

The Indo-Pacific Context : Maritime Security Challenges And Diplomacy Of Asean Countries

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region is considered strategic considering that there are intersections in international trade routes in it. Meanwhile, the strategic value as a geopolitical center is emphasized by the presence of strong countries such as the United States, China, India, Australia, Japan, as well as ASEAN countries. Based of the problem that has been described, the objective of this article is to examine the strategies and diplomatic efforts of ASEAN countries in dealing with maritime security threats in the Indo-Pacific Region. The study used qualitative methods with descriptive research design. This research through the Zoom Meeting application by inviting representative speakers from Universitas Pertahanan Malaysia. The activity will be held on 28 June-2 July 2021. Theoretical framework in this article using maritime security concept, maritime diplomacy concept, and Indo-Pacific Concept. The conclusion is the feud between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, especially the South China Sea has the potential to disrupt regional stability and security. Maritime security related to undisturbed shipping traffic and communications is an effort that the United States is guarding. China's presence in the South China Sea area threatens the interests of the United States regarding sea traffic which will have an impact on the global economy and its country if no action is taken. Countries in Southeast Asia see this problem as something that must be resolved. The presence of AOIP is expected to be able to help resolve existing problems regarding actions that are carried out individually by ASEAN member countries.

Keywords: *Maritime Security, Indo-Pacific, ASEAN Diplomacy*

INTRODUCTION

Geographically, the mention of the term Indo-Pacific or Indo-West Pacific or Indo-Pacific Asia will designate an area that stretches from the eastern part of the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific Ocean and is connected to the Malacca Strait. The term Indo-Pacific was used by Indian researcher Gurpreet Khurana in 2007. In the same year, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) forum introduced the Indo-Pacific concept to four countries, namely India, the United States, Japan and Australia. These countries have a goal to restrain the pace of China's power development in the Indo-Pacific Region. India, Japan, Australia and the United States then formed a strategic group which they named The Quad. The "Quadrilateral" or Quad was formed when United States President George Bush announced that India, the US, Japan and Australia would launch a coalition to collaborate on massive relief and rehabilitation work.

The Indo-Pacific concept was echoed again by QSD 2017 in Manila, the Indo-Pacific concept that replaces Asia-Pacific is not limited to its mention and geographical coverage, but also the expansion of actors, powers to the regional security architecture (Albi et al., 2021). The concept of the Indo-Pacific received more attention when the President of the United States (US) Donald Trump made his first visit as president to Asia and proposed a strategy for the Indo-Pacific Region with the strategy of "a Free and Open Indo-Pacific". Geographically, the Indo-Pacific region refers to the Indo-Pacific which has become the center of maritime geopolitical activities, security, trade, and the environment (Passarelli, 2014).

The Indo-Pacific region is considered strategic considering that there are intersections in international trade routes in it. Meanwhile, the strategic value as a geopolitical center is emphasized by the presence of strong countries such as the United States, China, India, Australia, Japan, as well as ASEAN countries. Some observers consider that although the Indo-Pacific concept has not been fully understood, the view of the concept is relatively the same, namely as the US reaction to China's increasing power with its success at the 2008 Beijing Olympics which showed modernization in various domestic sectors. The increase in China's economic growth is considered to have the potential to become a force that makes China's presence able to match the dominance of the United States in the international world. As well as the development of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) concept by China in expanding its influence throughout the world.

The Indo-Pacific concept for ASEAN member countries is not a new concept considering that there has been a concept of cooperation with a more comprehensive scope by cooperating with countries that have great power and have an interest in the condition of security stability in the Pacific and Indian Regions, for example through the framework ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). The reason the Indo-Pacific concept is important for ASEAN is because of the presence of ASEAN member countries in the Southeast Asia region and coincides at the transition point between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, then the countries that carry the Indo-Pacific concept are countries with great powers, both economic and military. Proponents of the Indo-Pacific concept assume that the growth of economic relations (De, 2019), the need for greater political and security cooperation and coordination requires an expansion of the regional concept.

