



The Future of Thailand to Counter Piracy and Armed Robbery in Malacca Straits

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Abstract

This research studies about the trend of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters in the future. The issues of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits cause the negative impacts to many countries. Thailand has suffered economic damage from the piracy and armed robbery attacks over the past few years shown by many statistical data. The study aims to explore the solutions for Thailand to counter piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters. This research is the exploratory research, of which the secondary data is collected from various reports, research, articles, journals, report, and a thesis study. The primary data is gathered via the interviews of the Royal Thai Navy Officers and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer who works in the related regional and an international cooperation organization. The results of the study show that piracy and armed robbery should be tackled with increasing collaboration from various stakeholders. Future studies should consider interviewing different organizations or individuals for the additional perspective.

Keywords: *Maritime security, Piracy, Armed robbery, Malacca straits, Royal Thai navy, ReCAAP ISC, IFC*

1. Introduction

Maritime security is significant for the protection of national interests because the marine environment enhances the potential of various activities at sea to proceed freely and safely. Thus, the states need to work in cooperation to promote the Maritime Security to eliminate threats in maritime environment. According to Christian Bueger, the Professor of International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations, maritime security is involved with several threats on the seaways such as maritime inter-state disputes, maritime terrorism, piracy, trafficking of narcotics, illegal fishing, environmental crimes, or maritime accidents as well as illicit goods (Bueger, 2015). The piracy and armed robbery in the Malacca Straits and adjacent waters is a major problem for many countries at the moment as it causes significant damage such as greater cost, economic loss, as this can lead to rising costs in deploying and maintaining military fleets.

Also, the bottleneck of the Malacca Straits continues to be of important strategic interest according to UNOSAT Global Report on Maritime Piracy (2014). This is because the area serves as the energy lifeline to many countries. By this, the increasing efforts for maritime security is undertaken by various stakeholders and organizations, reflecting many agreements, practices and military intervention to fight against piracy and armed robbery. Piracy was the form of any illegal acts of detention, violence and the depredation. Even though there were several efforts by the coastal states and other related stakeholders in tackling the piracy and robbery, still they were the major problems which became the causes of many incidents reported to have involved in act of piracy.

The number of incidents involved in maritime issues in 2015 dropped from the previous year, but nonetheless this multinational security initiative has some limitations to overcome (Collin, 2015). The cooperation efforts are quite potential for tackling these pirate attacks, it however requires inventive approaches which are broadened and eventually transformed maritime spatial planning (MSP) into a joint instead of cooperative framework. It is forecasted that the transformation could make the protection and security plan more effective as well as an increasing ability to fight against piracy in the Straits of Malacca (Raymond, 2009). Unfortunately, even if many efforts have been put in to fight against piracy and armed robbery in Malacca straits, some are on the information sharing and situation awareness, but just minor attention has been found in literature to the certain improvements on cooperation in military intervention including the laws enforcement which are about to be applied afterwards.



Thailand is another country which raises the significance of maritime security over the past decades as the country generally uses the sea routes for economic purposes (Kunakorn, 2012). Thus, Thailand recognizes that the maritime security at a high standard could bring about the national economy which heavily counts on a safe maritime environment. Based on the geographical location, Thailand is situated on a peninsular between the Pacific and Indian oceans, where, on the west, the coastline stretches along the Andaman Sea to the Malacca Straits, and, on the east, lying the semi-enclosed Gulf of Thailand (Ho, 2009). This geographical advantage allows Thailand to meet the wealth as the growth of economy from trading via sea routes including the food source, export, and energy. Accordingly, Thailand is located at the northern end of the Malacca Straits – the major corridor set between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. This area includes many ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore including Bangladesh (Hossain, Iqbal and Zakaria, 2010).

According to UNOSAT Global Report on Maritime Piracy (2014), the piracy in Southeast Asia has been a critical problem to most ASEAN countries including Thailand as they generally use Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea for national interests. The statistical data presented that attack rates in these areas from 1992 to 2008 was around 53 percent of the total incidents of the world. And more importantly, the economy of this region suffered from the attacks approximately about \$3 billion per year. Moreover, there was the growth of piracy, causing the worry among many countries and leading to needs for insurance, making the insurance rates even higher.

