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Non-Traditional Security and Borders: “Perspectives on and from the Indo-Pacific.”

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ABSTRACT :

In an era when non-traditional security (NTS) threats are growing, the Indo-Pacific region becomes a crucial arena where security is no longer determined solely by boundaries. In the Indo-Pacific, non-traditional security threats do not recognize the rigidity of borders; rather, they redefine them. This paper focuses on two pivotal NTS issues- irregular migration and maritime insecurity. Explore how they transcend and reconfigure the region's traditional notions of sovereignty and territoriality. This paper will also examine critical case studies including the Rohingya refugee crisis and the securitization of maritime chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea. The purpose is to analyze why current policies fall short and what regional frameworks can do differently. Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative, case study-driven approach. By engaging with official policy documents, multilateral cooperation agreements (SAARC, BIMSTEC, ASEAN), and secondary scholarly literature, the paper critically assesses gaps in the existing frameworks. This paper's importance comes from emphasizing how these cross-border issues necessitate a change from strict, state-centric methods to more flexible, human-centric ones. It reframes conventional ideas of sovereignty and territoriality in the Indo-Pacific region by presenting migration and maritime security as interconnected phenomena. This paper emphasizes the urgent need to transcend inflexible, conventional paradigms in an increasingly interconnected world and offers a novel viewpoint on reinventing security governance. By placing the analysis in the context of both top-down (state and institutional) and bottom-up (community and local) methods, this study helps to rethink Indo-Pacific border governance.

Keywords: Maritime, Migration, Non-Traditional, Security, Indo-Pacific, Governanc

Introduction

Non-Traditional Security (NTS) challenges represent a significant departure from conventional, military-focused understandings of national security. Unlike traditional security, which primarily concerns safeguarding a state's territorial integrity and sovereignty from external military threats, NTS encompasses a broader spectrum of issues. These include phenomena such as irregular migration, pandemics, climate change, food insecurity, maritime piracy, and human trafficking. Crucially, NTS threats are often non-military, transboundary, and involve multiple actors, impacting both states and non-state entities. As outlined by Caballero-Anthony (2006), NTS issues tend to be "people-centric rather than state-centric", frequently requiring non-coercive measures and demanding regional or global cooperation for resolution. The 1994 United Nations Human Development Report was a seminal international document that underscored the importance of centering security on individuals, not solely states. Traditional security paradigms, often rooted in realist theories, position the state as the primary actor and focus on deterrence, defense, and strategic competition. However, NTS challenges do not conform neatly to these frameworks. For instance, irregular migration cannot be deterred solely through border enforcement, and maritime piracy involves networks that extend beyond national jurisdictions. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998), through their "Securitization Theory," highlight that security is a social construct. NTS threats are often "securitized" by political elites, which can lead states to employ militarized tools even when the nature of the threat calls for humanitarian or developmental responses.

Addressing these complex challenges necessitates examining key concepts that are being reshaped. Territoriality, traditionally understood as the state's control over a defined geographical area, is being questioned as NTS challenges grow in scope. Elden (2013) notes that territorial control is a historically constructed practice, not a static reality. Similarly, the traditional notion of sovereignty—implying absolute state authority free from external interference—is being redefined by global challenges like mass displacement and terrorism. Krasner (1999) distinguishes different types of sovereignty, illustrating how globalization and interdependence complicate traditional state functions. Cases like the irregular migration of the Rohingyas and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea highlight the limitations of hard-sovereignty doctrines in the Indo-Pacific. These issues underscore the significance of transnationalism, processes that cross national borders and involve networks of people, goods, and ideas. Keohane and Nye (1977) argued that transnational actors and issues blur state authority boundaries, requiring a shift towards networked governance. In response to this complexity, the concept of security governance has emerged. This recognises the "pluralization of security providers", encompassing diverse arrangements involving states, international organisations, civil society, and private actors. Effective security governance in globalized contexts demands multilevel cooperation across borders, sectors, and institutions. It also incorporates "soft security" mechanisms such as diplomacy, information sharing, and capacity building, which are crucial for addressing NTS threats like piracy or displacement.

