

Analysis of The Trilateral Cooperation of the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia to Safeguard the Sea and Combat Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism is one of the things that globalization has somewhat enhanced. With the sumptuous ease of access to all sorts of technologies, the non-state actor has become the very thing that many states fear for their national security. One of such cases occurs in the Philippines where it has been dealing with the Abu Sayyaf terrorists. Given the terrorist’s ability to utilize the nearby sea to its advantage, which shares borders with Malaysia and Indonesia, the Philippines was faced with a complex matter at hand. However, it doesn’t deter them, rather, they came up with a unique approach which includes its neighbors in a joint effort to fight terrorism. The article focuses on three things which it unpacks later down the road. At the start, the article begins by explaining the trilateral cooperations between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in tackling terrorism over the sea and the Philippines. In the case of its implications, terrorism also has strong implications to national stability which might worsen a lot of sectors within a state, including areas where the SDGs are needed. Such conditions occur as acts of terror that the groups carry out would result in instability that may hinder development measures. The initiative to tackle the issue in a multilateral framework further shows how crucial the issue is to tackle and also why it must include that means. The latter can be attributed to the nature of the issue that is transnational which prevents any effective single state measures.

Keywords: *Security, Southeast Asia, terrorism, trilateral cooperation*

BACKGROUND

In the ever-globalizing world, states around the world have witnessed growing interconnectedness that at times bring them closer while at other times cause conflicts to emerge. All in all, the present state of the system has shown huge interconnectedness as states have learned how beneficial it is to maintain that line of interconnectedness. That very line has brought about numerous benefits in the form of international trade and technological advances that changed the world’s idea of information, communication, and transportation. However, it is also the advancements that globalization carried that could also cause conflicts. One of the ways it does so is through indirectly enhancing non-state actors’ capacity to become a new menace in the international system. A good example of that is the rise of terrorism around the world either in their proliferation or growth in capacity. Unfortunately, the huge capacity they have to inflict terrors is not something that can be easily faced by a single state.

An example of it is present in Southeast Asia. The region has witnessed numerous cases of transnational crimes, one of them being terrorist attacks. Such a group, known as the Abu Sayyaf group, operates in the Philippines. Its terror campaigns have crossed international level as it affects other states as well. A point to be made here is how their actions have taken people from other states as its victims (BBC, 2016). In dealing with the new non-state threat, the three states have taken a multilateral approach as opposed to unilateral ones. Such approach is imbued with the aforementioned interconnectedness as the three states are working together to face an issue that affects

them as well as to attain goals that would benefit them all. This article will provide an analysis and explanation as to what the trilateral framework known as Indomalphi is, the threat it is facing, as well as its importance as another example of the spirit of multilateralism.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. National security

National security can be understood as the effort by the state to deal with its vulnerabilities and dealing with threats to its security (Leffler, 1990). National security has the state as the referent object to be protected. There are numerous dimensions of national security considering that it covers a wide spectrum of considerations, from those in the sea (maritime security), food security, economic security, etc. In attaining national security, states can either pursue the path of enhancing its own strength (through procuring objects that could improve its power like armaments) or eliminating the threat it is facing. In doing either one of the two, they can also do it with the assistance of other states. By doing so, not only they could face the threats in a comparatively easier manner, they could also strengthen their relation with other states which would be beneficial in the long run (ensuring peace with them and gaining other sets of national interests). It is not surprising therefore that states have worked along in bilateral or multilateral frameworks to maintain their security.

DISCUSSION

A. Walking over the trilateral framework of Indomalphi

The Indomalphi can be seen in two ways, regarding the issue or its status as a trilateral framework. As a trilateral framework, it shows how the three states involved in Southeast Asia can work together for a shared goal. This is interesting to mention considering the three states are regional powers in the region. Given the area of cooperation that involves an important matter of security, it is noteworthy to point out that cooperation in that field would usually involve heavy deliberations as there would be a lot to consider. The ease of cooperation could be attributed to some factors, one would be discussed following this, one, in particular, is due to the three states' ASEAN membership. The membership gives them confidence as in ASEAN they all have been working together, albeit also with other member states, on numerous occasions (Yadav, 2022). That confidence also supports the little to no threat or fear perception towards one another.