Additionally, piracy is a threat to free trade as traders do not want to risk themselves on a sea route, creating more tensions to affected littoral states, locals and countries that have flagged ships associated with piracy acts (Caron & Oral, 2014). According to the IMB, Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Southeast Asia during 2000-2007, the data showed that the number of piracy and armed robbery surged up and it also presented fluctuation in rates of piracy and armed robbery attacks since the number increased in 2000 and quickly dropped in 2001. Later, the number skyrocketed again in 2004 and then declined by over half in the following year. This uncertainty prospected the threats to maritime security such when ASEAN countries depended their economic growth on this route. The piracy was prevalently found in Southeast Asia because the attackers believed that this region was the attractive areas where the maritime terrorism is committed conveniently (Banlaoi, 2005).

Collective security could refer to the security arrangement in regard with political, regional, or global issues that each state perceives that the security of a single state becomes the concern of all. By this, the states have the commitment to provide the collective response to such threats to a state. In the study of International Relations (IR), the theory of collective security has been discussed. It is considered as one of the most promising ways to create common peace and a valuable device for managing the power at the international level. Claude (2006) noted that the collective security was the measure to promote the ties of the states as they need to collaboratively operate under the same works so as to provide security for all via the measures against whatever that could challenge the existing order.

This paper focuses on the trend of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters and improvements on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement. This study therefore is the documentary research illustrated through Descriptive Analysis with the collection of primary and majority from the secondary data sources. The primary data mainly derives from the official statement, the governmental/ministerial policy during 2000 – 2017 of Thailand including other relevant countries and organizations or individuals involved in the Royal Thai Navy. Meanwhile, the secondary data comprises of the analysis, journal, report, reports, researches, articles as well as a thesis study on the piracy incident report, cost analysis, the international security's impact, military expenditure, military and maritime laws enforcement cooperation. This paper mainly focuses on the trend of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters, and the shortcomings of the current initiatives and cooperation in tackling the threat in the future as well as the improvements on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement for Thailand and the roles of Thailand in countering the piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters.



2. Objectives

1. To analyze the trend of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters, and the shortcomings of the current initiatives and cooperation in tackling the threat in the future
2. To recommend improvements on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement for Thailand to counter piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters
3. To suggest the solutions of the piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters for the current initiatives and cooperation in suppressing the threats

3. Materials and Methods

The research was exploratory research aiming to explain the problem of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits as well as the operations, type of piracy in Malacca Straits and to propose the policy recommendation for the future response to the piracy and armed robbery problem in Malacca Straits and the effective mechanism and training program to develop the roles of the Royal Thai Navy, using both of the secondary and primary data. The secondary data is from reports, researches, articles, journals, report, and thesis, and the primary data was gathered via the interviews of the Royal Thai Navy Officials who work in the related regional and international cooperation organization and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer who is Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC. The interview questions were set into three different parts as general information, the experience in the counter piracy and armed robbery mission, and recommendation for the RTN, and counter piracy and armed robbery mission.

The amount of piracy in Malacca Straits was gathered from the reports of ReCAAP ISC, where the Royal Thai Naval Officers who were stationed in ReCAAP ISC and IFC in Singapore and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer who is the Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC experienced the real cases and cooperate with the Royal Thai Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy, Indonesian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy. Most recent officers had been to Singapore for the liaison officers in ReCAAP ISC, IFC rotated annually and the naval officers attached to Singapore rotated every 3 years. They were selected by their past performance and qualification. And the Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC has been in this position since the establishment of the ReCAAP ISC itself.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews showed that the officers recognized the importance of the security environment in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters. They discussed that the security maritime would be increasingly better as the littoral states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand initiated the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) which allowed them to work to collaboratively to ensure security and safety of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS). They also viewed the issue of piracy and armed robbery to decrease meanwhile most of these incidents in Malacca straits were carried out at night as the littoral states had no surveillance during nighttime. As explained by one officer:

... The motivation of attackers remain the same as for their private aims and mostly they are the individual or small groups however still a few of them were well organized...(Lieutenant Commander (retired) Nicholas TEO, Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC)

Furthermore, an officer noted that most incidents involved over the past 25 years were mainly "petty thief" in nature, taking place in ports and anchorages, where perpetrators board ships, in the hours of darkness, stealing unsecured items such as ropes, tools and fire-fighting equipment and often these incidents were non-confrontational, Also, the difference between piracy in the Malacca Straits and other parts of the world was that most cases at Malacca Straits were small theft. For example, about half of them were the cases with no use of weapons. The attackers only aimed to steal the spare parts and items by speed boat, and leaving no injured. Another officer added to this point that the perpetrator's purpose of the attackers was the money and valuables. After they took the goods, they would escape. Nevertheless, in some areas e.g. Sulu and Celebes Sea, Gulf of Guinea, the perpetrators conduct kidnappings and demand for ransom.

