

(IJIF) Impact Factor - 3.034

ISSN 2249 - 8893

# Annals of Multi-Disciplinary Research

A Quarterly International Peer Reviewed Refereed Research Journal



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**Volume 11**

**Issue IV**

**December 2021**

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## **Theoretical Perspective of Security: An analysis of Maritime Piracy as a Non-Traditional Security Threat in Southeast Asia**

*Dr. Vimal Kumar Kashyap\**

With the Cold War coming to end in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, globalization emerged as the dominating feature of international politics. In an increasingly globalized world, political issues are deeply entangled with economic affairs (Collins 2000:1). The scope and significance of globalization have been significantly enveloped the entire global economic development. In response to this changing politico-economic scenario in the post-Cold War period, economic regionalism has spread. Many contemporary observers believe that globalization is neither as extensive nor as sweeping in its consequences. In the present era, national policies and economies are the primary elements of regional and international economic relations, creating a scenario where globalization and growing economic interdependence among national economies are indeed crucial (Gilpin 2001: 3-4).

Although, the driving force behind economic globalization has been certain distinct economic, political, and technological developments. Revolution in transportation technologies, especially trans-oceanic transport, galvanised international trade and made it feasible to integrate national economies into a global economic system. However, such integration also presents challenges as the underlying forces, both economic and technological, are beyond national control (Gilpin2001: -5).

As a measure of its growing integration with the global economy, in 2005 Asia's share of the world tonnage of seaborne cargo was the largest (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2006: 4). International trade in the region has been growing much faster than the growth of individual economies of the constituent countries, and most of this trade is seaborne. This increase has not only been in the traditional arena of commerce between East Asia and Europe and North America, but also in Southeast Asia. Growing domestic and international trade within Southeast Asia is mainly sea-borne, as in the large archipelagic states of Indonesia and the Philippines. This spurt can be observed in the increasing traffic volumes in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. This increase in sea-borne trade is expected to continue, with strong growth trends, into the future. An understanding of global trends in international shipping can be a useful background in analysing patterns and types of shipping in the Malacca and Singapore Straits (Bateman et al. 2006: 8).

Security is a complicated and multifaceted concept, which could imply freedom from threats (individual, national and international security). Since the origin of the nation-states, the issue of national security has dominated security studies. It is conceived as a paramount need for the survival of the nation-states. The term 'security' is a much-hyped approach in the domain of modern international relations which consolidate a variety of contested views (Sheehan 2005: 34).

Barry Buzan emphasized the conception of security as a link between power and peace (Buzan 2007). This notion of security is also applied to a central concern of national interest which is acknowledged as a particular form of politics called as a Tower of Babel

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(Kolodziej 2005:11). According to Romm (1993: 85), “A threat to national security is whatever threatens to significantly (1) degrade the quality of livelihood of the people, or (2) narrow the range of policy choices available to their government. “Another concept developed within the subject of national security is called International Security. Aravena (2002) calls it a new vulnerability which demands holistic perspectives. Further, he explains why states need international security: “Because the relationship is established simultaneously to meet global needs and the needs of the states, people, and peoples.”

An attempt has been made below to analyse various approaches to understanding regional responses to security threats.

### **Realist Approach**

Realism, a pre-eminent theory that explains international appearances, relies on the traditional state-centric view of security. The approach has been criticized by some scholars, on the ground of its stimulating dimensions. In the traditional notion of security, the state is restricted to a solemn actor and safety is understood only in military terms. The use of force by a nation-state is the single biggest threat to a different country. These assumptions are being tested due to the acceleration of non-traditional security threat perceptions, i.e. environmental, societal, economic and social, in an interdependent world. In the current global scenario, Non-traditional Security Threats (NTS) have become the biggest threat to the nation-states and its citizens (Anthony 2007). The new dimensions of security include plenty of non-state actors along with the states.

Realist scholars’ term this new approach to ‘comprehensive security’ in the context of growing interdependence among the nation-states. Moreover, it considers all the threats to global transnational stability, which can embarrass the political, economic and security interests of any nation-state. Most importantly, this notion of security is also sensitive of the well-being of human beings, without losing sight of the safety and welfare of a country. Human Security has developed into another new vision, which brings the citizens in the center of security discussion. The citizens have a right to live without ‘fear and want’ in the age of interdependence (Bajpai 2000:196).

