Enhancing Interoperability & Cooperation in a Complex Maritime Security Environment: The Royal Malaysian Navy Experience

INTRODUCTION

1. Over the last three decades the sheer scale and scope of global interconnectedness has become increasingly evident in every sphere from economic to the cultural. As globalisation has gained momentum so has the recognition of transnational problems requiring global regulations, from climate change to the proliferation of weapon of mass destruction. Dealing with these transnational issues has led to an exponential growth of transnational and global forms of rule-making and regulation as well as informal networks of cooperation between parallel government agencies in different countries. With the recognition of global problems and global interconnectedness has come a growing awareness of multiple ways in which the security and prosperity of communities in different regions of the world is bound together. Within the Southeast Asia Region, the globalisation phenomenon has brought about both positive and negative changes that evoke a complex maritime security landscape.

2. This region is situated strategically at the crossroads of European and Asian continents of opportunities that witnesses the free flow of people be it legally or illegally, seeking better fortunes or to deliver misfortunes and/or to increase market shares or reap riches from illicit activities. It is in this complex maritime security environment that the Royal Malaysian Navy as the guardian of maritime defence and security is expected to carryout its tasks without flaw or failure. In the traditional sense making, the prime role of any defence organisation is dominated by the idea of national security which is defined in militarised terms; military capabilities that nation states should develop to deal with the threats from others. However, with the ever evolving and manifestation of non-traditional threats in contemporary times evoked by globalisation, should nation states re-define their notion of security from 'national security' to 'international security'?

3. Barry Buzan, in his study, *People, States and Fear*, argues that states should shed the paradigm of 'excessively self-referenced security policies' and seek

ways and means for collective security well-being by thinking in more cooperative international and global terms. Being a small navy within a large region of challenges, the Royal Malaysian Navy continuously adopts and adapts various strategies to overcome these challenges by enhancing interoperability and cooperation bilaterally and regionally. In striving to be trend setter as well as catalyst to regional security, peace and stability, the paper will strive to propose one of many mechanisms that could be considered as a precursor to enhance the effectiveness of interoperability and cooperation within and without the region. Finally, in conclusion the paper will suggest ways and means to create a climate of opportunity to forge ahead with interoperability and cooperation within a complex maritime security environment.

MARITIME SECURITY LANDSCAPE AND ITS CHALLENGES

4. The global and regional security landscape has changed dramatically and uncertainty is now and will continue be part and parcel of this landscape. Consequently, it is a know fact that the maritime security challenges faced by our countries are more complex and are placing a greater demand on our limited resources. As a case in point, the maritime security environment in the Malacca Straits, Singapore Strait and South China Sea to the Sulawesi Sea was traditionally very much a local issue and was the concern of mainly the individual littoral states and to a small percentage of the straits and SLOC users. However, as the prevailing scenario evolved to a wider spectrum of threats, these issues are now not only considered trans-boundary or transnational but transcontinental in nature that further multiplies the complexity of the maritime security environment.

5. Issues which were once considered local have now transformed into issues of **GLOCAL** i.e. Global and Local concerns especially after September 11, 2001. Terrorism, piracy, sea robbery, human trafficking, contraband smuggling, arms smuggling and the add-ons to this list is ever-growing as we transcend evermore into a globalised and economically challenged environment. Although many predicted after 9/11, restrictions and limitations would have retarded movement but the tsunami of change is unstoppable and many countries are experiencing ever increasing threats of becoming hubs, transit points and final destinations or targets.

6. Within the region, the increase in number of stakeholders that have direct or indirect interest in the maritime security especially within the Royal Malaysian Navy's Area of Responsibility further compounds the complexity of managing the problems. Each and every state and non-state actor has differing degrees of interests and priorities and expectations which when not addressed effectively greatly impacts and questions Royal Malaysian Navy's capability and capacity to safeguard security within the AOR. By virtue of its geographical location in the centre of Southeast Asia, it is inevitable that any development in the region would influence Malaysia's maritime security. Malaysia shares common land or sea borders with most of the Southeast Asian countries with the exception of Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. Certain areas of national strategic interest also fall within the territory of its neighbours.

