

## **Role of Malacca Strait with a Geopolitical and Strategic Approach**

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### **Abstract**

One of the issues discussed in geopolitics is the role of international straits (canals); as such, it is of great importance to investigate their geopolitical and strategic role. It is because the straits are the places of distribution of power, where the competition of governments is very evident in using the potential of geographic space to achieve greater benefits and ultimately to gain power in international relations. Even in some cases, countries not located around the straits enter many ways in order not to lag behind other countries. That is to say, there is a kind of conflict and competition between countries over the use of straits, especially the countries bordering the strait. Therefore, the strategic straits play a decisive role in the power of nations and their fate and also in the foreign policy of the coastal states along with the balance of regional and global power, as a result, their study is essential for political geographers and geopoliticians. One of the most important straits in the world is the Malacca Strait whose investigation strategically and geographically provides important points. Using descriptive-analytical method and also based on statistics and figures for plotting diagrams in this paper, it has been tried to study the role, geopolitical features, and importance of Malacca Strait for coastal states and conditions as well as factors causing challenges and crises for the strategic role of the strait. According to the results, as one of the major international straits, the Malacca Strait has strategic potentials in the regional and global arena and coastal governments need to rely on targeted and strategic plans to combat the challenging processes in this strait.

**Keywords:** International Strait, Malacca, Seas, Strategy, Geopolitics.

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## **1. Introduction**

Countries, as key players in the international system, are forced to interact with each other for a variety of reasons, including the pursuit of common goals, gaining interests, dealing with crises and common threats. They use special strategies to create interaction. Choosing a particular type of strategy depends entirely on the capabilities of a country (Abdi et al., 2016: 6). Straits or crossings are situations that affect both the national power and foreign policy. They are also considered in naval and land military strategies. As a result, geopolitics and geostrategy in them are coordinated. The need to enjoy the privilege of controlling the straits, canals as well as their control by global powers, has led to the establishment of bases or military installations in the vicinity of the straits. This highlights the importance of straits and their role in international policy. These positions have strategic and geopolitical value and affect the security of neighboring countries as they allow their owners to control the traffic. International waterways are essential for maritime trade and transportation. Accordingly, any impediment to the free and peaceful use of these waterways for international shipping could have adverse effects on maritime trade and the world economy. On this basis, specific legal systems have been drawn up and consolidated to ensure smooth maritime shipping (Pourhashemi et al, 2013: 88).

As a result, geopolitics and geostrategy in these areas coincide; these situations allow the neighboring country to control the traffic in the straits and therefore have a strategic value. The more powerful coastal government of the Strait allows the use of the strait as a means of foreign policy in regional and global affairs. The Malacca Strait is no exception. Because of its geographical location, the Malacca Strait has been known as a gateway to the "geostrategic" and "geopolitical" basins of South and Southeast Asia, and has always been considered by the regional and transregional powers. The present study seeks to explain and describe the geopolitical role and characteristics of the Malacca Strait and what strategies are involved in increasing the geopolitical weight of the Malacca Strait.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations**

### **2.1 Geopolitics**

The term "geopolitics" as an ambiguous term was first introduced into the field of contemporary political geographical studies by the Swedish scientist

Radolf Kielen in 1899 with the concept of "knowledge of the analysis of geographical and political relations" (Dodds & Atkinson,2000:3). Geopolitics as a knowledge of power acquisition studies and proposes ways and strategies based on which power can be acquired for political institutions and governments at national, regional, and global levels (Attotiyle,2001:188). Geopolitics, as with any science, has a hierarchy of values and characteristics by which it is transformed from a potential state into an actual state and becomes an applied knowledge.

Attotiyle argues that 'geopolitics' discusses geography and international politics before being defined as a clear description of the political map of the world (Attotiyle,2001:26). Lacusta and Giblin consider geopolitics as a scientific insight examining the territorial opposition of powers and their reflections on public opinion in society (Lacusta and Giblin, Beatrice,1999: 85). Groups such as Piter Tylor and Sloane argue that geopolitics is the spatial analysis of the relationships and structures of power and global competition. Indeed, "geopolitics" is the art and process of competition. Geopolitics, in its literal sense, is land policy (Ezzati,1998:1). Ezzati has identified geopolitics as the perception of the realities of the geographical environment in order to gain the power to enter the global game at the highest level in order to preserve national interests and life (Ezzati,2001: 70). By considering "geopolitics" as a complement, Mojtahedzadeh considers it as the science of studying the effects of the environment and environmental shapes or phenomena on political decision-making, especially at the regional and political levels (Mojtahedzadeh,2002:128). Mirheydar considers "geopolitics" as the way of reading and writing the international policy by power-holders and its impact on national and regional political decisions (Mirheydar,1998:22). Hafeznia considers "geopolitics" as the study of the interrelationships of "geography, power, and politics" and the actions that result from their combination (Hafeznia, 2006:37).

