

CONCEPT PAPER ON ESTABLISHING A DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS LINK IN THE ASEAN DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING PROCESS

Introduction

1. A direct communications link (DCL), or sometimes referred to as a 'Hotline', is one of the key confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs).¹ Originally utilised for arms control issues, hotline is now being developed for other crisis or emergency situations such as terrorism, maritime security, natural disasters, etc.
2. This Concept Paper puts forward a joint development of DCLs among the ASEAN defence establishments, especially in terms of building concept, and developing and implementing arrangement, but to be established bilaterally between all ten ASEAN Defence Ministers under the guidance of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM).
3. The establishment of a DCL at defence minister level would complement the existing bilateral naval initiatives or procedures, and add value to the existing information-sharing mechanisms in the region, as well as enhance coordination and cooperation in addressing non-traditional security challenges.²
4. The initiative to establish a DCL in the ADMM process is drawn from the aspirations of:
 - 4.1 The Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Strengthening Defence Cooperation of ASEAN in the Global Community to Face New Challenges adopted in Jakarta, Indonesia on 19 May 2011 strengthens regional defence and security cooperation among ASEAN Member States through concrete and practical cooperation to address defence and common security issues.
 - 4.2 During the 22nd ASEAN Summit held in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam on 24 – 25 April 2013, His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah Ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar 'Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam, in His Majesty's capacity as the Chairman of the 22nd ASEAN Summit,

¹ The United Nations (UN) defines CSBMs as military provisions adopted by States to dispel mistrust that might otherwise lead to armed conflict. The UN generally divides CSBMs into three groups: information exchange measures; observation and verification measures; and military constraint measures.

² There are several established information-sharing mechanisms in the region, which includes the ASEAN Information-Sharing Portal (AIP), ADMM-Plus Maritime Security Community Information-Sharing Portal (AMSCIP), Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia Information Sharing Centre (ReCAAP ISC) and Information Fusion Centre (IFC).

has highlighted the importance of placing practical procedures such as hotline that could assist in avoiding undesired incidents at sea.

- 4.3 The Brunei Darussalam Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers: “Securing Our People, Our Future Together” adopted in Bandar Seri Begawan on 7 May 2013 commits to deepening cooperation by developing more concrete and action-oriented measures. Towards this end, the ASEAN Defence Ministers have supported the idea of putting in place practical procedures that could assist in avoiding undesired incidents at sea.
- 4.4 The Bandar Seri Begawan Joint Declaration on The Second ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus adopted in Bandar Seri Begawan on 29 August 2013 encourages the ADMM-Plus defence and military establishments to establish practical measures that reduce vulnerability to miscalculations, and avoid misunderstanding and undesirable incidents at sea.

Purpose and Objective

- 5. **Purpose.** The establishment of a DCL is aimed at providing a permanent, rapid, reliable and confidential means by which any two ASEAN Defence Ministers may communicate with each other to arrive at mutual decisions in handling crisis or emergency situations, in particular related to maritime security.
- 6. **Objectives.** The establishment of a DCL will have the following objectives:
 - 6.1 To prevent or defuse misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and therefore to prevent escalation; and
 - 6.2 To promote quick-response cooperation in emergency situations.
- 7. The goal would not be to resolve underlying issues, but to effectively manage and contain tensions in the event of a possible military encounter, to foster de-escalation, and to provide channel for initial quick reaction and assistance in emergency situations.

Policy Principles

- 8. A DCL, in this context, is a secure bilateral computer connection over which messages are exchanged between two ASEAN Defence Ministers by, but not limited to, email and possibly chat, through

linkages established at both ministerial and operational levels of each of the ASEAN defence establishments.

