

Maritime Insecurities in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas

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Subject Area: *International Relations*

Abstract

The increase in the threat of crime in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas in recent years has caused the countries bordering the two seas, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, to agree to form a trilateral cooperation called INDOMALPHI in 2016. The 2017 attack on Marawi City, Philippines, by a group affiliated with an international terrorist network has added to the security vulnerabilities in the Sulawesi and Sulu Seas. Despite being constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, trilateral cooperation continues with all its limitations, namely through online meetings. Until 2022, through the Ministry of Defense, the three countries will strengthen the trilateral cooperation agreed in Malaysia again. This study uses a maritime insecurity concept framework with a qualitative approach that uses a literature study data collection method consisting of books, journal articles, official ASEAN websites, and online news sites. The results of the study show that there are still threats that cause maritime insecurity, which encourages the strengthening of trilateral cooperation by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in 2022 in order to realize maritime security in the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea regions.

Keywords: *Maritime Security; Trilateral Cooperative Agreement; Indonesia; Malaysia; Philippines; INDOMALPHI.*

Introduction

The three countries' border areas between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have a high level of security vulnerability, especially in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. Therefore, the three countries need to increase vigilance and security in the region, one of which is through trilateral cooperation between the three countries. The intersection between the Sulawesi Sea and the Sulu Sea is divided into the jurisdictions of the three bordering countries. Parts of the Sulawesi Sea are under Indonesian jurisdiction. The other part is the territorial sea and falls under the jurisdiction of the Philippines. In addition, there is a small part of the territory that is the territorial sea and jurisdiction of Malaysia. Meanwhile, most of the Sulu Sea area is the territorial sea of the Philippines, and only a small part is the territorial sea of Malaysia (Arifin et al., 2018).

Since March 2016, incidents of piracy and piracy accompanied by kidnapping and demands for ransom have continued to target ships passing through the Sulu Sea (Dirgantara et al., 2020). Responding to threats to the security of the waters of the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines made a joint declaration regarding maritime security on May 5, 2016 in Yogyakarta (Rahman, 2019). The meeting

emphasized joint patrol efforts by the three countries. Second, steps to be taken when an incident occurs in the border area. Third, the exchange of information quickly. In addition, hotlines will be opened at crisis centers in the three countries (Kresna, 2016). On May 26-27, 2016, a Joint Working Group was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, consisting of military representatives of the three countries who agreed to form a joint working group, adopt the concept of a cooperative regulatory framework and SOP for coordinated maritime patrols (Pratiwi, 2020).

Furthermore, discussions on this cooperation plan continued on June 20, 2016. At the meeting, it was stated that the concept of coordinated patrol operations in the Malacca Straits (Malacca Straits Patrol) could be adopted and applied to coordinated maritime patrols and air patrols in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. The Defense Ministers of the three countries agreed to carry out coordinated maritime patrols, provide assistance for the safety of people and ships, exchange information, establish communication hotlines, and finalize Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) (Rahman, 2019). On June 19, 2017, the trilateral cooperation was officially launched, which carried out several military-based cooperation, including the Maritime Command Center, Trilateral Maritime Patrol, Trilateral Air Patrol, and Port Visits (Atamimi & Azzqy, 2020).

On June 19, 2017, an agreement was reached to start maritime patrol cooperation, which began with the establishment of the Maritime Command Center and the maiden voyage of the INDOMALPHI Trilateral Maritime Patrol in Tarakan, North Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. In addition, the integration of ground patrols and exercises. Thus, this activity is a comprehensive example of providing security guarantees for fishermen, ship traffic, and the exploration of natural resource wealth in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas (Pratiwi, 2020). On July 13-14, 2021, the 15th INDOMALPHI Joint Working Group on Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (JWG on TCA) took place online. This meeting discussed the implementation and operationalization of the TCA cooperation framework between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in the form of steps to address security issues in the maritime area, which are a common concern. In addition, this meeting also discussed SOPs and Operating Guidelines (Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, 2021). Then, on October 6-7, 2021, the 16th INDOMALPHI JWG on TCA will be held online. This meeting aims to discuss the implementation and operationalization of the continuation of the TCA cooperation framework between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines in an effort to address security and stability issues in the maritime area, which are a common concern, one of which is fighting terrorism (Direktorat Jenderal Strategi Pertahanan Kemhan RI, 2021).