7. In other words, a threat to these countries should also be considered as a threat to Malaysia. Thus, Malaysia's national security depends fundamentally on the security of the region as a whole. The Royal Malaysian Navy perceives in the medium to long term; maritime security-based challenges will influence much of its future efforts over and above the internal challenges it is experiencing currently. As far as the security-based challenges are concerned, the Safety and Security of Sea Lines of Communication in particular the Straits of Malacca and Singapore Strait that bridges the South China Sea and Indian Ocean, in the years to come, is anticipated to witness an increase in traffic density to such an extent that it would not only increase risk to safe navigation but also create an environment that will challenge the ability of littoral states to guarantee the maritime community twenty-four seven security in a seamless and continuous manner without internal or external cooperation.

8. In reflection, due to the rising number of sea robbery cases, Malacca Straits was once listed as a *war risk zone* by insurance companies for a brief period in 2006 and we do not intend for history to repeat again or the business model of the Pirate Action Groups of Somalia to be benchmarked and adopted by would be enterprising perpetrators in this region. Likewise, non-traditional security concerns of foreign origin such as transnational crimes are considered as mid and long term challenges. The 2000 trans-border incident resulting in 21 hostages been taken from the Eastern Seaboard of Sabah significantly affected maritime tourism industry and changed the

maritime security landscape. The hijacking of the Motor Tanker NAUTICA JOHOR BAHRU on 28 Oct 2011off the East Coast of the Peninsula was a classic case of traditional sea robbery (hit and run petty crime modus operandi) evolving into a more complex trans-boundary threat where the vessel was hijacked whilst on transit from the Singapore Strait to Sarawak.

9. The vessel eventually was located by the integrated efforts of the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and the Royal Malaysian Navy. National interagency interoperability and cooperation proved to be the hijackers undoing and the rescue would not have been a success without the willingness of the Indonesian authorities to approve immediately the Malaysian request to continue the pursuit of the hijacked vessel into Indonesian waters. The approval was obtained expeditiously by a phone call to Badan Koordinasi dan Keamanan Laut (BAKORKAMLA) and to the Tentara Nasional Indonesia Angkatan Laut Western Fleet Commander who committed KRI SUTANTO to assist in the rescue of the Malaysian vessel. The success of this operation was primarily the outcome of the mutual trust and confidence evoked by years of cooperation between both neighbouring littoral states.

10. It is evident that countries within the Southeast Asia regional especially the ASEAN partners are striving for 'international security' as espoused by Barry Buzan other than focussing efforts on 'national security'. The occurrences of earthquakes, landslides and tsunami in this region places greater demand on navies to be ever ready to react to calls for providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to neighbours in need. It must be emphasised that maritime security can erode quickly when disasters are not managed expeditiously. Such catastrophic calamities present criminal opportunists a myriad of avenues to commence unlawful acts which not only impinge on the security of the ill-fated state but will have great ramifications to its neighbours.

11. Evacuations of non-combatants or citizens are also seen as an evolving challenge and it is expected the Royal Malaysian Navy possess the capability and capacity to respond not only within the region but also beyond its traditional operating envelopes. **ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) of 26 July 2005** is a regional framework to

promote regional cooperation towards a disaster-resilient ASEAN Community. It sets in place regional policies, operational, and logistical mechanisms to enable ASEAN Member States to seek and extend assistance in times of disaster and carry out collaborative undertakings on disaster mitigation, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation. This arrangement requires interoperability and cooperation to be established and enhanced seamlessly on a continuous manner.

