

## Sea Lines of Communications (SLOC): Complexity of China's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Threats

Dirga Repindo Agustiyani<sup>1</sup>, Desi Albert Mamahit<sup>2</sup>, Panji Suwarno<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>(Student in Maritime Security Department, The Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Indonesia)

<sup>2</sup>(Lecture in Maritime Security Department, The Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Indonesia)

<sup>3</sup>(Lecture in Maritime Security Department, The Republic of Indonesia Defense University, Indonesia)

**ABSTRACT:** This research discusses the complement of threats that exist on china's maritime silk road, especially in the 21st century. Research methods using qualitative methods with descriptive analysis and quasi-qualitative analysis techniques that look for data and compare it with literary theory and study. Based on the results of the study, researchers described the form of complexity into three forms, namely military, non-military and hybrid threats. Military threats in China's SLOC line are dominated from the South China Sea region from 1974 to early 2016 in the form of arms contacts and frictions between state actors. Then non-military threats in China's SLOC were found in the form of transnational crimes in the South China Sea, ship accidents in the Strait of Malacca, and piracy in the Indian Ocean. Finally, the form of hybrid threats that occur along China's SLOC is more about the national interests of the countries involved such as the influence of external control of the Strait of Malacca that can trigger asymmetric warfare in the region.

**KEYWORDS:** Sea Lines of Communications, China's Maritime Silk Road, South China Sea

### I. INTRODUCTION

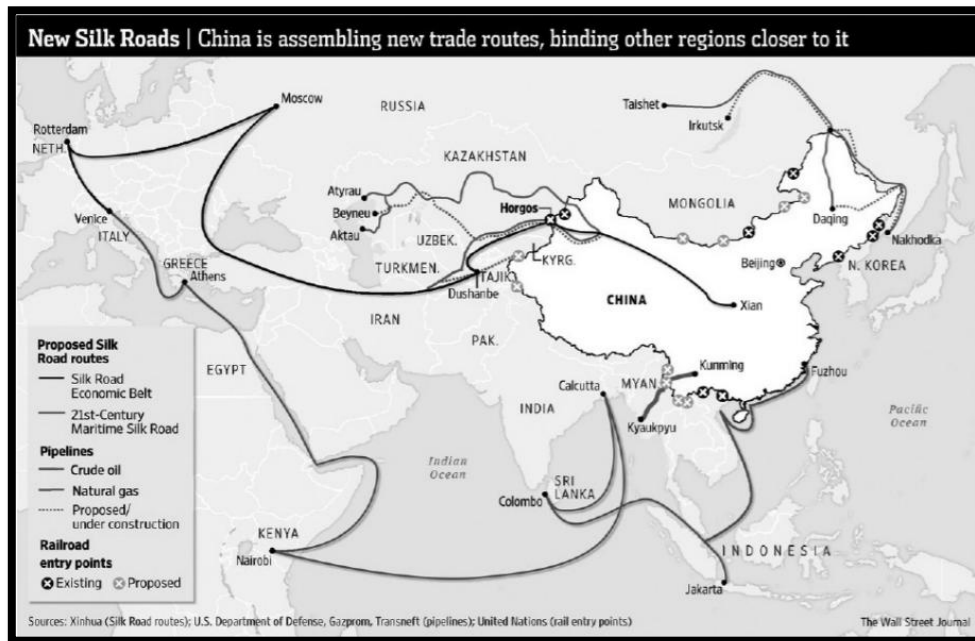
Discourse on the Asia-Pacific region is an interesting discussion to raise, one of which is about the Sea Line Of Communications (SLOC). The SLOC itself (SLOC) is seen as a maritime route between ports used for trade, logistics and naval activities in a region. The SLOC that is widely discussed especially in the Asia-Pacific region is the SLOC of the South China Sea. Of course, the phenomenon of SLOC is also inseparable from a concept of sea lanes ideas from China in showing its economic strength, namely the Maritime Silk Road or called the Maritime Silk Road.

SLOC (Sea Lines of Communication) is a major transportation line that facilitates large-capacity sea transportation and is the core of large-scale sea freight such as crude oil. SLOCs have choke points, or "bottlenecks," that the ship's captain must pay special attention to as it passes for fear of dumping the ship's cargo and causing an accident that could impede the flow of the ship. By this definition, SLOCs are of great strategic importance and geopolitical value to users. (Khalid, 2012).