According to some, Indonesia and India are considered important in this process of regionalization and regionalism and are early adopters of the Indo-Pacific idea (Khurana, 2017). One of Indonesia's initiatives towards the development of the Indo-Pacific concept is based on a series of security and economic concerns that are dominated by competition between China and the US within the Asia-Pacific framework (Natalegawa, 2013). The desire to increase economic growth and prevent China's economic and political dominance in the region is an important driver of the geopolitical construction that Indonesia is trying to play in the region. These factors place significant restrictions on the Indo-Pacific regional integration that Indonesia is trying to promote, in contrast to the understanding of the Indo-Pacific concept in the understanding of other major countries such as the United States (Ayres, 2019).

The location of the area on two continents makes the Indo-Pacific region rich in extraordinary species of fish, coral reefs, and other natural resources. Its strategic location also makes this area an area that has the potential for economic value in the present and future, especially in the maritime sector. The importance and economic value in the Indo-Pacific region is very high, and in this region there are also two regional trade agreements, namely the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). In this trade agreement, ASEAN plays an important role, because the countries that are members of ASEAN are part of the RCEP, then the four ASEAN member countries namely Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei are part of the CPTPP, therefore ASEAN must have an attitude towards the concept of Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific has become an economic center for decades, so there are continuous geopolitical and geostrategic changes that present opportunities as well as challenges for the surrounding countries. On the one hand, economic growth in this region has the opportunity to establish cooperation which in turn can affect the reduction of the poor and can improve the standard or standard of living of many people.

But on the other hand, this region also has the opportunity to present great economic and military power and this can create distrust between one country and another. In addition, the

movement and development of the Indo-Pacific concept also affects maritime security in the Southeast Asia Region, with its military capabilities, India is willing to cooperate with ASEAN, and this cooperation will certainly be beneficial for ASEAN member countries in an effort to maintain security and interests. national country. And the possibility of a military threat caused by China's efforts to militarize the SCS region. On the other hand, ASEAN member countries have also had good relations with China. The existence of different views and interests among ASEAN member countries towards the Indo-Pacific concept can cause ASEAN unity to be disrupted. In addition, there are also those who criticize ASEAN as a regional organization that has an interest in regional stability and security because it is slow to respond to various issues that threaten stability, including the struggle for influence in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the researcher feels that research on the strategies of ASEAN countries in dealing with maritime security threats in the Indo-Pacific region is necessary. Based on the formulation of the problem that has been described, the objective of this article is to examine the strategies and diplomatic efforts of ASEAN countries in dealing with maritime security threats in the Indo-Pacific Region.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examines the maritime security threats and diplomacy of ASEAN countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The study used qualitative methods with descriptive research design. Descriptive research is usually used to provide a description of natural phenomena and phenomena engineered by humans. This phenomenon can be manifested in activities, forms, relationships, changes, characteristics, and differences between phenomena (Linarwati et al., 2016). While the descriptive qualitative research method is a research method formed by the philosophy of postpositivism, where the researcher acts as a key instrument that analyzes objects naturally (Sugiyono, 2008). Descriptive qualitative research method is considered suitable for the topic we take because the research procedure will produce data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. This is in line with the opinion of Syaodih Nana (2007: 60) that qualitative research methods are techniques for analyzing and describing events, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, phenomena, social activities, and thoughts of people individually and in groups. This research through the Zoom Meeting application by inviting representative speakers from Universitas Pertahanan Malaysia. The activity will be held on 28 June-2 July 2021. Theoretical framework in this article using maritime security concept, maritime diplomacy concept, and Indo-Pacific Concept.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Maritime Security Condition on Indo- Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region has complex issues related to maritime security that surround the area. The major powers that play a role in the Indo-Pacific region provide their own complexities in addition to other non-traditional threats such as piracy, maritime terrorism, and illegal smuggling. The term maritime security implicitly appears through documents that have been issued by the United Nations Informal Consultative Process (ICP) since 2001 (Keliat, 2009). The term maritime security is not clearly explained, but it is stated that threats to international peace and security that come from the sea must be considered in the case of illegal activities such as illifit tracing, human smuggling, drug smuggling, and organized crime. All threats that occur have an impact on stability, security and comfort in the Indo- Pacific

region. The term maritime security also includes military factors that can lead to acts of violence.

