEACOP is an EU-funded project.

A key component of SEACOP's operational plan is the formation of specialized teams, such as the Maritime Intelligence Team and the Joint Maritime Control Search Team. Greater cooperation at the national, regional, and global levels is made possible by the way these units are built to function at the nexus of direct enforcement and intelligence collection. Additionally, the creation of cooperative marine control units has been a major accomplishment of SEACOP. To guarantee the successful detection of illegal goods, these units work as specialized search teams in conjunction with law enforcement organizations from recipient nations. SEACOP has also educated more than 400 staff around the area, equipping them with the worldwide expertise, skills, and tools needed for successful operations.

In addition to increasing enforcement agencies' efficacy, SEACOP's objective is to make sure that, as external support is gradually reduced, agencies can handle marine risks independently. The initiative intends to incorporate its knowledge and experience into regional and national curriculum in order to accomplish this. Enhancing collaboration with global agencies like Frontex and Europol is another goal of integrating this expertise. SEACOP also collaborates with other EU-funded programs including AIRCOP, ECO-SOLVE, and COLIBRI.

The requirement for efficient coordination between the several regional and worldwide programs, each with its own agenda and resources, is one of Cmdr. Kelshall's most difficult tasks. Agencies that operate in the area have difficulties as a result of this dynamic, particularly in preventing "friction." According to Cmdr. Kelshall, friction occurs when projects and agencies unintentionally operate against one another's interests or when many stakeholders are unaware of one another's objectives and duties. Coordination between non-governmental groups, law enforcement, and other international organizations is just one aspect of the problem. In order to prevent overburdening recipient nations with conflicting objectives, Cmdr. Kelshall emphasized the significance of

unambiguous communication, coordination, and upholding a cohesive strategy. This is especially important in areas like the Caribbean, where resources are already few and officials' and agencies' attention spans are constrained by the numerous international initiatives and conflicting goals.

Cmdr. Kelshall pointed out that these criminal groups, particularly cartels, engage in a variety of unlawful operations, such as illegal gambling, and environmental crimes, in addition to drug trafficking. The difficulties of locating and stopping these international groups, which frequently function through a web of crooked port infrastructure, customs offices, and shipping firms, is a key responsibility for Cmdr. Kelshall. These organizations frequently have the ability to take advantage of gaps in the governance and enforcement frameworks of nations that engage in marine commerce, Cmdr. Kelshall stated.

A major issue for Canadian law enforcement, according to Cmdr. Kelshall, is the illegal traffic between the Caribbean and Canada, especially the transportation of drugs. He gave the recent instance of the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) seizing over 270 kilos of suspected cocaine, valued at \$33.8 million, from a Halifax yacht club. The cocaine was allegedly imported from the Caribbean. The issue is made more difficult by the close diplomatic and cultural links that exist between the Caribbean and Canada as a result of commerce, education, and emigration.

According to Cmdr. Kelshall, 90% of his work focuses on comprehending regional dynamics and the ongoing changes in agendas and policies. As a result, SEACOP's strategy is very flexible and sensitive to the requirements of the nations it works with. The initiative focuses on creating frameworks that can be durable and appropriate to the particular requirements, resources, and difficulties of each nation rather than offering answers.

The value of boundary-spanning operations, in which several actors and agencies, including local law enforcement, Europol, and INTERPOL, collaborate without crossing one another's lines was highlighted. Cmdr. Kelshall emphasized the significance of effective communication and effort coordination by providing frequent updates on the objectives, schedules, and points of contact for each program in order to avoid this. This guarantees that all parties are in agreement and that the job being done is efficient and logical.

Cmdr. Kelshall explained that it is essential to be able to empathize with the feelings and worries of local players and maintain objectivity, while working

with nations and organizations that comprise radically different political cultures and social conventions. This is especially crucial in areas where corruption and public insecurity are prevalent, as there is frequently little faith in the police and outside parties. International collaboration initiatives can establish the trust required for effective interventions by exhibiting empathy and emotional intelligence.

### **Question and Answer**

*How do ports facilitate organized crime in the Caribbean?*

Ports in the region serve as crucial nodes for transnational criminal organizations. These criminal networks exploit systemic vulnerabilities in port security, customs enforcement, and private security systems. To combat this, Cmdr. Kelshall emphasized the importance of strengthening port governance, improving intelligence-sharing, and fostering international cooperation to disrupt these networks.

*How is the impact of counter-narratives measured in information-driven conflict?*

Criminal organizations leverage social media to spread fear and disrupt law enforcement efforts. Intimidation tactics, such as publicizing violent reprisals, undermine public trust in security forces. Cmdr. Kelshall cited a recent example where a trafficker was tied to an anchor and thrown overboard to intimidate rivals. He highlighted the importance of monitoring these narratives, enhancing digital intelligence capabilities, and addressing corruption within local systems to effectively counter these tactics.

*How does SEACOP adapt to shifting international agendas?*

Cmdr. Kelshall stressed the importance of tailoring SEACOP's strategies to the unique needs of beneficiary countries. He emphasized listening to local stakeholders, understanding regional political dynamics, and building adaptable frameworks. The program's success lies in fostering sustainable systems that integrate local expertise and address specific challenges, such as resource limitations and outdated legal frameworks.

### **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

- SEACOP VI targets transnational crime networks involved in drug trafficking and environmental crime. The program strengthens regional maritime intelligence and equips enforcement agencies with tools for sustainable action.

- Cmdr. Kelshall introduced “friction” as a concept to describe inefficiencies in international collaboration, ranging from legal mismatches to competing organizational agendas. Resolving friction requires coordinated action and consistent messaging.
- Success in maritime security depends on training local personnel, fostering regional ownership, and maintaining coherence among international stakeholders.
- Without accurate information, maritime security operations risk becoming ineffective. Sharing actionable intelligence is critical for sustained progress.
- Criminal networks exploit systemic corruption, infiltrating customs agencies, unions, and private security firms. Cmdr. Kelshall highlighted the need for robust governance reforms and international cooperation to address these vulnerabilities.

### FURTHER READINGS

Kelshall, J. (2005). Natural Gas And Energy Security In Trinidad And Tobago And Their Impact On U.S. Energy Policy And Caribbean Stability [Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School].  
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