In 2022, at the TCA Ministerial Meeting between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines (INDOMALPHI) in Malaysia, which was attended by the Indonesian Minister of Defense Prabowo Subianto, Senior Minister of Defense Malaysia Yb Dato' Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein and Secretary of National Defense of The Republic of The Philippines H.E. Delfin N. Lorenzana. During the meeting four points were agreed upon, among them optimizing the MCC communication process in Tawau, Tawi-Tawi and Tarakan which aims to exchange information, monitor, and carry out effective sea and air surveillance activities, and accelerating the deployment of the permanent Trilateral Maritime Patrol Liaison Officer (TMP LO) at the MCC of each country. Second, continue to increase the presence of the three countries in regional waters, which includes the implementation of maritime exercises to strengthen the joint show of force. Third, the

involvement of intelligence in future TCA surveillance operations to ensure productivity and accuracy in anticipating the activities of transnational criminal networks in the region. Fourth, increase strategic engagement and commitment among the three countries through continuous improvement of TCA structure, communication, and coordination (Imam, 2022).

Literature Review

In previous studies related to the INDOMALPHI trilateral cooperation agreement in the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea areas, it can be divided into four views, namely international cooperation, maritime security, constructivism, and argumentative articles. In view of international cooperation, Tan describes the process of regionalizing defense relations in Southeast Asia from the Cold War to the current situation (Tan, 2012). Febrica argues that the decision between Indonesia and the Philippines is a calculation between sovereignty and the implementation of costs and benefits, as well as the degree of control over the outcome of the cooperation between the two countries (Febrica, 2014). Meanwhile, Weiss argues that bilateral mechanisms have a greater role than multilateral cooperation in terms of daily functions and specific arrangements for relations between Indonesia and Malaysia (Weiss, 2010). On the other hand, de Castro is of the view that the Philippines and Malaysia have had an abnormal bilateral relationship in the last four decades. The two countries had to close their embassies several times until diplomatic relations were fully established in May 1964. This is due to the development of territorial disputes in the Sabah region (de Castro, 2010). Bakti is of the opinion that relations between Indonesia and the Philippines are in good condition. Since the formation of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and the Philippines on November 24, 1949, bilateral relations between the two countries have never experienced turbulence (Bhakti, 2010). Thus, the view of international cooperation argues that the relationship between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines is dominated by bilateral relations, which have an important role in overcoming the issues that arise.

In view of maritime security, Pratomo explained the development of issues related to the establishment of maritime borders between Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as future relations between the two countries (Pratomo, 2016). Meanwhile, Alverdian, Joas & Tynkkynen argue that the prospects for implementing multilevel governance in maritime security in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas include aspects of interdependence in the maritime environment (Alverdian et al., 2020). The conclusion from the perspective of maritime security is that the border areas between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines are quite sensitive because they are related to the realization of maritime security in these border areas. In a constructivist view, Prasetya, Haffsari & Estriani explain Indonesia's approach to territorial disputes in the Southeast Asian region during the reign of Joko Widodo (Prasetya et al., 2020). While there are two argumentative articles, namely, O'Brien argues that the reasons for fluctuations in criminal activity versus terrorists of the Abu Sayyaf group from 1991 to August 2011 can be identified based on four categories, including leadership, structure, membership, grievances, and relationships with other actors (O'Brien, 2012). Meanwhile, DeVantier, Alcalá & Wilkinson explained the environmental and socioeconomic impacts as well as the root causes of the Sulu and Sulawesi

Seas, to provide future forecasts up to 2020. In addition, recommend alternative policies that lead to amelioration through sustainable management and development (DeVantier et al., 2004).