Threats in the Indo-Pacific area are evolving into a rivalry between the two great powers in the region. China and the United States do not only compete in the trade and economic sectors, but also have an influence on stability and security in the South China Sea area (Yanuarti, Indri. Wibisono, Makarim. Midhio & Wayan, 2020). The battle in the Indo-Pacific region, which is in the Pacific Ocean region, including the West Coast of Africa, occurs because of changes in global power. In the Global Trends 2030 report, Asia will surpass North America and Europe in terms of global strength in national income, population size, technology investment, and military allocation (Putra & Hakim, 2016).

The United States has an interest in the Indo-Pacific region to make it a free and open area. The main element that has been proclaimed by the United States since 1995 is Freedom of Navigation (FoN). The United States also refuses to use any form of threat and force on the disputing parties (Bidara & Mamentu, 2018). The presence of the United States is increasingly visible by playing a role in the Law of the Sea Convention congress by providing support to countries opposing China's claims. The United States has increasingly cemented its role in the region through the 202 Declaration of Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea which is a form of commitment to countries in Southeast Asia to be independent and strong in dealing with the South China Sea conflict. The United States also participates in the Indo-Pacific region by pouring in funds for regional investment of \$940 billion. ASEAN countries will find it difficult to avoid the United States' efforts to exert influence in the region.

The United States' actions in the Indo-Pacific region are a step to pressure China, which is increasingly influencing the area through its economic and military sectors. The rebalancing to Asia program was implemented in 2011 by shifting the focus from the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific. The United States is rebalancing its military power from the US Central Command to the US Indo Pacific Command (Hadistian et al., 2021). The rebalancing policy also adheres to two pillars, namely the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as an effort to set high standards for trade in Asia Pacific without involving China.

The second pillar relates to the repositioning of the United States as a major military actor as well as the center of military alliances and partnerships in the Asia Pacific region (Kartini, 2015). The condition of the Indo-Pacific region is increasingly complex with the presence of other parties who have their own interests. It is noted that India, Australia and Japan played their roles with the United States through the initiation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The United States seeks to develop a common view of the Indo-Pacific concept (Roza, 2019). The merging of these forces brings the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region as dynamic. China also plays its role in the Indo-Pacific region through the Belt and Road Initiative. This policy is also accompanied by military deployments in the South China Sea area. The military deployment is focused on disputed areas namely the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, Scarborough Reef, Macclesfield Bank, and the Natuna Islands through the deployment of the armed China Coast Guard (CCG). This action resulted in a dispute between China and several ASEAN countries that claim parts of the South China Sea. Many countries rely on the economic value of the South China Sea, so security and stability need to be improved (Tertia & Perwita, 2018).

The rise of China in influencing the Indo-Pacific region has been seen since the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics through the modernization of various sectors. The Olympics organized by China become a strategy in building a picture of China in the future. Through media coverage of successful sports and cultural spectacles, it will benefit China's positive image on the international stage (Ni, 2008). China's rise was increasingly seen when it surpassed Japan as the first and second largest economy in Asia in 2010. After three decades of

astonishing growth, China overtook the United States in the second largest economy in the world (Barboza, 2010). The strength of the economy influences China's strong position in the Indo-Pacific region. China can determine the direction and future of disputes in the South China Sea.

China's success was then followed by the establishment of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) which has been able to gain cooperation with 140 countries starting January 2021 (Nedopil, 2021). China through the BRI seeks to provide financial assistance to gain influence in countries that receive it. China's interest through BRI seeks to open up traditional trade routes that it has been living for a long time. China's development is increasingly visible with the increase in foreign exchange reserves, export performance, as well as the rapidly growing technology sector. China also has an interest in access to seas that it claims are unilaterally acceptable to its sovereign maritime property. China's efforts to gain claims to disputed areas, especially in the South China Sea, are related to China's dependence on energy exports. Energy transportation originating from Western Asia through the Malacca Strait presents a dilemma for China. The presence of the United States in its proxy countries brings fear to the threat of China's energy stocks. The BRI strategy is an effort to overcome the "Malacca Dilemma" dilemma due to China's excessive economic dependence on a small number of sea lanes for commercial trade and energy supply of which 80% comes from exports (Chance, 2016).

