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## **STRENGTHENING ASEAN CENTRALITY WITHIN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

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### **Abstract**

*The emergence of Indo-Pacific terminology leads to an interesting path of cooperation within the arena between countries. The Indo-Pacific region, marked by the cross-geography of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, is home to some of the most diverse populations, international trade and global exports. Some countries have been questioned about the importance of this area, namely the U.S., Australia, Japan, People's Republic of China (PRC), India, and the states in the Southeast Asia. A few sea districts, such as the South China Ocean, have contended most over the Indo-Pacific, and the Indian sea over the Malacca Strait has been a source of expanding oceanic security dangers. This paper focuses upon the challenges of the Indo-Pacific region, non-traditional oceanic threats like piracy and particularly related to the maritime strife, namely South China Sea dispute. The method used on this research is a qualitative method with an analytical descriptive approach. The purpose of this study is to discuss the ASEAN centrality in region as a form of maritime security cooperation without any country feeling left behind to accommodate all nations within the region. This new nomenclature reflects a glimpse of ASEAN's spirit as an ecosystem of peace, stability, and prosperity, including in addressing the region's inclusiveness and connectivity. The conclusion of the study indicates that ASEAN's initiative*

*needs to be addressed within the Indo-Pacific if the idea is increasingly institutionalized and major powers collaborate more closely.*

### **Keywords**

ASEAN, Indo-Pacific, Maritime Threats, Maritime Security Cooperation

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## **1. Introduction**

The proposals of a number of academics in the Indo-Pacific context are not new, because they make no explicit reference to the Indo-Pacific, but the alternative of geographically including the Indian Ocean and including India in protecting U.S. (U.S.) interests is indicative of U.S. strategic considerations (Upadhyay, 2014). Changes within the political environment in the Indo-Pacific region have been triggered by the increasing U.S. impact on People's Republic of China (PRC) as a result of the "Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) activities, which has contributed to growing regional instability and tensions in the backyard of Indonesia between states in Southeast Asia (Godbole, 2017).

Moreover, the rising prosperity of several Indo-Pacific countries is accompanied by an increase in the defense budgets of countries with the aim of appearing, i.e. the arms race between Indo-Pacific nations. The arms race phenomenon is inseparable from the existence of conflicts of interest in the Indo-Pacific between a number of countries like PRC, U. S., Japan, India, and Australia. As a result, there could be higher and higher potential for confrontation and military clashes. Forms of conflict of interest include traditional threats such as border disputes and maritime conflicts, and non-traditional threats such as competition for access to natural resources and global markets, and piracy. Most of these disputes were maritime-related. The Indo-Pacific terminology therefore leads to a new discourse, particularly in the maritime aspects of the region. The open discourse on Asia's U.S. defense procedure is out of date, reflecting the center of the existing challenges, clashes and commitments of the final century, instead of the rising dangers and openings of this century. The renaming of U.S. Pacific Command to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) gives the U.S. with the opportunity to grow the scope of the U.S. terrific procedure and look in the locale with a clear eye.



**Figure 1:** *Map of Indo-Pacific*

Source: Geopolitica.ru, 2018

Whereas Northeast Asia was prioritized by the twentieth-century territorial security outline, the twenty-first-century outline calls for vital consideration to center on a more extensive scene characterized by hegemonic goals of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and a more extensive set of competing national interface. United States proceeds to see at Asia's security through an Indo-Pacific crystal, keeping up America's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific would require centered consideration on three issues: (1) denying China's claim of dominance over the South China Sea; (2) utilizing Indo-Pacific economic integration to balanced China's financial control; and (3) consolidating India as a territorial security accomplice (Carlisle, 2018).

China's ask calls on the U.S. to "open the gap" to its grand strategy. This will empower the U.S. to pick up a much broader picture and and a better understanding of the whole region. The Indo-Pacific region's broad picture indicates that current U.S. engagement — economic, political, and military — is lacking to ensure U.S. objectives against PRC's hegemonic drive for territorial control Department of Defense (DOD) pioneers appear solid signs of recognizing how the U.S. must react to this challenge. In May 2018, the DOD renamed U.S Pacific Command (USPACOM) as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). At a ceremony declaring the switch, Defense Secretary, James Mattis expressed that the alter of title recognized the significance of the collusions of America and relations with the nations bordering the Indian Sea as well as the Pacific Ocean in protecting territorial soundness and accomplishing a shared vision of "numerous

belts and numerous ways" within the Indo-Pacific locale, countering the One Belt & One Road (OBOR) of China (Carlisle, 2018).

