

## Unraveling the Maintenance of Southeast Asia's Maritime Security: A Look into the ASEAN Maritime Outlook

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### ABSTRACT

The sea is an important engine of development for the growth of Southeast Asia. It has provided the states with new opportunities for growth and development. It is not surprising that many initiatives have been undertaken to leverage the vast sea in the region. Under Indonesia's chairmanship, ASEAN's focus towards the maritime domain was accentuated by the release of the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO). This new addition to ASEAN's maritime security instruments serves as a reference for upcoming endeavors on the field and to avoid duplication. Through using the qualitative research methods, the author seeks to explore the ways ASEAN has sought to maintain its multifaceted maritime security. Against that backdrop, apart from elaborating what the AMO has to offer, the author also unravels the strides ASEAN has taken in maintaining some dimensions to its maritime security. The aforementioned dimensions, referring to Christian Bueger, consisted of national security, human security, marine environment, and economic development. It is found how ASEAN's effort to maintain maritime security is apparent in the initiatives done within its 3 pillars. Moreover, ASEAN also expands its effort by cooperating with actors outside of Southeast Asia in many aspects given the interconnectedness inherent to the sea. Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that ASEAN continues to prioritize and enhance its multifaceted approach to maritime security, building on the foundations laid by the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO). ASEAN should intensify efforts to strengthen national security, human security, marine environment protection, and economic development through its three pillars: Political-Security Community, Economic Community, and Socio-Cultural Community. To further bolster these initiatives, ASEAN should deepen its cooperation with external partners, leveraging the interconnected nature of the maritime domain.

Keyword: AMO, ASEAN, Maritime Security, Southeast Asia

### INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of the 20th century international system is the growing role and influence of the Indo-Pacific region. From the emergence of new global giants like China to the vast growth of its regional power counterparts like South Korea, Australia, and Japan, the region has long been on the minds of the old guards of the west. Such a reality is apparent in the strong presence the US and others have built over the years in this new stage of geopolitics. Apart from the grand picture of the Indo-Pacific and its aforementioned states, it is also important to take into account the very heart of the region, Southeast Asia.

As impressive as the growth of East Asia states have been in the last decades, one can not overlook the same occurrence in Southeast Asia. Following the tumultuous chapters of

the region's history, from the rise and twilight of the Cold War to the economic crisis that pervaded the region in the last decades, growths and developments have filled the region's plate. Now, the region has gone the distance in its trajectory of growth. An example can be made out of its GDP where Southeast Asia's combined GDP was the third largest in 2021 (Kominfo, 2023). Moreover, Southeast Asia's enormous population, being the third largest population, has also caught the attention of investments from outside of the region (Yogatama, 2023). However, the stream of investments is not the sole engine of the region's growth. One of the key region's engines of growth is present in an inseparable part of its identity, the sea.

As one of the engines of growth, the sea becomes the base for numerous industries and activities to take place. Long before present times, the people of Southeast Asia have relied on the sea as a means of subsistence, notably through fishing (Morgan & Staples, 2006). Now, the fishery industry stands as one of the key activities taking place on the region's vast sea. Almost all states in the region have leveraged on the priceless resources, from the fish to natural gas, that are stored below the sea. In 2018, Southeast Asia was responsible for around 52% of the global fishery production which amounted to almost 50 million MT of fish (Winch, 2022). The sheer size of the fishery industry alone has attracted many people across the region to join the industry as migrant fishers. In regard to other resources like natural gas, the landscape in Southeast Asia has also garnered attention as discovery of gas columns have occurred in states like Indonesia (Cavcic, 2023). Against that backdrop of utility, it is imperative for the sea to remain stable and secured from any threat.

As laid out by Christian Bueger, the dimensions of maritime security comprises national security, human security, economic development, and marine environment. The aforementioned dimensions are related that one can not seek to attain maritime security by not undertaking a holistic effort that encompasses them all. In the ever-globalizing world we live in, numerous threats have emerged alongside the many innovations it brought about. Threats to the region's maritime security can arise not only from state or non-state actors, but also from events taking place there. The former can be seen in conflicting interests between states, like the one occurring in the South China Sea, or the presence of non-state groups with ill intention as seen in many assortments of transnational crimes on the sea.

