

MARITIME SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION: A VIEW FROM THE GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION OF THE MALACCA STRAIT

Tran Hoang Long¹
Tran Xuan Hiep²
Nguyen Tuan Binh³

Introduction

Maritime security has been in recent times emerged as a burning issue in the fields of international relations in general and in the Indo-Pacific region in particular. With topographical tectonics, this area includes numerous “choke points” on maritime routes that are strategically important to world trade, playing an important role in the transportation of oil, gas and cargo products from the Middle East to Australia and East Asia. Therefore, maritime security issues for the lifeline of the world economy are a matter of concern for the countries in the Indo-Pacific region, in which the important role of the sea route through the Straits of Malacca is increasingly emphasized. With a geostrategic position connecting the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) and the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean), the Straits of Malacca is the shortest route between the Middle East and Asia in general and Pacific Rim countries in particular. This is the location that accounts for a quarter of the world’s marine traffic annually. Energy security and trade economy of major powerful countries in the Indo-Pacific region depend heavily on the maritime security of the Straits of Malacca route. Through an analysis of the Malacca Strait’s geostrategic location, this paper elucidates the Indo-Pacific region’s importance in maritime security field in the first two decades of the twenty-

¹ Institute of Northeast Asian Studies, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Hanoi, Vietnam.

² Institute of Socio-Economic Research, Duy Tan University, Da Nang, Vietnam.

³ Faculty of History, University of Education, Hue University, Vietnam.

first century.

An Overview of the Maritime Security Situation in the Indo-Pacific Region

The twenty-first century is considered by major countries in the Asia-Pacific region as “the century of sea and ocean” and is accompanied by a fierce competition among the nations to achieve their interests in the sea regions. Nowadays, countries around the world had increased their competition for economic interests and marine resources, and previously competition was viewed as only based on military objectives, geostrategic bases, and traffic channels through the straits. The development of military power and of competitive activities for resources at sea, clearly increasingly shows the tendency to use the sea to contain the continent. Strong maritime nations then derived their strategic thinking from the sea power concept by Alfred T. Mahan which explained as following: “Control of the sea, by maritime commerce and naval supremacy, means predominant influence in the world; because, however great the wealth product of the land, nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea” (Mahan 1897, 124).

The concept of maritime security was described by Geoffrey Till (British maritime thinker) as the “good order at the sea” (Till, Geoffrey 2009, 160), where seaborne trade which contributes to many states logistic needs have to be protected from any kind of risks and threats. To Christian Bueger, maritime security extends beyond traditional dimension (Bueger, Christian 2015, 160). Maritime security connects several issues through existing concepts of security, and is adapted to emerging temporary issues. Bueger still considers the concept of seapower, especially the naval forces as a tool for achieving national security. Seapower in maritime security also takes into account how national states operate their navies outside their territorial waters. The naval power projection of states for warfare means to secure sea lines of communication (abbreviated as SLOC), and to increase the awareness of a states’ presence in international waters as the core purpose of traditional maritime security. Protecting the SLOCs also includes search and rescue, preventing oil spills in ocean, regulation of maritime installations, and counter operations against piracy and terrorism.

To establish such cooperative security, nation states must first engage in security cooperation activities that will give them the opportunity to create inclusive relations, which eventually become the foundation for multilateral security frameworks. In terms of maritime security, security cooperation

serves as a bridge that connects maritime security understanding of one state to the others. The inclusiveness of security cooperation would enable national states to become more involved to cooperate in common areas of maritime security despite the geopolitical restraints. Chris Rahman explained that maritime security cooperation has a comprehensive approach to address the growing contemporary maritime security issues (Rahman 2009). In Indo-Pacific, for example, where maritime security issues continue to grow due to domestic political differences, maritime security cooperation offers a platform for regional states to communicate based on their commonalities to protect the regional SLOCs. However, to establish effective maritime security cooperation, it is necessary to set up the spectrum of maritime security activities which are deemed as inclusive.

