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# Malacca Strait Security Initiative: Potential for Indian Navy's Participation in the Evolving Regional Security Environment

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*The trilateral coordinated anti-piracy ship patrols in the Strait of Malacca and of Singapore (Straits) – codenamed Operation MALSINDO – by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, which commenced on July 20, 2004 to combat the menace of piracy have completed more than five successful years. The regional states have jointly developed a unique mechanism for ensuring safety and security in the Straits. The littorals, mindful of their sovereign sensitivities, have consistently declined offers of assistance from India and other user states in the security patrols. Meanwhile, the security situation in the Indian Ocean region is evolving fast, throwing up fresh challenges. The number of piracy attacks doubled in 2009 from a year ago, with the largest number of attacks taking place in the Indian Ocean. Not surprisingly, a majority of the G20 navies are currently deployed in the Gulf of Aden on anti-piracy patrols. In the prevailing scenario, is the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI) geared to address future security challenges, when the maritime resources of the littorals have been stretched too far? Is the issue of sovereign rights of the littorals being taken too far at the cost of jeopardising the security of world shipping? This article provides an overall assessment of the current safety and security initiatives in the Straits and examines the*

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*emerging trends and challenges in combating non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean region. The author concludes that the evolving security scenario offers many opportunities for regional states to cooperate with the Indian Navy in ensuring security of the Straits.*

## Background

### Operation MALSINDO

The trilateral coordinated anti-piracy ship patrols in the Strait of Malacca and Singapore (Straits) – codenamed Operation MALSINDO – by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, which commenced on July 20, 2004 have completed over five successful years. The coordinated patrols were initiated by the littoral states, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, under the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI). In 2004, when the patrols were launched, the number of attacks on ships transiting the Strait of Malacca had reached a record 38. In fact, the total number of attacks in the entire region that year was 157, almost half of the global total of 329! The Strait of Malacca was declared as the world's top piracy hotspot by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) and placed in the war risk zone by Lloyd's War Committee. This resulted in the levy of additional insurance surcharge for ships transiting the Straits.

### Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI)

More significantly, the patrols were prompted by the United States' (US) plans of involvement in the security of the Straits through the mechanism of the RMSI. While Singapore was supportive of the RMSI, both Malaysia and Indonesia were opposed to foreign naval presence. Malaysia and Indonesia were also critical of Indian Navy's role as part of Operation *Sagittarius* for escorting US Navy ships through the Straits in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks. The sensitivities of the regional states to their sovereign rights stems from their historical experience of being colonised by the European powers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by virtue of being located astride the world's strategic waterways.

When the patrols were launched, many critics had forecast that the regional states would be unable to sustain continuous surveillance in the Straits without support from the US or other extra regional navies. However, the success of MALSINDO patrols

has silenced such critics, with even the Lloyd's War Committee removing the Straits from its high-risk list in August 2006.

### **Safety and Security Aspects**

The regional states have jointly developed a unique mechanism for ensuring safety and security in the Straits. While the safety aspects are addressed in collaboration with the user states and other stakeholders, the security of the Straits is exclusively under the Malacca Strait Security Initiative (MSSI), which has now evolved into a comprehensive security regime. Piracy in the region appears to be under control 'at least for the time being' though the threat of maritime terrorism continues to remain high. The MSSI has proved to be a highly successful model of partnership between regional states in tackling a common threat. It has also helped the regional states in establishing their position with regard to their sovereign rights, albeit at the cost of stretching the naval resources of the littorals to their limits.

### **Evolving Regional Threat Scenario**

The security situation in the Indian Ocean region is, however, evolving fast and, thus, throwing up fresh challenges. Today, the majority of piracy attacks in the world take place in the Indian Ocean. The surge in the number of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Aden has revealed some dangerous trends that have serious ramifications. Not surprisingly, a majority of the G20 navies are deployed in the region, mostly around the Gulf of Aden on anti-piracy patrols. Also, the Gulf countries have deemed it appropriate to cooperate with the other foreign navies in the Gulf of Aden to better secure their strategic waterways.

In the prevailing scenario, is the MSSI geared to address the future security challenges, when the maritime resources of the littorals have been stretched too far? Is the issue of sovereign rights of the littorals being taken too far at the cost of jeopardising the security of world shipping? These questions can best be answered by the littorals by holistically examining their capabilities and limitations of coordinated patrols. Perhaps, the time has now come for the regional states to explore the option of co-opting the Indian Navy as a regional partner in order to augment their resources.

The author is aware of the stand taken by the littorals that the MSSI has no room for extra regional partners. Their stand has been strengthened by the fact that the MSSI

has successfully controlled the scourge of piracy in the straits. However, the author feels that the evolving security scenario in the Indian Ocean region offers various opportunities for the Indian Navy to cooperate with the regional states in the security of the straits under the MSSI.