Consequently, the main reason why ASEAN, with Indonesia taking over, needs to remain in its position to maintain, to reinforce its role in the region of Southeast Asia and gradually to expand its role in the Indo-Pacific. As such, ASEAN must first focus on developing cohesive policies to address the Indo-Pacific region's problems (Laksmana, 2018). Regional disputes between ASEAN members, such as border disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia, remain unresolved in the South East Asia region. The most important issue, however, is the territorial claim at the South China Sea involving PRC, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippines, and Taiwan. These issues add to the complexity of what has happened in the Indo-Pacific. Day-to-day competition for natural resource access and control (in terms of international affairs known as resource war). In Indo-Pacific seas, there is ample space in the form of natural gas and oil for natural resources. Both of these natural resources in the 21st century are the primary sources of energy that are not yet replaced by other sources of energy.

Piracy is also a maritime problem that needs to be addressed in the region. The Southeast Asian Sea Lane is the busiest sea lane because around one-third (1/3) of world trade and transport of half of the world's shipping fuel in the Malacca Straits plays a very central role in connecting one country with other parts of the world.. The Malacca Strait is a target for piracy and a potential target for terrorism in the central Indo-Pacific region (Felipe, 2012). The above assertion also suggests that the maritime zone of Indo-Pacific has a strategic position in connecting countries and as a communication channel or Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC). The South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, passing through the Malacca Strait, as well as sea-based trading systems are very important for transport and connectivity. The growing number of transnational crimes that threaten the economic prosperity of the Indo-Pacific countries, coupled with security vulnerabilities and stability due to the transformation of maritime safety and the competitive arms race of the region, has become a common concern for the Indo-Pacific countries.

## **2. Method and Materials**

Discussing in this paper, Authors utilize analytical qualitative method based on analytical descriptive. The concept of analytical descriptive is that the data used are descriptive data, which is usually oral and written in the form of words and images, and will then be evaluated using the correct theory (Sugiarto, 2015). In exploring data for this study, authors collect all data and information from common sources such The data source used in this study is to use literature by

collecting secondary data, in the form of books, scientific journals including electronic journals, both domestic journals and international journals, and international news articles from domestic and international media. Reliable associated with the issue in this study. Researchers put all the datas and analyze them into in rational authorial scripts using relevant theories. Authors seek to portray how ASEAN strengthens its centrality by offering maritime security cooperation to eliminate day-to-day possible competition, crisis, and conflict in Indo-Pacific region.

### **3. Maritime Issues and Non-Traditional Maritime Threats in the Indo-Pacific Region**

There are some of the most contentious geographic regions of the Indo-Pacific, namely the the Malacca Strait, South China Sea, the Indian Ocean. Although in these areas there has never been a direct military confrontation, these areas are sources of increased security threats in the region. The threat to these regions is largely due to the various regional countries' security needs. Furthermore, these regions have spread broad geostrategic interests which could intensify complex conflicts in the Indo-Pacific from a maritime security perspective.

Located in Southeast Asia's northeastern part, the South China Sea borders much of Southeast Asia and PRC. Since 2009, PRC has asserted sovereign rights over most of the South China Sea arbitrarily and without international legal recognition, citing the 1947 'nine-dash line' border and recently the the argument to the 'ten-dashed line', putting at risk the central U.S.interest in free and open navigation in Indo-Pacific seas (Carlisle, 2018). The Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands, Scarborough Shoal, Macclesfield Bank, and Natuna Islands make up the region's large islands and coral reefs, with around 1/3 of international exports transiting the South China Sea from Asia in 60% of total maritime trade (CSIC, 2013). The South China Sea, with a trade value of around USD 3.37 trillion in 2016, has a significant global shipping role. The Malacca Strait serves as the South China Sea entrance and was named after the Hormuz Strait as the second busiest oil transportation route. The Indo-Pacific countries rely on the economic values of the South China Sea referred to above (Perwita & Tertia, 2018).



**Figure 2:** Map of South China Sea

Source: UNCLOS, 2017

According to Carlisle, a free and open South China Sea is also vital to all South East Asian nations. As for the oil and gas quantity in the South China Sea, there are several assumptions and projections of the quantity of oil and gas reserves that are not yet understood. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reported in 2010 that around 5-22 billion barrels of oil and 70-290 billion cubic feet of gas might be in the South China Sea. The Chinese National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) is more positive about calculating potential resources in the South China Sea. In November 2012, the field was expected to hold approximately 125 billion barrels of oil as well as 500 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The Energy Information Administration (EIA) released estimated 11 billion barrels of oil reserves and 190 trillion cubic feet of the country's natural gas reserves in 2013. Although there are no accurate figures for oil and gas reserves, some reports suggest that the most plentiful of these resources are in the western Pacific (Damayanti, 2018).

