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Maritime Terrorism and Piracy: Security Challenges in South East Asia

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The security environment in South East Asia is being challenged from several directions. The region is plagued with piracy and has also witnessed maritime terrorism related activities, drug smuggling, gun running and illegal migration. Some of these have the potential to disrupt and destroy maritime enterprise in the region.

The security environment in South East Asia is being challenged from several directions. The region is plagued with piracy, and has also witnessed maritime terrorism-related activities, drug smuggling, gun running and illegal migration. Some of these have the potential to disrupt and destroy maritime enterprise. Efforts have been made by regional countries to address these problems and there has been an encouraging response to their efforts to combat disorder at sea. Nevertheless, concerns with threats of maritime terrorism in the region remains high primarily due to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region, presence of al Qaeda - linked groups like Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and the importance of the strategic choke points comprising the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits. Besides, there is also a noticeable link between threats of terrorism with the increasing incidents of sea robbery attacks on maritime shipping in the Straits.

Maritime Geography and Geo-strategic Importance

South East Asia is primarily a maritime area. Most of its countries have long coastlines, and some like Indonesia and Philippines are archipelagoes. Besides, the region is home to strategic maritime choke points like the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits that have direct impact on the economic and social well being of all the Asia Pacific countries. Among these, the Strait of Malacca is the main waterway that connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The strait is 600 nautical miles long, varying in width from 300 nautical miles in the west to three nautical miles in its most constricted point. It is relatively shallow and vessels of up to 65

feet draught are permitted passage.¹ Every year, more than 60,000 ships pass through the Strait of Malacca carrying a variety of cargo like oil, gas, raw materials and finished goods. The traffic is about three times the number of ships that transit through the Panama Canal and more than double the number that sail through the Suez Canal.

With the opening up of markets and countries seeking integration with the world economy, the seas have assumed an unparalleled importance. Hinterland communications are inadequate among the South East Asian countries. These states have now intensified their shipping activity to support their economic vitality. The primary interest of these states is to ensure an uninterrupted flow of energy requirements to fuel their growing economies as well as unimpeded access to sources of raw materials and markets for their products. Consequently, enhanced economic dynamism in South East Asia, primarily based on maritime activity, has resulted in increased sensitivity of the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) especially through the Straits of Malacca.

At this stage it is difficult to predict any 'state induced threats' to the stability and security of the strategic choke points in the South East Asian region, but the geo strategic and economic realities can change. The first closure of the Suez Canal in 1956 provides an historical example of how SLOC closure affects the cost of transportation.² Ships had to transit the Cape of Good Hope. The eight-

1 Henry J. Kenny, An Analysis of Possible Threats to Shipping in Key South East Asian Sea Lanes, Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria, Virginia, 1996, p.4.

2 John H. Noer, Choke Points : Maritime Economic Concerns in South East Asia, Center for Naval Analyses Alexandria, VA, 1996, p.40.

year Iran-Iraq war produced 543 attacks on ships with approximately 200 merchant sailors killed. More than eighty ships sank or were declared beyond repair leading to a monetary loss of more than \$ 2 billion in direct losses to cargo and hulls.³ This caused world-wide insurance rates to increase by 200 percent resulting in the hike of oil prices from \$ 13 to \$31 per barrel. Although tanker supply and capacity have increased since then, the event is a stark reminder of what might happen if the South East Asian SLOCs are not open for unimpeded and safe passage.

The freedom of navigation through the South East Asian SLOCs has both economic and strategic significance for both China and Japan. This sea-lane provides passage for the Japanese and Chinese mercantile marine for their trade with the Persian Gulf, Africa and Europe. Seventy percent of Japanese oil imports are carried from the concerns tanker traffic enters the straits of South East Asia.⁴

Maritime Terrorism

In the wake of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the maritime community had concluded that there was an urgent need to review measures to combat violence and crime at sea. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) took the lead and called for a resolution for reviewing the existing international legal and technical measures and procedures to prevent acts that threaten the security of ships at sea and ports was also adopted. It was agreed to adopt new regulations and mandatory statutory instruments to enhance maritime security by preventing and suppressing acts of terrorism against shipping and make sea-lanes safe for international commerce.