This article provides an overall assessment of the current safety and security initiatives in the straits and examines the emerging trends and challenges in combating non-traditional threats in the Indian Ocean region. It also provides an overview of the various security initiatives in the Gulf of Aden. In the end, specific areas of cooperation between the Indian Navy and littoral navies have been recommended.

The term 'piracy', as defined by International Maritime Organisation (IMO) refers to attacks on ships in the high seas. However, the IMB has used this term to include all types of attacks and robberies onboard ships. In this article, the IMB definition of 'piracy' has been used.

## History of Regional Cooperation

### Straits of Malacca

### Archipelagic Doctrine of Indonesia

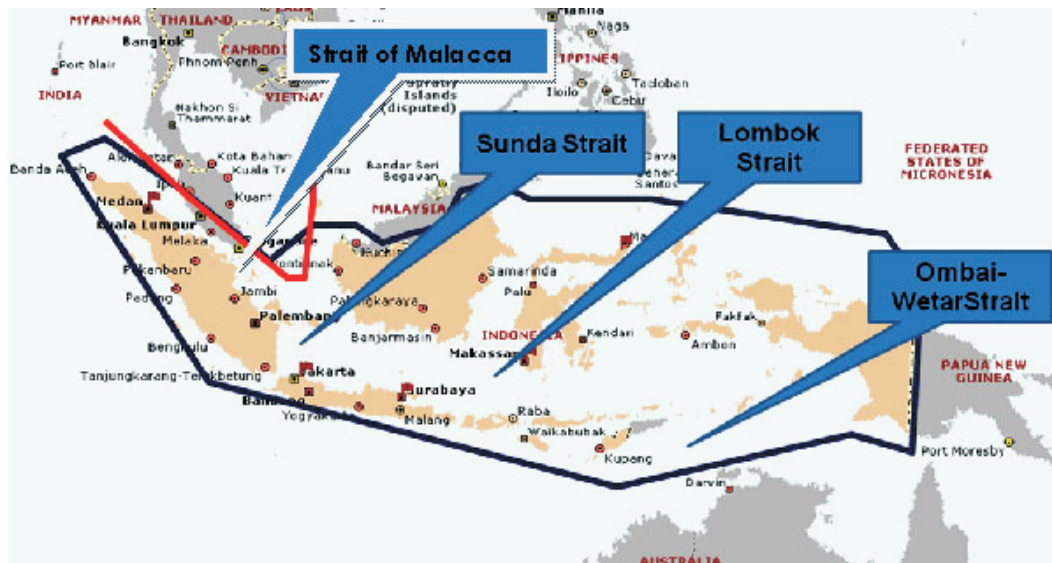


Fig. 1. Archipelagic of Indonesia.

The Archipelagic Doctrine of Indonesia is central to all issues involving the Strait of Malacca. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an archipelagic state is required to designate archipelagic sea lanes (ASLs) based on the route traditionally used by the shipping community. Indonesia has designated three North-South lanes – Sunda, Lombok and Ombai Wetar Straits (Fig. 1). The exclusion of the East-West lane, i.e. Strait of Malacca – which has historically been used by the shipping community – as an ASL is contrary to the spirit of UNCLOS. This implies that the Strait of Malacca is part of Indonesia's territorial waters. Hence, ships transiting through it exercise innocent passage, which may be disrupted. The Strait of Malacca is recognised as an international strait under Part II of the UNCLOS; guaranteeing the right to transit passage to ships. Indonesia's stand, however, is contradictory.

### **Management of the Straits**

The three regional states – Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore – have a long history of mutual cooperation with regard to the Straits. All matters pertaining to the Straits have been jointly discussed at ministerial level meetings. Following the first ministerial meeting held in October 1971, the states issued a joint statement opposing international legal status to the Straits. They maintained that the safety of the Straits would be coordinated solely by the three littoral states.

Several rounds of ministerial meetings were then conducted between the three states in which various regulations such as the Traffic Separation Scheme, rules for deep draught vessels etc., were promulgated for compliance through the IMO. A group of experts, known as the Tripartite Technical Experts Group (TTEG), subsequently coordinated policy matters.

### **UN Laws of the Sea Convention**

The Straits are governed by Part II of the UNCLOS pertaining to straits used for international navigation. In accordance with the UNCLOS, all commercial and military vessels have the right of transit passage through the Straits and such rights cannot be impeded or suspended. All ships are obliged to follow the various international rules and regulations pertaining to safety of navigation, pollution control etc., promulgated by the littoral states through the IMO.<sup>1</sup> It implies that the power to adopt a particular regulation rests with the IMO rather than the littoral state.