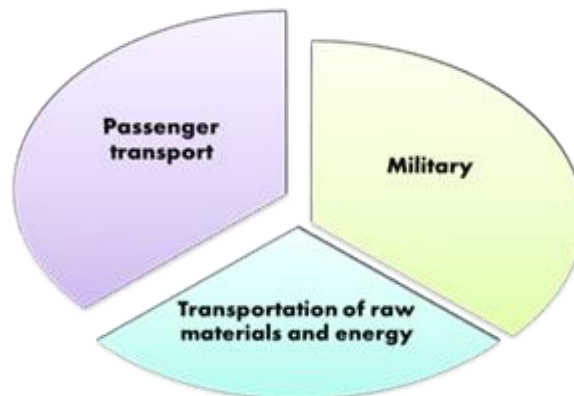
## **2.2 International Strait**

A strait is essentially a geographical phenomenon and refers to a narrow waterway that naturally connects two large parts of the water; straits can have a significant impact on local and global geopolitical thinking due to their importance in international maritime relations, depending on geographical features (depth, length and width) and degree of vulnerability

(Mirheydar,2004:204). In the Long Man geographic dictionary, the strait is defined as a narrow waterway that connects two larger water areas (Clarkman and Larry,1990:602). According to the International Court of Justice, the Straits are natural waterways that connect two free seas and are used for international shipping. In other definitions, the Strait connects part of the free sea to another part of the free sea or to another country's territorial sea (Bigdeli,2007:212).

Straits and waterways are often suitable for military and economic purposes to block or keep them open. Throughout history, control of the main straits and other artificial narrow ways in the sea has been one of the most important political-military objectives. For this reason, the great powers during the Cold War had a military strategy for many of these straits (Collins,2005:86). The International Straits have three dimensions in terms of their functions:

**Figure 1. Functions of Straits and International Channels**

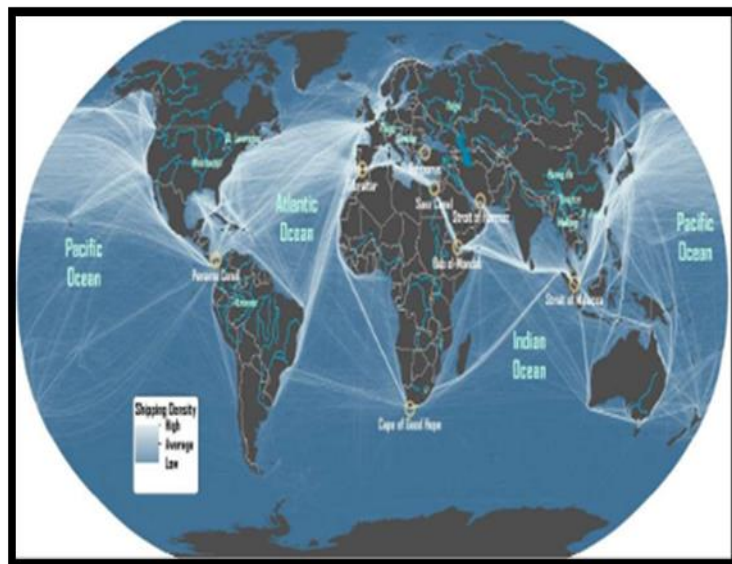


Strategic straits are a geographical factor that play an important role in the balance of regional and global power because of their communication, economic, military, and geopolitical value; the governments and powers governing the strait use it as a means in their foreign policy (Hafez Nia, 2009:3). Gerenal Gurshkf, the famous commander of the modern Soviet navy, believes that at times of peace, control over the straits allows for immediate control of the area at times of crisis (Verrzberger,1984: 35).

In general, the importance of straits at the present time is more important for international shipping (Cerchil,1997:16). Governments that have major commercial interests, especially those importing crude oil, fear that the world's waterways will be cut off by force or by military means through land or sea (Amirahmadian,2002:70). The role that the Straits play, and given that role, are of geopolitical importance and thus a tool for achieving domestic and foreign power; it determines their geopolitical weight. For example: The role of each of the following straits specifies their geopolitical weight:

1. Hormuz Strait, World Oil Trade
2. The Strait of Dardanelles, the Caspian and Black Sea oil trade
3. The Strait of Bob El Mandeb and Suez, Middle East Oil Trade
4. The Jebel Tariq Strait, European and African Commodity Trade
5. Panama Canal, European and American Oil Trade and Commodity Trade
6. Malacca Strait, World Trade in Oil and as a Connection to the Pacific Ocean (Bird, Pang & Lambeck,2006:241).

