THE FUTURE OF THE ADMM/ADMM-PLUS AND DEFENCE DIPLOMACY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Event Report
17 November 2015

RSiS
Nanyang Technological University
S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Event Report

THE FUTURE OF THE ADMM/ADMM-PLUS AND DEFENCE DIPLOMACY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Report of a roundtable organised by:
The Regional Security Architecture Programme,
Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS),
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS),
Nanyang Technological University (NTU),
Singapore

17 November 2015
Marina Mandarin Singapore

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This report summarises the proceedings of the roundtable as interpreted by assigned rapporteur(s) and editor(s) of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this report.

The roundtable adheres to a variation of the Chatham House Rule. Accordingly, beyond the points expressed in the prepared papers, no attributions have been included in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) has performed fairly well as an avenue for the ASEAN defence ministers to discuss and exchange views on Southeast Asian security issues, and has been relatively successful in the promotion of functional cooperation in the region. Its success can also be attributed to the ASEAN Way and the focus on non-traditional security matters. In spite of the non-issuance of a Joint Declaration in the 3rd ADMM-Plus, ASEAN centrality in the ADMM-Plus is widely seen to be still intact.

2. However, sensitivities regarding sovereignty, as well as differences in viewpoints and capacities have limited regional cooperation. Moreover, the tensions over territorial disputes, major power rivalry, mistrust and arms build-up in the region have complicated the maintenance of ASEAN centrality. The ADMM also has institutional hurdles that may impede improvements to its efficacy.

3. As such, ASEAN needs to continue to be the regional leader and speak with a stronger voice. In addition, the ADMM and ADMM-Plus must be better synergised, and the ADMM framework should be able to better feed into other high level forums like the ASEAN and East Asia Summits. In addition, the ADMM should continue cooperating with external partners so as to mobilise further resources. In sum, the ADMM needs to develop a strategic vision for the next five to ten years, while consolidating existing mechanisms and initiatives.

4. At the same time, the ADMM-Plus is a good forum for external countries to engage with the core ASEAN countries, giving the defence establishments of the Plus countries greater access to their counterparts with ASEAN member states. The ADMM-Plus also differentiates itself as more than a talk shop by focusing on practical functional cooperation as embodied in its Experts' Working Groups (EWGs), as well as on confidence and capacity building.

5. Nonetheless, the geopolitical uncertainties as stated above also have an impact on the ADMM-Plus. The focus on non-contentious issues has also led to the avoidance of the "hard" defence issues, and there is a need for the ADMM-Plus to step up from cooperation in familiar functional areas. Although the slow pace of decision-making may actually lead to lowered tensions, events may still develop more rapidly than the pace of the ASEAN processes.

6. All in all, the United States hopes to promote burden-sharing in the region, while Japan aims to consolidate a rules and norms-based regional framework as part of their engagement with the ADMM-Plus. China similarly supports the ASEAN processes and the ASEAN Way.

OPENING REMARKS

Associate Professor Ralf Emmers

In his welcome remarks, **Associate Professor Ralf Emmers**, Associate Dean, RSIS, considered the roundtable to be a special and timely event, as it coincided with the series of on-going related summits on defence diplomacy in the Asia Pacific, like the ADMM Retreat, the 3rd ADMM-Plus and the 27th ASEAN Summit. He outlined the objectives of the roundtable: to analyse the platforms achieved by ADMM and ADMM-Plus since their establishment, and to discuss the future of these two forums.

The roundtable was particularly structured to achieve these objectives. The first objective involved the current status of cooperation in the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus and the opportunities, challenges, strengths and weaknesses of the respective forums. Assoc Prof Emmers highlighted the current momentum in the ADMM and ADMM-Plus forum that is not seen in other ASEAN related forums. The roundtable aimed to explore the reasons behind this momentum.

The second objective involved discussions over the future areas of cooperation within the two forums. The suitability of current approaches of both the forums and the need for focusing on areas where greater results can be achieved was also discussed.

Stock-take of ADMM and ADMM-Plus Cooperation

Professor Tan See Seng observed that cooperation in the ADMM and ADMM-Plus has been incremental, yet steady and even remarkable by ASEAN standards, but he noted the significance of the unsolved questions and the role of these "achievements" in managing the security dilemmas of the region.