Article 43 of the UNCLOS, which governs the responsibilities of user states with regard to use of the international straits, states:

*“Navigational and safety aids and other improvements and the prevention, reduction and control of pollution.*

*User states and states bordering a strait should by agreement cooperate:*

- (a) in the establishment and maintenance in a strait of necessary navigational and safety aids or other improvements in aid of international navigation; and*
- (b) for the prevention, reduction and control of pollution from ships.”*

Thus, users are obliged to share the burden of maintaining safety and pollution control in the straits with the littorals. Unfortunately, with the exception of Japan, no other user state has contributed towards the cause of the Straits.<sup>2</sup> However, post 9/11, maritime security suddenly became a high priority. A review of the maritime security was undertaken by IMO and several new regulations, such as the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, were promulgated.

Following the 9/11 attacks, the US initiated various steps such as the Container Security Initiative (CSI) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Around the same time, the number of piracy attacks on ships increased considerably in the Straits and the US announced its plans for RMSI. All these developments did not go down well with the littoral states and were discussed in the 2005 joint ministerial meeting at Batam.

### **The 2005 Batam Joint Ministerial Statement**

The Foreign Ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore met at Batam in August 2005 to discuss matters pertaining to the safety of navigation, environmental protection and maritime security.<sup>3</sup> The Batam joint statement sets out the views of the three littorals on the roles of the littorals, the user states and international agencies, such as the IMO, in enhancing the safety, security and environmental protection in the Straits.

The statement reaffirmed the sovereign rights of the littorals in the Straits and their primary responsibility for safety of navigation, environmental protection and maritime security. It also recognised the importance of engaging with the funnel states. It states that any cooperative measures taken in the Straits must be in conformity with international law and the UNCLOS.

In regard to the roles for user states and others in cooperative arrangements, the Batam statement, mindful of the responsibility and burden of the littoral states and interests of the user states, welcomed assistance of user states, international agencies and the shipping industry in areas of capacity building, training and technology transfer, and other forms of assistance in accordance with the UNCLOS.

## Key Challenges

The key challenges in securing the straits as identified by the littorals can be categorised into safety and security threats as follows:

### Safety Hazards

#### Navigational Accidents

An average of over 60,000 ships transit the Straits annually. Table 1 indicates the traffic growth in recent years. It has been projected that the annual traffic in the Straits will

**Table 1.** Annual shipping traffic transiting the Strait of Malacca (Port Klang's Vessel Traffic System 2000-06)

Type of Ships	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
VLCC/ULCC	3,163	3,303	3,301	3,487	3,477	3,788	3,851
Crude/Product tankers	13,343	14,276	14,591	15,667	16,403	14,759	14,784
LNG/LPG	2,962	3,086	3,141	3,277	3,343	3,099	3,297
General Cargo	6,603	6,476	6,065	6,193	6,624	6,340	6,477
Container	18,283	20,101	20,091	19,575	20,187	20,818	22,615
Bulk	4,708	5,370	5,754	6,256	6,531	7,394	8,129
RORO/Car Carrier	1,761	1,764	1,980	2,182	2,440	2,515	2,863
Passenger	3,301	3,151	3,490	3,033	2,838	2,299	2,009
Livestock	70	108	108	80	46	45	51
Tug/Tow	774	610	422	478	568	420	372
Navy	117	155	111	120	130	153	81
Fishing	44	60	38	35	67	34	39
Others	828	854	942	1,951	982	957	1,081
Total	55,957	59,314	60,034	62,334	63,636	62,621	65,649

Source: Marine Department, Peninsular Malaysia.



increase to 100,000 ships by 2020.<sup>4</sup> With increasing density of shipping, the likelihood of navigational accidents, such as collisions, grounding etc., will increase significantly.

### **Environmental Pollution**

The Straits are the economic lifeline for millions of local people, who earn their living from various activities connected with the waterways. Environmental pollution resulting from thousands of ships transiting the straits can lead to degradation of the coastal zones, such as mangroves, coral reefs etc.<sup>5</sup> This can adversely affect the economies of the regional states in the long run.

### **Security Threats**

#### **Threats from Transnational Crimes, Piracy and Maritime Terrorism**

Transnational crimes in the region include a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from illegal fishing, sand mining, drug smuggling, human trafficking etc., to piracy and hijacking of ships. While piracy in the Straits is currently under control, the threat of maritime terrorism continues to remain high. Two leading terrorist groups – Al Qaeda and the Jemmah Islamiah (JI) – are known to be active in the region. As terrorist groups have been facing increasing pressures from security agencies on land, there exists a strong possibility of increased maritime terror attacks by global terror groups working in collaboration with pirates.

### **Cooperative Mechanism for Safety in the Straits**

Following the Batam statement in September 2007, the regional states launched a cooperative mechanism for addressing safety concerns in the Straits. This was based on Article 43 of the UNCLOS.

