

SPEECH BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, MINISTER FOR DEFENCE, AT ASIA-PACIFIC INTELLIGENCE CHIEFS CONFERENCE, 18 FEBRUARY 2009, 9:00 AM AT THE SHERATON TOWERS HOTEL



CDF, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good morning, and may I wish all of you a warm welcome to Singapore.

Introduction

To be fore-warned is to be fore-armed – that is something which all intelligence professional would know. Information is the basis upon which considered decisions are made and effective action is taken.

The security problems we face today go beyond the traditional. They are multi-faceted, trans-national and complex. They include terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, piracy, natural disasters and pandemics.

These problems are now compounded and made more acute by the severe economic crisis that the world is facing. What started as a housing credit problem in the US is now being felt in the real economy across the world. Its full impact has yet to unfold. Many countries have reported sharp declines in output and trade, and rising numbers of job losses. These hardships will create additional social and political stresses, and, if not managed properly, could lead to greater friction and tensions. We saw this in our region here in South-East Asia in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

These new multi-faceted security challenges have the potential to affect the well-being of our people and undermine the region's security. These are not hypothetical events. Our region has direct experience of real instances of such events which I listed out earlier within the last five years. We have learnt that these challenges cannot be resolved by any single country acting on its own. Rather, concerted multilateral cooperation is required to tackle them effectively. Hence, I think the theme of the conference is most appropriate – “Sharing Expertise in Managing Transnational Security Issues”.

Three Principles for International Cooperation in Intelligence and Information Sharing

Intelligence and information sharing is an important aspect of international cooperation that contributes to addressing the security challenges facing us today.

Such international cooperation can be guided by three broad principles. First, achieving regional security is the collective responsibility of all stakeholder countries. Second, our cooperative approach should be open and inclusive, engaging responsible international organisations and extra-regional stakeholders that can play a constructive role. And third, such cooperation must take place in a framework of respect for international law, regional

norms and national sovereignty, recognising the diversity of the Asia-Pacific region.

Let me illustrate these principles by referring to two current security challenges, and how information sharing can play a useful role in them.

Combating Piracy

The number of sea robberies or piracy incidents in the Malacca Strait had reached a high of 21 in 2004. The situation became bad enough for Lloyd's Joint War Risk Committee to classify the Malacca Strait as a War Risk Zone. This is not just a hypothetical classification with no impact to anyone, but affects things like insurance rate, hence the cost of transporting goods; and it has an impact on the economies in our region, apart from the fact that it affects the crews, the ships who are themselves the targets of such attacks. In August 2006, however, the committee lifted this classification and by 2008 the number of piracy incidents had dropped to 6 [ReCAAP figures]. This turnaround was brought about by several long-term measures taken collectively by littoral countries and user states to improve the security of the Strait.

One of these is the Malacca Strait Patrols agreed to by Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and most recently Thailand. The regular sea and air patrols are complemented by a Malacca Strait Patrols information sharing system. The patrols themselves are conducted with due regard to the respective national sovereignties through innovative concepts like the “eyes-in-the sky”.

Singapore has also worked with Japan and other regional countries to establish in 2006 the open and inclusive Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) with 14 member countries. The ReCAAP Informational Sharing Centre (ISC) has helped to provide more accurate reports of incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in the region, as well as facilitated the sharing of best practices amongst countries. Similarly, the Information Fusion Centre (IFC), to be located at the Changi Command and Control Centre in Singapore, will enhance information sharing on the sea situation in our region and beyond, thereby promoting international and regional maritime security cooperation. I am glad that members here will be visiting the Information Fusion Centre.

Recently, a group of officials from Yemen visited the ReCAAP ISC to learn from the experiences of cooperation in our region so that they could see what lessons they could bring back to their part of the world – the Gulf of Aden – to set up a similar sub-regional information sharing centre that is modeled after the ReCAAP ISC.

Singapore is now preparing to deploy a naval vessel to the Gulf of Aden later this year. The ship will work with the newly-formed Combined Task Force 151 to conduct escort and surveillance operations in the Gulf of Aden. An important aspect of our preparations and operations there is to exchange intelligence and information with our partners who are operating there. Without that, they will just be one isolated ship operating in the large sea, and not be effective. With information sharing and working together, the combine effectiveness for all the ships there will be multiplied.

Countering Terrorism

The Mumbai attacks are the latest in a string of terrorist attacks across the globe in recent years and serve as a grim reminder that terrorism remains a common and persistent threat to all nations. Studies of the Mumbai attacks have underscored the critical need for intelligence, early warning and preventive capabilities to detect, deter and defeat these threats.

Good intelligence cooperation in information exchange, early warning and capacity building has been instrumental in combating terrorism in our own region. Countering the regional Jemaah Islamiyah (or JI) network whose tentacles spread across several countries in our region, including Singapore, would not have been possible without good intelligence exchange and close regional cooperation.

Countries in the region are working together in vulnerable geographical areas such as the maritime border region between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in the Sulu Sea. This has helped to disrupt terrorist supply lines and infiltration routes. Good intelligence exchange and concerted action has also allowed the JI network to be disrupted, potential attacks thwarted and key personalities arrested.

But the work is not over. As the terrorists disperse throughout the region, regrouping in various countries and re-strategising to avoid detection and capture, intelligence and security agencies need to continually stay one step ahead in intelligence sharing as well as in gathering, investigating and following up on leads.

Importance of collaboration

More than ever, in today's complex security landscape, our armed forces and intelligence professionals need to cooperate in the sharing of information, knowledge and expertise. This is crucial for a collective understanding of the challenges faced, and to enable relevant and coordinated responses by the stakeholders.

No state is immune from transnational security threats such as terrorism, piracy or natural disasters. Neither is any state able to tackle such complex challenges on its own. Collaboration at the policy-making level must be complemented by operational-level dialogues and exchanges.

Your presence at this conference provides an excellent forum for discussing common intelligence challenges and opportunities, and sharing different perspectives and experiences. By helping to build understanding and formalise operational and information sharing processes, such conferences lay the foundation for our countries and armed forces to work together in response to any future crises.

Conclusion

The Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference is an avenue for senior intelligence practitioners to come together to better understand one another and to build the trust and mutual respect that are important for collaboration in addressing complex security issues. Fostering trust and mutual understanding takes time, and I hope that your exchanges over

the next few days will carry on even after you depart for home.

As you share your views and perspectives at the various sessions that have been planned, I hope you will be frank and open with one another. I wish you all a rewarding and fruitful conference and may you take back with you useful insights, good friendships and fond memories of Singapore.

It is my pleasure to now declare open the 2nd Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference.

Thank you very much.