**Figure 2. Location of international straits**

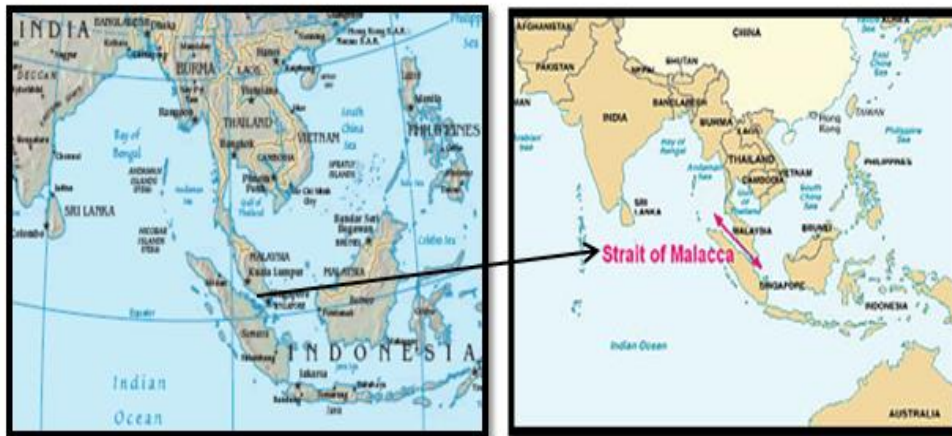


(Source: Allahverdizade,2019: 144)

### 2.3 Malacca International Strait and the Evolution of World Powers Sovereignty on the Strait

One of the most important waterways in the Algerian waters which has long been the focus of maritime powers is the Strait of Malacca. Malacca Strait with twenty-two and a half meters of depth and eighteen miles of width and three hundred miles of length is located between Malaya Peninsula (West Malaysia) and Sumatra Island, between the territorial waters of the two countries, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Malacca Strait is the main shipping route between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (Pishgahifard,2007: 31).

Figure 3. Map of Malacca



Old traders from Egypt, Rome, Saudi Arabia, Africa, Turkey, Iran, and India used this strait to enter the province of Kedah before reaching Guangzhou. Kedah served as the western port of Malaya Peninsula. In the 20th century, this strait was the crossing point of the Chinese who traveled to the Sumatra coast for trade and residence. Throughout Arab history, the Dutch, Portuguese and English have each managed and controlled this strait for some time. Therefore, it can be concluded that throughout the history of sailing, this strait has been the focus of the superpowers of its time demonstrating its geopolitical importance. After the fall of Suriyaya, the main power in the Southeast Asian Sea from Sumatra was transmitted to Java Island (Hall,1960). In 1293, the Kingdom of Java began, whereby the

next political power to rule the Strait of Malacca was identified (Ricklefs, 2001:78). Malacca was the next king to rule the Strait of Malacca and had a deep influence on the Strait of Malacca; notably, the name of this powerful monarchy has remained on this Strait (The History of Malacca, 2007).

Thus, the Malacca Strait, in its geographical and spatial complementarities, has acted as a geopolitical means for the great nations of the world to achieve economic benefits and power and, consequently, in their foreign policy victories. Indeed, this Strait with a great importance level has been considered as an infrastructure of domestic power for coastal states and foreign power for countries beyond the territorial boundaries of coastal states. Even in today's world, the American and European countries have realized the importance of this strait and are practically showing their geopolitical belonging.

### **3. Research Method**

The methodology of this research is descriptive-analytical with various library, drawing and software (Excel) methods being used in order to achieve the objectives. Qualitative and quantitative analysis methods have been used separately or in combination. In addition, using figures and statistics to draw composite diagrams, it has attempted to study the geopolitical role of the Malacca Strait as one of the major international straits and to point out the potential of the Strait in the regional and global arena.

### **4. Discussion and Findings**

#### **4.1 Explanation of the geopolitical and geostrategic role of the Malacca International Strait**

The Strait of Malacca is one of the most important straits in the world possessing the characteristics necessary to be international. In particular, this strait is economically important for all countries of the world and therefore the issue of crossing this strait has always been of interest. Although the traditional safe or non-suspended safe transit system through the Malacca Strait has been a guarantee of transit through the Strait, the adoption of the 1982 UN Convention on the Rights of the Sea and developments in state practice in recent years have brought about changes to the transit system of this strait and has made this strait subjected to a new transit system. The positions of the governments of Singapore, Malaysia and

Indonesia appear to have evolved to accept that the crossing of the Malacca Strait will be subject to the provisions of this Convention which include the transit system for international straits. Thus, the geopolitical weight of the Malacca Strait increases relative to other world's straits with the exception of the Strait of Hormuz, and is among the top world's straits in the geopolitical hierarchy. It is because according to reports published by the US Energy Information Agency (EIA) in 2011, the total world oil production was 87 million shale a day, half of which was through fixed and specified waterways. Thus, in terms of oil transit, the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and Malacca Strait are among the most important and strategic bottlenecks for oil flow rate in the world. The Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca account for most of the oil and other condensate. These two straits act as the communication artery of the places of production (Middle East and Africa) and places of energy consumption (East and Southeast Asia, Australia, Europe) (Allahverdizade,2019:145).

