



# SAFE AND SECURE SEAS

## 9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE

7 May 2025



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**REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE NAVY**

**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**07 MAY 2025**

*9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL MARITIME  
SECURITY CONFERENCE*



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# INTRODUCTION



The Heads of delegations, which consists of Navy Chiefs, Director Generals of Coast Guards, and Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies and their representatives, who attended the 9th IMSC.

The present global world order is increasingly under strain from great power contestation, exacerbating political uncertainty and national security concerns. Amidst these developments, regional geopolitical competition, unilateral responses to competing maritime interests and challenges to good order at sea continue to be of concern to regional maritime stakeholders. These challenges include the damaging effect of various maritime security threats such as piracy armed robbery and other maritime crimes perpetrated by non-state actors in this region and beyond, and some new and growing problems emerging from new technologies and domains such as the undersea environment and in the cyber realm.

In such an environment, safeguarding seamless maritime connectivity and navigation becomes ever more vital to Southeast Asia's sustained development and security. There is therefore growing imperative to preserve a rules-based maritime order by continually promoting an inclusive maritime region founded upon international rules and norms. To effectively create avenues for collaboration and enhancing mutual understanding, inclusive dialogue between all maritime domain stakeholders to facilitate better understanding of current geopolitical developments remains crucial.



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## CHAPTER

1

## KEYNOTE ADDRESS

6 May 2025, 19:15

SPEAKER

**Mr. Zaqy Mohamad**

Senior Minister of State for Defence





# KEYNOTE ADDRESS

## Introduction

Welcome to the 9th International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC) and to Singapore. Since its inception in 2009, the IMSC has served as a vital platform for maritime stakeholders and decision makers to come together in open and purposeful dialogue about the maritime domain. Through shared perspectives and interests, we continue to seek practical frameworks and collaborative solutions to deal with the security challenges that confront us all.

The theme for IMSC has remained constant over the years – Safe and Secure Seas. This enduring commitment centres on three key priorities. First, upholding a rules-based order. Second, preserving peace in the global maritime commons. And third, building trust through practical cooperation and dialogue. These three pillars continue to guide our work, and tonight, I will speak on each of them, beginning with the rules-based maritime order.

## Preserving and Strengthening the Rules-based Maritime Order

As we look at the world today, the oceans have never been more central to our daily lives. Over 90% of global trade is carried by sea, and more than 95% of the world's international communications data is transmitted via underwater cables, connecting distant shores and supporting economies worldwide. The maritime domain has become a lifeline for nations, driving economic activity, cultural exchange, and geopolitical influence. Yet, with such interconnectedness comes a responsibility – a responsibility to ensure that the rules that govern our oceans are respected by all.

At its core, a rules-based maritime order refers to a set of established international laws and norms that govern the use of the seas. These rules are enshrined in treaties and conventions including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organisation Collision Regulations (COLREGs). But the significance of a rules-based order extends far beyond the legal framework; it includes the attitudes and norms of behaviours which guide us. It ensures that no one state or actor can unilaterally claim or disrupt the established rights of others.



Mr Zaqy Mohamad giving his keynote address at IMSC 2025

It promotes stability by encouraging predictable behaviour, fostering diplomatic dialogue as an avenue to peaceful resolution between parties, and deterring unlawful activities such as piracy and illegal fishing.

However, as strategic competition intensifies and pressure on maritime resources grows, the norms and institutions that govern the seas are under unprecedented strain. We are seeing a rise in unilateral actions, excessive maritime claims, coercive behaviours, and militarisation of disputed waters. Over in Europe, underwater telecommunications and energy cables and pipelines have been damaged or cut, causing disruptions. These trends not only risk regional stability, but the very integrity of this international legal framework.

Defending the rules-based maritime order is not a burden for any one country. It is a shared responsibility by the international community. All of us here. I am heartened that we have over 450 guests from navies, coast guards, maritime industries, academia, and think tanks all converging here this week. Together, we advance our shared commitment to safe and secure seas.