SLOC tells us about the importance of the oceans in connecting people around the world through social and economic means. From a maritime point of view, SLOC is used as the main route between ports, SLOC establishes relationships that encourage trade and cooperation between peoples (Southampton Marine and Maritime Postgraduate Group, 2014). Colonel Reynold B. Peele added that if the United States fails to effectively import and export using maritime communication lines (SLOCs), SLOCs will soon fail from the standpoint of the United States, the US economy, and the world. Almost every issue of each person's each day lifestyle pertains to items and offerings at the end related to loose maritime change. SLOCs are also immediately associated with America's capability to supply troops, equipment, and elements to crisis regions to support countrywide interests. Problems with SLOCs and asphyxiation points typically involve undisturbed passage into, down, and up (air) into the area (Peele, 1997).

Kartini stated that China's Silk road concept changed into first delivered in a speech through President Xi Jinping throughout his go to Kazakhstan, and changed into reaffirmed on the 2013 Shanghai Cooperation

enterprise (SCO) summit (see in Fig 1). subsequent, President Xi Jinping provided 5 proposals for mutually setting up a brand new Silk avenue financial belt. This includes (1) strengthening political communication that may assist “provide an inexperienced light to economic cooperation”; (2) strengthening roads or infrastructure be part of with the concept of constructing a dedicated delivery hall from the Pacific to the Baltic and from primary Asia to the Indian Ocean, after which step by step constructing a transport community linking East Asia, West Asia, and South Asia; (3) improve trade centers by using taking measures to reduce alternate and funding fees with a focal point on eliminating obstacles to exchange; (4) beef up economic cooperation with a focal point on foreign exchange settlement to lessen transaction expenses and reduce monetary risks, even as growing monetary competitiveness; (5) strengthen relationships among peoples (Kartini, 2015).



**Fig. 1. Map of China's New Maritime Silk Road**

Source: Kartini (2015)

Fitriyanti (2020) added that the JSM China policy is part of the 11th Year Plan (2006-2010) and the Report on Marine and Ocean Industries Development in China (2006). China is committed to building and sponsoring marine transportation infrastructure from China across Southeast Asia to South Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. The move was followed up by offering a \$40 billion "Maritime Silk Fund" investment to build deep seaports in strategic locations passed by China's JSM route to control the world's strategic shipping lanes (Sea Line of Communications/SLOCs), markets for Chinese products (markets), as well as natural resources for energy, raw materials, and raw materials to China (resources). With the implementation of China's maritime silk road with SLOC control from the South China Sea to Africa, it will certainly present new challenges and threats to the Chinese Government.

## II. RELATED STUDIES

The study of the Indian Ocean and the Safety of Sea Lines of Communication discussed the spectrum of threats to SLOC in the Samudea Hinda (Indian Ocean) case study. The results of this study show the classification of transnational threats from the SLOC pathway in the Indian Ocean in the form of piracy, illegal drugs, firearm smuggling, illegal fishing, maritime pollution, human trafficking, and the impact of marine mining. Further, it additionally mentioned the techniques that countries inside the Indian Ocean have undertaken in addressing the SLOC danger bilaterally inclusive of naval and coast guard sports activities or patrols aimed in the direction of growing transparency, organizing commonplace strategies to cope with troubles associated with maritime disturbances, searching for and rescue at sea, and assisting the safety of the marine environment (Sakhuja, 2008).

About research Hazmi (2017) on “*Protecting vital sea lines of communication: A study of the proposed designation of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore as a particularly sensitive sea area*”, discusses also the potential of sea lines of communications in the scope of the Strait of Malacca and Singapore. The results show that the Strait of Malacca and the Singapore Strait are vital areas in the world's marine communication pathways with the potential for fisheries, environmental biodiversity and world heritage to be protected. In addition, the number of commercial shipping activities raises maritime incidents such as oil spills that can pollute the SLOC area, so the results of the study provide a study for PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Area) in reducing and preventing environmental degradation.

“*The Geopolitics of China's Maritime Silk Road Initiative*” examines the projects and content of China's maritime silk road ideas involving actors (Chinese governments, private companies, and state-owned enterprises) across many geographically world-scale i.e. (cities, provinces, states, and continents). The results provide insight into the geopolitical connectivity of China's maritime silk road that MSRI is a geopolitical project that aims to build a landscape built to enable trade and investment flows. In addition, state actors use their ability to control geographical entities to make decisions about economic investment. That is evident from development investments, for example, port facilities and rail networks through the orders of political leaders and to transform a country's cities, provinces, states, and territories to improve their ability to make future profits (Blanchard & Flint, 2017).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study uses descriptive qualitative research methods by providing systematic, realistic, and accurate depictions, schemes, and research of actual character, its relation to the status quo, as well as the complexity and threats that exist on China's maritime silk road. Furthermore, data analysis will be applied using Quasi-Qualitative techniques that prioritize congruent method. The congruent method is a method that analyzes the proof that the researcher can solve or predict the outcome of this case in theory (George & Bennet, 2005). The first author will understand the case-independent variable and the case dependent variable based on the theory used. The authors then look for case data and the theory used is causal to the case if it can prove the results of the field. In addition, the method used in this study is the study of literature, where the author looks for sources from various literature and interprets it with scientific approaches and qualitative or naturalistic descriptive methods because it performs under natural conditions.