The latter is closely related to the environmental dimension of maritime security as apparent in the likes of environmental degradation as a result of unsustainable exploitation of the sea. The aforementioned assortments of threats have occurred in the past and in present times in Southeast Asia. At times, difficulty to overcome those threats would be too much for a single state given the strong interconnectedness inherent to the sea. What is meant by the interconnectedness in the sea is how the maritime security of one state in a region is closely related to that of its neighbors. Under such circumstances, The Southeast Asian states would need to work together to maintain maritime security from the plethora of threats in the region.

To accommodate cooperation and dialogue between states in Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is present for that end. Established with the Bangkok Declaration in 1967, the regional bloc that initially had 5 member states has grown to encompass the whole Southeast Asia. Its vast growth in membership has made it inevitable for ASEAN to cater to far wider areas of interests. From economic cooperation and conflict resolution to the bigger regional integration for Southeast Asia, ASEAN has been involved in the region's development over the decades of its existence. One of the areas of cooperation and deliberation that the regional bloc is no stranger to is its maritime security. ASEAN has had its share of experience in deliberation on said matters, not to mention how it has its own forum for maritime deliberations, that is the ASEAN Maritime Forum (Agastia, 2021).

Such is the case as member states have made use of its capacity as a forum to highlight issues related to the region's sea which then could open the door for an agreement or a

practical initiative. Apart from the aforementioned ones, in 2023, ASEAN released another strategic document that highlights ASEAN's initiatives in the maritime domain which entails existing cooperation and maritime security.

During Indonesia's chairmanship in ASEAN, the ASEAN Maritime Outlook or AMO was released. In the past, research overtures have been done over the field of Southeast Asia's maritime security. Many of those undertakings were done over threats to the region's maritime security, like maritime piracy and its adaptation (Hastings, 2020), or the relevant initiatives under the ASEAN banner like the ASEAN Coast Guard Forum in 2023 (Manullang, 2023). However, given the recent release of the AMO, there has been little to no undertaking to properly look into it. With that in mind, the author aims to provide explanations as to what the AMO has to offer for the region's multifaceted maritime security as well as highlighting the challenges inherent to the region's maritime security. Through this undertaking, it is hoped that a look into the new chapter of Southeast Asia's maritime security development can be provided which could enrich the existing knowledge landscape of the topic.

## METHODOLOGY

In undertaking its research problems, the author utilizes the qualitative research method in the paper. The qualitative research method can be understood as a research method that is done through qualitative examination of data from which the conclusion can be drawn. Qualitative research method is more concerned with understanding the problem or subject at hand as opposed to predicting the outcome (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach involves the use of both primary and secondary data sources to provide a well-rounded explanation in the discussion section of the paper. Primary data is collected from official documents and records of relevant organizations, such as ASEAN, ensuring that the information is authoritative and directly related to the topic.

Secondary data, on the other hand, includes insights from previous studies, academic articles, and pertinent media coverage, offering a broader perspective on the issue. The data from these sources is then synthesized to create a cohesive narrative and is triangulated to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. Triangulation involves cross-verifying information from multiple sources to minimize the risk of misinformation and bias. This thorough process of data collection and analysis forms the foundation for the arguments and conclusions presented later in the paper, ensuring that the discussion is grounded in robust and credible evidence. By using the qualitative research method, the author aims to provide a nuanced and detailed exploration of ASEAN's efforts in maintaining maritime security, drawing from a rich array of documentary and empirical sources.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The ASEAN Maritime Outlook

The ASEAN Maritime Outlook or AMO is a strategic document that contains the plentiful cooperation on the maritime field that ASEAN has undertaken over the years. The launch of the first document was done back in August 2023, during Indonesia's chairmanship in ASEAN (MOFA Indonesia, 2023). The document, prior to its launch, had been around for some time, making its presence in numerous ASEAN deliberations like in the ASEAN Political and Security Council (APSC) meeting in 2022 (Kurmala & Suharto, 2022). Indonesia played an important role not only during its launch in 2023 but even in its early stages of formulation. Long before that, Indonesia had sought to formulate the document to support the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (Bradford, 2023). In the future, the document is expected to be published every 3 years where it would be updated with new maritime initiatives.