The Indo-Pacific currently has an undefined scope. In the narrowest sense, it is an area that ranges from the western shore of India to the US' western shore. In a broader sense, it might be considered to spread through the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific. Despite its unclear boundaries, the Indo-Pacific is considered an economic centre and a driving force for the world's economy. In this region, there are important sea lanes such as the maritime trade routes via the northern Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. In the Indo-Pacific, there are 9 out of the 10 busiest seaports in the world. About 60% of the world's maritime trade go through the region, of which one-third pass through the South China Sea. The Indo-Pacific is also the world's most biodiverse area. The region has about one-third of the world's shallow marine fish, about 3,000 species in comparison to no more than 1,200 in any other region (Helfman 2009, 331). The Indo-Malay-Philippines Archipelago is believed to host the maxima of the world's marine biodiversity. In the Indo-Pacific, marine-related industries, including fishery and tourism, are maintaining a large population of people.

Although the Indo-Pacific generally enjoys peace and security, it faces a number of challenges in maritime security. Firstly, it has about 40 sea-related disputes among regional countries, either disputes on sovereignty over territories at sea or sovereign rights over maritime areas. Among those disputes, some, such as those in the South China Sea or the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, are considered potential causes of a Sino-US war or even a Third World War. Secondly, piracy and armed robbery often causes the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean to be placed at the top of the list of the world's most dangerous waters. In 2018, the number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in those areas was 57 and 25 respectively, ranking only after West Africa with a total of 81 cases. Thirdly, maritime terrorism was spread through the region by Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups like Abu Sayyaf and

Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia. The SuperFerry 14 case, the bombing of a ferry in the Philippines in 2004 which killed 116 people, is considered the world's deadliest terrorist attack at sea even today (Echle, Gaens, Sarmah, and Rueppel 2020, 127). Lastly, the Indo-Pacific is also witnessing a number of new maritime security threats that are relevant for coastal communities, including sea-level rise, an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, a mounting volume of marine debris, and losses of biodiversity.

The seas and oceans of the Indo-Pacific region present a number of maritime security challenges including piracy, terrorism, territorial claims, jurisdictional disputes, illegal fishing, criminal trafficking, and arguments over the Law of the Sea Convention. The differences among coastal and maritime user nations involving navigation and military operations represent some of the pressing issues affecting the region. The most urgent transnational maritime security issue in the Indian and Pacific Oceans remains the Somali pirate threat, which affects the sea from the Gulf of Aden, the waters of Somalia, the Arabian Sea, and the western part of the Indian Ocean (Weir 2010, 210).

In recent years, various countries, including the US, China, Russia, Japan, Australia, India, and the European Union (EU), have proposed their own connectivity strategies for the Indo-Pacific region and considered the maritime domain as a component of their connectivity strategies. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) places the highest priority on the maritime domain when it proposed the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which links seaports together, as one of its two main connections between China and Europe (Kuo, L. and Kommenda, N., 2018). Besides, China is developing a "two ocean" strategy in order to expand its naval operations to reach the Indian Ocean (The State Council of the People's Republic of China 2017). Thus, the maritime strategy has increased Chinese naval presence in Indo-Pacific, especially in the Indian Ocean, in order to take a larger role in the next years.

The presence of the U.S. Navy in the region, according to the 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, "secures the vital sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific that underpin global commerce and prosperity" (The US Department of Defense 2019). The U.S., therefore, tries to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific through promoting linkages in economics, governance, and security. Through the United States Pacific Command (PACOM) stationed in Hawaii and military bases in Australia, Japan, ROK, Guam, and Diego Garcia in Indian Ocean, the U.S. has maintained its presence in the region (USPACOM 2016). The U.S. alliance agreement with Japan, Australia, ROK, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines remain as the foundation of strategic actions in Indo-Pacific. Engagement with India as an emerging power has also

strengthened US presence, especially in observing the Indian Ocean (Mishra, V. 2016, 165). The holistic regional approach is deemed as pre-condition for preserving American dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan also has its own “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” initiative, which stresses the importance of linking the Indian Ocean with the Pacific Ocean. This initiative aims to promote a rules-based order; freedom of navigation; free trade; economic prosperity; and commitment to peace and stability (Government of Japan 2019).

As a continental power and occupying a central strategic position in the Indian Ocean, India has become a prominent actor in Indo-Pacific region. India’s ‘Look East’ policy which was introduced in 1990s has expanded India’s strategic engagement to the Southeast and East Asian countries. Over the years, India’s engagement in the region transcended from economic relations to security. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “Act East” policy has strengthened India’s approach in Indo-Pacific, in which the “Act East” will increase India’s involvement through strategic partnerships. The “Act East” policy also reassures India’s commitment to protect the SLOCs of Indian Ocean for every littoral state to use. Moreover, India has its own vision of the Indo-Pacific, in which it wants to promote peace and stability through equal access to the sea and air, freedom of navigation, combating maritime crimes, protecting the marine environment and developing the blue economy (Government of India - Ministry of External Affairs 2018).

