The Significance of ASEAN Regional MDA Infrastructure in South China Sea Conflict

June 27, 2024

CDR Bagus Jatmiko, MSDA, PhD (Cand.), IDN; Admiral (Ret.) Prof. DR. Marsetio
Department of Information Sciences, Naval Postgraduate School, US;
Indonesian Defense University, Indonesia
Paper Presentation

Agenda

I. Problem Background

II. Research Question and Methods

III. The Concept of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

IV. The Comprehensive MDA in the Southeast Asia

V. Strategies for Enhancing Comprehensive MDA in the Region

- Enhancing Governance Model and Legal Framework
- Increasing International Cooperation and Collaboration
- Bridging Fragmented Maritime Architecture
- Inclusion of All Stakeholders
- Leveraging Advanced Technologies
- Development of Proper Narratives

VI. Conclusions

Problem Background

- South China Sea is in the heart of the Southeast Asia maritime environment is one of the vital maritime shipping lanes that contains one-third of the maritime global trade volume (Schrag, 2017)

- Disruption to the area would have tremendous impact on regional and global economic security and stability (Felsen-Parsons et al., 2020)

- South China Sea has appeared to be one of the hotspots of global conflict between China's unilateral claim over the region with other disputant countries, most of them are ASEAN member countries.

- Heightened tension emerges as a spectrum of conflict that may disrupt the security and stability of the region and global.

- Raised Awareness for the crucial role of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the region, particularly to address the increased gray zone activities

Picture source: Sovereignlimits.com
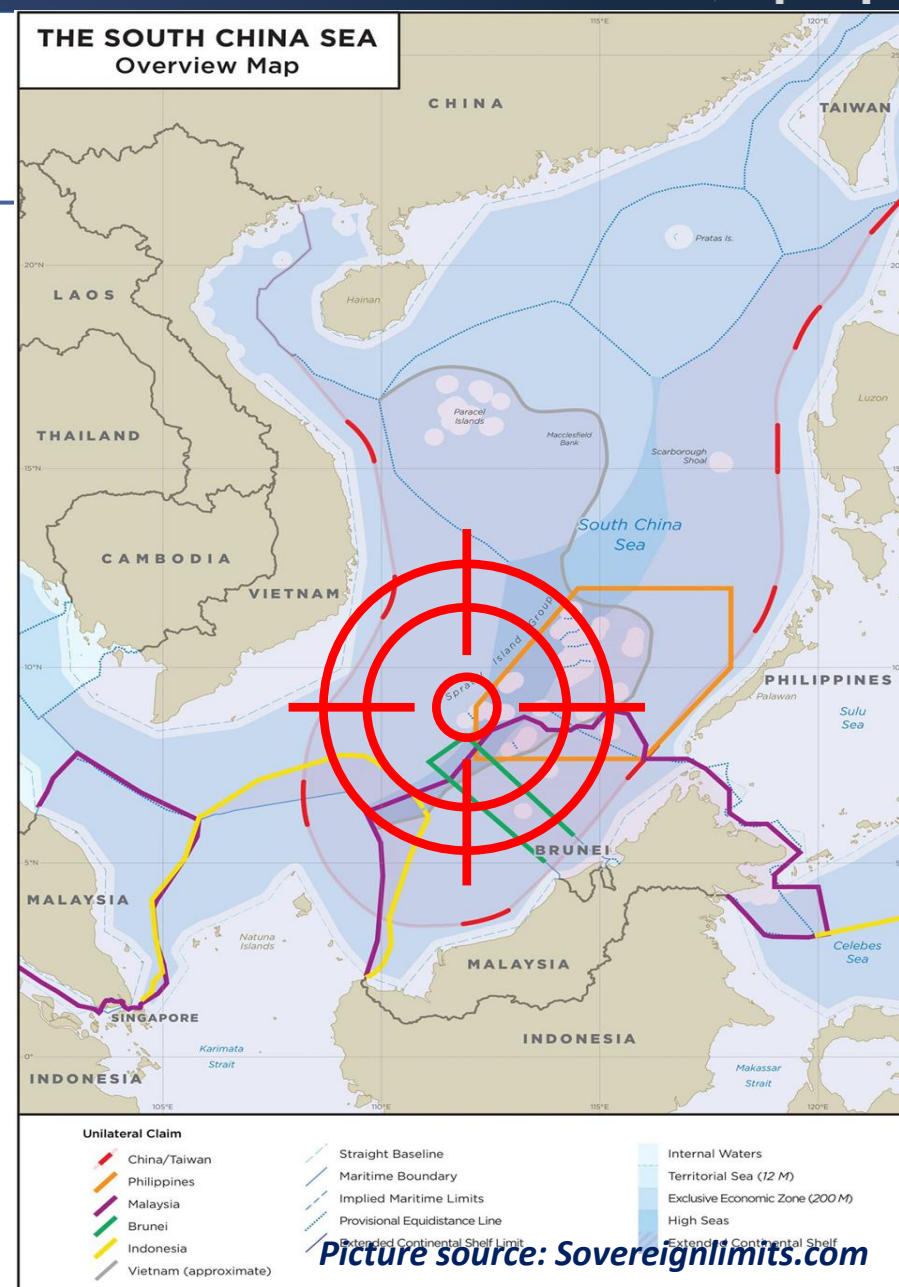
MDA Concept

