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**CONTESTATION ON THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF AMPHIBIOUS  
WARFARE IN ASEAN: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DEFENSE STRATEGIES  
AND EVOLVING SECURITY DOCTRINES IN THE  
ASEAN REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE**

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## University Permission Page

### **CONTESTATION ON THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE IN ASEAN: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DEFENSE STRATEGIES AND EVOLVING SECURITY DOCTRINES IN THE ASEAN REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE**

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This thesis titled: **CONTESTATION ON THE STRATEGIC RELEVANCE OF AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE IN ASEAN: DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF DEFENSE STRATEGIES AND EVOLVING SECURITY DOCTRINES IN THE ASEAN REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE**, is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Management and Development Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Program.

  
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## **Biographical Sketch**

NELSON P LIWANAG is a proud member of the Philippine Military Academy Class of 2009.

As a Marine Officer, he completed his junior command billets at Marine Battalion Landing Team-10, serving in the conflict-affected provinces of Basilan and Sulu from 2010 to 2016. Following his tenure as a Company Commander, he was assigned to the Headquarters of the Philippine Marine Corps as Branch Chief of the Marine Corps Doctrine and Warfare Office (MCDWO), under the Office of the Assistant Chief of Marine Corps Staff for Education and Training (MC8).

In 2017, he transitioned to the Naval Air Wing and became a rated pilot of the Britten-Norman Islander aircraft. His aviation career includes completing the Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) Course and served briefly as a resident instructor of the Naval Air Wing, specializing in IFR-related subjects.

NELSON LIWANAG is a graduate of several military and specialization courses, including the English Studies Program at the Defence International Training Centre (DITC) in Australia, the Special Operations Training (SOPT), Philippine Navy Instructor Course (PNIC), Instructor Qualification Course (IQC), Curriculum Development Course (CDC), Financial Management Course (FMC), Course Director Course and Assessment and Evaluation Course. He also completed the Project Management Program Training at the University of the Philippines Diliman Quezon City.

As both a line and staff Officer of the Philippine Navy, NELSON LIWANAG has specialized in plans and education and training. He has held various key positions related to training, and plans and programs, and has been recognized with numerous awards, commendations, and certificates of merit for his dedicated service.

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He earned his Master's Degree in Public Management from the Ateneo School of Government and is currently serving as Chief of the Research Branch, Training, Research, and Evaluation Division (TRED), at the AFP General Headquarters under the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Education and Training, J8.

## Acknowledgments

I thank the Almighty God for His boundless grace, wisdom, and strength that carried me through every challenge. His divine guidance gave me clear purpose, and His presence brought peace in times of uncertainty. Without his blessings, this journey would not have been possible. To Him be all the glory and honor.

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## **Dedication**

This paper is wholeheartedly dedicated to my beloved family, whose unwavering love, patience, and support have been my constant source of strength throughout this journey. To my colleagues, whose encouragement, shared struggles, and insights have enriched this academic paper, I am deeply grateful.

Most especially, I dedicate this work to the Philippine Marine Corps, an institution that has shaped my identity and instilled in me the values of Karangalan, Katungkulan and Kabayanihan. As an amphibious warfare organization tasked with defending our archipelagic country across both land and sea, the Philippine Marine Corps faces complex and evolving challenges.

It is my sincere hope that this study, in its own modest way, contributes to the ongoing professionalization and intellectual growth of the Marine Corps. May it serve as a small step toward deepening our strategic understanding, improving our operational effectiveness, and strengthening our commitment to excellence in service of the Filipino people.

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the strategic articulation, constructed relevance, and historical foundations of amphibious warfare within ASEAN's evolving security discourse, particularly in the context of maritime disputes in the South China Sea. The researcher examined defense documents, official communications, strategic narratives, defense journal and academic articles among ASEAN member states including Timor-Leste and identified varying degrees of doctrinal emphasis and operational integration of amphibious capabilities.

The first part of the study explores how amphibious warfare is formally articulated in national policies and military modernization programs, revealing a spectrum from explicit doctrine to implicit functional adoption and the articulated value to their respective defense strategies.

The second section analyzes how the relevance of amphibious operations is constructed within ASEAN's broader security dynamics, highlighting how such capabilities are framed not as instruments of aggression but as flexible tools for sovereignty assertion, deterrence, disaster response, and regional cooperation, particularly amidst Chinese maritime assertiveness.

The final section examines privileged themes emerging from historical and contemporary practices, including strategic geography, dual-use functionality, and symbolic contestation, underscoring how amphibious warfare informs and reflects the competing strategic priorities across the region. Amphibious capabilities are increasingly regarded as essential for states managing the intersection of national defense, ASEAN principles, and the evolving Indo-Pacific security landscape. This study draws on primary documents, defense white papers, and doctrinal texts to examine how regional states justify, define, and implement these capabilities. Rather

than being framed solely as tools for deterrence or military power projection, amphibious forces are often presented as adaptable assets suited for humanitarian missions, maritime security, and regional cooperation.

Although ASEAN members operate within a shared normative structure under the Political-Security Community, their approaches to amphibious warfare vary significantly. These differences reflect not only distinct national security priorities but also broader geopolitical pressures, particularly those related to the South China Sea. Strategic narratives and doctrinal developments reveal how national interests can both align with and diverge from ASEAN's broader goals of regional stability.

The study also explores how external partnerships, especially with the United States and China, influence the perception and development of amphibious capabilities. While these forces remain vital to the military strategies of several ASEAN countries, their future strategic relevance will hinge on whether they support collective regional efforts or contribute to emerging rivalries.

Keywords: Amphibious warfare; Southeast Asia; ASEAN security; Maritime strategy; Military modernisation; Geopolitical alignment.

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## **Chapter I**

### **RATIONALE**

Amphibious warfare has regained importance in Southeast Asia as states confront a dynamic and contested security environment. The region's archipelagic geography and growing maritime threats elevate the strategic relevance of amphibious capabilities. Once associated with large-scale conflict and traditional power projection, these capabilities are now seen as essential for humanitarian missions, maritime sovereignty, and regional stability (Till, 2013). Their renewed importance comes at a time of escalating tensions in the South China Sea, increased hybrid threats, and greater involvement of external powers in regional affairs (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).

The South China Sea remains a focal point of security concern. Overlapping claims, the construction of artificial islands, and the deployment of military assets have limited maneuverability for regional forces. China's maritime assertiveness, supported by its naval and coast guard buildup, has raised alarm across neighboring countries, prompting them to reassess their defense postures (Erickson & Goldstein, 2013, p. 45). ASEAN member states are therefore compelled to rethink the strategic value of amphibious operations, not only for national defense but also for their role in collective security (Till, 2018, p. 130).

Despite advances in cyber capabilities, unmanned systems, and space-based technologies, amphibious forces remain relevant. They provide strategic mobility, rapid deployment, and flexible options for responding to humanitarian crises, internal unrest, and maritime insecurity (O'Rourke, 2023, p. 89). In disaster-prone regions,

amphibious forces support critical non-combat roles such as Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) and maritime law enforcement (Heck et al., p. 210).

ASEAN states differ in their use of amphibious capabilities. Indonesia and the Philippines focus on defending their vast maritime territories and addressing internal threats through amphibious units (Sambhi, 2018; Newsham, 2015). Singapore and Vietnam prioritize deterrence and forward defense and regularly include amphibious training in exercises like CARAT and RIMPAC (Ng, 2021, p. 45). Malaysia and Thailand adopt more cautious approaches that emphasize regional cooperation and disaster response. These diverse strategies reflect differing threat perceptions and levels of military modernization.