The cooperative mechanism was the first instance of implementation of Article 43 with regard to an international strait. It consists of three elements – a Cooperation Forum, Aids to Navigation Fund and specific projects.<sup>6</sup> The Cooperation Forum is intended to promote dialogue and discussions between the littoral states, user states and other interested stakeholders. The Aids to Navigation Fund is intended to enable user states and other stakeholders to make voluntary contributions to enhance navigational safety and environmental protection by maintaining and replacing aids to



navigation, such as lighthouses and buoys. A total of six specific projects have been agreed upon by the littoral states to enhance the safety and environmental protection in the straits. These projects are:<sup>7</sup>

- Removal of wrecks in the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS);
- Cooperation and capacity building in relation to the Protocol on Preparedness, Response and Cooperation in Pollution Incidents by Hazardous and Noxious Substances, 2000 (OPRC-HNS Protocol);
- Demonstration project for placing Class B Automatic Identification System transponders on small ships;
- Setting up tide, current and wind measurement systems;
- Replacement and maintenance of aids to navigation; and
- Replacement of navigational aids damaged in the 2004 tsunami.

The response of the user states to the projects has been positive, with the main contributors being Japan, China, Australia, South Korea, the US and India. Encouraged by the response of the user states, the littoral states are working on new projects for enhancing safety and environmental protection.

### **Evaluation of the Cooperative Mechanism**

The cooperative mechanism has been hailed as a historic breakthrough. It allows the littoral states to identify projects necessary to address their safety and environmental concerns in the straits and implement them in collaboration with all stakeholders, including user states, international maritime bodies and even the shipping industry.

The success of the cooperative mechanism, particularly in respect of the special projects, will result in an increased responsibility on part of the stakeholders who have committed to investing huge capital. This is likely to lead to the stakeholders demanding a greater share in the affairs of the Straits. In the long run, the outcome could be different from what has been envisaged by the littorals, with the stakeholders demanding a role in the TTEG and joint ministerial meetings.

### **Security Arrangements in the Straits**

The security concerns of the littorals, which include a wide spectrum of transnational crimes, piracy, hijacking and maritime terrorism, have been kept out of the purview

of the cooperative mechanism. Thus, the cooperative mechanism has been limited to safety and environmental protection.

### Malacca Strait Security Initiative

The MSSSI was prompted by the US Navy's move to formally present before the US House of Representatives Armed Forces Committee, the RMSI in March 2004. The RMSI was quickly rejected by the littoral countries, with the Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Najib Tun Razak asserting on April 6, 2004 that:

*"control of the Strait is the sovereign prerogative of Malaysia and Indonesia, and the US military involvement is not welcome".*

He also said that US vessels:

*"could use the waterway for their ships, including warships, but to launch operations, they should have the concurrence of Malaysia and Indonesia".*

Subsequently, on July 20, 2004, 17 ships of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore navies conducted a sail past, before the launch of Operation MALSINDO, to mark the beginning of anti-piracy and anti-terrorism patrols in the Strait of Malacca.

While rejecting international participation, the littoral states left open their willingness to accept financing, equipment and training from outside nations. The littoral states were severely criticised for being overly sensitive to their sovereign rights. However, a significant drop in the incidents of piracy was observed within a year of the launch of the patrols.

In September 2005, aerial patrols codenamed *Eyes in the Sky* were introduced to augment surface patrols. In 2006, a multi-million dollar project, partly sponsored by the IMO as well as some shipping companies, was launched for setting up a radar chain along the Straits.

Also, in April 2006, a joint accord was signed between Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia to formally establish a security regime for the Straits, bringing both the surface and aerial patrols under one umbrella. Under the accord, the littorals also agreed to establish a joint coordinating committee to coordinate patrols. Control centres were established at various locations in the participating countries and a mechanism for

intelligence sharing was also introduced. Recently, a standard operating procedures (SOPs) Manual has been introduced.

Thailand was conspicuous by its absence from the accord, ostensibly due to political instability in the country, which led to the overthrow of Prime Minister Thaksin. However, since early 2009, Thailand has become an active participant in the MSSSI.

The MSSSI has evolved into a comprehensive security regime that includes surface patrols (MALSINDO), aerial patrols (Eyes in the Sky) and a chain of radar stations along the straits (SURPIC). All operations are coordinated by the joint coordination committee, with a network of command and control centres in each participating country and an intelligence sharing mechanism.

## **Extra Regional Initiatives for Security**

### **Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships (ReCAAP)**

The ReCAAP was initiated by Japan in 2004 to promote multilateral anti-piracy cooperation. The agreement came into force in September 2006. Under it, the ASEAN 10 and Japan, India, China, Korea, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have agreed to cooperate in areas related to information sharing, mutual capacity building and combined operations. Indonesia and Malaysia have not yet ratified the agreement, though they have agreed to cooperate. Under ReCAAP, an information sharing centre (ISC) has been established at Singapore. Broadly, the role of the ISC is to carry out an analysis of various transnational crimes, including piracy, in the region with a view to providing the security agencies with the operational intelligence to combat maritime threats.