The emergence of the strategic document could serve numerous purposes, one of them being its role as the container of the many maritime initiatives ASEAN has spearheaded

or been involved in over the years. While this may appear simple, its importance can not be downplayed. Such is the case as, referring to Moch Faisal Karim, there are many maritime initiatives among ASEAN member states as a result of the different interests or priorities each member states have in regard to the sea (CSDR New Delhi, 2023). For example, other states may have a higher stake on the national security dimension, like the claimant states in the South China Sea dispute, whereas such concerns may not resonate at all with other states in the region. Another purpose it serves is its role as a reference for ASEAN to point out opportunities for cooperation that would complement the existing initiatives. This particular purpose can be understood upon learning the different capacity in the maritime domain that each member state has.

ASEAN's centrality is another matter that the AMO can be paired with. ASEAN centrality can be understood as the ASEAN's centrality in the regional order of Southeast Asia (Indraswari, 2022). With such a centrality in place, ASEAN has a bigger chance of being relevant to the region's development and states' interest there. States would find ASEAN to be an important element to their national interest in the region either as a means to engage with other states or even to work together over regional issues, including ones in the maritime domain. In regard to the AMO, the strategic document could serve as a means to underline ASEAN's centrality, notably its internal centrality, to its member states. What is meant by that is how the existing regional architecture on maritime cooperation, including maritime security, which is enjoyed by the states in the region could come to be as a result of ASEAN's presence to accommodate their interaction.

The many initiatives that the member states have partaken in the past can be seen in the strategic document itself. Another way the AMO supports ASEAN centrality is how it promotes enhancement among member states over maritime issues by highlighting ASEAN's principles like non-intervention, rule-based framework, equality, mutual respect, and other values that are enshrined in the ASEAN Charter and Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia. It is also important to point out how apart from accentuating said values, ASEAN also takes into account the bigger international regime like the 1982 UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) as one of its guiding principles.

The launch of the AMO can be viewed as another proof of ASEAN's commitment to cooperate on matters related to its maritime domain as well as the great deal it puts over the stability and security of its sea. Upon looking at the contents of the outlook, one may see how many of the initiatives do not have maritime security as part of its title. The absence of said naming does not mean that maritime security is not the main concern contained in the document. One way to look at it is by understanding how maritime security itself is quite multifaceted as apparent in its many dimensions. Hence, should an initiative appear to only be concerned with the environmental or economic dimension of the issue, it is nonetheless also concerned with maritime security.

As mentioned before, the primacy of the sea itself for the region can not only be seen in its role as the base for numerous industries, but also upon looking at the growing threats to the sea as a whole. However, one can not overlook the prospect to overcome said challenges. While it is true that the strong interconnectedness in the sea and the non-state nature of the threats make it seemingly overwhelming to tackle, said interconnectedness also pushes states, especially within the region, to come and work together. This is apparent to witness in the many maritime initiatives that ASEAN and its pillars have undertaken to further the member states' interest in the maritime domain.

## 2. The 4 Encompassed Dimensions of Maritime Security

As previously mentioned, maritime security has some notable dimensions that consist of national security, economic development, marine environment, and human security



(Bueger, 2015). Similar to the maritime domain, the threats on the field are also interconnected in how they can affect more than one sector (Bueger et. al., 2019). A threat to one sector can resonate on other sectors as well, like how Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated fishing could not only jeopardize the blue economy practice (economic dimension), but it could also harm the marine ecosystem as a result of its unsustainable practice.

That attribute makes it necessary for a holistic approach that not only involves cross-sector planning but more states as well. Moving back to the AMO, the aforementioned need for such an approach can be seen to imbue ASEAN as seen in the many initiatives contained in the document. Maritime cooperations in ASEAN take place in its three pillars, that being the ASEAN Political Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. The existing initiatives in the ASEAN Political Security Community have a stronger focus on the national security dimension of maritime security. Cooperations in this pillar could take place in many of its bodies like the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Maritime Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting, ASEAN Regional Forum, etc.

Matters that are discussed here have the national security dimension as its salient feature. Regional issues that could have major repercussions to a state's national security emanating from state to state dispute or more direct threats take the center stage. Deliberations over numerous threats or issues in the maritime domain could occur in the aforementioned bodies. Some of its outputs could range from declarations or statements to call for cooperation or effort to combat threats in the maritime domain, like the EAS Statement on Enhancing Regional Maritime Cooperation (ASEAN, 2023).