External partnerships influence the development of amphibious capabilities in the region. The United States supports several ASEAN states through joint exercises, arms transfers, and military engagement, while China continues to expand its naval footprint and amphibious platforms (Kotani, 2020). These competing partnerships shape national defense strategies and reveal amphibious warfare as both a practical capability and a marker of geopolitical alignment.

Doctrinal inconsistencies persist among ASEAN members. While some maintain active marine forces and engage in joint amphibious exercises, others remain vague in their strategic planning. This uneven integration complicates regional cooperation. However, multilateral training initiatives have enhanced interoperability and built trust among members, reinforcing the need to further develop this capability (Kembara, 2023).

## **Relevance of Amphibious Warfare in ASEAN Security**

The growing complexity of Southeast Asia's security landscape is shaped by intensifying geopolitical rivalries and longstanding maritime disputes. The assertiveness of China in the South China Sea, combined with increased military presence from the United States and its allies, has created a tense and uncertain environment. In response, ASEAN states are reevaluating their strategic priorities to address these multifaceted challenges (Lee & Blanchard, 2025).

Amphibious warfare, which involves the integrated use of naval, air, and ground forces to project power from the sea, has traditionally played a critical role in conventional military strategy. It was essential for establishing footholds in contested zones and supporting strategic maneuver across maritime regions (Till, 2018, p. 123). In the current context, amphibious capabilities are once again central to how Southeast Asian states approach national defense, disaster response, and regional cooperation.

The archipelagic configuration of countries like Indonesia and the Philippines increases reliance on amphibious operations for sovereignty protection and rapid response. Despite technological innovations in other areas of warfare, amphibious capabilities remain indispensable due to their versatility and adaptability. They are used not only for combat purposes but also for disaster relief and regional stability operations (Heck et al., p. 210; O'Rourke, 2023, p. 89).

Yet, the modern battlefield has changed. The proliferation of anti-access and area denial systems, precision-guided munitions, and hybrid warfare tactics challenge the effectiveness of traditional amphibious assaults (Erickson & Goldstein, 2013, p. 45). These developments force military planners to rethink the role of amphibious warfare within both national and collective defense strategies. ASEAN's maritime

security concerns are closely tied to the evolving conditions in the South China Sea, making amphibious capability development both a national imperative and a regional concern.

While Indonesia and the Philippines maintain amphibious units focused on archipelagic defense and counterinsurgency, other states like Singapore and Vietnam use amphibious capabilities to enhance deterrence and interoperability. Training exercises such as CARAT and RIMPAC allow these states to operationalize their doctrines within a multilateral setting (Ng, 2021, p. 45). However, ambiguity remains in how each country frames the relevance of amphibious warfare in its broader strategic calculus.

Joint training and regional naval cooperation have improved interoperability and created new avenues for coordination (Kembara, 2023). This highlights the growing recognition among ASEAN states of the need to develop a shared understanding of amphibious operations that transcends national differences. How states frame and articulate this capability reflects deeper ideological positions and strategic preferences. Examining this discourse is crucial to understanding the future of regional security collaboration.

### **Amphibious Warfare as a Discourse**

The way ASEAN states perceive and describe amphibious warfare reveals how strategic narratives influence doctrine, alliances, and security behavior. Rather than focusing only on equipment or tactics, this study examines how amphibious capabilities are framed through official documents, political statements, and regional dialogues.

Existing literature often emphasizes the operational and technical dimensions of amphibious warfare, but there is limited focus on how these concepts are constructed and legitimized through discourse. This research addresses that gap by applying a constructivist lens to explore how ASEAN states interpret, justify, and represent amphibious operations. In doing so, it contributes to a broader understanding of how strategic ideas shape military development and regional alignment.

Doctrines are not static. They evolve through language, policy shifts, and changes in threat perception. Understanding amphibious warfare as a discursive practice allows for a more comprehensive analysis of its role in Southeast Asia. Political speeches, white papers, and training doctrines help to illustrate why certain strategies are favored and how legitimacy is built around them. Constructivist theory shows that strategic preferences emerge not only from material capabilities but also from shared ideas, identities, and historical experiences.

Theoretically, it reveals how the language used to describe amphibious operations reflects broader concerns about sovereignty, deterrence, and regional order. The strategic meaning of amphibious warfare is shaped not only by external threats but also by how states communicate their defense priorities. These interpretations influence how military resources are allocated and how states position themselves within the region's security architecture.

Conceptually, discursive alignment can help ensure that regional cooperation is not merely symbolic but also operationally effective. A shared understanding of amphibious operations as vital for both national and humanitarian missions can guide investments in adaptable platforms and interoperable systems. This alignment can make joint exercises more meaningful and improve readiness for future contingencies.

Recognizing the evolving discourse around amphibious warfare, practically this study enables ASEAN policymakers and defense planners to align capability development with shared strategic priorities. Common narratives about deterrence, disaster relief, and maritime security can support future planning, improve trust among states, and strengthen regional cooperation. In this context, amphibious warfare becomes more than a military function. It becomes a tool through which states express identity, manage alliances, and shape the norms of regional security.

## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter covers the review of literature and the theoretical framework related to amphibious warfare, defense strategies, and the changing security doctrines in the South China Sea. It also lays out the research framework and outlines the key questions guiding this study.

#### **Amphibious Warfare Concepts, Evolution and Application**

The concept of amphibious warfare has been extensively studied in historical and strategic contexts, emphasizing its crucial role in securing coastal territories and projecting military force. Alfred Thayer Mahan, a seminal figure in naval strategy, highlights the paramount importance of sea control in achieving global dominance. His Sea Power Theory articulates that maritime nations can safeguard their strategic interests through a combination of naval strength and the establishment of naval bases, thereby projecting power over vital coastal and island territories. Mahan's principles have influenced U.S. foreign policy and military thinking, particularly regarding the expansion of influence and the development of amphibious capabilities (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

Amphibious warfare, which involves military operations launched from the sea onto a hostile or potentially hostile shore, combines naval, air, and land forces to achieve strategic objectives and has evolved significantly due to technological advancements and doctrinal developments.

Integration of special operations forces with amphibious units further exemplifies contemporary strategies. This collaboration allows for unconventional tactics, including reconnaissance and direct action, enhancing overall mission effectiveness. As global threats evolve, the adaptability of amphibious warfare doctrines remains crucial for national security (Military Missions Editorial, 2024).

Historically, the origins of amphibious warfare can be traced back to ancient military campaigns, such as the Persian invasion of Greece and the Roman conquests (Luttwak, 1976). However, modern amphibious operations gained prominence during World War I and II. Studies such as Morison (1950) and Millett and Murray (1988) provide detailed accounts of major operations like the Gallipoli Campaign and the Normandy landings. These studies emphasized the strategic planning and operational challenges related to amphibious warfare. Amphibious operations during World War II, particularly in the Pacific Theater's island-hopping campaigns, underscored the significance of these tactics in securing contested territories. These campaigns illustrated how amphibious warfare facilitated the incremental occupation of strategically vital positions in order to support the broader maritime strategy objectives. Notable operations, such as the Guadalcanal amphibious landing, emphasized the integration of naval, air, and ground forces to achieve success in amphibious assaults. As Currey (2023) observes, the iterative refinement of amphibious doctrine during the war established its operational efficacy, proving invaluable for nations with extensive coastlines and maritime borders.