Australia also places high priority on maritime security, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia pledges to invest in maritime security capacity-building, regional maritime domain awareness, protection of the marine environment and international law, and freedom of navigation and overflight. Russia focuses on inland connectivity in its Greater Eurasia initiative. However, Russia also understands that its initiative is actually aiming “Toward the Great Ocean” to use it to link Russia with the Greater Eurasia, a vast area of land from Europe to East Asia (The Valdai Club 2017). The European Union also proposes to use its “Connecting Europe and Asia” strategy to link Europe with Asia via transport, energy, digital connections, and human-dimension networks. Maritime connections are important because 70% of the trade value between Europe and Asia goes by sea (European Commission 2018, 3).

About the issue of maritime disputes, there are several maritime areas which have been contested, mostly across the Indo-Pacific, namely the East China Sea, South China Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Although there have never been any direct military conflict in those areas, they are sources of rising security risks in the region. The contestation of those areas is caused

mainly by the different security needs of regional countries. Moreover, those areas hold significant geostrategic importance, thus the disputes have been a complex matter in Indo-Pacific maritime security.

About the issue of non-traditional maritime threats, the most common threat is piracy. Piracy used to be a major threat in the Strait of Malacca, however multilateral engagement has been successful in eliminating the danger. Then starting in 2005, Somali pirates began roaming the Indian Ocean with modern equipment which enable them to operate in the range of 1,500 nautical miles from Somali coastline. Moreover, the Somali pirates are also linked to terrorist organization such as Al-Qaeda and Al Shabab. Maritime terrorism began to be taken as serious threats after the “26/11 Mumbai attacks” which killed 160 people. Maritime terrorists had evolved from using the ship lines as supply chains to conduct terror attacks towards ships and vessels to send political messages. Philippines-based terror group, Abu Sayyaf which pledged allegiance to ISIS, has been conducting strikes to cargo ships in the Sulu Sea and abducting hostages. Although piracy and maritime terrorism aim different targets - the former is economic-driven, while the latter is more political - they have a common interest, which is to ensure weak states remain corrupt and vulnerable. Human smuggling and drug trafficking are also common transnational crimes found in the Indo-Pacific. Drugs produced in Afghanistan, India, and Indonesia are distributed by sea to other countries through illegal markets. Moreover hundreds of percent profit margins are often used to fund other illegal activities such as terrorism and piracy. A stronger link between the transnational crimes, piracy, and terrorism has advanced the complexity of non-traditional maritime threats in the Indo-Pacific. Plus, drug trafficking and human smuggling are not dealt efficiently due to the lack of countermeasures by the coast guard or port security facility. Seaborne economic activities, such as oil transfer and offshore drillings, fishing, and cruise ship movements have the potential to damage the surrounding marine environment. Major oil spills to the sea had affected the sea ecology and eventually had killed many marine species. Illegal fishing that often use explosives and cruise ships are prone to endanger the coral reefs that harbor marine biodiversity. While the damage is threatening to marine ecology, such sea accidents may also disturb SLOCs, and thus should be considered as common maritime threats, especially in the busy waterway of the Indo-Pacific.

As maritime security in the Indo-Pacific had evolved in complexity in the early decades of the twenty-first century, the role of “choke points” in this region had become even more important, such as the Strait of Malacca, which connects the Indian with the Pacific Ocean.

The Geostrategic Position of the Malacca Strait in Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific Region

World trade, including especially a big part of the world's energy resources, has to pass certain "choke points" between areas of production and their final destination. One of these "choke points" is the Straits of Malacca. Currently, for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, the position of the Strait of Malacca holds utmost geostrategic importance. From the 12th and 13th centuries, the regional and international trading activities were expanding. The global world trade model in this period included three interlocking systems: a European subsystem with Genoa and Venice as commercial centres; a Middle Eastern network incorporating routes in and out of Mongol Asia using the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea; and the Indian Ocean - East Asia system, incorporating Southeast Asia and the China - India networks. Venice and Genoa owed their wealth to their roles as intermediaries between Asian goods and European markets. The sea route for any of the cargoes from Eastern Indonesia, Java and from China, Indochina and Borneo, lay through Malacca Strait of the Malay Peninsula (Hooker 2003, 59-60). Historically, the Strait of Malacca has become the new center of the Southeast Asian maritime network as well as it had played an important role in the formation of mighty maritime empires such as Srivijaya and the Islamic kingdom of Malacca. During its heyday, Malacca dominated the entire Malacca Strait and the Malaya peninsula, "at least from Kedah in the north (west coast) to Ligor (east coast), former territories of Srivijaya" (Ginsburg and Roberts 1985, 26).