Based on the above literature review, there are no articles that specifically discuss the maritime insecurities in Sulu and Sulawesi Seas and that relevance to trilateral cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Thus, the research question that the researcher raises is "Why are the three countries strengthening cooperation again in 2022?". In answering this question, the researcher uses the maritime insecurities conceptual framework by Bueger and Larsen. The research systematics is divided into five sections, namely introduction, literature review, research methods, discussion, and conclusions

Methodology

The concept of maritime security lies between traditional and non-traditional security groups. Meanwhile, traditional security groups emphasize military factors. Meanwhile, non-traditional security groups put the concept of maritime security in a concept that is too broad to lose focus (Keliat, 2009). Maritime security has broader dimensions beyond traditional views. Maritime security connects several issues through existing security concepts and adapts to contemporary issues that are currently emerging (Tertia & Perwita, 2018). Maritime security refers to aspects of the Navy's strategy related to the protection of national maritime borders and strategic trading points at sea (Mudric, 2016; Pradityo, 2021). Maritime security is a concept that refers to the absence of all kinds of threats at sea with the aim of creating stability and order in the sea area (Bueger, 2015). Maritime security can also be understood as a concept related to maritime area security which consists of a set of policies, regulations, actions, and operations to secure the maritime area (Germond, 2015).

Contemporary maritime security challenges go beyond the focus of traditional realism groups that emphasize military and geostrategic power. In addition, beyond the focus of the norms and institutions of the law of the sea. Maritime security is increasingly understood as a complex and interrelated security concept that has global, regional, and national significance (Bueger et al., 2019). According to Percy, there are three issues that define maritime security, including conventional security issues that emphasize the importance of geostrategic issues, for example access to natural resources, freedom of transit by sea and so on. The second issue, namely security issues caused by violations of regulations such as piracy and smuggling. Furthermore, security issues are caused by unclear regulations such as the Flag of Convenience (FOC) issue, lack of fishing regulations and so on (Percy, 2018 in Bueger & Larsen, 2020).

There is no specific definition that can explain maritime insecurity because maritime threats continue to evolve from year to year (Limo, 2012 in Sackey et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Bueger and Larsen analyze various types of maritime insecurity, including piracy, terrorism, various forms of smuggling, environmental crimes, illegal fishing, and critical maritime infrastructure (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). Furthermore, the writer will analyze the variables above to answer the research questions. The key to understanding qualitative research lies in the notion that everything is socially constructed by individuals who interact with the world. Qualitative research is an attempt to understand the unique situation of a particular context and the interactions that occur, so the analysis of qualitative research is necessary to seek a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2002). The essential features of qualitative research include the proper selection of methods and theories,

introduction and analysis from various perspectives, researchers' reflections as part of the knowledge production process, as well as a variety of approaches and methods to be used in research (Flick, 2014).

Data collection methods in qualitative research consist of in-depth interviews and observations, the use of documents, Focus Group Discussions, and audio-visual methods. Following developments in the fields of technology, communication, and information, other methods can also influence the field of social science research (Rachmawati, 2017). In this paper, researchers will use data collection methods using documents or literature consisting of books, scientific journal articles, and news articles, especially from online media. Furthermore, researchers will triangulate the data that has been collected using various perspectives on research to answer research questions (Flick, 2014).

Result and Discussion

Piracy

Piracy was still a risk for seafarers in history, but now it has become an urgent global governance issue with the emergence of Somali pirates in 2008. The Malacca Strait has been a pirate-prone area since the 1990s, and cases of pirates increased in the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of the African continent in 2010 (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). The vulnerability to crime in the Sulu Sea and Sulawesi Sea areas is pirates coming from the Abu Sayyaf Group¹. The hostage taking carried out by the Abu Sayyaf group is an act of piracy, which is a crime using violence, illegal detention or destruction carried out for personal gain on the high seas (Pratiwi, 2020).

In the 2014-2016 period, boat users were kidnapped in the waters bordering Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Abduction cases are not only experienced by the three countries but also by Foreign Citizens outside the Southeast Asia region, thus making this issue an international issue (Rezky, 2018). There was an increase in acts of hostage-taking, consisting of 5 cases of kidnapping with 9 victims in 2014. Then, in 2015 there were 3 cases of kidnapping with 19 victims, and in 2016 there were 10 cases of kidnapping with 48 victims (Rahmat & Rusdiyanta, 2021). ASG has become the dominant kidnapper and sea pirate actor in the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea regions. ASG benefited from the ransom of US\$ 7.3 million (Ramos, 2017).

