



Regional Collaboration Strategy to Overcome Geopolitical Threats in the ASEAN Maritime Region

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ABSTRACT

The ASEAN maritime region is a strategic area that faces various geopolitical threats, such as piracy, smuggling and territorial disputes. Overcoming this threat requires effective regional collaboration among ASEAN member countries. This research aims to analyze regional collaboration strategies that can be implemented to improve maritime security in ASEAN. The research methods used include qualitative analysis of existing cooperation initiatives, evaluation of the effectiveness of collaboration mechanisms, as well as interviews with experts and stakeholders in the field of maritime security. The research results show that strengthening dialogue mechanisms, increasing the capacity of member countries, developing maritime infrastructure, and collaborating with external partners are key elements in the regional collaboration strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The ASEAN maritime region is one of the most strategic areas in the world, connecting the Indian Ocean with the Pacific and being the main trade route passed by most global merchant ships (Putra & et al, 2019). The existence of this maritime region is vital for the economies of ASEAN member countries, with abundant natural resource potential and an important role in international logistics routes (Kraska, 2011). However, this region is also faced with various geopolitical threats. Territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Fravel, 2011) (Winter, 2020) have become one of the most prominent issues, with overlapping claims between several ASEAN member countries and (Hyer, 1995) which often trigger tensions and incidents on the ground. Apart from that, fishing theft and piracy are real threats that disrupt stability and security in ASEAN waters (Bueger, 2020). Facing these threats requires a coordinated and effective regional collaboration strategy. ASEAN countries have realized the importance of cooperation to maintain maritime security and regional stability. Various cooperation mechanisms and platforms have been established, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM-Plus)) (Tan S. , 2017), which enable dialogue and joint security strategy planning. Initiatives such as trilateral patrols in the Sulu Sea by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines show how regional collaboration can be an effective solution in addressing maritime security challenges. With this background, this article will discuss the importance of regional collaboration to overcome geopolitical threats in the ASEAN maritime region, the strategies that have been implemented, as well as recommendations for increasing cooperation in the future, in order to create a safe and stable maritime environment for all ASEAN member countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collective Security Theory

Collective security theory focuses on the concept that the security of a country is highly dependent on the security of the entire international community. In the ASEAN context, this theory emphasizes the importance of cooperation and solidarity between member countries to maintain regional stability. ASEAN, through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), has developed mechanisms to address common security issues. The main principle of this theory is that a threat to one country is considered a threat to all, requiring a collective response (Tsagourias & White, 2011).

Maritime Security Theory

Maritime security theory emphasizes the importance of maintaining maritime security as an integral part of national and regional security. Maritime security covers various aspects such as shipping security, protection of marine resources, and prevention of threats such as piracy and maritime terrorism. In the ASEAN context, this theory highlights the need for closer cooperation in maritime patrols, sharing intelligence information, and increasing law enforcement capacity at sea. Initiatives such as the Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) are examples of how maritime security theory is applied in practice to improve security in the ASEAN maritime region (Leorocha, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method. The qualitative method is an observation method taken from literature studies and processed descriptively to produce analysis related to existing facts. This method provides a clearer picture of a problem in accordance with the facts on the ground through a detailed explanation of the problem (Adlini & et al, 2022). Data for literature research is collected through library research, which uses methods of searching for sources and constructing them from various sources, such as books, journals and previous research. Library materials obtained from various references are analyzed critically to support ideas and propositions (Waruwu, 2023).

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The ASEAN maritime region has extraordinary strategic significance both from an economic, political and security perspective. With the main trade route connecting the Indian Ocean with the Pacific (Cordner, 2014), these waters are a vital route for commercial ships carrying various important commodities such as oil, natural gas and manufactured goods (Lasserre, 2010). The economic interests of ASEAN countries depend heavily on the security and stability of this maritime region. Apart from that, the wealth of natural resources such as fish, oil and natural gas in ASEAN waters is also a big economic attraction for regional countries (Cheong, 2015). However, the ASEAN maritime region not only offers great potential but also faces various complex geopolitical threats (Lissa, 2013) (Reveron, 2016). The following are some of the main threats:

Territorial Disputes

Territorial disputes in the South China Sea are the most prominent issue affecting regional stability. Overlapping claims (Wenjuan, 2018) between several ASEAN countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia and Brunei and China have sparked prolonged tensions. China claims almost the entire South China Sea (Guifoyle, 2019) based on a nine-dash line (Gao & Jia, 2013) which is now a ten-dash line that is not recognized by the country -ASEAN countries and is contrary to international law, especially UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) (Sison, 2018). This conflict not only has an impact on

diplomatic relations but also affects economic and security activities in the region.