STRATEGIES WITHIN A COMPLEX MARITIME ENVIRONMENT

12. The **first strategy** that the Royal Malaysian Navy employs is strengthening and integrating inter-agency interoperability and cooperation within the country towards solidifying capabilities and capacities in managing maritime security. The Royal Malaysian Navy has established its networking with various national agencies under the umbrella of the National Security Council (NSC). The creation of smart-partnership programmes in line with Malaysia's Total Defence Concept has also alleviated some of the internal challenges of the ROYAL MALAYSIAN NAVY. An example of a *Blue Ocean Strategy* was the establishment of the *Naval Auxiliary Vessels* deployed in the Gulf of Aden in order to protect Malaysia's interest as well as the maritime community at large. The strategy allowed the Malaysian Armed Forces to adopt a modality that differed from the traditional military option which did not require the Ministry of Defence to seek for additional funding from the Government (competing for limited operating funds). The strategy did not require a sophisticated warship with a crew of hundreds to provide the protection service at a high cost other than only 2 merchant ships crewed by 60 personnel each was needed to achieve the desired endstate.

13. The strategy placed the Malaysian Government in a favourable position with the maritime community and promoted the Malaysian International Shipping Corporation as a service provider who could deliver consignments timely and safely. The Malaysian Armed Forces proved that it had the capability of safeguarding national interest beyond its normal operating envelope. The Royal Malaysian Navy did not have to use its limited operating funds to sustain a prolonged operation that has been conducted for 3 years and probably longer as the piracy threat still exists.

These internal strategies have enabled the Royal Malaysian Navy to continue delivering on its domestic and regional commitment. Forging strategic partnerships with other in-country maritime communities should be explored rather than solely focussing efforts on the traditional inter-agency cooperation with existing maritime enforcement agencies.

14. The **second strategy** embarked by the Royal Malaysian Navy is enhancing ***Bilateral and Multilateral Interoperability and Cooperation***. The Royal Malaysian Navy has instituted enduring standing bilateral and multi-lateral engagements with several ASEAN countries and other friendly nations. The Royal Malaysian Navy believes that wide and extensive bilateral or multi-lateral relations with neighbours and other friendly countries could provide an effective maritime security web and network. A strong regional security cooperative network could enhance regional resilience and would also assist the process of building confidence, trust and promoting transparency within the region. The peace and stability generated through thriving diplomacy would not only enable all nation states to achieve their national goals but also augur well for international security. Frameworks such as Malaysia and Indonesia General Border Committee 1972, Malaysia and Thailand General Border Agreement 1965, Malaysia and Philippines Defence Agreement 1994, Malaysia and Brunei Defence Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation 1992 and the Five Power Defence Arrangement in which Malaysia is a co-member with Singapore, United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand have provided avenues for building and strengthening capabilities and capacities to manage complex maritime environment that influences the well-being of all countries whether within or without the region.

15. Initiatives such Navy to Navy Staff Talks, Naval Working Group Interactions, Personnel Exchange and Training, Coordinated Patrols, Bilateral and Multi-lateral Exercises and even sports when synergised produces the desired effects that is critical for building trust and confidence. The outcome of which has seen the consensus of regional partners to develop documents such as Memorandum of Understanding on Common Guidelines Concerning Treatment of Fishermen between Malaysia and Indonesia and Incidents at Sea. These are other

brand of mutual cooperation which was developed from long existing engagements and confidence in each others desire to promote peace, stability and to preserve collective maritime security. In addition to existing frameworks, the Royal Malaysian Navy is continuously exploring and seeking new frontiers in bilateral and multilateral activities, such as, the Five Power Defence Arrangement, Western Pacific Naval Symposium, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and other regional or extra-regional mechanisms to enhance interoperability and cooperation with all friendly nations within the region and beyond the Southeast Asia region to manage the ever-challenging maritime environment.

16. The Royal Malaysian Navy is fully aware that managing trans-boundary, trans-national and trans-continental maritime challenges in an ever globalised world order on its own would be wishful thinking and detrimental to national as well as international security. It is this awareness that guides the Navy's leadership to continually partake in maritime security engagements with countries within and beyond the region, and towards this end the Royal Malaysian Navy will continue to develop constructive maritime security relations. In responding to the regional strategic environment, the Royal Malaysian Navy emphasizes that future security challenges in a complex maritime environment will be interdependent on the engagement with other regional states, and in the collective ability to drive these engagements towards safeguarding the regional interests. The security of these interests through the enhancement of interoperability and cooperation is vital to every nation's political, social, cultural and economic well being. It is readily apparent that internal strategies adopted may only address a small percentage of the complex maritime environment challenges where as support through bi-lateral and multi-lateral mechanism could further bridge the chasm of inadequacies that each Navy experiences in disrupting and deterring threats from the sea.

