

The Defense Perspective on the Implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

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Abstract

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) has emerged as a significant topic in the discourse of regional security policy. This initiative highlights the importance of maintaining stability and security in the Indo-Pacific region, which is now at the heart of global geopolitical competition. Through comprehensive analysis, this study explores the role of AOIP as a strategic tool for ASEAN countries in navigating complex defense and security dynamics. The article first examines the background and motivations behind the establishment of AOIP, emphasizing its significance in the context of regional defense. It then assesses ASEAN's role in managing Indo-Pacific security through the AOIP framework, including how member states integrate these principles into their national defense strategies. This research also provides an in-depth analysis of regional defense cooperation under AOIP, identifying the challenges and opportunities faced by ASEAN. Finally, the article discusses the hegemonic competition between China and the United States in the region and its impact on the implementation of AOIP. This study aims to offer valuable insights to policymakers, academics, and security practitioners in understanding ASEAN's key role in maintaining the power balance in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), ASEAN Defense Strategy, Indo-Pacific Regional Security, Regional Defense Cooperation, China-US Geopolitical Dynamics.*

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a geographical concept encompassing the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean regions since Gurpreet S. Khurana used the term “Indo-Pacific Strategy” in 2007 as a Marine Strategist and Executive Director of The New Delhi National Maritime Foundation (Herindrasti, 2019). The term Indo-Pacific is used as a replacement for the previously entrenched term Asia-Pacific, with a fundamental

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difference emphasizing areas related to waters. This region has become contested by various countries and their interests.

The Indo-Pacific has become a central area in the discussion of maritime geopolitical issues, security, trade, and environmental activities. The Indo-Pacific region also stands at the crossroads of international trade, with about 32.2 million barrels of crude oil passing through each year and 40% of global exports originating from this region (Tertia & Perwita, 2018). With increasing prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, exporting countries compete to market their products in this region. This competition is not limited to the level of international trade but also includes direct investment in various markets in the Indo-Pacific for distribution networks, manufacturing industries, and economic infrastructure investments such as ports, highways, railways, power plants, and banking (Montratama, 2016).

The Indo-Pacific returned to the spotlight after Japan announced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept, proclaimed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016. Abe's view is rooted in security, economy, and maritime issues. Later in 2017, President Trump announced the US vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific at the APEC Summit in Vietnam, committing to a safe, secure, prosperous, and free region benefiting all nations (The Department of Defense USA, 2019). Behind the great power already possessed by the United States, it is also supported by a lineup of forces behind it that agree with its Indo-Pacific concept. Its basis of support is the Quad, comprising the US, Japan, Australia, and India.

In recent decades, the Indo-Pacific region has emerged as an important global geopolitical center, attracting the attention of various major countries due to its strategic, economic, and security interests. This is a vast region, stretching from the east coast of Africa to the west coast of America, crossing two major oceans and connecting several continents. The dynamics created in this region not only reflect significant economic interests but also demonstrate the complexity of security and defense challenges faced by countries in the region. These challenges include issues such as competing maritime claims, military growth, and the need to secure vital trade routes.

In the midst of this increasingly complex situation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has played an increasingly prominent role. This regional organization, comprising ten member countries in Southeast Asia, has long been recognized for its ability to facilitate regional cooperation and dialogue. Through its latest initiative, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), ASEAN demonstrates its commitment to taking a more active role in managing and shaping the security and defense landscape in the Indo-Pacific region.

AOIP, adopted by ASEAN member countries, is a strategic response to changes in the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region. It is an effort to promote a more inclusive and rule-based security approach, emphasizing the importance of transparency, cooperation, and respect for international law. Through AOIP, ASEAN not only strives to strengthen internal cooperation among its member countries but also aims to build stronger relations with other major powers operating in the region, such as China and the United States. These two countries, with their often-differing interests and policies, have a significant influence on the stability and security of the region.

Therefore, this research focuses on a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and impact of AOIP in the context of regional defense and security. The main research questions include: How does AOIP influence the defense strategies of ASEAN countries? And how does the strategic competition between China and the US in the Indo-Pacific region affect the implementation and effectiveness of AOIP? The method used in this study is descriptive analytics, focusing on the analysis of policy documents, related literature, and interviews with experts and practitioners. This research is important as it provides in-depth insights into how ASEAN, through AOIP, seeks to navigate and

influence the complex and often uncertain security environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

By understanding the implications of AOIP implementation, this study aims to make a significant contribution to policymakers, academics, and practitioners in the fields of security and defense. It will help in understanding how countries in the region, and particularly ASEAN, can be more effective in responding to and shaping the rapidly changing security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region, a key area for global stability in the 21st century.