The South China Sea as a strategic region is subject to territorial maritime dispute, the importance of resources within and around the PRC and the Southeast Asian countries. Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, and PRC claim that this sea. The most prominent claim is PRC, with nine strips covering the majority of the region (Villar & Hamilton, 2017). PRC's claims to the region have already brought it into conflict with many neighboring nations, including ASEAN states, Taiwan, and India, further exacerbating PRC's need for a navy capable of securing its interests. The PRC aims to transform the South China Sea from an international SLOC into a Chinese-

controlled waterway and a strategic location for other countries. These claims to the sea area also led to SLOC insecurity in the South China Sea, which puts each country at risk.

These countries would certainly benefit from the abundance of marine fisheries and marine products in the South China Sea, in addition to the abundance of oil and gas. For example, in 2015, PRC's total fishery output from the Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) reached more than 15 million tons, which increased significantly in 2004 by a total of 16 percent million tons. With this increase in marine resources, the PRC has gained the most from Western Pacific waters. With the EEZ covering the Malacca Strait and the southern part of the South China Sea, Indonesia produced over 6 million tons of maritime production, led by the U.S. with a total of 4.8 million tons, followed by several Indo-Pacific countries such as India, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand (FAO, 2018). There is no question that the effects of major marine development in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea regions are a gift to coastal states. This region's high content of oil, gas and marine resources makes every country very vulnerable to various threats.

Piracy is the most common non-traditional threat to the sea. On the basis of the above table, there are cases of piracy in the world, piracy in the Indo-Pacific region ranks first in the Malacca Strait. Since 2005, Somali pirates have started to explore the Indian Ocean with modern equipment allowing them to operate 1,500 nautical miles off the Somali coast. According to the International Chamber of Commerce of the International Maritime Bureau (ICC-IMB), pirate attacks remain a concern for all countries around Pacific Ocean has decreased from 246 ship piracy and global armed robbery incidents in 2017 to 38 incidents in 2019, especially the most frequent offshore incidents in Indonesia. There was also piracy against boats in Indian Ocean which is bounded by India and Bangladesh (ICC, 2019). In addition, Somali pirates are also affiliated with terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab in the Indian Ocean region. After the 11/26 attacks in Mumbai, which killed 160 people, maritime terrorism has started to be considered a serious threat. The Malacca Straits is the world's most common route to piracy activities.

**Table 1: Data of Global Piracy**

Locations	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>S E ASIA</b>	86	33	23	31	20
Indonesia					
Malacca Straits	5				
Malaysia	11	5	6	9	10
Philippines	8	5	17	6	4
Singapore Straits	9	1	1	3	1
Thailand	1				
<b>EAST ASIA</b>		5	1	2	3
China					
Vietnam	19	6	1	2	2
<b>INDIAN OCEAN</b>	11	3	7	11	
Bangladesh					
<b>SUB CONTINENT</b>	7	14	2	3	3
India					
<b>AMERICAS</b>				4	2
Brazil					
Colombia	4	3	3	1	3
Dominican Republic					1
Ecuador			2	4	3
Guyana		1	1	2	
Haiti	1	2	1	3	1
Mexico					1
Panama					1
Peru		7	2	3	5
Venezuela	1	3	11	8	6
<b>AFRICA</b>		1	1		
Angola					
Benin				5	1
Cameroon				2	5
Democratic Rep. of Congo	2	2		1	1
Equatorial Guinea					2
Ghana	2	2	1	8	3
Guinea	3	3	2	2	2
Gulf of Aden*		1	2	1	
Ivory Coast	1	1	1	1	1
Kenya	2	2	1		1
Liberia	1				2
Morocco		1			1
Mozambique	1	1	2	1	2
Nigeria	12	31	20	41	29
Red Sea*			1		
Senegal			1		
Sierra Leone			4		1
Somalia			4	1	
South Africa		1			
The Congo	2	5	1		
Togo		1		1	2
<b>REST OF WORLD</b>			1		
Oman					
Papua New Guinea	1				
Yemen		1	1		
<b>Subtotal for nine months</b>	190	141	121	156	119
<b>Total at year end</b>	246	191	179	201	

