

Singapore on high alert as terror threats emerge

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“Certainly we know that in the past al-Qaida has had not only the intentions, but the capabilities to operate in the maritime environment,” - John Harrison, assistant

Singapore bolstered security and is in a state of alert Friday after receiving information of a terrorist plot to attack vessels off the coast of the city-state in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, a Cabinet minister said.

Malaysia and Indonesia have also stepped up maritime and air patrols in the Malacca Strait, where millions of barrels of oil pass daily. Singapore's navy warned Thursday that a terrorist group was planning attacks on oil tankers and other vessels but provided no details.

“All alert levels have been raised,” Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng told Parliament, saying that the government has increased security at border crossings, airports, sea ports and at high-risk targets such as two new casino resorts.

Wong did not say which terrorist group was planning the reported attack.

“We received intelligence from our liaison partners about this possible plot to go and attack vessels coming through Singapore waters through the Malacca Strait,” Wong said.

“As a result, the various security agencies have been working very closely with one another.”

A Singapore-based terrorism expert said al-Qaida and the Southeast Asian militant group Jemaah Islamiyah — blamed for twin bombings last year on hotels in Jakarta — would be the most likely to carry out such an attack.

professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

Suspected JI operatives have been previously been arrested in Singapore.

Also Friday, Indonesia's police chief Gen. Bambang Hendarso Danuri said authorities were investigating whether 14 suspected Islamic militants captured in a raid in Aceh province the previous day were linked to the threat.

The raid came amid a police crackdown on militants in Aceh suspected of ties to Jemaah Islamiyah. Indonesia's president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said Friday the group had set up in the western province believing that Indonesian

security forces had lost interest in Aceh since a violent separatist movement ended in 2005.

Indonesian police have blamed JI for suicide bombings of the J.W. Marriott and Ritz Carlton hotels in Jakarta in

July 2009 that killed seven people and bombings on the island of Bali in 2002 that killed 202 people.

Harrison said Singapore's warning likely reflects a credible threat.

"Both the Singapore navy and Home Affairs Ministry are not bodies that are known to hype any threats," Harrison said. "If they are putting this information out, it means they are very concerned that something may be developing." "The shipping industry should and is taking this very seriously," he added.

The Singapore navy said Thursday that small fishing boats or speedboats were used in past successful terrorist attacks against ships, and these kinds of vessels could be used in the Malacca Strait.

The strait, which is 1.7 miles (2.7 kilometers) at its narrowest point, is formed by the west coast of Malaysia and the east coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island.

Singapore, one of the world's busiest ports, lies at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula along the strait.

According to the US Energy Information Agency, 15 million barrels of oil a day passed through the strait in 2006.