
THE ROLE OF THE ASEAN MARITIME FORUM IN ADDRESSING THE COMPLEXITY OF ILLEGAL FISHING IN THE STRAIT OF MALACCA

Chalila Putri Komara¹, Windy Dermawan²

¹*International Relations Study Program, Universitas Padjadjaran, West Java, Indonesia*

²*International Relations Departement, Universitas Padjadjaran, West Java, Indonesia*

Corresponding Author: Chalila Putri Komara, E-mail: chalila22001@mail.unpad.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest maritime routes, faces persistent threats from Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, which undermines marine resource sustainability, economic security, and regional stability. This study analyzes the role of the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) in addressing IUU fishing through the lens of international cooperation and maritime security theories. Employing a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach and case study method, the research draws on secondary data from ASEAN documents, national regulations, international reports, and scholarly sources. Findings show that the AMF functions as a regional dialogue and coordination platform, facilitating intelligence sharing, joint patrols, capacity building, and policy harmonization among ASEAN member states. Notable mechanisms include the ASEAN Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) network, Malacca Straits Patrols, and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action to Combat IUU Fishing. While these initiatives have contributed to improved maritime domain awareness and reduced incidents by up to 20% in recent years, the AMF's operational impact remains constrained by disparities in technical capacity, sovereignty sensitivities, limited enforcement authority, and funding shortages. The study concludes that strengthening AMF effectiveness requires harmonizing fisheries laws, enhancing technological integration, ensuring sustainable financing, and fostering cross-sector collaboration with external partners. Ultimately, the AMF holds strategic potential as a pillar of collective maritime governance in Southeast Asia, yet its success hinges on transforming political consensus into binding, coordinated, and enforceable actions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is a widespread and heterogeneous phenomenon, encompassing various forms, scales, and modes of operation. This activity can be carried out by a range of actors, from domestic fishermen to foreign fishing fleets, and includes operations conducted by industrial-scale fishing companies small-scale, community-based fishing activities. IUU fishing may involve officially flagged and licensed vessels, however it is also frequently conducted by stateless vessels operating outside the applicable legal framework.



For example, IUU fishing practices can occur among domestic small-scale fishermen operating without permits, as well as on foreign industrial fishing vessels that illegally exploit fishery resources within sovereign waters of other states. The complexity of addressing this issue is further reflected in the global distribution of marine catches, which illustrates the diversity of actors and methods used.

The Strait of Malacca is one of the world's most important shipping lanes, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and serving as a major route for international trade. According to data from the International Maritime Organization (IMO), approximately around 25% of global goods trade passes through the Strait of Malacca every year, with more than 94,000 ships navigating this route annually (Nofrika Sari et al., 2023).

As a region dominated by maritime territory, Indonesia located in Southeast Asia, is vulnerable to transnational crime. Articles 100-107 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establish the legal framework for suppressing maritime piracy under international law. Within ASEAN, no concrete steps have been taken regarding regional maritime security (Aretha Michellia & Burhanuddin, 2024). Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimate that, in developing countries, small-scale fisheries contribute approximately 50 percent of the world's total marine catch and employ nearly 90 percent of the global workforce in the capture fisheries sector. This the urgency of developing comprehensive and inclusive policies that not only target industrial-scale illegal fishing practices but also regulate and foster small-scale fishing operations, enabling them to operate sustainably and in accordance with applicable laws (Shaver & Yozell, 2018).

Illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca has emerged as a serious problem, directly affecting the sustainability of marine resources and the region's economic security. A 2022 report from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stated that IUU fishing causes global economic losses of up to USD 23 billion per annually, with Southeast Asia among the most affected regions.

In this context, IUU fishing poses significant threat that directly impacts the economy, food security, and the sustainability of marine resources. According to a report from The ASEAN Magazine, published in the April 2025 edition, it is estimated that economic losses due to IUU fishing practices in several ASEAN member countries reach around USD 6 billion per year (Arbiol & Minh, 2025). This figure demonstrates the significant negative impact of IUU fishing on regional economies, particularly for coastal states that rely heavily on the fisheries sector.

Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is not just a problem limited to a single country, such as China, but a global challenge that demands a collective response. Effective maritime security requires a synergistic combination of legal instruments, public policies, and the judicial system, reinforced by military support and maritime law enforcement activities. In the context of addressing the unconventional threat posed by IUU

fishing, maritime nations need to be fully aware of the multidimensional nature of the threat—encompassing economic, social, political, and security aspects.

