

Featured *MSP Perspectives*:



MSP Perspectives:

Sustaining ASEAN-China Confidence-Building Measures in the South China Sea
— p. 4

Naval Development and Policy:

US Navy destroyer sails near disputed islands in South China Sea
— p. 5

Maritime Safety and Security:

Singapore, China eye inaugural Asean-China maritime exercise
— p. 7

Shipping, Ports, and the Maritime Economy:

Study: 71% of new ships comply with IMO's 2025 EEDI requirements
— p. 9

Table of Contents

MSP PERSPECTIVES	4
Sustaining ASEAN-China Confidence-Building Measures in the South China Sea	4
NAVAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY	5
US Navy destroyer sails near disputed islands in South China Sea	5
Australia to fit warships with anti-missile defense systems	5
Submarine-Launched Variant of China's YJ-18 Supersonic Anti-Ship Missile Emerges	5
India's only nuclear submarine damaged in accident	5
US, PH Marines launch KAMANDAG	5
Collins subs taken off Defence shame file	6
Australia's Amphibious Force Nearing Full Operational Capability	6
Canada deploys Victoria-class HMCS Chicoutimi submarine to Asia	6
GSDF security, missile units to be deployed on Miyakojima island to strengthen defenses in southwest	6
S. Korean Navy seeks aviation command, new task fleet	6
Navy to deploy aircraft, warships to check China along critical sea lines	6
355-Ship Navy Could Take More Than Three Decades to Build, Acting Navy Under Secretary Says	6
Navy puts three carrier strike groups in 7th Fleet waters	6
Military getting new assets	6
Japanese 'marines' eyed for Okinawa mission	6
MARITIME SAFETY AND SECURITY	7
Singapore, China eye inaugural Asean-China maritime exercise	7
Parliament: Vessels in fatal collisions in Singapore waters were detected, and not deemed potential security threats	7
M'sia to assume chairmanship of Aids to Navigation Fund next year	7
Maritime Security Task Force monitors vessels found to have 'malignant intent': Ng Eng Hen	7
Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia sign MOU for Joint Hydrographic Survey	7
Two collisions involving naval vessels on same day: Navy Command	8
Navy officials: Using a ship's ID in high-traffic areas poses no increased threat to security	8
Three countries launch joint trilateral air patrol	8
Indian Navy aircraft arrives in Philippines to search for missing sailors	8
At Least 317 Foreign Fishing Vessels Destroyed Under Jokowi's Direction	8
Pentagon chief seeks continued maritime cooperation with ASEAN	8
Defence ministers' meeting closes with communications infrastructure launch	8
With Exercise Sambandh, India to showcase naval supremacy in Indian Ocean region	8
India shuns maritime security meet in Pakistan	8
Japan to bolster Philippine maritime security with TC-90 aircraft	8
SHIPPING, PORTS, AND THE MARITIME ECONOMY	9
Study: 71% of new ships comply with IMO's 2025 EEDI requirements	9
PH maritime industry faces many challenges in 2017, beyond	9
Mahjong, shopping and karaoke – why the cruise experience is drawing Chinese tourists	9
Oil traders hoard less on ships near Singapore as Market flips	9
S. Korea maintains top spot in global shipbuilding orders in Sept.	9
Tuas mega port will boost Singapore as a maritime hub: PM Lee Hsien Loong	10
Govt to add two new maritime highway routes	10
China marries maritime ambitions with environmental protection	10
IEA sees Southeast Asia oil demand growing until at least 2040	10
Myanmar to reap greater rewards in deep-sea port development project	10
Shipping companies may adopt LNG as fuel faster than expected on carbon regulations: BSM	10
Investment in larger ships persists, but owners shrink in unprofitable container market: UN Report	10
Ship operating costs are set to increase for 2017 and 2018	10
MPA partners Shell in clean fuels tech, automation and port digitalisation	10
China to ban high-sulfur diesel used by tractors, ships from November 1	10

NOTES

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RSISMSP@ntu.edu.sg

Maritime Security Programme, RSIS

Editorial Team

Rajni Nayanthara Gamage
Philipp Martin Dingeldey
Octa Purnama Sari
Collin Koh

Sustaining ASEAN-China Confidence-Building Measures in the South China Sea



Author

Collin Koh

Research Fellow, Maritime Security Programme

After earlier adopting the framework on the proposed Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea in Manila, ASEAN and China attained yet another milestone this month. On the side-lines of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting in the Philippines, they agreed to aim for an inaugural joint maritime exercise between their navies next year. However, the specifics have yet to be tied down. "We'll work out the details. See the logistics... and find a suitable area where ASEAN and China navies can exercise together," Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen said.

