

# LITTORAL STATES' DEFENSE DIPLOMACY IN MALACCA STRAIT THROUGH THE MALACCA STRAIT PATROL FRAMEWORK

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**Abstract** – Malacca Strait, as one of the strategic straits in world trade, often face various non-traditional security threats. In accordance with United Nations Convention on the Law of The Sea (UNCLOS), littoral states such as Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia are obligated to maintain the security in Malacca Straits, to ensure that world trades and world economic are not disrupted. This study analyzes how the Malacca straits patrol (MSP) framework is formed by littoral states in order to maintain the security stability in Malacca Strait. The authors employ qualitative method through literature study. The obtained data were analyzed using the theory of defense cooperation and concept of defense diplomacy. The results of the study conclude that MSP, which is consisted of the Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP), "Eyes-in-the-Sky" Combined Maritime Air Patrols (EiS), and the MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG), is classified as a defense diplomacy activity in the form of multilateral contacts between military officials and multilateral military exercises aimed at increasing mutual trust and defense capabilities of each country.

**Keywords:** Malacca Strait, Malacca Straits Patrol Framework, Threat, Defense Cooperation, Defense Diplomacy

## Introduction

The Malacca Strait is a narrow sea that stretches for 520 miles and becomes the main gateway between Indian Ocean and South China Sea.<sup>2</sup> It is located between two large mainlands, namely Sumatera Island and Malaysia Peninsula. Currently, there are three sovereign countries that are directly

adjacent to Malacca Strait, namely Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>3</sup> With such geographic conditions, Malacca Strait is navigated by at least 200 ships each day, or at least 6,000 ships each month, and more than 70,000-80,000 ships each year.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Siti Zubaidah Ismail and Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, "The Straits of Malacca: Regional Powers Vis-A-Vis Littoral States in Strategic and Security Issues and Interests", accessed from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12118559.pdf>, on 25 June 2019

<sup>3</sup> Annisa Lestari, *Strategi Pertahanan Indonesia di Selat Malaka: Tawaran Proliferasi Security Initiative 2006-2008*, (Jakarta: Universitas Indonesia, 2013), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Taufan, "7 Hal yang Jarang Diketahui Tentang Selat Malaka", accessed from <https://kumparan.com/muhammad-taufan1530163979173/tujuh-hal-yang-jarang-diketahui-orang-tentang-selat-malaka-2743110790551702>, on 24 June 2019.



**Figure 1.** Map of Malacca Strait  
 Source: unav.edu, 2019

Malacca Strait is one of the busiest straits in the world as it is a shipping route which regulates one-third of the total trade in the world and facilitates energy supply from Middle East to East Asia.<sup>5</sup> In addition, 25% of the route in Malacca Strait is used for the sake of world trade, where half of it is oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker ships.<sup>6</sup> Malacca Strait is also a strategic international shipping route which connects Asia with Europe and middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Malacca Strait is also known as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century “Silk Road” which connects

the East and the West.<sup>8</sup> Malacca Strait is a strait with the fastest trade route which connects Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean. As the fastest route, Malacca Strait naturally requires the lowest travel cost for sea transportation.<sup>9</sup> Malacca Strait is one of the nine checkpoints which function as Sea Lanes of Trade (SLOT) and Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) for countries in the world.<sup>10</sup>

Due to its strategic position as international shipping and trade route, there is a growing security threat in Malacca Strait. The main maritime security issue that has become a global concern in

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Manners, “Moving Forward, Slowly: India-Indonesia Relations in the Twenty-First Century,” *Strategic Analysis Paper*, 2014, p. 1-8.  
<sup>6</sup> Annisa Lestari, *Op. Cit.*,  
<sup>7</sup> Sam J. Tangredi, *Globalization and Sea Power: Overview and Context*, in Sam J. Tangredi (ed.). *Globalization and Maritime Power*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, (Washington: National Defense University Press, 2002), p 1-23.  
<sup>8</sup> Annisa Lestari, *Op. Cit.*,

<sup>9</sup> Mochammad Yuniarto. 2016, *Kontribusi Integrated Maritime Surveillance System Terhadap Penangkalan Ancaman di perairan Selat Malaka*, (Bogor: Universitas Pertahanan, 2016), p 6.  
<sup>10</sup> Hartanto, *Ancaman Pembajakan dan Perampokan Bersenjata di Selat Malaka (Kajian Laporan IMB Periode 2016) Terhadap Tegaknya Kedaulatan NKRI*. (Bogor: Universitas Pertahanan, 2016), p 2.