Research Method

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative research. Qualitative methodology emphasizes the observation of phenomena and further investigation into the substantive meaning of these phenomena. The strength of words and sentences is significantly influenced by the analysis and acuteness of qualitative research. Therefore, Basri (2014) concluded that qualitative research focuses on processes and the meanings of outcomes. Qualitative research pays more attention to human elements, objects, and institutions, as well as the relationships or interactions among these elements, to understand an event, behavior, or phenomenon. To explore these questions, this study utilizes a descriptive analytical approach, based on extensive literature review, policy document analysis, and interviews with policy and defense experts. This approach allows the research to provide a deep and structured view of the issues faced by ASEAN and the implications of AOIP.

Discussion

The Emergence of the Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific region, a confluence of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, comprises over 50 countries. The Indian Ocean, the third-largest ocean in the world, occupies about 20% of the Earth's sea surface, covering a total area of 73.56 million square miles (Michel & Sticklor, 2012). This region is rich in minerals, oil, and natural gas, holding more than two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves, making it a region abundant in energy resources (Albert, 2016). It also contains significant reserves of other minerals like 35% of the world's gas, 60% of uranium, 40% of gold, 80% of diamonds, and many other minerals (Future Directions International, 2012).

The Pacific Ocean, covering an area of approximately 63.8 million square miles (165.25 million km²), is significantly larger than the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. Extending from the Antarctic coastline to the Bering Strait and covering a latitudinal range of about 15,600 miles (15,500 km), its greatest longitudinal expanse is roughly 19,000 miles (19,300 km) along the 5°N latitude (Cotter, Bardach, & Morgan, 2019). The average depth of the Pacific Ocean is 14,040 feet (4,280 meters), with the deepest known point being the Mariana Trench at 36,201 feet (11,034 meters).

Most Indian Ocean countries continue to export raw materials while importing manufactured goods, with exceptions like Australia, India, and South Africa. The Indian Ocean has become a crucial route for crude oil transportation to Europe, North America, and East Asia. Other major commodities include iron, coal, rubber, and tea, with processed seafood emerging as a significant export product. Tourism has also become increasingly important in many islands (Verlaan, Morgan, & Kanayev, 2020).

The Indian Ocean provides vital international shipping routes, surrounded by coastal nations like Oman, Yemen, Somalia, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar,

and Indonesia (Tertia & Perwita, 2018). Shipping in the Indian Ocean is categorized into dhows, dry cargo carriers, and tankers.

In the Pacific Ocean region, since the mid-20th century, there has been a remarkable growth in trade between the western Pacific Rim, notably China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, North America, and the United States. Trade has also expanded between North America and Southeast Asian countries like Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Cotter, Bardach, & Morgan, 2019). Thus, the Pacific Ocean supports some of the world's most vital trade routes.

The Evolution of Asia-Pacific and the Concept of Indo-Pacific

The term Indo-Pacific, though seemingly new to geopolitics, is not entirely a novel concept. It is viewed as an evolution of the Asia-Pacific idea that emerged around the late 20th century. Post-World War II, the Asia-Pacific concept predominantly defined Asia in the 1960s. It was generally understood as a region linking Northeast and Southeast Asia with Oceania and the Americas, reflecting and reinforcing the strategic and economic roles of the U.S. in Asia and the success of East Asian industrial nations as U.S. trading partners. The Asia-Pacific reached new levels of relevance and institutionalization in the late 1980s, marked by the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The concept of Asia-Pacific began to waver in the 1990s with two emerging factors: the rise of India as a substantial economic and military power with interests beyond South Asia, and the growing connections between East Asian economic powers and the Indian Ocean region, particularly related to energy and resource demands.

The Indo-Pacific concept, first articulated by Gurpreet S. Khurana in 2007, a director of the National Maritime Foundation in India and a former Indian Navy Captain, in his article "Security of Sea Lines: Prospect for India-Japan Cooperation", began as a geographical concept integrated with economic views. With the presence of extraordinary geo-economic opportunities and crucial security challenges, not just for Asia but globally, a singular regional construction of the Indo-Pacific was established. This concept explained the merging of the Indian Ocean area and the Western Pacific, including adjacent seas in East and Southeast Asia, into a single regional construct (Khurana, 2017). The term Indo-Pacific was then used in the context of geopolitical expression.

