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Strategic Importance and Maritime Terrorism in the Strait of Malacca

Israa Saadi Mohammed¹, Dr. Ahmed Ali Mohammed²

Abstract

The Research's goal is to conduct a comprehensive assessment regarding the strategic importance and the issue of maritime terrorism in the Strait of Malacca, in other words, the study will focus on the geostrategic importance of Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, in addition to the fact that this region was and still is the center of attention, strategic interest and control projects. A number of major international powers have been competing there for centuries. This importance stems from the important geographical location and the economic importance of the region, in addition to global energy security, which depends in its largest part on the security of the sea lanes in the region, on top of which is the Strait of Malacca. These factors have made the Strait of Malacca a hotbed of current and future geostrategic, geo-economic and geopolitical competition between the most important regional and global powers.

Keywords: Maritime Terrorism, Strait of Malacca, global energy security.

Introduction

In the Strait of Malacca region, unmonitored borders and ports pose a threat to security due to smuggling and crime. Some areas lack strong government control, which increases corruption and crime. The diversity of crimes and terrorist activities is active in those areas, with their impact on the stability of the region. The Strait of Malacca is an important strategic and economic area, as it connects the Indian and Pacific oceans, which affects trade and maritime traffic. However, security threats and regional tensions, such as the South China Sea disputes, complicate the situation and threaten stability. Where the region requires international and regional cooperation to address security and economic challenges, where work must be done to enhance safety in sea lanes and achieve sustainable development through combating crime and security cooperation.

Research Importance

The importance of the study stems from the importance of the research:-

The Strait of Malacca is considered as a strategic importance due to its geographical location, as the region is one of the busiest and most strategic shipping lanes in the world. More than (50%) of global trade passes through the Strait of Malacca, the "Sunda" Strait, and Strait of "Lombok" over the islands and waters of the South China Sea, which is worth about (5) trillion dollars. From an economic standpoint, the Strait of Malacca is considered one of the most important global sea lanes for shipping. It constitutes the main shipping channel between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, and a link between

¹ Department of Political Sciences, College of Law and Political Sciences, University of Al Anbar, israasaadi2019@gmail.com

² Department of Political Sciences, College of Law and Political Sciences, University of Al Anbar, dr.ahmedpolitics@uoanbar.edu.iq

major Asian economies such as India, China, Japan and South Korea. A quarter of global goods, such as oil and other goods, pass through the Strait of Malacca. This importance and other necessities called for the initiation of this study.

Research Hypothesis

The Strait of Malacca enjoys a geographical location due to its strategic and geoeconomic importance in terms of the passage of goods from regional countries, and the Strait of Malacca occupies an international place as it connects the East with the West, so whoever imposes hegemony on it controls the economies of the world.

Research Problem:

Undoubtedly that the shift in the field of energy transport and marketing trends across the sea is putting increasing pressure on the sea shipping routes to East and Southeast Asia and on the waterways and global bottlenecks that exist there. This creates security problems as well, and this is evident in the case of the Strait of Malacca. Although Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore affirmed their sole right to protect the strait and ensure security for navigation through it, other countries offered at various stages to contribute to this, including Australia, Japan, China, the United States of America and India:

To answer the problem, the following questions are asked:

1. What is the economic and geostrategic importance of the Strait of Malacca?

2. What are the effects and repercussions that would arise if the Strait of Malacca was closed?

3. To what extent does maritime terrorism pose a threat to the security of maritime navigation, especially in the Strait of Malacca?

Research Methodology:

The study is depended on the historical and analytical approaches to understand the subject of the study. These problems cannot be approached without relying on their historical background, and the use of methodological analysis tools is a scientific necessity required by the nature of the research, because the environmental phenomenon and the manifestations, problems and effects that result here require analysis and interpretation to understand it as it requires.

Research Structure:

In addition to the introduction, the research has included two requirements: the first addressed the strategic importance of the Strait from a geographical location and its importance in the strategic perception of countries at the international and regional levels, while the second requirement specialized in studying maritime terrorism in the Strait and the security breaches that targeted oil and gas tankers.

Conclusion:

It is clear that the Strait of Malacca represents a vital heart for the development of maritime energy transportation and marketing in the Asian region. The challenges faced by navigation in this region are evident, ranging in varying responses from the countries concerned, such as China, Japan, India, and the United States. These countries seek to protect their interests by enhancing regional and international cooperation, enhancing maritime security and expanding their influence. Thus, the Strait of Malacca remains a vital passage for energy exchange and trade, and interactions and alliances between major countries continue to play a crucial role in shaping the future security and stability of the region. Through grammatical and scientific analysis, we realize the importance of the strait and its profound impact on the regional and international context, with geographical

complexities and environmental conditions affecting ship movement and maritime transport....