A priority step is to implement and control and law enforcement mechanisms within each country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This challenge is further compounded for many countries in the South Pacific region, which, despite their vast EEZs, lack adequate military forces or maritime patrol assets to conduct effective surveillance. This situation creates a governance gap in maritime spaces vulnerable to exploitation by IUU fishing perpetrators.

Addressing this problem requires coordinated international efforts to expand governance in maritime that are not yet adequately monitored. One recommended strategy is to maximize the frequency of vessel boardings, both while vessels are in port (port inspections) and while still operating at sea (at-sea boardings). This process aims to verify the vessel's cargo, ensure the health and well-being of the crew, assess the safety of the voyage, and verify the legality of documents and fishing activities.

These inspections should be positioned not only as a form of law enforcement but also as a means of gathering maritime intelligence. Information obtained from these activities should ideally be shared in real time with regional security partners through a multinational command center or intelligence fusion center. This collaborative approach has the potential to strengthen the effectiveness of oversight, close legal loopholes, and significantly reduce crime rates in the transboundary fishing industry.

Crime in ASEAN waters has a significant impact on regional stability and maritime security in Southeast Asia. Piracy frequently occurs, particularly in strategic straits directly bordering ASEAN member states. These maritime areas are strategic points that could be exploited as routes for cross-border crime.

Efforts to combat maritime crime in the ASEAN region are the collective responsibility of all member states, although Indonesia itself has seven law enforcement agencies actively patrolling the seas. These agencies include the Indonesian Navy, the Indonesian National Police (POLRI)'s Directorate of Water Police, the Ministry of Transportation (Directorate General of Sea Transportation/ Dirjen Hubla), the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (Directorate General of Marine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance/ Dirjen PSDKP), the Ministry of Finance (Directorate General of Customs and Excis), the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), and the Task Force for the Eradication of Illegal Fishing (Satgas 115). These seven agencies conduct patrols within their respective jurisdictions, based on applicable regulations. Therefore, strengthening law enforcement in ASEAN waters requires synergy among member states, one of which is through the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF).

The ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) is a dialogue forum designed to discuss various maritime issues in the region. The establishment of this forum is stated in the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint (APSCB), specifically in point A.2.5, which

highlights the importance of strengthening maritime cooperation among ASEAN member states through the AMF initiative. In its implementation, the AMF adopts a comprehensive approach with an emphasis on maritime safety and regional security, which are considered a shared interest for all ASEAN member states (Oktavian, 2023).

According to Rijal (2018), the establishment of the AMF is part of Indonesia's strategy to advance its national interests in the maritime sector. Indonesia initiated this forum as a commitment to its identity as an archipelagic nation, safeguarding maritime sovereignty, and advancing the maritime economy. The AMF is also seen as a manifestation of Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy as well as an effort to establish an international maritime regime. Although the forum's effectiveness remains limited due to the lack of ASEAN consensus on collectively regulating illegal fishing issues Rijal (2018). Meanwhile Gaol (2017) emphasizes that the AMF serves as a platform for dialogue and coordination, although it does not yet have a direct technical at the operational level. In the context of Malacca Strait security, this forum contributes through information exchange, confidence-building measures, and preventative diplomacy. However, challenges such as differing national interests and a lack of collective law enforcement capabilities at sea continue to hamper the AMF's effectiveness in addressing piracy and IUU fishing.

Ibnu Bintang et al., (2025) reinforce this argument by highlighting that piracy and IUU fishing are non-traditional, transnational threats. They argue that, although the AMF has acted as a coordinating forum, its effectiveness in reducing maritime crime incidents remains low. Therefore, institutional capacity building and policy harmonization among ASEAN countries are needed so that forums like the AMF can respond to these threats more strategically.

In terms of national policy, Indonesia's role in maintaining maritime security in the region is also strengthened by domestic measures such as the policy of sinking illegal vessels, the establishment of Task Force 115, and strengthening maritime security. Medina & Enggriyeni, (2022) state that Indonesia is active in forums such as the AMF and the East Asia Summit as part of maritime security diplomacy, but the lack of consensus within ASEAN remains a major obstacle. The policy of sinking vessels as a law enforcement strategy against IUU fishing perpetrators has proven to have a deterrent effect and increase national fish catches. The explanation of this strategy, framed within a securitization approach and rational decision-making, demonstrates the country's commitment to maintaining territorial sovereignty, despite facing diplomatic and environmental challenges (Istiqomah, 2016)

Therefore, given the differences in national capacity, sovereignty sensitivity, and legal complexity among member states, the effectiveness of the AMF in addressing illegal fishing faces significant challenges. Therefore, this study will illustrate the importance of critically analyzing the extent to which the ASEAN Maritime Forum is able to carry out its role in strengthening regional maritime security, particularly in the context of addressing illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. 1 International Cooperation

The practice of international cooperation has existed since well before Thucydides introduced the concepts of diplomacy, treaties, and alliances more than two millennia ago. However, scholarly study of international cooperation is relatively recent. The modern understanding of cooperation began to emerge in the early 1980s, defining it as coordinated behavior among independent actors that, while oriented toward self-interest, still yields collective benefits (Axelrod, 1981, 1984; Taylor, 1976). This egoistic orientation does not necessarily hinder cooperation, particularly in the context of interdependence, where the well-being of one party is affected by the actions of another.