The development of amphibious warfare doctrine has been influenced by lessons learned from past conflicts. The U.S. Marine Corps' development of the tentative manual for landing operations, in the interwar period was a pivotal moment (Ellis, 1934). Later, Smith and Garland (1956) examined the refinement of amphibious

doctrine during the Korean War, highlighting the role of joint operations and logistical innovations.

The history of amphibious warfare in ASEAN dates back to colonial conflicts and World War II. The Pacific campaigns, including the liberation of the Philippines and battles in the Malay Peninsula, significantly shaped regional military doctrines (Hough, 2007). Studies such as Smith (2010) and Black (2011) provide detailed analyses of amphibious operations during these periods, highlighting strategic planning and operational challenges faced by regional forces.

Technological innovations have significantly shaped amphibious operations. The introduction of landing craft, hovercraft, and advanced assault vehicles has enhanced force projection capabilities (Isby, 1988). More recent studies, such as O'Hanlon (2000), discuss the impact of network-centric warfare and precision-guided munitions on modern amphibious strategies. Heck and Friedman (2020) note that the availability of such capabilities makes traditional amphibious assaults increasingly complex and risky; therefore, it may require a transformation in amphibious strategies that emphasize smaller and more agile forces capable of operating in contested environments. As large-scale amphibious invasions become less feasible, smaller, specialized operations such as raids and tactical withdrawals have gained prominence. These operations afford the flexibility to achieve tactical objectives without the logistical burdens of full-scale assaults. Heck and Friedman further assert that these specialized operations raise the importance of amphibious forces in modern warfare (2020, p. 258), indicating the critical role that amphibious forces play in contemporary security scenarios.

McCain (1963) also emphasizes adaptability and the enduring strategic relevance of amphibious warfare, suggesting that mobility and unpredictability are key assets for maintaining a strategic advantage. While typically framed within the context of past military strategies, McCain's insights resonate with modern security challenges today in the West Philippine Sea, particularly in regions where rapid response capabilities are vital.

In the 21st century, amphibious warfare remains a critical component of military strategy, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The increasing role of expeditionary forces and maritime security has been analyzed by scholars like Tangredi (2013), who argued that these forces remain vital in ensuring strategic flexibility, rapid response, and presence in contested maritime domains.

Within the framework of maritime disputes in the SCS, the significance of amphibious warfare is notably accentuated. The SCS has surfaced as a geopolitical contention point due to competing territorial claims, critical trade routes, and abundant natural resources. Encompassing around 3.5 million square kilometers, this region is essential for global trade, with approximately one-third of worldwide maritime commerce traversing its waters. The strategic importance of this area has given rise to increased disputes, primarily involving China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan (Joint Intermediate Force Capabilities Office, 2024). The dynamics in this area, especially concerning China's assertive actions, create a high-risk environment for any large-scale military operations, including amphibious ones.

Research highlights the importance of the Philippines' evolving grand strategy in response to China's military modernization. De Castro (2024) articulates that this strategy consists of several components: recognizing China's maritime expansion as

a primary national security threat, focusing military efforts on territorial defense, and strengthening alliances with the United States and other partners. Studies have noted the critical role of naval and air capabilities in this strategic transition, yet there is often an oversight of the continued importance of amphibious forces.

ASEAN member states have gradually developed their amphibious warfare doctrines, influenced by historical experiences and regional security threats. Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia have established marine forces with specialized training in amphibious operations (Tan, 2015). The evolution of joint and multinational exercises, such as Cobra Gold, Balikatan and CARAT, has reinforced doctrinal development (Goh, 2016). Technological innovations have significantly shaped amphibious capabilities within ASEAN. The acquisition of modern landing platforms, amphibious assault vehicles, and maritime surveillance systems has enhanced regional force projection (Koh, 2018). More recent studies, such as James and Rahman (2020), discuss the impact of network-centric warfare and precision-guided munitions on ASEAN amphibious strategies.

In the 21st century, amphibious warfare remains a critical component of ASEAN military strategies, particularly in maritime security and humanitarian assistance. The increasing role of ASEAN-led joint operations, peacekeeping missions, and responses to natural disasters has been analyzed by scholars like Chen (2021). Additionally, discussions on regional security challenges, including territorial disputes in the South China Sea, highlight the strategic importance of amphibious forces (Ng, 2022). Given the archipelagic nature of many ASEAN member states, amphibious capabilities are essential for defense, disaster response, and regional security cooperation. This study assessed how amphibious warfare is represented within the military policies of countries in ASEAN. Furthermore, it evaluated how these representations inform

collective security initiatives and response mechanisms, thereby providing insights into the strategic security landscape in the region.

### **On Defense Strategies**

The South China Sea remains a critical geopolitical flashpoint due to competing territorial claims, strategic maritime interests, and evolving security doctrines among regional and global powers. The defense strategies employed by claimant states and major stakeholders reflect the dynamic nature of modern security concerns, including deterrence, power projection, and hybrid warfare. This literature review examines key studies on defense strategies and evolving security doctrines in the South China Sea, focusing on historical developments, contemporary military postures, multilateral security frameworks, and future strategic considerations.

The territorial disputes in the South China Sea date back centuries, but the modern geopolitical tensions emerged prominently in the mid-20th century. Key works such as Kaplan (2014) and Hayton (2018) provide comprehensive accounts of the historical evolution of maritime disputes, highlighting how colonial legacies, international treaties, and Cold War dynamics shaped the region's security landscape. Studies by Valencia (1995) further analyze early regional security initiatives and their limitations in preventing conflict escalation.

The South China Sea stands apart from other contested territories in the modern nation-state system due to its lack of a permanent human population. For much of history, the South China Sea was primarily traversed by local fishing communities living along its coastal edges. Many of the atolls scattered throughout the region remain underwater during high tide, limiting long-term settlement. Beginning in

the 1950s, several countries that includes Taiwan, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia began deploying military personnel and establishing physical markers or weather facilities on islands that remain above water at low tide. However, under international law, such actions do not qualify as creating a permanent civilian population. Instead, these artificial installations function primarily as unilateral assertions of sovereignty. Each claimant insists that rival structures, often regarded as recent infringements, be dismantled before any meaningful negotiations toward a lasting settlement can begin. This dynamic fuels an ongoing cycle of diplomatic brinkmanship, as each party seeks recognition of its own legitimacy while expecting others to acknowledge their past actions as wrongful (Zha, 2000).

Given the absence of settled populations, a fundamental question arises: who exactly are these military forces meant to protect? More importantly, why do states invest so heavily in defending these geographical features? For claimant states, the primary objective is to reinforce their claims over vast maritime areas that were initially unclaimed by any one nation. Altering the natural geography through construction provides an additional layer of evidence in asserting national sovereignty over the South China Sea and bolsters the legitimacy of statehood in these contested waters (Zha, 2000).

The defense strategies of regional states, including China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, have significantly evolved in response to shifting power dynamics. Scholars such as Erickson and Goldstein (2017) examine China's naval modernization and the militarization of artificial islands as part of its broader Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy. Meanwhile, works by Grossman (2020) and Poling (2021) highlight the countermeasures adopted by ASEAN states, including

asymmetric warfare tactics, military alliances, and enhanced maritime domain awareness programs.