In order to improve on cooperation in military intervention and law enforcement among coastal states in Malacca Straits and other stakeholders, an officer noted that the littoral states conducted the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and also maritime information sharing through the Information Fusion Center (IFC), as this could turn more effectiveness if the littoral states advanced the patrolling and information



sharing cooperation with maritime stakeholders. Other officers believed that whilst initiatives existed in various forms;

It is the political will and commitment to suppress the maritime crime which could make the difference... (Commander Weerapat Rakpan, Senior Manager (Programmes and Special Projects), ReCAAP ISC and Officer attached to Naval Intelligence Department, Royal Thai Navy)

Noted by another one as:

...three major frameworks under the cooperation of the four countries are not effective enough because they work separately based on their own specific areas...(Lieutenant Commander (retired) Nicholas TEO, Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC)

Moreover, they had no collaboration on observation throughout the sea territory as each of them patrolled in their own area. Therefore, setting up the Point of Contact for each country the information was instantly shared and discussed could enhance the coordination faster than before.

For the effectiveness of cooperation of littoral states in Malacca Straits at the time being, one officer noted the effectiveness derived from the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and also Information Fusion Center (IFC) developed by the littoral states. The littoral states coordination operations, the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) undertaken by Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand could make these areas safer. As noted by different officer:

...the cooperation is quite effective but the enforcement agencies needed to oil their surveillance and response system periodically as the crime might reduce or suppress but still exist and could re-surface very quickly when the opportunity arose... (Captain Jumpon Nakbua, Director of Maritime Security Division, Naval Operations Department, Royal Thai Navy)

Also, the maritime security threats were complex and trans-boundary in nature. To eliminate them, the shared information at the national level as well as through bilateral and multilateral information sharing networks is needed. The sea was a vast area with many island groups that spread the enforcement agencies resources very thinly, as it suppresses actions, therefore, should be more innovative and responsive to the incidents. According to another officer:

...the role of international laws as the alternative to increase effectiveness as it authorized the cooperation to happen in trans-boundary areas for specific cases. This was due to the lack of coordination in practices over the past...(Captain Jumpon Nakbua, Director of Maritime Security Division, Naval Operations Department, Royal Thai Navy)

He also exemplified the case of Orkim Harmony ship confronting piracy at the area of Malaysia which many countries namely Malaysia, Australia, Vietnam and Thailand worked together in tracking the attackers and arrested them successfully as is the only few cases of coordination.

Up to this point, it was clearly seen that the piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits was the major issue which were highly recognized by the Royal Thai Navy Officers who works in the related regional and international cooperation organization, and the Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC. Most of them thought the same way as the number of piracy attacked declined but still the effectiveness of the cooperation should be more advanced in order to tackle the piracy and armed robbery issues more effectively. Therefore, the officers gave some suggestions for the improvements of the counter piracy and armed robbery mission in Malacca Straits. The Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC noted:

It is not only the littoral states responsibilities but also the user states and the international community need to co-operate and work together to ensure security and safety of the Malacca Straits for all legitimate users, meanwhile RTN as the key player to secure this waters needed to increase more patrol in Malacca Straits whether patrol by ship or aircraft...(Lieutenant Commander (retired) Nicholas TEO, Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC)

Another officer noted:

The military and enforcement assets presences were the great deterrence for crimes to flourish. When the policeman was around, would-be perpetrators were less willing to take their risk. Therefore, the publicity of success stories e.g. arrests, fouling of would-be incidents, breaking up of syndicate, recovery of stolen goods could deliver the message to them that crime did not pay. And to do this, the political leaders needed to continue supporting the enforcement efforts for these messages, showing the concern of the state



towards the crime... (Commander Weerapat Rakpan, Senior Manager (Programmes and Special Projects), ReCAAP ISC and Officer attached to Naval Intelligence Department, Royal Thai Navy)