### **Coordinated Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Exercise**

Notwithstanding the reluctance of Malaysia and Indonesia in seeking direct foreign participation in security patrols in the straits, the US Navy has maintained its presence in the region under the RMSI. It conducts several bilateral/multilateral exercises, such as the annual CARAT exercise with regional countries, aimed at combined maritime security operations. This is part of the US strategy of capacity building of regional countries. The CARAT exercises are generally held for a period of two months each year. These exercises are conducted bilaterally with the various littoral countries.

### Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA)

The FPDA between UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore is yet another multilateral initiative in maritime security. The scope of the FPDA has changed over the years, from air defence of Singapore and Malaysia to disaster relief and humanitarian aid and now maritime terrorism. Under the FPDA, an annual exercise dealing with maritime security is scheduled in the region.

### Overall Assessment of the Security Initiatives

The above initiatives in securing the Straits have ensured a drastic reduction in maritime crimes in the region. For the second year in succession in 2008, the Straits recorded virtually no incidents of piracy. Table 2 gives details of piracy incidents recorded by the IMB.

Table 2. Piracy incidents in the Strait of Malacca

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
38	12	11	07	02

However, the ability of the regional states to maintain this tempo of operations and further expand regional and global cooperation towards combating maritime terrorism remains a challenge. This can be a difficult task in the face of declining defence budgets, accentuated by the ongoing global recession. The other important factors are the emerging trends in global piracy observed in the Gulf of Aden, which is now the leading hotspot for global piracy.

According to the IMB 2008 Annual Report, Singapore and Malaysia are two of the littorals whose merchant ships have been attacked more than 10 times in 2008, mainly in the Gulf of Aden region. Both countries have deployed their ships on anti-piracy patrols in the area. But, how much longer can the littorals sustain extended anti-piracy patrols in the Straits as well as the Gulf of Aden remains to be seen?

### Drawbacks of the Malacca Strait Security Initiative

In contrast with the collaborative approach adopted by the Gulf States, Malaysia and Indonesia have consistently declined participation by extra regional powers. India's

stand on this issue is that despite considerable stakes in the security of the Strait of Malacca any material contribution will only be subject to an invitation from the littorals. India signed the ReCAAP in 2006 and has even posted a Coast Guard officer at the information sharing centre in Singapore. Further, India has contributed towards at least two out of the six projects in the cooperative mechanism for the straits. This indicates India's high level of commitment to maintaining security in the Straits. Any reticence on part of India is to give due regard to regional sensitivities.<sup>8</sup>

However, the consistent stand by the regional countries 'based solely on protecting their sovereign rights' to exclude India and other extra regional partners from actively participating in the security patrols can result in serious shortcoming in the security of the Straits. Moreover, such a stand is not in consonance with the requirements of the situation and the evolving security scenario in the region.

There is an urgent need to augment the resources under MSSSI in order to sustain all-round surveillance. During the initial years of the security patrols, the littorals adopted a 'foot on the ground' approach, committing several ships for round-the-clock patrols as well as frequent aerial sorties. Such vigorous patrolling is difficult to sustain, particularly when the littorals are required to deploy their navies on anti-piracy patrols elsewhere in the Gulf of Aden, as was recently demonstrated by Malaysia and Singapore. Thailand, which had successfully avoided its participation in the MSSSI since 2004, was finally coaxed into joining the patrols in 2009, ostensibly to contribute to a common cause and also augment capability in the Northern sector of the Straits.

However, despite Thailand joining the MSSSI, it is unlikely to augment the available resources significantly, given its modest naval capability. In any case, the Western approaches to the Straits are likely to remain under-patrolled. The need of the hour is a modern all-round surveillance system to provide total maritime domain awareness (MDA) and a capability for rapid response to developing security situations through quick response teams (QRTs), which can be deployed at various points along the straits. These are some areas where assistance can be sought from the Indian Navy.

## **Emerging Trends in Piracy Worldwide**

### **Spillover from Piracy Hotspot**

Since the beginning of 2009, there has been a clear trend of pirate attacks being conducted on the high seas, even beyond 600 nautical miles (nm) from the Somalia

coast. This can be attributed to an increase in naval patrolling in the region that has forced pirates to operate further away from the coast towards the busy sea lanes of the Arabian Sea.<sup>9</sup> This has significantly increased the size of the area required to be kept under surveillance, thereby diluting the effect of naval warship patrols.

Further, emboldened by their success and flush with ransom money, the Somali pirates are now equipping themselves with sophisticated weapons, global positioning systems (GPS), radio sets, high speed boats etc. The *modus operandi* adopted by these pirates has been to open out seaward on 'mother ships' (mostly captured fishing trawlers), carrying a few small and fast speed boats that are used to launch attacks and board opportune targets. Confronted by naval patrols in the region, the pirates can further modify their tactics. In fact, it is likely that the Somali pirate groups will evolve into organised groups operating from hijacked merchant ships, with the capability to operate in the busy sea lanes of the Indian Ocean region for several days, masquerading as innocent merchant vessels, targeting unsuspecting ships.