Interactions within international relations typically involve at least three patterns: collaboration, competition, and conflict (Holsti, 1988). Ultimately, these patterns can lead to a cooperative relationship. Interactions between actors or states can occur as a result of behavioral adjustment of international actors when responding to or observing the actions of other actors. According to (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1997), cooperation can run smoothly if there is a process of engagement that then leads to negotiations, held directly or in real time.

International cooperation is also defined as the actions of two or more states or other actors to achieve common goals based on ideas and agreements (Pevehouse & Goldstein, 2020). This definition provides a broader perspective on the actors involved in international cooperation, including the presence of non-state actors, and emphasizes the role and shared goals in realizing cooperation.

International cooperation stems from a collective awareness of global problems that cannot be addressed unilaterally by a single state, such as security, trade, and environmental issues. This dynamic has driven the formation of increasingly structured coordination mechanisms involving various cross-border parties. This development has given rise to the need for formal structures, a binding international legal basis, the application of the principle of non-intervention, and the formulation of clear objectives. All of these elements form the distinctive characteristics of international organizations, resulting from the transformation of a functional cooperative model into an institutional entity with international legal personality (Pasternak et al., 2023).

Some developed countries are able to coordinate their actions to acquire resources from less developed countries, governments with greater power are able to form aggressive alliances, and privileged industries can support their governments in protecting

themselves from competition from more efficient producers abroad (Zartman & Touval, 2010). Based on this understanding, it can be concluded that international cooperation as realized through the ASEAN Maritime Forum provides a means for ASEAN member states to establish a regional institutional mechanism to address the complexities of illegal fishing practices in the Strait of Malacca.

2.2 Maritime Security

In the late 19th century, the concept of maritime security was heavily influenced by Alfred Thayer Mahan's views, which emphasized the importance of concentrated sea power in the competition between great powers. During this period, industrialized nations engaged in a struggle for resources and maritime trade routes through imperialist practices. Maritime security was perceived as the result of a dominant maritime power's ability to control the seas (sea control) while simultaneously weakening or obstructing the maritime security of others (sea denial) (Gompert, 2013). This paradigm shift is also reflected in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, where threats to maritime security are no longer limited to the military, but also encompass issues of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, transnational crime, marine environmental degradation, climate change, and human and cargo smuggling (Bateman et al., 2008).

Conceptually, maritime security can be viewed from two perspectives: traditional and contemporary. In the traditional state and military-centric perspective, maritime security is understood as a state's efforts to maintain control and sovereignty over its maritime territory (Ridho & Sudirman, 2020).

According to (Bergin et al., 2019), maritime security is a more comprehensive concept that encompasses traditional military threats and the protection of state interests and sovereignty at sea, as well as non-traditional and non-state security challenges such as piracy, maritime terrorism, maritime disasters, climate change, illegal fishing, marine pollution, and the smuggling of narcotics, weapons, and people. Meanwhile, a report by the UNODC (2019) states that the Southeast Asian region, including the Strait of Malacca, faces significant risks from various maritime crimes, with illegal fishing being one of the most serious challenges that require close regional cooperation.

In the contemporary context, the definition of maritime security has expanded significantly in line with the complexity of threats at sea. Pandya et al., (2011) emphasize that modern maritime security encompasses not only the protection of sea trade routes from conventional threats such as piracy and sabotage, but also the need to address non-traditional security challenges, including maritime terrorism, illegal fishing, and other transnational crimes.

Maritime security in the modern era demands a more holistic approach, encompassing military, economic, social, environmental, and legal dimensions.

International cooperation, particularly at the regional level, such as ASEAN, through forums like the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF), is crucial in creating a collective mechanism to effectively address various forms of maritime threats.

