

Agenda Item 4: Contribution of the Armed Forces in Response to Traditional and Non-Traditional Security Challenges (Australia)

Thank you co-chairs.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the contribution that regional armed forces can make in response to traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

At the recent Shangri La Dialogue, Australia's Minister for Defence, Senator David Johnston, emphasised the collective interest that all countries have in maintaining peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.

- It is from this perspective that I would like to approach the following discussion.

Whether referring to traditional security challenges, such as territorial disputes, or non-traditional security challenges, such as natural disasters, our region's security is a collective good.

- Our economic interdependence means that we share a common interest in maintaining peace and stability in our region.
- This interdependence also means that threats to one country's stability or prosperity will most likely reverberate around the rest of the region.

Therefore, I would like to frame this discussion in collective terms.

- In other words, what can armed forces do to enhance the resilience of the region as a whole in response to traditional and non-traditional security challenges?

I propose three particular approaches that regional militaries can adopt. We can:

- Demonstrate transparency;
- Engage in dialogue and practical cooperation; and
- Play an active part in the regional security architecture.

Transparency

Our shared security and prosperity are best served when all countries, Australia included, are open and transparent about their interests in the region.

The Indo-Pacific is home to some of the world's most vibrant economies and accounts for an increasing proportion of global defence expenditure.

- With their growing prosperity, nations are pursuing military modernization programs and acquiring new defence capabilities.
- Military modernization is often a natural consequence of economic growth. In turn it creates a strong imperative for strategic transparency.

The region also faces the most traditional of security challenges, namely, the need to peacefully manage a number of complex and long-running territorial and maritime disputes.

- There is a risk that miscalculation or misunderstanding could escalate these disputes.

Strategic transparency is therefore vital in developing mutual understanding between our armed forces.

- We communicate our interests and intentions so there is no misunderstanding about our actions and what they mean for others in the region.
- Transparency helps to mitigate uncertainty and manage tensions surrounding some of these territorial disputes.

For Australia's part, we seek to contribute to greater transparency in the region through the publication of our Defence White Papers.

Defence White Papers are the Australian Government's most important publicly-stated guidance about Australia's long-term defence strategy and capability.

Australia is in the process of developing a new Defence White Paper.

- This White Paper will provide a costed plan to achieve Australia's defence objectives and an affordable Australian Defence Force structure.

The Defence White Paper will also take stock of the long-term opportunities and challenges for Australia's defence and security needs.

- It will clearly and transparently articulate how Australia will play its part as a committed partner in the region's security.

The adoption of an open and transparent approach by regional militaries in sharing their strategic outlook will support stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Dialogue and Practical Cooperation

Mutual understanding at the strategic level must also be reinforced by practical cooperation at the working level.

Dialogue and practical engagement will enhance the ability of our armed forces to operate together in response to traditional and non-traditional security challenges.

- The defining characteristic of many of these challenges is that their scope and scale means they cannot be addressed by any one military in isolation.

Recent events have demonstrated what we can achieve when regional militaries work together, while highlighting there is room for further improvement.

- This is particularly evident in relation to search and rescue operation for Malaysian Airlines flight MH 370 and the international relief efforts following Typhoon Haiyan.
- Further afield, we see regional navies supporting multinational efforts to combat piracy in and around the Gulf of Aden.
- Many ASEAN Regional Forum members present here have made significant contributions to these regional and international responses.

We have a shared and enduring interest in building interoperability between our armed forces.

- Natural disasters in particular are likely to remain a pressing non-traditional security challenges for the region.

Building the ability of the regional militaries to operate together takes time and effort, but the rewards are significant.

- The development of comprehensive personal, professional and organization links between armed forces is a critical part of the process.
- Greater familiarity and understanding between regional armed forces will allow us to act together promptly and effectively when the situation demands.

Australia recognizes the importance of building deep and lasting links within the region.

- We have invested heavily in supporting the capacity of militaries in South East Asia and the Pacific through our Defence Cooperation Program.
- This program includes education, training, officer exchanges and exercises.

The experience gained by the Australian Defence Force from these activities will enhance our ability to work with other armed forces in the region.

- We will be better placed to contribute to regional efforts to address security challenges.

Regional Security Architecture

Finally, the region's armed forces should seek to constructively engage with regional security architecture.

- Multilateral defence cooperation is critical to meet non-traditional security challenges and to help manage complex regional security issues.

Australia is a strong and active supporter of the region's evolving security architecture.

- We value the role played by multilateral security frameworks in building region-wide habits of dialogue and cooperation.
- We are committed to continuing our active participation within the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).

Central to the success of these fora is ASEAN, the region's longest standing multilateral political and economic organization.

- Australia has a long history of cooperation with ASEAN and 2014 is the 40th anniversary of our becoming an ASEAN dialogue partner.

Both the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ADMM-Plus offer valuable opportunities for regional militaries to contribute to confidence building activities.

- The ASEAN Regional Forum is well positioned due to its broad and inclusive membership and its unique capacity to foster civil-military cooperation.

The increasing focus of regional multilateral security frameworks on practical military cooperation is another encouraging development.

- This is a positive step will enhance mutual understanding and common approaches to addressing security challenges.

The progress achieved under the ADMM-Plus framework is particularly notable.

- The six ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups demonstrate the breadth of multilateral defence cooperation in the region and span a diverse range of non-traditional security issues.

- The increasing familiarity among ADMM-Plus members was demonstrated in the three field training exercises conducted last year.
- These exercises were unique opportunities as many ADMM-Plus members had not exercised together previously.

Australia welcomes the recent and successful transition of ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group co-chairs.

- We are pleased to be the new co-chairs, together with Singapore, of the Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism.
- We seek to build on the momentum achieved by the previous co-chairs in further advancing regional cooperation on counter terrorism.

The success of multilateral security frameworks in fostering practical military cooperation is ultimately dependent on the commitment of their members, on the armed forces involved.

- Progress requires times, resources and a broad consensus among members as to their objectives.

Even so, their potential contribution to addressing security challenges and enhancing peace and stability within the Indo-Pacific mean the investment is worthwhile.

Thank you.