Malacca Strait is sea robbery and armed robbery.<sup>11</sup> In addition, threats in Malacca Strait also include non-traditional and transnational security threat such as piracy, maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, illegal logging, drugs trafficking, human trafficking and violation of traffic in the sea.<sup>12</sup>

Issues concerning the security of Malacca Strait waters area is a topic that has become a concern of international community, because if untenable, security issues in Malacca Strait can have an impact on world economy, given that Malacca Strait is a highly strategic trade route which contains one-third of world trade. Both economic and maritime threats in Malacca Strait are the responsibility of three littoral states, namely Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, in accordance with international law of the sea, i.e. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Chapter 2 article 1 and 2 of UNCLOS stipulated that:

“The sovereignty of a coastal State extends, beyond its land territory and internal waters and, in the case of an archipelagic State, its archipelagic waters, to an adjacent

belt of sea, described as the territorial sea.” (Art. 1)

“This sovereignty extends to the air space over the territorial sea as well as to its bed and subsoil.” (Art. 2)

For Indonesia, Malacca Strait is part of national territorial and security integrity, hence it must be protected. For Malaysia, Malacca Strait is key facilitator of trade and also source of natural resources. Then, for Singapore, Malacca Strait is a foundation of their economy which relies on trade of maritime goods and service.<sup>13</sup>

Based on the national interest of these littoral states, they have agreed to cooperate in maintaining the security stability of Malacca Strait area through The Malacca Strait Patrol (MSP) Framework which was established in 2004. MSP is consisted of Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP), “Eyes-in-the-Sky” Combined Maritime Air Patrols (EiS), and MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG).<sup>14</sup> As such, this paper will focus on the implementation of Indonesian defense diplomacy in The Malacca Strait Patrol Framework.

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<sup>11</sup> Mochammad Yuniarto, *Op.Cit*, p 7.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Manners, *Op. Cit.*,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>14</sup> Singapore Ministry of Defence, “Fact Sheet : The Malacca Straits Patrol”, accessed from [https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press\\_room/official\\_releases/nr/2016/apr/21apr16\\_nr/21apr15\\_fs.html](https://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/press_room/official_releases/nr/2016/apr/21apr16_nr/21apr15_fs.html) on 22 June 2019.

### Framework for Defense Security Analysis

Based on the existing threats in Malacca Strait, there needs to be a defense cooperation between the littoral states. Defense cooperation is a cooperation which put an emphasis on state sovereignty, security, stability and people's wellbeing.<sup>15</sup> The Indonesian Defence White Paper (2015) explained that defense cooperation can be organized to build mutual trust between countries under the principle of mutual respect of each other's sovereignty, non-interference in the domestic affairs of each other, mutually beneficial, and national defense capacity building. International cooperation in the field of defense is one of the instruments of defense diplomacy in order to realize national interest in the field of defense through concrete steps, mutual benefit, and realizing regional security stability<sup>16</sup>

There are three basic reasons which underly the formation of defense cooperation, among others: <sup>17</sup>

#### a. Threat assessment

Each state has their own threat assessment, either traditional or non-traditional security which originates

from state or non-state actor. Based on the threat assessment, state shall formulate a defense strategy that it will employ to deter and deal with the threat.

#### b. State Situation

Development and change in state's strategic environment is also one of the factors that influence the formation of defense cooperation. Strategic environment will change in accordance with the developing environmental dynamics. Furthermore, change in strategic environment will influence the map of regional power and also the interaction between states. Therefore, state situation will underlie the formation of defense cooperation.

#### c. Arms technology development

State's military power can be seen, at least, through its weaponry. Each state has different capacity in arms technology. As such, defense cooperation in the field of weaponry is aimed at meeting the procurement of national weaponry, weapon modernization, and technology transfer for research and development

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<sup>15</sup> Makmur Supriyatno, *Tentang Ilmu Pertahanan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>17</sup> Parulian Simamora, *Peluang dan Tantangan Diplomasi Pertahanan* (Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu, 2013).

in order to realize independent state defense.

