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Singapore Terrorist Warning; A Singapore Navy advisory says oil tankers could be targeted

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SINGAPORE—Terrorists may be planning attacks on oil tankers and other large ships in the Malacca Strait, the Singapore Shipping Association said Thursday, citing an advisory from the Singapore Navy.

The navy's Information Fusion Centre "received an indication that a terrorist group is planning attacks on oil tankers in the Malacca Straits," it said in the advisory, which was reviewed by a reporter. "This does not preclude possible attacks on other large vessels with dangerous cargo."

Singapore's Ministry of Defense declined to comment. The Singapore Shipping Association declined to elaborate.

The Malacca Strait—some 550 miles long and 1.7 miles wide at its narrowest point—passes between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Indonesia's Department of Defense "hasn't received any information that Singaporean tankers will be disturbed in the Straits of Malacca by terrorists," Brig. Gen. I Wayan Midio said. However, Indonesia plans to step up air and sea patrols to monitor the straits, said Mr. Midio.

The Malacca Strait is a vital link connecting the Middle East and Europe to Asia. The number of ships passing through it this year will total 117,000, according to an estimate by the Ocean Policy Research Foundation.

About 15 million barrels of oil a day flow through the strait, according to a 2006 survey by the U.S. Energy Department.

"Normally, we don't see these types of alerts" from the navy, said Alex Duperouzel, managing director at Background Asia Risk Solutions, a security consulting firm.

Information about the plans to attack oil tankers or other shipping in the busy Strait of Malacca was "recently acquired" following the detention of terrorist suspects elsewhere in Southeast Asia, a regional intelligence official said.

The Southeast Asia-based Islamist group Jemaah Islamiyah has long harbored the ambition of seizing an oil tanker and using it as a huge floating bomb, the person said.

"Terrorist groups operating in the region have looked several times at threats to the maritime domain," said terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore.

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