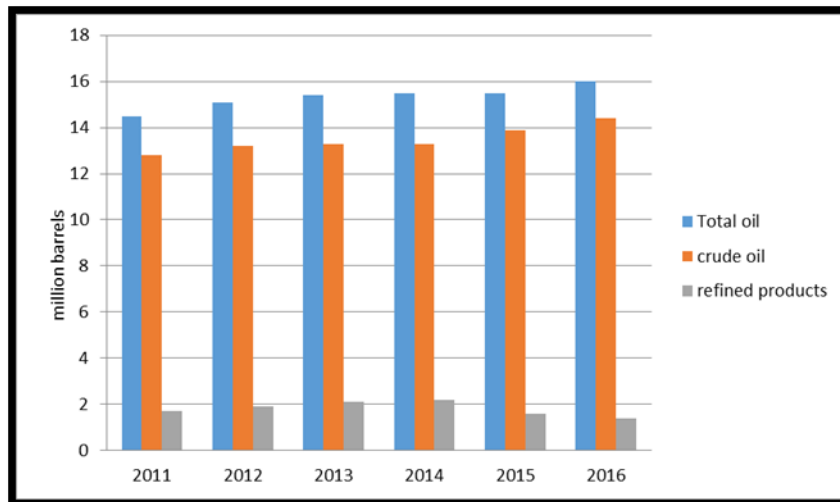
**Table 1. Strait of Malacca oil flows, 2011-2016**

million barrels per day	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Total oil flows through Strait of Malacca</b>	14.5	15.1	15.4	15.5	15.5	16.0
<b>crude oil</b>	12.8	13.2	13.3	13.3	13.9	14.6
<b>refined products</b>	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.2	1.6	1.4

(Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration)

Given the increase in transit traffic through the Malacca Strait, between 2011 and 2016, it is predicted that oil shale flow rate from this strategic strait would reach 17 million shale per day by 2030. Figure 4 displays the ascending growth of oil shale transit through the strait.



**Figure 4. The daily flow rate of oil from the Malacca Strait**

Most likely, the only strait in the world showing a geopolitical balance with the Strait of Hormuz is the Malacca Strait, as it is of great strategic and geostrategic importance in Southeast Asia, especially in the Indian Ocean. It has made the trade of the major countries of the world such as China dependent on itself. Also, countries around the Straits have strong economic relationships with giant neighbors, China and India (Manguin,2004). Malacca is a shipping port for ships traveling east from Saudi Arabia, Iran, and India (ChristieM,1995:185). By avoiding the delivery of ships tax, this waterway compensates the taxes at the ports of Suriyaya for the business activities in Southeast Asia (Pearn,1965:36). This in turn increases the geopolitical load of the strait and creates some competition and strife with other straits. The most important use of the Malacca Strait is for commercial and commercial purposes. However, it has also been claimed that the strait has strategic importance. About 250 ships pass through this strait every day, and since the strait is located in a rapidly growing area, the number of ships passing through the strait will also increase. The country that most depends on the Malacca Strait for commerce is Japan. Japan supplies most of its oil from the Persian Gulf and partly through Indonesia, so its oil tankers need to cross the Malika Strait. Indeed, this strait is the most cost-effective way to

transport oil to Japan. In addition to oil, minerals and raw materials are transported to Japan through this strait with goods from South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan being also exported from this strait. These cases suggest that the Malacca Strait is economically and commercially important for the Straits owning states; it is also a characteristic of international straits for other countries as well (Talayi,2003:57).

From a geographical point of view, there are a number of specific factors in the Malacca region that emphasize the geopolitical role of the Strait. These factors include:

(A) **Multiparty Building:** The area has at least three groups of straits, traditionally regarded as independent naval units, including Singapore and Sunda.

(B) **Significant narrowness of straits:** The straits in this area are generally small in width. In some places, the strait width reaches 3.2 m (Pishgahifard, 2007:31), which is less than the total width of land claimed by Indonesia and Malaysia's coastal governments.

(C) **Composition of several coastal states:** The Malacca Strait is essentially composed of the territories of the three coastal states, each of which has an important gateway control. The Singapore Strait lies between the Southwest China Sea and the South East Andaman Sea and is the international shipping and transportation center with this spatial structure increasing the geopolitical weight of the Malacca Strait. The Suanda Strait is also the link between the Indian Ocean and the Java Sea. This strait is the passing location of the 250000-tonne tanker due to lack of passage through the Malacca Strait (Pishgahifard,2007:31).