"Effective understanding of anything associated with the maritime domain that has an impact on the security , safety, economy, or environment" (Department of Homeland Security, 2005; IMO, 2018).

- Gained momentum in the early 2000s with the emergence of global maritime security threats.

- Became significant for reasons of increased threats, technological advancement, necessity of larger scale maritime cooperation, enabling more effective and efficient maritime law enforcement (Bueger, 2015).

- A comprehensive MDA capability should be supported by integrated and coordinated resources and infrastructures along with information sharing function (Bueger& Edmunds, 2024)

- Threefold advantages: ability to allocate resources, recognize maritime capacities, and comprehend current maritime trend (Agastia & Perwita, 2017).

- There are notable technological and socio-political Challenges (Bueger, 2015)

Comprehensive MDA in the Southeast Asia

What is known:

- Some MDA initiatives in the region have developed as part of wider response to address the emerging maritime threats, including gray zone activities in the South China Sea (Bueger & Edmunds, 2024; Guan & Koh, 2022)

- The challenges include the ambiguous nature of the gray-zone activities and the opaque characteristics of the region (lack of information regarding activities). Hence MDA may not be able to fully address all dimensions of threats (Bueger, 2020).

- The fragmented architecture of maritime domain capabilities (Jackson et al., 2016) refer to trust and confidence issue, ISR caps gap, and the addition of complex relationship with China.

- It makes the stability and security arduous to sustain.

- It presents vulnerabilities to illicit activities and exploitation even from state actors employing gray-zone operations.

What is expected:

- Requires holistic perspective framing with the inclusion of all stakeholders (Agastia et al., 2024)

- Enhanced comprehensive regional MDA enables capabilities to monitor and provide more information, mitigating the opaqueness of the region.

- The established MDA enabled centers in the region should be integrated in comprehensive and concerted effort to address the emerging maritime threats

- Supporting political, strategic, operational, international cooperation (Bueger & Edmund, 2024), and holistic cross-sectoral stakeholders' involvement are expected (Agastia et al., 2024)

Strategy 1. Enhancing governance model and legal framework

The confidence-building mechanisms between maritime between maritime security forces (MDA centers) are less developed (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 202)


These MDA initiatives should adapt their governance model and legal framework to allow more comprehensive collaboration and confidence security building measures (CSBMs) (Bueger & Edmunds, 2024)
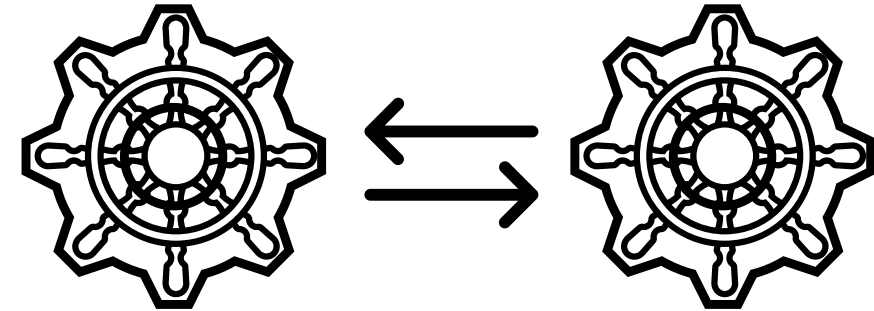
- Extensive Information-sharing to integrate collected data and information
- Harmonization of framework required to establish a strong regional MDA initiatives

Strategy 2. Increasing International Cooperation and Collaboration

- ASEAN, as an organization and its member countries should look more into increasing cooperation and seek collaboration with international partners or entities to enhance MDA caps (Coyne, 2019).