To analyze the complexity of threats in China's SLOC, the authors will outline through the division of threat criteria inside the form of navy, non-navy, and hybrid or uneven threats. This is following the State Defense White Paper, namely threats are considered as the main factor that becomes the basis in the preparation of the design of the country's defense system, both actual and potential. Refers to strategic evaluation and identity of the character of very dynamic threats, for that reason allowing the incorporation of numerous varieties of threats. consequently cutting-edge and future threats can consequently be classified into three kinds: army threats each armed and unarmed, nonmilitary threats, and hybrid or asymmetric threats (Kementerian Pertahanan RI, 2015).

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Military Threats in China's SLOC (South China Sea)

In describing the threat in china's SLOC the authors tend to describe it in a special area in the South China Sea. According to research al-Attar et al. (2017) military movements in the South China Sea region are quite high followed by all disputed countries except Brunei has deployed military forces on several islands around the South China Sea.

This shows that the disputes and military threats around the South China Sea are complex, based on data gathered from various sources including the Ultimate research Pamungkas et al (2013) on the Presence of the United States Military Fleet in the Spratly Islands Dispute in 2011, then Ginting (2018) on China's Military Behavior in the South China Sea and Its Influence on Indonesia's Sovereignty in the Natuna Islands (Period 2016-2017), and Raharjo (2014) in Indonesia's Role in Resolving The South China Sea Dispute, From the data

the impact provides recorded several incidents involving military forces between countries and military forces with fishermen presented in Table 1.

20 <sup>th</sup> Century		Military Activities	21 <sup>th</sup> Century		Military Activities
Years	Countries Involved		Years	Countries Involved	
1974	China – Vietnam	China takes over Paracell from Vietnam, with 18 soldiers killed.	2000	Filipina – Tiongkok	The Philippines shoots dead one fisherman and arrests seven on Palawan Island.
1988	China – Vietnam	Chinese and Vietnamese naval incidents on Johnson reef, Vietnamese ship sunk and 70 fishermen killed.	2002	Filipina - Vietnam	Vietnamese troops supply caution shots at Philippine navy patrolling Spratlys.
1992	China – Vietnam	China seized nearly 20 Vietnamese shipment ships carrying items from Hong Kong between June and September.	2011	China – Vietnam	Arms contact between China and Vietnam in the Spratly Islands.
1994	China – Vietnam	China-Vietnam confrontation over oil exploration in waters of Tu Chinh blocks 133,134 and 135.	2012	China – Vietnam dan Filipina	China forms the Sansha administrative region that includes Paracel Islands and Spratlys to the ire of Vietnam and the Philippines.
1995	Taiwan – Vietnam	Taiwan navy forces fire on the Vietnamese supply ship.	2014	Tiongkok – Vietnam	The mutual hit of a Chinese ship with Vietnam occurred as a result of the placement of Chinese drilling equipment near the Paracel islands.
1996	China - Filipina	China engages in 90-minute arms contact with the Philippine navy.	2016	Tiongkok – Indonesia	Chinese Coast Guard ship crashes into fishing boat caught and will be detained by Indonesian authorities near Natuna on suspicion of stealing fish.
1998	Filipina – Vietnam	Vietnamese soldiers contact weapons with a Philippine fishing boat near Pigeon Reef.			
1999	Malaysia – Vietnam	Two Malaysian warplanes and two Philippine planes lurk in Spratlys.			

**Table 1. List of Military Activities in the LCS of the 20th and 21st Centuries**

Based on Table 1 we can see that from the 20th Century from 1974 to the 21st century there has been a lot of military activity between countries in the SLOC region of China, especially in the South China Sea which is a claimant country. In addition to claimant countries, military activity in the South China Sea region also provokes the military activities of other countries to be on alert, for example, Indonesia and the United States. Indonesia, which does not claim territory in the waters, was "troubled" by China's unilateral claims in 1992 when China published a unilateral map of the South China Sea of nine breaking lines in the South China Sea (Al-Attar *et al.*, 2017).