### **Neo-Realist Approach**

The neo-realist approach principally defines power in global structure from the state-centric point of view, and it considers security as an integral part of national security. Kenneth N. Waltz argues that the state prefers balancing to bandwagoning (Waltz 1986: 127). Unlike realists, neorealists focused on the structure of the international system rather than human nature to the rise of anarchy. Neo-realist scholars, such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, believe that lack of a central authority to control the behaviour of the states in the international system is solemnly responsible to the rise of the chaotic situation. States are always grappling for independence and sovereignty, ultimately creating a threat to their survival. For this consideration, states develop offensive military capabilities i.e., alliances to protect their survival and to influence the behaviors of other countries. Under these circumstances, mistrust is always working on the states that are why countries are not confident about the intentions of other nation-states. States are often surviving in a system where they cannot guess exactly about the purpose and the potentiality of another state due to lack of information and continuous antagonism.

Therefore, neo-realism believes that the crisis of (in) security is the result of the structure of international relations and responsible for the anarchy, which ultimately leads to conflict and instability in the global system. The decades of Cold War (Bipolar system) were the most peaceful phase of power politics. After the end of the Cold War, the balance of

power politics was once again shifted which ushered great power politics and threatened international security (Mearsheimer 1994: 5).

However, the outcomes of these changes do not mean genesis of wars, but it brought the world to the brink of war with a lack of cooperation and constraints to the possibilities of peace. That is why the security dilemma is an integral part of the conflict between the states and forces them to act according to the logic of self-help. Consequently, an unending cycle of action and reaction of mistrust (Security Dilemma) enhances the agony of both sides by generating suspicion and fear. Neo-realism also argues that there are little prospects of changing this scenario in the post-Cold War era due to some constraints in cooperation among the states. While states are cooperating in the globalizing world, but due to an over-emphasis on the states' relative gains (respect to power balances), it is hard to sustain long-lasting peace and stability (Ibid.). The Gulf War 1991, Iraq War of 2003, issues of terrorism and other transnational crimes are the examples of this adverse situation.

### **Liberal-Institutionalist Approach**

Liberals also accept the underlying assumption of realism i.e. anarchy and importance of military power. Liberal theorists believe that international institutions and organizations can help prevent and overcome this problem by providing an avenue for cooperation between states. Where realism argues that institutions are merely a product and instrument to fulfil the interest of powerful countries, Liberals concentrate on the underlying assumption that organizations can provide the framework to enhance cooperation and stability among countries. Institutions and regimes are confined to developing information, reducing transition costs, making commitments, increasing coordination's and reciprocity (Keohane and Martin 1995: 42). The expansion of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are the most exemplary of the necessities of institutions in the post-Cold War era. Institutions are the most important component of reducing the possibilities of war, establishing peace and helping to restore the credibility and cooperation among the states.

As an integral part of the liberal institutionalism, the 'democratic peace theory' argues that democracy is the most important component of restoring order in the international system because there is a lesser possibility of occurrence of war between two democratic countries. Michael Doyle and Bruce Russett are two prominent scholars of democratic peace theory who believe that democracy can make the world safer and peaceful. While accepting the Kantian tenets of logic-republican democratic representation, ideological commitment to human rights and transnational interdependence, these scholars assert that instead of using force against each other, democracies are believed to settle their problem with mutual understanding and respect (Russett 1995: 175).

The theory does not entirely reject the essential elements of realism, but it has dismissed the pessimistic-called 'vulgar preoccupation' about the nature of the international system. There is hardly a situation of war always existing between the states and the institutions and norms fundamentally matter (Ibid: 180).

### **Constructivist Approach**

While power politics is the most discussed factor to the study of international relations, constructivist theorist, especially Alexander Wendt, believed that the fundamental structure of international politics is socially constructed rather than materially. The constructivist theorists fundamentally accept some fundamental conceptions of neo-realism, for instance, the structure of international politics. However, the constructivist theorists reject the contention that the structure can exist only by material capabilities. They emphasized that

the structure was the result of social relationships and social structures such as shared knowledge, material resources, and practices. Alexander Wendt further argues by giving the example of security dilemma that is considered as a worst-case assumption about the intention of each other and that defines interest merely with the logic of self-help. Moreover, the idea of the security community is also a construction of shared knowledge that helps resolve their problems. The security community adopts the mechanism of mutual understanding and consultation instead of going to the war.