Since the 1970s, perhaps due to turmoil in the Middle East, the phenomenon of terrorism has been gathering momentum. Today one finds a large number of terrorists groups located all over the world, and some even are transnational in their activities and linkages. What is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the rise in the number of such groups is that they have pervaded every facet of human activity, be it politics, governance, economics, trade and even religion. Interestingly, some groups are so ideologically driven that their primary agenda is to preserve their religious faith.

It is true that most of the terrorist activities take place on land than at sea. But the threat of maritime terrorism is not a new phenomenon. In the past there have been several instances when ships have been taken over by insurgents or attacked by terrorists.⁵ The takeover of a Portuguese passenger lines *Santa Maria* in 1961 ushered in the modern age of maritime terrorism.⁶ The vessel was taken over by Seventy-one Portuguese political insurgents who embarked the vessel as passengers. In the ensuing scuffle, one officer was killed and eight crewmembers were wounded. On a request by the Portuguese government, the vessel was intercepted, escorted to Brazil and the insurgents were granted asylum. The vessel returned back to the Portuguese authorities. In 1988, *City of Poros*, a Greek cruise ferry carrying 500 tourists, was attacked by terrorists.⁷ But it was the *Achille Lauro* incident that caught the attention of the international community with regard to the menace of terrorism at sea and the formulation of an international convention under the United Nations. On 8 October 1988, a group of Palestine Guerillas hijacked the Italian cruise vessel

3 Reynolds B. Peele, "The Importance of Maritime Choke Points", *Parameters*, Summer 1997, p. 64.

4 The Strait of Hormuz : Global Shipping and Trade Implications in the Event of Closure, Office of Naval Intelligence, US Navy ,1997, p.13.

5 Between 1857 and 1876, there were at least eight recorded cases of acts of terrorism committed on board ships. See, Samuel Pyeatt Menefee, "Piracy, Terrorism and Insurgent Passenger" in Natoline Ronzitte, *Maritime Terrorism and International Law*, Maritnus Nijoff, London, 1991, pp.43 — 55 .

6 *Ibid.*, pp.56 — 58.

7 "Danish Newspaper Explains City of Poros Slaughter", URL <www.washington-report.org/backissues/1088/8810039.htm

Achille Lauro.⁸ Similarly, on November 03, 1988, two trawlers carrying 150 PLOTE (People's Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelam) mercenaries landed in the Maldives.⁹ The mercenaries quickly overpowered the Maldivian militia using rockets and machine guns and attacked the President's residence. A 'panicked' Maldivian Government sent out calls asking for assistance to both Colombo and New Delhi and India responded. *Operation Cactus* was launched and a large contingent of paratroopers made an unopposed landing at Male. The island was secured within thirty minutes after the arrival of forces. Fighter aircraft of the Indian Air force were also deployed to the island in a show of force and helicopters landed commandos to the outlying island to search for any mercenaries. Shortly afterwards, a vessel was seen fleeing Male with mercenaries and hostages including Maldives Minister of Education. An Indian Navy maritime reconnaissance aircraft detected the ship and Indian navy vessels later captured the ship.¹⁰

In recent times, *USS Cole*, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer was attacked by terrorists.¹¹ Soon after that there was an attack on the French flag vessel *M V*

Limburg. These incidents exhibited the capability that terrorist groups like the Al Qaeda had developed and these incidents also exposed that exposed the vulnerability of both warships and merchantmen. It also emerged that maritime terrorism is a reality. Therefore threat of terrorism to commercial maritime enterprise is far from rare and is increasingly becoming a reality. Unfortunately, maritime shipping is the soft under belly of states that offers the best form of vehicle to carry out illegal activities.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the Al Qaeda terrorist network has made significant inroads into South East Asia too. The regional Al Qaeda operatives, who have been largely of Middle Eastern origin, began by establishing local cells that matured over a period of time primarily due to poor intelligence, security controls and of course, lack of political will. As a matter of fact the environment acted as a catalyst for these cells, which began to mushroom and found the region as a safe heaven.