Illegal Fishing

Illegal Fishing is a real threat that disrupts the economy and ecology in ASEAN waters. Illegal fishing vessels from other countries often enter the territorial waters of ASEAN countries, depleting valuable marine resources and causing significant economic losses. This problem also gives rise to conflicts between local fishermen and foreign vessels, which sometimes results in violent incidents (Lee & Viswanathan, 2020).

Piracy

Piracy in ASEAN waters (Beckman & Ashley, 2012) especially in the Malacca Strait and Sulu Sea (Miani, 2011) (Ikrami, 2018) has become a chronic problem that threatens shipping security and international trade. Even though there has been a decline in recent years, this threat is still real and requires serious attention from ASEAN countries (Amri, 2014). Piracy is not only economically detrimental but also poses safety risks to ship crews. To overcome these threats (Shie, 2006) ASEAN countries have established various regional collaboration mechanisms and initiatives (Liss, 2013).

The following are some important examples:

- a. ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)
ARF (Lim, 1998) is the main platform for ASEAN countries to dialogue and plan joint security strategies with dialogue partner countries (Choong, 2019). ARF is the premier platform in the Asia-Pacific aimed at promoting dialogue and cooperation in the fields of security and politics. With a membership that includes 27 countries, including ASEAN countries and key dialogue partners such as the United States, China, Japan, and the European Union, the ARF serves as a forum for confidence-building and preventive diplomacy. Through ARF (Emmers & S.S Tan, 2011) member countries can share information, experiences and best practices in dealing with maritime security threats (Mak, 2010). Regular ARF meetings are also an opportunity to strengthen cooperation (Haacke, 2009) in the field of maritime security (Heller, 2005).
- b. ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus
ADMM is an annual meeting of Defense Ministers from ASEAN countries (Tan S. S., *Is ASEAN Finally Getting Multilateralism Right? From ARF to ADMM+*, 2020) which aims to strengthen defense and security cooperation in the region (Tan S. S., *Providing for the other: rethinking sovereignty and responsibility in Southeast Asia*, 2017). ADMM-Plus, which involves partner countries such as the United States, China, Japan, and India, expands the scope of cooperation with a focus on maritime security, counter-terrorism, and humanitarian assistance (Koga, 2018). Through ADMM and ADMM-Plus, member countries can plan joint military exercises, maritime patrols and exchange intelligence information (Rymarenko, 2022).

c. Trilateral Patrol in the Sulu Sea

The trilateral patrol initiative in the Sulu Sea involving Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines is a clear example of effective collaboration in overcoming maritime security threats. This patrol aims to tackle piracy, fishing theft and smuggling in the area. By sharing information and coordinating patrols, these countries have succeeded in reducing piracy incidents and increasing security in the Sulu Sea (Maulana, 2022).

d. Information and Supervision Cooperation

Various information sharing and monitoring initiatives have also been established to improve maritime security in ASEAN. An example is the Information Fusion Center (IFC) (Canyon, 2017) in Singapore which functions as a center for collecting and analyzing maritime data from various ASEAN member countries and dialogue partners. IFC (Catano & Gauger, 2017) helps detect and respond to maritime security threats quickly and efficiently. Although various initiatives have been carried out, regional collaboration in maritime security is not free from challenges (Castro, 2022).

The following are some of the main challenges:

a. Differences in National Interests

Each ASEAN member country has different national interests, which sometimes conflict with each other (Azam & et al, 2015). For example, in the South China Sea dispute, several countries may have different economic and political interests in establishing relations with China (Hayton, 2014). These differences could hinder closer cooperation in dealing with geopolitical threats.

b. Lack of Trust

Lack of trust between member countries is also an obstacle to maritime security collaboration. The history of conflict and competition in the past still influences diplomatic relations today. Building trust through intensive dialogue and transparency is key to overcoming this challenge.

c. Resource Limitations

Not all ASEAN member countries have sufficient capacity and resources to actively participate in maritime security initiatives. These limitations include a lack of military equipment, surveillance technology, and trained human resources. More advanced countries in this case need to help less capable countries to increase their capacity (Emmers R. , 2014).

