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The Straits of Malacca commands a navigational water route for nearly sixty percent of [world](#) trade as well as one of the busiest waterways in the [world](#)

with more than sixty thousand ships passing through per annum. The drop in piracy attacks over the couple of years does not necessarily mean a safer passage for vessels with the littoral states assuring its security. As such, the threat of a large-scale maritime terrorist attack may be overlooked. Al-Qeada and Jemaah Islamiyah have infact sent out warnings on potential attacks on countries economies through navigational routes and this makes the Straits of Malacca a potential maritime target.

The international community such as the Joint War Committee (JWC) representing the London marine insurance and Ageis Defense Services, in its risk assessment of a maritime terrorist and piracy attack in the Straits of Malacca can be justified to some extend. Intelligence and information gathered from Piracy, Jemaah Islamiyah operating in Southeast Asia and the threats from the Free-Aceh Movement (G.A.M) on hijacking vessels, clearly indicates the level of penetration of terrorist organization infiltrating piracy operations in the Straits of Malacca.

Although the littoral states and to some extend the ship owners association has regretted over the decision of the JWC, it is with ought a doubt that we must be prepared for a maritime attack. A warranted lack of evidence pointing to an immediate threat from maritime terrorism and to completely rule out the possibility of an attack in the Straits would be an incorrect assessment.

Like I mentioned in my previous article on the Somali maritime piracy and terrorism issue (The Weekly Turkish Journal, 29 Jan 09), these “pirates” are no “Pirates of the Caribbean”. The piracy in the Straits of Malacca has been penetrated by terrorist organizations such as Jemaah Islamiyah’s and its role in supporting the G.A.M. movement in up north Sumatra as well as in the region around the Philippines where the Morro [Islamic](#) Liberation Front (MILF) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) have conducted acts of maritime terrorism in Davoa city and Manila Bay. Foreign terrorist organizations are also working in Southeast Asia as evidence and sources have proved that “Cheznya” terrorist “modus operandi” was uncovered in a bombing in the Patani area some six years ago. A quote from a colleague of mine that is relatively important to note; “Terrorist needs to be lucky once, we need to be lucky all the time”!

These pirates are well-trained “militia”, incorporating “military style” tactics that no “normal” pirate is aware of. There is no way a “regular” person can perpetrate this act, as one needs to be trained in engaging a vessel which is probably more than a hundred feet in length and about fifty feet in height. One needs skills of engaging a vessel, expertise on boarding a vessel, which means traveling at a speed, to keep up with the vessels speed and maneuvering next to it.

It is believed that ex-military personnel or renegade soldiers of “special forces” training are engaged in such piracy attacks. They may come from any part of the Southeast Asia region. The trainings are provided by them as well as Jemaah Islamiyah operating training cells in Southern Philippines and Indonesia and to some extend in Thailand, which the authorities have come hard upon after the 911 attacks, and in curtailing the growth of these training cells and the

involvement of JI. Terrorist operatives are well trained and are well prepared for a major maritime attack in the Straits of Malacca. The bombing of the UUS Cole of Yemen is not a “failure” but a means off education, learning, and training for a “bigger” attack to come.

As the issue of “sovereignty”, is the most controversial issue pertaining to the Straits of Malacca, the littoral states have to address these issues on the fact that an eventual maritime attack might cause a massive large-scale economic disaster not only regionally but also globally.

The Straits of Malacca remain vulnerable to the threat of maritime terrorism, as littoral states do not have the experience neither the capabilities to respond to an attack. If an attack was to occur in the Straits of Malacca from a hazardous chemical cargo, it will take a month to actually respond to it as there are no measures taken or planned for a maritime attack in the Straits. Appropriate measures need to be taken seriously in terms of training, responding, information and intelligence sharing among littoral states as well as partnering with the international community on securing the Straits.

The littoral states have to compromise in the cooperation of international joint patrols and sea borne trainings offered by many international maritime agencies. The littoral states can monopolize Asean countries expertise such as the Japanese Coast Guard who has the expertise of sixty years. The Japanese Coast Guard has conducted joint patrol trainings with the Philippines Coast Guard recently as of last year and Thailand will probably be following suit as well as Singapore. The JCG training vessel Kogima will be leaving Japan in April of this year bound for the Asia region on a capacity building program for a three-month voyage.

It is wise to be practical in addressing the issues of maritime terrorism rather than to harp on “sovereignty” issues. All nations due to past experiences from war or political issues need to “grow up” in order to deal, address and to be realistic in the fight of the “war on terror”. The “terrorist” is not going to wait for the littoral states to solve its “sovereignty” problems. As can be seen from evidence presented above, the Straits of Malacca is “open” access to a possible maritime attack. One area that concerns me most is the up north region of Aceh and the coastal town of Bireuen where potential attacks can be perpetrated due to the lack of surveillance and the wide open international waters leading into the mouth of the Straits. Al-Qaeda has shown us attacks from land and air with great destructions so as Jemaah Islamiyah in the Bali bombings. In my opinion, the next attack will be a major maritime attack! Do we need to wait for a next 911?

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