Furthermore, this paper draws on the human security paradigm, which pivots the focus from state protection to individual well-being, encompassing aspects like economic, food, health, and environmental security. Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) argue this paradigm reorients global governance around the individual, advocating for inclusive and multidimensional responses. The paper also employs insights from critical border studies, which challenge the idea of borders as fixed or neutral. Scholars like Newman (2006) note that borders are increasingly "managed", and Mountz (2011) highlights that "bordering practices" now extend beyond physical boundaries. The complexities of NTS in the Indo-Pacific are exemplified by two case studies: the Rohingya refugee crisis and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. The Rohingya crisis illustrates how human rights, statelessness, and irregular migration redefine borders, often leading to the securitization of asylum and practices like border externalization. Maritime insecurity, particularly piracy and IUU fishing, in vital chokepoints highlights how non-state threats challenge borders and necessitate transnational governance. Both cases reveal the limitations of existing regional frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN, often hampered by political fragmentation and a lack of enforcement mechanisms. They also underscore the contrast between top-down state-centric responses and the often more effective bottom-up approaches driven by local communities and NGOs. By integrating these concepts and case studies, this paper seeks to critically analyse how non-traditional security challenges reshape Indo-Pacific borders and security governance. It sets out to explore how irregular migration and maritime insecurity challenge conventional notions of sovereignty and security, arguing for a necessary shift towards more regional, cooperative, and human-centric approaches to security governance in the region and What alternatives exist for more effective, human-centric security governance?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Defining Non-Traditional Security (NTS)

Non-Traditional Security (NTS) refers to threats that go beyond conventional, military-centric understandings of national security. Unlike traditional security—which focuses on the protection of a state's territorial integrity and sovereignty from external military threats—NTS encompasses a broader range of challenges such as irregular migration, pandemics, climate change, food insecurity, maritime piracy, and human trafficking. These threats are often non-military in nature, transboundary, and multi-actor in their impact, affecting both state and non-state actors. As Caballero-Anthony (2006) outlines, NTS issues tend to be "people-centric rather than state-centric", often involving non-coercive measures for resolution and requiring regional or global cooperation. The 1994 United Nations Human Development Report was one of the first significant international documents to emphasize that security should be centered on individuals, not just states.

Divergence from Traditional Security

Traditional security frameworks, often grounded in realist and neorealist theories of international relations, view the state as the central actor and focus on deterrence, defence, and strategic competition. However, NTS challenges do not fit neatly within these paradigms. For example, irregular migration cannot be deterred solely through border enforcement, and maritime piracy involves networks that transcend national jurisdictions. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) in their "Securitization Theory" argue that security is socially constructed, and NTS threats are often "securitized" by political elites to justify extraordinary measures. This theoretical framing helps understand why states respond to NTS with militarized tools, even when the nature of the threat demands humanitarian or developmental responses.

Key Concepts: Territoriality, Sovereignty, and Transnationalism

Territoriality

Territoriality refers to the spatial dimension of state sovereignty—the claim and control over a defined geographical area. Traditional IR theory, particularly Westphalian sovereignty, equates strong borders with strong states. However, as NTS challenges grow in scope and scale, the rigidity of borders is increasingly questioned. The work of Elden (2013) in "*The Birth of Territory*" emphasizes how territorial control is a historically constructed practice rather than a natural or static reality.

Sovereignty

Sovereignty traditionally implies absolute authority of the state over its territory and population, free from external interference. However, in the face of global challenges such as mass displacement, terrorism, and climate change, this notion is being redefined. Krasner (1999) distinguishes between domestic, interdependence, and international legal sovereignty, highlighting how globalization and interdependence complicate traditional sovereign functions. In the Indo-Pacific, irregular migration of the Rohingyas and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea demonstrate the inadequacy of hard-sovereignty doctrines. States must increasingly negotiate sovereignty within multilateral arrangements and shared responsibilities.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism refers to processes and relationships that cut across national borders, involving networks of people, goods, capital, and ideas. Keohane and Nye (1977) in "*Power and Interdependence*" argue that transnational actors and issues have blurred the boundaries of state authority, demanding a shift from hierarchical to networked governance. The movement of refugees, human traffickers, and pirates in the Indo-Pacific is not confined by political boundaries, highlighting the transnational nature of NTS threats.