The importance of the South China Sea is not limited to countries with direct territorial claims. In the south, it connects to the Indian Ocean through the Straits of Malacca; in the north, it links to the Pacific via the Taiwan Strait. These strategic waterways have long served as key routes for both military and commercial activity by European and American powers in East Asia. While Japan's efforts to lead the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere ended with its defeat in World War II, the region regained significance for Japan due to post-war trade expansion involving the Western United States and the Middle East. Today, Japan still relies on the South China Sea for the flow of vital imports such as oil and raw materials that support its economic stability (Zha, 2000).

The United States has long considered freedom of navigation in international waters a core security concern. This extends to the right of U.S. Navy warships to pass freely without notifying the bordering nations. Given its history of military engagement in East Asia, the U.S. insists on this right as a means of preventing any Asian government from imposing restrictions on its naval movements (Zha, 2000).

As a result, the South China Sea's geography makes legal ownership and access a matter of contention not only for regional states but also for global powers like the United States and Japan. Both view potential threats to commercial and military interests in the region as strategic concerns. China's expansive maritime claims are frequently framed as a threat to international navigation rights. However, thus far, Beijing has refrained from taking direct action that would interfere with commercial shipping, providing little justification for U.S. intervention in disputes such

as the Spratly Islands. From a realist perspective in international relations, uncertainty about China's future actions continues to fuel concerns over maritime security. Mainstream discussions often portray China as a potential threat, which helps sustain the ongoing low-intensity conflict in the South China Sea (Zha, 2000).

### **On Evolving Security Doctrines in the South China Sea and Legal Strategic Discourse**

Security doctrines in the South China Sea continue to evolve through the actions and policies of both regional powers and external actors. Green and Cooper (2019) examine the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, which highlights freedom of navigation operations and efforts to deepen strategic ties with ASEAN and members of the Quad. On the other hand, Kuik (2022) points to ASEAN's use of hedging, managing economic engagement with China while maintaining defense partnerships with the U.S. and other security partners.

Hideshi (2013) notes that the security situation in the South China Sea has become more complex in recent years. He identifies three major drivers: access to offshore energy sources, overlapping maritime claims in both the South and East China Seas, and the ongoing expansion of naval power by regional states (Hideshi, 2013, p. 2013). According to his analysis, while maritime disputes tend to carry a risk of escalation, the current state of affairs is likely to remain unsettled. He also argues that finding legal solutions remains difficult, and rising competition between the U.S. and China will likely persist. The American strategic shift toward Asia has brought renewed attention to the South China Sea as a flashpoint in US and China relations (Hideshi, 2013).

The long-term stability of the region may depend in part on how China manages its position. Domestic considerations shape Beijing's decisions, but so do international

factors, including ASEAN's collective stance, U.S. involvement, and the prospect of a binding Code of Conduct. Because unresolved sovereignty issues in the South China Sea continue to influence regional order and relations with China, securing this maritime zone remains a top priority.

Rosenberg and Chung (2008) analyze the intersecting and at times conflicting maritime security interests of both regional and external actors in the South China Sea. Among the coastal states discussed are Singapore, Malaysia, China, and Indonesia, while the user states include Japan, the United States, Australia, and India. The article highlights a range of factors driving security concerns in the region, such as the rapid increase in maritime traffic, efforts to secure exclusive economic zone resources, incidents of piracy, terrorist threats, stricter global oversight of shipping and port operations, and the upgrading of naval and coast guard capabilities. Although all parties share a mutual interest in preserving secure and open sea-lanes, they vary in how they assess the seriousness of maritime threats and what countermeasures are appropriate. These differing perspectives, particularly on piracy and maritime terrorism, create challenges in forming cohesive responses. The authors conclude that while there is general agreement on the importance of maritime security, the gap between shared interests and coordinated action remains unresolved.

The South China Sea serves as a focal point for regional maritime security challenges. In terms of traditional security, escalating disputes over territorial and maritime claims could potentially lead to open conflict. From a non-traditional security standpoint, pressing concerns include the decline of marine biodiversity, overexploitation of marine resources, threats to the freedom and safety of navigation and overflight, and the destabilization of coastal livelihoods (Nguyen, 2016).

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) serves as a comprehensive multilateral legal framework that enables ratifying nations to promote the peaceful, equitable, and sustainable use and governance of maritime areas while respecting sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction. In the context of the South China Sea, UNCLOS provides a foundation for managing and mitigating threats to maritime security (Nguyen, 2016).

Although not designed as a legal instrument for resolving sovereignty disputes, the Convention can help parties clarify and narrow the scope of such disputes. It also establishes a framework for making legitimate maritime claims and defining the rights and responsibilities of coastal and non-coastal states. Additionally, UNCLOS facilitates cooperation on environmental protection, marine scientific research, and collaboration among littoral states in semi-enclosed seas (Nguyen, 2016).

Its dispute settlement mechanism allows nations to seek resolutions and requires them to establish temporary arrangements while awaiting a final settlement. To effectively apply UNCLOS provisions to the South China Sea, nations should consider using it as the foundation for developing a legally binding Code of Conduct in the region (Nguyen, 2016).

Efforts to develop multilateral security mechanisms have faced challenges due to competing national interests. However, research by Emmers (2019) and Ba (2020) discusses the role of regional institutions such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the Code of Conduct negotiations in promoting crisis management and confidence-building measures. The effectiveness of these mechanisms remains debated, with scholars like Thayer (2021) arguing that their impact is limited by the absence of enforcement mechanisms.

China controversially asserts special maritime rights in the South China Sea based on the nine-dash line depicted on official Chinese maps. The origins of this demarcation remain unclear, as it did not appear on government maps before 1947 or in private cartographic efforts prior to 1933. Even as recently as 2013, leading Chinese scholars acknowledged that China had never formally defined the legal significance of the line (Guilfoyle, 2019).

China has historically advocated for five key positions regarding maritime rights. First, it argued that territorial seas had no fixed maximum width, with a state's maritime boundaries determined by its sovereign discretion based on economic and security considerations. Second, it rejected the automatic right of warships to innocent passage through territorial seas and straits. Third, it classified Chiungchow Strait and Bohai Bay as internal waters with special legal status. Fourth, China maintained that maritime boundaries should only be settled through consultations, opposing any provision in UNCLOS for judicial resolution. Fifth, it asserted that a continental state with sovereignty over an outlying archipelago could establish straight baselines around it to define its territorial sea (Guilfoyle, 2019).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) recognizes the strategic value of legal frameworks. Its three warfares doctrine employs non-military tactics, public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare and to advance China's national objectives. Legal warfare, or lawfare, as described by Livermore, involves manipulating legal systems to restrict adversaries, challenge unfavorable precedents, and secure advantages in matters concerning China's core interests (Guilfoyle, 2019).

These strategies reinforce the CCP's internal and external legitimacy. Any challenge to China's South China Sea claims is perceived as an attack on the party's

authority. The CCP views itself as facing both domestic and foreign threats, interpreting legal arguments against its claims as a form of strategic opposition (Guilfoyle, 2019).