OUTCOME OF A REGIONAL COOPERATION MECHANISM

17. A significant cooperative arrangement is the **Malacca Straits Patrol** that manages maritime security both in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. This platform from its humble inception in 20 July 2004, as a tripartite naval cooperation between Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (MALSINDO) an all year-round operation was

launched to ensure greater safety for commercial ships that transit through the narrow Malacca and Sinagopre straits each year. In 2006, the tripartite arrangement evolved into a quartet with Thailand becoming the fourth partner. The Malacca Straits Sea Patrol is meant to enhance the security in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore by supplementing existing bilateral arrangements between Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Under this arrangement, the participating states conduct co-coordinated patrols while facilitating the sharing of information between ships and the Monitoring and Action Agency (MAA). At the same time, the Eye in the Sky is meant to reinforce the sea patrols with air surveillance utilising Combined Maritime Patrol Teams. The initiative provides combined and co-coordinated aerial surveillance over the straits using maritime patrol aircraft of Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.

18. The Malacca Straits Patrol is an open arrangement with the consent of the of the four littoral states and any other states could be invited to participate on a voluntary basis with the consent and approval of the partner states. There are those who may contend that this naval cooperation does not support a true joint effort as the patrols are conducted in a coordinated manner rather than in a combined architecture. In reality, whether the naval cooperation is joint or disjointed does not connote that the end is not achievable by other ways and means. From the lenses of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore littoral states, the coordinated approach was a much more conducive multi-naval cooperation to prevailing sentiments of sovereignty than not having one at all. The conduct of the operation in utilising the coordinated approach in which littoral state's assets remains under their respective national command and be permitted to conduct *hot pursuit* into the sovereign waters of its partner states with prior approval, did not bear prejudice to the position of all states in relation to any disputed or un-delimited areas.

19. The Malacca Straits Patrol maritime security initiative created through the multi-naval cooperation framework since 2004 is attested to have recorded success. In the article, "Maritime Security in the Southeast Asia: Two Cheers for Regional Cooperation" by Ian Storey (Southeast Asian Affairs 2009), he has quantified that figures published by the International Maritime Bureau demonstrates a significant

downward trend in the number of reported incidents of piracy and sea robbery in Southeast Asia between 2004 and 2008. This downward trend in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore has since spiralled further closer to the zero incident level based on the 2010 Annual International Maritime Bureau Piracy Report. The overall downward trend is also reflected in the statistics compiled by the Singapore based Information Sharing Centre which was established in 2006 under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). The Royal Malaysian Navy endeavours to continue establishing similar cooperative bilateral and multi-lateral arrangements in order to address the dynamic nature of today's and the future maritime security environment.

REALISATION OF ABSOLUTE GAINS FROM COOPERATION

20. It must be acknowledged perennial problem of insecurity has and will challenge efforts in sustaining continuous productive cooperation. It is a reality that cooperation as well as competition is a feature of international politics in the contemporary era, opportunities nevertheless, exists for cooperation to develop in various forms and for a multitude of reasons within the Western Pacific Region. The Malacca Straits Patrol is an exemplary outcome of a multi-naval between nation states that reside in a region where sovereignty baggage constantly evokes political irritations but the mechanism permitted maritime security dialogue and cooperation, which facilitated the actualisation of the ways and means of implementing the cooperation. The catalyst to the success of this multi-naval cooperation is that all four littoral states were looking at the 'absolute gains' rather than be concerned with the 'relative gains' and were more focussed on international security than be obsessed with national security especially when it related to maritime non-traditional threats. The Malacca Straits Patrol arrangement in a significant manner has challenged neo-realist proponents argument that we live in a world of mistrust and constant security competition, cooperation between states occurs but it is difficult to achieve and even more difficult to sustain. As such, it is evident common problems that threaten the self preservation of the nation state will influence states to acknowledge the way ahead is best addressed on a cooperative basis without compromising their national independence of action.

