



NEWS RELEASE

Visit <http://www.mindef.gov.sg> for more news and information about MINDEF and the SAF

Speech by Minister of State for Defence, Dr Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, at the Simultaneous Special Session 4 on "Regional Security in the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific", India Global Forum

09 Nov 2014

Good afternoon,
Ladies and gentlemen.

It's really a pleasure to be here today, and especially so because this is the first installation of the India Global Forum. First, let me thank the Government of the Republic of India for their gracious hospitality and IISS for inviting me to speak on this panel.

Security Environment in the Gulf and Indo-Pacific

The security challenges that confront countries today are increasingly transnational and complex. The latest manifestation of violence and extremism is the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which has plagued the Middle East. The threat of the ISIS is of particular concern because firstly, they can potentially sustain their efforts for a protracted period based on the rich oil resources in territories they occupy. Secondly, they have also embarked on an effective recruitment strategy, including the sophisticated use of social media to attract followers from around the world to join their efforts and to extend their linkages to other religious militant groups. An estimated 10,000 to 20,000 foreigners from at least 80 countries, including Southeast Asia, have travelled to fight in Iraq and Syria. In this year alone, an estimated 350 Southeast Asians have travelled to the conflict zone. This is compared to an estimated 400 Southeast Asians who were involved in the Afghan War over a 10 year period beginning in the 1980s.

The greater worry about these foreign fighters is the "return wave", when they come back from Iraq and Syria, trained, further radicalised, and possessing greater networks to

fellow extremists or groups across the region. The threats to the region caused by the export of terrorism from the ISIS are real. Some Malaysians and Indonesians fighting for the ISIS have formed a militant group called Majmu'ah Al Arkhabily or "Group from the Archipelago", from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Leaders of organised militant groups in this region, for example, Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia, have also pledged allegiance to the ISIS and declared their similar intent to establish an Islamic State in Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, the authorities arrested militants in April 2014 who were inspired by the ISIS and had planned to attack pubs, a disco and a beer brewery.

If this terrorism threat is allowed to grow and spread, innocent civilians here and elsewhere could be endangered and killed. Singapore, though some 7,000 kilometers away from the Middle East, is also not immune to the ISIS threat. As part of our ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, Singapore will be contributing to the multinational coalition effort against the ISIS. We will also be working with other countries to combat this threat by sharing information on the ISIS and on returning jihadists, and stemming the flow on terrorist financing. The transnational nature of this threat requires all countries to work together to curb the export of terrorism to our region.

Likewise, modern maritime threats such as piracy, terrorism and natural disasters are transnational and complex. They can threaten to disrupt the flow of energy supplies from the Middle East and also have a significant impact on every nation, as the shipping industry currently carries about 90% of the world trade.

Piracy and maritime terrorism typically manifest in lucrative sea routes, of which the Gulf and Indo-Pacific has plentiful. Singapore, as a maritime nation with one of the busiest ports in the world, has approximately 1,000 ships call at our ports or cross our waters every day. Our trade is three times our GDP. Thus, we fully understand the value and importance of global maritime commerce. In this regard, I would like to focus my subsequent remarks specifically on the security of the maritime realm and the sea lines of communication.

Importance of International Cooperation to Address Maritime Security Challenges

Maritime security challenges cannot be solved by any one nation, no matter how well resourced. Instead, all countries need to work together to effectively deal with them. Small states can also contribute to these efforts. To ensure that the sea lanes are secure for everyone's use, cooperation between the international community, user States and Littoral States is essential. Promoting stability in the Persian Gulf, maintaining freedom of the seas, protecting the sea lines of communication, and choke points such as the Strait of Malacca, are important economic and security interests for all nations.

One example of a multinational effort to enhance maritime security is the USled Combined Maritime Forces. It is a multinational naval partnership comprising three task

forces which focuses on combating piracy and maritime terrorism, encouraging regional cooperation and promoting a safe maritime environment across the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Indian Ocean, Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman. One of which is the Combined Task Force 151 which the Singapore Armed Forces has actively participated in.