Another critical basis of the Indo-Pacific idea is the growing prominence of India. The rise of India as a power in the early 21st century was one of the triggers for Khurana to coin the Indo-Pacific term. In the 1990s, India experienced impressive and significant economic growth. The starting point was the increased US-India cooperation in trade, security, and defense (Iriawan, 2018). This made India and the Indian Ocean no longer sidelined in Asian geopolitics. Although "Indo" in "Indo-Pacific" represents the Indian Ocean and not India, Khurana envisioned India playing a major role, including ensuring a maritime environment conducive to growth and economic development. This was hindered at the time due to the "Asia-Pacific" view being inadequate and ambiguous in terms of integrating India into regional affairs. Another reason for the emergence of the Indo-Pacific term was the context of increasing political-military assertiveness of China, leading to enhanced relations between India and Japan since 2006.

The Indo-Pacific accounts for two-thirds of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth because it contributes at least 60% of the global GDP (The Department of Defense USA, 2019). The region includes the world's largest economies like the United States, China, and Japan. It also houses six of the fastest-growing economies in the world, namely India, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, and the Philippines.

Military Capabilities in the Indo-Pacific Region

Military capabilities are an aspect that each country must pay attention to. Good military ownership will be a selling point or competitiveness for maintaining sovereignty and recognition from other countries. Therefore, each country ensures to strengthen its military capabilities, from budget to main defense system equipment (alutsista).

Rivalry Between China and the United States (Quadrilateral)

The increasing influence of China, becoming increasingly unavoidable, has made China a new center of gravity in the region. Supported by significant economic strength, China's attention to the South Pacific has increased and intensified. China needs to maintain a stable external environment conducive to domestic economic reform and growth. Currently, China treats neighboring countries as friends and partners. China must make them feel safe and help them develop (Glaser, 2014).

This is marked by the increase in economic aid provided by China to countries that establish diplomatic relations with it. China, also recorded as the third-largest donor after Australia and the U.S., offers various financial aid packages aimed at strengthening trade, building infrastructure, enhancing government and military capabilities, and developing natural resources (Dugis, 2015). Currently, there are three Core Security Objectives of China in Asia, pursuing three core security objectives in East Asia: controlling the "near seas", promoting regional economic integration centered in China, and defending and advancing China's sovereignty claims (Glaser, 2014).

One initiative that has drawn international attention is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013. The One Belt One Road (OBOR) aims to promote orderly and free economic activities, highly efficient resource allocation, and deep market integration, encouraging countries to achieve economic policy coordination and pursue broader and deeper regional cooperation with higher standards. Together, they aim to create an open, inclusive, and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all parties. The vision of the One Belt One Road Initiative is to realize the "Five Links", referring to policy coordination, infrastructure, trade, finance, and people (Fung Business Intelligence Centre, 2015). BRI consists of two main components: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Anam & Ristiyani, 2018).

Then, in 2017, an interesting year in the development of the Indo-Pacific discourse, the U.S., as a superpower and major countries in the region, adopted the Indo-Pacific concept and revived the "Quad". The quadrilateral cooperation framework, including Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, was reactivated in 2017 after a freeze of about ten years (Hanada, 2018).

In April 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" (MoFA Strategy) describing how Tokyo would expand its worldview and strategic role under the Shinzo Abe era, determined by the desire to make a "proactive contribution to peace" (Lee, 2018). One of Japan's Development Cooperation policy priorities is to promote strategic development cooperation through FOIP to achieve stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. About seven months later, in November 2017, Australia issued the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper (Hanada, 2018). The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper contains five crucial goals for Australia's security and prosperity, one of which is to "promote an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region in which the rights of all states are respected" (Australian Government, 2017).

In December 2017, the White House released The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS) (White House, 2017). The NSS contains fundamental goals that the U.S. must undertake. First, the fundamental responsibility of the state is to protect the people and homeland of the U.S. Second, to strive to create prosperity for the U.S. Third, to maintain peace through strength by rebuilding the military to remain

superior, deter enemies, and fight and win. Fourth, to advance U.S. influence in the world.

Following Owen Jacobs' remarks regarding the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity) nature of the current strategic environment, the Indo-Pacific region exemplifies this description. The Indo-Pacific, as a strategic environment, is rapidly evolving, giving rise to a situation where uncertainty prevails, such as in matters of security or stability. This uncertainty is further exacerbated by the complex inter-state relationships within the region. The multitude of nations involved adds to the intricacies of these relationships, complicating national planning and decision-making processes, and often leading to ambiguous decisions.

