**S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL
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RSIS COMMENTARIES

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**Beyond the Sea:
Fighting Piracy in Southeast Asia**

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Policy makers should extend the battle against piracy from the high seas to onshore. As seen in Somalia and the upsurge of piracy off the Riau Archipelago, the condition of the state on land is the key to the fight against piracy. (This is an update of the commentary published on 21 December 2009 to clarify the locations of the piracy incidents.)

BETWEEN 2005 and 2008, sea and air patrols contributed to the fight against piracy in the Malacca Strait. These efforts are necessary though not sufficient to secure the entire waters in the Strait. In 2009, sea piracy hit a five-year high in the South China Sea.

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More precisely, official reports mention three piracy-prone areas: the waters off Anambas in the South China Sea, the northwest of Batam and the northwest of Bintan. This upsurge underlines the need for more research in the Riau Archipelago, which presents itself as the 'playground' of this local piracy. Moreover, such studies can provide clues for formulating new policies towards tackling this problem. As the pirates cross the national borders to attack ships, researchers should also cross their academic frontiers to help fight and prevent piracy as efficiently as possible.

Fighting Piracy off the Coast

The usual questions asked when planning the fight against piracy are essentially technical and operational in nature: Which patrol boats to fight piracy? Which equipment to use? Helicopters? Private security companies or SWAT teams? It may be time to ask new questions: Why do the pirates take such risks? What are the roots of piracy? Such broader questions are often asked by social scientists who can share their insights. They can provide their perspectives on issues that are seldom asked, such as the economic factors behind piracy (crisis, lack of resources, pollution); the geographical ones (neglected territories, specific status of these areas, lack of infrastructure, natural spaces conducive to 'maritime guerrilla'); the migratory aspects (overpopulation, unemployment, rootlessness); and the political context, both at the national level (instability); and at the local one (corruption, autonomy policy).

New prescriptions could also be considered to fight piracy over the long term. Between 2005 and 2008, what has been done in Aceh since the peace agreement, and by the authorities in the Riau Archipelago province, has been as effective as the patrols set up in 2004. The success over piracy stems from the ability of the littoral provinces to divert young people from piracy. For example, according to Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA), Batam attracts foreign companies to increase its development and helped create jobs: 688 in 2003 and 1,015 in 2008. The infrastructures have also improved: the island produced 2,343 litres of fresh water per second in 2008 compared to 1,760 five years earlier.

The situation in Somalia is much more difficult. But there, diplomats have also to focus on crime prevention, clampdowns and intelligence. It demands the deployment of not only soldiers but also civil servants. The international community should help them tackle the social integration of the pirates (economic and urban measures); the performance of the legal system (tribunals, prisons); and the fight against financing of piracy and piracy-related activities. This 'land approach', adopted by Indonesia, was suggested for Somalia by the United Nations, as proposed by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Brussels during a meeting on piracy off Somalia in April 2009.

Emerging Trend: Beyond the Remote Areas

Field research amongst the pirates may also help to prevent an upsurge in the short term. Former Indonesian pirates, who kill time in Batam, say they hope for an opportunity to go back to sea. Now, their daily salaries in petty and legal jobs on land are about S$6. As pirates, they can get paid by their ringleaders between S$13,000 and S$20,000 for a successful strike. The current trend is worrying and the BIDA statistics support this socio-economic concern: The transfer of funds by workers to their families' fell from 190 billion rupiah in 2007 to 113 billion rupiah in 2008, at a time when the regional revenue dropped by 46%. Last October, more than 1,000 workers demonstrated to complain about falling incomes.

In this context, in the north of Belakang Padang, in a former 'pirate's hub' off Batam, villagers showed last month the house where a certain Mr. K. managed a new gang of pirates. He recently conducted attacks from a wooden mother-ship off Tioman Islands. Today, some members of his gang are still in Belakang Padang. They are not the only sea muggers. Last month, D., who managed a gang in this area ten years ago, came back to Belakang Padang.

In the future, even if the authorities develop more infrastructure in Riau Archipelago, pirates will move to the remote areas. For example, in the South China Sea, it is well-known that pirates have recently anchored off Keramut, near Mangkai Island (see map). New local testimonies maintain that they come from Palembang (South Sumatra). A report published last month by the International Maritime Bureau shows that the place still seems to be a 'pirate's haven': Ten attacks have been reported in the South China Sea since January, compared to zero for the same period last year. It is the same in Somalia when pirates moved to deserted French islands in the Indian Ocean. If the authorities no longer have control over these remote areas, pirates will move in.

From Land to Sea, From Sea to Land

In Indonesia, the same word – *perampokan* – is used for robberies on land or at sea; sea or land thugs have the same motivations. Piracy must be considered not only as problem arising from commercial issues but also as a social one. The 'strategic centre of gravity' in tackling it should be moved from sea to land. As both the fight 'to win the hearts' and intelligence may refine counter-insurgency theories, 'area studies' and anthropology may refresh the academic agenda on piracy.

In return, this maritime issue can offer states an opportunity to reinforce their presence on coastal 'grey areas'. They may find new partnerships to support their actions in littoral districts: international task forces, NGOs, regional organisations or even private security companies. Faced by international pressures and equipped by regional powers, Indonesia has managed to effectively address the security challenges posed by piracy. The 'return of the state' should now be extended to the remote islands.

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