Since the 7th century, the Strait of Malacca has achieved an important position on the South China Sea trading system, linking the regional economy with the world. The Strait of Malacca was once under the control of the Arab states, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. In the mid-19th century, it was a haven for pirates whose aim was to target British and Dutch merchant ships. Until now, the narrow straits, shallow reefs, thousands of small islands and the dense passage of hundreds of commercial ships every day made this sea more than just a pirate's dream but also of a terrorist. It can be said that Malacca has actually held an important role in the regional trading system in particular and the international trading system in general. The Malacca Strait has advantages because it is convenient in traffic, located close to the spices area, and the precious goods that international traders need, and also it is the main, multi-route, easy road to connect India, West Asia with China and Southeast Asia. Around the strait are located rich islands and archipelagos with rich food and fresh water. The strait serves as an interchange station for long-distance trade and does not have a shallow area that causes large ships to

run aground. Those bright spots brought a prosperous Malacca and the most brilliant development in the history of East-West trade.

In terms of its geographical position, the Strait of Malacca is located between Sumatra (Indonesia) and the Malay Peninsula (West Malaysia), connecting the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. Geopolitically, the Strait of Malacca falls under a number of different territorial and maritime jurisdictions. The International Hydrographic Organization has defined the Strait of Malacca as the following:

- On the west: From the northernmost point of Sumatra (Pedropunt) and Lem Voalan on the southern extremity of Phuket Island, Thailand;
- On the east: From TanjongPiai on the Malaysian Peninsula and Klein Karimoen, Indonesia;
- On the north: The southwestern coast of the Malay Peninsula;
- On the south: The northwestern coast of Sumatra to the eastward city of Tanjung Kedabu to Klein Karimoen, Indonesia.

With a length of 800km, Malacca curves unevenly, the widest place is 38km and the narrowest is only about 1.5 nautical miles (2.8 km) wide, which is the Phillips Channel in the Singapore Strait. It is one of the world's most significant traffic bottleneck. This place is part of the busiest stretches of water in the world and is significant for the international maritime trade system. The Strait of Malacca has a very favorable geographic position since it is situated in an extremely important traffic route, transporting goods by waterway from Europe, Africa, South Asia, Middle East to East Asia (Tran and Nguyen 2020, 48). Along with the Sunda Strait, Malacca is known as an important "traffic hub" connecting the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. This strait played a very important role for the wide-ranging and sophisticated network of maritime trade in Asia. "This network linked ports in the western Indian Ocean to those in the Bay of Bengal and, via the Malacca Strait, to those in the South China Sea. The Middle East, East Africa, India, Southeast Asia, China and Japan thus together constituted a major trading zone" (Chaudhury and Morineau 2007, 175). The straits are not only rich in marine resources but are one of the oldest and busiest shipping lanes in the world. They serve as a primary conduit for the movement of cargo and human traffics between the Indo-European region and the rest of Asia and Australia.

Connecting the Indian Ocean with the Pacific, the Strait of Malacca is the shortest route between the Middle East and Asia in general and the

Pacific Rim countries in particular. They are the shortest East-West sea route compared to the Indonesia's Macassar and Lombok Straits. Every year billions of Euro worth of goods and services pass through the region formed by the Straits of Malacca and other associated shipping routes (Evers and Gerke 2006, 3). Located between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, the Strait of Malacca as the bottleneck is a familiar shipping route for both international oil traders and shipping. Each year over 60,000 vessels pass through the strait, carrying about one-fourth of the world's traded goods; about a quarter of all oil carried by sea passes through the Strait, mainly from Persian Gulf suppliers to Asian markets. According to the data of the US Energy Information Administration, over 30% of maritime crude oil trade price passes through the South China Sea. Over 90% of the crude oil arriving in that sea pass through the Strait of Malacca, thus making it one of the main geographical hubs of black gold in the world (Valori, Giancarlo 2020). Currently, Malacca is an inseparable strait from the South China Sea, forming a strategic shipping route that is vital to the economies of China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. Especially in the context of globalization and economic development of Southeast Asian countries, the position of the Malacca - South China Sea maritime route is even more important. Even for Australia, India, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the US, this international shipping route can be called the "lifeline". Energy security and trade between economies in East Asia and Southeast Asia depend heavily on the maritime security of the Malacca and the South China Sea route.