The importance of straits and sea lanes as crucial strategic factors in the security and economic context of countries is clearly evident. These passages are vulnerable to competition between major and regional powers for control, as they greatly affect global trade and energy transfer.

Strategic importance and maritime terrorism in the Strait of Malacca

In the Malacca Strait region, uncontrolled borders and ports pose a threat to security due to smuggling and crime. Some areas lack strong government control, which increases corruption and crime. A variety of crimes and terrorist activities are active in these areas, with their impact on the stability of the region. The Strait of Malacca is an important strategic and economic region, as it connects the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which affects trade and maritime traffic. But security threats and regional tensions, such as the South China Sea disputes, complicate the situation and threaten stability. The region requires international and regional cooperation to address security and economic challenges, as work must be done to enhance safety in sea lanes and achieve sustainable development through combating crime and security cooperation. This study will address two issues: the first topic deals with the strategic importance of the Strait from a geographical location and its importance in the strategic awareness of countries at the international and regional levels, while the second topic will address maritime terrorism in the Strait and the security breaches that targeted oil and gas tankers.

The first requirement: - the strategic importance of the Strait of Malacca

The Strait of Malacca is considered one of the most important straits and waterways in the world in particular and the Far East in general, especially the major countries in East and Southeast Asia, because it has an impact on the economy of these countries, due to its distinguished geographical location and its role in the strategies of great and developed countries. It is considered a meeting place for global economic and political concerns, as it constitutes a meeting point for the interests of neighboring and global countries. Therefore, it is divided into two parts. The first part is the geographical location of the strait, while the second part will address the strategic perception of this strait by regional and international countries.

First: - The geographical location of the Malacca Strait

The Strait of Malacca is a long waterway extending more than 500 miles from the Andaman Sea to the South China Sea in Southeast Asia. This strait connects the Arab world and the State of China, and is considered a major passage for trade between the regional region and major countries such as the United States, Japan, China and India. After World War II, the Strait came under the control of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, the countries that gained independence, and this Strait remains of high strength and importance as a strategic passage that affects the politics and economy of the region and the major countries concerned. (1) The Strait of Malacca, a strategic sea passage, passes between the island of Sumatra in Indonesia and Peninsular Malaysia, linking the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, represents a vital sea route between the two oceans. Its length is about (1080) km, its width is northwest (370) km, and its southeast is (37) km. Its depth varies between (25 and 113) meters, and its importance has been demonstrated in economics, politics, environment, and strategy. It links the economies of Asia with countries of commercial influence such as the United States, Germany, and Russia. (2) Where we can indicate Map No. (1) of the location of the Strait of Malacca.



Map (1)

Putra Ansa Gaora, The Asymmetric- comparative analysis of the strigts of Hormoz and Strait of Malacca, Peperangan Asimetris, Vol 8, No 2, 2022, P.110.

The map shows that the geographical strait facilitates the passage of commercial and noncommercial ships, while difficulties exist in the Pacific and Indian oceans due to the terrain and harsh weather conditions. The surrounding islands and the strait increase the complexity of traffic and the cost of transportation, so the Strait of Malacca is the safest and most effective option. (1)

The energetic Strait of Malacca is considered a vital shipping lane connecting major industrial countries such as Japan, China, India, Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and South Korea. It witnesses the passage of more than (50) thousand commercial ships annually, and the flow of about (15) million barrels per day (2) and it is considered a vital passage for global trade and passes through which about (25%) of the world's commodities and about (33%) of the total oil trade crude and its derivatives. It is the second most important sea passage for oil trade after the Strait of Hormuz. And it plays a vital role in China's economy, as about (80%) of its exports pass through it, which makes the stability of the situation in the strait crucial

for the China economy. (1) It is also an important transit route for liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Arabic Gulf and African suppliers, especially (Qatar), to East Asian countries with a growing demand for liquefied natural gas. The largest importers of liquefied natural gas in the region are Japan and South Korea. (2)

And that the importance of Malacca Strait is represented by: (3)

1. The strait is of commercial importance: The strait is an important passage for transiting maritime trade.

2. Dispute over ownership: Malaysia and Indonesia dispute the strait and claim their rights in it.

3. The geostrategic impact: The strait is a passage for naval forces between the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea, and witnessed previous tensions between the United States and India.

4. The presence of the community and control: The presence of a large Chinese community along with the role of Singapore as a strategic passage reinforces the geopolitical importance of the strait.