## **Maintaining Peace Amid a Challenging Maritime Security Landscape**

The stability of the seas is deeply shaped by geopolitical dynamics – the rise of major powers, shifting alliances, and ongoing territorial disputes.

For instance, the South China Sea – an area that is rich in resources and vital shipping routes – has become a flashpoint of strategic competition and overlapping maritime claims. At the same time, transnational issues such as terrorism, piracy, drugs, human trafficking, and illegal smuggling persist; growing more frequent, more coordinated, and violent in nature.

In response, countries are building capabilities and reinforcing their military presence at sea. These are understandable measures to safeguard national interests. However, as positions harden on all sides, so too does the risk of miscalculations, where a single incident at sea could escalate into a wider conflict with far-reaching consequences. Such a scenario could destabilise the region and undermine the global commons that we have worked so hard to preserve and protect.

Hence, it is important that the maintenance of peace remains a shared responsibility – one that demands sustained cooperation from regional and international stakeholders. All parties must remain committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes, guided by dialogue, diplomacy, and international law.

This brings me to my third and final point – the strengthening of mutual trust and understanding through practical cooperation and dialogue.

### **Practical Cooperation and Dialogue**

In this region, we have a broad and substantive agenda of cooperation and dialogue. Our navies and coast guards conduct maritime exercises such as the ASEAN Multilateral Naval Exercise (AMNEX) and the Maritime Information Sharing Exercise (MARISX) to foster interoperability, mutual trust and cooperation, and for capacity building as well. We also look to extra-regional players such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) partners to establish opportunities for exchanges. Some of these include the Regional Maritime Security Practitioners Programme (RMPP), Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK), and ASEAN-Plus-One Maritime Exercises.

Complementing these are practical cooperative measures to tackle common maritime challenges at the operational level. One such example is the Malacca Straits Patrols – a joint effort by Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand – comprising “Eyes-in-the-Sky”, combined maritime air patrols, sea patrols, and an intelligence exchange group. Since its inception in 2005, it has yielded tangible results and has contributed substantially to bringing piracy levels down in regional waterways; the Straits today are no longer flagged as a “high risk war zone” under international watchlists. That is one example of how international collaboration and cooperation has yielded results.

Another example is the CORPAT INDOSIN operation. It is a bilateral initiative between Indonesia and Singapore to safeguard the Singapore Strait and Phillip Channel through coordinated patrols, information sharing, and joint responses at sea.

These cooperative maritime groupings, together with information-sharing platforms such as the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), help foster trust and interoperability between our militaries and coast guards. In turn, this builds more predictable, constructive relationships and lowers the risk of miscalculation and unintended escalation at sea.

That said, we cannot stop here. At the strategic level, open and inclusive dialogue remains essential to building confidence amongst policymakers, which the larger maritime community takes the lead from. Central to these efforts are platforms such as the IMSC. Because I think there is a lot of work we can do here, collaboratively, and to exchange dialogue and ideas.

This week’s conference will cover key issues – from the implications of geopolitical developments to ways that we can strengthen cooperation in an increasingly contested maritime environment. We have also lined up discussion panels on emerging and evolving threats in the maritime domain – including grey zone contestation, and disruption or damage to critical undersea infrastructure. Through robust and candid discourse, we aim to deepen mutual understanding and trust with one another, and pave the way for more effective solutions to the maritime challenges that we face today.

## Conclusion

“Safe and Secure Seas” is a necessary foundation for the well-being of our nations and the global economy. Without it, our ability to secure a prosperous future is at risk.

In closing, let us reaffirm our shared responsibility – to safeguard the sea lanes that unite us; to build bridges rather than barriers; and to remain steadfast in our commitment to maintaining peace in the maritime commons, even when the tides are turbulent.

I wish all participants a fruitful conference and to have wonderful dialogues ahead. Thank you.



Mr Zaqy Mohamad giving his keynote address at IMSC 2025





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## CHAPTER

2

## OPENING ADDRESS

7 May 2025, 09:00

SPEAKER

**RADM Sean Wat**

Chief of Navy, Republic of Singapore Navy



# OPENING ADDRESS



RADM Sean Wat, Chief of Navy, Republic of Singapore Navy

Navy Chiefs, Director Generals of Coast Guards and Maritime Law Enforcement Agencies, esteemed moderators and panellists, distinguished guests – good morning. It is a privilege to welcome you to the 9th International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC) here in Singapore.

