

## POST OPERATION REPORT

FOR MOAS  
OPERATIONAL  
ACTIVITIES AT  
SEA



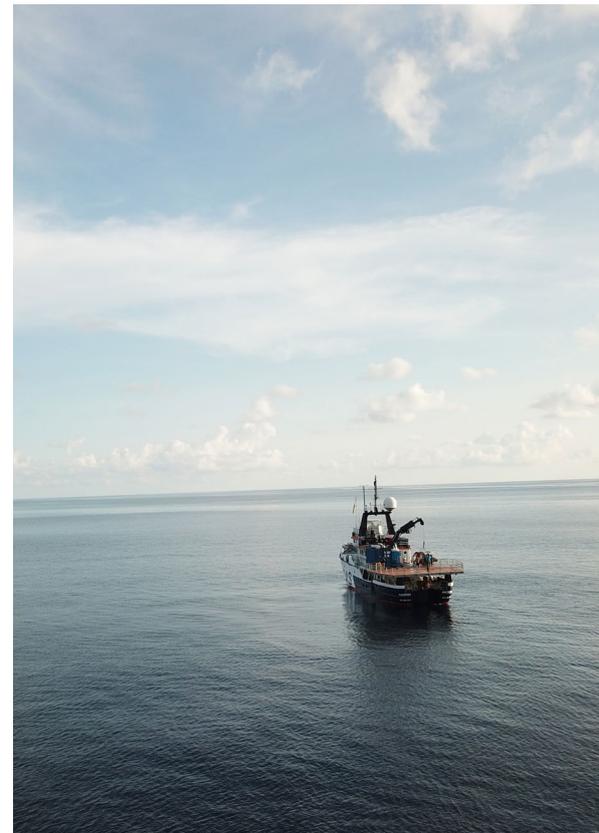
## GENERAL

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Since launching its first 60-day mission in 2014, MOAS has been delivering a professional Search And Rescue (SAR) capability. At one time, the organisation was operating two vessels in different areas of the world. Through SAR operations, MOAS has rendered assistance in the Central Mediterranean and Aegean seas. Through discovery operations, MOAS shone a light on the Rohingya movement at sea during its 2016 and 2018 South East Asia missions. Over the years, MOAS has applied its unrivalled operational ethos to other areas, when it delivered an air evacuation option in Libya and land-based medical aid stations in Bangladesh.

In the SAR domain, MOAS fused air and maritime operations to deliver an independent comprehensive SAR capability that took advantage of some of the most recent technological advances. This ensured that operations were as effective as possible. The maritime component was composed of *MY PHOENIX* supported by fast rescue craft and an air component comprising either Unmanned Aerial Systems or Maritime Patrol Aircraft, carrying the finest optics on the market. When running a two-boat operation, *MY PHOENIX* was supported by another very capable vessel, *TOPAZ RESPONDER*, a purpose built emergency recovery and rescue vessel.

In 2018, when MOAS decided to conduct a monitoring mission in SE Asia, it opted to launch *MY PHOENIX* without a dedicated air component, but relying on its state of the art optics. In the SE Asia configuration, *MY PHOENIX* still had the ability to deliver emergency support and assistance to those requiring it. The crew and operations team included SAR specialists, medics and a ship's complement that could deal with any SAR operation. 2018's SE Asia mission was coordinated by MOAS Italia.



## BROAD CONCEPT AND AREA OF OPERATIONS

### Area of Operations and Influence

The selected Area of Operations allowed MOAS to deploy *MY PHOENIX* in an area where she could be most effective by bringing assets to bear and support coastal SAR authorities by providing situation awareness on activities at sea and being prepared to provide emergency support and assistance.

The identified Area of Influence was an area in which incidents could have had an impact on operations.



### Operational Aim

MOAS launched its observation mission using *MY PHOENIX* as its observation vessel. *MY PHOENIX* had the ability of delivering emergency medical support and emergency SAR support in accordance with international obligations, and in full cooperation with the local authorities.

The aim of MOAS operations at sea in SE Asia was to start understanding the dynamics at play in the Andaman Sea, with regards to the drowning of refugees fleeing persecution and inhumane conditions. The operational aim was to reduce human suffering and preventing loss of life at sea through the application of MOAS assets and coordinated actions by locating and supporting suffering human beings.

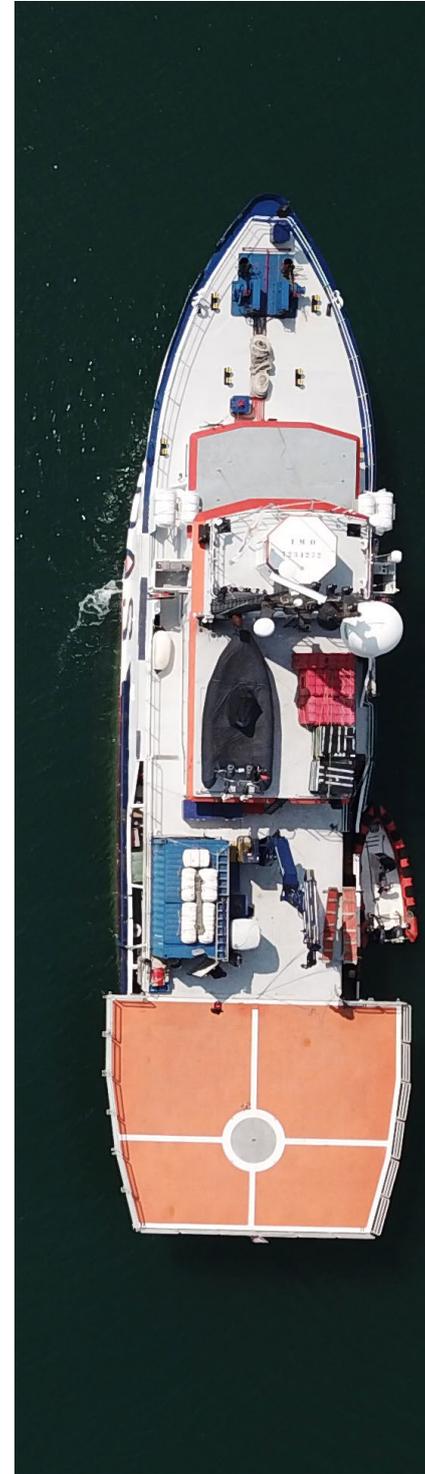
## Operational Objectives

- Enhance safety at sea
- Alleviate human suffering
- Enhance response to distress calls
- Enhance operational cooperation
- Share and exchange information
- Improve situation awareness
- Identify and mitigate potential threat to human life

## Broad Concept of Operation

MOAS deployed *MY PHOENIX* to the selected Area of Operation to conduct patrolling activities. The vessel relied primarily on her optics to detect vessels of interest (VOI) and determine their status by conducting monitoring activities. MOAS was prepared to support VOIs in distress in full cooperation and coordination with the competent and responsible Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) of the respective Search and Rescue Region. Additionally, MOAS was at the disposal of responsible RCCs to deliver effect on SAR operations.

MOAS was able to provide dedicated medical assistance and post rescue emergency care for rescued persons through the employment of an Emergency Medical Team. MOAS also delivered professional medical support and emergency supplies including water, non-perishable food, life jackets, blankets and medical supplies to a VOI via fast RHIBs. The medical component on board MYP was able to stabilise urgent medical cases for casevac to the nearest hospital, or until better care became available. At end-state MOAS wanted to be able to contribute effectively towards enhancing safety at sea.



## Likely Tasks

During planning, the operations team identified the following tasks as those that were most likely to be executed:

**Patrolling.** *MY PHOENIX* was to sail to the designated operations box and conduct presence patrols maximising the standoff capability of its optics. Patrolling was to be overt and highly visible. The purpose of patrols was to detect VOI, report and monitor them, and provide emergency support if assessed to be required.

**Reacting to Specific SAR tasking by RCC.** This task was to be carried out by MOAS as appropriate. *MY PHOENIX* staff was held at readiness to maintain core skill competency in delivering SAR solutions.

**Monitoring.** This task was to be primarily carried out by means of dedicated optronics (Electro optical and Infra-red sensors) and the duty watch. The aim of monitoring is to ascertain the status of detected vessels of interest. The purpose of monitoring was to enable MOAS to alert and report to RCC and form probable courses of action to deliver support and assistance following RCC guidance and direction. Monitoring also allowed the embarked operations team to start establishing a pattern of life in the Andaman Sea.

**Medical, Safety and Security Assessment.** Assessments were to be conducted by the duty watch and / or the RHIB crew. The purpose of such assessments was to confirm initial assessments based on observation and to support and reinforce the MOAS decision-making process. The reported assessments were to serve as advance warning and to support planning and preparation prior to embarking rescued personnel.

**Emergency Support.** Emergency support was to be delivered utilising RHIBs as the main delivery platform. Emergency support was to be in the form of:

- equipment – life vests, blankets, foul weather clothing
- supplies – water, food, emergency medical supplies
- medical – initial treatment, casualty preparation for casevac
- safety – recovery from the water, or from immobilised / sinking vessel of interest

**Emergency Medical Assistance.** Assistance was to be given to all rescued persons at the first possible instance once they had been embarked and processed on the *MY PHOENIX*. The Medical Assistance Team was to lead and assume responsibility of the medical wellbeing and care of rescued persons. This included initial medical assessment, treatment and a duty of care for the duration of embarkation on-board *MY PHOENIX*. The Medical Assistance Team was also responsible for the proper handing over of the rescued persons to the appropriate authorities upon disembarkation.

## EXECUTION OF OPERATION

Operations commenced with entry-operations held on 16 and 17 April 2018, whereby key MOAS Operations' personnel conducted meetings with high ranking Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) and Malaysian Navy officers and HE, the Italian Ambassador of Malaysia. The aim of entry-operations was for MOAs to brief authorities on operations at sea and to exchange information on the situation.

The sea phase commenced on 23 April 18, when *MY PHOENIX* departed Galle, Sri Lanka, heading towards Langkawi. The operation was concluded on 13 May 2018, when *MY PHOENIX* arrived in Pulau Weh, in Indonesia. Throughout the deployed period at sea, *MY PHOENIX* navigated 2674 nautical miles and registered and investigated 408 contacts at sea that did not show an Automatic Identification System (AIS) signal.

### SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

**The following are the main events and the assessed impact on operations.**

#### **16 & 17 April - Entry Operations**

Conducted by Mr Chris Catrambone, Rear Admiral (Retired) Franco Potenza and General (Retired) Azumi. Meetings were held with the Director of the MMEA, Chief of Staff (Operations) of the Malaysian Navy, and HE the Italian Ambassador to Malaysia.

#### **16 April - MMEA and Malaysian Navy.**

Cordial exchanges on the respective understanding of the Rohingya crisis. The Malaysian perspective as represented by the officers present, was that MOAS could act as a 'pull factor' for Rohingya migrants. MOAS was to desist from escorting Rohingya vessels within Malaysian territorial waters. Malaysian authorities were not keen in designating Langkawi as a port of disembarkation, and wanted to dissuade would-be migrants from heading there. Some aircraft were flying maritime patrol sorties over Malaysian areas of responsibility. Exchange of information and intelligence with Thai counterparts was sporadic. Communication between *MY PHOENIX* and Malaysian authorities was to be via General Azumi and to the MMEA Director.

#### **17 April - HE the Italian Ambassador to Malaysia.**

Cordial exchanges between parties. Ambassador was briefed on the meeting with MMEA and Malaysian Navy. HE explained that in his vision, Italy was acting as the global leader in prioritising saving lives at sea. Both parties agreed to keep the Ambassador apprised on developments. Both parties discussed the effects of Thailand's pushback policy.

### 22 – 27 April - Initial Movement and Training

#### 22 – 23 April – Departure from GALLE, Sri Lanka.

Departure from Galle, Sri Lanka. Embarkation processes of ship's complement and Operations Team completed. Initial familiarisation and brief for all embarked persons.

#### 24 – 26 April

Conducted various drills, to include fire, abandon ship and counter – piracy drills, including movement to the citadel. Some minor repairs effected underway.

### 27 1900 April – 13 May – On Patrol

#### 27 April

Officially on patrol in position 06°28 N; 094°38'E after the passage of the Great Channel Nicobar (North of Sumatra). Started duty watch, utilising enhanced optronics turret.



Figure 1. Patrol area and track of search patter.

#### 28 April – 1 May

Conducted initial watch debrief to fine-tune procedures. Arrived in Langkawi after 1220 nautical miles of navigation. Conducted immigration formalities and minor crew changes. Embarked 60,000 litres of fuel, conducted hull cleaning and departed Langkawi heading towards Similan islands, in Thailand.

### 1 May

Malaysian Coast Guard vessel 3224 requested basic information regarding *MY PHOENIX* intentions via a VHF radio call. Once intentions communicated, clearance to proceed approved.

### 2 May

*MY PHOENIX* arrived in the vicinity of Similan islands, on patrol. Whilst in position 08°37,8'N; 097°36,8'E, *MY PHOENIX* is overflown (at low altitude) by a Thai Maritime Patrol Aircraft. At 1300 hrs operations team and crew conducted a SAR exercise involving a small rescue craft and flotation devices, such as Centifloat. Man – Overboard drills were practised, too. In the evening a decision was taken to proceed to Surin island.



*Thai Maritime Patrol Aircraft – Dornier 228.*

### 3 May

After approximately 160 nautical miles, *MY PHOENIX* commences patrol near Surin Island. In position 09°21,5'N; 097°32,7E at a distance of 2.2 nautical miles, duty watch reports that Royal Thai Navy ship *RTN 533 LONGLOM* is shadowing *MY PHOENIX*. At 1435 hrs, *RTN 533* informed *MY PHOENIX* via VHF radio that *MY PHOENIX* was cleared to navigate within the Thai contiguous zone. However, no permission was granted to drop anchor in littoral waters without the express permission by the Thai authorities. *MY PHOENIX* acknowledged the message and informed that she was on her way to the assigned anchorage for a port call in Phuket. Later at 1830 hrs, as a result of unreasonable restrictions imposed on *MY PHOENIX* and its crew, the operations team decided to return to Langkawi, Malaysia. *RTN 533* and respective authorities informed accordingly. At this point *RTN 533* stopped following *MY PHOENIX*.

### 4 May

*MY PHOENIX* on patrol, proceeding to Langkawi via a route that allowed for patrol activities to the North West of Surin island, located within the Thai contiguous zone. The first information report to the Italian Ambassador forwarded, highlighting activities at sea.

### 5 May

Whilst in position 08°36,8'N; 097°20,3'E, duty watch observed a contact heading directly towards *MY PHOENIX*. Point of origin was from within the Thai territorial waters. Through the high-powered optics, the duty watch could confirm that the vessel was none other than RTN 533. RTN 533 continued heading towards *MY PHOENIX* until it reached the limit of Thai territorial waters.



*Royal Thai Navy RTN 533 LONGLOM, shadowing MY PHOENIX*

### 6 - 8 May

Arrival in Langkawi to conduct embarked persons change. Acquired open source information that a vessel carrying 36 Rohingya migrants departed Sittwe, Myanmar, on 5 May, in the early hours of the morning (approx. 0130 hrs). Commenced initial planning to try to intercept vessel and provide support. Two MMEA officers visited *MY PHOENIX* on courtesy calls. On 8 May, *MY PHOENIX* is cleared for departure. The vessel headed to an operations box in between the islands of Surin and Similan. The next port of call scheduled was Pulau Weh, Indonesia.

### 9 – 10 May

*MY PHOENIX* navigates to operations box near 09°38,4'; 097°29,6'E (Northwest of Surin Island.) Search operations underway, members of the on-board media informed of plan of action. Late at night on 10 May, one of the reporters on board informed the operations team that he had received an unconfirmed message that the Rohingya vessel had to return to Sittwe, due to engine trouble.

### 11- 13 May

*MY PHOENIX* continued with search pattern to try to locate the Rohingya vessel. Late at night on 11 May, it was confirmed that the vessel had indeed made it back to Sittwe. On 12 May, *MY PHOENIX* started patrolling towards PULAU WEH. On 13 May, *MY PHOENIX* arrived at her anchor point, whereby port formalities were cleared without any issues.

**13 May** – Monitoring mission for MOAS concluded with the following contact statistics:

Serial (a)	Date (b)	Nr of Targets (Non – AIS) Investigated (c)
1	23 to 27 Apr 18	29
2	28 Apr	20
3	29 Apr (0900)	11
4	1 May (1500)	18
5	2 May	31
6	3 May	22
7	4 May	7
8	5 May	30
9	6 May	64
10	8 May	60
11	9 May	67
12	10 May	30
13	11 May	13
14	12 May	6
15	13 May (0930)	NN
<b>16</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>408</b>

The vast majority of the contacts observed resulted in fishing boats. Some other small boats, pleasure craft, yachts and commercial vessels were observed as well. Whilst at anchor, *MY PHOENIX* was visited by four Indonesian Naval officers. The nature of the visit was a cordial one, which included a tour of the vessel. The vessel is currently still at Pulau Weh, preparing for transit back to the Mediterranean, where other work awaits her.

