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# The Role of The Southeast Asia Region in International Relations and Its Security Issues

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the geostrategic features of the Southeast Asian region, its problems, and their origins. It also analyzes the factors contributing to Southeast Asia's significant increase in international relations importance and its role in ensuring international security. The strategic influence of the world's leading countries in the Southeast Asian region is also studied.

**Keywords:** ASEAN, "Bangkok Declaration", "ASEAN Security Community", "ASEAN Economic Community" and "ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community", transnational threats, "Jamaa Islamiyah", "Abu Sayyaf".

**Introduction:** Along with the increasing importance of regions and regional powers as actors in global politics, it is also evident that they are gaining importance in research in the field of international relations. . One such important region is the Southeast Asian region. Today, Southeast Asia refers to the countries that make up this region, such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Singapore, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and East Timor. All of these countries have interacted and mixed with each other throughout history, especially culturally. Present-day Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore once formed the great Malay Empire, which dominated the region at one time. In addition, the Southeast Asian region has always been studied with great interest by researchers and experts due to its location at the

crossroads of global trade routes, its rich natural resources, and its strong impact on global security and the prospects for interregional cooperation. Under the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) agreement signed in 1995, none of the countries in the region will pursue the initiative to acquire nuclear weapons, which are considered weapons of mass destruction. Factors like these make any researcher in international relations and regional studies interested in studying the region in depth.

**The main part.** Southeast Asia is a key player in international relations due to its strategic location, economic potential, rich cultural diversity, and role in global geopolitics. The region occupies a key position between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, serving as a gateway for maritime trade between East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. In particular, the Strait of Malacca is one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, through which a large portion of global trade, including energy shipments, passes. Southeast Asia is also home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, with countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines experiencing rapid economic growth. These countries are key players in global supply chains, particularly in manufacturing, electronics, and textiles. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), founded in Bangkok in 1967, is a large economic bloc with a combined population of over 650 million and a gross domestic product of over \$3 trillion. The goals and objectives of the organization were set out in the Bangkok Declaration in 1967. The text of this declaration outlines seven main goals and objectives of the organization:

1. Economic growth, social and global development.
2. Regional peace and stability.
3. In economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative affairs cooperation.
4. Cooperation in the field of education and research.
5. Cooperation in agriculture and industry, trade, transport and cooperation in raising living standards.
6. Promote and develop research on Southeast Asia.
7. Cooperation with regional and international organizations .

ASEAN has free trade agreements with other major economies, including China (under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership), Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand. The region is also an integral part of global trade, and its economic integration has enabled it to become a hub for investment, manufacturing and exports. Foreign direct

investment in Southeast Asia is mainly attracted by China, Japan, the United States and European countries. The region has a large young workforce and growing consumer markets. Singapore alone has already become one of the major financial centers. Indonesia and Vietnam have become important centers of manufacturing and assembly, especially in the electronics sector, not only in the region but also worldwide. Southeast Asian countries are at the forefront of digital technology adoption, with internet use, e-commerce and technological innovation growing. Countries such as Singapore, Vietnam and Malaysia are emerging as leaders in computer technology and innovation. The region's young, tech-savvy population is a growing market for digital services, and the Southeast Asian region is one of the regions increasingly connected to global information and technology networks.

China, the region's main trading partner, is making significant progress in Southeast Asia with its "One Belt, One Road" initiative. China has invested heavily in infrastructure projects such as railways, ports and power plants. These investments will reshape the region's economic landscape, but are sure to raise concerns about debt sustainability and China's growing influence.

Despite its strategic location, Southeast Asia is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and natural disasters such as typhoons and floods. These challenges make countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam particularly vulnerable to the potential for large-scale population displacement. The region's environmental challenges impact global climate policy and international cooperation in areas such as disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and sustainable development.

