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Venue: SHANGRI-LA HOTEL SINGAPORE
Date : 05-06-2005
**Title : 2005 SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE FIFTH PLENARY SESSION :
ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION**

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AT
2005 SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE
FIFTH PLENARY SESSION:
ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

5 JUNE 2005, SINGAPORE

My fellow panelist,
Admiral William Fallon, Commander of the US Pacific Command,
Distinguished guests
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen

1. At the outset let me register my appreciation to John Chipman and his team at the International Institute for Strategic Studies for once again inviting me to participate at this year's Shangri-La Dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen

2. Maritime safety and security remains one of the key security challenges facing Southeast Asia today. The Straits of Malacca is one of the busiest sea lanes in the world and as such faces a multitude of threats. Malaysia, like the other countries in the region, has taken various measures to reduce threats across the maritime domain and we shall continue these efforts. Given the heightened concern with terrorist activities post September 11, the safety of ships using the Straits of Malacca in particular has now become a major international concern.

3. While Malaysia fully recognizes the need to do more on a collective basis to prevent transnational threats, our view is that we have yet to find a credible link between terrorists i.e. those who commit acts of aggression for a political motive, and modern day pirates whose primary aim is to derive commercial benefit from their acts. For the time being, these pirates who operate on the high seas are no different from their land based cousins who extort ransoms from travelers and hijack lorries with valuable cargo. This is not to argue that we should ignore these threats to peace. Given the strategic importance of the Straits of Malacca to global trade and economic stability, we must ensure that all stakeholders – the littoral states as well as other countries with security and economic interests tied to this region – continue to work together to find and develop preventive measures that can be accepted politically by all and that can work effectively on the ground.

Ladies and gentlemen

4. Let me reiterate Malaysia's position that any form of preventive measures and operational arrangements to secure the safety of the Malacca Straits must not impinge on the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the littoral states. Safeguarding the Straits is a primary responsibility of the littoral states

5. However, I believe we should also recognize the limitations of the littoral states in bearing this responsibility alone. Given the huge resources in terms of assets, capabilities and manpower required to secure the Straits to a level that would make it an unattractive target for pirates and terrorists, we should call upon the wider international community, and in particular those who benefit most from safe passage through the Straits, to step forward and make concrete contributions to support ongoing efforts by the littoral states.

6. Capacity building has become a key priority for countries at the front lines of securing the Straits. There is an urgent need to build capacity along several fronts: from enhancing the operational readiness of front line enforcement agencies; to developing operational solutions that appropriately leverage new technologies; to making much needed investments in assets and equipment that will provide a credible deterrent value to pirates, terrorists and other organized crime; and finally to improve situational awareness, information sharing and intelligence gathering across multiple agencies domestically and across national boundaries.

7. Malaysia has established a dedicated Maritime Enforcement Agency that will become operational by the end of this year. The MMEA will be wholly responsible for security, enforcement, search and rescue within the Malaysian maritime zone. Malaysia would like to seek the cooperation of other interested stakeholders to assist us in training and coordination. As an example, I have been made to understand that PACOM has mobile training teams that could assist us in acquiring a number of specialized skills. Achieving better intra-agency coordination, via the use of a common tactical data information system and standard operating procedures, is another area where we hope to learn from the experiences of other countries.

Ladies and gentlemen

8. Invariably, when we speak of enhancing maritime security cooperation, it is perhaps in the area of enforcement that the need to cooperate is greatest. Given the narrow nature of the Straits, operations to track and apprehend criminals is complex as it is easy to escape across national boundaries into another jurisdiction. The littoral states have stepped up cooperation to address such issues. Since July last year, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia have launched coordinated patrols to combat piracy in the Straits, and we have been successful in reducing pirate attacks by about 25% from previous years. We have extended an invitation to the Royal Thai Navy to participate in these coordinated patrols to enhance security along the approaches to the Straits. We will need to explore additional mechanisms that can act as effective deterrents. These may include placing law enforcement personnel on vessels traveling through the Straits as well as seeking out and working together to detain pirates at source rather than in the high seas.

9. Countries will also need to look at new technology solutions to achieve more effective coordination and enforcement among the littoral states. These include the use of "eyes in the skies" or coastal radar linked to satellites and radio tracking

technology, all of which can help to provide real-time information for enforcement operations and a common electronic picture for multiple enforcement agencies operating in the Malacca Straits. In this regard, Malaysia welcomes the recent cooperation between Indonesia and Singapore in jointly operationalising a tracking centre in Batam that will serve to monitor vessels approaching the Straits of Singapore using radar and satellite technology.

10. As countries begin to step up cooperation in enhancing maritime security in the region, we have observed that some private companies are providing escort services for vessels plying the Straits. These services should be provided outside of our territorial waters, and remain consistent with international law. Given the nature of the Straits, it is very likely that these escort services will at some point or another enter territorial waters, and we are obliged under the Straits regime, to allow them transit passage, that is passage that should be continuous and expeditious. However, while we recognize that it has been common practice for merchant vessels to carry small firearms of a defensive nature in the past, we remain concerned with the possibility of larger, offensive weapons systems used by these private companies. The role of private security companies should be controlled and regulated and they should not impinge on our national sovereignty.

11. There have also been suggestions of foreign vessels being escorted by their naval or coast guard ships. Malaysia is steadfast in our belief that the littoral states are capable of patrolling the Straits without external intervention.

Ladies and gentlemen

12. Let me conclude my remarks by reiterating that Malaysia believes in the need for greater cooperation and wider support – be it financial, operational or strategic – in enhancing security in the Straits of Malacca. It is crucial for countries to recognize that littoral states will have to remain in the driver's seat and retain primary responsibility for implementation of measures designed to strengthen security and safe passage in the Straits. We, as littoral states, should first and foremost be engaged in consensus building and be united in our position. And following this, we can then establish various forms of linkages with the other stakeholders. Only then can we begin to make effective progress on this issue in the spirit of true partnership and cooperation, and achieve a safer security environment for all.

Thank you.