In terms of economic and strategic value, the importance of the sea route through Malacca is comparable to that of the Suez Canal or the Panama Canal. Of these three straits, the Malacca Strait is by far the most frequented sea lane, roughly one-third of the world trade passes it annually which is, by comparison, twice the amount of annual passage through the Suez Canal and many times the amount of the Panama Canal (Pradt 2016, 40). This strait forms the main shipping corridor between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, connecting the three most populous countries in the world, India, Indonesia and China, and is therefore considered the most important traffic regulation point in Asia. In addition, the Strait of Malacca is famous for major ports such as Belawan in Indonesia, Melaka and Penang in Malaysia. Singapore is the southern end of the strait. The narrowest point of the shipping route through the Strait of Malacca is at the Phillips Canal section of the Singapore Strait. This is also one of the most important bottlenecks in the world, where there is a potential for collision, stranding or spill, piracy, and terrorism. At the Strait of Malacca, half the world's oil, and two-thirds of its natural gas trade pass through its waters (Institute for the Analysis of Global Security 2004).

The Malacca Strait witnessed approximately 50,000 vessels passing annually, carrying one-third of the world's sea trade. The most important commodity transported is oil. Half of all oil shipments carried by sea come through the Straits. In 2003 a total of 19,154 tankers passed the Straits eastbound (Persian Gulf Countries - East Asia), carrying more than 10 million barrels per day (Evers and Gerke 2006, 5). A trade that is expected to expand as oil consumption rises especially in China. China's current biggest concern in the Indian Ocean is energy security. The Chinese Global Times stated that the Malacca Strait is decisive for China's economy, so Beijing must be involved in its direct management to enhance security. China's thriving economy today is heavily dependent on oil, gas and other natural resources imported mainly by sea, of which 80% of its trade, including its energy supplies from the Middle East, passes through the Straits of Malacca (Tan 2011, 100). The Beijing government is facing a "dilemma" in Malacca because of its over-reliance on the strait and the impact of US movements to control it. In fact, whichever country controls the Strait of Malacca will also control China's energy shipping route. Therefore, the issue of trade and energy security has prompted China to adopt a more aggressive "seaward" policy, especially with the coastal states of the Indian Ocean. China is well aware of US great power position and India's strategic advantage in the region and is pursuing a harmonious approach, avoiding any offensive involvement with these powers. This gives China the advantage of gaining a larger strategic space through cooperation with the coastal states of the Indian Ocean. China is also aware of the fact that India may use the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to block the western entrance of the Strait of Malacca on which China is dependent (Kaplan 2009, 20). As tensions may rise in the South China Sea, the more important the Strait of Malacca becomes, and its strategic position is the focus of attention for countries whose economy depends heavily on this shipping route. At present, oil flows through the Straits are three times higher than through the Suez Canal, and fifteen times greater than through the Panama Canal (Tan 2011, 93).

In addition to fuel, the ASEAN countries, China, Japan and South Korea daily export textiles, clothing, electronics, cars and food through the Strait of Malacca. High-value products transported by large cargo ships across the strait are increasingly at risk of piracy and terrorism. Piracy in the Straits of Malacca has historically been an unresolved threat to ship owners and mariners who ply the 900km-long (550 miles) sea lane (Zulkifli, Ibrahim, Rahman and Yasid 2020, 15). Piracy endangers the security of energy transport on two aspects: the disruption of energy supply and the increase in the cost of energy transportation. The serious pirate's attacks, such as