Referring to the view of Arif Havas Oegroseno (2005), maritime security is positioned as a crucial aspect of the ASEAN Security Community concept. It is within this framework that ASEAN subsequently established the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) mechanism. However, as with the UN Integrated Coastal Policy (ICP) document, there is no clear definition of "maritime security." This forum is primarily a discussion forum aimed at responding to various forms of threats to maritime security. These threats include piracy, armed robbery at sea, marine environmental damage, illegal fishing practices, and the smuggling of goods, people, weapons, and narcotics (Keliat, 2009, 119) .

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. This approach is used to gain a deeper understanding of the maritime cooperation strategies implemented through the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) to address the complexities of illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca, particularly in the context of strengthening regional maritime security and managing transboundary fishery resources.

According to Lamont, (2022), a qualitative approach is a strategy for data collection and analysis that focuses on the use and analysis of collective datasets rather than, not numbers. Lamont also divides research design into two streams: empiricism and interpretivism. Interpretivism emphasizes understanding social meaning through analyzing relationships between variables. Based on this perspective, this study aims to understand how cooperation within the AMF framework is implemented through multilateral diplomatic mechanisms to address the issue of illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca.

This research also utilizes the case study method as the primary method to explore the policy dynamics, coordination among ASEAN member states, and the AMF's mechanisms in addressing these issues within their specific context. The data used in this study consist of secondary data obtained from various written sources, such as official ASEAN and member state government documents, international organization reports, academic journal articles, and relevant news and media publications. To ensure data validity, data triangulation is used, involving cross-checking data from one source and with other sources. Using qualitative methods, the researcher draw conclusions based on interpretations of data obtained in the field, guided by relevant concepts or theories. The collected data are analyzed to identify patterns, strategies, and challenges faced by the AMF in addressing the problem of illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The term Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (Fishing) is a relatively new term, coined in 1997 by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), the Regional Fisheries Management Organization (RFMO) responsible for the conservation of the Antarctic marine ecosystem. It refers to fishing activities that are illegal or not in accordance with regulations on the high seas and under the management of CCAMLR and are carried out by parties that may be either members or non-members. The United Nations (UN) and RFMO widely adopted the term IUU in 1999, and soon after, this issue emerged on the international fisheries agenda (Popescu, 2022).

Illegal fishing falls under the category of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and encompasses all fishing activities that violate national and international laws. These activities can take place within a country's jurisdiction—such as its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), territorial sea, and internal waters—without obtaining official authorization, or on the high seas, while ignoring applicable fisheries conservation and management regulations. Violations include operating in foreign waters without authorization, using prohibited fishing gear, violating catch quotas, and exploiting protected species.

This practice is often accompanied by the use of fishing methods that damage the marine environment and are linked to transnational crimes, such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms trafficking. The resulting impacts include not only direct economic losses—for example, decreased catches and reduced state revenues—but also indirect losses such as loss employment opportunities in the fisheries sector. More broadly, illegal fishing poses a threat to the sustainability of fisheries resources, food security, and economic stability and maritime security globally (Afriansyah, 2016; Crowell & Turvold, 2020; Withrow, 2021).

Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are highly dependent on the Strait of Malacca as a major route for trade, economic activity, and political interests, making this region a strategic meeting point for the three countries. Geopolitically, the Strait of Malacca is the shortest sea route connecting the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea or the Pacific Ocean, making it strategically valuable not only for coastal states but also for user states. However, management of this area has long been considered inadequate and incomplete, resulting in disruptions to the smooth flow of trade and increased crime rates in these waters. Despite its immense potential for facilitating international trade, the Strait of Malacca also poses significant risks. Threats such as pollution, piracy, and inter-state conflict have the potential to impede global trade flows and cause significant and unpredictable economic losses to the global economy.

The Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, is not only a major target for legal trade but also for illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing results in the loss of approximately 11 to 26 million tons of fish annually, with an estimated economic value of USD 10 to 23 billion (FAO, 2015). The ASEAN region contributed 20–25% of global fish production in 2022, but also suffered an economic loss of approximately USD 6 billion due to IUU fishing in 2019 (Lee & Viswanathan, 2020). At the local level, data from the Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries shows that as of 2021, 135 foreign-flagged vessels were apprehended for illegal fishing in the Strait of Malacca (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan RI, 2021). Meanwhile, the Ocean Justice Initiative report noted dozens of IUU fishing incidents in the Malacca Strait in June 2021, confirming that the frequency of cases remains high despite increased patrol efforts (Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative, 2024.)

IUU fishing in the Malacca Strait consists of diverse actors with transnational networks. In addition to local traditional fishermen sometimes interested in quick profits, this practice is often carried out by "Foreign Fishing Fleets" (FFF)—large vessels from neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and China—that exploit jurisdictional loopholes and sophisticated technology to penetrate no-take zones. (Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative, 2021.)