The Strait of Malacca is of economic importance, but it suffers from several problems, the most important of which are: (4)

1- Narrow places force tankers to turn to cross, such as the Straits of Lombok, Makassar and Mandur.

2- The presence of old shipwrecks poses a danger to ships passing through the strait.

3- Fires in the Sumatra region cause dense fog that affects the movement of ships in the port.

It can be said that the Strait of Malacca represents one of the prominent points in the geostrategic and economic map of the region. It is a vital sea passage for trade, oil and natural gas, which gives it strategic importance with significant political and economic consequences in the Strait region affects the circulation of ships and the movement of goods, which prompts reliance on it as a safe and effective passage for maritime transport.

Second: - The strategic realization of the regional and international powers of the Strait of Malacca

Undoubtedly, shifting maritime energy transportation and marketing trends are putting growing pressures on seafarers in East and Southeast Asia, and putting pressure on waterways and global choke points there. This also creates security issues that are most evident in the context of the Strait of Malacca. Although Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore affirmed their individual rights to protect the strait and secure navigation through it, other countries at various stages made their contributions in this regard.

China relies heavily on waterways to transport up to 90% of its trade, and imports more than 80% of its energy needs from external sources. This makes safety and security in those waterways vital for China as well as other countries. (1) In addition, the waterway is not only a shipping lane, but also an important source of livelihood, food, and entertainment for the coastal nations including Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Naval powers consider this passage strategic for Maritime Communications (SLOC) and consider it a vital military target, which confirms its great strategic value, and is evident during the escalation of tensions between China and the United States. Military authorities are working to expand China's maritime rights and interests. (2)

The Strait of Malacca is very important for Japan , because it is one of the main trade routes for it. Japan uses the Strait of Malacca to import 90% of its energy supplies from Middle Eastern countries. (3) The rapid development of the economy and the energy sector in Japan increased the demand for energy resources in the country.

In 2011, Japan's energy supply was represented by oil (45%), coal (23%) and natural gas (22%), respectively. Nuclear energy decreased to (15%) due to the Fukushima accident, and Japan is working on nuclear safety standards before reopening its stations, (1) and as it paid attention to security and safety in Malacca in order to protect the security of its tankers, and it is the third largest producer of vehicles, which makes it particularly dependent on importing oil. From the Gulf region.

The Malacca Strait Council was established (MSC)* to protect the surrounding waters. In the military field, Japan supported Indonesia and Malaysia financially, as Indonesia acquired three ships in 2006, and gave Malaysia funding worth (473) million yen to strengthen its facilities in 2009. Japan provided support to Singapore by sending experts in training and rescue, due to its solid economic strength. (2)

India has emerged as an important maritime player due to its geographical location and maritime history. India's vital maritime center in Andaman and Nicobar contributes to monitoring the strategic Strait of Malacca, making it a vital energy artery for the countries of Southeast and East Asia. (3)

Indian policy focuses on cooperation with regional and international countries to address threats and enhance security, including energy threats to China, which relies to a large extent on the Strait of Malacca. (1)

As for the United States of America, it considered the strait a key to controlling the continent, as it focused since the eighties on tightening its grip on the world's oceans and strategic transit centers. It seeks to surround the naval and navigation powers during wars by monitoring and controlling their straits. The Malacca Strait is known for its importance, as it can impose its control and cut off the supply lines of Asia. Taiwan is of strategic importance due to its location between the South and East China Seas, which makes it a hub for trade and transportation of resources towards China. Singapore is an ally of the United States and has an important role in controlling oil destined for China. The rapid arming aims to influence the oil supply during a struggle between the two powers. (2)

Thus, the development of overseas energy transportation and marketing in Asia puts great pressure on navigation, raising complex security and economic challenges. Concerned countries such as China, Japan, India and the United States differ in their dealings with these challenges, as they seek to protect their interests through regional and international cooperation and to enhance maritime security and influence in strategic areas. The Strait of Malacca remains an essential hub for energy and trade, and the interactions and alliances between these countries have an important impact on the future security and stability of the region, which represents a synergy between the grammatical and scientific aspects in providing a comprehensive assessment of the situation.

It is clear that the Strait of Malacca is a vital heart for the development of energy transportation and marketing via sea routes in the Asian region. The challenges facing the means of navigation in that region are evident, which range in the varying response of the countries concerned such as China, Japan, India and the United States. These countries seek interests' protection by enhancing regional and international cooperation, enhancing maritime security and expanding its influence. Thus, the Malacca Strait remains a vital passage for energy and trade exchange, and interactions and alliances between major countries continue to play a decisive role in shaping the future of security and stability in the region. Through grammatical and scientific analysis, we realize the importance of the strait and its profound impact on the regional and international context, with geographical complexities and environmental conditions affecting ship traffic and maritime transport.