The sovereignty dispute over the South China Sea islands and waters highlights a paradox in international diplomacy that Realist theories struggle to fully explain. This paradox manifests on multiple levels (Zha, 2000). Domestically, the governments involved in these disputes fail to create conditions that allow their coastal populations to sustainably access marine resources. Regionally, both national governments and regional security institutions are unable to coordinate efforts to address daily threats to fishing and shipping in the South China Sea. Internationally, the ongoing disputes provide justification for the United States to maintain its military presence in the region and for East Asian states to engage in an arms race, anticipating potential future conflict (Zha, 2000).

Despite continuous diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the sovereignty issues, these initiatives are often undermined by the reluctance of states to appear weak in asserting their territorial claims. As a result, negotiations that begin with the stated goal of achieving a resolution ultimately stall, reinforcing the very disputes they seek to end. At its core, the deadlock reflects a deeper struggle over national and sovereign identities (Zha, 2000).

Herscovitch (2017) argues that as the world's largest trading nation, China has a strong interest in keeping South China Sea trade routes open and has no desire for military conflict with regional powers. While China's policies in the South China Sea sometimes conflict with certain norms and institutions of the rules-based liberal order,

Beijing does not seek to dismantle this order entirely and continues to support key aspects of the international system.

To avoid unnecessary involvement in the South China Sea dispute, the United States should refrain from backing any country's territorial claims and clarify that the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty does not extend to contested waters and territories claimed by the Philippines. Additionally, Washington should encourage claimant states to establish de facto jurisdiction over disputed areas and collaborate on resource exploitation while working toward long-term solutions. Lastly, the U.S. should recognize that ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea would have minimal impact, if any, on resolving the South China Sea dispute (Herscovitch, 2017).

Looking ahead, the security landscape of the South China Sea will likely be influenced by technological advancements, geopolitical shifts, and evolving military doctrines. Works by Bitzinger (2023) and Raska (2022) discuss the role of emerging defense technologies, such as unmanned systems and cyber warfare, in shaping future military engagements. The ongoing recalibration of U.S.-China relations and the responses of regional actors will remain critical variables in future security frameworks.

The defense strategies and evolving security doctrines in the South China Sea reflect the region's complex geopolitical realities. While military posturing and alliances continue to shape regional security, multilateral efforts and emerging technologies may provide alternative means of conflict prevention and strategic stability. Continued scholarly analysis will be essential in understanding and addressing the evolving security dynamics of the South China Sea.



## Chapter III

### RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

#### Research Framework

This study is anchored on a dual analytical framework that draws from military strategy analysis and international relations theory, particularly constructivism. These two perspectives provide complementary tools for understanding how amphibious warfare is framed, legitimized, and integrated within Southeast Asian defense discourse.

Figure 3.1. Analytical Framework of the Study.

<b>Military Strategy Analysis</b>	<b>International Relations Theory (Constructivism)</b>
	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focuses on the doctrinal logic and strategic utility of amphibious warfare.</li><li>• Evaluates force posture, joint operation and doctrinal evolution.</li><li>• Helps interpret how AMS operationalize amphibious capabilities in relation to its threats and geography</li><li>• Anchors analysis in real world military planning and capability development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focuses how ideas, norm, and identity shape defense security behavior.</li><li>• Interpret amphibious warfare as a socially constructed concept.</li><li>• Analyzes how language, strategic narratives and regional norms influence doctrine legitimacy and cooperation.</li><li>• Explains why states emphasize deterrence, defense of sovereignty or HADR roles in the discourse</li></ul>

Military strategy analysis serves as the foundation for understanding the operational logic behind the use of amphibious capabilities. It offers a structured approach for analyzing how states integrate these capabilities into broader military planning, taking into account historical experience, force structure, and technological development. Amphibious warfare is not seen as a stand-alone function but rather as an integral component of a state's response to emerging security challenges. These challenges include the defense of maritime claims, territorial integrity, disaster response, and deterrence in contested waters. In this study, the strategic perspective

helps identify patterns in how ASEAN member states develop and justify amphibious units as part of their evolving military posture.

In parallel, this research draws from constructivist international relations theory, particularly the securitization framework developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (1998), to examine how states socially construct the meaning of security and the role of amphibious forces. Constructivism shifts attention away from material capabilities and structural constraints, focusing instead on how states form interests and security strategies through shared norms, values, and identity. This lens is particularly important in the Southeast Asian context, where overt displays of military power are often tempered by diplomatic norms and institutional culture. Within ASEAN, the framing of military activities tends to reflect a cautious balance between national interests and regional cohesion.

Securitization theory, a subset of constructivist thought, interprets security as a speech act in which political leaders frame a particular issue as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures. This framework makes it possible to understand amphibious warfare not only as a set of capabilities but also as a discursive tool used to shape public perception and justify policy decisions.

When governments articulate amphibious force development in terms of

humanitarian assistance, maritime sovereignty, or regional stability, they engage in a process of securitization that seeks to legitimize military investments within an accepted normative framework. Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde (1998) argue that such processes rely on the successful construction of a shared threat perception to move the issue beyond normal political debate.

This lens reveals how ASEAN states employ amphibious forces to address both conventional and non-conventional threats. For example, Indonesia's deployment of marine units to the Natuna Islands during tensions with China illustrates a securitizing move in which sovereignty protection is presented as a matter requiring military readiness. Similarly, the Philippines' intensified amphibious training exercises with the United States after the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling illustrate the use of security discourse to strengthen alliance signaling and deterrence. In both cases, amphibious warfare becomes embedded in broader narratives of external threat and national defense.

At the regional level, ASEAN's foundational principles of non-interference, consensus, and peaceful dispute resolution shape how states communicate their security policies. While member states have expanded amphibious capabilities in recent years, ASEAN as a collective entity has refrained from issuing explicit guidance on such developments. This absence reflects a strategic ambiguity that allows national-level securitization without triggering collective concern over militarization. Strategic ambiguity, in this context, provides space for states to respond flexibly to shifting maritime threats while maintaining the appearance of regional unity.

Constructivist analysis further underscores the role of identity in shaping security narratives. Amphibious capabilities are often portrayed as symbols of statehood, modernity, and maritime presence. These narratives serve domestic purposes by reinforcing national identity and projecting an image of military readiness and sovereignty. At the same time, they interact with ASEAN's institutional identity, which prioritizes stability and regional cohesion. This interaction produces a tension between national assertiveness and collective restraint.

External actors, especially the United States and China, play an influential role in these processes. Through military aid, joint exercises, and arms transfers, these powers contribute to the securitization of maritime issues in Southeast Asia. Their involvement shapes how ASEAN states interpret and respond to evolving security dynamics. As a result, amphibious warfare in this context is not merely a technical issue but also part of a broader discursive contest over the meaning of security, legitimacy of action, and the future of regional order.

Together, the dual frameworks of military strategy and constructivist theory provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the development and presentation of amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia. Strategic analysis helps explain the operational logic, while constructivist theory reveals how these strategies are framed to align with both domestic priorities and regional norms.

### **Research Questions**

This research, therefore, investigates how the relevance of amphibious warfare is constructed within the security discourse of ASEAN, particularly in the context of the West Philippine Sea.

1. How do member states of ASEAN articulate the strategic value of amphibious warfare in their defense documents and official communications regarding regional conflicts?

2. How is the relevance of amphibious warfare constructed in the discourse surrounding ASEAN security dynamics in the context of the West Philippine Sea?

3. What privileged themes emerge from historical instances of amphibious operations that inform the discourse on modern military strategies in Southeast Asia?