Illegal fishing has devastating multidimensional impacts. According to the Coral Triangle Initiative, IUU fishing results in losses of approximately USD 5.8 billion annually in the Asia-Pacific region, with approximately 10 to 22 percent of global fisheries production coming from illegal fishing activities (Meere & Lack, 2008). Meanwhile, ASEAN estimates that Indonesia experiences losses of approximately USD 3 billion, or approximately 30 trillion rupiah, annually due to IUU fishing (Heriyanto, 2025).

From a social perspective, IUU fishing threatens the food security of coastal communities, erodes the livelihoods of small-scale fishers, and is often accompanied by human rights violations—including the mistreatment of crew members and the placement of migrant workers under forced labor conditions. These conditions exacerbate poverty in coastal communities and fuel social tensions along the Strait of Malacca. Social factors are one of the main drivers of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the ASEAN region. Poor social conditions, such as high population pressure, low levels of education, and limited economic opportunities, encourage fishermen to engage in illegal fishing activities (Gallic & Cox, 2006). In other words, a concerning social background can be a trigger for fishermen to violate maritime regulations and commit crimes at sea.

Differences in lifestyle and welfare levels contribute to the varying fishing behaviors among fishers. In developing countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, fishers tend to engage in IUU fishing, with many working on foreign-flagged vessels, often flagged as "flags of convenience" (FOCs). The abundant availability of cheap labor in these two countries is

exploited by illegal vessel operators to recruit fishermen to engage in illegal fishing activities in ASEAN waters (Gallic & Cox, 2006).

According to FAO data (2016), the number of active fishers in the ASEAN region is estimated at 8.5 million. However, low income from fishing activities also contributes to involvement in IUU fishing. For example, in the Philippines, legal fishers earn only around USD 6 per day—an amount insufficient to even meet basic needs (International Labour Organization, 2020). Limited domestic economic prospects force some fishers to work on vessels involved in IUU fishing, despite poor working conditions that fall far short of international labor standards.

Illegal vessels generally disregard workers' rights. Fishermen often work in unhealthy conditions, without safety protections, and work hours that exceed permitted limits. A ILO (2014) noted that 26.3% of fishermen in Thailand reported not receiving adequate rest periods, often working between 17 and 24 hours a day (International Labour Organization, 2013). This practice clearly violates the 2007 ILO Convention on Work in Fishing, which mandates regular rest periods to ensure the safety and health of fishermen.

In Thailand, the median monthly wage for Cambodian fishermen is THB 4,500 (USD 139), equivalent to USD 4.60 per day, while for Myanmar fishermen it is THB 6,000 (USD 185) (International Labour Organization, 2020). This income inequality encourages fishermen to engage in IUU fishing to support their families. This situation shows that economic and social aspects cannot be ignored in efforts to combat IUU fishing, especially in the Southeast Asian region which still faces significant social and economic inequality challenges (Lee & Viswanathan, 2020).

4.1 Legal Framework, Regional Policies, and Mechanisms of the ASEAN Maritime Forum

To combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, various legal instruments and policies have been created at the international, national, and regional levels. At the international level, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establishes the rights and obligations of coastal states within their sovereign zones, including the obligation to prevent, detain, and punish vessels engaged in illegal fishing (UNCLOS, 1982). Furthermore, the 2009 Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) requires port states to deny port access and services to vessels involved in IUU fishing (FAO, 2009).

Another form of regional cooperation in addressing the threat of piracy is through the establishment of various legal and policy frameworks that support the strengthening of maritime security in Southeast Asia. The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) is a key initiative that facilitates information exchange, law enforcement coordination, and rescue cooperation between countries. Although Indonesia is not a member of ReCAAP, it respects and adheres to

applicable norms within the framework of regional cooperation. Furthermore, the 1997 ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime and the 2003 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Statement recognize piracy as a form of transnational crime requiring comprehensive action (Ferdin Bakker et al., 2020). In this regard, the ARF serves as a strategic forum for formulating joint policies to strengthen maritime security and encourage cross-sectoral cooperation among ASEAN member states.

At the national level, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore implement different regulatory frameworks according to their respective capacities and sectoral interests. Indonesia strengthened its position through Law No. 31/2004 concerning Fisheries and its 2014 amendment, which establishes criminal penalties and a mechanism for establishing "no-take zones." Malaysia regulates IUU fishing in the Fisheries Act 1985 and the Fisheries (Prohibition of Foreign Fishing and Licensing) Regulations 1998, with administrative sanctions and license revocation for foreign vessels (Ministry of Agriculture Malaysia, 2017). Meanwhile, Singapore—despite not having a large exclusive economic zone (EEZ)—relies on the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA) to implement a vessel surveillance system and risk analysis of fishing activities in regional waters (MPA Singapore, 2011).