- An effective way to enhance capabilities in relatively short time

- The Quad and EU offer advanced technological capabilities, expertise, and resources (Do, 2023)

- Mitigate the ISR capabilities gap

The Quad

EU
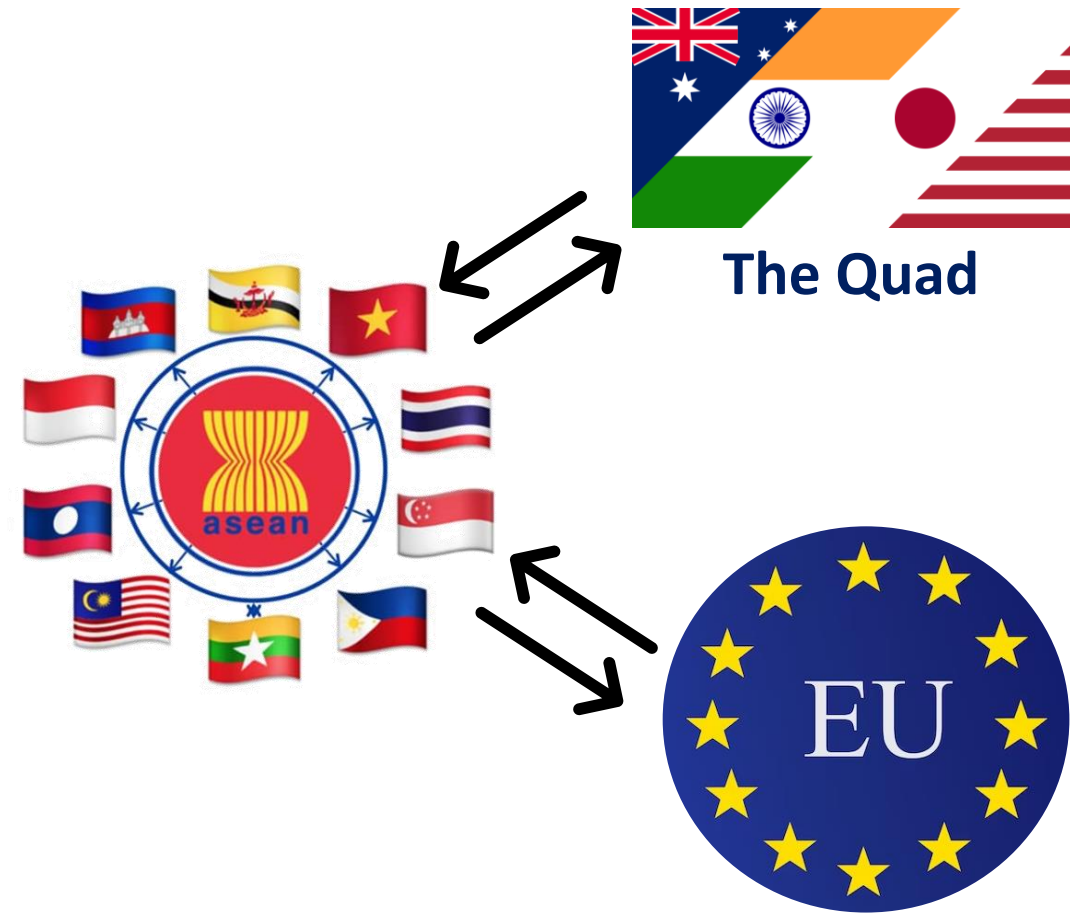
Strategy 3. Bridging Fragmented Maritime Architecture

- **Fragmented due to the diverse socio-economic and political perspective (Edwards, 2022)**

- **It will be a complex challenge with multifaceted approach (Boşilcă et al., 2022)**

1. **MDA should level the uneven MDA capabilities and the lack of interoperability with common standard and protocols**

2. **A medium to foster collaboration and communication**

3. **Holistic approach encompasses traditional (diplomatic mission, dialogues) and non-traditional (leveraging technologies) approaches.**

Strategy 4. Inclusion of All Stakeholders

The role of the private sector and other stakeholders outside public sector (government)

Are often overlooked for several reasons:

- Security concerns,
- Lack of trust and communication,
- Differing priorities
- Limited understanding of the private sector capabilities (Boşilcă et al, 2022).

Despite their footprints in maritime activities.