Despite facing various challenges (Herrmann, 2015) the benefits of regional collaboration in maritime security are very significant. The following are some of the main benefits:

a. Increasing Regional Security and Stability

Regional collaboration can increase security and stability in ASEAN waters (Jones & Jenne, 2016). Joint patrols, information sharing, and military exercises can help detect and respond to maritime security threats more effectively. This will create a safer environment for shipping and international trade (Hameiri & Jones, 2016).

b. **Strengthening Bargaining Position in the International Arena**

Through collaboration, ASEAN countries can strengthen their bargaining position in the international arena. In the face of great powers such as China and the United States, regional cooperation provides greater collective power (Lee & Chan, 2021). ASEAN countries can dialogue and negotiate together, thereby increasing their influence on maritime security issues.

c. **Minimizing Conflicts Between Member Countries**

Regional collaboration can also minimize the potential for conflict between ASEAN member countries. With the existence of dialogue and cooperation mechanisms, member countries can resolve disputes and disputes peacefully. This will strengthen diplomatic relations and cooperation in various other fields, including economic and social (Mottaghi & Khoy, 2016).

To improve regional collaboration in facing geopolitical threats (Caldara & Lacoviell, 2022) in the ASEAN maritime region, the following recommendations can be considered:

a. **Increasing Dialogue and Transparency**

Building trust between member countries through intensive dialogue and transparency is an important step. Regular meetings, information exchange, and bilateral consultations can help overcome distrust and strengthen cooperation.

b. **Capacity Strengthening**

ASEAN countries that are more advanced in terms of technology and resources need to help less capable countries to increase their capacity. This can be through technology transfer, training and financial assistance to strengthen maritime surveillance and defense capabilities.

c. **Development of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

Effective conflict resolution mechanisms need to be developed to resolve disputes and disputes peacefully. This could involve mediation by a third party, international arbitration, or other dispute resolution mechanisms agreed to by all parties (Supancana, 2015).

d. **Strengthening Collaboration with External Partners**

ASEAN needs to strengthen cooperation with external partners such as the United States, China, Japan and India in the field of maritime security. This collaboration could involve joint military exercises, information exchange, and other maritime security initiatives that can increase stability in ASEAN waters (Heng, 2014).

e. Increasing Public Awareness

Raising public awareness about the importance of maritime security is also important. Educational campaigns and community involvement in maintaining water safety can help reduce internal threats, such as fish theft by irresponsible local fishermen. One clear example of successful regional collaboration is the trilateral patrol initiative in the Sulu Sea. This patrol involves Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, who together face the threat of piracy, fishing and smuggling in the area. By sharing information and coordinating patrols, the three countries have succeeded in reducing piracy incidents and increasing security in the Sulu Sea. This trilateral patrol not only shows the effectiveness of cooperation in dealing with maritime security threats but also becomes a model for similar collaborative initiatives in other regions.

The success of this patrol was supported by several key factors, including:

a. Effective Coordination:

The three countries are committed to sharing information and conducting joint patrols in a coordinated manner. This enables rapid response to security threats.

b. Logistical and Technical Support:

These patrols are supported by adequate logistical and technical infrastructure, including patrol vessels, communications equipment, and an integrated command center.

c. Political Commitment:

The political leadership of the three countries plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of these trilateral patrols. Strong political commitment helps overcome bureaucratic obstacles and improve cross-border coordination.

Singapore also plays an important role in regional maritime security initiatives (Grzywacz, 2019). As a country with advanced maritime technology and infrastructure, Singapore has contributed significantly to strengthening maritime security in ASEAN.