For instance, Al Qaeda's Manila cell was founded in the early 1990s.¹² Ramzi Yousef, a brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden, was involved in creating this cell, and the cell was particularly active in the early mid 1990s. Interestingly, Ramzi Yousef had coordinated 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York with plans to blow up eleven airliners in a two-day period (what was known as the "Bojinka" plan). There were also plans to assassinate the Pope during his visit to the Philippines in early 1995. Yousef was assisted in Manila for a time by his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Having embedded themselves in the Philippines, it became easy for the Al Qaeda to branch out their activity in several other South East Asian countries, particularly Malaysia, Singapore and

8 They threatened to kill American and British citizens and demanded release of a group of Palestine prisoners detained in Israeli prisons. Meanwhile the ship sailed in to the international waters and anchored off Port Said. After two days of negotiations, the hijackers surrendered for a guarantee of safe passage out of Egypt. An Egyptian aircraft was chartered and the Palestine guerillas left Egypt. Meanwhile it was learnt that the guerillas had killed an American citizen on board the cruise vessel. The aircraft was intercepted by American fighter aircraft when it was flying over the Mediterranean Sea and escorted to US airbase in Sicily.

9 "Operation Cactus", at <<http://www.bharat-rakshak.com/CONFLICTS/Operationcactus.htm>>

10 Ibid.

11 In October 2000, while the ship was refueling in Aden, Yemen, a small craft packed with explosives crashed into the warship and exploded leaving the ship with a forty feet hole on its side and several crew members dead. The bombers had links with al-Qaeda and America's No. 1 terror suspect, Osama bin Laden. For more details see "Those Responsible Caught", <http://www.cargolaw.com/2000nightmare_cole.html>

12 M. Manyin, E. C. Avery, R. Cronin, L. Nicksch and B. Vaughn, Terrorism in South East Asia, CRS Report for Congress available at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/35795.pdf>.

Indonesia. In 1999 and 2000, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok were the venues for meetings among some of the September 11 plotters.¹³

More recently, the Singapore authorities arrested fifteen suspected Islamic militants, with links to al-Qaeda, planning to blow up U.S. naval vessels and a bus that was to transport American military service members.¹⁴ The tape, released by the Singapore government, features a man describing how explosives could be carried on a bicycle without arousing suspicion. One plot involved bombing U.S. navy vessels in a special 'kill zone' along the northeastern shores of Singapore, and the bus that was targeted carries U.S. military personnel between a naval base used by visiting warships and a train station. The U.S. Navy has a logistics unit in Singapore and warships going to and from Afghanistan have been docked for replenishment in the new naval facility specially designed to accommodate U.S. aircraft carriers.

There is yet another pan-Islamic terrorist organisation i.e. Jemaah Islamiah (Islamic Group) that has been active in South East Asia. Although it began its activities in the 1960s, when its co-founders, clerics Abu Bakr Baasyir and Abdullah Sungkar, wanted establishment of *sharia* law in Indonesia, they became more active during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.¹⁵ The duo recruited Muslims to fight against the Soviets and by 1995 they had established links with Al Qaeda. Now it has cells in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Thailand and even Bangladesh. The group has formal links and operational contacts with the Filipino separatist group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that has maritime terrorism capabilities.

According to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) it is virtually impossible to

verify the authenticity of the identity of the ships crew.¹⁶ There is a major problem of counterfeit and improperly issued mariner documentation. The IMB has issued a warning to ship operators about the thousands of unqualified crew and masters working illegally with false papers, and has called for tighter security by authorities issuing certificates. The alert follows the release of statistics showing that of fifty-four maritime administrations surveyed, more than 12 000 cases of forged certificates of competency were reported.¹⁷ These figures highlight the gravity of the situation. Both the Philippines and Indonesia are the largest suppliers of merchant ship crew. These states are home to radical group like Abu Sayyaf and Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebels.¹⁸ The possibility of this crew employed by vessels that fly 'flags of convenience' and employ multinational crews further adds to the complications of maritime terrorist activities. It is difficult to verify the authenticity of the identity of the crew.

