

**8<sup>th</sup> RSIS-NMF DIALOGUE**

**‘INDIA-ASEAN MARITIME  
COOPERATION:  
OUTLOOK FOR 2017**

**S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies**  
**and**  
**National Maritime Foundation**

**22 March 2017**

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

### WELCOME & OPENING ADDRESS:

Dr Tan See Seng

*Professor of International Relations, and Deputy Director and Head of Research of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies*

Admiral (Retd.) RK Dhowan, PVSM, AVSM, YSM

*Chairman, National Maritime Foundation, India (NMF)*

### PANEL 1: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON THE EVOLVING INDO-PACIFIC MARITIME ENVIRONMENT

#### Moderator

Ms Jane Chan

*Research Fellow; and*

*Coordinator of Maritime Security Programme, RSIS*

#### Panellists

##### **Indian Perspectives**

Dr Vijay Sakhuja

*Director, National Maritime Foundation, India*

##### **Southeast Asian Perspectives**

Dr Collin Koh

*Research Fellow, Maritime Security Programme, RSIS*

### PANEL 2: INDIA AS A NET PROVIDER OF REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY

#### Moderator

Dr Collin Koh

*Research Fellow, Maritime Security Programme, RSIS*

#### Panellists

##### **India's role in promoting good order at sea in the Indo-Pacific**

Captain (Dr) Gurpreet S Khurana

*Executive Director, National Maritime Foundation, India*

##### **ASEAN's views on extra-regional roles**

Dr Termsak Chalermphanupap

*Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies - Yusof Ishak Institute*

### **PANEL 3: THE ROLES OF OTHER EXTRA-REGIONAL ACTORS**

#### **Moderator**

Dr Vijay Sakhuja

*Director, National Maritime Foundation, India*

#### **Panellists**

##### **Japan and the United States**

Commander Gopal Prakash

*Research Fellow, National Maritime Foundation, India*

##### **China and Russia**

Dr HooTiang Boon

*Assistant Professor, China Programme and Coordinator of MSc (Asian Studies) Programme, RSIS*

### **PANEL 4: MANAGING MISPERCEPTIONS AND PROMOTING COOPERATION**

#### **Moderator**

Dr Collin Koh

*Research Fellow, Maritime Security Programme, RSIS*

#### **Panellists**

##### **Maritime Cooperation on Non-Traditional Security Threats and Promoting Blue Economy**

Dr Kapil Narula

*Research Fellow, National Maritime Foundation, India*

##### **Ways to promote inclusive, practical maritime security cooperation**

Dr ShafiahMuhibat

*Senior Fellow, Maritime Security Programme, RSIS*

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

## INTRODUCTION

The National Maritime Foundation (NMF) conducted its 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the RSIS and NMF workshop titled “**India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation: Outlook for 2017**” on 22 March 2017 at Singapore. Nearly 50 delegates participated in the event. Dr Tan See Seng, Deputy Director and Head of Research of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies delivered the Welcome Address. The opening address was delivered by Admiral RK Dhowan (Retd.), Chairman, National Maritime Foundation.

There were four different academic sessions and issues were discussed under the following sub-themes:

- (a) Comparative Perspectives on the Evolving Indo-Pacific Maritime Environment
- (b) India as a Net Provider of Regional Maritime Security
- (c) The Roles of Other Extra-Regional Actors
- (d) Managing Misperceptions and Promoting Cooperation

## SALIENT TAKEAWAYS

1. The prevalence and growing importance of maritime trade and commerce continues to constitute a primary factor that influences both cooperation and competition between countries in the Indo-Pacific region. It remains beset by a holistic range of traditional and non-traditional maritime challenges.

2. India’s maritime vision recently articulated by the nation’s apex political leadership seeks resurgence of India’s comprehensive maritime power. Combined with India’s new ‘Act East’ policy, the vision leads to the emergence of tremendous potential for India-ASEAN maritime cooperation in all dimensions ranging from enhanced economic connectivity and infrastructure, to sustainable development of marine resources and preserving ‘good order’ at sea.

3. The ASEAN countries are seeking India’s leadership role to preserve maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, especially

considering the uncertainties of United States' policy for the region. While India is willing to play such a role, it would need to factor regional perceptions, and the support of the ASEAN countries. For instance, India's role should not be construed by the regional countries as hegemonic or an attempt to act like a 'policeman'. It would involve cooperative endeavours to shape a favourable maritime environment in the region. The Indian maritime forces would also need to carefully balance India's role as a regional 'Net Security Provider' with their competing 'brown-water' imperatives of coastal and offshore security.

4. Notwithstanding clear political directives to the Indian maritime forces to play a more proactive foreign policy and security role in the Western Pacific (Pacific Asia), there are limits to such role east of the Southeast Asian straits posed by India's national-strategic and geopolitical imperatives, which need to be understood and appreciated by the ASEAN countries.

5. Maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas for example, underpinned by Great Power rivalries that are characterised by naval buildups and growing inclination to project force further afield across the whole swath of the regional littorals, look set to persist and would continue to be mitigated by existing regional mechanisms.

6. At present, the Indo-Pacific region continues to be characterised by a diverse yet complex array of regional mechanisms that range from multilateral institutions spearheaded by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the traditional "hub and spoke" alliances led by the United States.

7. However, in recent times, there have been some shifts in the way Indo-Pacific countries conduct policies with others, including moves to realign their alliances and partnerships to carve a greater room to exercise strategic autonomy. In addition, large, multilateral frameworks have begun to be complemented by so-called "mini-lateral" mechanisms designed to deal with localised, maritime security issues of common concern.

8. In the current times, the continued involvement of the United States in the region is clouded in uncertainty due to the change in the US administration led by President Donald Trump. There are also mixed signal emanating from Washington as the US State Department budget

has been cut, but the defence budget is set to increase. The future of the 'pivot' or 'rebalance' is uncertain - though it is likely that it will emerge in a rebranded form - considering the importance of the Indo-Pacific region to the US.

9. Japan is grappling with the conflict between the need to have a more forward security outlook and its pacifist Constitution. The Abe administration is however determined to amend the constitutional provisions to better suit the security needs of today.

10. Nonetheless, it is necessary to not overlook the growing challenge posed by more immediate and arguably more pressing issues that are non-traditional in nature. Such challenges are often characterised by high likelihood of occurrences and high impact - especially the economic losses that may entail. There is hence a need to foster greater interstate cooperation to derive collective solutions to these problems.

11. At the same time, it is also necessary to recognise that extra-regional involvement in Indo-Pacific maritime security capacity-building can be easily politicised by others because of a prevalent deficit in strategic trust. This has become part and parcel of geopolitical life in the region. It is essential to look beyond such competitive dynamics and stay focused on the pertinent need for the regional governments to effectively cope with mainly non-traditional maritime challenges.

12. The navies form the vanguard of the emerging security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, and remain engaged through a number of multilateral structures (commonly referred to as 'alphabet soup') to address a variety of non-traditional security (NTS) issues.

13. ASEAN and India have ample room to explore in promoting maritime security cooperation, leveraging on longstanding interactions at both bilateral and institutional levels. The Blue Economy appears to be a promising avenue for the elevation of ASEAN-India maritime cooperation, since it could potentially help tackle common maritime security challenges yet at the same time, promote sustainable development. More attention, however, needs to be paid to this concept for it to gain traction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

14. There is a high potential of collaboration between Singapore's Information Fusion Centre (IFC) and India's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC). A data-link between the two would reinforce India's existing 'white-shipping' information-sharing agreement with Singapore. In due course, the functional scope of the IMAC could be expanded to encompass that of the IFC, with the former serving as an effective supplement to the IFC, with an emphasis on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

15. The maritime environment of the Indo-Pacific region is witness to a rapid proliferation of submarine forces, leading to a major challenge of submarine safety. Singapore is playing a constructive role in this direction through its IFC. Water-space management is not feasible considering the sensitivities of regional countries to share information on their submarine movements. Hence, the IFC provides real-time data to submarine-operating authorities on vessels in the vicinity of the distressed submarines. India could effectively collaborate to add to the data in its proximate maritime areas, particularly off India's eastern seaboard. Furthermore, in the future, India's IMAC could replicate IFC's model for submarine safety, with an emphasis on the IOR.

16. The security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region is currently underpinned by the post-World War II alliance system with the United States as its lynchpin. It was built around Communism and USSR as a common adversary. Today, it is not possible to designate such a common adversary, and hence, there is a need to evolve a different mechanism for the regional maritime security order. The need of the times is to move towards smaller issue-based partnerships than ideology-based alliances. Smaller groupings can probably deliver more meaningful outcomes, as it is easy to identify convergences.

17. Besides cooperation taking place at various bilateral, regional and sub-regional levels it is important to recognise the importance of national capacity-building. In this respect, the role of extra-regional actors becomes crucial since they offer a range of niche capabilities to offer to especially smaller and medium states in the Indo-Pacific, such as ASEAN member countries.

18. Governance, technology, management and entrepreneurship are enablers of the Blue Economy. The concept of 'Blue Economy' is a paradigm shift for sustainable development of the oceans. The 'Blue Economy' can be seen as a tool for countering NTS challenges, since it lowers environmental risks while promoting resource efficiency and optimization. India and ASEAN need to play a more proactive role and have to move from 'opportunities' to 'action' for countering NTS threats and promote Blue Economy. Low carbon shipping, regional fisheries agreements, ocean surveillance, information sharing, marine biotechnology and IT services are some of the areas for cooperation.

19. NMF could partner with regional centers of excellence such as PEMSEA (Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia) to promote the Blue Economy.