



SPEECH

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Speech by MG Desmond Kuek, Chief of Defence Force at Opening Ceremony of 2nd Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) Multilateral Sea Exercise and Other Related WPNS Activities

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Navy Chiefs, dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning and a very warm welcome to Singapore.

I am pleased to be here to officiate the opening ceremony of the 2nd Western Pacific Naval Symposium Multilateral Sea Exercise, the complementary Multilateral Tactical Training Centre Exercise and the Maritime Security Information Exchange Seminar. It is heartening to note that 19 out of the 24 WPNS member and observer navies are represented here, with 18 ships participating in the exercise at sea. It is inspiring to see the high level of co-operation and commitment among the WPNS navies.

The maritime security challenges we face together are multi-faceted and trans-boundary in nature. They cut across traditional sectoral boundaries of navies, coast guards, port authorities and other maritime security agencies. The growing economies of China and India will increase the flow of trade and energy demands. Southeast Asia will become increasingly important in the maritime conveyance of these trade and energy resources as the region straddles some of the world's most important maritime trading routes. For example, the Straits of Malacca and Singapore carry over 30% of the world's trade and half of its oil. These straits are the arteries that connect the economies of East Asia with those of Europe and the Middle East. Any disruptions to the maritime traffic traversing these vital sea lanes will have an economic and strategic impact far beyond this region. Countries therefore need to work together to deal effectively with the prevailing threats for a more secure maritime domain. And no country can do it alone.

The need to go beyond one's own resources to work with other governments and military forces is evident in a world that is so inter-connected and inter-dependent. Most nations recognise that cooperation with other countries is no longer just a "nice to have" but clearly a "need to have". In our Western Pacific region, military forces are well-placed for multilateral cooperation against the wide range of trans-national threats. Militaries have common professional experiences and a common understanding of operational realities on the ground, and this gives us a practical basis for cooperation. There is also a strong tradition of defence diplomacy in this region, as well as a habit of working together in a wide range of bilateral

and multilateral interactions over many years, both in the field, in joint exercises and operations, and in professional exchanges at seminars and workshops. One important outcome of this web of interactions is that mutual understanding and trust are continually forged and strengthened among regional military forces.

To build the capacity for multilateral co-operation among militaries and for it to be effective, I see three essential ingredients that are required for the recipe to be successful.

First, is that of confidence building and mutual understanding. Confidence building and mutual understanding provide the foundation upon which further co-operation can be developed. The web of interaction through exercises, seminars, discussions, workshops and programme exchanges are key to sustaining and strengthening confidence building and enhancing mutual respect and understanding. These need to be fostered among our people at all levels and not just at the leadership apex. Involving our leaders at all levels helps to ensure that current relationships and mutual understanding can be sustained into the future.

The second ingredient is that of sharing professional knowledge and skills. The gathering of professionals helps to prioritise the opportunities, while the climate for open dialogue helps to create the conditions for the rich exchange and sharing of practices, knowledge and experiences. It is through such sharing of wisdom and experience that we will all benefit and learn. This process allows our militaries to grow the requisite competencies and capabilities to meet the operational demands that we will have to face together.

The third ingredient is that of exercising and operating together in the sea, land and air domains. This phase will naturally require that we can first succeed in building confidence and mutual understanding and promote the sharing of professional knowledge and skills. Tactical exercises and operations can then be mounted, and through these exposures, we can develop and practise common procedures, as well as develop equipment compatibility to be able to communicate and inter-operate effectively.

The WPNS has grown from strength to strength since its inception in 1988. The grouping has been successful in mixing these three key ingredients that I have outlined, and has contributed significantly to building capacity and developing inter-operability for maritime security cooperation in this region. Membership has grown from an initial number of 12 to the present 18-member and 6-observer navies.

The WPNS has served to increase the level of confidence and mutual understanding among its members. The biennial symposiums and annual workshops provide the opportunity for regular dialogue and sharing of ideas and perspectives among navy leaders and senior staffs. Beyond that, initiatives like the Seminar for Officers of the Next Generation (SONG) and Sea-Riding programme for junior officers help to build linkages and understanding among officers at other levels.

The WPNS has enabled navies to share professional knowledge and increase their competencies. Initial topics like navigation and pollution control have progressed to more substantial exchanges on conventional maritime warfare, the role of navies in protecting sea lines of communications (SLOCs), and in-depth sharing on maritime interdiction, force protection, and regional maritime security. Dedicated seminars have also been conducted on specific competency areas, like mine countermeasures, disaster relief, ship boarding and maritime security information exchange.

Most significantly, the WPNS navies have come together to build inter-operability at sea and also initiated co-operation to enhance real-time maritime awareness and information sharing. Exercises such as the WPNS Mine Countermeasures and Diving Exercise as well as the WPNS Multilateral Sea Exercise have allowed participating navies from diverse backgrounds to gather and operate together at sea. In this respect, the Republic of Singapore Navy has also developed the Regional Maritime Information Exchange or ReMIX initiative to facilitate real-time information sharing and collaboration among the operational staff of WPNS navies. I am told that the response has been positive and many navies have used it to increase their awareness of the maritime domain. These exercises and on-line collaboration are firm steps in growing multilateral co-operation among WPNS navies.

You have indeed all the ingredients necessary for effective multilateral co-operation present in the WPNS and the activities it conducts. Ultimately, the success of multilateral co-operation among navies depends on the commitment of professionals, like yourselves, in carrying them out. It leaves me now to wish all of you a safe and enriching exercise.

I am pleased to declare the 2nd WPNS Multilateral Sea Exercise open.

Thank you.

News Release:

- Opening of 2nd Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) Multilateral Sea Exercise, Multilateral Tactical Training Centre Exercise and Maritime Security Information Exchange Seminar 2007 (MINDEF_20070516001.pdf)

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