21. It is evident that cooperation provides political, strategic, operational and tactical avenues for promoting confidence and security building measures, which previously was only visible at the political and strategic levels. The younger generation of our Navy People are benefitting most from the frequent interactions during dialogues and mutual activities. The networks and relations that develop amongst them today will provide the bridges of friendship that could be used to resolve irritations and frictions in future. Notwithstanding, to its rationale for existence, the Royal Malaysian Navy's numerous cooperative engagements with its ASEAN brothers-in-arm and others has also provided for the sharing of resources in other areas of concern which currently challenge the maritime security of states outside the its domain of interest. Information sharing from nodes established through the cooperative mechanism have been occasionally optimised to great success in monitoring trans-boundary and trans-national illicit activities.

22. The other benefit of such an arrangement allows for creativity and innovative ideas to be bounced and built amongst the operational and tactical staffs of the multi-naval cooperation before it is crystallised into proposals to be presented collectively to the political and strategic members. These ideas do not have to be curtailed to the terms of reference of the cooperation and could explore uncharted waters that will expand the envelope of naval cooperation. This bottom-up approach will mitigate the challenge in managing perceptions and expectations, and establish a high level of trust between stakeholders in addressing the appropriate strategies and action plans. Subsequently, it will enhance transparency that builds on existing framework and strengthens partnerships that can facilitate collective preservation. It is also provides crucial access to stakeholders, especially the nation states, naval partners, and others to play their roles towards achieving the shared outcome of collective preservation. As such the ultimate supplementary benefit of multi-naval cooperation is that it provides a platform to continuously be engaged.

CONCLUSION

23. On**e** suggested mechanism that could crystallise a seamless enhancement to interoperability and cooperation is Information Sharing but achieving it through existing structures and national chain of commands typifies the term Cylinders of Excellence. One may have observed there are systems that operate in isolation as independent Islands of Information and do not provide a common operating picture for situational awareness. If we are able to create Networks of Excellence in sharing actionable intelligence within the context of Total Maritime Domain Awareness this will enhance effective interoperability and cooperation in managing maritime security. To manage the maritime security threats in the 21st century and beyond, Total Domain Awareness within the regions is a necessity. Being ready to respond at a moment's notice, anywhere and anytime entails a sound real-time collaborative security information interoperability and cooperative environment. By working together, building partnerships whose capability is much greater than the sum of its parts will synergise regional confidence building measures. But creating Networks of Excellence domestically and regionally is certainly not without challenges. One challenge that is common to all at this juncture is constructing regional interoperability based on a high level of trust and confidence. We all need to take on this challenge squarely and turn it into an opportunity that will benefit the countries represented here today. .

24. The aim of enhancing interoperability and cooperation is to strengthen collaboration towards managing maritime security and building high level of trust. However, there is no one panacea to how a problem be solved and a universal standard by which a bilateral or multi-lateral cooperation should behave. Effectively, everything will be focused on the need to protect the national interest of each nation state. As such, stakeholders have to permit national interests, regional sentiment and common concerns to forge collective adoption and adaption of ways and means to achieve the ends that is self and collective preservation. It is also a certainty that the Royal Malaysian Navy is, and will continue to be committed in achieving the desired outcome, which is to provide sense of security to all maritime users through enhancement of existing arrangements as well as be involved in creating new ones with the aim of committing itself completely to fostering regional maritime security

interoperability and cooperation. Finally, what is important is for all of stakeholders to be part of the solution set and not be part of the problem itself, there will be many more challenges ahead but it is imperative to cooperate and work together to transform these challenges to opportunities and not perceive them as threats.