The significance of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in the context of regional defense

The significance of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in the context of regional defense is multifaceted and profoundly impactful in shaping the defense landscape of Southeast Asia and beyond. Given the substantial strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, AOIP provides a framework for ASEAN and its member states to address the complex and dynamic security challenges. The importance of AOIP in this context can be understood through several key aspects:

1. **Inclusive and Rule-Based Security Approach:** AOIP offers an inclusive and rule-based approach to security. This is a response to the growing need to strengthen regional security cooperation amidst increasing geopolitical tensions and military competition, particularly between major powers like the United States and China. Through AOIP, ASEAN seeks to promote regional stability and peace, emphasizing the importance of international law and diplomacy in conflict resolution.
2. **Facilitating Regional Defense Cooperation:** AOIP plays a crucial role in facilitating regional defense cooperation. This includes initiatives such as joint patrols, military exercises, and intelligence sharing. AOIP has enabled ASEAN countries to collaborate more closely in facing common threats such as terrorism, piracy, and natural disasters. This cooperation not only strengthens the defense capabilities of each nation but also enhances trust and transparency among them.
3. **Platform for Greater Dialogue and Engagement with Major Powers:** AOIP provides a platform for more extensive dialogue and engagement with other major powers in the region. Through mechanisms like the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum, AOIP allows ASEAN to play a more active and influential role in regional security diplomacy. This is crucial in managing relationships with countries such as the United States, China, India, and Japan, all of which have significant strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

In this context, AOIP emerges as a vital instrument in ASEAN's regional defense strategy. Through a more coordinated and collaborative approach, ASEAN countries can not only address the security challenges they face but also shape the regional security landscape in accordance with their interests and values.

The role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Indo-Pacific security

The role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Indo-Pacific security is pivotal in defining the security architecture of a region characterized by intense strategic competition and diverse security challenges. Focusing on a dialogue and diplomacy-based approach, ASEAN has successfully established forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit, facilitating discussions and security cooperation between its members and other major powers in the region. This approach not only strengthens internal cooperation among member states but also enhances their capacity to confront non-traditional security threats like terrorism, piracy,

and natural disasters. Through close defense cooperation, including joint patrols and military exercises, ASEAN has demonstrated its ability to coordinate responses to complex security challenges.

1. **Managing Competition Among Major Powers:** One of the most significant challenges ASEAN faces is managing the competition between major powers, particularly the United States and China. In navigating these dynamics, ASEAN has maintained a neutral and inclusive approach, striving to balance relations with both powers while ensuring the region remains stable and peaceful. This approach underscores ASEAN's strategic role in maintaining the power balance and promoting dialogue to prevent conflicts in the Indo-Pacific.
2. **ASEAN's Strategic Diplomacy:** ASEAN's diplomatic efforts are pivotal in fostering an environment conducive to peace and stability. By engaging in multilateral diplomacy, ASEAN provides a platform for major powers to discuss and potentially resolve their differences, thus reducing the likelihood of conflicts.
3. **Challenges in Addressing Non-Traditional Security Threats:** Despite its achievements, ASEAN faces challenges in responding to non-traditional security threats and ensuring the effectiveness of regional security and defense cooperation. Variations in policies and capabilities among member states can hinder the effectiveness of collective responses. This necessitates a more synchronized approach and a deeper commitment to shared security objectives.
4. **Future Prospects:** Looking forward, ASEAN's role in Indo-Pacific security is likely to become even more significant. As the region continues to navigate complex geopolitical shifts and security challenges, ASEAN's ability to maintain a unified and balanced approach will be crucial. The organization's future efforts will likely focus on enhancing regional security mechanisms, promoting confidence-building measures, and fostering inclusive dialogue among all stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific.

In conclusion, ASEAN's role in Indo-Pacific security is multifaceted, balancing the need to manage relations with major powers while addressing a range of security challenges. The organization's commitment to dialogue and diplomacy remains a key strength, positioning it as a significant player in shaping the security dynamics of this strategically important region.

The implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in the defense strategies of ASEAN countries

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) represents a significant affirmation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s role in maintaining peace, security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, encompassing both Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean. This outlook promotes an open and inclusive approach to dialogue and cooperation in areas prioritized by ASEAN, such as maritime affairs, economy, connectivity, and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. **Response to Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD):** AOIP serves as a response to the presence of the QSD in the Indo-Pacific region. The formation and transformation of QSD cooperation have elicited various reactions and assumptions from countries in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in Southeast Asia. Indonesia, through ASEAN, introduced the vision of AOIP at the ASEAN Summit in Bangkok in 2019 as a shared vision and guideline for countries in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. **Regional Architectural Initiative Centering ASEAN:** Adopted at the 34th ASEAN Summit in Thailand in 2019, AOIP is intended as a guideline for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Initially, AOIP's focus on "security" was limited and primarily maritime-oriented, with "defense" mentioned in the context of strengthening the role of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM).