The social constructivist scholars believe that the material things acquire meaning only through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded. In constructivist conception, the assumption of shared knowledge is imperative i.e., resources can only be gained from shared experience. The realist assumption of power politics and *realpolitik* is also disputed by constructivist scholars who argue that power politics not define the behaviour of all states. Most of the time, states are also influenced by the other ideas, viz. the rule of law and institutional cooperation. In his seminal work *Anarchy is What States Make of it* Alexander Wendt argued that wars are the result of self-fulfilling prophecies of states.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory and the Process of Securitisation**

Globalization has formed a sense of uniformity in every sphere of economic, social and political life. It is also responsible for reconstructing the traditional understanding of nation-state. In the post-Cold War era, there are discernible actors emerging in the arena of the international security system. Along with the state, organizations, individuals, global systems, NGOs, and local governments are also regarded as actors in the sphere of security (Rothschild 1995).

Buzan's seminal work *People, States, and Fear* (1983) derived 'classical Regional Security Complex Theory'. In this theory, Buzan emphasized the social aspects of security. The concept of security is cohesive and deep-rooted with five principal categories- political, societal, economic, environmental and military (Buzan et al. 1998: 24).

'Security' is thus a self-referential practice; because within this exercise, an issue becomes a security-related issue- not because a real existential threat exists, but because the problem is presented in the form of a threat. The process of security is what in language theory is called a speech act. It is the utterance itself, not the sign that is the action. By saying the words, something is done (like betting, giving a promise, naming a ship, etc.) (Ibid: 26).

Peter Chalk (1998) has further described security as invisible threats to the whole nation-state and clubbed the new term "Grey Area Phenomena." The approach has restored the traditional comprehension of the danger in the modern era. The method consists of two types of threats, violent and non-violent threats, where non-governmental process and organizations are considered as a constant peril. Starvation, hunger, pandemics and unlawful immigration are the most implicit non-violent threats. Also, the violent actors i.e. transnational crimes, syndicates, drug trafficking and terrorism are considered a threat to the stability of the sovereign states (Chalk 2000:67).

The applicability of the "Grey Area Phenomena" in Southeast Asia can be clearly seen in the turbulent history of the region. The conflictual national building, inherent conflicts, and the superpower struggle have represented a distorted portrait of stability of Southeast Asia. The increase in violent non-traditional security threats has likewise jeopardised safety and stability of the region.

In many societies, piracy was historically a common phenomenon, where it was regarded as an act of bravery, for example, the "Pirate Kingdoms" of the 8th century Southeast Asia (Young 2007:26). Other examples include the Caribbean Island of Port Royal in the

17th century (Frick 2008). We can also readily observe that the recent surge in the piracy in Somalia is the testimony of the acceptability of piracy as a profession. These are all examples of instances where piracy was and is flourishing on the fringe of civilizations.

Political factors are also one of the key factors that help in the growth of piracy. The countries which are grappling with chaos are more susceptible to piracy, as here they operate out of the reach of the instruments of legitimate state power. Lack of governance can occur either because the government is complicit in piracy, is too weak to provide sufficient security in the area, or is not concerned with the problem.

Globalization is also an important factor in the recent upsurge in the incidents of the piracy. Pirates are very much aware of the importance of global trade. Globalization also helps to equip pirates with modern information technologies and arms. These new trends of globalization tremendously change the understanding about piracy (Young 2005: 2). It is also made more relevant of to the geographical location of the region. The topography of an area or country and famous sea passes attract the pirates. The area around harbors makes vessels vulnerable to attacks while they are at anchor waiting to enter the port. (Johnson et al., 2005)

Globalization has also been one of the most important reasons for the rise registration of vessels in second countries. The process is known as Flag of Convenience (FOC) registries, the Bahamas, Liberia and Panama merchant fleets account for almost half of global merchant shipping tonnage (Upadhyaya 2010: 52). These are mostly developing and small island States. An FOC ship is a ship flying the flag of a country other than the country of ownership (Ibid). High registration fees and taxes can be avoided in this way. In some cases, the registration of a ship can even be done on-line. Registries are in some cases administered by companies and not by the flag countries. A US private company, for example, conducts Liberia's registry (Ibid.).

#### **Non-traditional Security Threats in the ASEAN Region**

Once called Balkan of East, Southeast Asia is undergoing a new kind of security riddle in the entire region (Gerstl 2008; Wei 2014). The security of the region was extremely endangered during this time of development. Certainly, China is more proactive and is prevailing in the maritime domain of Asia. China is striving to strengthen the remote Maritime connectivity to solidify its presence in the oceans of whole Asia. The expression 'Maritime Silk Route' is the most strident effort of the Chinese government in the recent years. This route is regarded a new strategic construction of dominance in the entire Asia. It is also concentrated to assure reliable connectivity and linkages between maritime routes of West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia (Chaturvedy 2014:3)

The security of ASEAN region can be divided into three groups: internal (in) security, traditional security challenges and the non-traditional security problems (Sukma 2007). The end of Cold War was seen as the most significant development in Southeast Asia. The non-traditional security threats have upsurged dramatically in the ASEAN region since last few decades. The transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, terrorism, piracy, human trafficking have become a common threat to the political and social stability. The trans-boundary security threats faced by the ASEAN countries have an interesting dimension to it. These are a complicated interrelationship between domestic predicaments, regional tests, and global necessity (Bhattacharyya, 2007:13).