## Importance of IMSC in a Changing World Order

I would like to begin by saying that a gathering of this nature – bringing together maritime practitioners, stakeholders, and thought leaders – has never been more timely or more necessary. In a world where the rules-based maritime order we have long relied upon is facing new pressures, the ability to convene such a diverse and experienced group is critical.

## Longstanding and Emergent Challenges in the Maritime Domain

Our maritime domain is navigating a complex set of challenges. Some of these are longstanding challenges, such as sea robberies, piracy, illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, and the trafficking of humans, weapons, and drugs, alongside other illicit economic activities at sea.

But beyond these persistent challenges, we are also witnessing a maritime domain that is becoming increasingly contested. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has spillover effects on the freedom of navigation and trade in the Black Sea, while the Houthi militia has mounted deliberate attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

European countries have also faced a spate of incidents where critical underwater infrastructure (CUI), like telecommunication cables and energy pipelines, were damaged. Nearer to home, tensions in key flashpoints, such as the South China Sea, remind us of how quickly misunderstandings can escalate.

However, the channels of communication and mechanisms for conflict resolution that have long provided essential pathways to de-escalation are weakening, leaving fewer offramps to manage tensions. These developments not only test the resilience of existing frameworks but risk eroding, or even overturning, the international structures that have underpinned maritime stability and peace for decades.

Finally, rapid advancements in technology are quietly but profoundly transforming the maritime domain. The increased integration of artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, the use of cyber space, and the growing significance of undersea infrastructure are changing not just how maritime operations are conducted, but also how security and stability at sea are understood. These innovations offer new opportunities but also present novel risks, especially as they proliferate into the hands of non-state actors, challenging traditional operational frameworks and requiring navies to remain agile, forward-thinking, and prepared to adapt to an evolving seascape.

## Collaboration as The Pathway Forward

As we stand at the crossroads of these evolving challenges, it is clear that our strength lies not in individual efforts, but in our shared commitment to safety and security in the maritime domain. While it is clear that much uncertainty lies ahead, it is only through collaboration, mutual respect, and collective leadership, that we will navigate these choppy waters together. I would put forth to you that the more contested the domain becomes, the more vital it is that we retain space for dialogue and cooperation – even, and especially, in times of disagreement.



## Introduction of IMSC Panels

With this in mind, we have shaped this year's IMSC to highlight a few key areas of focus.

Our first panel will examine the impact of current geopolitical developments on the maritime domain, and what these mean for peace, security, and rules-based order at sea.

The second panel brings together senior naval leaders to consider how mutual cooperation and collaboration can serve as steady anchors in pivotal times, and how trust can be deepened even amidst uncertainty.

In our third and final panel, we will turn toward the horizon, where new developments and their impact on the seas are brewing – from emerging technologies to underwater infrastructure – we will discuss how these trends are reshaping contemporary maritime security.

## Conclusion

With participants from over 40 countries bringing a wealth of expertise in this room, this is an opportunity to engage deeply, share candidly, and chart practical pathways forward. Let us make full use of the time we have together to listen, to learn, and to lead.

Thank you to all our panellists, moderators, and delegates for your presence and support, and to our partners, RSIS and Experia, for making today possible. I wish you all a meaningful and productive conference.



RADM Sean Wat (fourth from left), Chief of Navy, Republic of Singapore Navy with Ambassador Ong (fifth from left), moderators and speakers of IMSC





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## CHAPTER 3

### Panel 1

## Geopolitical Developments and their Maritime Consequences

7 May 2025, 09:15

### MODERATOR

#### **Professor Tommy Koh**

Former President, UN Conference on the Law of the Sea

### SPEAKERS

#### **Dr. Rizal Sukma**

Senior Fellow, Centre for Strategic and International  
Studies, Jakarta

#### **Dr. David M. Finkelstein**

Vice President and Director, Center for Naval Analyses

#### **Dr. Wu Shicun**

Chairman, Huayang Center for Maritime Cooperation and  
Ocean Governance

#### **Dr. Sarah Kirchberg**

Academic Director, Center for Asia-Pacific Strategy and  
Security, kiel University



# GEOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR MARITIME CONSEQUENCES



**Professor Tommy Koh**, former president of the UN Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), opened the panel by describing the post-World War II geopolitical order as one that is crumbling without a new world order in place. With stability at risk, including in the maritime domain, he emphasised the importance of upholding international law, including UNCLOS. There is a greater need for negotiations and peaceful settlements, particularly between the two superpowers – the US and China.

Prof Koh directed his analysis to the ASEAN region, where the South China Sea is a hotspot due to ongoing disputes between China and four ASEAN claimant states. Noting that the US-China rivalry is particularly intense in this region, he urged both superpowers to respect ASEAN's aspirations to remain independent. Prof Koh closed his opening remarks by making two suggestions: first, that China work harder to regain the trust of ASEAN to advance progress in negotiations on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea; and second, for stronger defence diplomacy as a form of preventive diplomacy, through more engagements between the leaders of regional navies and coast guards.



**Dr Rizal Sukma**, Senior Fellow, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, highlighted the change taking place in the maritime domain, from an area of cooperation to an area of competition. Against this backdrop, he posited that great powers will work harder to strengthen their own economies and strategic interests, including control of maritime access. With middle and small powers in a difficult position amid greater geopolitical rivalry, he pointed out the need for countries in the region to assert the autonomy of ASEAN as a regional bloc.

In particular, Dr Rizal discussed several ideas to help ASEAN survive the great power rivalry. First, ASEAN needs to put UNCLOS at the centre of the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific, suggesting that an eminent individual like Prof Koh start a "formation of ASEAN defenders". Second, the COC should not be proclaimed as "dead" until something better is found. Rather, there is a need to get more creative to find new ideas and breakthrough in the COC. Third, a new security architecture is needed in the region, not just for the long term but also for the medium term. He suggested that the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership serves as a useful reference for how regional powers can be brought together, including the need to involve India as a key player.





**Dr David M. Finkelstein**, Vice President and Director at the Center for Naval Analyses, picked up Chief of Navy RADM Sean Wat’s observation in his opening remarks that the maritime domain has become more contested since the previous iteration of IMSC in 2023. Dr Finkelstein highlighted recent developments like the Russia-Ukraine war and its shutting down of commerce in the Black Sea, and the attacks by the Houthis on the Red Sea after the Israel-Hamas war post-October 2023; as well as longstanding maritime domain issues like the South China Sea tensions and developments in the Taiwan Strait.

Sharing the American perspective on Indo-Pacific, he noted that Manila’s tensions with Beijing in the South China Sea has attracted international interest, including a strengthening of the US-Philippines relationship. He also drew attention to the fractious situation in the Yellow Sea, with steel structures built by Beijing shaping up to be what he believes is a potential cause of friction with South Korea. He ended his segment by expressing both caution and optimism, with many challenges across the global maritime commons but also plenty of opportunities for cooperation and diplomacy.



**Dr Wu Shicun**, Chairman, Huayang Center for Maritime Cooperation and Ocean Governance, focussed primarily on the South China Sea. He noted the potential for developments in the region to move towards dialogue and cooperation, pointing out China’s commitment to building a “new maritime order” in the waters around the Nansha/Spratly Islands. He outlined what he believes to be the driving forces behind the evolution of the South China Sea situation, with the three main variables being China itself, the claimant states, and the US. He noted the increase in Chinese ability to safeguard its rights in the South China Sea, while affirming the continuity and stability characterised by its South China Sea policy.

With consultation on the COC in the South China Sea entering what he described as “deeper and uncharted waters”, he outlined key issues including the question of whether the upcoming COC should be legally binding, the level of political will by claimant states to reach an agreement, and the US involvement in the region. Dr Wu expressed his lack of optimism about the future of the COC, in particular the aim to conclude it by end-2026.