To reconcile these differences, in 2014, ASEAN released the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Combating IUU Fishing (ASEAN RPOA-IUU Fishing), which outlines mechanisms for policy harmonization, data exchange, and the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for cross-border law enforcement (ASEAN, 2014). The RPOA also encouraged the establishment of the ASEAN Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (ASEAN-MCS) network to enhance regional maritime domain awareness (MDA), particularly in point A.2.5. The ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) was established to coordinate cross-sectoral maritime issues through a comprehensive approach that emphasizes safety of navigation and regional security as shared interests. The ASEAN Maritime Forum and its expanded forum, the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), serve as a platform for diplomacy and confidence-building measures involving partner countries and international organizations such as the IMO, IMB, ILO, and ReCAAP (Gaol, 2017). This forum serves as a strategic platform for information exchange, policy dialogue, and the formulation of joint recommendations to strengthen regional maritime security in a collective and coordinated manner.

ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) As a functional forum for maritime security, the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) was then activated to follow up on the RPOA-IUU Fishing within a broader framework. The AMF's vision is to create a secure and stable ASEAN maritime region, while its mission includes enhancing law enforcement capabilities, promoting confidence-building measures (CBMs), and facilitating cross-border coordination (ASEAN, 2017). The AMF's mandate is reflected in three main pillars: strategic dialogue, joint operations, and capacity building.

Mechanistically, the AMF holds annual ministerial-level meetings and technical meetings of Working Groups—particularly the WG on Maritime Security and the WG on MCS—to review progress and propose new initiatives (Agastia, 2021). In addition, the AMF facilitates joint exercises, such as coordinated patrols in the Strait of Malacca, conducted in collaboration with the ASEAN Coast Guard Forum (ACGF) and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), such as the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), to expand the scope of multilateral monitoring and law enforcement.

By integrating the international legal framework, national policies, and functional mechanisms of the AMF, ASEAN strives to create an effective collective response to combat IUU fishing in the Strait of Malacca, while maintaining the stability and prosperity of the maritime region.

4.2 AMF Operations and Challenges in Combating Illegal Fishing

The ASEAN Maritime Forum actively promotes enhanced maritime domain awareness (MDA) through intelligence exchange between ports and maritime law enforcement agencies. By utilizing the Automatic Identification System (AIS), Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), and the ASEAN Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (ASEAN-MCS) regional platform, member states can disseminate real-time data on the movements of vessels suspected of IUU fishing, while simultaneously harmonizing intelligence analysis procedures through information-sharing workshops to accelerate the detection of anomalies in vessel route patterns (ASEAN, 2017). The AMF also facilitates joint patrols under the Malacca Straits Patrols scheme, which consists of three main components: Eyes in the Sky (joint air patrols to map IUU fishing hotspots), Sea Patrols (coordination of military and coast guard patrol vessels from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore within their respective jurisdictional zones), and Operation Laya Alam Nusa (OP LAN), an integrated interception operation targeting vessels without valid documents or permits with the support of naval and helicopter fleets (ASEAN & SEAFDEC, 2016). To bridge the technical capacity gap between members, the AMF conducts joint training programs for PSDKP, coast guard, and Customs officers.

To strengthen oversight and law enforcement against illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing), the Indonesian government has initiated various comprehensive strategic measures since 2014. One of the key policies implemented is the establishment of the Illegal Fishing Eradication Task Force, based on Presidential Regulation No. 115 of 2015, which serves as a coordinating body for cross-sectoral agencies, including the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (KKP), the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL), the National Police, the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), and other law enforcement agencies. This task force plays a role in conducting integrated enforcement operations throughout Indonesia's maritime jurisdiction.

In line with this, the KKP has issued several technical regulations in the form of Ministerial Regulations aimed at addressing the root causes of IUU fishing. For example, Ministerial Regulation No. 2 of 2015 prohibits the use of destructive fishing gear such as trawls and seine nets throughout the Indonesian Fisheries Management Area (WPPNRI). Furthermore, Ministerial Regulation No. 57 of 2014 prohibits transhipment activities at sea to prevent the embezzlement of catches and to facilitate the tracking of illegal foreign vessels (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan RI, 2014). Another strategic policy is a moratorium on licensing for ex-foreign vessels through Ministerial Regulation No. 10 of 2015, which aims to reorganize fishing business licensing and encourage more transparent and accountable fisheries sector governance (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan RI, 2015).

