



## RMN SEA POWER CENTRE ONLINE COMMENTARY ON MARITIME ISSUES

SUAR 1/23

15 FEB 2023

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## GLOBAL MARITIME SECURITY CHALLENGES

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### INTRODUCTION

In the past, the major security threat was the global war between the superpowers or the threat of proxy ideological wars. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the irrelevancy of that threat. However, the peaceful atmosphere is still occasionally shaken due to doubts about the intentions of some state and non-state actors and the emergence of a new class of threats or issues that impact maritime security. Maritime security challenges in the global arena should not take lightly, and it has recently become more important in the contemporary and future strategic environment. Today, maritime security issues and challenges are more complex and transboundary in nature. The prevailing threats are real. The evolution amplifies these threats from the traditional setting to the non-traditional, regional, and global concerns. Thus, this essay will discuss a broad spectrum of maritime security issues that surface in the maritime dimension by examining international security.

### What is Maritime Security?

Maritime security is a broad and multifaceted term that points to peace and security maintained by naval force at maritime borders. Similar to the concept of 'national security', it may convey different meanings, depending on the context and users (Bueger, 2015, p.2). Maritime security may also be better understood by exploring the different concepts it is associated with such as maritime safety. The 2008 United Nations of General Assembly (UNGA) report on Ocean and Law of Sea (OLOS) has generally classified several specific threats that are related to maritime security. For example, maritime security is linked with the evolution of maritime safety concerning activities related to international maritime transportation and port facilities, from the economic perspective. This include improving the maritime safety of vessels and ships carrying either economic goods or exercising maritime economic activities, transport of dangerous goods and the safety of routes used for international navigation (UNGA, 2008 & OLOS, 2015).

In linking with economic development, maritime security means providing a secure maritime environment, which is vital for managing marine resources (Bueger, 2015, p.4). This also includes embracing sustainable and ecological management strategies, which requires a practical implementation and constant inception of laws and order. Furthermore, this cluster also emphasized the role of the human element as a critical part in creating a safe and secure marine environment for economic-related development (UNGA, 2008 & OLOS, 2015). This involves securing maritime professionals at sea and the right management of seafarers and fishers in terms of providing safe living and working conditions at sea and adopting the right approach in handling marine casualties and marine incidents (Ibid). It can also be related to another human activity at sea, which is the safety of migration of people by sea from incidents of deaths and the safety of ships and maritime installations at sea. Maritime security is also associated with the concept of the 'good order of the sea' whereby the sea, as a resource, as a medium for trade and information exchange for continuous human development and survival, faces threats and requires a good order (Till, 2018, p.283).

Maritime security can also be linked to mitigating cross-border activities which are threatening a country, such as a) the act of terrorists against shipping and offshore installations, b) piracy and armed robbery against ships, c) illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, d) illicit trafficking in arms and weapons of mass destruction, e) smuggling and trafficking of persons by sea, f) illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) and g) international and unlawful damage to the marine environment, as a particularly grave form of maritime pollution due to the potential to threaten the security of one or more

states given the impact on the social and economic interest of coastal states (Klein, 2011, p.10).

Nevertheless, to conclude the most precise and relevant definition of maritime security, we may refer to two dimensions: (i) traditional maritime security involving inter-state disputes and b) non-traditional maritime security involving non-state actors. The dichotomy of traditional and non-traditional security threats has been used widely in the present study of security and international relations. In the following section, the essay has also utilised this dichotomy to group the maritime issues.

### **Traditional Maritime Security Threats**

Traditional maritime threats cover elements such as i) freedom of navigation at territorial water and high sea, ii) conducting naval activities, and iii) protection from direct threats to the territorial integrity of a country, such as an armed attack from a military vessel, intrusion and trespassing over territorial waters, and territorial water claims by other countries. In other words, a threat that is imposed by a state on another state, causing danger and instability towards a particular nation and sovereignty, is a traditional threat.

Certainly, the relationship between China and the US attracted the world. Their competition is under pressure in a world where the global order is changing dramatically. These changes will undoubtedly threaten the shared prosperity and security. For example, the ASEAN countries' views and concerns regarding the rivalry between these two major powers and it is clearly highlighted and strengthened in the ASEAN Outlook Report 2021. There is no hint that the competition will change in decades to come. Today, notwithstanding the competitive relationship between the major powers remains key to the future geopolitical structure of the region.