### **Defense Diplomacy**

In general, there are several definitions made by scholars on defense diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> Andrew Cottey in his book *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance* explained that Defense Diplomacy is the use of armed forces and infrastructure in the times of peace as an instrument of foreign policy and security, and especially the use of military cooperation and assistance. Rodon Pedrason explained that Defense Diplomacy is all means and strategies employed by state which might be in competition with other states, but they might use certain activities, including economic, cultural and political cooperation as well as defense cooperation and diplomacy to make friends, and most importantly to build and increase mutual trust.<sup>19</sup> In principle, there are three main characteristics of defense diplomacy, namely Defense Diplomacy for confidence building measures, Defense

diplomacy for defense capabilities and Defense diplomacy for defense industry.<sup>20</sup>

Defense diplomacy has several objectives such troops meeting activities carried out by the defense ministry of each country to eliminate hostilities, build and maintain trust, assist armed forces that are democratically responsible, and contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflicts.<sup>21</sup> Based on the definition of defense diplomacy from the two scholars, there are several key points on defense diplomacy that can be relevant with the maritime security issue in Malacca Strait area, namely military diplomacy and cooperation which can build and increase mutual trust.

### **Discussion**

The attempts made by the three littoral states to maintain the stability of Malacca Strait area is carried out by establishing a multilateral security cooperation mechanism named The Malacca Straits Patrol Framework (MSP) or Coordinated Patrol by Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia (MALSINDO). This MSP

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Cottey dan Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), p 6.

<sup>19</sup> Rodon Pedrason, *ASEAN's Defence Diplomacy: The Road to Southeast Asian Defence*

*Community*, (Heidelberg : Ruprecht-Karls-Universitat, 2015)

<sup>20</sup> Budi Hartono, *Strategi Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia terhadap Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) di Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa*, (Bogor: Universitas Pertahanan, 2016), p 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,

cooperation began in 2004 to maintain the security in Malacca Strait waters area. In the beginning, only the three littoral states were involved in this cooperation. However, in 2005, Thailand joined as an observer and eventually in 2008 Thailand officially became a member of MSP. MSP is consisted of cooperation such as Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP), “Eyes-in-the-Sky” Combined Maritime Air Patrols (EiS), and MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG).<sup>22</sup>

#### a. Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP)

Malacca Straits Sea Patrol (MSSP) is one of the parts in The Malacca Sea Patrol (MSP) cooperation framework which focuses on maritime security in Malacca Strait. MSSP is a coordinated sea patrol carried out by Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. This cooperation was first introduced in July 2004 in order to reduce piracy in Malacca Strait as well as monitor

Malacca Strait through the command center of the three countries.<sup>23</sup> Indonesia has two command centers in Batam, Riau Islands, and Belawan, North Sumatera. Malaysia has theirs in Lumut, Johor while Singapore has a command center in Changi.<sup>24</sup>

MSSP is implemented under the principle of coordinated patrol, not collective patrol. The principle of coordinated patrol is different with collective patrol. Coordinated patrol is carried out in the territorial area of each country, then those countries will coordinate by reporting the condition during the operation. Meanwhile, collective patrol is carried out by two countries entering into certain area and patrol together.<sup>25</sup> MSSP mechanism is carried out by the navy which participate in coordinated sea patrol and also by facilitating various information between ships and the navy’s operational center.

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<sup>22</sup> Singapore Ministry of Defence, Op. Cit.,

<sup>23</sup> Carolin Liss & Ted Biggs, *Piracy in Southeast Asia; Trends, Hot Spots, and Responses*. (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Fajar Fitriyadi, Abubakar Eby Hara, & Supriyadi. “Kepentingan Indonesia dalam Kerjasama Keamanan di Selat Malaka”, *e-Journal Ilmu Hubungan Internasional*, p 6, accessed from <http://repository.unej.ac.id/bitstream/handle/12>

3456789/71596/Fajar%20Fitriyadi.pdf?sequence=1 diakses on 21 June 2019

<sup>25</sup> Marina Ika Sari, *Diplomasi Pertahanan Indonesia terhadap India atas Kepentingan Nasional Indonesia di Samudera Hindia*, (Bogor: Universitas Pertahanan, 2017)