Source: ICC-IMB, 2019

Maritime terrorists have worked to send political messages from the use of ship lines as supply chains to terrorist attacks on vessels and aircraft. The terrorist group based in the Philippines, Abu Sayyaf, who claimed to be loyal to ISIS, carried out attacks on cargo ships from the Sulu Sea and abducted hostages. While piracy and maritime terrorism follow various goals—the latter is financially driven, while the latter is more political—they have a common interest in ensuring a corrupt and vulnerable weak country remains. In Indo-Pacific transnational crimes, human smuggling and drug trafficking are also common. Drugs produced in Afghanistan, India and Indonesia are being transported by sea to other countries via illegal markets. The strong ties between transnational crime, insurgency and piracy have raised the intensity of non-traditional maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Nevertheless, due to a lack of calculation by coast guards and port security services, drug trafficking and trafficking of human beings are not handled adequately. Illegal fishing threatens to destroy coral reefs which hold marine biodiversity, often using mines or cruise ships. While the disruption poses a threat to marine ecology, such underwater collisions may also threaten SLOC and must therefore be deemed a general maritime



hazard, especially in Indo-Pacific waters such as the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and, more precisely, the Malacca Straits.

### **3.1 Maritime Security Cooperation**

The sea has always been the main focus for humanity and international relations. Historically, the contribution of the sea to human development can be seen at least four attributes, according to Geoffrey Till (2009) interrelated and interdependent. For the commodities it provides, its use as a means of transport and trade, its value as a means of exchanging information, and a source of strength and supremacy, the ocean is important. In the current era, this position is becoming increasingly important as the maritime sector is becoming a symbol of globalization for the supply, selling and consumption of goods around the world. Not to mention the ability to further explore the ocean, because it has a lot of information and thus provides further opportunities for marine science. This article focuses on the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific, as this ocean illustrates the increasing importance of the sea as a tool and means of transport. The Indo-Pacific definition is used here, by Hasjim Djalal, an Indonesian maritime law professor who argues that the Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean are the seas of the current and the oceans of the future for humanity (Djalal, 2016).

The author would describe the nature of a maritime security cooperation system as a synthesis of the principles of maritime safety and security cooperation. Christian Bueger (2015) explains that maritime security goes beyond the conventional risk aspect. Maritime security incorporates a number of problems with existing security principles and adapts to specific obstacles that occur. David Dewitt (1994) explains in order to establish a favorable security order in which multilateral mechanisms must be established, security cooperation related to the security dimension must be aimed at 'insurance' rather than 'prevention'. Retaining maritime security, while retaining SLOC as a geographic region stretching from the Indian Ocean separating the South China Sea from the Malacca Strait, raises awareness of the role of countries in international waters as part of the cooperation on maritime safety.

To ensure that such cooperation is secure, countries should initially engage in security cooperation activities that will allow them to establish inclusive relationships that ultimately form the basis of a multilateral security system. Security cooperation acts as a bridge in the case of maritime security from one country to another. Adding security cooperation will allow these countries, despite geopolitical barriers, to become more involved in cooperation in general maritime safety areas. Cooperation in maritime security has a systematic approach to maritime security issues (Rahman, 2009). For instance, maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, where maritime security concerns continue to grow due to domestic political differences, provides a platform for regional countries to engage in the defense of regional SLOCs based on their

similarities. Nonetheless, it is important to control the scope of maritime security activities that are considered inclusive in order to build successful cooperation on maritime safety.

### **3.2 The Role of ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific Region**

The concept itself was initially used by the Australian government in White Defense 2013. The paper refers to PRC and its relationship with the U.S., India, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia which are increasingly influencing and military capacity. On the one hand, this can be a positive contribution to connectivity between countries. On the other hand, the situation could increase the risk of regional security and peace destabilization. This concept also applies to the Asian countries surrounding the Western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, which comprise 10 ASEAN nations in the middle of two oceans. Accordingly, this article argues that ASEAN must be a strategic driving force behind the establishment of a multilateral framework for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Utilizing Indo-Pacific economic integration to balanced China's financial control, the balance of power policy need s to be recognized in order to increase the importance of regional geo-strategy. By using security approaches and diplomatic relations, ASEAN could be a form for all regional countries. ASEAN is a regional organization that has member states located in the Indo-Pacific triangle geographically with other countries such as Japan, India and Australia. ASEAN is historically referred to as the 'shelterbelt', an organization which becomes a meeting place for cooperation between the world's major powers and intra-regional countries. In 2013, Indonesia, as an ASEAN member state, led the Indo-Pacific Friendship and Cooperation Treaty by establishing the Indo-Pacific Framework through agreements in line with the norms and regulations established or defined in ASEAN and its affiliates (CSIS, 2013).