9. The establishment of a DCL shall be guided by the following policy principles:
 - 9.1 The ADMM shall provide the framework for the setting up of the DCLs, which includes building concept, and developing and implementing arrangement.
 - 9.2 Between all ten ASEAN Defence Ministers, 45 secure bilateral DCLs would be set up. (See **Annex A**)
 - 9.3 Each bilateral DCL will be stand-alone. There will be no connection between any two DCLs.
 - 9.4 The DCL will consider information assurance policies that address issues pertaining to authentication including counter impostors, integrity of data, availability of connection, confidentiality and non-repudiation.
 - 9.5 Each ASEAN defence establishment may choose to set up multiple terminals at its receiving end.
 - 9.6 The ASEAN defence establishments may wish to share relevant communications technology with each other.
 - 9.7 Each ASEAN defence establishment would be responsible for the arrangements of the DCLs on its own installation and facilities, including set-up, 24/7 manned operation, and transmission and reception of messages.
 - 9.8 Periodic review of the DCLs may be held regarding the implementation and usage, to take advantage of technological innovations in communication systems.
 - 9.9 In exploring the possibility of widening the DCLs with the Plus Countries, the ADMM will uphold the ASEAN's principle of ASEAN centrality.

General Operational Procedures

10. In support to the above policy principles, the following general operational procedures can be observed:
 - 10.1 The DCL will only be activated under the circumstances where the decisions of two ASEAN defence ministers are urgently required or needed to prevent escalation in crisis, and to provide quick reaction and assistance in emergency situations.

- 10.2 The DCL will be reserved for the exclusive use of each of the ASEAN Defence Ministers. Each of them may specifically designate other users in their own defence establishments.
- 10.3 An existing 24/7 manned operation centre at the installation and facilities in each of the ASEAN defence establishments would be designated as the primary terminal for receipt and transmission of messages. This operation room would also be responsible for the periodic testing of the DCL.
- 10.4 Release of messages originated at other terminals must receive ministerial authorisation either directly from the defence minister or other users he/she specifically designates.
- 10.5 English will be the language used in transmitting outgoing messages.
- 10.6 Where English is not an official language used in some of the ASEAN defence establishments, the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting (ADSOM) Leader through the ASEAN Defence Senior Officials' Meeting Working Group (ADSOM WG) Leader of each of the ASEAN Member States would be responsible for the translation of the incoming and outgoing messages before transmitting.
- 10.7 Incoming messages will be translated and delivered to the defence minister by the fastest secure means available.
- 10.8 Records of messages will be maintained in the official files of the defence minister or other users he/she specifically designates.
11. In fulfilling the general operational procedures, the ADMM shall establish an ad hoc working group, composed of policy and technical officials, responsible for the overall operational supervision of the DCL, and the continuing review of its technical parameters and operational procedures.

Process and Form of Activities

12. The process of establishing the DCL will be pursued in a step-by-step approach, as below:
 - 12.1 Building concept (overall framework, policy principles and general operational procedures)
 - 12.2 Developing arrangement (designation of terminal points, timely transmission and timeline for implementation process)
 - 12.3 Implementing arrangement (installing, activating and testing)

13. The overall timeline of establishing a direct communications link in the ADMM process is target to be implemented by the 9th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting in 2015 in Malaysia.
14. The form of activities to be carried out by the ad hoc working group may be through meetings/workshops that could entail discussions of the following:
 - 14.1 Share knowledge on existing bilateral naval initiatives or procedures, and existing information-sharing mechanisms in the region;
 - 14.2 Further modalities and procedures of the arrangement;
 - 14.3 Choice of communications technology (reliability, maintenance and continuity);
 - 14.4 Conduct Table-Top Exercises (TTX) to test the DCL;
 - 14.5 Evaluation procedures;
 - 14.6 Financial requirements; and
 - 14.7 Possible involvement of the Plus Countries in the future.

Review and Report

15. The outcome of the meetings/workshops shall be duly reported to and assessed by the ADMM through the ADSOM and ADSOM WG.

Conclusion

16. The Concept Paper on Establishing a Direct Communications Link in the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Process sets out the overall framework, policy principles and general operational procedures that serve to guide the evolution of the establishment of DCLs within the ASEAN defence establishments. The setting-up of DCLs will be an important and concrete step in establishing a wider structure of military CSBMs, where relevant, in order to further foster security in the ASEAN region and beyond. It would also underscore ADMM's proactive contribution to that objective.