Sea Piracy

Sea piracy in South East Asia is not new. The narratives of Fa-Hsien record cases of raiding, and robbing in the Malacca Strait and South China Sea in AD 414. The Spice trade in the Malacca Straits in the 1670s also invited piracy aimed at disrupting the trade.¹⁹ By the 19th century piracy became part of internal dynamics of inter tribal warfare and empire building. In the 20th century, sea-raiding thought to be condoned by Indonesia, further acted as a catalyst for piracy.²⁰

13 Ibid.

14 See <<http://www.pilotonline.com/military/ml0112sing.html>> for details.

15 Mark Manyin (et.al.), *Terrorism in South East Asia*, op.cit.

16 See 'IMB Calls For Clamp-Down on Fake Maritime Documents' at <http://www.iccwbo.org/index_ccs.asp>.

17 Ibid.

18 See 'The World's Oceans Could be the Next Target in the War on Terrorism' at <<http://www.emergency.com/cntrterr.htm>>. The Philippines, which is home of the Abu Sayyaf militant group, is the world's biggest crew supplier, while Indonesia is home to numerous radical Muslim groups, and is the world's second biggest crew supplier.

19 Peter Chalk, *Low Intensity Conflict in South East Asia: Piracy, Drug Trafficking and Political Terrorism*, *Conflict Studies*, No. 305/306, January-February 1999, p.4.

20 Ibid.

Pirates are like sharks. They rear and nurture more often in some areas than others. They can strike anywhere but some areas are indeed very popular with them partly due to past experience and geography and more due to the absence of security forces. It appears that piracy moves around and its center of gravity keeps shifting but pirate-plagued areas remain active. It may simply happen that one area may record more attacks than the others but no area can claim itself to be free from pirates.

According to the IMB, South East Asian waters are the hotspots of piracy. The region retains its position as the most active with regard to attack on vessels accounting for more than half of the reported attacks. As per IMB's annual report for 2003, 'Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships', piracy attacks worldwide increased both in frequency and brutality.²¹ There were a total of 445 incidents reported compared with 370 in 2002 thereby registering an increase of about twenty percent. Twenty-one seafarers were reportedly killed and some seventy crew/passengers were missing. Attacks in the Malacca Strait, were up from 16 to 28, with Indonesian waters accounting for the 121 reported incidents.

The Malacca Straits and the Singapore Straits continue to be popular among pirates. This is due to geographical and operational reasons. The area around the straits attracts the heaviest maritime traffic concentration. Over 200 vessels of different types ranging from Very Large Crude Carriers (VLCCs) to fishing vessels transit the Malacca Strait every day. For instance, the traffic density in the Malacca Straits has increased from 43,965 vessels in 1999 to 62,332 vessels in 2003.²² These include 3,487 VLCC/deep draft carrier and 15,667 tankers that reported to Klang VTS.²³

The high rates of piracy-related incidents could be squarely attributed to the geographical constraints of the traffic lane. Although there is a traffic separation scheme, the transiting vessels reduce speed to negotiate traffic. VLCCs transit through the Strait at safe speeds with only a meter or two of clearance under the keel. Besides, the Strait is home to several shipwrecks and shallow areas that further contribute to navigational constraints. These navigational and operational conditions provide the right type of environment for pirates to undertake attacks as also manage a quick getaway. The numbers of attacks have gone up substantially over the last years.

Indonesian waters are currently one of the most pirate-infested areas on the map. This is attributable to the country's unrest and poverty forcing fishermen to look for more lucrative employment like pirate syndicates. Moreover, merchant ships have to slow down to navigate and negotiate narrow channels, and thousands of islands of the Indonesian archipelago offer a haven for escaping bandits.

