

CN Address at the 5th International Maritime Security Conference

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Singapore

Responding to Transnational Maritime Security Threats

I have been asked to give my thoughts today on the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and other practical ways to address transnational maritime security threats.

However before doing so, I would like to put into context Australia's strategic interest in ensuring safe and secure seas and our approach for ensuring our maritime security.

Australia is an island nation, facing three oceans — the Indian, the Pacific and Southern — with a coastline of more than 32,000 nautical miles — and yet a population of only 25 million.

In terms of search and rescue and as a Security Forces Authority we have maritime responsibility for an ocean area twice the size of our vast landmass — it equates to about 11 per cent of the world's oceans.

Ten per cent of the world's sea trade passes through Australian ports. We rely on the sea for 99 per cent of our exports—and for a substantial proportion of our domestic freight.

With this in mind you would expect the Australian Defence White Paper, published in 2016 to have a decidedly maritime focus. It does and it will for the foreseeable future.

It reflects concern for changes in the maritime security situation in the Indo Pacific region – a region which is becoming increasingly uncertain. Here are three well known examples.

Firstly, transnational crime is a growing problem, particularly the illegal importation of illicit substances. In the last six months alone three on sea interceptions off the Australian coast has recovered several tons of high quality drugs and precursors – the most recent this year a yacht carrying almost 1.5 tons of cocaine worth in excess of \$312 million dollars.

Secondly, there is growing concern among Pacific nations as a result of environmental changes: be it an increasing trend in severe weather patterns or rising sea levels. Both of which threaten stability with changes in available natural resources, or the displacement of affected populations.

Thirdly, regional maritime disputes generate the potential for miscalculation which could result in armed confrontations at sea. We all have a vested interest in regional peace and stability, respect for international law, unimpeded trade, and freedom of navigation and overflight in our region.

To address these challenges the Australian Government has adopted a whole of government approach through the Defence White Paper.

The Australian Navy plays two keys roles in addressing these transnational maritime security threats.

First, and most obvious, is that the Australian Navy is a combat force tasked with maintaining our sovereignty, defending our territorial integrity, and protecting our national interests wherever they are threatened – regionally and indeed globally.

As a consequence of this fundamental premise the Australian fleet is currently undergoing a significant recapitalisation.

Second, and somewhat unique by regional comparison the Australian Navy provides significant assets and personnel to Maritime Border Command, a civilian multi-agency taskforce headed by a serving 2 star Admiral which combines the resources and expertise of subject matter experts whose operations are tailored to counter the full spectrum of civil maritime security threats which impact on Australia.

This arrangement means that the Australian Navy must have a force structure which enables it perform maritime civil security roles and naval combat operations concurrently.

It also dictates the degree to which the Australian Navy is engaged in regional maritime security forums, exercises, capacity building operations, and information sharing initiatives in support of furthering regional stability.

These are the mechanisms by which regional cooperation can be conducted. So now let me turn to some of the more prominent initiatives and offer a view of their efficacy before we consider how they might be enhanced.

Let us start with the Naval Symposiums in the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Each aim to increase cooperation and provide the ability for Navies to operate together.

WPNS has grown over the years to become a respected conduit for the exchange of information, for discussion of maritime issues of mutual interest and for the practice and demonstration of common capabilities in prescribed operations like search and rescue and HADR.

The adoption of CUES through development within this forum is a tangible example. In my view, WPNS has built a level of trust and

confidence between Navies by providing a framework to develop such practical measures.

Likewise IONS provides its members with a similar framework within which the Conclave of Chiefs can increase maritime co-operation by providing an open forum of discussion and a practical means of demonstrating at-sea collaboration.

As a recent chairman of IONS I see great potential for the forum, however I do make the observation that governance arrangements must be developed to allow a fully inclusive representation of those with a legitimate interest in the forum. This holds true for any such forum.

Alongside these naval fora sits the Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM). This forum focuses on issues including search and rescue, environmental protection, preventing and controlling unlawful acts at sea, and capacity building. Like its purely military equivalents it is a platform for countries to share information and operational experience, in order to reduce the threat of high priority maritime issues within the Asia Pacific region.

I am sure an enduring issue for us is to delineate, but not preclude common areas of action within these fora.

Now at the government to government level a more recent construct is the Asian Defence Minister Meeting (ADMM Plus) Experts Working Group on Maritime Security.

Founded in 2011, the Working Group was established in part to benefit ASEAN member countries in building capacity to address shared security challenges, and to enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defence and security, in view of the transnational security challenges the region faces.

I observed directly the beneficial outcomes of this group when I hosted a multi nation exercise in Australia in late 2013. We had the opportunity to conduct boarding operations, manoeuvring serials and maritime security patrol exercises with a number of countries including Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore and the United States. It proved to me that a well subscribed and well-coordinated exercise over several days in controlled conditions can benefit all.