Pre-ADMM defence regionalisation in Southeast Asia began with what Prof Tan termed the "defence spider web", the thickening build-up of military exercises and bilateral arrangements in ASEAN. In the early 1990s, ASEAN formally included security issues in its agenda as well as in forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Shangri-La Dialogue and the Bali Concord II. This paved the way for the formation of ADMM in 2006 to promote regional peace and stability, and enhance transparency and openness through dialogue and cooperation among the ASEAN members.

Prof Tan outlined some important observations on the current and future prospects of the ADMM and the ADMM-Plus forums. He mentioned that both forums showed a track record of relatively successful achievements at the functional and operational levels, but he questioned the practical application stated in the papers given the lack of an adequate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) response during Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. He also believed that the collective political will to implement the designed plans would help in solving the challenges involved.

The focus on practical cooperation in select non-traditional security (NTS) areas, also referred to as the "low hanging fruits", should also be prioritised by the two forums. Prof Tan examined the evidence of Asia Pacific military establishments performing better than their sectoral counterparts in making regional cooperation work. He found the possibility of functional cooperation and trust building generating the requisite mutual reassurance and confidence to facilitate cooperative "spill over" to the strategic domain. Prof Tan concluded by expressing concerns on whether the sharp disagreements among its dialogue partners at the 2015 ADMM-Plus, despite the maintenance of ASEAN unity, imply that the forum is at risk of following the ARF as a venue for great power megaphone diplomacy.

Professor Tan See Seng

SESSION 1: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ADMM

Mr Tan Seng Chye

Mr Tan Seng Chye emphasised that ASEAN-level cooperation to promote stability and peace must not be affected by bilateral cooperation with external powers. He highlighted the need for ASEAN to return to its principles of respect for sovereignty, pointing out the sensitivities of ASEAN members that impact the kind of cooperation that the ADMM or the ASEAN in general could have. He found the ADMM to be a significant platform for cooperation in non-traditional security among the militaries of ASEAN members. However, he mentioned that regional cooperation remains limited due to the ASEAN members' sensitivities regarding national sovereignty, divergences in approaches to national defence and cooperation, as well as differences in levels of defence capacities. Thus, he indicated the importance of ASEAN as a regional leader to speak with a stronger voice, manage good political and defence diplomacy, and manage cooperation and good relations among ASEAN members. He also highlighted the crucial role of the Track II Network of ASEAN Defence and Security Institutions (NADI) in providing relevant inputs to the ADMM.

Dr Tang Siew Mun underscored that the ADMM provides an avenue for the ASEAN defence ministers to discuss and exchange views on Southeast Asian security issues and concerns on par with other sectoral regional cooperation, where no such formal platform existed before. He also highlighted the importance of the ADMM as the core of the ADMM-Plus in maintaining ASEAN centrality and keeping the major powers positively engaged in the region. Nonetheless, he cautioned that the ADMM should work in tandem with the members' foreign affairs ministries, rather than moving ahead of them. According to Dr Tang, the ADMM faces three major drawbacks. First, it is ill-equipped to handle traditional security threats due to the lack of capacities. Second and relatedly, ASEAN is not a military alliance and has not subscribed to collective security. Third, the ADMM appears to be "an institution in search of a mission". The institutional challenge of the rotating ADMM chair is compounded by the absence of a regional military power that could serve as an anchor to drive and sustain security cooperation.

Dr Tang Siew Mun

Mr Iis Gindarsah found the ASEAN way to be the most acceptable strategy to build a cohesive regional security order and cooperation in trans-boundary issues and defence regionalism. He commended the deepening institutionalisation and regularisation of the ADMM, along with the pace of cooperation among ASEAN members in HADR. However, Mr Gindarsah noted that, first, maritime problems increasingly pose a significant challenge to regional security and stability. Recent tensions over the South China Sea have complicated ASEAN-China relations and weakened ASEAN unity. Second, the worrying trends of the on-going

Mr Iis Gindarsah

regional arms build-up could further deepen mistrust as new military technologies have the potential to alter the balance of power among Southeast Asian countries. Third, the increasingly complex relationship between traditional and non-traditional security issues could potentially complicate the strategic landscape in Southeast Asia. Mr Gindarsah concluded that the ADMM should further promote practical cooperation among the militaries of ASEAN countries as well as the development of regional defence industrial collaboration.

Discussion

Participants debated whether ASEAN is in danger of overstretching itself beyond its original role when it was established, as well as the ability of ASEAN to maintain its strategic space and flexibility in regional security given the on-going major power manoeuvres. Participants also discussed the level to which the ADMM would like to set the extent of its institutional design to produce functional cooperation.