It is possible to identify at least three types of piracy that are currently occurring in these waters. These are:

1. **Harbour and Anchorage attacks.** These are essentially petty thefts and pirates simply rob the crew of their valuables, belongings and ships stores such as ropes, paint, hoses and other lightweight on deck equipment.
2. **Highjacking Vessels.** These are sophisticated operations that involve use of weapons like pistols, machine guns and other crude home made machetes/ knives. In such piracy cases, the pirates look for ship cargo and cash including personal belongings.
3. **Hijacking vessels to convert them into phantom ships for the purpose of illegal trade.** In this case, it is very difficult to trace the ship and in some cases, the crew is left adrift or even killed.

21 'Piracy Takes Higher Toll of Seamen's Lives', 28 January 2004 available at < <http://www.icc-ccs.org/main/news.php?newsid=23>>

22 For statistics of vessel traffic See, statistic STRAITREP at <<http://www.marine.gov.my/misc/indexstat.html>>

23 Ibid.

The 1990s have thus witnessed an impressive increase. The actual problem of piracy is much more disturbing and serious than what the figures reflect. The most horrifying aspect of maritime piracy is the violence associated with it. Crew traumatized, hurt, injured, left adrift or even killed is some of the violent shades of modern-day piratical attacks. The international shipping community is growing more pessimistic over the ability of states to control piracy and the viciousness of attacks.

The statistical data in respect of South East Asia is indeed disturbing. South East Asia is a hot spot for piratical attacks and a danger zones. The actual problem of piracy is much more disturbing and serious than what the figures reflect. Ship owners fear costly delays. It can cost anything up to US \$ 20,000 to keep a merchant vessel operational on any single day. The high rates of incidents of piracy result in high insurance rates. The ships and their companies prefer to compensate the crew than incur losses due to holdups during investigations. It costs a heavy purse to pay extra for crew and operational maintenance costs. Shipping companies privately concede to attacks on their vessels but prefer not to report. Many victims of attacks are so traumatized that they do not have a desire to return to sea again but ship owners fail to appreciate this fact and discourage crew from reporting incidents of attacks.

Piracy and Terrorism: Understanding the Thin Line

In recent times, this distinction between piracy and terrorism seems to be fast eroding. For instance, in August 2001, a general cargo carrier *M V Ocean Silver*, while transiting through the Malacca Strait, was seized by the Aceh rebels. The six crewmembers of the vessel were taken hostage. The rebels issued a warning that all ships transiting through the straits between Sumatra Island and Malaysia must first get permission from the insurgents. Earlier, in May 2001, Thai police captured a consignment of 15,000 bullets, grenades, landmines and TNT

explosive devices destined for the Aceh rebels.²⁴ Two Thai army sergeants in southern Thailand were arrested. The Aceh rebels continued their efforts to acquire more weaponry and in the process, in November 2002, the Indonesian navy sank two ships that had been seized from the Thai fishermen by separatist rebels to smuggle arms to Aceh.²⁵

Similarly, in another incident, *M V Cordiality*, a merchant vessel was seized by the LTTE near the port of Trincomalee and the five Chinese crew were killed. In August 1998, a Belize flagged general cargo vessel *Princess Kash* was hijacked by the Tamil Tigers. While on its way to Mullaitivu, a Tamil stronghold, the Sri Lankan Air Force bombed the vessel to prevent the ship's cargo falling into the hands of the rebels. The status of the twenty two crew members is still not known.

But strategists differ in their understanding of the two phenomena. According to Brian Jenkins, an expert on terrorism and security, it is incorrect to conclude that an increase in piracy will result in an increase in the terrorist threat. He also notes that there is no indication that terrorists and pirates are operating in close cooperation. Their aims are different.²⁶ Similarly, Captain Mat Taib Yasin, a former Royal Malaysian Navy Officer, and Senior Fellow at the Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA), "The pirate wants to enjoy his loot. The terrorist wants to destroy the enemy, get political mileage - and he's prepared to die."²⁷ It has also been argued, "How far little money might go in convincing pirates to assist terrorists. After all, money — loot — is the pirate's language, and the terrorists who may be

24 Kazi Mahmood, "Thailand cracks down on arms smuggling to Aceh," <http://www.islamonline.net/English/News/2001-05/18/article4.shtml>

25 "Indonesian navy sinks 2 arms smuggling ships," *The Straits Times*, 26 November 2002.