Security Governance

Security governance is a concept that recognizes the pluralization of security providers. It refers to the diverse arrangements, both formal and informal, through which security is managed, including states, international organizations, civil society, and private actors. Krahmann (2003) asserts that in globalized contexts, security governance requires multilevel cooperation across borders, sectors, and institutions. In the Indo-Pacific, mechanisms like ASEAN Regional Forum, BIMSTEC, and SAARC reflect attempts at regional security governance, though their effectiveness remains limited. Security governance also accounts for "soft security" mechanisms, including diplomatic engagement, information sharing, and capacity building—tools that are particularly crucial in addressing NTS threats such as piracy or displacement.

Introduce the human security paradigm and critical border studies

Human Security Paradigm

The human security paradigm shifts the focus from state protection to individual well-being. As conceptualized by the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, it encompasses economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. Unlike traditional approaches, human security does not view individuals as mere subjects of state protection, but as active participants in the security process. Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) argue that human security reorients global governance around the individual, calling for inclusive, bottom-up, and multidimensional policy responses. In the Indo-Pacific context, applying this lens helps reframe irregular migration and maritime insecurity not just as threats to states, but as crises of human dignity, livelihood, and survival.

Critical Border Studies

Critical border studies challenge the notion that borders are fixed, natural, or neutral. Rather, they are socially constructed, politically contested, and historically contingent. Newman (2006) emphasizes that borders are increasingly being "managed" rather than defended, with techniques including biometric surveillance, externalization, and smart border technologies.

Scholars like Mountz (2011) argue that bordering practices now extend far beyond the territorial edge, such as at sea, in detention centers, and through digital infrastructures. In the Indo-Pacific, the naval policing of maritime chokepoints and refugee pushbacks at sea exemplify this "bordering beyond borders" phenomenon. This theoretical lens helps analyze how irregular migration and maritime governance are interconnected, and how security practices transform border regimes.

In sum, this conceptual and theoretical framework draws on a multidisciplinary and critical approach to understand how non-traditional security challenges reshape Indo-Pacific borders. By integrating concepts like human security, transnationalism, critical border studies, and security governance, this paper sets the stage to critically analyze how irregular migration and maritime insecurity are managed, and how they call for rethinking sovereignty, security, and cooperation in the region.

Case Study I: Irregular Migration – The Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The Rohingya refugee crisis represents one of the most severe and complex non-traditional security (NTS) challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, where human rights, statelessness, and irregular migration intersect to redefine the concept of borders. The crisis has its roots in the colonial and post-colonial history of Myanmar. The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim minority in Myanmar's Rakhine State, have faced systematic discrimination and denial of citizenship under the 1982 Citizenship Law, rendering them stateless despite centuries of habitation (Cheung, 2012). Tensions escalated into violence, particularly after 2012 and then again in 2017, when a military crackdown led to the mass exodus of over 700,000 Rohingya into neighboring Bangladesh (UNHCR, 2018). The primary migration routes include overland escape from Myanmar's Rakhine State into southeastern Bangladesh—particularly the Cox's Bazar district—as well as perilous sea voyages through the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea toward Indonesia and Malaysia. These routes are often managed by human smugglers and expose refugees to significant risks including drowning, trafficking, and abuse (Yegar, 2002). In many cases, Rohingya refugees are forced to undertake irregular journeys due to the absence of formal migration channels, further contributing to the "illegal migrant" label and justifying securitized responses by host states. The crisis also exemplifies the securitization of asylum, where the presence of stateless refugees is framed as a security threat rather than a humanitarian emergency. Both Bangladesh and Malaysia, while offering initial refuge, have increasingly adopted hardline stances, including turning away boats, detaining migrants, and limiting their rights to work or move freely (Amnesty International, 2020). The notion of border externalization—preventing entry outside a state's official boundary—has become prominent. For instance, Malaysia has often intercepted boats before they reach its coast, mirroring EU-style pushback practices. India too has tightened border patrols and sought to deport Rohingya, viewing them through a security-centric lens rather than international refugee law (Jha, 2017).

