

# **Thailand's Contribution to the Regional Security**

## **By Captain Chusak Chupaitoon**

### **Introduction**

The 9/11 incident and the bombing at Bali on 12 October 2002 shook the world community and sharpened it with the awareness of the new form of terrorism which intimidate every region including Southeast Asia. As a member of the world community, Thailand has never ignored the existence of this threat. On the other hand, it has provided full cooperation and support to fight against terrorism under the framework of the U.N. resolution and with the belief that terrorism can be brought down through sincere cooperation from every country. Without such joint effort, it could swell into a major problem that would destabilize the world security as a whole. Lives and properties of the innocent people would then inevitably be put into great danger.

### **Thailand's Policy on Anti-terrorism**

After the 9/11 incidents at World Trade and Pentagon, there has been a wide speculation that terrorists would use oil tankers as floating bombs to attack major cities and towns that have important seaports or sink ships to disrupt navigational traffics in the world's major straits and channels. The Strait of Malacca is one of the their targets as it lies strategically between the Indian Ocean and South China Sea which the world's economic powers such as Japan, China, South Korea, etc. use as important sea route for oil transport from the Middle East. In addition, the United States of America uses the strait as an important route for force rotation from the Asia-Pacific to the Middle East.

The current world situation has no less facilitated the acts of terrorism in the Strait of Malacca and its vicinity because of its location, heavy traffics in the strait, piracy, local terrorist who know the area very well. Although the U.S. government successfully overthrew the Taliban government, many of the radical Afghanistan groups fled into other countries and continued to provide support to other terrorist

groups. U.S. war against Iraq in 2002 also created another surge of terrorist groups. At the same time more targets have been presumably added to on the list for terrorist attack. These are the U.S. places of interest and the countries that provide support to it.

At present, the Thai government has added more measures to eradicate the terrorist network. These include arresting leaders and key members of terrorist groups, destroying the hiding places, training schools and operating centers of terrorists, denying the use of Thailand as a route to third countries to trade illegal arms and drugs which are sources of finance to support terrorist operation. Over the years, the Thai government has contributed significantly to the effort to fight against terrorism such as the appointment of a committee to work on policy and solution on terrorism and establishment of an anti-terrorism and transnational crimes coordination center, the improvement of information exchange, the issuing of money laundering law, the signing of bilateral and multilateral agreements such as CSI to prevent terrorists from using containers to hide their weapons of mass destruction to the U.S., etc.

All these measures are in harmony with the National Security Policy from 2003-2006. Among these are

- to prevent and suppress all forms of terrorism whose focus is given on the root of the problem, and eradication of supporters
- to prepare readiness to effectively meet with challenges by integrating forces concerned
- to coordinate plans with the private sector for national mobilization
- to develop the network with allies for anti-terrorism and transnational crimes whose focus is given on Southeast Asia, both on bilateral and multilateral bases and also
- to improve information exchange and
- to establish communications channels among the allies
- to improve the existing law concerned.

In addition to the National Security Policy 2003-2006, the National Security Council has issued a policy on maritime security 2005-2009 as an add-on to suppress

maritime terrorism. The said policy aims to speed up prevention and suppression of terrorism, transnational crimes, piracy, illegal arms trade, human trafficking, abuse of maritime resource and other illegal activities through multilateral cooperation with inter-agencies, both private and government sectors, and also with other countries. This policy also encourages the development of Thailand Maritime Enforcement and Coordination Center to have more capabilities to protect the national interest at sea and to conduct feasibility study to establish a Coast Guard at a more appropriate level. In the past, Thailand Maritime Enforcement and Coordination Center has limitation as it acts only as a coordinating agency at the policy level under the supervision of the Royal Thai Navy. With the changing maritime environment, especially the maritime terrorism, the center has more assignments and responsibilities. At present, the National Security Council together with the Royal Thai Navy and other governmental agencies concerned are working on the improvement of the center to make it more effective as well as on the possibility of creating a new Coast Guard to protect the vital interests at sea like many of those in many other countries.

### **The Royal Thai Navy and its Prevention of Maritime Terrorism**

Apart from its primary mission to defend the country from external threats at sea, the Royal Thai Navy has the duty to protect the national interests at sea in close conjunction with the Marine Police, Customs Department and Harbor Department. The Royal Thai Navy by the Maritime Enforcement Coordination Center acts as coordinating agency to work with various government agencies concerned.

The Royal Thai Navy divides the area into three zones for taking responsibility. Zone One under the responsibility of First Naval Area Command, located in Sattahip, is in charge of the upper part of the Gulf of Thailand. Zone Two under the responsibility of Second Naval Area Command, located in Songkhla Province, is in charge of the lower part of the Gulf of Thailand. Zone Three under the responsibility of Third Naval Area Command, located in Phuket Province, is in charge of the Andaman Sea. Ships and aircraft have been assigned to each zone for patrol in the territorial waters and EEZ on a regular basis. They are deployed to monitor and suppress illegal activities at sea such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, transport of

illegal labor force and illegal immigrants. They are also used to prevent any terrorists from attacking its targets located in the vicinity of the sea such as resorts, airports, harbors and platform facilities at sea, etc.

The Strait of Malacca is surrounded by the Indonesian island of Sumatra, West Malaysia and Singapore. Taking these geographical features into consideration, the strait apparently falls under the jurisdiction of the littoral states. Joint patrol in the Strait of Malacca then should be the matter of these countries. As Thailand is located further north of the strait, it can be said that Thailand is situated at the mouth of the strait. For this reason, Thailand has contributed to the joint effort of the said countries through its regular patrol in the territorial waters and its EEZ which help prevent and suppress maritime terrorism whose targets lie in the Strait of Malacca. Thailand will continue to deploy ships from Naval Area Command Two and Naval Area Command Three to prevent terrorism in the territorial waters and its EEZ which could threaten the Strait of Malacca and natural gas platform facilities in the area without this contribution.

In addition, the Royal Thai Navy has combined its efforts with other governmental agencies, civil servants and military, by means of workshops and scenario exercise for exchange of knowledge to promote working relationship for future operability, and also to conduct bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with allies including neighboring countries. Each year, the Royal Thai Navy sends officers to participate in seminars, conferences and training overseas with the hope when they return they will help develop the navy with the knowledge which they have acquired.

## Conclusion

To confront with the network of terrorism throughout the world at present, all countries must join hands to destroy the terrorists' hiding places, their financial resources and equipment. Information exchange is therefore considered an important key for the success of our fighting against terrorism among agencies at the national and international levels.

Last but not event the least, I wish to conclude my presentation by stressing that for us to fight against the terrorist network we must fortify ourselves by building our strong network to fight their network.

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