But the idea of having an ASEAN-China joint exercise is not new. As part of the "early harvest" projects listed in the Chairman's Statement of the 17th ASEAN-China Summit in November 2014, a table-top search-and-rescue exercise was proposed, along with two hotline mechanisms – one between foreign ministries on maritime emergencies, and another between search-and-rescue agencies.

Subsequently, Beijing called for the exercise to be held, first in October 2015 and then in May 2016 amidst rising tensions in the South China Sea. While there was common interest expressed by ASEAN member states on that last occasion, there was no agreement reached – attributed to the lack of trust – even though the Philippines and Vietnam reportedly "simply acknowledged it". In June this year, it was revealed that ASEAN and China are exploring this joint exercise – in no small part facilitated by easing of tensions in the South China Sea.

Having long backed the initiative, as the incoming ASEAN chair in 2018 Singapore would do its utmost to bring the exercise from drawing board to actuality. However, one should also be realistic in tempering expectations of such an initiative.

Given the diversity of participating navies, with their varying capabilities and disparate levels of interoperability with each other, this exercise would most plausibly be pitched to the lowest common denominator acceptable to all. Moreover, China is a relatively new player where it comes bilateral training and exercise engagements with ASEAN militaries. Suffice to say, the joint ASEAN-China exercise builds on Beijing's nascent slate of maritime exercises with some of these countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

Based on past observed patterns of such regional engagements, this joint ASEAN-China exercise would therefore be modest in scope, touching on less

sensitive functional areas like search-and-rescue, and information sharing. It could possibly incorporate the Code of Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) to avoid and mitigate the risks of encounters between forces operating in the South China Sea – a theme that was reiterated during the 19th China-ASEAN Summit in September 2016, when China and ASEAN agreed to adopt the mechanism with respect to the disputed waters.

Clearly, this exercise could be more symbolic than anything else. Given earlier endorsement of the CoC Framework, support for this initiative should therefore not come across as surprising. It culminates from longstanding confidence-building efforts and made possible only by the easing of political atmosphere that was especially acrimonious amidst the earlier spike in South China Sea tensions.

That said, while symbolic as it might be, this joint exercise would signify the common desire of ASEAN and China to ensure peace and stability in the region. It could be a potential precursor to more institutionalized, substantial forms of cooperation between those navies, operationalizing areas such as CUES implementation on a broader scale.

And where China is concerned, this joint exercise may mark the beginning of a more comprehensive relationship with ASEAN and its member states – beyond one that is characterized chiefly by diplomatic, economic and sociocultural interactions. It would also add to defence diplomacy efforts that have been maturing over time, in line with the growing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army, in particular the navy.

The bigger challenge, assuming this exercise does take off, is to sustain it in the long run instead of having it as a one-time project. This would hinge heavily on the collective efforts of both ASEAN and China to maintain a positive ambience in the South China Sea, and not allow resurgent tensions to derail it. Only then it is possible to pursue meaningful, expanded future training and exercise engagements designed to cope with evolving common security threats in the regional waters.

This commentary first appeared in the *South China Morning Post* (see [here](#)).



UNITED STATES | 10 OCTOBER | CNN

US Navy destroyer sails near disputed islands in South China Sea

A US Navy destroyer conducted a "freedom of navigation" operation near the disputed Parcel Islands in the South China Sea on Tuesday, two defense officials told CNN.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 2 OCTOBER | REUTERS

Australia to fit warships with anti-missile defense systems

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on Tuesday nine war ships set for construction in 2020 will be fitted with long-range anti-missile defense systems to counter the threat of rogue nations.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 2 OCTOBER | NAVY RECOGNITION

Submarine-Launched Variant of China's YJ-18 Supersonic Anti-Ship Missile Emerges

Pictures have emerged in China of a new submarine-launched variant of the YJ-18 supersonic anti-ship missile.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 3 OCTOBER | THE PRINT

India's only nuclear submarine damaged in accident

India's nuclear-powered submarine, INS Chakra, has suffered "some damage" in an accident and could require substantial repair work to get it back in shape.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES | 3 OCTOBER | UPDATE PHILIPPINES

US, PH Marines launch KAMANDAG

The United States Sailors and Marines under the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade together with Filipino counterparts launched the inaugural exercise KAMANDAG on October 2.