The difference in approach between the United States and China has an impact on the stability of the Indo-Pacific region, especially the South China Sea. China wants the United States not to be in the disputed area and allows claimants to negotiate with China. The rejection of foreign intervention in the South China Sea dispute has been seen in China's efforts to maintain a Declaration of Conduct (DoC) which is ambiguous and non-binding (Darmawan & Mahendra, 2018). The United States seeks to position itself as a country that has power over its territorial waters while still prioritizing Freedom of Navigation (FoN). The given fight is demonstrated by cooperation with the Philippines. The offer of military bases was given by the Philippines to the United States (Ebrina & Tjarsono, 2016). The emergence of this offer resulted from the Philippines' distrust of ASEAN's sovereignty and ability to suppress China's influence and intervention in the South China Sea (Chalid et al., 2016). Ignoring conflicts that occur will have a serious impact on the stability and security of the Indo-Pacific region. The dynamics in the Indo-Pacific area can be described as a 'spaghetti bowl' that is connected to each other and problems that are not easily stopped.

Role of ASEAN and ASEAN Member Against Maritime Security Threat on Indo Pacific Region

Threats that occur in the Indo-Pacific region are trying to be resolved by using diplomatic efforts between countries. Negotiations and diplomacy were carried out within ASEAN's internal bodies which eventually resulted in the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The presence of AOIP will determine the direction of cooperation that will be developed by each of its members. The success of the AOIP approval is considered a major victory for regional integration (Roza, 2019). The realization of a safe, peaceful and orderly Indo-Pacific region is the key in regional development which has implications for the national welfare of every country. The absence of peace and stability brings disaster as happened to countries in conflict in the Middle East (Alby et al., 2021). Prior to the formation of the AOIP, ASEAN countries were divided to support two major powers that were in conflict with each other. Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar are the countries that China seeks to influence to support its actions in the South China Sea Region. The United States is also trying to get support from Vietnam, the Philippines, and Singapore to reduce influence from China. The struggle for

influence carried out by the two major powers brings ASEAN in a dilemmatic position (Chalid et al., 2016). The division within ASEAN will have a big impact on its member countries.

The implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is carried out by prioritizing the principles of ASEAN centrality, openness, transparency, inclusion, according to the rules, good governance, respecting sovereignty, non- interference, cooperation, equality, mutual benefit, mutual trust, mutual respect. as international regulations (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2019). The cooperation carried out is basically to make ASEAN the center in solving regional problems. This is inseparable from its role as an area that is in direct contact with areas of conflict. The formation of the AOIP was initiated by Indonesia as a medium power (Middle Power) in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia's foreign policy makers have realized the importance of the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions that surround its sovereignty. Indonesia focuses more on the Southeast Asian region and plays the role of institutional connections in playing its role. During the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Indonesia's foreign diplomacy was focused on building the geopolitical construct of the Asia- Pacific. Indonesia has a vision for the Indo- Pacific that is integrative and does not isolate one party. Indonesia's leadership in the Southeast Asia region seeks to make ASEAN the fulcrum for the normal formation of attitudes in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia also seeks to integrate various interests in the region such as China, the United States, Australia, India and Japan to be on the same path in accordance with Indonesia's ambitions. The presence of Indonesia which introduces AOIP as a formation of ASEAN is expected to be the main vehicle in maintaining regional stability (Agastia, 2020).

Other countries in the Indo-Pacific region have also formed strategies in dealing with the problems that exist in the area. Malaysia, through Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, views US warships as responsible for the increasingly tense situation in the South China Sea region. Mahathir Mohamad commented on the United States' developing strategy in the region. Malaysia will welcome the United States but not by sending a seventh fleet in the South China Sea region (Thu, 2018). This shows how Malaysia will carry out its strategy without using its military instruments. Thailand plays a role in the Indo-Pacific issue but does not make it a major issue. Thailand's role in the disputed issue seems invisible due to the country's non-involvement as one of the parties claiming the disputed area. Thailand continues to pay attention to the Indo- Pacific region as one of the areas that can be profitable for it. Thailand and the United States have established a partnership that was formed as a hope for achieving peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region (US Department of State, 2019). In maritime security issues, Thailand cooperates with India. Economic factors remain the background for cooperation between the two countries. There is a tendency that cooperation carried out in the military sector will expand to efforts to combat maritime terrorism, piracy, arms trade, and preparation for natural disasters and man- made disasters (Cogan & Mishra, 2020). Another country, namely Myanmar, tends to be in a 'wait and see' position regarding problems in the Indo-Pacific region, especially the South China Sea. The current development of the democratic system in Myanmar is still on the verge of fear of a domestic conflict. Domestic problems are still a major concern for Myanmar. Myanmar's position connects India with ASEAN in its northeastern region which has an important point in economic relations and population traffic (Dhyani, 2021). Myanmar since 1948 has put forward the principle of an independent and non-aligned foreign country. Sincere feelings, good intentions, and genuine friendship are the approaches used by Myanmar to deal with international issues (Myo, 2020). Myanmar in 2011 found a new path through improving diplomatic relations with the United States. The advantage is obtained from the United States' strategy which began to focus on the Indo-Pacific area and its domestic politics. At the same time Myanmar maintains 'Pauk Phaw'