3. **Consensus on Defense Cooperation:** The ASEAN defense ministers' meeting on 15 June 2021 issued a discussion text on AOIP from a defense perspective. One of the six principles stated that any form of ASEAN defense cooperation with other countries must be through the consensus of all 10 ASEAN member states to maintain regional security and stability.
4. **Implementation of AOIP:** At the 42nd ASEAN Summit held in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia, in May 2023, AOIP was a major agenda item. Indonesian President Joko Widodo, as the ASEAN Chair for 2023, emphasized strengthening ASEAN to face challenges, respond to dynamics, and maintain a central role in the region. Given the growing rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN leaders agreed on the increasingly important implementation of AOIP, focusing on cooperative, inclusive, and concrete paradigms.
5. **Challenges in Implementation:** However, AOIP faces challenges in international implementation, including accommodating the interests of each country in the Indo-Pacific region.
6. **Principles of ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific:** Indonesia continues to advocate the three main principles of AOIP - ASEAN centrality, inclusivity, and complementarity - crucial amid the shifting geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics in the Indo-Pacific. AOIP fosters dialogue and cooperation with all countries and aims to strengthen existing mechanisms to face regional and global challenges.
7. **Defense Cooperation and Military Engagement:** ASEAN members have established defense and security cooperation with countries outside the region. Countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines have joint military exercise schedules with the United States, while China has military cooperation with Cambodia and Vietnam.
8. **Concrete and Inclusive Cooperation:** President Joko Widodo sees the need for concrete and inclusive cooperation to reduce tensions in the Indo-Pacific, such as the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Forum.

In summary, the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) has been a crucial step for ASEAN countries in developing and enhancing their defense strategies. AOIP, as an inclusive regional cooperation framework, has influenced member states' approaches to the evolving security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, particularly amid increasing geopolitical tensions and military competition. Through AOIP, ASEAN demonstrates its commitment to maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity, strengthening defense cooperation, and promoting an inclusive, rule-based security approach in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Analysis ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) crucial role in shaping the framework for regional defense cooperation

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) has played a crucial role in shaping the framework for regional defense cooperation in Southeast Asia and beyond. As an initiative designed to enhance cooperation and stability in this strategically significant region, AOIP has guided ASEAN countries to adopt a more coordinated and integrated approach in addressing increasingly complex security challenges. This defense cooperation encompasses not just the military aspect but also defense diplomacy and security capacity building.

1. **Enhanced Military and Security Collaboration:** One of the main pillars in the implementation of AOIP has been the increase in military and security collaboration. This involves activities such as joint military exercises, maritime security patrols, and intelligence sharing. Joint exercises, in particular, have enhanced interoperability and collective capabilities among the militaries of member states, while also strengthening trust and cooperation. Examples include joint exercises under the ADMM-Plus

framework, which have become a significant platform for defense cooperation in the region.

2. **Defense Diplomacy:** AOIP has also enhanced defense diplomacy in the region. Forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit have enabled ASEAN member states to engage in dialogue with major powers in the region, promoting a rule-based and international law approach in addressing security issues. This approach has allowed ASEAN to play a more significant role in regional security diplomacy, maintaining a balance of relationships with global powers like the United States and China.

3. **Security Capacity Building:** Capacity building in security has been a major focus within the AOIP framework. ASEAN countries have received support in enhancing maritime capabilities, disaster management, and combating terrorism and transnational crime. This not only helps strengthen the national security of each member state but also reinforces overall regional stability and security.

4. **Challenges in Regional Defense Cooperation:** Despite the progress made through AOIP in regional defense cooperation, challenges remain. These include differences in capabilities and security priorities among ASEAN member states. Additionally, there is a challenge in maintaining inclusive and effective defense cooperation amidst competition and differing interests of major powers in the region.

Overall, AOIP represents a significant step forward in regional defense cooperation, providing a comprehensive approach that includes military collaboration, defense diplomacy, and capacity building. However, navigating the varying capabilities and interests within ASEAN and among external powers will be key to the successful and sustainable implementation of AOIP in enhancing regional security and stability.

ASEAN challenges and opportunities

In the dynamic geopolitical and security context of the Indo-Pacific region, ASEAN faces a series of significant challenges and opportunities. The unity and strength of ASEAN as a regional bloc are key to addressing these challenges and capitalizing on available opportunities.