Professor Tommy Koh (Center) engaging speakers from Panel 1 of IMSC 2025 on their views of the geopolitical developments





**Dr Sarah Kirchberger**, Academic Director, Center for Asia-Pacific Strategy and Security, Kiel University, contributed a European perspective to the panel, highlighting the different fronts that Europe has been challenged by: disruptions, hot conflict, and the need to rapidly adapt to a new geopolitical reality. She seconded Prof Koh's earlier analysis of the disruption of the world order, pointing out that the impact on the maritime domain is not limited to the sea, as there has also been attacks on maritime infrastructure on land, including shipyards.

She noted a rise of smaller actors globally and their surprising ability to influence their immediate environments. Citing Ukraine as an example, she shared how it has managed to conduct successful anti-access/area denial in the Black Sea with the introduction of drone warfare, unmanned surface vehicles, and an accelerated innovation cycle. Another example brought up was the Houthis, the first group to use anti-ship ballistic missiles. With this shift in dynamic on the battlefield, she underscored the need to be able to produce at scale and speed, noting that quantity can also be a quality on its own.

Questions posed to the panellists ranged from the future of the COC, possible US-China collaboration, and balancing each country's national security with rule-of-law obligations.

Panellists noted the need to continue speeding up COC negotiations, with one panellist emphasising that the COC is "not dead until we kill it". Next steps beyond the COC negotiations were also raised, including the need to discuss the environmental protection convention in the South China Sea region. On US-China collaboration, panellists noted that there are areas of common interests that both powers can still work together on, such as non-security maritime issues and emerging security issues and technology, but there remains the wary perception of the Chinese towards US activity in the region.

Panellists offered differing views to the notion of balancing national security and international rule-of-law obligations. First, while national interests take priority, the international rule-of-law is also part of national interests, illustrating the complementarity of both. Second, it might be beneficial to shift more of the burden to diplomats and policymakers, who are trained in the art of diplomacy and making compromises, rather than merely keeping such discussions to the military. Lastly, the formation of smaller coalitions of the willing might help to achieve greater speed and chances of success in multilateral cooperation, although these run the risk of fracturing established regional groupings.

Closing the panel, panellists concurred on the need for continued cooperation in the maritime arena. They expressed hope that countries with serious differences will continue engaging in meaningful dialogue and strategic cooperation, emphasising that countries still have the agency to chart the path forward to secure a safe and stable future for all.



# 9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE

## CHAPTER

4

## Panel 2 Mutual Cooperation and Collaboration in Pivotal Times

7 May 2025, 10:35

### MODERATOR

#### **Professor Joseph Liow**

Dean, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences,  
Nanyang Technological University

### SPEAKERS

#### **Admiral Datuk (Dr.) Zulhelmy bin Ithnain**

Chief of Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy

#### **Rear Admiral Garin Golding**

Chief of Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy

#### **Vice Admiral Kanchana Banagoda**

Commander of the Navy, Sri Lanka Navy

#### **Admiral Stephen T. Koehler**

Commander, United States Pacific Fleet,  
United States Navy





# MUTUAL COOPERATION AND COLLABORATION IN PIVOTAL TIMES



**Admiral Datuk (Dr) Zulhelmy bin Ithnain**, Chief of the Royal Malaysian Navy, started by underscoring the tremendous advantages that the Southeast Asian region is endowed with, from being at the crossroads of maritime trade routes, to serving as a conduit for people-to-people connectivity and cultural exchange. He outlined the challenges facing the region, including non-traditional threats like piracy and human trafficking, as well as the great power competition with rising tensions and regional flashpoints.

He shared Malaysia's view of the way forward in this era, including the continuation of proven mechanisms like the Malacca Straits Patrol, Trilateral Cooperative Arrangements, and active involvement in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises. ADM Zulhelmy also spoke about Malaysia's interest in strengthening maritime domain awareness, including in relation to artificial intelligence (AI), drones, and satellites; enhancing interoperability in the region through joint training and SOP alignment; expanding regional partnerships like the ASEAN+1; as well as building trust through diplomacy with forums like IMSC and the upcoming ASEAN Navy Chiefs' Meeting hosted by Malaysia as ASEAN Chair 2025.