Claimed by the last officer:

...each single countries needed to come up with the good management practices especially in terms of the sharing information. It would be better like having a closed connection. Currently, we relied on Singapore too much but still lack of the cooperation which boosted the easeness of operation. Thus, it should started from sharing information. If the sharing information was clearly developed, it would lead to other areas for improvement such as data collection, data analysis and so on...(Captain Jumpon Nakbua, Director of Maritime Security Division, Naval Operations Department, Royal Thai Navy)

The paper suggests that piracy and armed robbery is still an issue in Malacca Straits and could not be prevented easily. The interviews showed that most attacks were in the form of individuals or small groups and not quite organized. Also, there was not much violence caused by them, but it did not mean that the worry towards them was no relevant. Even though the cooperation of littoral states was considered as effective among them, as the officers discussed, in association with the theory of collective security these threats of piracy and armed robbery should be more focused and thus the related stakeholders of many countries including politicians and lawmakers must plan to carry out the way to increase cooperation such as the RTN to increase more patrol in Malacca Straits whether patrol by ship or aircraft. In terms of law enforcement, the laws should authorize the cooperation across the boundaries so that they could track the attackers in the trans-boundary areas meanwhile the politicians should also underpin the publicity of success stories and express their concerns which were the good way to prevent intentions to these threats. According to Article 111 of the UNCLOS, states needed to have a clear reason to claim that the foreign vessel had violated the law of the state and also the right only belonged to the authorized states' vessels or warships that were vividly marked. The result of this paper and the method are in the Table 1 below.

Table 1 the result and method of "The Future of Thailand to Counter Piracy and Armed Robbery in Malacca Straits"

Research Questions

1. How do the coastal states in Malacca Straits maintain the maritime security in the area?
2. What can be done to improve on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement among coastal states in Malacca Straits and other stakeholders?

Research Objectives

- To analyze the trend of piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters , and the shortcomings of the current initiatives and cooperation in tackling the threat in the future
- To recommend improvements on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement for Thailand to counter piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters

Method

Exploratory research to demonstrate the current situation/picture of the cooperation in Malacca Straits and demonstrate the future of the cooperation in the area, using interviews with the Royal Thai Navy Officers and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer involved with the piracy and armed robbery cooperation in Malacca Straits

Theory

Collective security as the security arrangement in regard with political, regional, or global issue which each single state focuses on the security of others and require the active collaboration to provide security for all

Result of Research

The paper suggests that the piracy and armed robbery issue is a threat at the international level as it affects the international security. Based on the collective security, it is important that the collaboration of multi-states should retain and the increasing cooperation from various key players is needful in order to successfully tackle such issues. There are some recommended improvements on cooperation in military intervention and laws enforcement for Thailand to counter piracy and armed robbery in Malacca Straits and adjacent waters such as the improvement in Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and the Information Fusion Center (IFC), focusing on information technologies and increasing the patrolling and information-sharing cooperation with maritime stakeholders in order to increase the capacity of data collection, data analysis as well as the share of information that is most updated



5. Conclusion

The Maritime Security of Malacca Straits was important for the protection of national interests of many countries including Thailand. However it recently had been threatened by the piracy and armed robbery attacks which demolished the countries' opportunities for trade as well as economic loss. Many statistical data showed that the number of these threats in Malacca Straits remained dangerous and needed to be resolved to bring back the confidence and the economic boost to such areas. This research, therefore, arranged the interviews with the Royal Thai Navy Officers who works in the related regional and international cooperation organization and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer who is the Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC. The results of the interviews showed that piracy was a considerable issue which needed to be more concerned by the related stakeholders and they needed to bring about more serious collaboration as the current operation lacked the good cooperation in different countries and levels, leaving the chances for piracy and armed robbery attackers to commit their actions in Malacca Straits potentially. Therefore, to remedy to these issues, it should have an ongoing improvement in Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) and the Information Fusion Center (IFC) so as to improve the coordination between agencies.

For future studies, as this research made with the interview with the Royal Thai Navy Officials who works in the related regional and international cooperation organizations and a retired Republic of Singapore Navy Officer who is Deputy Director of ReCAAP ISC, the other different organizations or individuals whose work are related to the maritime security in Malacca Straits should be taken into the interview in order to explore the different perspectives.

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