As a form of firm law enforcement and to provide a deterrent effect, the government also sinks illegal foreign vessels caught stealing fish in national waters. As of May 2019, 516 illegal vessels had been legally prosecuted through sinking, a symbol of the country's sovereignty and courage in defending its maritime resources (Pangestu, 2020).

Since the intensification of joint operations in 2016, IUU fishing incidents in the Malacca Strait have decreased by approximately 15–20% between 2019 and 2021, marked by an increase in the number of vessels intercepted from an average of 40 to 60 per year for legal proceedings, demonstrating the effectiveness of enhanced MDA and integrated interception (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan, 2024).

Despite this progress, the AMF faces significant obstacles, including disparities in technical capacity, with some member states still relying on outdated fleets and limitations with satellite surveillance; sovereignty sensitivities that delay cross-border operations when law enforcement vessels enter other countries' waters; and limited funding, as maritime defense budget allocations focus more on traditional military threats than non-traditional crimes (ASEAN, 2017). With the various operations and collaborations undertaken, various ASEAN countries must also face the costs of illegal fishing. The following is an estimate or overview of the losses incurred by various countries:

Countries/Region	Illegal fishing losses(USD M)
1. Brunei	13
2. Indonesia	3000
3. Malaysia	334
4. Philippines	620
5. Thailand	500
6. Vietnam	1600
7. Africa	1351
8. Europe	1400
9. World	10000-23500

Source: Havascope, 2019

Unregulated (IUU) fishing in three Southeast Asian countries are substantial. It is estimated that approximately 20% of the total fish catch in these countries comes from IUU fishing, causing significant losses to national economies. Indonesia suffers the largest losses in ASEAN, at approximately USD 3 billion per year, followed by Vietnam with losses of USD 1.6 billion per year (Havascope, 2019).

There are differing views on IUU fishing between developed and developing countries. In the ASEAN region, the main causes of IUU fishing are weak oversight and regulation of domestic fishers and fishing vessels, as well as a lack of effective management tools to regulate fishing capacity. Furthermore, many fisheries in the region are poorly managed and pay little attention to the conservation of fishery resources. In contrast, developed countries generally have strong oversight of domestic fishers and effective fisheries law enforcement. They are also equipped with more advanced management tools, such as transferable fishing quota systems to maintain the sustainability of marine resources (ASEAN & SEAFDEC, 2016).

4.3 ASEAN Maritime Forum Cooperation in the Perspective of International Cooperation

The ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) is a regional forum established within the framework of the ASEAN Security Community (ASC) to discuss strategic maritime issues, including maritime security, safety of navigation, and transnational issues such as piracy, smuggling, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The AMF was established as part of ASEAN's efforts to strengthen regional solidarity and promote maritime cooperation through open, inclusive, and collaborative forum.

Within the context of international cooperation theory, forums such as the AMF demonstrate how countries can interact collectively based on shared interests. As stated Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff (1997), international cooperation can be effective if there is a direct and ongoing process of negotiation and communication. The AMF provides formal and informal spaces for ASEAN member states to engage in dialogue and formulate collective responses to strategic issues that threaten regional security, including of IUU fishing, which has increased in the last decade.

The issue of illegal fishing poses a serious challenge for ASEAN countries, which have vast maritime territories but limited surveillance capacity. IUU fishing practices not only cause significant economic losses—as is the case in Indonesia, which loses over USD 3 billion annually—but also threaten the sustainability of marine resources and create tensions between countries due to violations of maritime jurisdiction. Furthermore, IUU fishing is often linked to transnational organized crime such as human trafficking, drug smuggling, and human rights violations, further compounding the complex security challenges facing the region.

The AMF's role is relevant in this context as a regional platform that prioritizes collaborative approaches among ASEAN member states and partner countries. The AMF fosters synergy between national institutions, bringing together maritime authorities, law enforcement officials, and non-state actors such as shipowners, academics, and international organizations. Its goal is to increase transparency, exchange intelligence, and establish regional mechanisms that can strengthen member states capacity to effectively detect, prevent, and prosecute IUU fishing activities.

The AMF also serves as a platform for building normative understanding regarding the importance of compliance with international maritime law, particularly the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Through this forum, ASEAN countries affirm their commitment to upholding the principles of freedom of navigation, respect for territorial jurisdiction, and peaceful dispute resolution. The AMF also supports the commitments outlined in the 2012 Phnom Penh Declaration, in which ASEAN leaders agreed on the importance of enhancing maritime cooperation and expanding regional collaboration to address shared challenges.