Beyond these routine efforts, he also brought up the need to address underwater space management, with more nations gaining the capability to operate submarines that could raise the potential for clashes and contestation.



**Rear Admiral Garin Golding**, Chief of the Royal New Zealand Navy, underscored the enduring importance of cooperation and collaboration in maritime security, drawing from New Zealand's history and its bicultural values. He emphasised how cultural competence and strategic partnerships have shaped New Zealand's defence posture, including prioritisation of expeditionary capabilities like blue-water combatants and strategic airlift. Operating far from home necessitates close collaboration with regional partners, especially in Southeast Asia, to enhance interoperability and collective security.

Focusing on the Southwest Pacific, he highlighted the region's inherent maritime nature and the growing challenges posed by strategic competition, environmental change, and economic fragility. He pointed to mechanisms like the Southwest Pacific Heads of Maritime Forces forum as key platforms for collaborative planning and operational coordination, including joint surveillance and crew exchanges. RADM Golding reaffirmed New Zealand's commitment to the rules-based international order, noting its leadership in Combined Task Force 150 in counter smuggling in the Indian Ocean. He concluded that even as the international order is under strain, countries should still continue to advocate for and contribute to the rules-based international order.





**Vice Admiral Kanchana Banagoda**, Commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, drew attention to Sri Lanka's deep interest in regional maritime governance, given its strategic location at the crossroads of major shipping lanes. Sri Lanka sees itself as what he describes as a "gatekeeper of maritime security". He shared Sri Lanka's track record of facilitating partnerships and naval diplomacy, having facilitated port calls for over 650 naval ships, its participation in US-led peacekeeping missions, and engagements in collaborative forums and dialogues.

He continued by sharing Sri Lanka's priority areas, in particular the expansion of subject matter expert exchanges. This includes the areas of maritime search and rescue, information fusion and maritime domain awareness, anti-smuggling and narcotics interdiction, and special forces interoperability. He also shared Sri Lanka's interest in promoting inclusive maritime governance involving academia and the civilian population, allowing practitioners to take the lead to ensure effective maritime security.

VADM Banagoda underscored the need to strengthen mutual trust, emphasising that "with clear purpose, deep understanding and strong commitment, we secure the seas".



**Admiral Stephen T. Koehler**, Commander of the United States Pacific Fleet, expressed his personal belief that cooperation is an enabler of the regional and global stability everyone desires. He highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region, where a majority of the global GDP and the world's population reside.

He brought up a number of common challenges that transcend national borders and have to be addressed together, including piracy, illegal fishing, smuggling, human trafficking, cyberspace challenges, and undersea issues. To this end, he cited the US involvement in bilateral engagements with like-minded partners like Canada, France, and the Philippines, as well as multilateral exercises such as the Rim of Pacific Exercise and Super Garuda Shield. He ended his remarks by underscoring the US's commitment to building mutually-beneficial alliances and partnerships.



ADM Datuk (Dr.) Zulhelmy bin Ithnain (first from left) Chief of Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy answering a question from the audience during Panel 2 of IMSC 2025

Questions were posed to the panellists about each of their countries' efforts to enhance regional cooperation. Panellists shared a wide range of initiatives, including through improved professional military education, confidence-building measures hosted by their nations, efforts to combat transnational crime, incorporation of technology into the maritime domain, as well as a greater focus on the underwater domain.

Further questions were raised about how trust can be established in turbulent times. Various ideas were raised, such as exposing navies to collaboration at all levels beyond the top leadership, and having their own country take the lead on cooperation. Panellists also responded to questions on tackling maritime grey zone challenges, including the need to increase maritime domain awareness by having datasets to facilitate more effective cooperation.



