

**21<sup>ST</sup> ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT**  
**THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

**SIXTH PLENARY SESSION**  
**CONNECTING INDIAN OCEAN AND PACIFIC**  
**SECURITY**  
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**SUTIN KLUNGSANG**  
**MINISTER OF DEFENCE, THAILAND**

**Sutin Klungsang, Minister of Defence, Thailand**

Sir John Chipman, the Executive Chairman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Excellencies and distinguished delegates, I am much delighted to be a part of the Shangri-La Dialogue this year, as I recognise that this has become the prominent strategic dialogue in the region. The participants have openly exchanged their perspectives and opinions, which will significantly contribute to fostering understanding and promoting security cooperation among us. I would like to express my gratitude and admiration towards the IISS and the Ministry of Defence of Singapore for continuously organising the remarkably important forum. Especially, I am honoured to have the opportunity to share my perspectives regarding 'Connecting Indian Ocean and Pacific Security'.

When referring to the Indian Ocean, I think of a vast maritime area stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the Southeast Asia peninsula, reaching the western coast of Australia. It is an area rich in natural resources, as well as the birthplace of numerous monumental ancient civilisations of mankind. Moreover, it has been a vital maritime route since ancient times, continuing to be so today. More than one-third of global maritime trade and significantly more than two-thirds of oil and natural-gas shipments pass through the Indian Ocean.

As Thailand is located on a peninsula in Southeast Asia, connecting to both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, it has been a hub of prosperity and cultural amalgamation from the Eastern and Western civilisations. This region has historically been referred to as *Suvarnabhumi*, or the Land of Gold, characterised by its geopolitical connection and its role as a cultural crossroads bridging the world, as well as being historically important trading posts, demonstrating that connectivity has been a key factor in fostering prosperity and wealth from the past to present.

I do very much realise that every country has its own strategy to promote connectivity. While there may be variation in implementations and approaches, I believe that we all share the same goal of fostering trade and people-to-people interactions, which are fundamental factors for the shared prosperity of the region.

Strategies and mechanisms of regional cooperation include initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, as well as collaboration within the APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] framework. In this regard, Thailand is pleased to promote cooperation with all countries through various mechanisms to enhance connectivity and mutual prosperity on both sides of the ocean. The increasing connectivity, on one hand, will present the opportunities for economic prosperity, societal benefits and collective human-security development. However, on the other hand, it also poses challenges to regional security, ranging from intensified geopolitical competition to the emerging transborder security challenges such as transnational crime, illegal migration, piracy and environmental-degradation issues. Therefore, enhancing cooperation among countries in the region is a vital mechanism to foster trust and confidence-building, as well as to enhance collective efforts in addressing regional security challenges in order to ensure safe and seamless connectivity in all dimensions.

In this regard, Thailand is pleased to act as a mediator and is ready to be a valuable collaborator with all parties in order to cultivate a friendly atmosphere in the region, rather than conflicts or tensions. We also aim to promote and support the cooperative mechanisms in border management to respond to the borderless non-traditional security threats.

Furthermore, I reaffirm our support of regional multilateral cooperation, particularly through the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]-led mechanisms, and aspire to promote genuine cooperation based on mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefits, as well as openness, transparency and inclusiveness from all parties. These principles are reflected in the ASEAN Outlook

on the Indo-Pacific. I do also support coordination and collaboration between the ASEAN-led mechanisms with regional and sub-regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the Mekong Cooperation Framework, as well as other mechanisms in the Pacific region, including the Pacific Islands Forum, to strengthen relationships and to promote a more coordinated, integrated and interconnected cooperative effort.

In order to promote connectivity, the safety of the maritime domain is crucial. In this regard, to address maritime security challenges, Thailand firmly supports regional cooperation, particularly in enhancing maritime domain awareness through the promotion of maritime information sharing and collaboration, which is not only focusing on military and traditional security aspects, but also on other dimensions such as maritime search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, climate change, and maritime environmental issues including the illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, or IUU. Besides, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Ministry of Defence of Singapore for the initiation and establishment of the maritime Information Fusion Centre, which carries on its duty effectively in collecting and sharing of maritime information that helps create a comprehensive regional maritime common picture, as well as promptly facilitates coordinated responses to maritime threats.

Thailand emphasises regional maritime cooperation by actively participating in various key cooperative mechanisms, such as the ReCAAP [Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia], the Strait of Malacca Sea and Air Patrols, the ASEAN Naval Chief Meeting, the ADMM [ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting]-Plus Experts Working Group on Maritime Security, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which the Royal Thai Navy has an opportunity to chair during the years 2023–2025, highlighting the blue economy that would support effective and sustainable use of marine resources, and efficient and beneficial shared maritime domains management.

Additionally, the Ministry of Defence of Thailand is pleased to co-chair with the US Department of Defense the ADMM-Plus Experts Working Group on Maritime Security between 2021 and 2024. The key outcome is the initiative of the Maritime Security Roadmap 2040, which is the long-term cooperation framework that aims to promote continuity, consistency and practical activities at all levels, including a work plan focusing on climate change and protection of the marine environment. And we look forward to supporting the Republic of the Philippines and Japan to further develop practical cooperation under the Roadmap.

Distinguished delegates, when we talk about security challenges, it is not limited only to the military dimension. It also encompasses other dimensions including human security, especially economic security, food security and public health. These are fundamental factors in sustaining people's livelihoods. As for Thailand, the Royal Thai Armed Forces has been tasked not only in defending the country in the traditional sense, but also plays a crucial role in promoting and supporting national development by utilising its capabilities and resources to promote economic development and the elevation of the people's living standard. These efforts are carried out on the people-oriented and people-centred basis, aiming to strengthen the national resilience and move towards the goal of comprehensive security and sustainable development. Therefore, the Ministry of Defence must utilise the allocated budget to develop the Armed Forces to be modern, versatile and capable of performing a variety of tasks.

We also aim to review our force structure to be more compact, agile and self-sufficient, being able to cope with the current security challenges of the twenty-first century, as well as in supporting other government agencies and private sectors to address vital national-security issues, particularly

transboundary security challenges and cyber security. This also includes assisting the people in times of distress and participating in national development to enhance the livelihood of the people.

Distinguished delegates, over the past decades we have witnessed an increase in military expenditures across all regions, which has been perceived as a factor impacting global and regional security and stability. However, I would argue that increasing military spending and modernisation efforts are not solely the main causes of instability. Instead, in my belief, lack of continued communication and confidence-building are the main factors potentially leading to misunderstandings and miscalculations. Under the current circumstances of intense strategic competition, it is essential for us all to find commonalities, to work together and play a constructive role in collectively addressing global pressing security issues, as well as creating shared public goods and prosperity.

Last and very importantly, to punctuate all that I have mentioned, the promotion of connectivity between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean presents opportunities for shared prosperity and sustainable development in the region. However, on the contrary, there are also rising challenges that we must consider and find more collaboration to address. Maintaining regional security and stability is not something that can be achieved easily and quickly. Therefore, I call upon all countries for our highest level of commitment on continual close cooperation and moving forward together constructively. These efforts should be based upon mutual trust, mutual respect and mutual benefit, which would lead to the attainment of regional peace, security, stability and shared prosperity.

Thank you.

**Sir John Chipman, Executive Chairman, IISS**

Thank you very much, Minister, and in particular for noting the importance of the maritime Fusion Centre. We might in discussion want to address the question of whether the information that is gathered in the maritime Fusion Centre can also help with policing issues like unregulated fishing and energy disputes in the area. So let us hold that for the Q&A.