CONCEPT PAPER ON THE AD-HOC ADMM-PLUS CONFERENCE ON CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND RADIOLOGICAL THREATS

Introduction

1. While the COVID-19 pandemic has led to immediate health, social and economic challenges across the globe, the threats of terrorism and violent extremism have not abated, aggravated by social and economic instability. Chemical, Biological and Radiological (CBR) attacks are possible means through which terrorism and violent extremism may occur. A successful CBR attack has the potential to amplify the consequences of a terrorist attack in devastating ways.

2. CBR threats are an example of non-traditional security threats that are gaining prominence as a key area of concern in our security landscape, with implications for peace and security. This is a common concern for the regional and international community. Defence establishments play an important role in countering CBR threats, as an effective response to CBR incidents requires a multi-agency approach and can leverage existing military training programmes and capabilities.

3. The nature of CBR threats makes the impact of CBR attacks highly unpredictable. Info-communication technologies have also facilitated access to scientific information and chemical agents, while manufacturing and commerce of dual-use substances are growing in the region. These developments necessitate multilateral cooperation in the CBR domain to allow countries to develop the right networks and procedures, build habits of cooperation and ensure we are well-prepared to deal with CBR threats.

4. ASEAN recognises and is committed to address the grave threat of CBR regionally and internationally. The Network of ASEAN CBR Defence Experts, adopted by the ASEAN Defence Ministers in 2018, was set up for this purpose. The Network has since made significant progress in facilitating cooperation and strengthening ASEAN’s readiness in the area of CBR counter-terrorism.

5. Since its inaugural meeting in 2019, the Network has: (a) established a secure online portal to facilitate information-sharing among ASEAN Member States’ CBR experts and a directory of regional CBR experts; (b) organised meetings, workshops and conferences with invited resource speakers from Plus countries such as the US’ Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) and ROK’s Agency for Defense Development (ADD); and (c) collaborated with international organisations and research institutions such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In view of the pandemic, the Network also hosted a virtual workshop on
“Promoting Scientific Cooperation for Infectious Disease Outbreaks” in June 2020.

6. In the last decade, the ADMM-Plus has facilitated cooperation between ASEAN Member States and Plus countries, to better address non-traditional and transnational security challenges. To maintain the ADMM-Plus’ relevance in the changing security environment, there is scope to explore and discuss common security challenges in new domains and niche areas, beyond the domains of the seven Experts’ Working Groups (EWG). An ad-hoc ADMM-Plus conference would provide an opportunity for the ADMM-Plus to discuss emerging domains of common interest, such as CBR threats, on a one-off basis.

Proposal

7. Singapore proposes to host an ad-hoc ADMM-Plus conference on Countering CBR Threats in 2022. It will focus on the technical aspects of CBR threats. To enrich the discussions, technical CBR experts from relevant international and regional organisations and Track II participants will be invited to share their expertise. In addition to technical CBR experts, the ASEAN Centre of Military Medicine and EWG on Counter Terrorism co-chairs may also be invited to share their experiences.

Objectives

8. The objectives of the conference are as follows:

8.1 Develop a deeper understanding of the risks posed by the use of CBR agents in terrorist acts in the region;

8.2 Share information, experiences and best practices, including: (a) responses to CBR incidents, such as systems for the detection and transportation of dangerous materials, as well as training required for an effective response, and (b) roles of different national agencies, including defence establishments;

8.3 Consider possible approaches, recommendations and solutions to enhance cooperation and preparedness against CBR threats; and

8.4 Establish closer networks between regional and international CBR experts, so as to strengthen information-sharing mechanisms.
9. More details, including the proposed programme for the conference, will follow in due course.

**Reporting Procedures**

10. All outcomes of the conference will be reported to the ADMM, through the ADSOM Working Group and ADSOM. Any proposals or cooperative activities undertaken will also be submitted through the due ADMM process for approval. The outcomes will also be reported to the ADMM-Plus for information.

**Conclusion**

11. The conduct of the ADMM-Plus conference on CBR threats would promote dialogue and cooperation within the ADMM-Plus and enhance countries’ collective ability to deal with the common challenge of CBR threats.