Regional organizations such as SAARC, ASEAN, and BIMSTEC have largely failed to develop a coordinated or robust humanitarian response. ASEAN's principle of non-interference has inhibited collective pressure on Myanmar, and despite multiple emergency meetings, little tangible action has been taken to ensure safe repatriation or protect the Rohingya (Davies, 2019). BIMSTEC and SAARC, while geographically relevant, have neither institutional mechanisms nor political will for refugee coordination or burden-sharing frameworks. This inaction reveals a critical gap in regional migration governance, where ad hoc national responses have prevailed over multilateral collaboration. At the local level, responses from host communities have been both supportive and strained. In Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, communities initially welcomed the Rohingya but later expressed concerns about resource competition, environmental degradation, and security. NGOs and local civil society actors have played a critical role in sustaining humanitarian aid, education, and psychological support for refugees (Uddin & Rahman, 2020). In Malaysia, refugee-run schools and Islamic organizations have stepped

in where state services are absent, highlighting the importance of bottom-up governance in NTS crises. The implications of the crisis extend across borders. For Bangladesh, the protracted refugee situation has strained its economy and infrastructure. India, which hosts over 40,000 Rohingya, has viewed them as security threats and taken a deportation-first approach. For Southeast Asia more broadly, the maritime dimension of the crisis exposes weaknesses in coast guard coordination and refugee protection at sea. The core tension lies between securitization and humanitarianism: while states seek to control and deter migration to protect national security, the Rohingya remain victims of statelessness, persecution, and neglect. This case underscores the urgent need to shift from reactive, state-centric frameworks to more regional, cooperative, and rights-based approaches to NTS in the Indo-Pacific.

Case Study II: Maritime Insecurity – The South China Sea and Strait of Malacca

Maritime insecurity in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea (SCS) and Strait of Malacca, exemplifies how non-traditional security (NTS) threats challenge the integrity of borders and demand transnational governance. These maritime chokepoints are of immense strategic and economic importance—the Strait of Malacca, for instance, is the world's second busiest waterway, through which nearly one-third of global trade and more than 80% of China's oil imports pass (Kaplan, 2010). Similarly, the South China Sea facilitates over \$3.5 trillion in annual trade, making it a focal point for both regional and global stakeholders (Hayton, 2014). However, these waterways are plagued by a range of non-state maritime threats, including piracy, human trafficking, arms smuggling, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The Strait of Malacca has long been a hotspot for piracy, particularly in the early 2000s, when attacks surged due to weak coastal surveillance and limited interstate coordination (Raymond, 2005). Although regional naval cooperation has reduced piracy incidents, the rise of IUU fishing—especially by Chinese fishing fleets—has created new ecological and economic pressures, while simultaneously being used as a tool of coercive diplomacy (Ewell et al., 2020). Trafficking routes for drugs, arms, and migrants often overlap with legitimate trade lanes, complicating detection and law enforcement.

Beyond non-state threats, the South China Sea is also a zone of geopolitical contestation among regional powers like China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia, and extra-regional actors such as the United States, Japan, and Australia. China's expansive "nine-dash line" claim has led to the militarization of disputed features, including the artificial island-building campaign on the Spratly and Paracel Islands, which contravenes the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling (Permanent Court of Arbitration, 2016). The U.S. and its allies have responded with Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to challenge Beijing's territorial claims, resulting in a growing naval buildup in the region. This strategic friction has blurred the line between traditional and non-traditional security threats, as military standoffs now often occur alongside trafficking and IUU fishing incidents.

The complexity of maritime insecurity in these chokepoints has exposed the institutional limitations of regional mechanisms. The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), while facilitating dialogue, has struggled with consensus-building due to ASEAN's non-interference principle and China's influence within the bloc. Efforts such as the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea remain non-binding and protracted in negotiation. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), though relevant to the broader Indo-Pacific maritime architecture, lacks enforcement mechanisms and rapid-response capabilities, rendering it ineffective against real-time threats like piracy or smuggling. Moreover, both ARF and IORA lack inter-agency coordination, particularly among coast guards, fisheries, and customs, further weakening operational coherence (Emmers, 2010). The overlapping interests and limited cooperation among states have made maritime insecurity in the Indo-Pacific a paradigmatic example of border fluidity, where sovereignty is contested not only by other states but also by transnational criminal networks. As maritime threats continue to evolve in both complexity and scale, this case highlights the urgency for multi-level, collaborative, and non-militarized frameworks of maritime governance—ones that address not just state security but the security of trade, ecosystems, and coastal communities.