[Full Report](#)

Continue on page 6

Continued from page 5

AUSTRALIA | 4 OCTOBER | SBS

Collins subs taken off Defence shame file

The long-troubled Collins Class submarines have finally shed their "dud subs" tag.

[Full Report](#)

AUSTRALIA | 5 OCTOBER | USNI NEWS

Australia's Amphibious Force Nearing Full Operational Capability

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is nearing full operational capability of its amphibious force, after a six-year effort to turn an Army battalion into the heart of a joint-service expeditionary capability akin to the U.S. Marine Corps.

[Full Report](#)

CANADA | 6 OCTOBER | CBC NEWS

Canada deploys Victoria-class HMCS Chicoutimi submarine to Asia

For the first time ever, Canada has deployed a Victoria-class submarine on patrol to Asia.

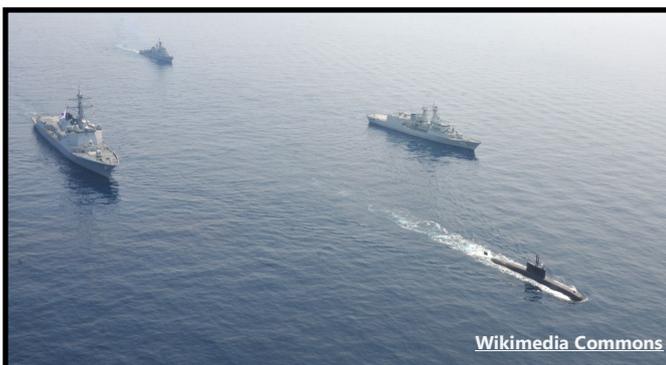
[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 8 OCTOBER | THE JAPAN TIMES

GSDF security, missile units to be deployed on Miyakojima island to strengthen defenses in southwest

The Defense Ministry plans to deploy security and missile units of the Ground Self-Defense Force on the island of Miyakojima in Okinawa Prefecture as part of efforts to strengthen the defense of remote islands in the southwest of the country, informed sources have said.

[Full Report](#)



SOUTH KOREA | 19 OCTOBER | YONHAP

S. Korean Navy seeks aviation command, new task fleet

South Korea's Navy said Thursday it plans to create an aviation command and a new task fleet in tandem with the military's push for "aggressive operations" in

response to North Korean provocations.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 25 OCTOBER | HINDUSTAN TIMES

Navy to deploy aircraft, warships to check China along critical sea lines

Navy chief Admiral Sunil Lanba on Tuesday gave his stamp of approval to a new deployment pattern that seeks to position mission-ready Indian warships and aircraft along critical sea lanes of communications and choke points.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 25 OCTOBER | USNI NEWS

355-Ship Navy Could Take More Than Three Decades to Build, Acting Navy Under Secretary Says

Chances are the Navy's leaders of a proposed 355-ship fleet have not even finished high school yet, according to Pentagon estimates.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 25 OCTOBER | NAVY TIMES

Navy puts three carrier strike groups in 7th Fleet waters

The Navy now has three aircraft carriers and their attendant aircraft and ships in the waters of 7th Fleet, the U.S. military's front line in the tensions between the United States and North Korea.

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 29 OCTOBER | THE STAR ONLINE

Military getting new assets

The armed forces will receive more than 20 new assets as announced in Budget 2018, says Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN | 31 OCTOBER | THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

Japanese 'marines' eyed for Okinawa mission

Japan will model a new amphibious combat force on the U.S. Marine Corps in March 2018 and may deploy part of it in Okinawa Prefecture.

[Full Report](#)



ASEAN-CHINA | 23 OCTOBER | THE STRAITS TIMES

Singapore, China eye inaugural Asean-China maritime exercise

Singapore and China on Monday (Oct 23) agreed to work closely to deepen ties between Asean and China, including planning for an inaugural Asean-China maritime exercise.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 2 OCTOBER | THE STRAITS TIMES

Parliament: Vessels in fatal collisions in Singapore waters were detected, and not deemed potential security threats

The vessels involved in two separate fatal collisions in the Singapore Strait had been detected and identified by Singapore's network of maritime sensors, but were not designated as potential threats to security, said Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen on Monday (Oct 2).