One significant outcome of ADMM Plus has been the renewed determination to strengthen the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP).

ReCAAP was the first regional government-to-government agreement to promote and enhance cooperation specifically against piracy and armed robbery in Asia through information sharing portals and capacity building activities.

Its utility has been complemented by the Information Fusion Centre established here in Singapore by the Republic of Singapore Navy. With 16 international liaison officers, including an Australian Navy officer, working alongside the Republic of Singapore Navy this centre continues to show great potential. The next step is to fully exploit that potential.

Finally, we need to consider the utility of capacity building efforts within the region. Whilst usually part of a donor nation's strategic engagement policy, the provision of platforms, people and training can boost immeasurably the capability of a broader number of nations to defend themselves against maritime security threats.

There have been a plethora of such plans within our region, increasing especially in recent years. But a note of caution is required. Equipment alone is not the solution; indeed it can become

a liability where it is complemented by poor or no sustainment and training.

The Australian Government and Navy has learned this over decades in support of what is now termed the Pacific Maritime Surveillance Program.

The centrepiece of this engagement has been the gifting of over 20 patrol boats as well as the long term provision of ongoing maintenance, training and in-country advisory support to provide South Pacific Nations with a significant sovereign capability to conduct maritime surveillance and enforcement, primarily to counter illegal fishing.

This is not an aid program. Its long term aim is to allow each nation to develop and sustain their own capability.

So now let us pause and consider the mechanisms that are currently in place – in summary: there are numerous forums, exercises and capacity building programs.

But is it enough? Or is it too much? And are they being effectively harmonised to prevent duplication of activity? This latter question is especially significant in a time of constrained budgets.

I believe there are a number of things to consider to improve the efficacy of existing mechanisms before new ones are even considered.

First, let us talk about the promotion and enhancement of the exchange of information. Over the last decade we have come a long way in explaining the need for open communications between relevant organisations, both intra- and inter-governmental.

This is particularly evident with respect to cooperation in maritime security threats emanating from transnational crime, people smuggling or in HADR and search and rescue.

Examples include the coordinated responses during cyclone Hanan in the Philippines in 2013; and the search for missing aircraft MH370 in the waters of Western Australia in 2014.

However, it behoves us to better explore how similar methods of coordination, the sharing of expertise, best practice and lessons learned, can be better applied during more complex scenarios that challenge timeliness, trust and confidence.

Second, we should be committed to improving the portals through which this information is shared.

The Information Fusion Centre is a good example of how such a commitment can strengthen multinational and inter-agency collaboration amongst regional and extra-regional stakeholders.

Consider its success as recently as May 2016, when the IFC was crucial in enabling the Indonesian Navy to board the vessel Hai Soon 12 and detain pirates whilst rescuing the crew unharmed.

Third, we must continue to routinely exercise together, both at sea and ashore, as these practises provide essential avenues for enhancing interoperability.

But here's my caution: we must not simply exercise more often or do more of the same — we need to increase the complexity of the exercises and actively challenge the vulnerabilities in our collective processes.

Finally, we should seek to harmonise the efforts of disparate forums, set a common agenda for the discussion of maritime security issues,

publish one HADR directory and one set of CUES for use across the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

The proliferation of transnational maritime security threats, or the onset of effects from climate change has no geographic boundary; neither should our thought processes in countering them.

Lofty ideals I hear you say and who is the 'we' I keep talking about. Well – It's this group. Those of us Chief's or our delegates who meet regularly at forums like this or ISS or at WPNS and IONS. We regularly meet and we regularly discuss the same issues.

We must raise the bar. We must each consider bringing more to the table.

In its 2016 Defence White Paper the Australian Government recognised the need for more to be done in relation to transnational maritime security threats and has committed significant resources for this to be done.

As a result, the Australian Navy will participate more regularly in multinational exercises and make more effective and meaningful contributions during those exercises.

Also, the Australian Navy, as part of the broader efforts of the Australian Defence Force will expand its cultural understanding and language capabilities to increase its effectiveness when operating in the near region and collaborating with international partners.

And using these expanded cultural and language capabilities the number of Defence personnel posted overseas will increase to conduct more liaison, capacity building, training and mentoring with partner defence and security forces.

Each of these steps will enable the Australian Navy to strengthen our regional and international partnerships, and to meet shared security challenges.

I look forward to working with all of you.

Before closing let me again thank Rear-Admiral Lai and Ambassador Yong for the opportunity to share my thoughts on the effectiveness of existing maritime security mechanisms and other practical ways to address transnational maritime security threats.

It is through conferences such as this, that we are able to explore, as maritime stakeholders, how we can continue to develop transparent and predictable maritime security arrangements through which we can create safe and secure seas in our region.

Thank you.