Here are some of the initiatives led by Singapore:

a. Information Fusion Center (IFC):

This center functions as a center for collecting and analyzing maritime data from various ASEAN member countries and dialogue partners. IFC helps detect and respond to maritime security threats quickly and efficiently.

b. Maritime Security Exercises:

Singapore regularly holds joint maritime security exercises with ASEAN countries and dialogue partners. This exercise aims to improve operational capabilities and coordination between navies in the region.

c. Information Sharing Initiative:

Singapore is active in the maritime information sharing initiative, which allows ASEAN countries to share data and intelligence on maritime security threats. This helps in improving situational awareness and response to threats.

Regional collaboration in maritime security in ASEAN has shown some success, but there is still room for improvement (Jin & Feng Y, 2024). Evaluation of existing cooperation mechanisms shows that:

a. Success:

Initiatives such as the trilateral patrol in the Sulu Sea and the IFC in Singapore have succeeded in improving maritime security in the region. Joint patrols and information sharing have reduced piracy incidents and improved threat detection.

b. Obstacles:

Despite progress, several obstacles remain to be overcome, such as differences in national interests, lack of trust, and limited resources. ASEAN countries need to work more closely to overcome these challenges and increase the effectiveness of collaboration.

Based on this evaluation, the following are several recommendations (Caballero, 2022) to improve regional collaboration in maritime security in the future:

a. Strengthening Dialogue Mechanisms:

Increasing the frequency and quality of dialogue between ASEAN member countries to build trust and strengthen cooperation. Intensive and sustained dialogue between ASEAN member countries is key to building trust and improving coordination. Currently, dialogue mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) have provided important platforms for discussion. However, there needs to be an increase in the frequency and quality of dialogue.

b. Capacity Building:

More developed ASEAN countries need to assist less capable countries in increasing their maritime surveillance and defense capacities. Therefore, countries that are more advanced in terms of technology and resources, such as Singapore and Malaysia, need to assist less capable countries, such as Laos and Myanmar, in increasing their maritime surveillance and defense capacities. Training programs, technical assistance and investment in maritime infrastructure need to be increased.

c. Infrastructure Development:

Investments in maritime infrastructure are critical to improving threat detection and response capabilities. The construction of a sophisticated maritime surveillance center, increasing the number and quality of patrol vessels, and developing better communications technology will strengthen maritime defense.

d. Cooperation with External Partners:

Cooperation with partner countries such as the United States, China, Japan, and India must be strengthened to obtain technical and logistical support in maritime security initiatives. These external partners have resources and technology that can help ASEAN in strengthening maritime defense. In addition, collaboration with international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the

International Maritime Organization (IMO) can provide additional benefits in the form of training, technical assistance and policy support.

e. Public Education and Awareness:

Increasing public awareness (Khalid & et al, 2019) about the importance of maritime security through educational campaigns and community involvement in maintaining water security.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Facing geopolitical threats in the ASEAN maritime region requires a comprehensive and effective regional collaboration strategy. Despite various challenges, such as differences in national interests, lack of trust between countries, and limited resources, the collaborative efforts that have been carried out have shown positive results. Initiatives such as trilateral patrols in the Sulu Sea, the Information Fusion Center in Singapore, and dialogue mechanisms at the ASEAN Regional Forum and ADMM-Plus have succeeded in increasing maritime security and stability in the region. This regional collaboration brings many benefits, including increasing security and stability, strengthening the bargaining position of ASEAN countries in the international arena, and minimizing the potential for conflict between member countries. This collaboration is strengthened by several recommendations, such as increasing dialogue and transparency, strengthening the capacity of member countries, developing effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and strengthening cooperation with external partners. Strengthening cooperation through existing mechanisms, as well as adapting to changing geopolitical dynamics, will be key in maintaining maritime stability. Additionally, investment in surveillance technology and increasing naval capacity should be a priority to strengthen collective defense. Collaboration with partner countries also needs to be expanded, including joint military exercises and intelligence sharing. In the future, ASEAN needs to continue to adapt to evolving geopolitical dynamics and maintain its commitment to shared maritime security. ASEAN countries can work together to create a safe and stable maritime environment, which not only supports economic growth but also maintains the sovereignty and prosperity of all people in the region. Therefore, closer and more coordinated collaboration will be the key to facing increasingly complex challenges and ensuring long-term security and prosperity in the ASEAN maritime region.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Still conducting further research to find out more about the Regional Collaboration Strategy to Overcome Geopolitical Threats in the ASEAN Maritime Region.

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