26 Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Malacca Strait: Target for Terror," *Asia Times*, August 11, 2004. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/FH11Ae02.html

27 Ibid.

eying the Strait are well funded".²⁸ Similarly, Adam Young and Mark J. Valencia make clear distinction between piracy and terrorism,

"Terrorism is distinct from piracy in a very straightforward manner. While piracy is a crime motivated by greed and thus predicated on immediate financial gain, terrorism, and its maritime manifestation, 'political piracy' or maritime terrorism, is motivated by political goals beyond the immediate act of attacking or hijacking a maritime target. Terrorism at sea includes the twin threats of attacks on shipping and the threat of ships being used as weapons, and the threat of ships being used to deliver concealed weapons of mass destruction (in containers or within the ship's superstructure). Both have the potential to cause systemic economic dislocation. Indeed, the effect of a major attack on a US port or on a transshipment hub such as Singapore would be felt globally."²⁹

Although sea piracy and terrorism have common characteristics, and both may employ similar tactics of ship seizures and hijackings. Also, poverty, political instability and poor law enforcement allow piracy and terrorism to flourish simultaneously. However, there are clear distinctions in the final purpose of these activities. The terrorist seek attention for their cause and inflict as much harm and damage as possible to achieve their political objectives whereas the pirates simply seek economic gains.

Regional Response

During the last few months, the Straits of Malacca has been a center of tension between the South East Asian states and

the United States. In April 2004, Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander-in-Chief, US Pacific Command, (CINCPAC), announced that the US military was planning to deploy Marines and Special Forces troops on high-speed boats in the Malacca Straits to combat terrorism, proliferation, piracy, gun running, narcotics smuggling and human trafficking in the area. The deployment was being conceptualized under the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). In response, Malaysia had reacted to this initiative and had noted that the US should get permission from regional countries as it impinged on their national sovereignty. Likewise, Indonesia too was averse to the US initiative and wanted that the US must consult regional countries before any effort to fight terrorism in South East Asia. Washington is now pushing ahead the Regional Maritime Security Initiative through 'informal contacts with friends and allies in the region'.

On July 19, 2004, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore launched (Malsindo Corpat) a trilateral Coordinated Patrol in the Straits of Malacca. According to Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh, Chief of Staff, Indonesian Navy, this coordinated patrol is an improvement over the previous 'corpats'.³⁰ After conducting a meeting attended by the three countries, a decision was made on the form of the coordinated patrol, which was different from a joint patrol.³¹ Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh has noted, "Our cooperation in coordinating the patrol activity will take place all year, every day, 24 hours a day."³² It is believed that at least three to four ships will patrol the 600-mile Strait at any one time. Besides, intelligence will be shared. But there are inherent fears of maintaining this ambitious coordinated maritime patrol by

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Adam Young and Mark J. Valencia, "Conflation of Piracy and Terrorism in Southeast Asia: Rectitude and Utility", *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 25 (2), pp. 269 — 283.

³⁰ Admiral Bernard Kent Sondakh, "National Sovereignty and Security in the Strait of Malacca", paper presented at Conference on The Strait of Malacca: Building a Comprehensive Security Environment, October 11-13, 2004, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

³¹ According to Admiral Bernard Sondakh, 'a joint patrol means, there is only one command and one logistic and has been part of a defence pact. Ibid.

³² Ibid.

the three littoral countries. These countries need more material and human resources including a more structured intelligence sharing. Besides, coordinated patrols don't allow for hot pursuits.