A similar trend can be anticipated in the Strait of Malacca, especially since the Western approaches to the Straits, close to the Andaman group of islands, are currently not patrolled. With the Royal Thai Navy joining the patrols, only the Northern part of the approaches are currently patrolled, leaving the Western area unprotected. Thus, it is evident that in order to completely seal the Indian Ocean approach to the Straits and prevent any spillover to the West, the Indian Navy will have to be involved.

### **Impact of Global Recession**

According to a study by the Asian Ship-owners Forum,<sup>10</sup> the global recession is likely to lead to an increase in the number of attacks on ships. The total number of attacks globally increased to 293 in 2008 from 263 in 2007. In the first quarter of 2009, 102 attacks were reported worldwide as compared to 49 attacks in the first quarter of 2008 (an over 100 per cent increase!). One of the fallouts of global recession has been reduced freight earnings by shipping companies, which are being forced to cut down their operating expenses. Thus, the chances of shipping companies spending on private security measures are further reduced.

### **Nexus with Terrorist Outfits**

The possible threat of global terrorist outfits linking with pirates to carry out maritime

terror strikes cannot be ruled out. At least two major terrorist organisations – Al Qaeda and JI – are known to have maritime experts in their cadres. The Al Qaeda was responsible of the attack on French tanker *Limburg* and USS *Cole*, both of which occurred in the Gulf of Aden in 2002. In 2004, the JI was involved in the bombing of the Philippine *Super Ferry 14*, in what is considered to be the most destructive act of terrorism in maritime history and the fourth most serious attack since 9/11.<sup>11</sup>

As terrorist groups are facing increasing pressures from security agencies on land, there exists a strong possibility of a resurgence in maritime terror attacks by global terror groups working in collaboration with pirates. Further, the easy ransom money made by pirates (in the midst of a global recession) is likely to attract terrorist outfits, which are increasingly facing lack of funding precipitated by the US-led global war on terror.

## **Global Response to Piracy in the Gulf of Aden**

The response of the international community to increased piracy in the Gulf of Aden has been remarkably swift. A majority of the G20 navies are currently deployed on anti-piracy patrols and several robust international measures have been introduced. Broadly, the following security initiatives are in place in the Gulf of Aden:

### **Coalition Task Force (CTF) 151**

The CTF 151 under the US' Fifth Fleet headquarters in Manama, Bahrain was established in January 2009, with a clear mandate to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden. It comprises of countries engaged in the Coalition Maritime Force (CMF) in the North Arabian Sea region and includes Germany, UK, Turkey, and Pakistan, among others.

### **Maritime Security Patrol Area (MSPA)**

The US Navy Central Command (CENTCOM) established a 560 nm-long security corridor or MSPA in the Gulf of Aden on August 22, 2008. This area is currently patrolled by the coalition forces, from sea and air.<sup>12</sup> The MSPA has been widely supported by the shipping community and various organisations such as the IMO and IMB. The coalition forces have since repulsed several attacks by Somali pirates.



### **NATO's Operation *Ocean Shield***

A Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) has been deployed in the region to allow the World Food Organisation to fulfil its mission of providing humanitarian aid to Somalia under the UN World Food Programme. The operation has been codenamed *Ocean Shield*. The SNMG comprises of about seven ships from Italy, Germany, Greece, Turkey, UK, US and Spain.

### **Operation Atlanta**

A convoy escort system codenamed Operation *Atlanta* is being maintained by nearly 14 ships of the 27-nation European Union (EU). The convoys are routed in the area North of Somalia, with protection teams placed onboard EU ships. Other ships are also permitted to join in the convoy with free protection being offered. The EU has now decided to extend Operation *Atlanta* up to December 2010.<sup>13</sup>

### **Independent Anti-piracy Patrols**

Several countries have deployed their navies on independent patrols for safety of their merchant ships. These include China, Russia, India, Iran, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore etc.

### **Role of Regional Navies in the Gulf of Aden**

The deployment of the US, NATO and EU taskforces, and an armada that includes three Chinese warships and many other warships to the Horn of Africa to combat piracy without recourse to a UN force gives the first indications of how a multi-polar world might look like.<sup>14</sup> In such a scenario, there is no room for regional sensitivities; as the Arab states have now learnt.