with China. The brotherly relationship with China and the improvement of diplomatic relations with the United States point to a diplomatic balance that Myanmar may be able to build.

Brunei Darussalam, Laos, and Cambodia have little visible role in the Indo-Pacific issue. Diplomacy carried out by the three countries is known to have close ties to China. Laos and Cambodia are known to support China's efforts with regards to claims in the South China Sea. China's economic and political proximity to Laos and Cambodia influences its foreign policy (Heiduk & Wacker, 2020). Several external countries are trying to exert their influence on Laos by using political, security, economic, and cultural instruments to co-opt people's thoughts and perspectives. Efforts to influence Myanmar are believed by the United States to be carried out by China and Russia to prevent Laos from acting as an independent actor who makes ASEAN the centrality in Indo-Pacific issues (US Department of State, 2018). Singapore has the potential to impact the region through its large economy in the Indo-Pacific region. Singapore has close ties with China and India which can make it play a role in regulating relations between the two countries. Singapore encouraged India to look to the east in the 1990s. Since then India's partnership with Singapore and Asean has grown to become a strategic partner. This role has demonstrated Singapore's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region (Maini, 2018). Singapore also views the role of ASEAN and its members who have formed the AOIP as a simple but realistic action. For Singapore the AOIP does not stop the strategic strength of each ASEAN member, but will eventually be needed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, 2019).

Vietnam has a different view from ASEAN which is closer to the United States' Indo-Pacific framework. Vietnam's acceptance of minilateral engagements outside the ASEAN framework is easier. The use of the term Indo-Pacific from its own understanding is more important for security and economic purposes than promoting AOIP. This action was caused by his concern for China in the SCS region which requires a balance of power as the main factor in solving problems. In the diplomatic activities carried out by Vietnam, the keywords are independence, sovereignty, respect for the rights and interests of the nation, and the enforcement of international law and order based on rules (Ha, 2019). This action is increasingly visible when Vietnam has bilateral relations with countries that support the Quad. Another country is the Philippines which has an interest in parts of the South China Sea. The presence of the Free-Open Indo Pacific (FOIP) provides an opportunity for the Philippines to be part of countering China's behavior in the South China Sea and preserving rules-based regional behavior. The Philippines is working with the United States to push its defenses against China. Defense cooperation was carried out with the United States in 2014 which allowed access to the use of military facilities at designated locations. At the same time, the Philippines did not leave China for cooperation. The Philippines continues to strive to communicate issues related to the disputed area with China (Vicedo, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The feud between China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, especially the South China Sea has the potential to disrupt regional stability and security. Maritime security related to undisturbed shipping traffic and communications is an effort that the United States is guarding. China's presence in the South China Sea area threatens the interests of the United States regarding sea traffic which will have an impact on the global economy and its country if no action is taken. Countries in Southeast Asia see this problem as something that must be resolved. The presence of AOIP is expected to be able to help resolve existing problems regarding actions that are carried out individually by ASEAN member countries. The difference in these views was seen before the formation of the AOIP which is known from the

divisions between ASEAN members who support China and the United States. The existence of AOIP is expected to be central in solving problems in the Indo-Pacific region that can maintain maritime security stability in the area. Looking at the results of the research that has been done, further studies are still needed regarding the role of each country regarding the Indo-Pacific. An understanding of the role of the state in viewing the Indo-Pacific will be a complement to studies related to the topic. The study that has been carried out is expected to be a consideration for stakeholders in solving problems that occur in the Indo-Pacific region

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