Regional Frameworks and Governance Gaps

The Indo-Pacific region's capacity to respond to non-traditional security (NTS) threats is significantly shaped by the policies and institutional strength of regional frameworks such as SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), and ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Despite their geographic and strategic relevance, these platforms have largely failed to deliver effective and unified responses to pressing NTS issues such as irregular migration, statelessness, and maritime insecurity. As noted in the case of the Rohingya refugee crisis, SAARC has remained notably silent, lacking both the political cohesion and institutional capacity to formulate a regional asylum policy or shared humanitarian framework. This reflects deeper structural weaknesses: SAARC is frequently stalled by India-Pakistan hostilities, which undermine collective action on any front, including disaster response and human security (Davies, 2019). Similarly, BIMSTEC, though better situated geographically to address Bay of Bengal migration flows and maritime issues, remains under-institutionalized and dominated by economic rhetoric rather than actionable security policy. Its agenda lacks clarity on migration governance and maritime law enforcement, which has hampered its role in addressing transnational issues such as human trafficking and piracy, both of which were highlighted in the context of the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea (Kaplan, 2010; Raymond, 2005). Moreover, BIMSTEC lacks an operational security arm and has not been able to coordinate joint responses or pool intelligence on irregular migration routes, despite shared exposure to these challenges.

ASEAN, while more developed in its institutional architecture, also suffers from political limitations rooted in its non-interference principle and consensus-based decision-making. As seen in the South China Sea maritime dispute, ASEAN has struggled to present a unified front, let alone enforce norms, against member and non-member states such as China. Its mechanisms—like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the long-negotiated Code of Conduct—remain non-binding, thereby limiting their deterrent or preventive capabilities (Emmers, 2010; Hayton, 2014). In the context of irregular migration, ASEAN's response to the Rohingya crisis was confined to diplomatic statements and voluntary humanitarian aid, with no framework for refugee protection or burden-sharing. A common shortfall across these regional bodies is the absence of cohesive action plans, clearly defined mandates

for NTS, and enforcement mechanisms. For instance, there is no regional coast guard coordination mechanism or refugee status determination system in place, leaving states to respond individually and often through securitized approaches, as seen in Malaysia's naval pushbacks and India's deportation policies (Jha, 2017; Amnesty International, 2020). Furthermore, these organizations lack cross-sectoral integration—they do not sufficiently coordinate between civil society, national governments, and local actors, despite evidence from bottom-up responses in Bangladesh and Malaysia that local engagement is critical for effective governance (Uddin & Rahman, 2020).

The Indo-Pacific's regional frameworks are hampered by political fragmentation, institutional inertia, and a lack of enforceable protocols, making them ill-equipped to address the transboundary and multidimensional nature of NTS threats. This governance vacuum necessitates a shift toward more cooperative, human-centric, and multilateral models, where regional institutions must evolve beyond their current limitations to manage the complexities of irregular migration and maritime insecurity in a connected world.

Bottom-up vs. Top-down Approaches

Addressing non-traditional security (NTS) threats in the Indo-Pacific requires a critical evaluation of top-down state-centric approaches versus bottom-up community-driven responses. In both the Rohingya refugee crisis and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, the limitations of traditional state-led, securitized models have become increasingly evident. National governments, guided by sovereignty and territoriality, have often prioritized border control and deterrence over humanitarian engagement. For instance, Malaysia's naval pushbacks of refugee boats and India's deportation initiatives reflect a rigid state-centric response to irregular migration (Amnesty International, 2020; Jha, 2017). Similarly, top-down policies in the South China Sea, including militarization and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), emphasize state power rather than addressing the underlying non-state threats such as piracy and IUU fishing (Raymond, 2005; Hayton, 2014). By contrast, bottom-up approaches—driven by local communities, NGOs, civil society organizations, and coastal populations—have offered more nuanced, humane, and often more effective responses to NTS challenges. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where over 700,000 Rohingya reside, local communities and NGOs have provided education, mental health services, and basic livelihood support in the absence of formal refugee policies (Uddin & Rahman, 2020). In Malaysia, informal community schools and religious organizations have extended support to Rohingya migrants denied access to public services. Similarly, in maritime contexts, local fishers and coastal communities have been essential in early detection of piracy and reporting illegal fishing, contributing to situational awareness beyond the capacity of overstretched naval forces (Kaplan, 2010).