(D) **Geopolitical factors act more structurally in the Convention and are the basis of action.** Threats from the presence of supra-regional powers caused the reaction of regional powers and the competition between them created a new form of relations between countries at different regional and extra-regional levels and caused differences and disputes between them to determine spheres of influence and consequently Became maritime territories (Hafeznia et al.,2019:4).

#### **4.2 Malacca Strait and Geopolitical Challenges**

The importance of the Malacca Strait as a special geographical location in the global maritime space is such that if over time, the geographical, political, military and economic conditions of this Asian continent will

change so dramatically that this strait will be closed; in the first place, the economies of the industrial giants of the region, Japan and China, will be in crisis, and then the economies and national security of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore will be in danger. In such a crisis, the countries of Southeast Asia, which are dependent on strategic straits, will face an economic crisis. A regional survey shows that among the three countries in this Strait, only Indonesia (the world's most populous Muslim nation with a population of 170 million), in this crisis, plays a major role in keeping the Malacca Strait open by relying on its relatively strong navy (Shah Hosseini, 1992:110). The geographical location of the Strait of Malacca is one of the factors that affects the political behavior of governments as well as their domestic and foreign political decisions. Its geopolitical and strategic position is one that provides the power of global control for its holders. In other words, it is such that if its challenges turns into a crisis, it will have regional, continental, or global ramifications. The low width and depth of the waters surrounding this shipping line, which has been free for all governments for many years, is also a matter for coastal governments (Indonesia and Malaysia) declared as their jurisdiction as one-sided manner but have faced opposition from other countries. Given the points such as political tendencies, national characteristics, and domestic problems of these two governments, it can be predicted that there will be a great deal of clashes in the region in the absence of specific regulations. The major issue here is the significant difference in the size, extension, and population of the three coastal countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore). While Indonesia is a country of 735268 square miles with a population of 167 million, and Malaysia has an area of 129374 square miles with a population of about 16 million, Singapore is only 225 square miles and has a population of about 2.6 million. Thus, a large government, a medium government, and a small government are joined together. Obviously, these differences and contradictions in turn influence the future geopolitical situation of the strait (Dolat'yar, 1992:75).

Thus, due to the narrow width of the strait, there is often conflict between the three coastal states. When Indonesia introduced the system of origin to determine its territorial sea, it was faced with opposition from the Malaysian government. The Singapore Strait, one of the major straits in the bottleneck of the Malacca Canal, has caused competition among the three coastal states

due to its high trade and strategic transportation in the region. These include the importance of the strait to Japan, the political stability of the states around the strait, and the importance and competitiveness that Japan, China and the former Soviet Union consider for the region, all of which testify to the sensitivity of the waterway's position. In addition to conflicts between coastal governments, there have been accidents between coastal and non-coastal governments regarding the right of free passage and the free use of waterways. However, there was no problem as long as the three miles were not acceptable for the governments of the territorial waters, and any support for the straits was undeniable, while the public right of passage was valid for third states and the Strait of Malacca was used as an international waterway. However, as the coastal waters expanded to twelve miles, much of the strait became part of the territorial sea, causing geopolitical challenges (Dolat'yar, 1993:76). Currently, Singapore is working to implement measures such as upgrading research in order to avoid over-dependence on future trade. However, it is not predicted the effect of development in the next few decades in Singapore on the development of this sea route.

As a result, there are some major issues in the Strait of Malacca that may cause a crisis in the future. The first issue is the specific geographical position of the strait, which is related to the depth of water in the strait. The water depth is very low in many parts of the Malacca Strait, and this creates problems for the safety of some ships, especially large ships and large oil tankers. For example, the depths of some parts of the Strait of Malacca are less than 11 meters, which can cause large ships to aground, causing another problem for the marine environment. Since large oil tankers make up a large percentage of the ships passing through the Malacca Strait, the grounding of these ships will be accompanied by a significant oil drop in the marine environment. For example, in 1975, a Japanese tanker named *Shetmaru* was grounded the Strait, causing 844,000 gallons of oil to fall into the marine environment of the Strait of Malacca. Such marine pollution, especially due to the impact of the pollution on coastal areas, has prompted governments to take precautionary measures. This is why the issue of pollution by large and heavy ships, especially tankers, has long attracted the attention of the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. Indeed, these governments have attempted to reach an agreement on the minimum height of water from the bedrock to the bottom of the ship. While Malaysia and

Indonesia were considering the aspect of protection of the marine environment for determining such a height, Singapore emphasized the economic aspect of the matter and did not want to set such a height to negatively affect shipping in the Strait of Malacca. Finally, at the Jakarta Summit on 24 February 1977, the governments of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore agreed to a minimum height of 3.5 meters, which was also accepted by IMO<sup>1</sup>(Talayi,2003:59).