The second requirement: maritime terrorism in Malacca

Malacca is considered the second most important strait in the world after Hormuz, due to it being the only vein that connects the countries of the East to the rest of the world throughout the year, and the lack of natural risks. A closure of the Malacca Strait in Indonesia, like the Sundabyne Strait between Java and Sumatra, could disrupt the flow of half the global shipping fleet, necessitating diversion around the archipelago, reducing available global shipping capacity, increasing shipping costs, and potentially affecting energy prices.

Consequently, many countries attached great importance to it. However, security breaches in the Strait of Malacca increased with the diversity of the methods and goals of the perpetrators. Incidents decreased between 1991 and 1996 due to the strengthening of maritime security by coastal states. (1) In 1998-1999, pirate activity increased as a result of the Asian financial crisis, as some individuals resorted to piracy as a way to improve their livelihood and this negatively affected maritime security in the region. (2)

In 2000, piracy tactics saw a significant shift in their methods of execution, with terrorist maritime attacks becoming a serious threat to international shipping traffic. These attacks were ranked second in terms of their impact on maritime security. About (75) terrorist

incidents were documented at that time, including about (40) cases that targeted control of ships through attackers infiltrating them.

In addition, the remaining incidents included hijackings and collisions with the Coast Guard. Among these events is the hijacking of the tanker (MARS Global), which was carrying the flag of (Panama), which reflects the complexities of the maritime situation in the Strait of Malacca and the challenges facing ships and international shipping at that time. (1)

In light of the deteriorating economic and social conditions, the increase in the rates of piracy attacks and maritime terrorism in the coastal strip areas could lead to a negative circulation on maritime security, and this includes a negative impact on the Straits of Malacca and other vital waterways. Therefore, it is necessary to improve these influencing conditions to ensure the strengthening of maritime security in these vital areas, as sustainable measures should be taken to achieve economic and social stability that enhance the achievement of sustainable safety in vital waterways and reduce potential threats to maritime security. The armed and terrorist attacks on ships are due to the lack of coordination between the concerned authorities and the lack of security stability in the region. It is known that these developments are the result of changing and complex situations. On the other hand, the decrease in the rate of terrorist attacks in the port of Malacca indicates the existence of effective cooperation and coordination between the concerned parties, both at the regional and international levels, (3) where some incidents play a role in the phenomenon of complicity, as it appears that there is cooperation between the parties involved in illegal activities and individuals with governmental responsibilities, and therefore these factors can accumulate and undermine the safety of maritime navigation and maritime safety in general, by exacerbating threats and increasing cases of uncertainty in the marine environment. This problem requires strong international cooperation and strict measures to confront it and prevent the exacerbation of its effects on maritime security and stability. (4)

According to the United Nations Global Hacking Report released in November 2012, the escalation in rates of terrorist attacks and piracy was highlighted during the relevant period. The report showed that there was a clear increase in the number of attacks, as 262 attack cases were recorded in 2000, and this number decreased to 73 cases in 2008. These numbers highlight the diverse security challenges that the region faced during this period, which calls for thinking about strategies , enhancing security and combating these negative phenomena. (1)

A series of attacks on ships transporting oil, gas and goods continued, and were carried out by maritime terrorist groups, leading to escalation of tensions in maritime areas. In this context, Admiral Abdul Aziz Jaafar, Naval Commander of the Malaysian Navy, revealed the existence of potential terrorist threats or plots that may target specific tankers in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, which reflects the increasing security challenges facing the region and the need to address them seriously and effectively. (2)

According to the annual report of the International Center for Strategic Studies (ISC) for the year 2022, a series of notable maritime events were documented, as (6) ships were subjected to pirate attacks during the month of April 2022 alone in the Strait of Malacca, as the Strait of Malacca is one of the most important vital waterways in the region Asia, connecting China, India and Southeast Asia. This strait is exposed to major security challenges due to the escalation of severe incidents, as (55) different incidents were recorded in it during the year 2022. These numbers highlight the increasing level of danger and the urgent need to take strong measures to maintain the safety of this vital waterway (3), which represents a significant increase by (65%) of the total, which reached (55) out of (84) accidents that occurred in the Asian region. These numbers indicate the escalation of events and challenges faced by private security forces in the region during this period and make it necessary to take effective measures to address these increasing threats. (4)

Below is documentation of incidents of piracy and armed robbery in 2023 against ships in the port of Malacca. These incidents were reported by member states and international organizations of consultative status. (1)