In international cooperation theory, this type of cooperation reflects the dynamics of regional cooperation (Holsti, 1988), a form of cooperation built on geographic proximity, aligned interests, and the urgency of addressing collective problems. ASEAN countries, through the AMF, demonstrate how state actors can develop alliances based not only on idealism but also on the practical need to maintain regional maritime security and stability (Fearon, 1998; Zartman, 2010)

To strengthen the effectiveness of the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) in combating illegal fishing, harmonization of regulations and standard operating procedures is crucial. First, ASEAN needs to harmonize national fisheries laws and maritime patrol Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) so that any interception can be carried out without jurisdictional barriers. (ASEAN, 2014). Second, the use of advanced technologies—such as the integration of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data, satellite imagery, and of surveillance drones—must be enhanced to improve regional Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA); this real-time data enables early identification of suspicious fishing patterns and faster response coordination (ASEAN, 2017). Third, sustainable financing schemes through public-private partnerships (PPPs) can open access to new financial resources and technologies, such as private sector support for the procurement of maritime drones or big data analytics platforms. Finally, expanding collaborative networks with external partners—such as the UNODC for combating transnational criminal syndicates, INTERPOL for exchanging of notes verbale, and environmental NGOs actively conducting community-based monitoring—will strengthen law enforcement synergies and expand the maritime intelligence base (UNODC, 2019).

As part of the implementation of theory of international cooperation, the AMF illustrates that regional cooperation is not merely discourse, but a crucial instrument in creating

equitable and coordinated maritime governance. This is all the more crucial given that IUU fishing respects no borders and requires a unified response that goes beyond the capacity of each individual country.

4.4 Implications of Maritime Security Theory on the Issue of Illegal Fishing in ASEAN

Strengthening the AMF will not only reduce illegal fishing but also contribute to regional stability through its deterrence effect—the awareness that coordinated patrols and consistent firm law enforcement will reduce the incentives to engage in IUU fishing (ACGF, 2016). Synergy between traditional (military and coast guard) and non-traditional security forces must be maintained to ensure a holistic and responsive maritime security approach to various threats. According to Christian Bueger (2015), modern maritime security addresses not only military threats but also environmental issues, maritime crime, and infrastructure security. The threat of IUU fishing is a major concern because it directly impacts the sustainability of marine ecosystems and the economic stability of coastal states, particularly in densely populated regions like Southeast Asia..

At the regional level, ASEAN has addressed this challenge by establishing the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) in 2010. The AMF serves as a forum for dialogue among member states to address various non-traditional maritime threats such as piracy, smuggling, marine environmental damage, and IUU fishing. This forum is part of the ASEAN Political-Security Community pillar, established by the Bali Concord II Declaration (2003)

In its implementation, the AMF represents a more open and inclusive approach to collective security. While recommendatory in nature, the AMF seeks to promote policy harmonization among ASEAN member states, particularly on sensitive issues such as illegal fishing, which is often carried out by vessels from member states themselves. Indecisiveness in responding to these violations indicates a weak collective commitment and the absence of regional law enforcement mechanisms (Medina & Enggrieni, 2022).

Fajriah & Latifah (2018) state that the AMF and related forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), are important tools for building a shared understanding of maritime security amidst the complexity of regional threats. They highlight that IUU fishing and maritime smuggling are classified as non-traditional crimes that require sustained and comprehensive regional cooperation (Fajriah & Latifah, 2018).

Indonesia's role in the AMF is highly strategic. As the largest archipelagic nation in ASEAN and with a direct stake in the management of the Malacca Strait and the Natuna Sea,

Indonesia is not only a key host for AMF and EAMF meetings but also advocates for the re-drafting of regional regulations governing collective countermeasures against IUU fishing (Medina & Enggriyeni, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

The shift in ASEAN maritime security paradigm from a traditional approach focused on national defense to a multidimensional, collective approach through the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) reflects an adaptive response to the complexity of contemporary maritime threats, particularly Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Within this framework, the AMF has served as a platform for cross-border dialogue and coordination to collectively strengthen regional security. However, its effectiveness remains limited by several factors, including capacity imbalances among member states, the lack of an operational definition of maritime security, weak collective law enforcement, and dependence on other forums for policy implementation. Therefore, for the AMF to function more optimally as a regional pillar in maintaining ASEAN maritime stability and sovereignty, strategic efforts are needed such as harmonization of national regulations, strengthening institutional capacity and the role of the AMF executive, developing common operational standards, and concrete implementation of agreed regional cooperation commitments. With a more integrative and synergistic approach, the AMF has the potential to become a key instrument in building responsive, collaborative, and sustainable ASEAN maritime governance.

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