There are four significant threats where these converging economic and political forces affect globally, especially the Indo-Pacific region and its dealings with the major powers;

1. The differences regarding the SCS dispute and individual geopolitical preferences vis-à-vis the great powers have proven to be points of contention.
2. A crucial node in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

3. Indo-Pacific construct that invited new powers to have also begun to make their presence felt in Southeast Asia: European powers, Britain, France, and Germany, virtually absent since the fall of their colonial empires, are sending their navies into the SCS.
4. Taiwan's reunification with China is still not imminent and remains status quo.

### **Non-Traditional Maritime Security Threats**

Non-traditional maritime security, on the other hand, covers the elements such as i) piracy, ii) armed robbery against ships and iii) terrorist acts, and iv) other illicit activities at sea. However, the differences between non-traditional maritime threats embedded are noticed in terms of the danger it poses to human security and a region's stability rather than one state or nation, as described earlier. The rise of globalisation and advanced technology is one of the major drives that has increased human mobility across national borders; ultimately leveraging cross borders activities across the globe. Consequently, non-state actors began taking advantage of such leverage, conducting illegal activities, impacting human security, and destabilising global security.

For example, today's environment focuses more on illegal immigrants and cross-border contraband activities. Geographical features that are the main reason for such activities to occur. The close proximity between States i.e. the shortest distance, the situation of the islands and shipping in the busy straits, prompted the illegal immigrants and contraband activities to choose this rat trail to evade from nation's security forces and enter into a country.

States are looking at the problem superficially and not seriously considering the more significant issue of each particular non-traditional threat's impact on national security. State sees illegal immigrants that come into a country. How will it affect national security? When States have more migrants, there are more smuggling activities and the possibility of another pandemic. The unseen enemy invariably becomes a national security problem. When it gets beyond the ability of public services to handle it, the Government will direct the involvement of the military.

## Course of Actions

It is therefore vital for each nation, even international organizations such as Association Southeast Nations (ASEAN), United Nations (UN) etc., while negotiating through political settlement to resolve the present maritime security challenges, to seriously think about the compelling ways and means of protecting the maritime interests. Even, the maritime security threats have led to the formation of multinational initiatives such as the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP), Trilateral Cooperative Agreement (TCA), ASEAN Defence Minister Meeting, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and so on that aims to eradicate the threats effectively. Apart from multinational initiatives as briefed above, the Navies also actively involves some other forum or platform that assist in eradicate the security threats and challenges. The remedies namely cooperation, mutual support and interoperability became best solution to close the gaps among all the maritime forces and effectively overcome the threats.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that the Westphalian system is still relevant in defending national interests. In international relations, there are no permanent friends except permanent interests in each other. Clearly, this statement states that the need for defence is essential. Protecting maritime security is a fundamental element in deterrence which requires naval power to possess a credible and versatile fleet capable of dealing with challenges from the naval force of another state and deterring threats, aggression, or assault.

## Conclusion

All nations are tied to uncertain and ever changing to the security threats. It is notable that today environment has given us a new set of rather complex security challenges. These challenges are growing and much more complex due to various reasons. Undoubtedly, the geopolitics and geostrategies happening throughout the country are increasingly attracting the attention of the world. Maritime security is a priority for all countries that care about economic interests at sea. Ultimately, traditional and non-traditional maritime security threats that exist in maritime waters worldwide clearly have a high impact on coastal states.

The maritime security challenges are dynamic, adaptive, and highly complex, consisting of an assortment of traditional and non-traditional threats. Based on the current geopolitical and geostrategic scenario, it is regrettable that conflicting interest among the countries remains one of the major obstacles in building trust and mutual confidence between States. These include overlapping claims, sovereignty sensitivity, competing for natural resources, and adverse perception. No less, non-traditional maritime security threats also attract

attention and debate by the world community. Non-traditional maritime security is mostly non-state in nature.

On the whole, enhancing regional and multinational cooperation in ensuring effective security of the maritime realm is clearly an area crucial to global importance, which requires a holistic approach and cooperation not only among the navies but also with interagency as well as commercial and private sectors.

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