The 9/11 attack is also held accountable for some other significant change in the security drift, which pushed the US to re-engage in this area. The growth of terrorism on a global level gave a boost to local separatists and rebellions to unite with them. The possibility of 'the second front' brings the US once again as an important part of the Southeast Asia.

This re-engagement helped the US to consolidate its security structure. The US also regarded pervasiveness of piracy, and maritime terrorism is an immediate threat to her homeland (Acharya and Acharya 2007).

One specific threat that is increasingly emerging as a real menace is the re-emerging spectre of maritime piracy. Although the problem has been manifesting since the late 1990s, especially in the waters of Southeast Asia, it has started assuming dangerous proportion only in the last ten years, mostly in the form of attacks perpetrated by gangs operating in and around the narrow Malacca Straits. Incidents in this region reached unprecedented proportions and started impacting the perceived viability of the main SLOCs that is of critical importance to global energy supplies, international commerce, and maritime trade in general. Moreover, the areas where pirates are rampant change quickly, and new zones of danger could quickly emerge with little prior notice (Chalk 2009: 3)

Furthermore, substantial economic growth generates more trade, which means more ships that can be victims of piracy. The increasing trade and commerce also tempt organised criminal gangs to devise ways to cut into legitimate business. Until the recent past, countering maritime piracy was a relatively low priority for most Southeast Asian nations. Greater threats, including the prospect of regional naval warfare, international drug trafficking, maritime terrorism and counterinsurgency, and policing illegal fishing and smuggling, preoccupied maritime security forces (Bradford 2008:478).

Most of the incidents of piracy depend on the existence of valuable geographical conditions, namely narrow straits to place future preys, islets, or coastal areas remote enough to escape any form of authority (Ong-Webb 2007; Murphy 2008). Not only geographical conditions are important, but also the geo-economics and political context of the countries suitably located to host piracy. Maritime piracy could indeed take roots when intensively used maritime trade routes pass nearby potential pirates' harbours located in failed or weak states.

Shipping is the largest industry in the Southeast Asian region and is essential to the efficient functioning of this region's economy. It also has potential threats to both the marine environment and social security through the consequences of shipping accidents, or the furtherance of illegal activity at sea, including piracy and armed robbery against ships. It is a largely self-regulated activity controlled at the global level through the International Maritime Organization (IMO) by flag States and ship owning interests (International Maritime Organization 2008).

### **Piracy in Southeast Asia**

The geography of Southeast Asia provides an ideal environment for piracy, and the region's pirate traditions go back virtually uninterrupted to the 5th century BC. A British traveller writing more than a century ago observed that: "as surely as spiders abound where there are nooks and corners, so have pirates sprung up wherever there is a nest of islands." More incidents are reported in this region than anywhere else. Pirates can escape easily amongst the maze of islands, reefs, shift shoals and sandbars that require intimate knowledge to be safely navigated. They can hide in the creeks, small rivers and mangrove swamps that puncture the coast, and amongst the thousands of other small craft that ply between Islands: estimates suggest that 80,000 people crossed the Malacca Strait and fished by 10,000 boats daily (Murphy 2007: 12). It is challenging to explore the history of piracy within an appropriate time, although, the problem of piracy has existed ever since the advent of a sea voyage.