The issue became the convergent point of Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia's national interests in the maritime domain. In short, the sea is an important issue for the aforementioned states. The sea holds an important role in maintaining the national supply line (especially for archipelagic states) as well as being the vein of international trade. Moreover, the sea also holds an important role in the effort to maintain national security and defense. Given its importance, the states need to maintain maritime security and safety so as not to jeopardize the sea's role. The importance of the sea and the interest in maintaining its security are present in the Indomalphi framework. Given the threat's capacity to threaten maritime security across traditional borders, as apparent in the terrorist group's activities, it eventually came to the attention of the

Philippines, which would later be followed by Indonesia and Malaysia that actions need to be taken (Parameswaran, 2022). With a focus on the maintenance of maritime security in the Sulu and Celebes sea, waterways that are important for the three states, agreement was obtained to create it. Finally, in June 2017, the Indomalphi was finally created. The multilateral framework would encompass numerous measures to attain its ends from maritime patrol, maritime surveillance to even port visits (Apriyana, 2017).

A unique feature of the framework is how it involves the coast guard elements of the three states, Indonesia with its Bakamla RI, Malaysia with its Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and the Philippines with its Philippine Coast Guard (Sadongdong, 2022). The involvement of national coast guard units make room for more flexibility between the three states. While it is true that the threat that is being faced is armed, its non-state characteristics make it compatible to deal with using units other than the military, like the coast guard. Moreover, using the coast guard is easier as its less militaristic features make it less hostile, especially when it is being viewed by actors outside the region. This is important for the framework as given it is based in Southeast Asia, its presence is also being noted by other states outside the region which happen to have its interest there. Hence, by involving the coast guards, they may not negatively view it and it would also make it easier for the states involved to make the decision to partake in the arrangement. Not to mention it is in line with the coast guard’s role and responsibilities in the respective countries. Take Bakamla RI for example, as Indonesia’s coast guard, it has the responsibility to maintain the national maritime security and safety. Based on the rules of the head of Bakamla RI number 1 year 2020, in carrying out its duty, it can explore opportunities abroad as well, especially when it comes to the security of Indonesia national waters. The aforementioned conditions are important as to why the member states can move forward with the multilateral arrangement.

B. Maritime security and Terrorism: A mix of threat and interest

As a threat to maritime and national security, the Abu Sayyaf group can be considered so given its location and the damage it can inflict. For the former, its location and area of operations that cover territories of neighboring states (Malaysia and Indonesia) also make it viewed as a threat by the two countries aside from the Philippines. As for the latter, its capacity to threaten people and activities beyond traditional national borders makes it imperative for the aforementioned states to deal as it is against their national interests to have their actions disrupted.

Despite not possessing the same capacity as that of traditional threats, terrorist groups like Abu Sayyaf could inflict considerable damage and terror. In the Philippines, they are famous for conducting acts of terror in the form of kidnapping to bombings (Atamimi & Azzqy, 2020). Their area of operation also has exceeded Philippine’s territory. In recent times, they have taken their action on the sea where they would commit kidnapping and demand ransoms for the release of the hostages. Such actions, should they be left undealt with, would harm the sea and region’s stability. A threat to those matters would not be something any of the three states wish to have. Not only it would threaten the security of any activities in the sea, but it would also attract negative views from the international community as they would be deemed incapable of upholding their maritime security. In the domestic stage, the actions they committed

could also threaten domestic stability which could lead to numerous problems in the long run, from the incapacity to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to endangering numerous dimensions of national security.

Hence, it is important for an effective measure to eradicate the threat to be made. However, given their non-state nature, it is difficult to completely erase them considering how easy it is for them to disperse and be present at another time. Against this backdrop, the Indomalphi is present to accommodate the three states' desire to deal with such non-state threats as well as protect their maritime security.