The Gulf of Aden is nearly 4,000 nautical miles away from Singapore. However, what happens there affects us as well. The Gulf of Aden is a major waterway that connects the trade between Asia and Europe. More than 30,000 vessels pass through those waters each day and they carry on them essential commodities - crude oil and petroleum goods - some making their way to Singapore each day. If this essential waterway is disrupted, trade will be affected. Livelihoods would be severely affected in Singapore and in our entire region as a result.

It is heartening that the international counter-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden has made a difference to its security. Pirate attacks have come down significantly in the Gulf of Aden over the past few years. In 2011, there were 237 reported incidents and it has decreased to only 15 in 2013. This year, there has just been one reported piracy incident so far.

In the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS), Singapore, together with the other littoral States of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, established the Malacca Strait Patrols (MSP) in 2005 to tackle piracy and sea robbery in our waters. We are pleased that the efforts of the littoral states have been effective, as the SOMS is a key international sea lane, which links the economies of the Persian Gulf region and India with China, Japan, Indonesia and the Pacific Rim, with more than half of the world's oil and a third of the world's trade passing through. Just one year after the establishment of the MSP, Lloyd's dropped the classification of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as a "war-risk" zone.

However, as it is clear from these efforts in the Gulf of Aden and SOMS, more can still be done to enhance cooperation in the maritime security domain. We must continue to strengthen practical cooperation in areas of shared interest, which will in turn build greater understanding, strengthen inter-operability and engender deeper trust.

One way to achieve this is for militaries to exercise together to build capabilities and improve effectiveness in the area of non-traditional security. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus has already embarked on this, where we had a successful HADR/ Military Medicine exercise last year in Brunei where militaries from all 18 countries took part. The momentum for practical cooperation is still strong. In the upcoming cycle of the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups (EWG), Singapore, together with Brunei, Australia and New Zealand, will be organising an ADMM-Plus Counter-Terrorism/Maritime Security Exercise. This will allow the region to better respond to armed robbery and piracy in the SOMS and the South China Sea, both of which remain persistent issues.

I am also pleased that India has taken up the co-chairmanship of the EWG on Humanitarian Mine Action with Vietnam. India had also contributed a very substantial contingent for the exercise in Brunei last year, and I would like to congratulate India for playing that role. Singapore welcomes India's greater participation and leadership role in the region.

Singapore also sees significant potential in the domain of information-sharing. Information-sharing is a key resource to enhance the effectiveness of collaborative efforts between states as it provides better maritime situational awareness and facilitates timely and effective responses to security threats. This is why we established the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) at the Changi Command and Control Centre in 2007, to provide a useful platform for inter-agency cooperation and information-sharing amongst different nations. The IFC has operational linkages with 65 Operation Centres across 35 countries. Currently, 14 International Liaison Officers from 13 countries are stationed at the IFC. The IFC's partnerships act as key enablers for rapid information-sharing and coordination of operational responses to incidents at sea.

In July this year, the Royal Malaysian Navy made use of information from the IFC to promptly localise and rescue a Malaysia-flagged oil tanker in the South China Sea, which had been attacked by pirates and had lost communications with its company. The IFC also supported the Search-and-Locate efforts for MH370 earlier this year.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific have enjoyed substantial growth and prosperity for the last two decades, and it continues to hold tremendous potential and promise. However, this region is witnessing changes in the global order and the new security challenges that come with it. To safeguard the security and stability of our region, all states, including major powers like the United States, need to work together collectively and cooperatively. Small states can also contribute towards enhancing stability in the regional security architecture and beyond. As a close friend of India, Singapore looks forward to continue working with India to forge peace and prosperity for Asia and beyond.

Thank you.

News Release:

- Minister of State for Defence Attends the Inaugural India Global Forum (Document No: MINDEF_20141109001_1)