



Terrorist Group Planning Malacca Oil-Tanker Attacks (Update2)

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By Yee Kai Pin

March 4 (Bloomberg) -- A terror alert from the Singapore navy to oil tankers in the Malacca Strait, a shipping lane that's almost six times busier than the Suez Canal, may be linked to regional groups associated with al-Qaeda.

Singapore's navy has "received indication" that a terrorist group is planning attacks on oil tankers in the Malacca Strait, according to an advisory today from its [Information Fusion Centre](#).

"The warning should be taken seriously," [Rohan Gunaratna](#), the head of the Singapore-based International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, said in an interview. "There are terrorist groups in the region that have the intent to carry out terrorist attacks and some of these groups have relationships with al-Qaeda."

The advisory from the navy to the maritime community, sent through the Singapore Shipping Association, reflects the "significant" threat of marine and land-based attacks in the Malacca Strait amid an increase in global trade, Gunaratna said.

"The terrorists' intent is probably to achieve widespread publicity and showcase that it remains a viable group," it said, without naming any groups. "This information does not preclude possible attacks on other large vessels with dangerous cargo."

Shortest Route

The 600-mile (965-kilometer) Malacca Strait, between Malaysia and the Indonesian island of Sumatra, is used by more than 90,000 vessels every year. It's the [shortest](#) sea route between the Persian Gulf and North Asia, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

An estimated 15 million barrels a day of oil passed through the channel in 2006, about a third of global seaborne volumes. "Nearly half" of the world's shipping fleet would need to reroute if the strait was blocked, the EIA said.

"In the past there were a number of attempts to mount terrorist attacks in the Malacca Strait," Gunaratna said. "The threat of terrorism in this region is still very significant."

Governments in the region are likely to step up intelligence gathering, boost "protective security measures" and alert commercial partners when there's a terror alert, he said.

The Singapore navy has started "operational coordination" and information-sharing with regional partners, according to today's advisory.

A Singapore navy spokeswoman, Zheng Xinhui, couldn't provide further details of the warning.

Dinghies and 'Sampans'

Past cases of successful terrorist attacks on tankers were carried out using smaller vessels such as dinghies, speedboats and fishing boats, which are common in the Malacca Strait, the advisory said.

Wooden, 3-meter long fishing vessels that usually carry two fishermen, known as sampans, may be "exploited by perpetrators" and ship masters should steer clear of them, according to the advisory.

The advisory recommended shipmasters to adopt defensive measures similar to those taken when transiting through the Gulf of Aden near Yemen. In October 2000, 17 American sailors were killed by a suicide bombing of the USS Cole warship docked at the port of Aden.

The Singapore Shipping Association represents about 370 members including marine-fuel suppliers and

trading companies.

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