Another example of the national security dimension of maritime security at work is the deliberations of regional issues like the outlook towards regional development as well as ongoing issues like the South China Sea dispute. A by-product of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting is the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific that highlights the outlook towards the region's development as well as areas of cooperation which includes maritime security. As for the South China Sea dispute, efforts to push for progress have been taken like by the release of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and the ongoing progress to come up with the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

The approach to maritime security is also present in the form of capacity building activities. Training and exercises or workshops have been held on numerous occasions involving member states over a range of maritime issues like combating transnational crimes on the sea to maritime law enforcements. In the ASEAN Economic Community, the cooperations have a stronger focus on the economic dimension of the issue. Deliberations within this pillar may occur in the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry, ASEAN Transport Ministers Meeting, Meeting of the ASEAN Tourism Ministers, High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration, etc. The scope of the issue here can range from trade policy and blue economy, and fishery development over maritime goods to its forthcoming shipping process. Threats that could jeopardize the economic dimension also resonate with the previously discussed dimension.

Transnational crimes like illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) is a good example as it could jeopardize the practice of the blue economy given its severe impact (Ma, 2020). An initiative related to that issue is present in the ASEAN Guidelines for Preventing the Entry of Fish and Fishery Products from IUU Fishing Activities into the Supply Chain. Another example of maritime security imbued initiative is present in the security initiatives, notably ones related to port security and search and rescue operations. The former can be seen in the 2017 Regional Action Plan on Port Security that is concerned with port security measures and the relevant human resource development. As for the latter, the establishment of a specific forum, like the ASEAN Transport SAR Forum, that caters to the said matter is also another example in the pillar.

The salient feature of cooperations in this pillar is its focus on the environmental and human dimension of maritime security. Cooperations under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community are done over sectoral bodies like the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment and the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting. Against that backdrop of concerns, ASEAN has made numerous strides on efforts to maintain the security of said fields. In regard to the environmental dimension, marine debris is one of the threats to the region's sea. Debris on the sea has the capacity to jeopardize the marine ecosystem which in the long run would also have its toll on the economic activity and human health (Purba et. al., 2019).

To face that threat, ASEAN has formulated numerous initiatives like the ASEAN Framework on Marine Debris and the ASEAN Regional Action Plan (RAP) on Combating Marine Debris. Similar to the previous pillars, some of the issues there also come to be seen as such. One in particular is transnational crimes with the likes of human trafficking taking the forefront given its immense threat towards human security. In regard to human security, ASEAN has developed numerous declarations and frameworks to overcome existing threats. Concerns over those who work on the sea have caught the attention of ASEAN as apparent in one of its newest strides known as the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers (Greenpeace Southeast Asia, 2023). The declaration represents ASEAN's awareness of the plight of migrant fishers who play an important role in the region's fishery industry as well as the desire to fulfill their rights to a safe workplace.

Apart from the three ASEAN pillars, maritime initiatives involving ASEAN are also present elsewhere. ASEAN has established a wide web of relations with other states beyond Southeast Asia, from those in East Asia all the way to South America. The strong ties it has established has led to numerous cooperations across many fields, including ones on the maritime domain. The existing cooperation, along with the potential fields in the future, can be taken as another example of ASEAN's external centrality. As opposed to internal centrality, the external counterpart is concerned with how ASEAN is relevant or important for states that are not its member states. Another reason that could drive maritime cooperation, including but not limited to maritime security, is the interconnected nature inherent to the sea.

An example here can be made by the relations ASEAN has maintained with global powers like the US and China even as they are both in competition for influence in the region. In regard to the US, under the strategic partnership, ASEAN has the opportunity to further cooperate with the US on maritime cooperation that seeks to promote understandings of existing international regimes as well as regional stability. As for China, even amidst the existing dispute on the South China Sea, the two still have the leeway to work together and maintain ties through numerous maritime cooperation. Said cooperation could range from the framework to avoid tension, like efforts to conclude a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, to cooperations to overcome a common threat like transnational crimes on the sea.

Moreover, the resort towards ASEAN can also be seen as a means for capacity building or knowledge sharing in the maritime domain. This particular example can be seen in ASEAN partnerships with European states like France, Germany, and Italy that entail maritime cooperation on issues like maritime debris, IUU fishing, and circular economy.