Another issue is the probability of a collision between ships passing through the strait. Many ships cross this strait daily. Increasing sea traffic in this strait itself increases the likelihood of collisions between ships. Meanwhile, it is necessary to consider the maximum safety speed for passing ships. The tide change situation as well as the weather and climate are among the issues in the Malacca Strait affecting safe and secure shipping in the Strait. There are also indications warning that the maritime trade situation in the region may lead to new changes in the future. Climate change and melting sea ice in the Arctic may mean that the North Siberian Sea Route - Northeast Passage - will be transportable over the summer months during the upcoming decades. This route will be shorter and faster for freight transport between Europe and East Asia than the route through the Suez Canal and the Malacca Strait.

One of the issues highlighted in international treaties in recent decades has been the growing concern of international maritime crime, including maritime terrorism, drug trafficking, migrant smuggling, armed robbery against ships, and particularly piracy. Thus, one of the most important challenges of the international straits today, and one of the most important issues is to develop criminal piracy activities and to counter it and eliminate the associated crimes (Bueger,2015:26). Indeed, coastal states have increasingly realized the importance of combating this phenomenon, with increasing piracy incidents in recent years in areas such as the Malacca Strait, Singapore and the waters linking the Pacific and Indian oceans. This phenomenon reflects the complex and interconnected layers of international security in today's world (Sadjadpour,2017:12). The following map displays the places where the most piracy has occurred:

However, significant issues that are considered as geopolitical crises and endanger the future of the Malacca Strait and have attracted the attention of

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1.International Maritime Organization

governments alongside the issue of shipping and crossing the Malacca Straits include the collision and accident of ships in the Strait, marine environmental pollution including pollution caused by oil and radioactive materials as well as maritime piracy and safety in the sea. Studies suggest that new maritime law rules for protecting and preventing geopolitical challenges from turning into geopolitical crises in international straits reflect balance and equilibrium in supplying the interests of the strait-wielding states and ensure the interests of the international community and the prevention of crisis (Mortazavi,2013:1).

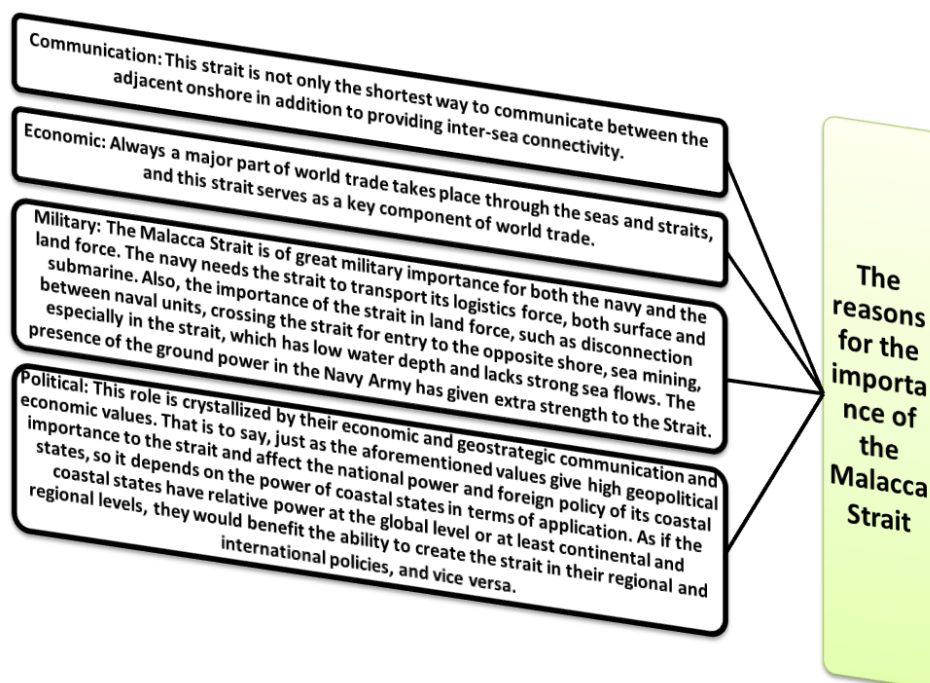
As a result, the responsibilities of coastal governments in the security and conservation sector of Malacca International Strait identify the most important geopolitical challenges, including:

- Determining high-risk areas
- Providing search and rescue services and tackling sea pollution
- Investigating marine accidents
- Developing a Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation with Marginal Countries (Amami,2012:20).
- Geopolitical Significance of Malacca International Strait

