Fact Sheet: Safeguarding Singapore's Maritime Security

30 Jun 2017

Introduction

As an island state with a short but porous coastline, Singapore is vulnerable to threats from the sea. Singapore's port is one of the busiest in the world, with close to a thousand ships passing through its waters daily. The risk of terrorists mounting swift attacks from the sea to inflict great damage, as witnessed during the 2008 Mumbai attacks, cannot be ruled out.

Since 1967, the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) has been at the frontline of safeguarding the nation's waters. In addition to setting up the Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) to respond to potential maritime threats, the RSN leads a Whole-of-Government approach to plan and coordinate responses across national agencies against such threats.

National Maritime Security System

Established in 2011, the National Maritime Security System is a Whole-of-Government framework which facilitates the detection and monitoring of maritime security threats and the coordination of operational responses. Under this framework, the Permanent Secretaries of Defence and Home Affairs co-chair the Homefront Crisis Executive Group (HCEG)(Maritime Security)(MARSEC) for wider coordination at the national level. The HCEG (MARSEC) is supported by the Crisis Management Group (CMG)(MARSEC), which

the Chief of Navy leads as Crisis Manager to ensure a unified command and control during operations.

Singapore Maritime Crisis Centre

Located at the Changi Command and Control Centre, the SMCC performs a coordinating role within the CMG(MARSEC). It brings together incident managers from various national maritime security agencies like the RSN, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), Police Coast Guard (PCG), and Singapore Customs to drive integrated operations, coordination and planning for anticipated threat scenarios. It achieved full operational capability in 2013, and serves to tighten linkages between the national maritime security agencies in the areas of (i) sense-making and threat assessment, (ii) doctrine and operations planning, (iii) conduct and monitoring of current and future operations, (iv) capability development, and (v) conduct of training and exercises. This strengthens interoperability between agencies during a maritime security contingency, allowing for a more coordinated operational response and minimising the duplication of efforts.

The SMCC comprises the National Maritime Sense-making Group (NMSG) and National Maritime Operations Group (NMOG).

a. National Maritime Sense-making Group. The NMSG uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics collected from multiple sources to generate unique signatures and build profiles for the close to a thousand commercial shipping vessels that pass through Singapore's waters daily. It is able to detect deviations from these signatures, picking out anomalies and suspicious behaviour for further investigation. The NMSG also continuously monitors indications of threat scenarios. The results of its analyses and pick-ups are shared with the relevant national agencies so that decisive actions can be taken to neutralise the identified threats. Such AI-embedded methods detected a possible ISIS supporter on board a tanker in 2015, and that person was barred from disembarking in Singapore. Similarly, on 9 Dec 2016, the NMSG flagged out a merchant vessel that was possibly involved in suspicious activities. The PCG boarded the vessel and discovered contraband goods onboard, and one of the crew members involved was subsequently arrested.

b. National Maritime Operations Group. The NMOG drives training, builds common protocols and conducts exercises, such as the Exercise Highcrest series, to tighten operational responses between the various agencies. It has also been leading efforts to review the national maritime security response framework to close any operational gaps and build a more coordinated operational response. For example, the NMOG coordinated a layered defence plan involving all national maritime agencies to safeguard the National Day Parade, which was held at the Sports Hub in 2016.

Maritime Security Task Force

The MSTF was set up by the Singapore Armed Forces in 2009. It leverages the RSN's suite of naval capabilities, such as its Littoral Mission Vessels, Specialised Marine Craft, Accompanying Sea Security Teams, and Bedok-class Mine Countermeasure Vessels, for maritime security operations. It comprises two groups: (i) the Comprehensive Maritime Awareness Group (CMAG); and (ii) the Operations Group.

a. The Comprehensive Maritime Awareness Group. The CMAG builds and maintains a comprehensive maritime situation picture through its information-sharing networks. It works closely with the NMSG, national agencies, international partners and the shipping community (such as ship owners, ships charterers, agents and port operators) to share maritime information. The collated information helps in deciding the allocation of MSTF assets in day-to-day maritime operations and operational responses when required.

b. Operations Group. The Operations Group comprises operations planners who undertake planning and execution of all maritime security operations. It conducts daily patrols, boarding and escort operations in the Singapore Strait and Sea Lines of Communication, to ensure maritime security and the protection of key installations and potential targets.

In the event of maritime incidents, the MSTF, coordinated by the SMCC, works hand-in-hand with representatives from the other national maritime agencies, to forestall and interdict any potential maritime threats. Linkages are exercised regularly in scenarios ranging from the interdiction of hijacked vessels to responses to maritime emergencies.

News Release:

- Minister for Defence's SAF Day Media Interview 2017 (MINDEF_20170630002.pdf)