C. The chosen path of multilateralism

The Indomalphi is a good example of multilateralism at work. As elaborated earlier, maritime security and safety are important parts of the three states' national interests. However, when faced with the new threat of terrorism on the horizon, a transnational and non-traditional threat, they realized that it was too difficult to face it on their own (Rinjani, 2022). This is apparent in how the Abu Sayyaf group does not operate exclusively in any part of a single state's territory, rather it involves the waterways of Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia. Hence, it is a rational choice for the member states to work together to attain the shared goals. Especially upon noting how effective the trilateral framework has worked.

Another interesting implication the trilateral framework has on the three states, as well as on the region, is how it positively supports the region's regional security and stability. While the explanation for the former can be seen in the previous discussion point, the latter can be elaborated through Buzan's regional security complex theory. Apart from the theory's coverage of regional security and stability, it also posits some factors that contribute to those ends. One of them is the importance of the pattern of amity and enmity between the states, especially those considered as the regional powers, in the region. What is meant by that pattern is how relations between states in a region affect a region's dynamics and eventually its stability and security. Should relations between the states be antagonistic or filled with enmity, it would then have negative implications for the region as it would make them prone to conflicts. The same also applies to the opposite scenario.

Returning to the case of the Indomalphi, that pattern of amity and enmity can be seen to be positively affected by it. The framework supports positive relations by giving the leeway for all three states to deliberate upon the means to attain the agreed goals. While it is true that the main threat that's being faced emanates from the Abu Sayyaf group, there are also other threats to maritime security and safety out in the open sea that all three states can benefit from their absence (Espeña, 2020). It can be in the form of trafficking, illegal oil siphoning or even pirating done by other groups. Against that backdrop of crimes, the trilateral maritime patrol was made to secure the Sulu and Celebes Sea. By partaking in that patrol, the member states would enhance their coordination during patrols on the sea and information sharing. In tackling the transnational threat in the sea, covering the water is not the only and adequate solution. The air over the sea is also a domain that matters in the attempt to ensure maritime security. The three member states are well aware of this as they have made it one of their means which is the trilateral air patrol (TAP). Similar to the maritime joint patrol,

the combined available air force of the three states would be a great support to maritime security. That is because through doing so, not only would it allow the states to obtain better and more accurate information, it also allows them to mobilize resources as they have each other to rely on. With that laid out, it is not surprising that the efforts that all three states have made can also work on other sorts of threat in that particular waterways.

The multilateral framework also allows the states to engage in defence diplomacy as well, especially because the framework operates on the security domain. A good example of defence diplomacy that the framework paves their way for is the many port visits and joint training the three states have been involved in. The trilateral port visits and joint training serve as an important means for the states involved to enhance trust and understanding. Activities like port visit and joint training allow them to understand the relevant institutions' capacity and ways of work as well as enhancing that very capacity. Those benefits are in line with the defence diplomacy's purpose of capacity building (joint training) and confidence building measure (port visits) (Chaer et al., 2021). The many benefits the framework can bring, along with its central area of focus, make it an important matter to its member states which in return make them more committed to it in the long run. That way, it can be understood how the framework strengthens the 3 regional powers relations positively as it enhances the pattern of amity.

CONCLUSION

The development and dynamics of the international system have brought around numerous challenges. One of which is the rise of terrorism including in Southeast Asia. In the case of the Abu Sayyaf group, it has shown its capacity to threaten numerous states despite being a non-state actor. The states involved (Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines) have made the necessary move to work together to tackle the issue by forming the Indomalphi trilateral cooperation. The trilateral framework fits the bill, especially in facing the terrorist group, as not only it allows the three states to match their ability to go around numerous territories, it also allows the states to make use of their combined strength as well. Moreover, as a multilateral framework, it also has a set of positive implications for the involved parties as it serves as a medium for defence diplomacy and other positive interactions that could strengthen their ties as well as contributing to the region's stability.

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