The three littoral states have contradictory attitudes towards coordinated patrols. For instance, Singapore, the only non-Muslim state among the three, wants a greater US presence in the Strait, as it believes that being a strong ally of the United States; it is the primary terrorist target in the region. Unlike Singapore, Malaysia is confident of managing the security of the straits. It is building its own coast guard, and plans to bring the marines, navy, fisheries and other maritime agencies under one umbrella.

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi has stated, "I wouldn't say that Jemaah Islamiah (JI) — the suspected Southeast Asian wing of the al-Qaeda network is destroyed, but if there are any more, we [Malaysia] are able to contain them."³³ Recently, Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Najib Razak visited Indonesia and met Indonesian Armed Forces Chief, General Endriartono. According to a joint statement, "piracy in the Malacca Strait is overstated by International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports [...] criminal acts in the strait need to be re-categorized, as the current method lumps acts of theft of personal materials from crew with true acts of piracy."³⁴ It was also observed that the coordinated patrols by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore navies had reduced the incidents of piracy in the fourth quarter of 2004.

Towards Maritime Multilateralism

Post September 11 international initiatives have shown that to combat terrorism requires a full spectrum of networked statecraft that includes diplomatic,

economic, military, law enforcement, intelligence and public opinion working in tandem. The events have also shown that commonality of opinion, interests, values and a coordinated approach are a must to combat forces inimical to peace and security. A country as powerful as the United States could not have gone alone to challenge terrorism. It needed international cooperation to track terrorists, quickly deploy military forces, undertake surveillance, obtain tactical intelligence, base facilities or even to over fly national air spaces.

A secure maritime environment can never be achieved by the efforts of a single country. It requires mutual understanding and cooperation of all the countries in the region, including neighbours. For that, it is necessary to start by sharing the common values on the benefits of regional maritime cooperation to be enjoyed by the whole maritime community. Multilateral cooperation in the maritime security domain in Asia Pacific region is inherently feasible. This is so because regional maritime forces have valuable experience of coordination and cooperation in maritime missions. Despite differences in political, economic, social, cultural, language, national interests, military structures and threat perceptions, maritime forces have cooperated on issues of common security concerns such as terrorism, piracy, gun running, etc. Therefore devising a common framework for the whole region is not a formidable exercise. It is also widely understood that no country can, all by itself, defend its long and often vulnerable sea lines of communications. It has been argued that unlike the economic globalization (driven by revolution in information technology), oceanic highways are acting as catalysts for globalization of maritime security.³⁵

Conclusion

The war against Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda in Afghanistan may be nearing its end but the war on terrorism is far from

33 Ioannis Gatsiounis, "Malacca Strait: Target for Terror," *Asia Times*, op.cit.

34 Mohd Nasir Yusoff, "Piracy in Melaka Straits not as Serious as Made Out to Be", *Bernama*, December 09, 2004. Available at http://bernama.com/bernama/v3/news_lite.php?id=107955.

35 Atul Bhardwaj, "Indian Ocean: The New Template for Indo-US Ties", *Financial Express*, New Delhi, December 01, 2001.

over. Military planners are aware that it would not be possible to handle the war on terror all by them and would therefore have to rely on the strength and expertise of a diverse international coalition. The naval coalition forces have so far operated remarkably well in the combat environment.³⁶ There is a need to develop a new template for 'maritime multilateralism' in South East Asia so that regional navies, however small, can also be taken on board such an arrangement to challenge terrorism and maritime disorder. Given the limitations of any nation to handle or unilaterally respond to multiple threats, a coalition provides the strength and expertise. It helps them to deploy powerful forces to bear at the best place, at the right moment and resulting in a rapid and an overwhelming victory. South East Asian countries cannot ignore the growing economic linkages and the rising significance of the Asia Pacific region.

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36 For instance the French, Italian and Dutch military liaison officers are embarked on board the USS Roosevelt, to coordinate between their commands and the U.S. operational commanders. Even smaller Navies such as those of South Korea and Bahrain have contributed naval ships to the naval coalition.

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