1. Challenges for ASEAN:

- **Maintaining Unity and Solidarity:** One of the primary challenges is preserving unity and solidarity among its member states. Differences in interests and policy priorities among members can impact ASEAN's ability to respond effectively to regional security and economic issues.
- **Navigating Major Power Competition:** Another significant challenge is managing the rising competition between major powers, especially between China and the United States. This competition poses challenges in maintaining regional balance and avoiding polarization.

2. Opportunities for ASEAN:

- **Enhancing International Role:** ASEAN's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific offers significant opportunities to strengthen diplomacy and security cooperation, both among its member states and with other major powers and regional partners.
- **Economic Integration and Development:** ASEAN is well-positioned to further promote regional economic integration and development. With growing economies and large markets, the region is attractive for international investment and economic cooperation.
- **Addressing Non-Traditional Security Threats:** ASEAN needs to enhance cooperation and coordination in facing non-traditional security threats like terrorism,

climate change, and natural disasters. These challenges often transcend national boundaries and require a collective response.

3. Strategies for ASEAN:

- **Consensus-Based Approach:** Through close cooperation and a consensus-based approach, ASEAN can leverage these opportunities to strengthen its position and contribute to regional stability and prosperity.
- **Building Capacities and Partnerships:** Improving capacities in areas like disaster management, counter-terrorism, and addressing climate change can enhance ASEAN's role in regional security.
- **Balanced Diplomacy:** Navigating the interests of major powers while maintaining an independent and unified stance is crucial for ASEAN's role in regional stability.

In conclusion, while ASEAN faces challenges in maintaining unity and dealing with major power rivalries, it also possesses significant opportunities to enhance its international standing and contribute to the region's security and economic development. Capitalizing on these opportunities will require ASEAN to continue fostering a spirit of cooperation and consensus, enhancing its collective capacity to address both traditional and non-traditional security threats, and playing a balanced and strategic role in the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific.

The Struggle for Hegemony between China and the US in ASEAN

The struggle for hegemony between China and the United States in the ASEAN region has become a central focus in the geopolitical and security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. With deep strategic interests in the region, both countries are endeavoring to strengthen their influence, which has significant implications for ASEAN nations.

1. **China's Approach:** Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has substantially increased infrastructure investment and economic presence in ASEAN countries. While this has brought economic development, concerns have been raised about impacts on sovereignty and strategic dependence in recipient countries.
2. **US Strategy:** The United States, through its Indo-Pacific policy, aims to reinforce strategic ties and consolidate alliances and partnerships. This effort is seen as an attempt to offer an alternative to China's influence and to promote a rules-based order.
3. **ASEAN's Balancing Act:** In the midst of this rivalry, ASEAN faces the challenge of maintaining a balance in its relations with these two global powers. Upholding principles of non-alignment and ASEAN centrality, the bloc strives to avoid getting caught in the China-US competition, while ensuring that the interests and sovereignty of its member states remain protected.
4. **Opportunities for ASEAN:** This situation also presents opportunities for ASEAN to strengthen its role in regional diplomacy and security. Through a prudent and balanced approach, ASEAN can leverage the dynamics between China and the US to advance stability, security, and prosperity in the region.
5. **Navigating the Hegemonic Competition:** ASEAN's approach to navigating the hegemonic competition between China and the US will be key in determining the future direction of regional security and economic development. Effective strategic balance and skilled diplomacy will be crucial for ASEAN in maintaining regional stability and advancing the collective interests of its members.

In conclusion, the ASEAN region is a pivotal arena for the hegemonic contest between China and the United States. ASEAN's ability to navigate this competition, maintain strategic balance, and promote its collective interests will play a critical role in shaping

the future of regional security and economic development. This requires a nuanced approach that leverages the strengths of ASEAN's unity and diplomacy.

Indonesia's Strategy to Realize ASEAN Outlook On Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

Indonesia's current position in the face of major power competition between China and the United States presents a complex scenario. On one hand, Indonesia seeks to maintain a positive relationship with China, benefiting from significant Chinese investments in infrastructure and domestic industry development. On the other hand, there is awareness of China's potential to create instability in Southeast Asia, especially as a challenger to ASEAN unity.