the earlier mentioned phantom ship, not only hijack ships, but also steal cargoes. Bulk carriers and oil tankers, which are heavily loaded with energy products, are vulnerable to piracy attacks when passing through the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. These ships are on the top of the victim ships list, amounting to over half of the total number from 2003 to 2007 (Lai 2009, 187). Furthermore, one dangerous scenario is that pirates may kill or hijack all the crew on board during the attack, and abandon the ship in the Straits of Malacca. The unmanned ship might collide with other ships in the congested channels of the Straits, thus cutting off traffic passing through the Straits. If the Straits were closed, ships have to use the alternative route via Sunda and Lombok-Makassar Straits, the transit time and distance for the passing fleet would increase by two-three days, and freight rate will increase nearly 20-30% than that while using the Straits of Malacca (Richardson 2004, 38). The Strait of Malacca accounts for one third of all piracy cases in the world. The number of robberies has tripled over the past three decades. The Straits of Malacca are the third most affected piracy hotspot in the world in early years of the 21st century, rising from around 25 attacks in 1994 to a record 112 in 2000 (Evers and Gerke 2006, 7).

In early March 2020, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore raised their terrorist alarm when it was reported that terrorists were planning to attack ships passing through Malacca. This threat had no stopped millions of barrels of oil from being carried by ships and boats every day. As one of the busiest sea routes in the world, the intermittent traffic in this area will seriously affect the regional and world economy. According to 2006-2007 data from the US Department of Energy, nearly a third of the oil is transported by ship across the strait, making it one of the two most important waterways in the world. The terrorist threat focuses on the possibility that a large vessel could be robbed and sunk in a shallow point of water (the shallowest part of the Strait of Malacca is 25 m), causing congestion on the entire route, and then, full trade demand will be seriously affected.

To limit the risk of piracy, three countries Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have jointly patrolled to protect this area. Coordinated naval patrols by Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore (Operation MALSINDO) were implemented in July 2004 (Bateman, Raymond and Ho 2006, 33). This has been complemented by the “Eye in the Sky” combined maritime air patrol that was inaugurated in September 2005, with the first flight carried out from Subang in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Strait of Malacca is mainly controlled by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore and all three countries above do not agree to let other countries directly participate in the management of maritime security here. Only in 2005, Thailand was invited to participate in the air

patrol “Eye in the Sky”. Under the initiative, the three countries as well as Thailand will each conduct up to two air patrols per week along the Malacca and Singapore Straits, with each flight carrying a combined mission patrol team consisting of personnel from the participating states (The Maritime Executive 2005).

While piracy has been and is under control, there is still a risk that terrorists can paralyze many economies in the region by attacking oil tankers. After the “9/11 attacks” in the U.S., Singapore announced that it could agree to let the US carry out anti-terrorism activities in the strait. However, up to now, non-coastal countries can only participate in the indirect management of the Strait of Malacca through financial support, technology and means of transport. In addition, five countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, the U.K., New Zealand and Australia, regularly coordinate with their naval forces to exercise counterterrorism here. In the Malay archipelago, another security concern that was raised soon after the “9/11 attacks” was the security of the vital and strategic sea-lanes of the region, particularly of the Straits of Malacca. This was an understandable concern, given the fear that terrorists fleeing worldwide security action after the “9/11 attacks” could easily find refuge in the Malay archipelago, which has the world’s largest population of Muslims. In turn, these terrorists could look for new, vulnerable targets in the region, in collaboration with local radical elements, Muslim insurgents, or people in existing organised crime networks, such as those involved in numerous piracy attacks in the region. Moreover, this concern has also been seen as being closely linked to the emerging threat from radical terrorism within the region, especially in the wake of the Bali bombing in 2002 (Tan 2011, 91).

The situation of piracy and terrorism taking place in the Strait of Malacca has prompted the countries concerned to establish a multilateral cooperation mechanism. The Cooperative Mechanism for the Enhancement of Safety, Security and Environmental Protection of the Straits of Malacca consists of three components. The first is the Forum for Cooperation, comprising senior officials and technical experts from the maritime authorities of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. The second component is the Project Coordination Committee. This committee was primarily formed to oversee a package of projects proposed by the littoral states. To ensure the progress of these projects, funding and participation from the user states and interested parties have been sought. The third component is the Aids to Navigation Fund, in which interested stakeholders can volunteer to finance the maintenance of the critical aids to navigation (Ho and Bateman 2012, 134).

Today, with its geostrategic position the Straits of Malacca provide the main artery through which a huge proportion of global trade and energy

flow. Tankers and bulk carriers move vast quantities of oil, coal, iron ore and minerals to the manufacturing centers of Southeast and Northeast Asia, whilst millions of containers flow in the opposite direction to feed consumer markets all over the world. As the connection of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, the Strait of Malacca held an important position for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific in the early decades of the 21st century.