This contrast highlights the need for inclusive, multilevel governance that blends top-down institutional frameworks with bottom-up knowledge and engagement. While regional organizations like ASEAN and BIMSTEC have focused on diplomatic and intergovernmental dialogues, their effectiveness remains constrained by a lack of enforcement mechanisms and grassroots integration (Emmers, 2010; Davies, 2019). An effective model for NTS response must therefore embrace co-ownership of security, where states, multilateral forums, and local actors collaborate within a shared framework. This is particularly crucial in a region as diverse and decentralized as the Indo-Pacific, where threats transcend fixed boundaries and require adaptive, people-centered approaches. Ultimately, the comparative analysis reveals that while top-down mechanisms are necessary for regional coordination and international diplomacy, they must be complemented by localized, human-centric interventions to address the full spectrum of NTS threats. Without such synergy, security governance will remain partial, reactive, and exclusionary—failing to meet the evolving demands of borderless challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

Findings

This section presents the key findings drawn from the analysis of non-traditional security (NTS) challenges in the Indo-Pacific, as illuminated by the Rohingya refugee crisis and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca. Utilising concepts from NTS theory, securitization theory, critical border studies, human security, and security governance, the analysis reveals significant shifts in how security is experienced, governed, and contested in the region.

1. **NTS Challenges Fundamentally Redefine Borders and Sovereignty:** The case studies demonstrate that NTS threats, being non-military and transboundary, challenge traditional understandings of rigid territoriality and absolute state sovereignty.

- The Rohingya crisis exemplifies how statelessness and irregular migration flows redefine borders not just as physical lines, but as sites of human rights contestation and exclusion, where hard-sovereignty doctrines prove inadequate. Practices like naval pushbacks and deportation illustrate state attempts to reassert control, often by securitising humanitarian issues.
- Maritime insecurity in vital chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea shows how non-state actors (pirates, traffickers, IUU fishers) and transnational processes challenge state authority within their claimed territories and exclusive economic zones. This highlights the fluidity of maritime borders and the limitations of state control against transnational threats.

2. **Securitisation of NTS Issues Leads to Ineffective State Responses:** Both case studies reveal a tendency among states to securitise NTS threats, often leading to reactive, militarised, and exclusionary responses that fail to address the root causes.

- The presence of Rohingya refugees has been framed as a security threat by states like Malaysia and India, resulting in measures like border externalisation and detention rather than rights-based or humanitarian aid.

- While maritime security involves naval patrols, the focus often remains on state-centric deterrence or geopolitical competition (e.g., FONOPs) rather than effective governance mechanisms for transnational crimes like IUU fishing or trafficking.
- This securitised, top-down approach is often insufficient and exclusionary, failing to address the human dimensions of these crises.

3. Traditional Regional Frameworks Exhibit Significant Governance Gaps: Existing regional organisations in the Indo-Pacific, such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN, are largely ill-equipped to effectively manage complex, transboundary NTS challenges.

- Analysis shows these frameworks are hampered by political fragmentation, institutional inertia, and principles like ASEAN's non-interference.
- They lack clear mandates, cohesive action plans, enforcement mechanisms, and cross-sectoral integration necessary for coordinating responses to irregular migration, statelessness, piracy, or IUU fishing.
- Their limitations mean that responses often default to uncoordinated national, state-centric measures, creating a governance vacuum.

4. Human Security and Bottom-up Approaches Offer More Effective Alternatives: The case studies underscore the importance of shifting from state-centric security to a human security paradigm and integrating bottom-up approaches.