1. **ASEAN Members' Preferences:** According to Kentaro Iwamoto, a majority of ASEAN members lean towards China over the US, with notable exceptions like the Philippines and Vietnam, primarily due to maritime disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea. This preference distribution shows a nuanced geopolitical landscape within ASEAN.
2. **Indonesia's Non-Aligned Policy:** As observed by Muhamad Habib and Ibu Rahmawati, Indonesia, adhering to a policy of non-alignment and active engagement, seeks to avoid siding with any major power. This stance is aimed at maintaining ASEAN's unity and centrality, amidst the varied bilateral relationships of ASEAN countries with China and the US.
3. **Challenges to ASEAN Unity:** The “political map” or “proximity tendency” among ASEAN countries towards either China or the US poses challenges for ASEAN's cohesiveness. Indonesia, therefore, emphasizes maximizing ASEAN to achieve common interests and welfare.
4. **Indonesia's Role in Formulating AOIP:** Indonesia's proposal to formulate an ASEAN perspective on the Indo-Pacific region is a strategic move to preserve ASEAN centrality. In the context of a Security Community, ASEAN already has a foundation of norms and identity based on sovereignty and non-interference principles, embodied in the “ASEAN Way.”
5. **Development of AOIP:** The development of AOIP was a strategic and consultative process initiated by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in February 2018. Through extensive consultations, a document titled “Indonesia’s Perspective for an ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific: Towards a Peaceful, Prosperous, and Inclusive Region” was formulated.
6. **Diplomatic Efforts:** The concept was diplomatically endorsed by key Indonesian figures, including Minister Retno Marsudi and President Joko Widodo, across multiple ASEAN meetings and summits.
7. **Adoption of AOIP:** At the 34th ASEAN Summit in June 2019, the concept was adopted as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, marking ASEAN’s official stance on the Indo-Pacific amid the rising competition of major powers in the region. The AOIP proposes cooperation in four areas: maritime, connectivity, sustainable development, and economy.
8. **Multilateral Diplomacy and Strategic Goals:** Indonesia's approach through these meetings was multilateral in nature, engaging with several governments simultaneously. The establishment of AOIP is seen as a joint project and a reactive strategy within ASEAN to manage external environments and foster mutually beneficial deals.

According to John Lovel and William D. Coplin, each country in developing its foreign policy tends to apply strategies that can be explained through an analysis of decision-makers' strategies regarding the opponent and their assessment of their own capabilities. This approach is known as the Strategic or Rational Model, which includes four main

strategies: leadership strategy, concordance strategy, accommodation strategy, and confrontation strategy.

1. **Leadership Strategy:** This strategy involves efforts to eliminate violence in foreign policy and is often directed at leaders who seek to build consensus and promote peaceful solutions.
2. **Concordance Strategy:** This strategy refers to efforts to create mutually beneficial situations for all involved parties, aiming to achieve agreements based on common interests.
3. **Accommodation Strategy:** This strategy is used when there is a country dominant in terms of capabilities, where other countries tend to accommodate the dominant power to maintain balance and stability.
4. **Confrontation Strategy:** This strategy is employed when a country increases its capabilities to a level that cannot be matched by others, often leading to confrontational actions.

In the context of Indonesia, especially in developing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), the adopted strategy tends to combine leadership strategy and accommodation strategy. This approach reflects a rational choice logic based on soft power, where Indonesia, as a country with a good reputation in ASEAN and an independent and active political principle, strives to accommodate various interests while maintaining peace. Indonesia does not impose its will on other ASEAN countries but seeks common ground to reach a mutual agreement. This approach strengthens ASEAN's identity and values, emphasizing national sovereignty, non-intervention, and peaceful problem-solving. Thus, Indonesia endeavors to strengthen ASEAN as a united and resilient regional bloc amid complex geopolitical dynamics, while promoting stability and prosperity in the region.

In summary, Indonesia's strategy in navigating the regional geopolitical dynamics and fostering the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific is characterized by a balanced, non-aligned approach and active engagement in multilateral diplomacy. This strategy aims to preserve ASEAN unity and centrality, addressing common challenges and promoting regional stability and prosperity.

Indonesia's Interests in ASEAN Cooperation Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

After approximately two years, Indonesia successfully guided the initiation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) framework, which was eventually approved and established in 2019. The AOIP, formulated by Indonesia, strongly characterizes the region without losing ASEAN's centrality. This Outlook is designed for use by ASEAN in general and Indonesia specifically, relating to Indonesia's position in ASEAN. Indonesia, with its independent and active foreign policy, considers ASEAN a crucial foundation in its foreign policy, enabling the country to advance its national interests through ASEAN (Agastia, I Gusti Bagus Dharma, and Perwita, 2015).