Based on data from the ReCAAP Information Sharing Center, in 2016, there were 10 attacks and six attempted attacks in the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea areas. In 2017, assault incidents decreased to three assaults and four attempted assaults. In the first half of 2018, only one attempted attack was reported. Thus, in the 2016-2018 period, there were 13 attacks that resulted in 61 crew members being kidnapped, 28 crew members being released (after the ransom was paid by the ship owner), 17 crew members being rescued, seven crew members died and nine crew members being taken hostage (Storey, 2018).

¹ The Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) was founded around 1990 by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani. In 1988, Janjalani reportedly met Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and fought together against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. After that, Janjalani developed his mission to turn the southern Philippines into an Islamic state. After returning to the Philippines from the Middle East permanently, Janjalani recruited members of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) disillusioned with his organization, to become the forerunners of the ASG. The ex-MNLF is known to be more radical in its ideology of establishing an independent Islamic state. The Abu Sayyaf Group is based around the southern islands of the Philippines, such as Jolo and Basilan, with around 400 followers until 2015, led by Isnilon Hapilon (DW, 2016).

In 2020, in Lahad Datu, Sabah, Malaysia, eight Indonesian citizens worked for fishing companies in Sandakan, Malaysia. Three people were freed by the kidnappers, and five others were taken by speed boat to the Philippines. The kidnapping group is still under the control of ASG led by Salip Murah and Mike Apo continues to target valuable targets around the maritime border between Sabah, Malaysia, and Tawi-Tawi, Philippines, along with other small islands (Ralon, 2020). The Philippine Coast Guard recommended lowering the threat of kidnapping crew members for ransom in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas from “High Potential” to “Moderate”. The moderate threat level means that an incident is still possible but relatively not severe. This assessment is based on the perception that the Philippine government continues land military operations that reduce the power of criminals to commit crimes at sea, although there are still remnants of terrorist groups on Basilan Island, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, Philippines (ReCAAP, 2022). Looking at the cases above, the threat of piracy in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas has not completely disappeared, and terrorist groups are still being detected with the potential to commit piracy against passing ships. Increasing joint vigilance by Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines is an important part of efforts to reduce maritime insecurity in the region.

Terrorism

Terrorism and piracy have connections that are interconnected and support each other, which makes terrorism a maritime insecurity that can be said to be a net of criminality. ASG is a group that often commits kidnappings and piracy in the Southeast Asian region. The activities carried out by the ASG are often referred to as piracy in general (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). The Sulu and Sulawesi Seas are synonymous with ASG tactics, namely kidnapping for ransom, which began to be carried out frequently after the death of Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani, which resulted in the worsening of the financial connections between ASG and Al-Qaeda. In addition, the ASG also utilizes asymmetrical maritime capabilities to control the flow of militant terrorists, logistics, and funding. ASG also took advantage of the shallow waters and mangroves in the area to trick security forces. ASG often kidnaps and pirates using small boat to avoid detection by satellite systems and reduce the accuracy of visibility by ships or patrol aircraft (Yeo et al., 2021).

The ASG is the main channel connecting Malaysian and Indonesian militants with local armed rebel groups, including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Zulkifli Marwan, a member of the Malaysian Mujahidin Association (KMM), trained BIFF members in making bombs. Meanwhile, Mahmud Ahmad, a Malaysian citizen, facilitated the formation of Daulah Islamiyah in the southern Philippines, which initiated the attack on Marawi, Philippines, in 2017 (Oreta, 2023). Apart from ASG, the threat from Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) is still significant today. Hazani Ghazali, Sabah Police Commissioner, stated that in 2021, Sabah will still be a region for recruitment, transit, and fundraising for JI members. Between 2014 and 2020, 83 people were arrested in Sabah allegedly involved in JI activities. A total of 38 Malaysian citizens, 39 Filipino citizens, and eight Indonesian citizens (Yeo et al., 2021). At present, Mindanao is the main battleground for the Islamic State (IS) in Southeast Asia. Militants coming to Mindanao were smuggled via the Sulu Archipelago, Sangihe, or Palawan Island in order to participate in the attack on Marawi, Philippines. After the Marawi Attack, the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea areas are still important for terrorist

groups in Mindanao to survive. Foreign fighters around the world continue to enter Mindanao to support the struggles of the ASG, Maute Group, Ansharul Khilafah Philippines, and BIFF (Yeo et al., 2021).