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## CHAPTER

### 5

## Panel 3

## New Developments in the Maritime Domain and their Impact on Contemporary Maritime Issues

7 May 2025, 13:45

### MODERATOR

#### Professor Geoffrey Till

Advisor, Maritime Security Programme,  
S Rajaratnam School of International Studies

### SPEAKERS

#### Rear Admiral Steven Waddel CMM, MSM, CD

Deputy Commander, Royal Canadian Navy

#### Leitender Polizeidirektor Nils Von Waaden

Head, Federal Police Department for Maritime Security  
German Federal Police

#### Vice Admiral Erwin S. Aldeharma

Vice Chief of Navy, Indonesian Navy

#### Admiral Saito Akira

Chief of Staff, Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force





# NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MARITIME DOMAIN AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY MARITIME ISSUES



**Professor Geoffrey Till**, Advisor, Maritime Security Programme, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, set the stage for this panel by sharing about the value that the diverse backgrounds of the panellists bring to the discussions. These perspectives allow for an understanding of how new maritime developments are identified, varied, and viewed across the world. He noted the presence of not just navies represented among the audience, but also the important coast guard community, which are similarly affected by new developments in the maritime domain.



**Rear Admiral Steven Waddell** CMM, MSM, CD, Deputy Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, opened with Canada's identity as a Pacific nation with Pacific interests. He remarked that his presence at IMSC reflects Canada's commitment to deepening engagements with the Indo-Pacific, including with ASEAN in particular.

He drew attention to lessons learnt from the Ukraine war, on how the use of technology and new commercially-available technology has serious effects on wartime, especially in the realm of unmanned systems. Conventional forces now need the ability to defeat uncrewed systems, on top of the ability to deploy their own. In this regard, he acknowledged ASEAN's efforts in pursuing unmanned technology in the maritime realm.

Additionally, he pointed to the value of IMDEX in showcasing the range of corporate enterprise and technology that navies can adapt for their use, to complement their own bespoke systems.



**Leitender Polizeidirektor Nils von Waaden**, Head of the Federal Police Department for Maritime Security, German Federal Police, emphasised the significance of the maritime domain, where a vast majority of global trade is transported. He pointed to the Evergreen blockage in 2021 to demonstrate the vulnerability of sea lanes.

He identified shadow fleets to be one of the biggest maritime threats today, alongside others such as attacks on undersea cables, a danger Germany experienced firsthand with the Nord Stream incident. With hybrid warfare potentially motivated by state actors, he underscored the need for new solutions to address hybrid threats and hybrid warfare. These include the need to synthesise efforts by both military and law enforcement, as well as the involvement of the private sector in developing new technologies to support military responses.





**Vice Admiral Erwin S. Aldedharma**, Vice Chief of the Indonesian Navy, spotlighted Indonesia's position as the world's largest archipelagic nation. For the country, maritime security is not merely a policy choice but an existential necessity, which shapes Indonesia's response to new maritime developments.

He identified several emerging developments including the proliferation of unmanned systems, accelerating application of AI, and advances in undersea capabilities with breakthroughs in sea floor mapping and deep-sea exploration. He pointed out that technology is democratising maritime power, as capabilities once exclusive to militaries are now accessible to both state and non-state actors.

Indonesia's response, outlined by VADM Aldedharma, is a collaborative one—prioritisation of regional partnerships, building confidence through transparency, and developing skilled personnel who are adept in working with international partners. He also proposed several priorities for cooperation in these contested times, such as establishing practical norms for emerging technologies through inclusive dialogue, building interoperable maritime domain awareness networks, and ensuring equitable access to maritime technologies. He affirmed Indonesia's commitment to being a bridge-builder in these troubled times, and urged the audience to use these technological innovations as a positive means to enhance cooperation and strengthen the rules-based maritime order that serves all nations.



**Admiral Saito Akira**, Chief of Staff of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, presented several contemporary maritime issues of most interest to Japan, such as the Houthis' attacks on commercial ships, melting arctic ice and the emerging viability of the Northern Sea Route, and the Nord Stream pipeline explosions. ADM Saito also stressed the importance of CUI protection, as technological advances provide easier access to the underwater domain. He shared Japan's contributions to safety and security in the Indo-Pacific, include longstanding counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and support for port infrastructure in Southeast Asia. Saito highlighted Japan's leadership in undersea cable maintenance and mapping efforts under initiatives like Seabed 2030 and the development of AI to monitor cable integrity. He called for deeper international cooperation, spotlighting Japan's leadership in the ADMM-Plus maritime security working group co-chaired with the Philippines. He concluded by reaffirming Japan's commitment to upholding a rules-based, free, and open maritime order through collaboration with like-minded nations.