Final Remarks

In the early years of the 21st century, as the Indo-Pacific becomes the center of global economic activities, geopolitics, and security dynamics, the region needs a comprehensive maritime security cooperation. The regional maritime security cooperation is needed to preserve the increasing seaborne activity and to maintain SLOCs stability. In addition, this region also takes place fierce competition between major powers in the world. China's expanding maritime influence, the emergence of India as regional power, US Indo-Pacific approach, and the regional non-traditional maritime issues have become core discussions regarding Indo-Pacific maritime security. The South China Sea disputes also have raised the risks in the region. The Indian Ocean SLOCs stability also needs to be managed, as the waterway has become the busiest sea lines in the world. The US "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy implied by the quadrilateral dialogue Australia, India, Japan, and the US should be treated carefully. The quad countries seem to agree on the common strategic problem of the Indo-Pacific, which is China's maritime expansion. China on the other hand, has become an important partner for the region in terms of maritime trade and investment; however its naval presence is still not quite welcomed by some regional countries. The power competition between the above major powers will then shape the future pattern of interactions in Indo-Pacific.

With its geostrategic position in Southeast Asia as well as in the world, the Strait of Malacca increasingly plays an important role in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, as a "life-line" trade route connecting these two oceans. In recent years, the security situation in the Strait of Malacca has attracted the attention of many major powers in the region as well as in the world. The international community's attention to the security issues within the Strait of Malacca demonstrates the importance of these waters to the global community and regional international organizations, as well as non-governmental and commercial organizations, have responded to the threats of terrorism and piracy with various initiatives. Besides, terrorism

and piracy are not the only issues that are threatening the safety of this area. Despite, all efforts to manage the situation in the Strait of Malacca, the issue of the delimitation of disputed maritime boundaries remain. This situation has led to blurred territorial divisions in the Strait thus complicating law enforcement which is the main thrust in ensuring the safety of this strait. Unresolved maritime boundaries in the strait are also kinked to the most sensitive issue in this region which is sovereignty. Littoral states of the Strait of Malacca consider the sovereignty issue to be the paramount consideration in all its decisions on the strait. However, to have a conclusively safe and secured Strait of Malacca, littoral states need to put aside their differences and to be more flexible in their interpretation of sovereignty. Currently, many regional and world powers with great interests in this strait are actively participating in maritime security cooperation in the region. The construction of an international cooperation mechanism to preserve the security in general of this strait is a solution that is mutually beneficial.

REFERENCES

- Bateman, S., Raymond, C. Z. and Ho, J., 2006, *Safety and Security in the Malacca and Singapore Straits: An Agenda for Action*, Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University.
- Bueger, Christian, 2015, "What is Maritime Security?", *Marine Policy*, Vol. 53, pp. 159-164.
- Chaudhury, S. and Morineau, M., 2007, *Merchants, Companies and Trade: Europe and Asia in the Early Modern Era*, London: Cambridge University Press.
- Echle, C., Gaens, B., Sarmah, M. and Rueppel, P., 2020, *Responding to the Geopolitics of Connectivity: Asian and European Perspectives*, Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.
- European Commission, 2018, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank: Connecting Europe and Asia - Building blocks for an EU Strategy, Brussels: *Publications Office of the European Union*.
- Evers, Hans-Dieter and Gerke, S., 2006, "The Strategic Importance of the Straits of Malacca for World Trade and Regional Development", *ZEF Working Paper Series*, No. 17, Center for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn, pp. 3-16.

