

**THE 10<sup>TH</sup> CSCAP GENERAL CONFERENCE  
CONFIDENCE BUILDING IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC  
THE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA  
OCTOBER 21-23 2015**

Session 5 Maritime Cooperation

**ABSTRACT**

At the 9<sup>th</sup> CSCAP General Conference held in Beijing in December 2013, we discussed the need to strengthen maritime cooperation in the face of a growing array of challenges in the maritime domain that could undermine regional security.

Some important progress has been made since the last General Conference in building habits of cooperation. Notably CUES, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, has been agreed and drills are being held by some regional Navies to practise its provisions. China and the United States have concluded a MOU on rules of behaviour for safe military encounters at sea and in the air. Japan and China have agreed to set a maritime communications system between their naval and air force chiefs, and China and the ASEAN's have agreed to set up a hotline between their foreign ministries. The ASEAN Defence Ministers plus forum has been active in promoting cooperation between the navies of member countries.

Those developments are very welcome, but during the same time frame the maritime security environment has become even more complicated and the need to make further progress is even more compelling.

Sovereignty disputes over maritime borders coupled with the rapid growth of naval forces in the region – and particularly of submarine forces operating in often confined waters – heightens the risk of unintended consequences from what some parties might consider provocative patrolling. The use of merchant vessels by criminal enterprises to support the irregular movement of people which can have security implications; the increasing incidence of illegal, irregular and unreported fishing which is seriously depleting fish stocks; the problem of piracy and robbery at sea, and the risk of maritime terrorism targeting high value cargoes or vital under-sea communications cables, all in their various forms create risks to regional security. They call for heightened endeavours to establish a more secure maritime commons for the benefit of all.

There is no shortage of ideas going forward and I will present some of these in my paper. But the ultimate challenge for the region is to build not only confidence but more importantly trust and that is the most difficult challenge of all.

Paul Sinclair  
Regional Security Fellow  
Centre for Strategic Studies  
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand  
October 2015