Smuggling

Based on a study conducted by Bueger and Larsen, the cross-regional typology of crime can promote an understanding of several things related to the mechanisms surrounding organized crime and forms of smuggling at sea that are interconnected, leading to a conceptual framework as an analysis of maritime insecurity (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). Illegal narcotics smuggling in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas is inseparable from the role of the Abu Sayyaf group, because it is linked to the Hong Kong dealer network. Furthermore, the narcotics were distributed to the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries by sea (Rantung, 2020). Demand for methamphetamines has increased since 1998, and there are concerns that materials for methamphetamines are being smuggled into the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea areas in order to support local production of methamphetamines. The Sulawesi Sea is the connecting location for drug smugglers, with the route connecting the southern part of Mindanao Island (including General Santos City, Philippines) to the Sangihe, Karakelong and Sarangani Islands in North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. This area is the illegal landing site for small boats used for narcotics smuggling (Amling et al., 2019).

In addition, there is illegal arms smuggling, which is a vulnerability for the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea areas. This is supported by conflict areas in Mindanao, the Southern Philippines, and Pattani, Thailand. The Sulu Islands also allow smuggling to occur because they have many markets at almost every stop, making it easier for couriers. On the other hand, the location of the Sulu Islands is also the starting point for Sandakan, which is the center of the Sulu Sultanate in Sabah, Malaysia (Rantung, 2020). The supply of Small Arms and Light Weapon) is a threat to security in the region because it encourages criminal acts such as theft and armed robbery, which contributed to the armed conflict in Marawi City, Philippines, in 2017. The Sulu and Mindanao Islands are centers of the illegal arms trade in the Philippines. Armed groups steal weapons or buy them from military personnel in Mindanao, which they resell for economic gain. In addition, locally made weapons were also smuggled by sea from Danao, Cebu, to Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao. Furthermore, these homemade weapons are distributed to Sulawesi via the City of General Santos or to meet local demand. Meanwhile, homemade weapons from Sabah, Malaysia, were also found in the Philippines (Amling et al., 2019).

Wildlife smuggling is also a threat in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. In 2019, an animal smuggling syndicate planned to smuggle 3,300 pig-nosed turtles to Malaysia by ship. However, the action was thwarted by the local Coast Guard/Marine Security Agency. On the other hand, the Philippine security forces managed to thwart the smuggling of large shells worth US\$ 5 million. Other fauna found to be illegal commodities include pangolins, shark fins, and others (Makoni, 2021). Ports in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines form a route for the illegal trade of transoceanic wildlife originating from other countries to Asian markets. As many as 35,000 Sunda Pangolins were found during confiscations from 2010 to 2015. On the other hand, there is illegal trade in timber originating from Indonesia, especially teak, which is in great demand by western countries. The mode of smuggling is through the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas using container ships and aircraft

cargo. In addition, wildlife smugglers also use small boats to travel through small islands that are not detected by local security forces (Amling et al., 2019).

Environmental Crime and Illegal Fishing

In the context of maritime insecurity, environmental crimes include activities related directly and indirectly to a variety of issues, including extraction of natural resources, illegal fishing, coal smuggling, oil theft, and hunting of wildlife. The topic of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing is the main focus, in line with the findings of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime that illegal fishing activities are related to other maritime crimes, namely human trafficking, drug smuggling, and weapons smuggling (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). The issue of organized IUU fishing has been detrimental economically, socially, and ecologically in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas (Pratiwi, 2020). Based on research by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Sulu Sea is still a hotspot for illegal fishing. After 2015, there were additional illegal fishing locations located in the interior of the Philippine Sea, including the Bohol and Visayan Seas (Wilcox et al., 2021). On the other hand, issues also arise when fishermen who catch fish illegally are not equipped with legal documents (Taufika, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas have experienced significant loss or fragmentation of forest cover, coastal vegetation, mangroves, seaweed, and coral reefs. In addition, there is a significant decrease in forests, mangroves, and fisheries (illegal catching of marine mammals, turtles, and shellfish). This causes changes in community structure and ecosystem productivity as well as a reduction in ecosystem services. The Sulu and Sulawesi Seas are priority areas for the world to immediately issue conservation initiatives. This is due to the location of the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, which are at the center of world tropical biodiversity and surrounded by population growth and rapidly deteriorating ecosystem conditions (DeVantier et al., 2004).