Rear Admiral Steven Waddell CMM, MSM, CD (leftmost), Deputy Commander of the Royal Canadian Navy answering questions from the audience

The panellists fielded questions on the biggest single challenge they face. Their responses ranged from the complexities posed by unmanned systems, the ability to process voluminous data from their own detection systems, and the impact of technological advancements on the way navies conduct their operations. The commonality across these responses lies in the need for cooperation between military, corporations, and academia.

Further questions were raised from the floor about interoperability with maritime services between countries, such as partnerships between different information fusion centres. Panellists opined that while these efforts are already underway, the key still lies in building relationships. For instance, while common data standards can provide the technical foundation for information sharing between nations, it is the building of relationships that ultimately unlock information sharing. At the same time, panellists noted that each information fusion centre has its own strengths, and there is value in keeping the uniqueness of each platform instead of pursuing complete standardisation across different systems.

Closing off the final panel, Prof Till summarised the key topics raised across the three panels: the South China Sea, Northeast Asia, and Taiwan; the relationship between the US and China; and worries about grey zone operations. Conversely, he noted that several issues did not come up as prominently, such as the future of globalisation, nuclear proliferation, and climate change. He also acknowledged the vested interests of many stakeholders in maritime domain issues, which point to the importance of the maritime community – navies, coast guards, and the commercial shipping industry – responding to these issues together. This itself is the value that IMSC provides, helping the maritime community understand the pressing issues of the day, identify the stakeholders invested in these issues, and enable the open sharing of perspectives to chart the path forward.





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# 9<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL MARITIME SECURITY CONFERENCE

## CHAPTER

6

Closing Address

7 May 2025, 15:10

SPEAKER

**Ambassador Ong Keng Yong**

Executive Deputy Chairman,  
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies





# CLOSING ADDRESS



Ambassador Ong giving his closing address to IMSC 2025

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the closing remarks for the 9th International Maritime Security Conference. I trust that today's proceedings have been insightful and rewarding for all of us.

Throughout the conference, we have heard thoughtful exchanges on the shifting global order, the implications of great power competition, and the growing pressures facing our maritime commons. Against the backdrop of regional geopolitical competition and evolving maritime threats, the need for collaboration has never been more urgent.

As a maritime region, Southeast Asia's future hinges on seamless maritime connectivity and navigation. Our economies, livelihoods, and prosperity are deeply intertwined with the safety and security of our sea lanes. As many speakers have emphasised, safeguarding an open and secure maritime domain is not the task of any one nation alone—it demands collective commitment from all stakeholders.

The discussions today underscored that to preserve a rules-based maritime order, we must continue promoting an inclusive maritime region grounded in international law and norms. We must work together to ensure that the maritime commons remain free, fair, and accessible to all.

Dialogue and cooperation across navies, coast guards, policymakers, academics, and industry are crucial. By sharing best practices, fostering transparency, and deepening mutual understanding, we can strengthen maritime governance and uphold the rule of law at sea.

We are reminded that even as we manage threats from non-state actors, we must also guard against unilateral actions that undermine collective maritime interests. The rules-based maritime order is not a given; it must be continually upheld and defended through our words and, more importantly, through our deeds.

There is no viable alternative to an open and inclusive maritime security architecture. Despite the challenges, we must press forward with resolve, for the stakes are simply too high.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we conclude, allow me to express my deep appreciation to the Republic of Singapore Navy, as RSIS's co-host in organising the 9th IMSC. I also extend my thanks to Experia Events and the many dedicated individuals who made this conference a success.

Thank you all for your active participation and thoughtful contributions. I look forward to seeing the partnerships and understanding forged today continue to grow stronger in the years ahead.

Safe travels, and I hope to welcome you back to Singapore for the next International Maritime Security Conference. Thank you.