### 3. Challenges and Opportunities beyond the Sea

Following the litany of maritime initiatives ASEAN has developed over the years, the document also lays out the existing challenges and opportunities that could be worked on. In the long run, there also remains numerous issues in the maritime domain to be worked on by the regional bloc. Maritime cooperation in the region has many room to be strengthened, from areas of cooperation over renewable energy, blue economy, sustainable development, etc. Putting them aside, the AMO also underlines some notable maritime security issues that still

remain on the region's plate. Some notable ones fall under the transnational crimes group like IUU fishing and maritime piracy (ASEAN, 2023).

The aforementioned threats can inflict severe damage to the region's maritime security. Its capacity to do so is also further exacerbated given the interconnected nature of maritime security's dimensions. For example, the presence of the two threats could jeopardize and bring about instability to the region's sea. Such a condition would make activities on the sea involving cargo, fishing, or even passenger vessels exposed to the risks associated with those threats. Should such a landscape come to fruition, it would certainly not benefit the region's growth given the important role the sea holds for the states in the region. Another important thing to point out is how incapacity to overcome those threats could also negatively affect ASEAN centrality.

Said implication could come about in the form of stronger presence of outside powers, like the US and China, in the region, including its maritime domain. The global powers' presence in the region could be further accentuated should they find that the ongoing state of the region's maritime security as detrimental to their interest. Yes, ASEAN member states are not only ones that place huge importance on the region's maritime security. States like the US and China have had their share of initiatives, from programs on the field to cooperation with ASEAN or its member states, over issues in the maritime domain (Paszak, 2021).

The growing presence the two states could have in the region may outshine that of ASEAN should they be able to better cater ASEAN member states' interests as opposed to ASEAN itself. Such a case could potentially push ASEAN out of the region's spotlight, making them not as relevant as they could have been. This particular fragmentation or cohesion issue itself is already present in the South China Sea dispute as ASEAN member states can not find a common ground as they have different views towards the dispute (De Castro, 2020). Hence, ASEAN's awareness towards what's at stake as seen in the AMO demonstrates the importance it puts for future endeavors in maintaining maritime security.

Opportunities that ASEAN can explore to address the existing challenges that emanate from the aforementioned threats are present within and outside of ASEAN. Within ASEAN, ASEAN underlines the importance of enhancing the ASEAN Maritime Forum. The use of this ASEAN body could be further developed to enhance its capacity to facilitate dialogues and information sharing. Similar attention is also given to the regional bloc's lead sectoral bodies. For the latter, ASEAN is also aware of the potentials that cooperations with external partners have to offer. The document highlights the prospect to do so by mentioning the existence of a relevant framework to ground said opportunity like the AOIP.

It is also important to note the existing network of cooperations that ASEAN has established with external states across the world (ASEAN, n.d). The wide scope of states is not the only thing that could be developed, but also the scope of activities, which has taken the form of strategic partnerships, capacity building initiatives, and dialogues. The inclusion of external states to the region's maritime security maintenance could help in bolstering the available capacity for the task. Cooperations involving them could pave the way for a more holistic approach to the region's maritime security. Through some of those opportunities, it is hoped that the management and coordination of a plethora of maritime issues in the region could be improved.

## CONCLUSION

The centrality of maritime security in Southeast Asia has made it an important matter to be paid attention to by ASEAN. Through its numerous sectoral bodies and member states, ASEAN has brought about numerous initiatives that embody maritime cooperation that at times could also entail the involvement of external states. One of ASEAN's recent overtures came in the form of a strategic document known as the AMO. The aforementioned document

was released in August 2023 as another output of Indonesia's chairmanship in ASEAN. The document provides a litany of ASEAN maritime initiatives over the years which could be used as a reference for future endeavors as well as to avoid duplication of similar strides. The AMO lays out three pillars that encompass ASEAN's maritime initiatives that consist of the APSC, AEC, and ASCC.

Many initiatives under those pillars have their focus on the 4 dimensions of maritime security, from human security, marine environment, national security, and economic development. Finally, in regard to challenges and opportunities, the AMO highlights the threats posed by transnational crimes like maritime piracy and IUU fishing towards the region's maritime security and stability. As for opportunities to explore, the AMO points out numerous areas of cooperations in the maritime domain like renewable energy and sustainable development. It also points out the need for a collaborative approach that would require the involvement of external states that also have their share of interest in the region. Given its novel nature, there lies many things to be observed in regard to the AMO. Later down the road, other undertakings over the AMO could be done, for example by looking at its future development and how ASEAN's commitment to maintain maritime security would evolve as the years go by.

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