

The Report on the IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE 23rd Asia Security Summit, Singapore, 29-31, May, 2026

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Introduction

This report introduces with succinct analysis the Sessions of the **IISS SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE 23rd Asia Security Summit, Singapore (SLD, 2026)**, which, the author expected, closely relate to the law enforcement at sea. This is because the author has been serving as a member of *the Compass Voice*, External Expert Network of the Japan Coast Guard.

1. THIRD PLENARY SESSION ASIA'S MARITIME SECURITY DISORDER

(1) While the Session title is "Asia's Maritime Security," the three speakers came from Australia, Qatar, and France. There were no speakers from South Asia and East Asia countries. Maybe for this reason, the speakers from Qatar and France explained how the Asia's maritime security concerns their countries.

Australian speaker gave an excellent overview of the current situation of Asia's maritime security from Australian, regional, and global perspectives, with taking up the relevant incidents which have occurred not only in the Indo-Pacific region but also in other regions of the world. It is meaningful to introduce the presentation of the Australian speaker first, and then, based upon the introduction, to add interesting points that other two speakers raised.

(2) Australian speaker emphasized the current highly tense situation which appeared first after World War II. The gist of his presentation is as follows.

The following various facts have caused such tense situation: first, serious incidents of destruction of undersea infrastructure which has taken place to Australia, the Pacific Island States, Indo-Pacific region, and in Europe, too; second, violence and attacks at sea by militia; third, the recent shadow fleet problem, illegal fishing and damage to the marine environment; fourth, infringement upon the freedom of navigation in the important sea

routes.

As to the characteristics of these facts, they demonstrate not only the disorder against Asia's maritime "security" in a strict sense, but also the growth of the so-called "gray zone" situation. Furthermore, in addition to the military risk, economic and environmental security, too, has been at risk.

In the South China Sea, they have seen further militarization and enhancement of the coast guard operation. Australia and Indo-Pacific nations have strengthened defence force and increased defence budget. Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is developed.

To cope with such tense situation and maintain the cooperation for maritime security, he stressed the importance of the legal framework and law enforcement based upon, mainly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Cooperation among the powerful and small States are indispensable, as maritime security, which is connecting regions and world, is "indivisible."

(3) Qatari speaker, after emphasizing that the issue of Asia's maritime security influences the Gulf region, explained a wide meaning of maritime security, which includes the issues of the security, economic disruption and human security.

Particularly, for the States of the Gulf region, to ensure the oil trade, the freedom of navigation for that purpose, is so important. The freedom navigation is really a basis for the world trade of oil, energy and food, so as to be the national interests of Qatar and those of other States in the Gulf region, and it is also a shared international interest.

To maintain maritime security, military measures alone are not enough, and the following three factors are indispensable: first, dialogue and diplomatic negotiation for the de-escalation to which Qatar has been contributing; second, respect for international law, mainly the UNCLOS, that guarantees the freedom of navigation and the protection of civilians; third, international and regional cooperation for securing the international water ways under Article 44 of the UNCLOS, such as those in the Hormuz Strait and those in the Indo-Pacific region.

To achieve the goals that these three factors indicate, international allies for that purpose is critically important.

(4) French Speaker stressed, for the purpose of the maritime security, the common values of sovereignty and liberty, and importance of coalition to protect and realize these values that are based upon law, including UNCLOS. According to the speaker, maritime security encompasses as its geographical coverage, the regions on the globe, such as Europe, the Indo-Pacific region, and the East China Sea, and as a matter of substance, it consists of

various issues, such as those relating to sovereignty and liberty.

The speaker pointed out the issues, such as shadow fleet, vulnerability of underwater cables, piracy, illegal trafficking, marine pollution, IUU fishing, climate change.

All States have interests in Asia's maritime security, and as a result, coalition among them is indispensable. France has responsibility for its maintenance.

(5) Thus, it was suggested that, on the one hand, geographically, Asia's maritime security covers not solely the Indo-Pacific region, and that on the other hand, substantially, it contains various issues that are not limited to the issues of security in a strict sense. To maintain and protect Asia's maritime security, the importance of international law was emphasized. International and regional cooperation for that purpose were strongly proposed in this Session, but their concrete methods were not necessarily discussed. Enhancement of military capability and increase of military budget were introduced.

(6) In the Q & A section, many audiences endorsed the importance of the protection of undersea infrastructure, and the protection of the navigation of international straits. In addition, particularly to French speaker, possible NATO's involvement in Asia's maritime security was questioned. Such a question is totally understandable, as SLD 26 and this Session are the opportunity for discussing Asia's maritime security.

3. SIMULTANEOUS SPECIAL SESSIONS

Session 2: ENHANCING LITTORAL SECURITY IN ASIA

(1) From five countries, Indonesia, USA, China, Greece, UK, speakers made a short presentation. While the Session title is "Enhancing Littoral Security in Asia," three of speakers among five came from Europe and USA.

In their presentations, there were several common points, and the following part will deal with them, rather than introducing the six presentations by each.

(2) While there is some difference depending on each country, the speakers emphasized that the coastlines and coastal security have various significance including matters not confined to sovereignty and territorial integrity of coastal States. Economic factors of coastal community were pointed out, such as fishing. In this regard, the stakeholders in relation to littoral security are not only States but also non-State actors.