[Full Report](#)

MALAYSIA | 2 OCTOBER | NEW STRAITS TIMES

M'sia to assume chairmanship of Aids to Navigation Fund next year

Starting next year, Malaysia will head the management of the Aids to Navigation Fund, which was established to finance navigation safety operations in the Straits of Melaka and Singapore.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 3 OCTOBER | CHANNEL NEWSASIA

Maritime Security Task Force monitors vessels found to have 'malignant intent': Ng Eng Hen

The Maritime Security Task Force (MSTF) closely monitors and could even board vessels that are found to have ill-intent towards Singapore, Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen said in Parliament on Monday (Oct 2).

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA-MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE | 3 OCTOBER | MARITIME LOGISTICS PROFESSIONAL

Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia sign MOU for Joint Hydrographic Survey

To demonstrate multilateral cooperation between littoral states and stakeholders to improve navigational safety in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS), Phase Two of a Joint Hydrographic Survey was formally launched via a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed today at the 10th Co-operation Forum held from 2nd to 3rd October 2017 at Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

[Full Report](#)

Continue on page 8



TAIWAN | 3 OCTOBER | FOCUS TAIWAN

Two collisions involving naval vessels on same day: Navy Command

Two collisions involving naval vessels occurred on the same day Tuesday as two Keelung (Kidd)-class destroyers were hit by commercial vessels on opposite sides of the island, Navy Command reported that day.

[Full Report](#)

UNITED STATES | 10 OCTOBER | NAVY TIMES

Navy officials: Using a ship's ID in high-traffic areas poses no increased threat to security

Navy officials aren't worried about ship enthusiasts' online speculation on the location of the Navy's combatant ships.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA-MALAYSIA-THE PHILIPPINES | 12 OCTOBER | ANTARA NEWS

Three countries launch joint trilateral air patrol

A Trilateral Air Patrol (TAP) between Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines was launched at the Subang Air Base, Malaysia, on Wednesday.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 16 OCTOBER | THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Indian Navy aircraft arrives in Philippines to search for missing sailors

An Indian Navy aircraft was dispatched to assist in search and rescue operations for the 10 missing sailors of MV Emerald Star which sank near the Philippines coast on October 13.

[Full Report](#)

INDONESIA | 19 OCTOBER | THE JAKARTA GLOBE

At Least 317 Foreign Fishing Vessels Destroyed Under Jokowi's Direction

Indonesia has destroyed at least 317 boats under

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's administration in a bid to protect the country's exclusive economic zone from foreign fishing vessels, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti said on Wednesday (18/10).

[Full Report](#)

ASEAN-UNITED STATES | 24 OCTOBER | THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Pentagon chief seeks continued maritime cooperation with ASEAN

US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and his ASEAN counterparts discussed views on regional security during informal meetings in Clark, Pampanga.

[Full Report](#)

ASEAN | 25 OCTOBER | BORNEO BULLETIN

Defence ministers' meeting closes with communications infrastructure launch

THE Phase I of the Asean Direct Communications Infrastructure was launched yesterday following the conclusion of the 4th Asean Defence Ministers' Meeting – Plus (ADMM-Plus) meeting at the Asean Convention Centre in Clark, Pampanga, Philippines.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 25 OCTOBER | THE PRINT

With Exercise Sambandh, India to showcase naval supremacy in Indian Ocean region

Over the next few days, India is seeking to showcase its supremacy over the Indian Ocean region through a naval exercise that will see participation from officers of 10 nations – stretching from Oman in the west to Malaysia in the east.

[Full Report](#)

INDIA | 27 OCTOBER | THE TIMES OF INDIA

India shuns maritime security meet in Pakistan

The government this week pulled out of a multilateral Asian coast guard event in Islamabad in a sign that it remains chary of any engagement with Pakistan.

[Full Report](#)

JAPAN-THE PHILIPPINES | 30 OCTOBER | DEFENSE NEWS

Japan to bolster Philippine maritime security with TC-90 aircraft

Japan says it will donate five turboprop training aircraft to the Philippines for use in the maritime patrol role, boosting the Southeast Asian nation's ability to carry out maritime security operations.

[Full Report](#)



WORLD | 2 OCTOBER | MARINE INSIGHT

Study: 71% of new ships comply with IMO's 2025 EEDI requirements

Almost three-quarters (71%) of all new containerships, which emit around a quarter of global ship CO2 emissions, already comply with the post-2025 requirements of the IMO's Energy Efficiency Design Index (EEDI), a new study reveals.