Maritime Critical Infrastructures

The central issue of maritime insecurity is inseparable from the protection of important infrastructure, including Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC), chokepoints, and maritime installations such as data cables, ports, and Navy bases (Bueger & Larsen, 2020). SLOCs located in the Southeast Asian region include the Malacca Strait (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore), the Lombok Strait (Indonesia), the Sunda Strait (Indonesia), and the South China Sea (Laimou-Maniati, 2000). The Sulu Sea is directly related to the Sulawesi Sea, which is the entrance to the Indonesian Archipelago Sea Channel (ALKI II), which is connected to the Makassar Strait, the Flores Sea, and the Lombok Strait to the Indian Ocean. ALKI II as well, and vice versa (Saraswati et al., 2020). The Lombok Strait is geographically located between the islands of Bali and Lombok, which are in the southern part of Indonesia, in the Indonesian Archipelago Sea Channel (ALKI II). The Lombok Strait is also an important route because it is often used by sailing ships both from Indonesia and foreign ships and international transportation routes (Sea Lane of Transportation/SLOT). In addition, ALKI II is also a second alternative door for Indonesia to conduct trade because of its strategic route for shipping ships to East Asia (Anwar, 2021; Arvianissa & Fitriani, 2018; Saraswati et al., 2020). The ALKI II route functions

for shipping that passes through the Lombok Strait, Flores Sea, Makassar Strait, Sulawesi Sea (connected with the Sulu Sea), and vice versa (Idhom, 2021; Saraswati et al., 2020).

The Lombok Strait is also one of four chokepoints (the Malacca Strait, the Sunda Strait, and the Makassar Strait). Chokepoints are narrow channels that are used as world energy trade routes, which are an important part of global energy security due to the high volume of petroleum and other energy sources transported through these routes (Arvianissa & Fitriani, 2018). ALKI II, which connects the Indian Ocean and the Sulawesi Sea through the Lombok Strait, provides the situation in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas important to avoid maritime insecurity.

Important maritime infrastructure in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, namely ports. Ports are an important aspect of the success of the blue economy in the Southeast Asian region, including the Sulu and Sulawesi Sea regions. In the view of the Blue Economy, utilizing innovative ways is an important way to generate more benefits for life. In addition, protecting the quality of marine resources is an important aspect of the Blue Economy. The activities related to maritime protection are the result of port development. Therefore, the Blue Economy must be based on sustainable port governance and integration (Zhang & Ravesteijn, 2019).

This view is in line with the declaration of ASEAN leaders at the 38th ASEAN Summit on October 26, 2021 in Vietnam, which stated that ASEAN is committed to prioritizing regional cooperation related to the Blue Economy. In addition, they agreed to explore Blue Economy cooperation, including protection of the maritime environment, IUU Fishing, protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, marine pollution, maritime transportation, security in navigation, marine knowledge, marine energy, and others (ASEAN, 2021). Therefore, the ports located in the Sea of Sulu and Sulawesi need attention and protection from all threats in order to support the blue economy in the region.

Conclusion

In order to realize maritime security in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines must be able to overcome threats that can cause maritime insecurity in the region. Terrorism, which is closely related to piracy with ransom, is a priority aspect that must be addressed by the three countries. Even though the threat level of terrorism and ship piracy has decreased in the past 2 years, this does not eliminate these crimes because there is still a possibility that they will occur in the future. In addition, there are still other transnational crimes that cause maritime insecurity in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas. Therefore, strengthening cooperation again between the three countries is significant and should be followed up on and implemented so that effective maritime security in the Sulu and Sulawesi Seas can be realized.

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