- Ginsburg, N. and Roberts, C. F., 1985, *Malaysia*, Wasington: University of Wasington Press.
- Government of India - *Ministry of External Affairs*, 1 June 2018, "Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue", <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements>. (accessed on April 24, 2021).
- Government of Japan, November 2019, "Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific", <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf> (accessed on April 17, 2021).
- Helfman, G. S., 2009, *The Diversity of Fishes: Biology, Evolution, and Ecology*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Ho, J. and Bateman, S., 2012, *Maritime Challenges and Priorities in Asia: Implications for Regional Security*, New York: Routledge.
- Hooker, V. M., 2003, *A Short History of Malaysia: Linking East and West*, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, 24 May 2004, "Chilly Response to U.S. Plan to Deploy Forces in the Strait of Malacca", <http://www.iags.org/no524042.htm> (accessed on April 4, 2021).
- Kaplan, R. D., 2009, "Center Stage for the Twenty-First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 2, pp. 16-32.
- Kuo, L. and Kommenda, N., 30 July 2018, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative?", <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/ng-interactive/2018/jul/30/what-china-belt-road-initiative-silk-road-explainer> (accessed on April 20, 2021).
- Lai, Hongyi, 2009, *Asian Energy Security: The Maritime Dimension*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mahan, Alfred Thayer, 1897, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Mishra, V., 2016, "US Power and Influence in the Asia-Pacific Region: The Decline of "Alliance Mutuality"", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 40, Issue 3, pp. 159-172.
- Pradt, T., 2016, *China's New Foreign Policy: Military Modernisation, Multilateralism and the "China Threat"*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rahman, C., 2009, *Concepts of Maritime Security: A Strategic Perspective on Alternative Visions for Good Order and Security at Sea*, with Policy Implications for New Zealand, Wellington: Victoria University.
- Richardson, M., 2004, *A Time Bomb for Global Trade: Maritime-Related Terrorism in an Age of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Tan, Andrew T. H., 2011, *Security Strategies in the Asia-Pacific: The United*

- States' "Second Front" in Southeast Asia, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- The Maritime Executive, 15 September 2005, "Strait of Malacca Nations to Use Air Patrols", <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/2005-09-15strait-of-malacca-nations-to-use-air-p> (accessed on April 25, 2021).
- The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 20 June 2017, "Full Text of the Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative", http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2017/06/20/content_281475691873460.htm (accessed on April 9, 2021).
- The U.S. *Department of Defense*, 1 June 2019, "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region", <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-%20DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF> (accessed on April 24, 2021).
- The Valdai Club, September 2017, "Toward the Great Ocean - 5: From the Turn to the East to Greater Eurasia", <http://valdaiclub.com/files/15300/> (accessed on April 17, 2021).
- Till, Geoffrey, 2009, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edition, New York: Routledge.
- Tran, X. H. and Nguyen, T. B., 2020, "The Strait of Malacca (Malaysia) with Its Role in the Network of Maritime Trade in Asia and East - West Cultural Exchange in the Middle Ages", *Palarch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 84-92.
- USPACOM, 2016, *United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Guidance*, Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.
- Valori, Giancarlo Elia, 24 November 2020, "The Strait of Malacca: China between Singapore and the United States", <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/11/24/the-strait-of-malacca-china-between-singapore-and-the-united-states/> (accessed on April 24, 2021).
- Weir, G. E., 2010, "Fish, Family, and Profit: Piracy and the Horn of Africa", in *Piracy and Maritime Crime: Historical and Modern Case Studies*, Bruce A. Elleman, Andrew Forbes and David Rosenberg, eds., 2010, Newport, RI: Naval War College Press.
- Zulkifli, N., Ibrahim, R. I. R., Rahman, A. A. A. and Yasid, A. F. M., 2020, "Maritime Cooperation in the Straits of Malacca (2016-2020): Challenges and Recommend For a New Framework", *Asian Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 10-32.

ABSTRACT

Maritime security has been in recent times emerged as a burning issue in the fields of international relations in general and in the Indo-Pacific region in particular. With topographical tectonics, this area includes numerous “choke points” on maritime routes that are strategically important to world trade, playing an important role in the transportation of oil, gas and cargo products from the Middle East to Australia and East Asia. Therefore, maritime security issues for the lifeline of the world economy are a matter of concern for the countries in the Indo-Pacific region, in which the important role of the sea route through the Straits of Malacca is increasingly emphasized. With a geostrategic position connecting the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) and the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean), the Straits of Malacca is the shortest route between the Middle East and Asia in general and Pacific Rim countries in particular. This is the location that accounts for a quarter of the world’s marine traffic annually. Energy security and trade economy of major powerful countries in the Indo-Pacific region depend heavily on the maritime security of the Straits of Malacca route. Through an analysis of the Malacca Strait’s geostrategic location, this paper elucidates the Indo-Pacific region’s importance in maritime security field in the first two decades of the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS

Maritime; security; Indo-Pacific; Malacca; Cco-coperation.

Received on November 05, 2021

Approved on May 19, 2022