### **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Navies**

A meeting of the representatives of the six GCC members – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – and the Arab Red Sea littoral countries (Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Yemen) was held at Riyadh on June 29, 2009 to discuss the role of the GCC in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. In a joint statement, it was declared that it is the responsibility of the littoral countries to

maintain the security of the Red Sea and combat piracy. The meeting suggested the formation of an Arab naval taskforce against piracy in tune with the international laws and the resolutions of the UN Security Council. The planned taskforce would have a single command and a one-year mandate after which an assessment of the process should be conducted. Each of the concerned countries can decide the size and nature of its contribution to force. The force will be tasked with safeguarding the oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) tankers passing through the Red Sea against the risks of piracy.<sup>15</sup>

However, realising the growing threat of maritime terrorist attacks on their essential infrastructure, including oil facilities, power plants, desalination plants etc., the Gulf states are now coordinating their efforts with multinational forces for a comprehensive security regime. These states have also realised that piracy is as much of a problem for the regional states as for the extra regional powers. Perhaps, this is exactly the approach that needs to be adopted by the Southeast Asian littorals to engage with India to ensure a comprehensive security regime in the Strait of Malacca.

The multinational forces together with the regional navies of the Gulf can collectively put up a force of up to 30 ships to patrol the Gulf of Aden. This will substantially increase surveillance in the area. Further, information sharing between the participating forces will lead to enhanced maritime domain awareness. The net result can be a win-win situation for all stakeholders.

## **Areas of Cooperation with the Indian Navy**

In a model similar to the Gulf of Aden security patrols, it would be prudent for the littorals to engage with their immediate maritime neighbour and a funnel state, i.e. India to augment their resources necessary to combat emerging threats in the region and keep pace with the evolving threat scenario. A spillover of transnational crimes to the East into the Andaman Sea, a trend observed in the Gulf of Aden, will necessarily involve the Indian Navy.

## **India's Stand**

India's stand with regard to participation in the MSSSI was clearly stated in June 2006 at Singapore by the then Defence Minister, Pranab Mukherjee during the Shangri La dialogue. He had said that:

*“there is a need to increase and strengthen regional cooperation to enhance maritime security... We believe that through the coordination of our individual efforts, the security of the sea lanes will be enhanced... Subject to the desire of the littoral states, as a major user-state, India would be willing to assist the project in whatever capacity is deemed suitable. India has developed capabilities in various aspects of maritime security and would be most willing to share its expertise with countries of the region”.*

India's stand and commitment to regional cooperation to enhance maritime security has remained unchanged since then.

### **Ongoing Foreign Cooperation Programmes**

India has close defence ties with all the littoral countries and has provided them with training assistance as well as technical support in several areas. The Indian Navy has been conducting coordinated patrols with two of the four MSSI participants, viz. Thailand and Indonesia, under bilateral agreements signed in 2005 and 2001, respectively. Moreover, the Indian Navy conducts annual exercises with the Republic of Singapore Navy. Thus, the Indian Navy has established a high degree of interoperability with almost all the littorals and is ideally suited to contribute to the security mechanism. This interoperability exists at various levels, ranging from political compatibility at the highest level to tactical operating procedures at the elementary levels.

### **Ship Patrols Along the Western Approaches of the Strait of Malacca**

The bilateral patrols with Thailand and Indonesia are currently conducted along the international exclusive economic zone boundary line established between the countries. The boundary line roughly runs along the Western approaches to the Strait of Malacca, through which the entire shipping traffic, moving in and out of the Straits, cuts across. A patrol established along the Western approaches by the Indian Navy, either singly or jointly with Indonesia and Thailand, can perfectly seal the Strait of Malacca in a security cordon. It is not important that the mechanism for involving the Indian Navy be framed under the aegis of the MSSI or a unified command. Perhaps, it can be an arrangement wherein both sides operate independently and exchange tactical information to augment each other's overall MDA. The scope and periodicity of the patrols can be

simply adopted by suitably modifying the existing bilateral arrangements with Thailand and Indonesia.

### Aerial Surveillance by Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and Maritime Reconnaissance (MR) Aircraft

The Indian Navy currently operates the Heron and Searcher UAVs and several MR aircraft, like Dornier, IL-38 and Tu 142. These can be operated from an air station in the Andaman group of islands; an archipelago of 572 islands. The Southern tip of these islands is only 165 km from the Strait of Malacca, separated by the Six Degree Channel. The UAVs, launched from the Andaman group of islands and operating within a radius of about 100 km, can be tasked for aerial surveillance of the Western approaches or the funnel region of the Straits (Fig. 2). The UAV can transmit the data/