Participants discussed how the ADMM would handle regional security in light of external influence. While some asserted that ASEAN needs to maintain its strategic space, others saw external intervention as a natural phenomenon since the ADMM-Plus includes member states outside of ASEAN. However, it was also pointed out that engagement, cooperation and the right to intervene are three different regional security issues. Participants nonetheless agreed that the ADMM-Plus should not be a platform for major power rivalry, with some mentioning that the ADMM itself is not yet ready to discuss traditional security matters, which could be discussed in another forum such as the East Asia Summit.

Participants also debated whether the ADMM was truly in search of a mission. Some argued that the inclusion of security issues in the ADMM agenda was itself a major progression for ASEAN members, especially when the agendas of the ADMM are compared to the principles upon which ASEAN was founded. Turning to the non-issuance of a Joint Declaration at the recent 3rd ADMM-Plus meeting, it was noted that the issuance of a Joint Declaration was not a requirement, but that the Chairman's Statement itself did mention the South China Sea issue. Participants concurred that maritime security was a major regional concern, and the disagreement on whether to include the topic of the South China Sea in the Joint Declaration of the 3rd ADMM-Plus is seen as a setback for ASEAN itself. Nevertheless, some participants highlighted that it is in the collective interest of the ASEAN to discuss the South China Sea issue and place it on the agenda.

SESSION 2: FUTURE OF THE ADMM

Associate Professor Raymund Quilop

Associate Professor Raymund Quilop emphasised that the ADMM and ADMM-Plus can promote the strategic message that defence ministers in the region prioritise cooperation rather than conflict. He also highlighted the challenges that those forums face. First, both the ADMM and ADMM-Plus need to be better synergised. Second, there is a need to let go of certain EWGs when new ones are created, so as to keep the forums manageable. Third, the ADMM should be held before the ASEAN and East Asia Summits so that the former can feed into the latter. Fourth, there is the challenge of maintaining ASEAN centrality, which should not just be the case of the ADMM first agreeing on some issues and then presenting them to the Plus countries for approval. Fifth, there is the issue of striking a balance between ASEAN leadership and cultivating the Plus countries' sense of ownership, as well as avoiding a situation where major powers dominate the ADMM-Plus. He concluded that future areas of cooperation for the ADMM and ADMM-Plus include cybersecurity, food security, infectious diseases and illegal migration.

Major General Vu Tien Trong noted the growing major power rivalry in Southeast Asia, with the ADMM facing challenges in maintaining solidarity and centrality. He urged the ADMM to increase practical cooperation towards concrete actions and tangible outcomes. Nonetheless, he noted that ASEAN countries have limited resources, different levels of development and varying national priorities and interests. He urged the ADMM to continue cooperating with external partners so as to mobilise further resources, and to harmonise the diverse interests of ASEAN countries and external partners. GEN Trong believed that the ADMM needs to develop a strategic vision for the next five to ten years, while consolidating existing mechanisms and initiatives. He also emphasised that the ADMM should advocate the peaceful settlement of the South China Sea disputes based on international law and concrete initiatives. Lastly, he suggested that the ADMM could coordinate with other ASEAN meetings such as the relevant ARF forums, as well as strengthen the connection between Track I and II to facilitate information sharing.

Major General Vu Tien Trong

Discussion

Participants reiterated the importance of practical cooperation in the ADMM, with the agreement to establish direct communication links cited as an example of progress in that field. It was mentioned that the ADMM should not end up becoming a talkshop like the ARF, which had become too unwieldy. There is in fact a high level task force looking into reducing the number of meetings. The importance of strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat to relieve the pressure on the ministries was underscored as well. It was also suggested that some existing EWGs could be replaced by others that are more timely and relevant.

Some participants expressed the view that while ASEAN places heavy emphasis on issues of sovereignty and non-interference, these concepts have historically not been deeply embedded in Southeast Asia, and the region thus maintains a more relaxed attitude towards sovereignty, notwithstanding the South China Sea disputes. An example is cooperation over HADR, in which there appears to be intervention especially with regard to the entry of foreign teams into a disaster-stricken country.

Participants also discussed whether the expansion of the military's role into non-traditional issues was an area of concern, given the implications for democratic development. Nonetheless, it was mentioned that militaries are often called upon to perform civilian tasks, and are often reluctant to assume full responsibility over every aspect of an assigned issue.