ASEAN, which brings together countries in the region, plays a key role in regional diplomacy and has become a key platform for resolving regional issues, promoting dialogue, and fostering cooperation in areas such as trade, security, and environmental sustainability. It provides a convenient environment for regional powers (including China, Japan, and India) to engage with Southeast Asian countries. Formats such as ASEAN+3 and ASEAN+6 - which include ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, and South Korea (ASEAN+3) and ASEAN+6 (including Australia, New Zealand, and India) - are important for economic cooperation, political dialogue, and regional stability. ASEAN's central role in these forums further strengthens its role in promoting multilateralism and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

The 11th ASEAN Summit held in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005 was a significant milestone in the development of the organization. During the summit, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Preparation of the ASEAN Charter, which provides a legal and institutional framework for the achievement of ASEAN's goals and objectives, was signed, and the "ASEAN Security Community", "ASEAN Economic Community" and "ASEAN Social-Cultural Community" were established, and it was decided to build the "ASEAN Community" based on three pillars. Among the topics discussed during the summit; the establishment of the ASEAN Community, ASEAN's interests after 2015, claims over the South China Sea, the "Global Moderation Movement", and the fight against extremism and terrorism were highlighted.

Unlike Europe, not only in the Southeast Asian region, but in Asia as a whole, there are almost no strong, multilateral political institutions. In Asia, only ASEAN, the Regional Forum on Security (RFA) and, to some extent, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are comparable to the European security structures (EU, NATO, OSCE, Council of Europe). China and other major players in East and Southeast Asia have not joined ASEAN. The APEC mainly performs consultative functions. Security in Asia is ensured not by multilateral agreements, but by bilateral agreements between the countries of the region and the United States, primarily the security agreements between the United States and Japan and the United States and South Korea.

Forces influencing the security system of Southeast Asia. The creation of a security system in East and Southeast Asia is mainly influenced by four major powers: the United States, Japan, China, and to a certain extent Russia. Therefore, assessments of the situation in the region in the field of international security and the possibilities of establishing peace and stability in it depend largely on the positions and policies of Washington, Tokyo, Beijing, and Moscow. A number of scholars argue that Japan's approaches to these issues "do not differ much from those of the United States."

Southeast Asia is a focal point of the competition between the United States and China. The United States has long-standing security alliances with countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. These alliances have a military dimension, including U.S. military bases in the region, joint military exercises, and defense agreements. At the same time, China is increasing its influence in Southeast Asia. This is particularly evident in its assertive policy in the South China Sea and its growing involvement in regional trade and investment.

Southeast Asia, particularly in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, has been plagued by terrorism and radicalization. Terrorist attacks in the region have been attributed to groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah and Abu Sayyaf. Counterterrorism in Southeast Asia requires international cooperation, and many countries in the region work closely with global powers such as the United States to combat these threats.

Southeast Asia is a hotspot for transnational threats, including drug trafficking, piracy, and illegal fishing. Regional cooperation and international relations are essential in addressing these challenges. ASEAN countries are now working together to address these common threats.

In general, another unique feature of this region is that no country in the region possesses nuclear weapons. Therefore, there is almost no risk of nuclear war between countries in this region. The main principles of security cooperation among Southeast Asian countries include the following:

- not joining military-political blocs;
- striving to resolve foreign policy issues peacefully;
- resolve conflicts without using force;
- the abandonment of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction;
- preventing an arms race in the region;
- Refrain from using force or threatening to use force.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, Southeast Asia occupies a significant place in international relations, both as a dynamic region in its own right and as a major player in the broader Indo-Pacific context. Its strategic location, rich natural resources, and rapidly growing economy make it a key hub for global trade, investment, and security. The region's importance is further enhanced by its active role in multilateral organizations such as ASEAN, which fosters cooperation and stability among its various member states through active external relations with global powers. Southeast Asia's geopolitical importance is underscored by its centrality in the ongoing competition between the United States and China, particularly over maritime security, trade, and regional power dynamics. The disputes in the South China Sea, in particular, are further enhancing the region's importance to global security, drawing the attention of major powers, and shaping broader geopolitical strategies.

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