#### **4.2 Non-Military Threats in China's SLOC**

##### **1) The threat of Transnational Crime in the South China Sea**

Based on Thontowi research (2018) quoted from many cross-border crimes, which is the focus of four types only, namely:

- a) *Narcotics Crimes from China.* In 2018, in several cases of drug kingpin arrests through the airport, on January 13, police shot dead a drug dealer from China in Cengkareng.
- b) *Migrant Workers and The Crime of Trafficking people to China.* 70 migrant workers from China as illegal migrants were repatriated in 2015 and 50 Indonesian citizens were also repatriated to Indonesia. In 2017, the national police repatriated 1083 migrant workers victims of trafficking and they were repatriated from Abu Dhabi in Saudi Arabia.
- c) *Arms Smuggling to China.* The threat of danger that directly threatens the sense of security of the community is the practice of illegal weapon trafficking. The alleged illegal arms trade originated in China is quite reasonable. No fewer than ten poor provinces in China produce weapons. Some of these provinces include Guizhou, Qinghai, Sichuan, Hunan, Yunnan, Gansu, Guangdong, Fujian, and Guangxi, both for official and illegal sale.
- d) *The crime of Foreign Fishermen violates IUUF.* Violations committed not only against UNCLOS 1982, while foreign ships must have a permit and must use a clear flag. Law enforcement's stance on fisheries crimes still appears discriminatory. Of China's 37 fishing boats, only one was sunk.

##### **2) The Threat of Ship Accidents in the Strait of Malacca**

Based on Sintia (2019) several examples of cases of inter-ship accidents that occurred in the Strait of Malacca, namely occurred on January 3, 2017, between the Singapore-flagged ship Wan Hai 301 and the Gibraltar-flagged APL Denver ship. Furthermore, the hull of the MT AVL Denver ship was reportedly torn, resulting in the spill of oil that reached 300 tons into the waters. In addition, oil spills from APL Denver ships crossed to the beach in Pulau Ubin, Batam Island, and Nenas Island, Riau Islands. The collision of ships that culminated with the spill of oil into the sea greatly impacted the environmental pollution of the waters around Riau Islands Province. Waste in the form of black oil plumes covers the waters and fishing gear of fishermen so that it will certainly have an impact on various aspects such as the Riau islands tourism sector which is one of the economic drivers of the area will be disrupted.

##### **3) The Threat of Piracy in the Indian Ocean**

Piracy that takes vicinity inside the Indian Ocean and Indonesia has harmed Indonesia as the biggest archipelago however can't grow to be a maritime country due to unsafe maritime. This has a bad effect because the high intensity of delivery requires a big value in phrases of ship and team coverage charges. Despite everything, pirates no longer handiest take shiploads but additionally take hostages and harm the crew. Further, the excessive operational fees of the ship when you have to rotate in case you need to keep away from the danger of piracy, it provides a fee to items due to the fast shipping and logistics aren't loose. ICC-IMB found out for 2013 there had been 106 acts of piracy in Indonesian territorial waters. This number accelerated from 2010 which handiest hit forty hijackings in comparison to Somalia, the prevalence of delivering piracy decreased dramatically from 160 hijackings in 2011 to seven assaults in 2013 (Ayuningtyas, 2016).



### 4.3 Hybrid or Asymmetric Threats in China's SLOC

The country-wide hobby of the Claimant state in this situation Malaysia considers the defense of the country-wide hobby as the basis of its sovereignty and independence. inline with this, the most important goal of the US Defence insurance is to protect and defend Malaysia's pursuits and territory from domestic and foreign places threats. Malaysia's geographical interests are divided into the subsequent: center regions, Nau offshore financial pursuits, and strategic waters and airspace. Strategic Strait of Malacca due to the fact it's far one of the primary global shipping lanes and serves almost all east-west sea transportation. It additionally hosts Malaysia's essential ports and commercial enterprise hubs and is the transport direction for 80 percent of Malaysia's exports and imports. Malaysia explicitly regards any encroachment into the Strait of Malacca as a threat to its country-wide pursuits, safety, and sovereignty. furthermore, the manipulate of the Strait of Malacca by outside forces can have a horrific impact on the financial prosperity of most international locations which includes main powers. So this triggers an asymmetrical war that is usually a war between professional soldiers who stand and rebels or militias of resistance movements that often have unlawful combatant status (Naufal, 2021).

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis outlined above, the authors concluded that understanding the complexity of threats on the maritime silk road can not be separated from china's control of the Sea Lines Of Communications (SLOC).The form of threat is divided into three, namely first, military threats in the form of military activity in the South China Sea from 1975 to 2002. Second, non-military threats in the form of transnational crimes in the South China Sea, ship accidents in the Strait of Malacca, and the threat of piracy in the Indian Ocean. Third, the hybrid threat in the form of asymmetric warfare potential indicated by the State of Malaysia over conflicts of interest in the Strait of Malacca. The study of the complexity and threats that exist on the Maritime Silk Road needs to be improved again the spectrum of problem-solving, actions, or solutions of related countries need to be further investigated by looking at the evaluation and current conditions, especially from the conflict on the China Maritime Silk Road.

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