### **b. “Eyes-in-the-Sky” Combined Maritime Air Patrols (EiS)**

“Eyes-in-the-Sky” Combined Maritime Air Patrols (EiS) is a combination of maritime air patrol which monitors the Malacca Strait waters area from the sky. EiS is implemented using Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) from Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand. Each country will bring Combined Mission Patrol Team which is consisted of host country and other officers from participating countries.<sup>26</sup>

In its implementation, EiS requires each country to carry out air patrol twice per week. Each flight will bring a combined patrol team mission which is consisted of personnel from each participating country. EiS operational area includes the international and national airspace throughout Malacca Strait area. While the EiS operation center is built in each country to coordinate flight schedule. The monitoring by aircraft is allowed up to 3 miles from the sovereign waters of each participating country.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Singapore Ministry of Defence, Op. Cit.,

<sup>27</sup> Avia Nariyanti Putri, “Kerjasama Indonesia, Malaysia, dan Singapura di Selat Malaka dalam Menangani Perampokan Bersenjata Tahun

### **c. MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG)**

MSP Intelligence Exchange Group (IEG) is a form of cooperation carried out in order to support sea and air patrol which put more focus on information development and sharing known as Malacca Straits Patrol Information System (MSP-IS). MSP-IS is managed by Fusion Centre Information (IFC) and is consisted of Open and Analyzed Shipping Information System (OASIS) and Sense-Making Analysis and Research Tool (SMART). Through MSP-IS, air and sea personnel on-duty will be able to quickly process and deliver information on the result of monitoring in Malacca Strait area.<sup>28</sup>

The strategic value of Malacca Strait ultimately generates various national interests for Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. However, due to its strategic nature, threat potential in Malacca Strait is a concern for those four states. The four states must enter into defense cooperation in order to achieve and maintain their national interest. If

2004-2013”, *Journal of International Relations*. No. 3, Vol.2, 2016, p 252-253.

<sup>28</sup> Singapore Ministry of Defence, Op. Cit.,

analyzed using the concept of defense cooperation, there are three factors that encourage a state to enter into defense cooperation with other states to secure the Malacca Strait waters area, i.e. first, the four states have a same perception on the growing non-traditional security in Malacca Strait. Due to the transnational nature of the threat, a transnational strategy and cooperation is thus required to deal with it.

Second, there is a change in the dynamics of strategic environment. In the past, threats from state actor are usually the one and only focus. Nowadays, states are starting to pay more attention to threats from non-state actor. Challenges in maintaining the maritime security in Malacca Strait is the responsibility of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand in accordance with UNCLOS. Third, each state has different military technology capability. By building defense cooperation, the four states can carry out technology transfer to deal with regional threats.

In general, MSP cooperation mechanism can be classified as a form of defense diplomacy activity in the form of multilateral contacts between military officials and multilateral military exercise. Defense Diplomacy can also become one of the solutions to resolve differing perspectives between Singapore and Malaysia and Indonesia. These three states have different perspective on the presence of external party as maritime security provider in Malacca Strait. Singapore allows user states to assist maritime security in Malacca Strait. Meanwhile, Indonesia and Malaysia rejects the presence of other states to provide security in Malacca Strait by referring to UNCLOS.<sup>29</sup> If this polemic is let unresolved, it can become a new polemic in the currently-implemented defense cooperation mechanism. As such, defense diplomacy which aims to create mutual trust between one country and another can become an alternative solution for the different views between Singapore and Indonesia and Malaysia.

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<sup>29</sup> David Brewster, "An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?", *Security Challenges*, No.3, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2010, p 1-20.



Furthermore, interaction and cooperation between the military personnel of those states during the coordinated patrol can also develop and increase defense capability. The increase in defense capability can be seen, especially in the air navy and air force of each nation during the knowledge sharing and training on the field.

### **Conclusion**

Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand agreed to enter into MSP defense cooperation because first, all four of them have the same perception on the growing non-traditional security threat in Malacca Strait; second, there is a change in the dynamics of strategic environment where, unlike in the past where threats from state actor are the only focus, threats from non-state actor are now the focus; third, by building defense cooperation, these four states can carry out technology transfer to deal with regional threats. MSP can be classified as a form of defense diplomacy activity in the form of multilateral contacts between military officials and multilateral military exercise to create mutual trust and increase the defense capabilities of each country, especially in the military personnel. Through the MSP cooperation,

it is expected that threats in Malacca Strait can be reduced to ensure that the national interest of each country as well as their collective interest remain undisrupted.

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