## **Research Methodology**

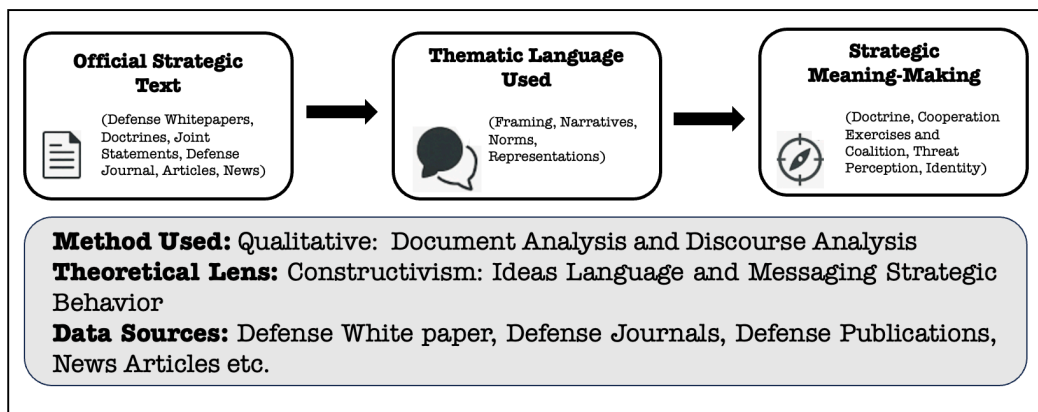
The study focused on discourse analysis of military doctrines and strategies, official reports and publications related to amphibious warfare and ASEAN defense strategies.

Discourse analysis is an essential methodological approach for investigating the relevance of amphibious warfare within the ASEAN context, especially concerning the military strategies prevalent in the West Philippine Sea. This method facilitates an examination of how language and narratives in military texts shape perceptions of threats and influence policy decisions among ASEAN member states. Analyzing the framing and language used in these military doctrines and strategies reveals how narratives construct identities, prioritize strategic responses, and define security postures (Furuseth, 2003). Köhler (2019) highlights the role of security discourse in shaping national policies, indicating that understanding the narratives surrounding military strategies is crucial for grasping regional dynamics. This perspective aligns with Adler's (2002) assertion that language plays a pivotal role in shaping social realities (Carlsnaes et al., 2013, p.123), making discourse analysis a fitting tool for exploring how ASEAN states articulate their military identities and the relevance of amphibious warfare in response to emerging threats.

Amphibious warfare has undergone significant transformations within ASEAN, influenced by historical experiences, doctrinal refinements, and technological innovations. As regional security dynamics evolve, continued research on amphibious operations will be essential for enhancing military strategies and cooperation among ASEAN member states.

The study examined the defense white papers, strategic doctrines, and multilateral communiques to uncover the themes, representations, and contestations that informed how member states articulate the role of amphibious operations in addressing contemporary regional threats.

Figure 3.2. Research Methodology



### Documents That Are Examined in Relation to Amphibious Warfare in the Regional Security Architecture

The following foundational documents, ASEAN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and other relevant documents such as the ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025, the Joint Statement by the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus on Resilience to Climate-related and Other Natural Disasters, including Through Best Practices Exchange and Capacity-Building, are examined in this section.

The question: How is the relevance of amphibious warfare constructed in the discourse surrounding ASEAN security dynamics in the context of the West Philippine Sea? directly connects with the aspirations and guiding principles laid out in the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint 2025, particularly regarding

regional peace, conflict management, and enhanced defense cooperation. Amphibious warfare, which involves coordinated land-sea operations, becomes increasingly relevant given the maritime nature of disputes in the West Philippine Sea. In the APSC Blueprint, ASEAN envisions a rules-based, people-oriented region committed to upholding international law, including UNCLOS. While the document avoids overt militaristic posturing, it opens pathways for member-states to strengthen collective defense capabilities, indirectly supporting the relevance of amphibious operations in protecting territorial integrity and maritime rights.

### **Data Collection**

This research adopted a multi-layered qualitative data collection strategy to ensure a comprehensive examination of the contestation surrounding amphibious warfare within ASEAN. The study relied on two primary methods: Document Analysis and Discourse Analysis.

1. Document Analysis was employed to systematically review a wide range of official and publicly available documents related to amphibious warfare and ASEAN defense strategies. This approach allowed for an in-depth examination of the policies, strategic frameworks, and institutional perspectives that shape amphibious operations in the region. The following categories of documents were analyzed:

Military Doctrines and Strategies included national defense white papers, joint operational doctrines, and strategic guidance documents published by ASEAN member states' armed forces. They provided insights into the formal positioning of amphibious capabilities, force structure, and operational priorities.

Official Government and Defense Reports: Reports issued by defense ministries, ASEAN security bodies, and regional military forums were examined to

understand how national and multilateral security policies address amphibious operations and maritime security.

ASEAN Agreements and Regional Defense Frameworks such as the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint and defense-related statements from the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), were reviewed to assess regional cooperation and divergence in amphibious capabilities.

Academic and Policy Publications: Research papers, think tank reports, and articles from security and defense studies journals were analyzed to contextualize the historical and contemporary relevance of amphibious warfare in ASEAN. These sources also provided expert opinions and theoretical perspectives on the subject.

Systematically reviewing these documents enabled the researcher to extract key themes, trends, and strategic priorities that define ASEAN's approach to amphibious warfare.

2. Discourse Analysis. Beyond merely cataloging official policies, this study critically examined the language, narratives, and framing strategies present in the collected documents. Discourse analysis was employed to interpret how amphibious warfare is conceptualized, justified, or contested within ASEAN security discourse. Key areas of focus included:

Strategic Narratives, which was identifying how amphibious warfare is framed, whether as a defensive necessity, a deterrent capability, or a symbol of military modernization;

Regional and National Perspectives, or comparing how different ASEAN states discussed amphibious capabilities, revealing potential areas of convergence or divergence in security priorities;

Threat Perceptions and Security Justifications, which was analyzing how threats (e.g., territorial disputes, non-traditional security challenges, or foreign military presence) were articulated in relation to amphibious operations.

Policy and Institutional Language, which covered examining the rhetoric used by defense institutions and ASEAN bodies that assessed whether amphibious warfare was positioned as a cooperative endeavor or a contested security issue.

Through this approach, the study not only documented existing policies but also uncovered deeper strategic motivations, ideological influences, and geopolitical considerations shaping ASEAN's amphibious warfare discourse. The combination of document and discourse analysis provided a holistic understanding of how amphibious operations were framed, debated, and institutionalized in the region.

This study focused on the construction and contestation of the strategic relevance of amphibious warfare within the ASEAN regional security discourse. It is limited to analyzing publicly available primary documents such as defense white papers, military doctrines, and policy statements issued by selected ASEAN member states. The geographic emphasis centered on Southeast Asia, with particular attention to developments in the West Philippine Sea, which served as a contemporary flashpoint influencing regional defense thinking.

The study included historical references to amphibious operations in the region to extract recurring themes and strategic patterns, but it did not provide a

comprehensive operational history. Instead, these references were selectively used to contextualize how past experiences inform present strategic discourse.

The research did not assess the operational effectiveness or tactical deployment of amphibious units per se, nor did it engage in technical military evaluations of hardware or force projection capabilities. Rather, its primary concern was how such capabilities were conceptualized, legitimized, and communicated within the political and strategic narratives of ASEAN.