Participants raised concerns about the possibility of the ADMM-Plus overshadowing the ADMM, which could be inevitable due to the large international attention given to the forum whenever the major powers are involved. However, their presence may still bring benefits as they are able to bring their capacities to the region and also enable interoperability. It is also important to ensure that the initiatives at the ADMM dovetail with those at the ADMM-Plus.

SESSION 3: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE ADMM-PLUS

Lieutenant Colonel Luke R. Donohue

Lieutenant Colonel Luke R. Donohue argued that the emerging strengths of the ADMM-Plus far outweighed its weaknesses. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) sees the ADMM-Plus as an appropriate forum to discuss common security concerns, which gives the DoD access to the senior defence leadership of Southeast Asian partners. This forum has contributed to the development of a pattern of military-to-military engagement through the planning of multinational practical exercises. Nonetheless, the ADMM-Plus's focus had necessarily been on non-contentious issues, and the emphasis on practical cooperation and the ASEAN principle on consensus has led to the avoidance of the "hard" defence policy issues. Moreover, a whole-of-government approach was the best way to tackle these issues. At the same time, the DoD has focused on enhancing practical cooperation and burden-sharing in five areas of regional security, namely Maritime Security, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response, Peacekeeping Operations (PKO), Counter-terrorism, and Military Medicine. LTC Donohue concluded that, contrary to the perception of an American decline, the U.S. demonstrates its respect for its allies and partners by expecting them to commit to burden-sharing.

Associate Professor Ken Jimbo argued that the ADMM-Plus had made contributions to ensure regular multilateral meetings among the Defence Ministers of 18 countries and practical cooperation, establish the appropriate inter-government coordination through the annual ADSOM-Plus and its Working Group, and enhance future functional cooperation through the recommendations of the EWGs. He also did not see the lack of a Joint Declaration at the latest ADMM-Plus as a failure, but posited that consensus still exists among the 10 ASEAN countries. However, the ADMM-Plus faced three major fault lines, including mismatches on national positions, limited ADMM-to-ADMM-Plus linkage for risk management, and resource shortage for joint actions. Assoc Prof Jimbo put forward a conceptual model of a three-tiered regional security architecture, consisting of defence cooperation mechanisms such as treaty alliances in the first tier, functional/cooperation mechanisms and dialogues in the second tier, and region-wide cooperation based on rules and charters in the third tier. He framed the ADMM-Plus as one important pillar in Tier 3. He said that the ADMM-Plus should become the basis for anchoring norms and rules, and formalising security cooperation in the Asia Pacific. However, these need to be crafted through practical cooperation in Tier 1 and Tier 2.

Associate Professor Ken Jimbo

Discussion

Participants agreed that both the U.S. and Japan are pursuing strategies to engage with the region's interdependent multilateral security architecture, including assistance in capacity building and promoting interoperability. The U.S. is pursuing more effective burden-sharing to discourage free-riding and promote political will towards action. Similarly, Japan, aware of the importance of inclusive participation and the need for ASEAN's development of its own concepts, aims to consolidate the ASEAN-led rule-based regional model through ADMM-Plus cooperation. It was also noted that although ASEAN's principle of consensus may lead to slower decision-making, it could instead be an advantage because it helps bypass the obstacles against cooperation.

Nonetheless, participants noted several challenges. For example, there could be potential for a commitment problem in burden-sharing, as ASEAN countries may be unwilling to commit to any action that binds their autonomy, and prefer to defer responsibility to an outside actor. There was also the question of the sustainability of the informal ADMM-Plus meetings between ASEAN countries and each Plus country, given the likely huge number of such meetings annually if all Plus countries are involved.

Participants also suggested that the Military Medicine and Humanitarian Mine Action EWGs could be subsumed into HADR, while the PKO EWG could be cut given the maturity of the state of PKO in the region, while new EWGs on cybersecurity, weapons proliferation and transnational crime could be established.

SESSION 4: FUTURE OF THE ADMM-PLUS

Senior Colonel Guo Xinning

Senior Colonel Guo Xinning argued that the ADMM-Plus has great potential as a platform consisting of major players involved in regional security, with these states sharing the common goals of improving regional peace and stability through multilateral security cooperation. However, SR COL Guo cautioned that the future process may still face difficulties arising from a lack of political trust, territorial disputes, and obstacles in achieving a coordinated ASEAN position. In order to mitigate these challenges, SR COL Guo argued that, on the basis of the "ASEAN Way" of non-interference and consensus-based decision-making, the ADMM-Plus should take the initiative to provide a feasible roadmap and timetable, institutionalise existing programmes to enhance cooperation, and explore new areas of collaboration, such as resource sharing and tackling illegal immigration. In sum, SR COL Guo was optimistic about the ADMM-Plus's future. He noted that the past experiences of the ADMM-Plus demonstrated it was not merely a talkshop, especially where confidence building and functional cooperation are concerned.