As coastlines and coastal security relate to various and diverse factors, challenges against coastal security are caused also by various and diverse incidents: piracy, infringement upon

the freedom of navigation, illegal fishing, harmful acts against undersea infrastructure, maritime pollution, sea level rise, etc.

Solely safeguarding of the coastlines, in a strict sense, is not enough to protect and enhance littoral security which composes various factors with different nature. In addition to combatting the challenges, technology development, such as MDA, enhancement of defence capacity are required.

International and regional cooperation, joint exercises, information sharing, and data protection are also indispensable.

These are for protecting the rule-based maritime order whose center is UNCLOS.

(3) The strangest thing in this Session's discussion is, no speakers mentioned innocent passage of foreign vessels that may cause most serious tension between coastal States, and foreign and flag States. The challenges that the speakers pointed out are to be considered non-innocent passage of foreign vessels in territorial sea. Coastal States should combat non-innocent passage of foreign vessels to protect their littoral security. Plural speakers mentioned the freedom of navigation, while this Session dealt with littoral security by assuming the vicinity of sea areas. States enjoy the freedom of navigation in high seas and exclusive economic zones, not in territorial sea and contiguous zones.

They touched upon some measures to combat the challenges against littoral security, and gray zone issues. However, no speakers touched upon law enforcement, that should be every-day operation to maintain and protect the order, safety, and littoral security of coastal States.

Judging from the Session title, relationship to law enforcement was most strongly expected among all the Session of SLD 26. However, it was not the case.

(4) In the Q & A section, audiences suggested possible conflicts between sovereignty of coastal States and international and regional cooperation, and conflicts between sovereignty and MDA operation. While there would not be argument against significance of international and regional cooperation and allies for the purpose of littoral security, it is totally understandable that coastal States themselves should maintain their own discretion and sovereignty as to what measures should be taken for their littoral security. In this sense, such suggestion is totally understandable.

4. SIXTH PLENARY SESSION

MANAGING REGIONAL TENSIONS AMID GLOBAL COMPETITION

(1) This Session had three speakers who came from Japan, the Netherlands, and Malaysia. The speakers from the Netherlands and Malaysia demonstrated very interesting relationship between a sort of “abuse” of international law by great powers and tense situation to security. The gist of the logic is as follows.

(2) Regional tensions are interconnected. Every country in the world relies on a secure geopolitical environment to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The causes of the tense situations are not only military hostility but also damage to economy by disruption of sea lanes.

International law guarantees sovereignty and territorial integrity. It applies equally to all nations, regardless of size and power. The foundation of peace are trust, reliability and mutual respect. However, they are disregarded and selective interpretation of international law brings *non-universality* of international law. Stronger powers selectively interpret international law.

Middle-sized and smaller powers *by coming together* have great influence and reduce the risk of escalation. Collectively they have moral legitimacy and responsibility not to defend the rule-based order but also to strengthen and restore credibility to international institutions, such as the United Nations.

Dutch speaker and Malaysian speaker added practical examples from a perspective of their countries, to elaborate upon their explanations of their line of logic.

(3) With enough understanding of the Session title, “Managing Regional Tensions and Global Competition,” Dutch speaker and Malaysian speaker gave the regional tensions in Europe and the South China Sea. They confirmed the importance of international law and explained the function of international law for which the middle-size and smaller counties can contribute to. This is their perspectives relating to global common interests and peace beyond competition.

(4) In the Q & A section, audiences asked questions concerning possible collaboration between NATO and Japan and Korea, double standard and selective interpretation of international law, and possible restoration of respect for and enforcement of international law.

5. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

The main theme of SLD is “Asia Security Challenges” The Home Page of the SDL begins

with the following sentence: “The IISS Shangri-La Dialogue is a unique platform for debate among government ministers and senior officials, as well as business leaders and security experts, on Asia’s developing security (<https://www.iiss.org/ja-JP/events/iiss-shangri-la-dialogue/>).” Regarding the speakers for the Sessions that this Report touched upon, they did not enough reflect “Asia” and “an Asian perspective.” The speakers who came from non-Asian regions explained that Asia’s maritime security relates to and concerns the regions of their own.

Among the Sessions that this Report dealt with the common feature is that the speakers emphasized various factors and incidents are causes of tense situations in Asia’s maritime security. In addition to military hostile acts, even international and/domestic crimes, such as IUU fishing, maritime pollution, and illicit trafficking may contribute to creation of tense situations. In this regard, some speakers mentioned gray zone which exists between defence (military) situations and law enforcement situations.

To cope with such tense situations with multiple natures, not only military measures but also law enforcement measures should be taken. Particularly, for avoiding escalation, law enforcement measures, different from military ones have significant function. Some speakers pointed out the importance of de-escalation.

Many speakers introduced enhancement of defence force and increase of defence budget, and mentioned techniques for data collection, information gathering, and MDA. However, the speakers take up little law enforcement. As the very-day operation, law enforcement ensures the order, safety and maritime security of States.

As explained above, many speakers confirmed the importance of international law for maintaining and restoring peace. Little was heard about the law of armed conflict which regulates hostile acts. So, situations without armed conflicts were assumed, and importance of international law was frequently emphasized. All states’ law enforcement measures are taken in accordance with domestic laws and international law.

Considering these things, it is so difficult to understand the lack of law enforcement perspectives in SDL.