Moreover, the study was constrained by the availability and accessibility of official sources. While every effort was made to include documents from as many ASEAN states as possible, in-depth discourse analysis was conducted on a purposive selection of states with active maritime defense postures and amphibious capabilities, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Here’s an analytical table summarizing key aspects of ASEAN Defense White Papers. This table compares defense priorities and strategic directions across ASEAN member states based on common themes found in their Defense White Papers.

Table 3.1 presents the category, common trends in ASEAN Defense White Papers, differences among member states, and key challenges and opportunities.

**Table 3.1**

*Comparison of Defense Priorities and Strategic Directions Across ASEAN Member States Based on Common Themes*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Common Trends in ASEAN Defense White Papers</b>	<b>Differences Among Member States</b>	<b>Key Challenges and Opportunities</b>
Military Modernization	Focus on upgrading technology,	Some nations prioritize	Balancing modernization

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	enhancing capabilities, and expanding cybersecurity defense.	conventional forces, while others focus on asymmetrical warfare and cyber defense.	costs with economic constraints.
Regional Cooperation	Strong emphasis on joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and multilateral defense dialogues (ADMM).	Varying levels of participation in joint defense programs depending on political stance and strategic interests.	Enhancing trust and interoperability among member states.
Geopolitical Considerations	Recognition of major global power influences, including China-U.S. strategic competition.	Some ASEAN members align with specific external partners more closely than others.	Maintaining ASEAN neutrality while addressing external pressures.
Climate and Security	Increasing acknowledgment of environmental threats affecting regional stability.	Different levels of preparedness and prioritization for disaster response and climate adaptation.	Strengthening regional response frameworks for environmental security.
Cyber and Emerging Threats	Recognition of cyber warfare, terrorism, and non-traditional security threats.	Some states have advanced cyber defense strategies, while others are still developing policies.	Enhancing cyber resilience and intelligence-sharing networks.

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Source: Made by the Author

The succeeding chapter examined the articulated value of amphibious warfare among ASEAN member-states, the construction of its strategic relevance and the historical and thematic patterns that frame its evolution. These discussions are supported by analytical tables that illustrate the comparative positioning, doctrinal emphasis, and regional significance of amphibious capabilities.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding members: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. This regional organization aims to promote political and economic cooperation and regional stability among its members.

Since its inception, ASEAN has expanded to include ten member states. Brunei Darussalam joined on January 7, 1984; Vietnam became a member on July 28, 1995; Lao PDR and Myanmar both acceded on July 23, 1997; and Cambodia joined on April 30, 1999. This expansion reflects ASEAN's commitment to fostering regional integration and cooperation across Southeast Asia.

This chapter is presented in three sections: the first devoted to answer Research Question No. 1, the second section to answer to Research Question No. 2, and the last section to answer the Research Question No. 3.

The answer to the first question discusses the individual member-countries of the ASEAN, on their date of membership into ASEAN.

#### **Articulation of the Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare Among ASEAN Member States**

*Research Question 1: How do member states of ASEAN articulate the strategic value of amphibious warfare in their defense documents and official communications regarding regional conflicts?*

The Members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) articulate the strategic value of their respective amphibious warfare in their defense documents and official communications regarding regional conflicts as follows:

Contestation on the Strategic Relevance of Amphibious Warfare in ASEAN...32

## **(1) Indonesia and its Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic state, possesses over 80,000 kilometers of coastline. It is poised to become the global maritime axis (Raba, 2024). This unique geography necessitates a strong maritime strategy, with amphibious warfare forming a critical pillar of its defense and security operations. Amphibious capabilities are essential not only for traditional warfare but also for humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and maintaining territorial integrity across dispersed islands (Raba, 2024).

Indonesia comprises more than 17,000 islands stretching across Southeast Asia and Oceania at the Pacific Ring of Fire, straddling key maritime routes between the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Clifford, 2024). Such a vast and decentralized landscape requires a robust and adaptive maritime defense posture (Clifford, 2024). In this context, amphibious warfare emerges as a cornerstone of Indonesia's national security agency.

### **Strategic Importance of Indonesia's Amphibious Warfare**

Amphibious warfare is vital for Indonesia due to its vast maritime domain and numerous remote islands. In times of conflict, the ability to project force from sea to land allows the Indonesian military to defend against invasions, retake occupied territory, or respond to threats. In peacetime, these capabilities enhance rapid deployment for national emergencies, such as natural disasters or insurgencies in remote regions like Papua or the Natuna Islands (Indonesian National Armed Forces, 2024).

Indonesia's defense policy is shaped by the realities of its current strategic environment, both regionally and globally. The country faces a range of national security challenges that are increasingly complex and carry serious implications for national unity and public safety. These threats originate from both external sources and internal dynamics, and their growing intensity underscores the need for a responsive and adaptive defense strategy (Minister of Defence, 2021).

In times of armed conflict or heightened tension, amphibious capabilities enable the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia or TNI) to swiftly transport troops, vehicles, and supplies from naval vessels to contested shores. The capacity to launch amphibious assaults allows the TNI to retake such territory with a combined sea-land strategy, often supported by naval and air assets. Moreover, amphibious capabilities act as a deterrent to potential adversaries, showcasing Indonesia's readiness to defend its sovereignty across every part of its island chain (Indonesia National Armed Forces, 2024).

During peacetime, the utility of amphibious warfare extends far beyond traditional military confrontations. In such instances, amphibious assets allow for the rapid deployment of emergency personnel, relief goods, medical teams, and engineering units to hard-to-reach areas, often before land-based assistance becomes viable (Indonesian National Armed Forces, 2024).

Furthermore, amphibious forces are frequently mobilized in response to internal disturbances or insurgencies in peripheral regions such as Papua, the Maluku Islands, or the resource-rich Natuna Islands in the South China Sea. Amphibious units offer the advantage of speed, versatility, and psychological impact, projecting the presence

of the central government and reinforcing the sense of national unity across distant and diverse regions (Indonesian National Armed Forces, 2024).

Ultimately, amphibious warfare represents not just a tactical asset, but a strategic necessity in Indonesia's defense doctrine. It serves both military and humanitarian purposes, forming the bridge between Indonesia's geographic realities and its aspirations to be a regional maritime power capable of safeguarding its people, territory, and interests across the archipelago.

### **The Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL)**

The Tentara Nasional Indonesia-Angkatan Laut (TNI-AL) is the backbone of Indonesia's amphibious warfare capability. It is composed of several key elements, including the Marine Corps (Korps Marinir or KORMAR), amphibious ships (notably Landing Platform Docks or LPDs), and naval aviation units. Over the years, TNI-AL has expanded its fleet and operational doctrine to reflect modern amphibious operations with an increasing emphasis on interoperability and mobility (globalsecurity.org, 2020).

The TNI-AL, or Indonesian Navy, forms the central pillar of the country's amphibious warfare capability and broader maritime defense strategy. As the naval branch of the Indonesian Armed Forces, TNI-AL is entrusted with defending Indonesia's sprawling maritime domain, securing sea lines of communication, protecting national sovereignty, and projecting military force across its archipelagic territory. Within this complex mission set, amphibious warfare stands out as a strategic priority, and the Navy has cultivated a range of specialized assets and units to fulfill this role effectively (militarysphere.com, 2024).