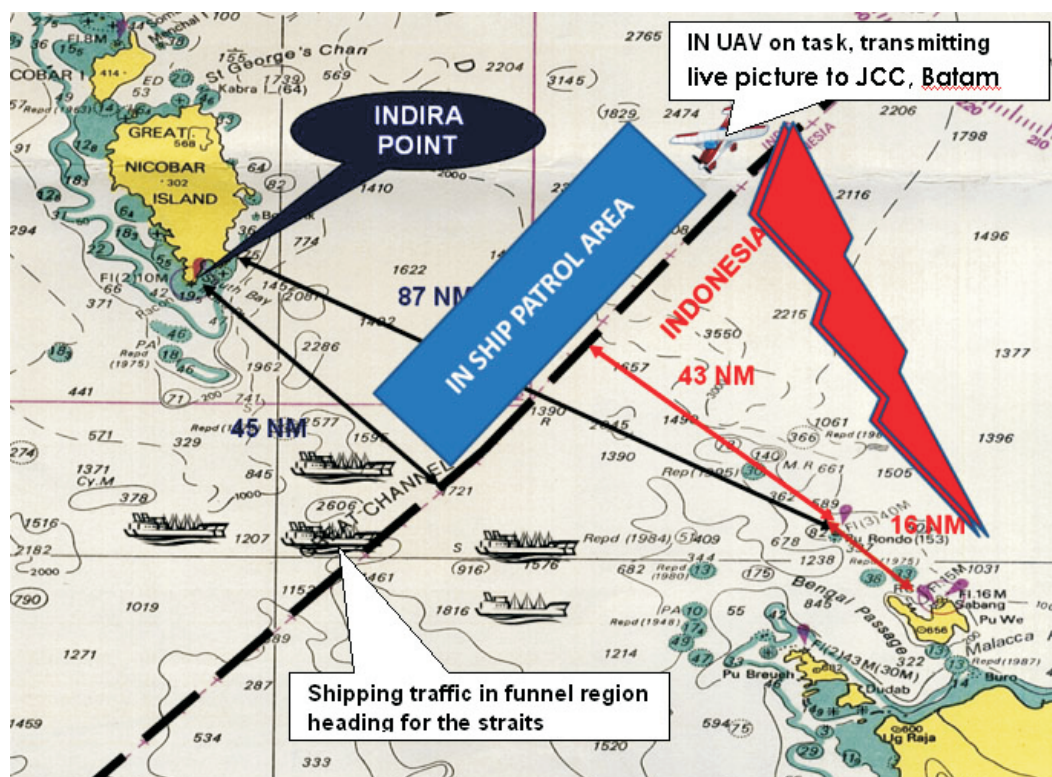


Fig. 2. Potential areas of surveillance in the Strait of Malacca funnel region by Indian Navy along the exclusive economic zone boundary line with Indonesia.

picture on a real time basis to all the joint coordination centres established under the MSSSI. The Republic of Singapore Navy has also recently acquired UAVs. These can be used in coordination with Indian UAVs to establish all-round aerial surveillance. This will significantly augment the surveillance capacity of the littorals and ease the task of ship patrols. Further, a system of all-round aerial surveillance in the Straits coupled with immediate response from QRTs based along the Straits will go a long way in improving the security of the straits.

### **Information Sharing**

Virtually, the entire shipping traffic passing through the Straits is routed South of the Indira Point in the Great Nicobar Island. Information about the traffic can be shared with the littorals to provide advance information about the traffic entering the Straits. This will significantly enhance their MDA.

### **Conclusion**

The MSSSI and the cooperative mechanism was jointly launched by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand in 2004 to counter interference by extra regional powers in the Straits as also to combat transnational crimes and ensure safety of shipping. The MSSSI has completed five years of successful operations and helped the littorals to establish and strengthen their sovereign rights in the Straits. Meanwhile, the cooperative mechanism has significantly improved the safety situation in the Straits through greater involvement of the user states, including India and other stakeholders.

But the evolving security situation in the Indian Ocean region demands greater efforts, beyond the combined capacities of the littorals. It can be concluded that the issue of sovereign rights in the Straits has been stretched a bit too far and the stand taken by the littorals to exclude India from the MSSSI is definitely not in consonance with the evolving security requirements in the region. Here, the decision taken by the GCC to actively coordinate their efforts with the extra regional navies in combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden is worthy of emulation.

India, as the immediate maritime neighbour and a funnel state, has established a flourishing defence cooperation with the littorals and indicated its willingness to contribute towards augmenting their efforts. It is important that the Indian Navy is involved in the MSSSI as a partner to meet the emerging threats and challenges in the

region. The littorals should be mindful that an act of maritime terrorism in the Straits can permanently erase the success of the MSSSI and even 'backfire' on the littorals. It will also, probably, forever change the dynamics of security in the region.

## Notes

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3. *Ibid.* This paragraph is based on the excellent paper presented by Robert Beckman, above.
4. *Ibid.* Yohei Sasakawa, Chairman of Nippon Foundation (estimate made during his speech at the "Symposium on the Enhancement of Safety of Navigation and the Environmental Protection of the Strait of Malacca and Singapore", Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, March 13-14, 2007).
5. *Ibid.*
6. See note [2].
7. *Ibid.*
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15. Paul Handley, AFP News Report, June 29, 2009 (accessed July 20, 2009).