Indonesia sees the opportunities in the ASEAN region as a space that can aid in its scope of cooperation. Indonesia's success in bringing maritime issues to the ASEAN agenda is also an initial step that helps Indonesia pave the way towards achieving its vision of becoming a Global Maritime Fulcrum (PMD). Maritime issues for Indonesia currently represent threats that impact crucial aspects related to economic, defense, and security issues, such as border issues, piracy, and illegal fishing, as well as geopolitical changes threatening the region's centrality, which are central to Indonesia's interests mapped out in the PMD (Anwar Fotuna, 2020). In realizing the PMD, Indonesia looks more towards inward-looking cooperation and utilization of domestic strengths, focusing its policy on infrastructure improvements and the development of new ports within the country. While domestic development continues, cases beyond Indonesia's borders attract the

government's attention. Threats emerging amid these geopolitical changes provide the Indonesian Government with a space to conceive concepts related to its external borders, including the regional scope of Indonesia. In this regard, the formation of AOIP is a bridge for Indonesia to help resolve its issues beyond its borders (outward looking) (Jenderal & Pertahanan, 2014).

Through AOIP, Indonesia's vision for the PMD will be realized, including creating a maritime economy with increased shipping capacity to enhance economic process efficiency. This is expected to position Indonesia as a global trade hub. Indonesia needs to improve not only domestic infrastructure but also security to ensure safe navigation in Indonesian waters. Through AOIP, the resolution of security stability issues beyond borders is achievable, and its approval will provide Indonesia with investment support for development in the country itself. Therefore, maritime infrastructure issues, used by Indonesia as a tool for economic development, are expected to grow. Besides, Indonesia also has ASEAN to maintain its foreign relations, making it easier to attract investment to Indonesia.

Then, AOIP as Indonesia's defense strategy is used to maintain the complex security architecture of Southeast Asia. Faced with concerns about stability and peace in Southeast Asia, especially the future of ASEAN and all of East Asia, it is recognized that the geo-economic and geopolitical center of gravity of the world is shifting from the West to the East. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the conflictual border dynamics in the South China Sea, threatens Indonesia's security position. Through AOIP, it is promised that ASEAN will maintain its centrality in the face of changing regional architecture in Southeast Asia and beyond. With this outlook, ASEAN will become a mediator (Leading Role) within the strategic scope and interests at play. AOIP is a response to the increasing challenges of external pressures that could threaten ASEAN unity. It is hoped that the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Outlook can serve as a foundation among major powers (Sari & Delanova, 2021).

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific from a Defense Perspective serves as a guide for ASEAN in the field of defense cooperation with dialogue partners. Moreover, AOIP aims to bridge the interests of Indo-Pacific countries in maintaining peace, security, and prosperity with ASEAN's central and strategic role. This is a response to the current evolving geopolitical dynamics, ensuring the region remains stable, peaceful, and prosperous. With AOIP, ASEAN countries prioritize dialogue, mutual trust, and a win-win solution. Meanwhile, the goals and principles of AOIP provide guidance for ASEAN's engagement in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, encouraging ASEAN's external partners to engage in practical cooperation in the four main areas identified in AOIP (Yanuarti, Indri. Wibisono, Makarim. Midhio & Wayan, 2020).

Conclusion

This research has examined various important aspects related to the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and its role in the dynamics of regional security and defense. Through in-depth discussion, we have gained an understanding of how AOIP influences the defense strategies of ASEAN countries, providing insights into regional defense cooperation, and highlighting the challenges and opportunities faced by ASEAN in the current geopolitical context.

The implementation of AOIP has demonstrated ASEAN's commitment to developing more integrated and responsive regional security cooperation in response to contemporary security challenges. This includes increased collaboration in military exercises, intelligence exchange, and handling non-traditional security threats. However, differences in interests and capacities among member states remain a challenge in realizing closer defense cooperation. In the context of the hegemonic competition between China and the

United States, ASEAN faces the challenge of maintaining a balance in its relations with these two global powers. The conflicting interests between these countries create complexity in regional diplomacy but also present opportunities for ASEAN to strengthen its role as a mediator and key player in regional security.

In conclusion, AOIP represents a strategic step for ASEAN in navigating the complex security landscape of the Indo-Pacific. With a wise and collaborative approach, ASEAN has the potential to strengthen its position on the international stage, advancing stability and prosperity in the region, and maintaining a strategic balance amid the changing dynamics of global powers. Success in this regard will depend on ASEAN's ability to overcome internal and external challenges and its capacity to leverage emerging opportunities for the collective benefit of its members.

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