The Korps Marinir, or KORMAR, is an elite ground combat force under the Navy's command structure specializing in amphibious operations, expeditionary warfare, and coastal defense (globalsecurity.org, 2020). These Marines are rigorously trained to deploy from sea to shore, often under combat or high-risk conditions, and are equipped to engage in a wide range of missions, from conventional landings to counter-insurgency and disaster response. The Marine Corps is also structured into several brigades and battalions, strategically stationed across the country to enable rapid reaction in various regions (globalsecurity.org, 2020).

Complementing the Marine Corps is a fleet of amphibious ships, most notably Landing Platform Docks such as the Makassar-class vessels (warsearcher.com, 2024). These ships, designed for transporting troops, armored vehicles, and helicopters, serve as floating bases that enable sea-to-shore operations across vast distances. With well decks, vehicle storage areas, and flight decks for helicopter deployment, these LPDs significantly enhance Indonesia's ability to conduct large-scale amphibious assaults or humanitarian missions (Childs, 2023). The Navy has also explored acquiring more advanced amphibious platforms, including Landing Helicopter Docks (LHDs), to further modernize its capabilities. Recently, the military has worked on the acquisition of the Zaha Marine Assault Vehicle (MAV) (Miller, 2022).

### **Regional Maritime Challenges and the Role of Amphibious Forces**

Indonesia's amphibious posture is shaped by its complex and dynamic maritime environment, which presents wide array of regional security challenges. As the largest archipelagic nation in the world, Indonesia's geographic positioning and extensive coastline make it inherently vulnerable to a range of maritime security concerns. Among these challenges, disputes in the South China Sea (Habibie, 2024; Zoe, 2023),

piracy in the Malacca Strait (Papas, 2024), and illegal fishing (Gokkon, 2024; Mordhorst, 2021) pose significant threats to Indonesia's national sovereignty, economic interests, and regional stability. In response to these evolving challenges, amphibious warfare plays a critical role in Indonesia's maritime strategy, providing the country with a flexible and rapid means to enforce its sovereignty, maintain control over its maritime territory and respond to non-traditional security threats.

### **Disputes in the South China Sea**

One of the most pressing maritime security issues for Indonesia is the ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea, an area of strategic importance not only for Southeast Asia but for global shipping lanes. While Indonesia is not directly involved in the primary territorial claims between China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and others, it faces significant challenges related to overlapping claims in the Natuna Islands. China has asserted a broad Nine-Dash Line that encroaches on Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), leading to concerns over its maritime rights and resource exploitation in the area. These tensions, particularly with the growing presence of Chinese vessels, have led Indonesia to strengthen its maritime defense posture (Habibie, 2024; Zoe, 2023).

### **Indonesia as a Regional Maritime Power**

Indonesia treats defense cooperation as a key part of its foreign policy, using it to strengthen mutual confidence with other states. One way it supports global stability and peace is through the deployment of peacekeeping forces to conflict-affected areas around the world (Ministry of Defence, 2021, p. 62).

As Indonesia continues to assert itself as a regional maritime power, its amphibious forces become an increasingly integral part of its strategic toolkit. The flexibility and rapid-response capabilities of amphibious warfare allow Indonesia to respond to both traditional and non-traditional security and challenges, ranging from territorial defense against external threats to maritime law enforcement and humanitarian missions (Saha, 2016). By enhancing its amphibious capabilities, Indonesia strengthens its position as a key player in regional security, able to project power and influence in the Southeast Asian maritime domain and assert its leadership role in protecting the region's sea lanes, resources, and territorial integrity (Rochwulangsi, 2019; Saha, 2016; and Shekhar and Liow, 2014).

### **Strategic Enabler of Indonesia's Archipelagic Defense and Maritime Sovereignty**

**Table 4.1**

*Indonesia's Amphibious Warfare: Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Indonesia's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious warfare is linked to Indonesia's archipelagic defense posture (Total Defense Doctrine). -Framed within "Minimum Essential Force" and "Archipelagic Sea Defense Strategy." -Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI-AL) (Navy) and TNI-Marinir (Marines) conduct regular joint amphibious exercises (e.g. Latgab, Komodo Exercises).
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Indonesia avoids overt alignment in WPS disputes but emphasizes sovereignty over the Natuna Islands, located near disputed zones. -Amphibious readiness is justified in terms of "border integrity," "gray zone threats" and "illegal fishing." -Naval and marine deployments in the Natuna Sea act as symbolic deterrence.
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-Indonesian military operations in East Timor (1975) involved combined arms including amphibious forces.

Features/Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Historical focus on “internal conflict containment” and “territorial consolidation.”</li> <li>-Transition to external-facing amphibious capability post-2000s.</li> <li>-Marine Corps (Korps Marinir): large, well-established with amphibious assault training.</li> <li>-LSTs and LPDs: Ships like the Makassar-class Landing Platform Docks.</li> <li>-Indigenous shipbuilding boosts fleet self-sufficiency.</li> <li>-Participates in multilateral exercises (eg., RIMPAC, Komodo)</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ensures rapid mobility across 17,000+++ islands, a core pillar of archipelagic defense.</li> <li>-Deters non-traditional maritime threats (piracy, Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, incursions)</li> <li>-Enhances HADR capability</li> <li>-Supports regional peacekeeping and ASEAN-led maritime stability initiatives.</li> </ul>

Source: Indonesia’s National Defense Strategy Paper (2021)

This table synthesizes Indonesia’s strategic value of amphibious warfare, amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

The Preamble of the 1945 Constitution outlines Indonesia’s core national interests, which include defending state sovereignty, maintaining the unity of its territory, ensuring the nation’s safety and dignity, and contributing to global peace. Guided by this constitutional mandate, Indonesia’s defense strategy must support the fulfillment of these goals. Looking ahead, the country’s strategic defense priorities will involve safeguarding ongoing national interests, responding to emerging security demands, and strengthening international defense cooperation (Ministry of Defence, 2020, p. VII).

On the Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare, Indonesia articulates amphibious warfare as a vital component of its broader archipelagic defense strategy, anchored in the concept of “Total Defense” (*Sistem Pertahanan Semesta*). As the world’s largest archipelagic state with over 17,000 islands, Indonesia integrates amphibious capability into its military doctrine to ensure territorial integrity, border protection, and internal stability. Official defense white papers and the *Minimum Essential Force (MEF)* framework recognize the need for mobile, flexible, and sea-land integrated forces, particularly for operations across vast maritime zones. Amphibious warfare is seen as essential in enabling power projection, especially in outer islands and remote regions vulnerable to separatist or external threats. The Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI-AL) (Navy) and TNI-Marinir (Marines) conduct regular joint amphibious exercises (e.g. Latgab, Komodo Exercises).

On the construction of relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse, although Indonesia is not a direct claimant in the Spratly Islands, it has significant territorial and economic interests in the Natuna Islands region, which overlaps with China’s expansive nine-dash line claim. Asserting its maritime sovereignty, Indonesia has taken steps to reinforce its military presence in the Natuna Sea, including the deployment of amphibious-capable units. Official statements and actions emphasize the role of amphibious and joint forces in defending the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from encroachment. Indonesia strategically uses amphibious deployments to assert its defense posture without overtly escalating the conflict, reflecting but firm approach to the broader South China Sea tensions.

On the privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, Indonesia’s understanding of amphibious warfare is historically informed by anti-colonial campaigns, such as the struggle against Dutch forces during the

independence movement, and counterinsurgency operations in Aceh, