



SPEECH

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Keynote Address by Efthimios E. Mitropoulos Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization ASEAN Regional Forum Conference Regional Co-Operation in Maritime Security

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Ministers, Excellencies, Navy Chiefs and Admirals,
Permanent Secretaries
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to be with you this morning, and to address what is undoubtedly one of the most important issues concerning the maritime community today. However, before doing that and since this is my first visit to the region since last's years Tsunami disaster, I wish to pay tribute to the memory of that catastrophe's innocent victims and convey IMO's deep compassion and condolences to their families and friends. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, maritime security in general and the security of key international shipping routes, in particular, has a significance that goes far beyond the immediate concerns of the shipping industry; and the need for genuine progress to be made, and made without delay, carries a global imperative.

I should like to commend our hosts in the Government of Singapore for their foresight in convening this conference and for their hospitality in hosting it. That such an array of distinguished participants have made the time to attend shows just how high a priority maritime security is, both for the region of South-East Asia and, indeed, for the whole world.

Although this event will focus on co-operative and collaborative efforts to enhance maritime security "C which, incidentally, I believe are crucial if we are to tackle this issue effectively "C we should not forget that it behoves every country, first of all, to set its own house in order. In this respect I should like to commend the diligence with which our hosts have approached this task. Singapore, I know, has taken the regional piracy and armed

robbery situation and the possibility of terrorism very seriously for some time and the small number of such incidents in its waters over a period of many years bears witness to the success of these efforts.

Since 9/11, vigilance has been heightened against security threats and, in the maritime domain, Singapore has increased patrols by its navy and Police Coast Guard, enhanced surveillance of high-risk areas, tightened the linkages between its national maritime agencies and formed an inter-agency working group on maritime and port security. The same, of course, can be said about the efforts made by the other two littoral States, Indonesia and Malaysia, of the Malacca Strait, which I intend to focus on during my address.

But threats to maritime security are no respecters of political boundaries, and there is only so much that an individual State can do alone. To my mind, the title you have selected for this event "Regional Co-operation in Maritime Security" contains a clear message: that the need to co-operate with others is fundamental to the very concept of maritime security. Common sense tells us that you cannot achieve security in isolation. If, despite your own best efforts in your own territories, your neighbour, albeit inadvertently, provides a haven for those who would wish to do you harm, then you cannot claim to be genuinely secure, and I am sure you will agree that this is particularly so in the case of international straits and waterways such as those expected to be the prime focus of consideration during the course of this meeting.

As I have stated on several occasions before, terrorism is not a matter of concern to one country or a group of countries - it has, unfortunately, become a global issue and we must therefore address it as such. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, put it in similar terms, when he said that: "Terrorism is a global scourge with global effects." Because of the interdependence of the world's economies today, the chain reaction that such an act might trigger could have a major negative impact on trade and the global economy - we may all be victims. Also, because of inter-connectedness and globalised nature of the world's maritime community, it is vitally important to the safety, security and economic stability of the international sea borne trade that countries, in this region and elsewhere in the world that share the same commitment to maritime safety and security, approach the important issue of combating terrorism co-operatively. Indeed, the 1967 ASEAN Declaration exhorts the Association to attain its economic, social and cultural aims through "joint endeavours" and "active collaboration and mutual assistance". I am not therefore preaching something new to you.

So we need to work together, and at every level. IMO, for example, apart from agreeing a comprehensive network of security measures for all its 164 Members to implement, has been active in its collaboration with other international Organizations, such as the International Labour Organization on the question of the seafarer identity documentation and with the World Customs Organization on the security of container transport.

We have also been very active in our efforts to assist our Member States to understand and

fulfil their obligations under the security measures I just mentioned, which (in the form of amendments to the SOLAS Convention and the ISPS Code) entered into force last year. To date, our extensive programme of technical co-operation in the field of maritime security has seen some sixty-six national or regional workshops and seminars on maritime security organized and undertaken and, as I speak, the seventh "Train the Trainer" courses is underway in Ghana, with around a dozen more planned before the end of the year. Two of these courses were organised in this region: the first in the Republic of Korea in October 2004 and the second here, in Singapore, in November of last year. Most commendable in this context is, of course, the work of APEC, in particular the Secure Trade in the Asian Pacific Region, the APEC STAR Initiative.

If the need for co-operation is generally accepted, as I believe it is, the questions we then have to deal with are:

- with whom do we co-operate?
- how widely do we co-operate with them?
- over what things do we co-operate and in what way?
- and what are the mechanisms we need to establish to achieve this co-operation?

You will, I know, be considering these and other questions in great detail in the course of the meeting; so, in this keynote address, I should like to offer you some background and some of my own thoughts that I hope will provide a useful context for your deliberations, in particular with respect to security in the Malacca Strait.

Ladies and gentlemen, during the ninety-second session of the IMO Council in June of last year, I took the opportunity to emphasize the need not only for IMO to continue to contribute to worldwide efforts to enhance security and thus prevent heavy loss of life and catastrophic pollution of the marine environment resulting from a terrorist attack against shipping, but also the importance of ensuring that shipping lanes, particularly those of strategic significance and importance, were kept open under all circumstances.

I told the meeting how, to that end, the IMO Secretariat had undertaken research to identify the shipping lanes that might be vulnerable to terrorist attack, and was ready and willing to work with others in a pro-active manner to protect as far as possible the interests of safety, security, the environment, seaborne trade and the world economy at large.

The IMO Council shared my concern, and requested that I should continue working on the issue in collaboration with all parties concerned. At its next meeting, in November, I was able to present an analysis of the key issues involved in protecting vital shipping lanes against terrorist attacks. It identified two broad types of shipping lanes that are vulnerable to terrorist attacks: on the one hand, lanes which, because of their configuration and location, made ships passing through vulnerable to attacks and, on the other, lanes whose vulnerability lay in their being cut off as a result of a terrorist attack.

The study revealed the Straits of Malacca and Singapore to be an indicative example highlighting various relevant security issues. At 520 nautical miles in length and, in places, extremely narrow and shallow, the Malacca and Singapore Straits link the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea and provides the artery through which a huge proportion of global trade is conducted. Some 50,000 ship movements carrying as much as one quarter of the world's commerce and half the world's oil pass through these Straits each year. Any serious disruption to the flow of maritime traffic through that channel would clearly have a widespread and far-reaching detrimental effect, forcing ships to a detour of around 600 miles and, without doubt, resulting in higher freight rates and costlier goods. That is why the preservation of its integrity is so important.

An OECD report published last year estimated that the overall cost of a major terrorist attack on shipping in a strategic location would likely be measured in the tens of billions of dollars. There are just a handful of such locations in the world and it does not take a great strategic mind to understand where they are – nor that the Straits of Malacca and Singapore are amongst them.

As part of my own efforts to push forward collaboration on maritime security in the region, I initiated a round of consultations with representatives of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the three littoral States, and other States using the Straits, offering my services in the pursuit of any collaborative scheme aimed at ensuring safety, security and environmental protection through the Straits. I have been greatly encouraged by the constructive response and by the understanding shown by all the parties approached.

For anyone concerned with the Malacca Strait continuing to serve unimpededly the international seaborne trade, it has been very pleasing to see the three littoral States acting in a manner demonstrating their keen interest in the subject as evidenced by:

- Malaysia's sponsorship of the ASEAN Regional Forum Workshop on Maritime Security in Kuala Lumpur in September 2004;
- Singapore's sponsorship of the present Conference; and
- Indonesia's co-sponsorship with IMO of another ad hoc meeting sanctioned by the IMO Council and scheduled to take place in Jakarta later in the year.

I consider this latter meeting a unique opportunity for us all to work together and make progress in producing an outcome conducive to the building of confidence in the safety of navigation and the overall security in the Strait. This should be endeavoured with full respect to the sovereign rights and the territorial integrity of the littoral States and the relevant provisions of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

I would envisage the Jakarta meeting as a Ministerial Conference at the end of which the participating Ministers would be invited to agree to, and sign a Ministerial Declaration endorsing an action plan designed to take the issue of security in the Malacca Strait forward in the most efficient and effective manner. I will be extremely pleased to see Ministers

coming to the Conference and contributing to its success.

There are, I think, two broad yet distinct issues that need to be addressed within the theme of this conference. The first is to determine how, and to what extent, the countries of the region can co-operate with each other to their mutual benefit. The second is to examine the possibilities for co-operation between the countries of the region, whether individually or collectively, with countries outside of the region. Let us be under no illusions. This is a complex and difficult subject and there are numerous interests that have to be taken into consideration if progress is to be made.

From the outset, I took pains to make it clear that any action to take the issue forward by means of an international approach must, as a *sine qua non* condition, be based on the consent, support and co-operation of the littoral States concerned, which would be invited to play a principal role in all developments. It should take due account of any relevant principles and conditions concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity and observe and comply with existing national laws and regulations. And as I state earlier on, it should also be consistent with international law, including the relevant provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

With regard to the question of security versus sovereignty (or vice versa), while I can understand and fully respect the sensitivity of any State over the issue, I, at the same time, also endorse the statement made a few months ago by the UK Foreign Secretary, who said that States have the right to non-interference in their internal affairs, but they also have responsibilities towards their own people and towards the international community and their international engagements.

Ladies and gentlemen, in his address at the United Nations General Assembly last September, Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke about the need for common solutions to the common problems that we all face today. He said, "At the international level, all States – strong and weak, big and small – need a framework of fair rules which each can be confident that others will obey. Fortunately, such a framework exists. From trade to terrorism, from the law of the sea to weapons of mass destruction, States have created an impressive body of norms and laws. This is one of our Organization's proudest achievements". ASEAN's own Declaration of 1967, which I mentioned earlier on, points to the same direction when it speaks of "respect for justice and the rule of law" and "adherence to the principles of the United Nation's Charter".

Mr. Annan went even one step further when he added that it is by rigorously upholding international law that we can, and must, fulfil our responsibility to protect innocent civilians. "History will judge us very harshly", he said, "if we let ourselves be deflected from this task, or think we are excused from it, by invocations of national sovereignty."

In the case of the Malacca Strait, it is helpful that the littoral States are no strangers to the concept of working together on maritime security issues. The current international climate

may have greatly heightened the collective resolve to tackle the terrorist threat but let us not forget that modern piracy and armed robbery against ships have been problems in this region for some time and all three littoral States have been actively engaged in efforts to counter it. Singapore and Indonesia, for example, began co-ordinated patrols of the Singapore Strait in 1992 and since then there have been a number of initiatives, both at diplomatic and operational level, involving all three countries, to promote this kind of co-operation, leading not only to bilateral but also to trilateral co-ordinated patrols of immense significance and importance.

Quite apart from issues of sovereignty, one can point to several reasons why it makes perfect practical sense for the littoral States to be at the heart of any collaborative security effort. It is they that will be immediately and most severely affected by any incident; it is their forces that have the local knowledge, of both geography and culture, that offers the best chance of nullifying regional threats; their forces already have experience of working together in the areas concerned and, while the Strait may be a key economic artery for the rest of the world, it is more akin to a jugular vein for the littoral States.

Nevertheless, this is an issue that clearly involves wider interests and a greater stakeholder community and it would be disingenuous to suggest otherwise. I think it is both appropriate and entirely within the provisions of international law that the views of this wider stakeholder community should be sought and taken into consideration, and I see this meeting as being part of the necessary process that must be undertaken to determine the mechanisms for doing so.

One can completely understand the reluctance of any State to move in a direction that might be seen as even a first small step towards compromising in any way its sovereign rights and powers. One can equally see a number of areas in which collaboration would clearly not even hint at such an eventual outcome. I am thinking, in particular, about such things as increasing awareness and the sharing of information and intelligence - in which, I should add, the Marine Electronic Highway project, which IMO is helping to promote in the Strait with commendable support and co-operation from all three littoral States, has the potential to be an extremely valuable asset. Sharing information is critically important not only between naval and maritime agencies within a country but also between neighbouring countries that share the important goal of securing the Malacca Strait in order to facilitate regional and global commerce. Other areas in which the littoral States can both collaborate with one another and begin to explore the ways in which the extra-regional interests might make a positive contribution, include personnel training, capacity-building and technical co-operation, and I am pleased to note that these are already being actively pursued.

Once comfortable and mutually beneficial working relationships have been established, such activities could then provide a firm basis for further co-operation, perhaps in the form of some kind of linkage or co-ordination between coast guard and maritime police assets in the countries concerned and perhaps leading eventually to permanent co-ordinated joint patrolling of the area. I know that tentative steps have already been taken in this direction and

it is not difficult to see the practical advantages that would accrue if an agreeable framework for this kind of activity could be found. We have all seen the wild-west movies in which the pursuit of the bank robber ends as he crosses the State line, where the sheriff and his posse have little choice but to shrug their shoulders and head for home. It would be nice to think we have moved on since those days.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude: the IMO initiative to seek an international approach on such a delicate and sensitive issue as the protection of the Malacca and Singapore Straits against terrorism has generated wide interest including by the United Nations General Assembly which, in a resolution on Oceans and the Law of the Sea adopted in November 2004, welcomed it and encouraged the Organization to continue to work on the issue in collaboration with the littoral States and user States.

I personally remain staunchly convinced that co-operation with others is the best possible way to combat the threats that face us all today and of providing us with the level of security we so urgently need to achieve. Such-cooperation must extend to Governments, regional and international organizations and the maritime private sector. Only by working together can the international community ensure that lawful private and public activities in the maritime domain are protected against attacks and other unlawful acts. I have no doubt that meetings such as this help to move us forward towards a mutual understanding of how that co-operation can best be manifested, for the benefit of us all.

We should not let our interest, indeed our concern not to allow shipping to become a soft target for international terrorism to wane, because we cannot afford dropping our guard or becoming complacent in the implementation of any relevant security measures. The fight against terrorism is an ongoing task and to win it we need to be vigilant and alert and act collectively in unison. Engaging ourselves in a continuous dialogue, co-operating with each other and implementing, on board ships and in port areas, IMO's global security standards is the only answer to a real and present threat. I have great expectations in the outcome of this Conference and even higher in that of the Jakarta meeting later in the year. May their success exceed my expectations!

Thank you.