Piracy also has been a local affair throughout much of the history of Southeast Asia. Most piracy occurs at the port or anchor, low-level armed robbery. In the history of Southeast



Asia, the region has remained a hot spot as far as piracy is concerned. The early history of piracy was written by the Ban Gu, a Chinese historian, who emphasised the seaborne trade route from China via Du Yuan Guo (Singapore). The kingdom of Champa, the famous Cham coast had adorned the emblem of this notorious crime during this time. A further most noteworthy dynasty of Sumatra Srivijaya was helpless to maintain their sea trade and maritime boundaries from the pirates and was forced to share revenues with pirates (Young 2006:). In Southeast Asia, several local tribes are linked to piracy. Among some local clans involved for centuries, the earliest pirates were the Illanum of the Indonesian archipelago. They operated in the sea lanes from the Philippines to the South China Sea. Other famous clans include the Balanani Pirates of the Jolo Island, the Bugs of the Sulawesi, the Riau Pirates of the Sumatra Sea, and the Dyak pirates of Borneo. These tribes constantly endangered the entire sea lanes of medieval Southeast Asia. In the colonial period, piracy flourished, especially around busy colonial trade routes where the pirates were tarnished by the European expeditions and missions (Ibid.). The first incident of piracy in the Malacca Straits was recorded in the fifth century. Piracy in Southeast Asia was seen by rulers as a legitimate activity to supplement income. This perception of piracy was changed in the early 16th century with the arrival of Europeans. (Young 2005: 2, 9, 10)

Piracy was at a high in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Dutch East India Company monopolized trade in the East Indies, which led to a decline in employment opportunities for seamen and a consequent rise in piracy. Poor small States in the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian Archipelago levied taxes on cargo or turned to piracy as an alternative source of income. Other unprotected States were themselves vulnerable to attacks. The topography and maritime nature of the area made the sea a point of easy access. By the late 18th century European trade in the East, particularly in tea, led to an increase in demand for labour. Two networks are controlled trade to and from Southeast Asia. The first was centered on the Island of Lingga, in the Malacca Straits. The second network had the Mindanao and the Sulu Sultanate (now the Southern Philippines) as core, which became a centre of piracy and slave raids, financially gaining from raids on the coasts of Borneo, Celebes (now Sulawesi), the Moluccas and the Malay Peninsula (Ibid)

Chinese merchants estimated losses to piracy in the early 1830s between US\$ 15,000 to US\$ 20,000 per year (about 2 percent of total trade). European traders did not petition the government of Britain, the governor of Singapore or the East India Company to act against piracy for fear that the cost of protective measures would mean an increase in taxes (Anderson 1997: 88-96). As a result of the lack of protection from the British government and the East India Company, Singapore merchants armed their vessels to reduce losses. In 1832, the Chinese merchants sent four sampan-pukats armed with 30 swivel guns to drive the pirates away from Singapore. In 1833, an armed brig was used as an escort for boats that were blockaded by the pirates in the port of Pahang. Finally, the Chinese merchants petitioned the British government, which sent warships to drive out the pirates. Piracy incidents were significantly reduced with the help of the British ships (Anderson 1997: 96; Frecon 2008: 23).

In 1836, a pirate base on the island of Galang near Singapore was destroyed, and expeditions led against the coastal Sultans of Borneo finally broke the Pirates' power. Political domination led to a significant decrease in piracy in Southeast Asia over this time, but after the British East India Company had established a base on Penang Island, the increase in trade led to a rise in piracy in the area and left the State of Kedah impoverished. The company created a concentration of rich targets, and poor Malay seamen and traders were left with no other alternative income than piracy. In 1874, the British changed their policy of non-

interference in local politics to protect their tin interests and, as a result, the pirate problem in Malaysian waters was brought under control. (Anderson 1997: 96-97)

It is a crucial fact that between 1750 and 1850 piracy along the Chinese coast was rampant as a result of the decline of the vast Chinese empire. Pirates were dominant and acted as auxiliaries of the Vietnamese Tay-son Emperor. A rise in piracy is often experienced where weak political control exists. After the Tay-son Empire collapsed in 1801, the Pirates were highly organised, skilled in warfare and dominated the South China Sea. Thousands of pirates formed a confederacy based on family and clan structures. They defeated Chinese naval forces and undermined European vessels, selling safe passage and kidnapping sailors for ransom. The Chinese government was busy repressing internal rebellion with the result that the piracy problem received no attention. Chinese naval forces were also poorly equipped with inefficient command structures. The pre-existing poverty and poor social conditions the local population experienced also acted as a breeding ground for piracy in this area (Young 2005: 21; Murray 1997: 62; Anderson 1997: 98-100)

Thus, piracy is a major maritime security issue in the Indo-Pacific region. Nowadays, the two most famous piracy hot spots, the Malacca Straits and the Gulf of Aden, both have conditions favourable to the emergence of piracy. Against this backdrop, Somali piracy plays the leading role today. These two hot spots of maritime piracy are located on the trade routes linking Asia to Europe. The situation in Southeast and South Asia has improved overall, but there has been a worrying increase in the number of attacks in the southern part of the South China Sea (Chow, 2009).

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