Malacca historical background shows that Malacca Strait has played an important role in shaping the region's personality. Considering the fact that, countless travelers travel to the coast of Malacca, brought rich cultures and a community of different races, each with its own distinctive features has been established (Hussin,2008:8). The Malacca Strait is also of great economic importance. The Strait of Malacca and Singapore have important fishing grounds for their coast. The fishing potential is for all waters under Indonesian control (Nontji,2004:117) and the fishery products are exported to more than 210 countries. In 1994, the coasts of Malacca were designated as a marine park, attracting both domestic and foreign tourists (Thia-Eng et al. 2000). There are also many tourist attractions in the Malacca Strait that help foster the tourism industry and attract international tourists (Hooi, 2008: 45). Sandy beaches, mangrove forests, tropical rainforests, and natural caves which are many habitats for plant and animal species (Langkawi Geopark: 99 Magical Islands in the Sun 2011) and Singapore coastal areas have a variety of features, including rocks , steep beaches, sandy beaches, rocky beaches, mango swamps, corals and beaches being natural environmental features (AR Abdullah, Tahir, Loong, Hoque & Sulaiman

1999). The most important shipping lines on land, but also as the longest strait used. In 2008, ship movements in the Strait increased to about 76,000. In 2010, the BBC reported that tanker traffic in the Strait is about six times the volume of traffic passing through the Suez Canal (Singapore) (Singapore Warns of Threat to Tankers in Malacca Strait 2010), with many ships being from European countries such as Britain, France and Belgium (Graham, 2006:212). The volume of traffic is predicted to reach 141,000 by 2020 (Sakhuja, 2007). Hence, the Malacca and Singapore Strait are essential for transportation. Especially with the emergence of China as the world's strongest economy, the entry of transit ships to Malacca will increase in the future. The economies of East Asia, Japan, China, and South Korea rely heavily on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore to transport their oil needs (Hamauzu, 2005: 143). Therefore, more than half of the ships crossing the Malacca Strait are destined for China. Japan is heavily dependent on this Strait for 90% and South Korea for 100% of their imports. Although the United States is less dependent on the Malacca Strait for trade ships, its military bases in Guam, Japan, and South Korea depend on it. China is dependent on this Strait for about 80% of its oil imports, indicating that China will become more dependent on the Straits and Seas in the future (Xuegang,2007:18). In recent years, China has taken solid steps to consolidate its position in the Malacca Strait (Ogutcu,2006:20). Japan and India, in contrast, have taken similar steps to increase their control over the Malacca Strait. In 2005, Japan proposed a security mechanism to enhance anti-piracy and terrorism security and unofficially requested the Strait states to allow the presence of the Japanese Defense Force. However, this proposal was rejected by the ASEAN for fear of increasing dominance in the region. Indian forces, on the other hand, are increasingly willing to intervene to protect the strait. The creation of military bases by India began in the 1990s. In the Andaman, Nicobar archipelago and at the western end of the Malacca Strait, the ability to patrol the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea also shows the ambition of Indian forces (Xuegang, 2007: 21). Thus, the Malacca Strait is one of the most important straits in the world; its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz and Bob El Mandeb has increased its geopolitical significance. Meanwhile, the most important reasons that add to the importance of this strategic strait have been shown in Figure 5.

**Figure5. The reasons for the importance of the Malaccan Strait**



Thus, Malacca is the shortest maritime route between energy producers in the Persian Gulf and Asian markets, namely China, Japan and South Korea and the Pacific coast lands. Singapore is located at the southern tip of the Strait of Malacca and is one of the most important ports in the world and an important center of oil refining. The oil shipments flowing through Malacca supply the energy of the world's two most populous countries, China and Indonesia. Tanker traffic through the Malacca Strait is more than three times the Suez Canal traffic and more than five times the Panama Canal traffic. If the strait closes, transit time and distance could significantly increase for about half of the world fleet, and transport fares would be multiplied. If Malacca closes, nearly half of the world's fleet will need to change the route and bypass the Indonesian archipelago through the Lambrak Strait, or the Sunda Strait. Also, as the Strait of Malacca is the shortest sea route between the three most populous countries, China, Japan and Indonesia, the level of shipping increases there. This increase in traffic is slowly and steadily

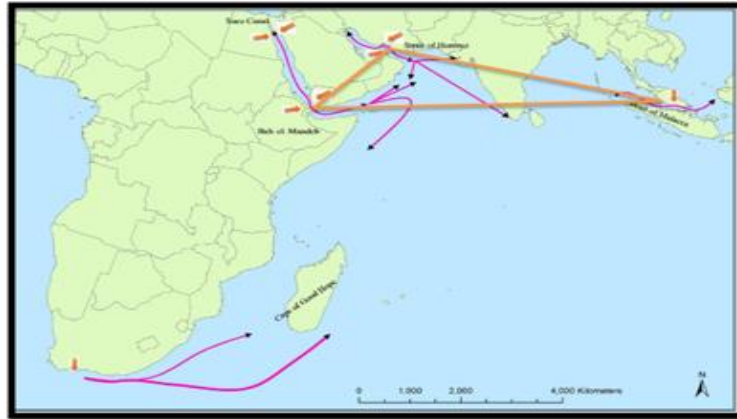


increasing as oil imports from the Middle East to China increase. For the giant oil tankers who follow the route between the Middle East and the Far East, transit through Malacca is the shortest route, about 1000 miles. This strategic waterway is an important component of the international trade chain, which does not require unnecessary delay time (Marlow and Gardner, 2006:189).