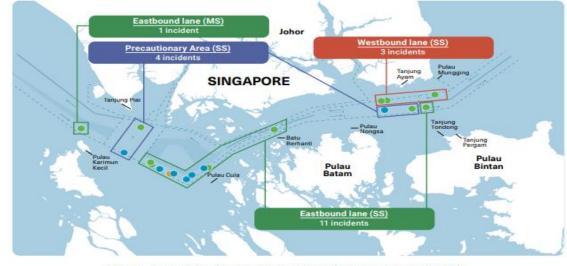
1- A Liberian bismuth tanker was attacked in the Strait of Malacca, Indonesia, on April 2, 2023. Unknown individuals approached in a small boat, but fled after hearing shots. The crew has been fine and no thefts occurred, and the Chinese authorities and RECAAP have been informed.

2- A tanker (Al-Najah 9) was attacked in the Malacca Strait, Indonesia, on April 10, 2023. Five unauthorized people were spotted in the engine room, and they escaped after activating the alarm. Stolen engine parts were found, and the crew was not injured. The incident was reported to the authorities and the international organization, and security measures were taken.

3- The Ji Shun Da tanker was attacked in the Malacca Strait in Indonesia, where an unauthorized person was spotted near the engine room. In another incident, a wooden boat loaded with scrap metal was intercepted in the Malacca Strait in Malaysia, six perpetrators were arrested and the stolen cargo was seized. Incidents have been reported to coastal authorities and RECAAP.

4- The Hong Kong tanker was attacked in the Malacca Strait in Indonesia. The crew saw people inside the engine room. The ship's alarm was activated and safe navigation broadcasts began. No thefts occurred and the crew was safe. The authorities were reported to RECAAP and the information was shared with the Indonesian authorities.

Map No. (6) also shows the attacks that targeted tankers in the Strait according to the regions and degree of the accident. The green one is considered a simple accident, while the blue one is a moderately dangerous accident, while the red one can be said to be an accident with a high degree of seriousness.



Map 2 - Location of incidents in SOMS (January-March 2023)

Map (2)

Information sharing center, Piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia, March 2023, P.14, Available at: https://www.recaap.org/resources, Date of visit 2023/ 8/6.

The beginning of the twentieth century is considered the period in which terrorism and maritime piracy were the most active in Malacca, as shown in the table below, due to the weakness of the security apparatus and international cooperation in that period, and terrorist attacks and cases are considered the least, and this is attributed to international cooperation in that region and work on the existence of alternatives by regional countries.

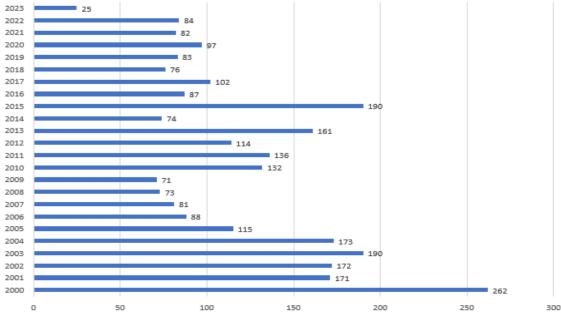


Table No. (1) shows the number of attacks in the port of Malacca

Abd al-Amir Abbas Abd, Wissam Ali Kaitan, previous source, p. 19.

Information sharing center, PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN ASIA, MARCH 2023, P.24 Available at: https://www.recaap.org/resources, Date of visit 2023/ 8/6.

It can be said that the improvement of political, social and economic conditions could positively affect maritime security in the straits, particularly in the Strait of Malacca. This improvement could contribute to reducing the incidence of maritime piracy attacks, although it cannot be completely eliminated; It is active at times and declines at other times.

It is clear that the Strait of Malacca is a vital heart for the development of energy transportation and marketing via sea routes in the Asian region. The challenges facing the means of navigation in that region are evident, which range in the varying response of the countries concerned such as China, Japan, India and the United States. These countries seek to protect their interests by strengthening regional and international cooperation, enhancing maritime security and expanding their influence. Thus, the Malacca Strait remains a vital passage for energy and trade exchange, and interactions and alliances between major countries continue to play a decisive role in shaping the future of security and stability in the region. Through grammatical and scientific analysis, we realize the importance of the strait and its profound impact on the regional and international context, with geographical complexities and environmental conditions affecting ship traffic and maritime transport.

The importance of straits and sea lanes is clearly evident as critical strategic factors in the security and economic context of states. These passages are subject to competition between major and regional powers for control over them, as they greatly affect global trade and energy transfer.

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