- The inclusion of all stakeholders is an equally important approach to actualizing a comprehensive picture of the South China Sea (Boşilcă et al., 2022; Bueger & Edmunds, 2024)
- Also related to the effort of bridging the regional fragmented maritime architecture.
- Involving government agencies, maritime industry and private sector, academia, and civil society organization (Agastia, 2021)
- Interdependence of maritime stakeholders and their infrastructures is crucial to establish maritime security, particularly MDA capabilities (Bueger & Liebetrau, 2023)

Strategy 5. Leveraging Advanced Technologies

- Technology gap between the MDA center in the region under different entities, countries or organizations

- The advancement of technologies can be expected to support a comprehensive and holistic depiction of information on the regional maritime domain.

- By enabling efficient information sharing and linking disparate data sources and technology (Boşilcă et al., 2022)
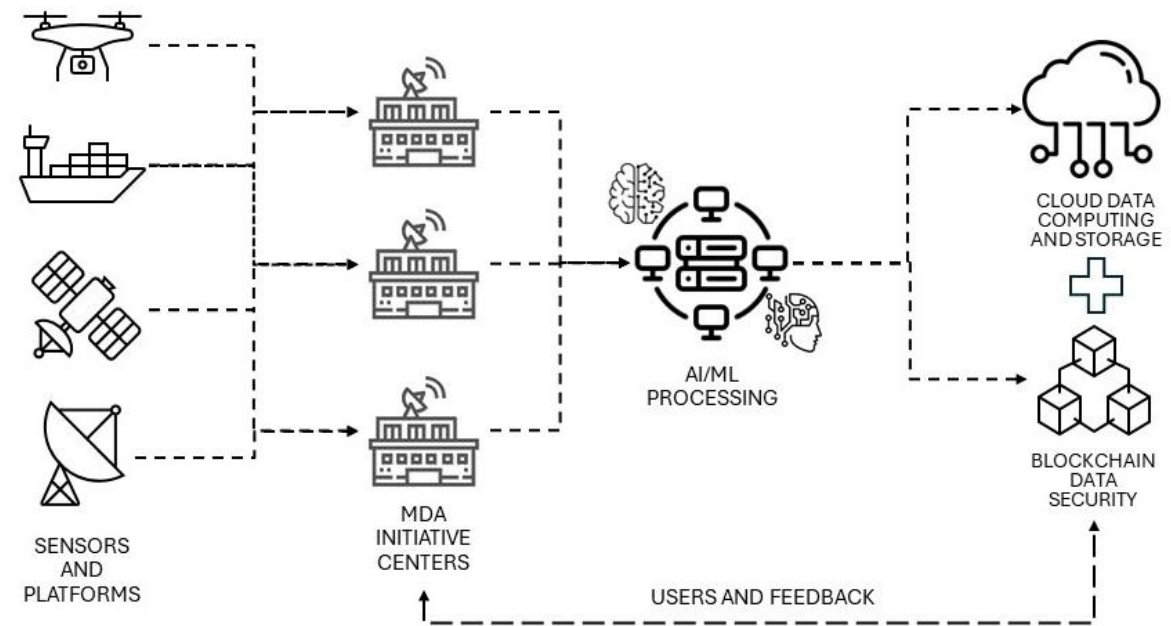

Figure 1. Advanced Technologies for MDA (Picture is generated by the authors)

Strategy 6. Development of Proper Narratives

- The lack of a narrative of an integrated regional MDA contributes to the struggle of bridging different perspectives of the stakeholders in Southeast Asia (Boşilcă et al., 2022; Bueger & Edmunds, 2024), particularly in the South China Sea issue (Zuo, 2021).

- Narrative strategy may be the most challenging part since it must acknowledge many aspect, including the different perspective from diverse backgrounds.

- The narrative should also acknowledge the assertiveness of the gray-zone operation in the South China Sea without further antagonizing China, which may incite conflict escalation.

- Nevertheless, this strategy is probably part of the most important step that needs to be taken to establish effective communication, trust, and confidence.

Conclusions

- Integrated comprehensive regional MDA is important for the countries in the region to timely and accurately monitor the maritime environment in Southeast Asia, particularly related to the gray-zone activities in South China Sea

- The existing MDA initiative frameworks are not sufficient to address the emerging maritime threats especially when it comes to the ambiguous gray-zone operations

- The proposed strategies are not the panacea for all the maritime issue in the region. They are form of contribution of brainstorming ideas to the policy makers.

- The emphasis on the development of narrative as arguably the most important thing to consider. It will take more effort. However, the result may also be more fruitful.

- This paper advocates the implementation of integrated infrastructure framework for the MDA implementation with the support of all the proposed strategies.

NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
PRAESTANTIA PER SCIENTIAM

lpdp
lembaga pengelola dana pendidikan

Thank you
Very Much

Any Questions?