Malacca, as one of the most popular ports for Muslim traders, was responsible for the Islamization of Southeast Asia, with the area remaining largely Muslim to this day (Tarling,1992:95). Albookerc, the Portuguese admiral, believed that any government which dominates the three straits of Bab al-Dinbe, Hormuz, and Malacca would dominate the world. It can be said that Malacca succeeded as an important link in the world trade by 1511 and the population of the port of Malacca was as large as that of other European cities. As with Paris, however, Malacca's fascinating moments were with the arrival of the Portuguese in the region in the early 16th century (Lockard,2008:132).

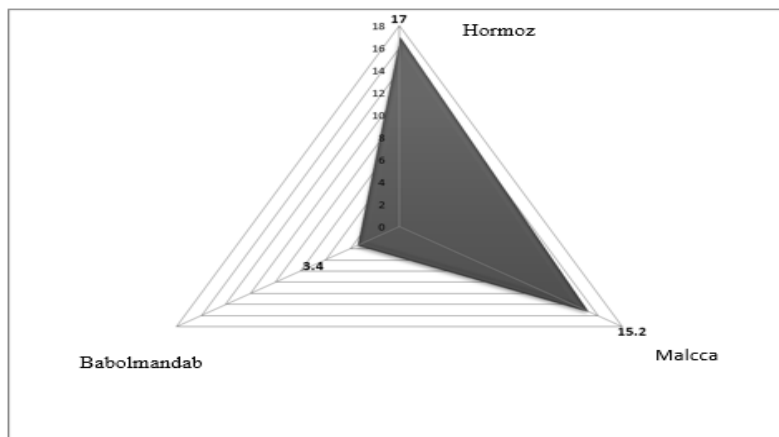
Indeed, the strategic feature that makes Malacca so important to the world is that, this strait is the main gateway for merchant ships and oil tankers moving east to west and vice versa. The Malacca Strait as the main route of maritime communication to the east-regional Asia is predicted to have the most progressing economy in the world. Thus, many powers want to have full control over the Malacca Strait or at least have sovereignty over the Strait. In other words, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Bab al-Mandeb and the Strait of Hormuz complement each other and can be used in the future as the "geopolitical triangle of Asia". That is, where politics, power and geography (sea and land) are intertwined and the owners of these straits create a geostrategic triangle within the open waters if they work together, that can provide them with special security and privileges. According to the well-known strategist Mackinder, it can be said that the countries possessing the Asian geopolitical triangle have surrounded South, South East and Southwest Asia and as a result, these countries have dominated the important geopolitical place of the world economy and eventually have global power.

**Figure 6. Geopolitical Triple Map of the Three Straits of the World**



Given the importance of the three major straits, according to Hartland McIndar, if a government or governments in the coming years, during the Fourth Seas Convention - which is expected to take place in one of the coastal states of these three straits - can gain economic and security dominance over the 'geopolitical triangle' Asia” or (SHMB), they will dominate the political economy of South Asia as a whole and therefore of Asia as a whole and ultimately of the world.

**Figure 7. Share of daily oil transposition from the geopolitical triangle of the Asian Sea**



## **5. Conclusion**

The geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic role of the Malacca Strait has led us to examine the geopolitical features of the Strait in this article. The results of the study revealed that "Malacca Strait has an international position due to its geopolitical importance and its high geopolitical weight in the maritime trade regionally and globally. It attracts the attention of the great powers in the East and the West because of its important role in trading which has created a positive geopolitical code for the coastal states of the Strait. They can use this geopolitical code to create a new geopolitical order in the Malacca Strait and fight geopolitical challenges. Research also shows that this strait has led to the development of the maritime industry and maritime transport and is of great importance to neighboring states. The Malacca Geopolitical Strait is currently one of the three major straits in the world, competing and contending between the peripheral countries and the Southeast Asian countries as well as the European countries for greater use of its benefits and is of particular importance in regional and global shipping. Therefore, the study of its geopolitical principles by political geographers is of great importance and application, as the Malacca Strait is one of the angles of the South East Asian maritime power pyramid.

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