Dr Euan Graham pointed out two main purposes of ADMM-Plus, namely capacity building and confidence building. In the field of capacity building, given the different levels of ASEAN countries' military capabilities, the ADMM-Plus can promote coordination and help build the capacities of ASEAN countries to better address shared security challenges. The ADMM-Plus has strengthened the interoperability of member states through the EWGs, as well as through the development of links and relationships and enhanced information-sharing. Moreover, the establishment of hotlines among ASEAN defence ministers play an important role, especially in HADR. In terms of Australia's role in the ADMM-Plus, the country has demonstrated its enthusiastic support through its active participation in maritime and counter-terrorism exercises, given its existing synergy with the East Asia Summit. Dr Graham concluded with suggestions for the future of the ADMM-Plus, including the carrying out of follow-up policies based on existing initiatives, and specifying its position in relation to other security and defence dialogues. The ADMM-Plus also needs to step up from cooperation in familiar functional areas like HADR to more contentious issues.

Dr Euan Graham

Discussion

Participants highlighted that despite China's initial concerns regarding the ARF, including its slower speed of decision-making, China later changed its attitude and grew comfortable with ASEAN's pace, gradually developing confidence in ASEAN's capacity to deal with sensitive issues. Another participant argued that the slow process is good under some circumstances, since it can lower tensions over disputes, with the caveat that events can develop more rapidly than the pace of the ASEAN processes.

Participants debated whether there existed an alternative entity to be the driver of the ADMM-Plus, with a participant suggesting that because Asia was more diversified and given the difficulty of coordinating with major countries, ASEAN should continue to be the leader.

Participants stressed the lessons that the ADMM-Plus could learn from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which initiated confidence building between countries in Central Asia that had territorial disputes. The SCO further developed CBMs like military exercises and economic cooperation. In terms of the ADMM-Plus, however, a gap of trust still exists among members and the work of confidence-building is far from complete.

While participants discussed why the ADMM-Plus appeared to be more successful than the ARF so far, it was argued that countries were enthusiastic about the ARF during its early institution-building process, due to the high level of optimism present in the post-Cold War era. However, as a result of these high expectations, the ARF's failure was more apparent when it began to stumble, especially when compared to the more recent ADMM-Plus setback, since the latter did not have similarly high expectations. Despite the apparent disappointment in the 3rd ADMM-Plus, it is notable that no one is calling for the dissolution of the ADMM-Plus.

Participants also observed that there has been an emerging division of labour between the Shangri-La Dialogue, ADMM-Plus and other regional security frameworks. In particular, the ADMM-Plus, as compared to other frameworks, has played an important role in confidence and capacity building.

ROUNDTABLE PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 17 November 2015

0830hrs **Registration**

0900hrs **Opening Remarks**
Associate Professor Ralf Emmers
Associate Dean, RSIS

0905hrs **Stock-take of ADMM and ADMM-Plus Cooperation**
Professor Tan See Seng
Deputy Director and Head of Research, IDSS, RSIS

ADMM

0945hrs **Session 1:**
Strengths and Weaknesses of the ADMM

(i) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ADMM?
(ii) What are the challenges and opportunities facing cooperation in ADMM?

Speakers:

Mr Tan Seng Chye
Senior Fellow, RSIS

Dr Tang Siew Mun
Senior Fellow, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

Mr Iis Gindarsah
Researcher, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta

Discussant:

Professor Tan See Seng
Deputy Director and Head of Research, IDSS, RSIS

1110hrs **Tea Break**

1115hrs **Session 2:**
Future of the ADMM

(i) What's next for the ADMM?
(ii) What are the potential areas for future ADMM cooperation?

Speakers:

Associate Professor Raymund Quilop
Assistant Secretary,Department of National Defense, Philippines

Major General Vu Tien Trong
General Director, Institute for Defence International Relations, Vietnam

Discussant:

Professor Anthony Milner
Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Malaysia

1225hrs **Lunch**

ADMM-PLUS

1400hrs **Session 3:**
Strengths and Weaknesses of the ADMM-Plus

(i) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ADMM-Plus?
(ii) What are the challenges and opportunities facing cooperation in ADMM-Plus?