- Focusing on human security reframes issues like irregular migration and maritime insecurity as crises impacting individual well-being and dignity, advocating for inclusive and multidimensional responses.
- Bottom-up initiatives, driven by local communities, NGOs, and civil society, have proven crucial in providing essential support and situational awareness where state services are absent or insufficient. Examples include aid for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and local intelligence on piracy or fishing.
- Effective NTS governance requires a multilevel and inclusive approach that strategically blends necessary top-down coordination with vital bottom-up knowledge and engagement.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that NTS challenges in the Indo-Pacific profoundly impact traditional state functions and security concepts. The region's current security governance architecture, dominated by state-centric and often securitised responses and limited by fragmented regional cooperation, is inadequate. The evidence from the Rohingya crisis and maritime insecurity cases strongly supports the argument for a necessary shift towards more regional, cooperative, human-centric, and multi-stakeholder approaches to security governance that recognise the limitations of traditional borders and the critical role of non-state actors.

Conclusion

This paper has critically analysed how non-traditional security (NTS) challenges, specifically irregular migration through the lens of the Rohingya crisis and maritime insecurity in the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca, are reshaping the concepts of borders and security governance in the Indo-Pacific. As established in the introduction, NTS threats differ fundamentally from traditional military concerns, being often transboundary, multi-actor, and people-centric. The theoretical framework employed—drawing upon NTS theory, securitization theory, key concepts like territoriality, sovereignty, and transnationalism, security governance, the human security paradigm, and critical border studies—has illuminated the complex dynamics at play in these critical regions. The findings derived from the case studies strongly support the paper's central argument. Firstly, the Rohingya crisis and maritime insecurity demonstrate unequivocally that NTS challenges fundamentally redefine traditional notions of territoriality and sovereignty. Borders are revealed as fluid, contested, and increasingly managed beyond physical lines, while state authority is challenged not only by other states but also by transnational networks of migrants, smugglers, and pirates. The inadequacy of hard-sovereignty doctrines is particularly evident in the face of mass displacement and the complexities of securing vast maritime spaces against diverse non-state threats.

Secondly, the analysis reveals a pervasive tendency for states in the region to securitise NTS issues. This approach, while understandable from a state-centric perspective, often leads to ineffective, militarised, and exclusionary responses, such as naval pushbacks and deportation policies in the migration context, or an overemphasis on military posturing in maritime disputes. These securitised responses frequently fail to address the humanitarian dimensions or the complex, root causes of the threats, as highlighted by the limited rights and precarious situations of Rohingya refugees and the persistence of transnational maritime crimes despite increased patrols.

Thirdly, the paper's findings underscore the significant governance gaps within existing regional frameworks in the Indo-Pacific. Bodies like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and ASEAN, despite their relevance, are largely ill-equipped to manage the transboundary and multi-actor nature of NTS threats. Their limitations stem from political fragmentation, institutional inertia, principles of non-interference, and a lack of binding protocols, enforcement mechanisms, and cross-sectoral integration. This results in uncoordinated, ad hoc national responses that are insufficient to the scale of the challenges.

Crucially, the analysis strongly indicates that more effective approaches lie in adopting a human security paradigm and integrating bottom-up initiatives. Shifting the focus from state protection to individual well-being provides a more inclusive and multidimensional lens, essential for understanding and responding to the human costs of irregular migration and maritime insecurity. Furthermore, the vital role played by local communities, NGOs, and civil society actors in providing support and intelligence, often where state capacities are lacking, demonstrates the critical importance of co-ownership and multilevel governance. These bottom-up efforts offer a more nuanced, humane, and often more effective complement to traditional state actions.

The complex interplay of irregular migration and maritime insecurity in the Indo-Pacific serves as a powerful case study for the evolving nature of security in a globalised world. The evidence presented demonstrates that traditional, state-centric approaches, while still relevant, are insufficient to manage these borderless challenges effectively. Addressing NTS threats in the Indo-Pacific necessitates a fundamental shift towards more regional, cooperative, human-centric, and multi-stakeholder approaches to security governance that move beyond the limitations of fixed borders and embrace the fluidity and transnational nature of contemporary threats. Such a transition is not merely a theoretical imperative but a practical necessity for enhancing both state stability and human security in this vital region.

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