[Full Report](#)

THE PHILIPPINES | 7 OCTOBER | MANILA TIMES

PH maritime industry faces many challenges in 2017, beyond

Although the Philippine maritime industry has a lot of potential for growth, stakeholders agree that its biggest challenges lie in the people's mindsets, the way they perform their duties, in infrastructure, and the policies that regulate activities within the industry.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 8 OCTOBER | SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

Mahjong, shopping and karaoke – why the cruise experience is drawing Chinese tourists

Major cruise lines have sharpened their focus on the mainland market, catering towards Chinese tastes in an effort to tap the world's second largest cruise market in terms of passenger numbers.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 9 OCTOBER | BLOOMBERG

Oil traders hoard less on ships near Singapore as Market flips

The volume of supplies held on tankers in the Strait of Malacca in September dropped to the lowest level since August 2016, according to data from cargo-tracking and intelligence company Kpler.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTH KOREA | 11 OCTOBER | YONHAP NEWS

S. Korea maintains top spot in global shipbuilding orders in Sept.

South Korean shipyards maintained the No. 1 position in new orders worldwide in September, while their order backlog also rose for the first time in 23 months, industry data showed.

[Full Report](#)

Continue on page 10

SINGAPORE | 16 OCTOBER | THE STRAITS TIMES

Tuas mega port will boost Singapore as a maritime hub: PM Lee Hsien Loong

While Singapore has enjoyed much success as a maritime hub, it cannot rest on its laurels, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a Facebook post on Monday (Oct 16).

[Full Report](#)



INDONESIA | 18 OCTOBER | THE JAKARTA POST

Govt to add two new maritime highway routes

The government plans to open next year two new routes in its maritime highway program, the Transportation Ministry's inspector general, Wahju Satrio Utomo, has said.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 23 OCTOBER | CHINA DIALOGUE

China marries maritime ambitions with environmental protection

Much ink has been spilled of late about China's expanding maritime ambitions from the announcement of new projects along the Maritime Silk Road to news of Chinese icebreakers operating in the Arctic.

[Full Report](#)

SOUTHEAST ASIA | 24 OCTOBER | REUTERS

IEA sees Southeast Asia oil demand growing until at least 2040

Southeast Asian demand for oil will keep growing until at least 2040 as emerging nations there rely on the fossil fuel to transport their rapidly growing populations, ship goods and make plastics.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA-MYANMAR | 25 OCTOBER | MIZZIMA

Myanmar to reap greater rewards in deep-sea port development project

Myanmar is set to receive a greater amount of the

profit-sharing in a \$7.2 billion deep-sea port development project in the town of Kyaukphyu in western Rakhine state, though negotiations with the main Chinese investor are ongoing, RFA reported on 24 October quoting a commerce ministry official.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 26 OCTOBER | REUTERS

Shipping companies may adopt LNG as fuel faster than expected on carbon regulations: BSM

The shipping industry may adopt liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a fuel faster than expected because of stricter environmental regulations that target carbon dioxide emission, according to an executive at maritime agency Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM).

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 26 OCTOBER | XINHUA

Investment in larger ships persists, but owners shrink in unprofitable container market: UN Report

The world's commercial shipping fleet grew by 3.2 percent, to reach 1.86 billion dead-weight tons in early 2017, but a persistent imbalance between supply and demand is keeping freight rates and earnings low in most segments.

[Full Report](#)

WORLD | 26 OCTOBER | MOORE STEPHENS

Ship operating costs are set to increase for 2017 and 2018

Vessel operating costs are expected to rise in both 2017 and 2018, according to our latest survey. Repairs & maintenance and spares are the cost categories which are likely to increase most significantly in each of the two years.

[Full Report](#)

SINGAPORE | 31 OCTOBER | BUSINESS TIMES

MPA partners Shell in clean fuels tech, automation and port digitalisation

Cooperation in research and development, and the test-bedding of projects in clean fuel technologies, automation and digitalisation in Singapore's maritime industry is set to get a boost.

[Full Report](#)

CHINA | 31 OCTOBER | REUTERS

China to ban high-sulfur diesel used by tractors, ships from November 1

China said it would stop domestic sales of diesel with sulfur content higher than 10 parts per millions (ppm), typically used by tractors and ships, from Nov. 1, in its latest effort to clean up the nation's air.

[Full Report](#)