

## Maritime Security in South and East Asia: Developments and Challenges

**T**he speakers at Session Three of the Dialogue were **Colonel Ramli Hj Nik (Rtd)**, Research Fellow, Centre for Maritime Security and Environment, Maritime Institute of Malaysia (MIMA) and **Dr Vijay Sakhuja**, Director (Research), Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). The session was moderated by **Amb Sudhir T Devare**, Director-General, Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), India. **Susan Teoh**, Director of ISIS Information Services, reports.



(From left) Ramli Hj Nik, Sudhir T Devare and Vijay Sakhuja

**Colonel Ramli Hj Nik** focused his presentation on the common security challenges faced by both India and Malaysia, and the different types of existing maritime security cooperation as well as the modalities for promoting capacity-building.

Maritime security is an important issue as 90 per cent of global trade today uses the maritime domain. Both India and Malaysia have played important security roles at the international level. In 2009, India deployed 8,757 personnel in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations while Malaysia sent 1,067. In short, about 10 per cent of the peacekeepers are from India and Malaysia.

A second common security challenge is that of piracy and armed robbery in the seas. With the adoption of the United Nations Security Resolution 1816 (2008), authorised members can assist in combating piracy off the coast of Somalia. India and Malaysia contributed by sending their Naval Task Forces to the Gulf of Aden.

The International Maritime Bureau defines piracy as 'the act of boarding and attempt to board any vessel with the intent to commit theft or any other crime, and with an intent or capacity to use force in furtherance of that act.' Under this definition, 100-170 piracy attempts were recorded in the Malacca Straits.

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The third security challenge is the threat of terrorism. There are three fundamental elements of terrorism:

- Creating fear to draw support towards the terrorists' political ideology;
- Strengthening revolutionary warfare against the ruling regime; and
- Publicising the terrorists' cause to the international community so as to solicit support.

In its efforts to counter terrorism, Malaysia set up the Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-terrorism (SEARCCT) in Kuala Lumpur, in November 2003.

It has also provided effective counter-terrorism training to law enforcement officers in the region, and organised seminars and training courses on the interdicting of terrorist organisations.

Ramli highlighted some examples of maritime security cooperation, such as the participation of India and Malaysia in multilateral exercises in the Indian Ocean since 2007.

Ensuring international peace and security is of paramount importance in sustaining economic development. Cooperation is needed to deal with root causes in order to combat land or maritime terrorism. Maritime security is not only important to the economic growth of India and Malaysia but also to that of other Asean member countries and other regional powers like Australia, China and the US.

Ramli suggested some areas to promote capacity-building within the region. Since 1992,

India has had a Look East Policy to enhance bilateral security agreements. It has made a number of agreements within the region. It signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2003.

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India has had vast experience in responding to disasters, thus aiding in the development of cooperative maritime humanitarian responses. It is important for both countries to expand cooperation further so that they can assist quickly in neighbouring countries, such as Sumatra, Philippines and Indonesia, where disasters have occurred.

Finally, India and Malaysia are equally committed towards international peace and security as stipulated in the United Nations Charter. Both are involved in Maritime Peacekeeping Operations in areas of conflict, including the Gulf of Aden.

India has vast naval assets and experience, and therefore it would be good to have a dynamic strategic partnership between India and Malaysia when promoting maritime capacity-building.

The second speaker, **Dr Vijay Sakhujia**, focused his comments on maritime security in South Asia but also covered the broad trends of naval build-up in Southeast Asia. He noted that

there seemed to be a naval arms race in the Asia Pacific region. Naval acquisitions are projected to increase from US\$60 billion during 2010-2015, to US\$108 billion from 2016-2020 and to US\$ 173 billion by 2020-2030.

Asian navies acquired 83 submarines at a cost of US\$55 billion in 2007, and in 2009, about 80 to 100 submarines were projected to be added. Sakhuja questioned the rationale for the naval build-up in the region, especially of submarines. Each nation was acquiring submarines independently and there was no mechanism or institution to govern the region in this aspect.

He listed a few reasons for Asian naval acquisitions. These were:

- To serve as a deterrent to littoral dominance by external powers;
- In Asia, colonial dominance came by sea to the littorals or coastal areas and into the heartland;
- Ripple effects as nations are comparing themselves with others;
- Naval transformation sweeping the region;
- Impact of globalisation and economic growth;
- The exercising of jurisdiction in respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ);
- Protection of maritime and energy supply chains;
- Threats of terrorism and piracy;
- Strategic necessity of protecting economic hubs in the littorals. Much of the development in Asia is along the littorals.

Sakhuja explained the term 'littorals' to mean the space of a few miles on either side of the coastline. This is where the bulk of the world's population and economic hubs are located. The littorals are also the breeding grounds for activities such as armed robbery, smuggling, hijacking and sea piracy emerging variously as liberation armies, insurgents, terrorists and cartels.

Groups with maritime attack capability that have emerged in South Asia include the Al Qaeda, LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), LeT (Lashkar-e-Taiba) and HuJI (Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami). South Asia is also sandwiched between the Golden Crescent<sup>1</sup> and the Golden Triangle<sup>2</sup> explaining perhaps the large number of terrorist activities in the region.

India's Look East Policy has a fair amount of maritime component. India is a partner of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), the Council for Security and Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific (CSCAP), and is a member of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF).

India's trade with Asean has increased. In August 2009, the Asean-India Trade in Goods (TIG) Agreement was signed in Bangkok, paving the way for a market of 1.8 billion people, with a combined GDP of US\$ 2.75 trillion. The volume of trade and cargo using the sea lanes will increase.

<sup>1</sup> The name given to one of Asia's two principal areas of illicit opium production, located at the crossroads of Central, South, and Western Asia, a space that overlaps three nations, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> An area that overlaps the mountains of four countries of Southeast Asia, namely Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand and one of Asia's two main illicit opium-producing areas

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Today, 55 per cent of Indian trade transits through the Strait of Malacca. There is also the shipping of energy from Russia's Far East.

The Strait of Malacca has become a dense area with the increase in shipping through it and the South China Sea is a cause of security concern for India, which considers itself an important stakeholder in the security environment of the South China Sea.

The centre of piracy has moved from the Strait of Malacca to Somalia's Gulf of Aden. Sakhuja commended Malaysia for being the first Asian country to send its naval vessels in response to piracy in the Gulf of Aden. While India's response has been slower because of domestic problems, it however has responded to formal requests for EEZ surveillance from the Mauritius and Seychelles governments.

And while India responds to requests for maritime patrol aid in Southeast Asia only when requested, it has contributed US\$1.3 million to the Strait of Malacca fund. In terms of technological support, India is conducting hydrographic surveys in the Strait of Malacca. Other aspects of India-Asean maritime cooperation include training, joint exercises and high-level visits between some Asean countries.

Some possible avenues of maritime cooperation between India and Malaysia pointed out by Sakhuja include joint naval exercises, joint counter-piracy operations off Somalia, and naval exercises in the South China Sea. There is also the possibility of exploring joint defence-technological enterprises such as maritime platforms, the building of naval hardware and aviation platforms.

In the area of climate change, cooperation in the development and sharing of naval technology and hardware which are climate change adaptable is important for both countries.

Finally, as Malaysia has the MSSI (Malacca Straits Security Initiative), Sakhuja suggested the possibility of integrating this initiative with the present IMSL (India Maldives Sri Lanka) initiative which will create a seamless maritime domain from the Arabian Sea through the Straits of Malacca.

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