## OBSERVATIONS

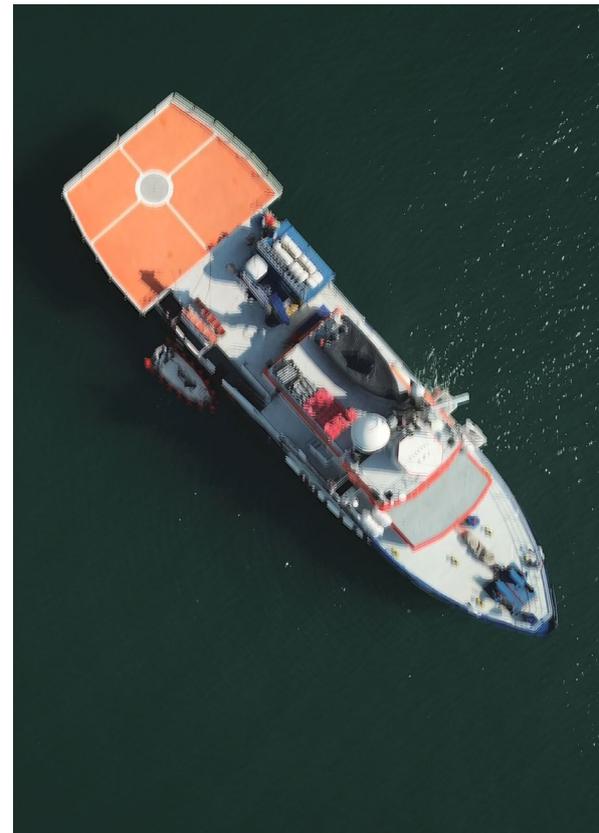
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The situation for the Rohingya refugees is dire. They are persecuted in their country of origin (Myanmar) and the neighbouring states do not recognise their refugee status and statelessness. This is more often the case when dealing with mass migration, as there seems to be a 'pass the buck' or a 'zero-sum game' mindset. This is clear in the way coastal states try to push Rohingya boat people back to country of departure, or onto the next territory, unless under the limelight of the international community.

MOAS stands for mitigating loss of life at sea. It does so by raising awareness, being a voice of reason and delivering a technical and operational ability of the highest professional order. It has operated under international maritime law and other supporting conventions when dealing with the complexity of saving lives in a mass migration context.

Under the United Nations Conventions on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS), coastal states have an obligation to establish and maintain effective rescue services and a further obligation to cooperate with neighbouring states to deliver the required effective rescue service. UNCLOS also determines that states should ensure that masters of vessels, whether they are state or privately owned, should render assistance to any vessel that requires assistance.

Yet MOAS, during its mission in the Andaman sea, observed a reluctance by coastal states to uphold these fundamental obligations based on age-old seafarers' traditions. Undeniably the situation in this part of the world will require a multi-faceted, cross-cutting approach to bring to the fore sustainable and effective solutions to the crisis. The migration phenomenon, as is the case in other parts of the world, will require solutions aimed at countries of origin, transit and destination. But in the meantime, there is a requirement for an independent element to provide objective situation



awareness on migration at sea, with the aim of convincing coastal states that obligations need to be met.

Whilst the debate on 'push' vs 'pull' will always be at the forefront of every migration discussion, we need to keep in mind that the Rohingya opt to leave by any means to escape the desperation and depravity of systemic inhumane treatment at the hands of state authorities. MOAS believes that desperation is the real push factor and until the desperation level is reduced, then mass migration will remain the only option. Coastal states cannot argue that upholding their obligations at sea will constitute a pull factor and desist from providing the required emergency services on the chance that the Rohingya see the rescue as a pull factor. Reality on land versus at sea is very different.

## CONCLUSION

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MOAS set about establishing a mission with a capability fit that allowed for a better understanding of the strategic and operational context, as well as being prepared for any eventuality. Coupled with previous experiences in the region, MOAS was ready for the posturing and non-cooperation of coastal states.

MOAS has come away with an understanding that an independent mission needs to continue the work that MOAS has commenced. It could be a mandate that could be undertaken by ASEAN, which stands for cooperation in the fields of economics, politics and security, as well as improvement in cultural development and social progress.

What is certain, is that the Rohingya tragedy cannot remain a side issue.