Speakers:

Lieutenant Colonel Luke Donohue
Visiting Fellow, RSIS

Associate Professor Ken Jimbo
Keio University

Discussant:

Associate Professor Bhubhindar Singh
Coordinator, Regional Security Architecture Programme, IDSS, RSIS

1515hrs **Coffee / Tea Break**

1530hrs **Session 4:**
Future of the ADMM-Plus

(i) What's next for the ADMM-Plus?
(ii) What are the potential areas for future ADMM-Plus cooperation?

Speakers:

Senior Colonel Guo Xinning
Deputy Commandant, National Defense University, China

Dr Euan Graham
Director, Lowy Institute for International Policy

Discussant:

Associate Professor Ralf Emmers
Institute of Strategic and Associate Dean, RSIS

1645hrs **Wrap-up and Closing**

SPEAKERS AND DISCUSSANTS

1. **Lieutenant Colonel Luke Robert DONOHUE**
   U.S. Army War College Visiting Fellow
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

2. **Associate Professor Ralf EMMERS**
   Associate Dean
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

3. **Mr Iis GINDARSAH**
   Researcher
   Department of Politics & International Relations
   Centre for Strategic and International Studies
   Indonesia

4. **Senior Colonel GUO Xinning**
   Deputy Commandant and Professor
   College of Defense Studies
   National Defense University
   People's Republic of China

5. **Dr Euan GRAHAM**
   Director
   International Security Program
   Lowy Institute for International Policy
   Australia

6. **Associate Professor Ken JIMBO**
   Faculty of Policy Management
   Keio University
   Japan

7. **Professor Anthony MILNER**
   Tun Hussein Onn Chair of International Studies
   Institute of Strategic International Studies
   Malaysia

8. **Associate Professor Raymund Jose G. QUILOP**
   Assistant Secretary
   Department of National Defense
   The Philippines

9. **Associate Professor Bhubhindar SINGH**
   Coordinator
   Regional Security Architecture Programme
   Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

10. **Professor TAN See Seng**
    Professor of International Relations
    Deputy Director and Head of Research
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

11. **Mr TAN Seng Chye**
    Senior Fellow
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

12. **Dr TANG Siew Mun**
    Senior Fellow
    Regional Strategic & Political Studies
    ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
    Singapore

13. **Major General Vu Tien TRONG**
    General Director
    Institute for Defence International Relations
    Ministry of National Defence
    Socialist Republic of Vietnam

PARTICIPANTS

1. **Mr Mushahid ALI**
   Senior Fellow
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

2. **Ms Sally ANG**
   Defence Policy Office
   Ministry of Defence
   Singapore

3. **Associate Professor Mely CABALLERO-ANTHONY**
   Head
   Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

4. **Ms Jane CHAN**
   Research Fellow and Coordinator
   Maritime Security Programme
   Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

5. **Ms CHEN Zhao**
   Student Research Assistant
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

6. **Assistant Professor CHONG Ja Ian**
   Department of Political Science
   Faculty of Arts and Social Science
   National University of Singapore

7. **Dr Alistair D. B. COOK**
   Research Fellow
   Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

8. **Dr Malcolm COOK**
   Senior Fellow
   Regional Strategic & Political Studies
   ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute
   Singapore

9. **Associate Professor Leonard C. SEBASTIAN**
   Coordinator
   Indonesia Programme
   Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
   S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
   Singapore

10. **Ms Sarah TEO**
    Associate Research Fellow
    Regional Security Architecture Programme
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

11. **Mr David HAN**
    Research Analyst
    Malaysia Programme
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

12. **Assistant Professor Kei KOGA**
    School of Humanities and Social Sciences
    College of Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences
    Nanyang Technological University
    Singapore

13. **Mr KWA Chong Guan**
    Senior Fellow
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

14. **Mr Edwin LEE**
    Defence Policy Office
    Ministry of Defence
    Singapore

15. **Mr LEE Sang Ok**
    Visiting Fellow
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

16. **Professor LU Guangsheng**
    Visiting Senior Fellow
    China Programme
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

17. **Assistant Professor Anit MUKHERJEE**
    Student Research Assistant
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

18. **Ms Samridhi PANT**
    Student Research Assistant
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

19. **Mr Henrick Z. TSJENG**
    Associate Research Fellow
    Regional Security Architecture Programme
    Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies
    S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies
    Singapore

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STUDIES

Nanyang Technological University
Block S4, Level B4, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel: +65 6790 6982 | Fax: +65 6794 0617 | www.rsis.edu.sg