ASEAN succeeded in getting China to sign the South China Sea Declaration in 1992, together with a declaration on the actions of the parties in the South China Sea. All agreements essentially call for a peaceful resolution of jurisdictional disputes without the use of force, cooperation on maritime security, maritime and environmental protection, action against transnational crime and application of the principles of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) as the basis of the South China Sea Code of Ethics for Conflict. This has also confirmed that, particularly in South East Asia and Asia-Pacific, ASEAN has become the main driving force responsible for maintaining peace, growth, security and stability (Damayanti, 2018, p. 12). With regard to its responsibilities to maintain peace, stability and security in the region, ASEAN also has a range of mechanisms through which all members may engage in dialog and consultation on common political and security issues and make a significant contribution to building trust and preventive diplomacy. The East Asian Summit (EAS) is one of the ASEAN meetings and dialogs that can be used in multilateral security cooperation.

With regard to the ASEAN mechanisms referred to above, especially those relating to maritime issues, we can say that ASEAN has developed a comprehensive and inclusive way to improve maritime connectivity and cooperation between ASEAN countries plus partners from East and South Asia. Against this context, through the Indo-Pacific Outlook of ASEAN, ASEAN leaders agreed to further explore the effort to improve the ASEAN-centric regional architecture. This Outlook is not intended to replace existing ones or create new structures, but rather to address current and future challenges and opportunities in the global environment coming from the region (ASEAN, 2019). All ASEAN and ASEAN-led Maritime mechanisms have been carried out through discussions on comprehensive issues that focus on maritime security, navigation safety, marine management and fisheries regimes as a way to build trust. Additional cooperation may also be addressed in ASEAN forums, including activities such as information sharing, technology cooperation, exchange of visits by relevant authorities, capacity building, infrastructure and equipment upgrades, seafarers education, marine science studies, coastal environmental protection, promotion of eco-tourism, disaster relief, illegal and unregulated fishing.

In addition to the universally recognized principles of international law, namely the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the importance of ASEAN's central role in the development of a basis for cooperation in Indo-Pacific maritime security must be provided. This law is very important in establishing rules in the region based on maritime security and maritime cooperation and in addressing conflicting claims, such as those in the South China Sea. The key role of ASEAN in the growth of maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region must also be based on the importance of regional agreements and the TAC framework. The mechanism for maritime cooperation that ASEAN must use is to develop connectivity in line with the vision of ASEAN. The Indo-Pacific Connectivity Initiatives of ASEAN will complement and support the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan (MPAC) of 2025 (ASEAN, 2019).

Continuity of policy and maritime officials in supporting the Indo-Pacific maritime security cooperation must continue to be pursued because regime change and coordination among internal institutions can be a problem. Lack of coordination other than limited resources and human capital may limit the effectiveness of regional maritime security cooperation towards global maritime governance. Therefore, encouraging ASEAN to play a central role in implementing the Indo-Pacific maritime security cooperation framework in resolving key maritime issues in the area must always be supported by any country wishing to contribute to the preservation of stability, freedom and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific Treaty principle was intended as a commitment by countries in the ever-changing Indo-Pacific region. The importance of the Indo-Pacific region, coupled with its maritime problems, requires the efforts of all the countries in the region to establish regional cooperation on maritime security. As one of the regional organizations in the Indo-Pacific region, ASEAN is responsible for promoting and reacting to the interests of its member countries and major powers involved in the maritime sector in Indo-Pacific through ASEAN frameworks in a cooperative manner. The key role of ASEAN through the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific as a maritime security cooperation initiative can be a solution to the regional maritime cooperation process. However, ASEAN needs more time to consolidate between ASEAN itself and within ASEAN member countries.

The ASEAN cooperation framework in anticipating the Indo-Pacific region can be developed into a "security community" that can be realized in the long term and wants regional security to be a joint responsibility of all countries in the Indo-Pacific area and a peace process will be agreed to resolve disputes that are not a form of using force. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific maritime security cooperation framework is expected to be a benchmark for global maritime governance while remaining based on the principles and principles of international maritime law.

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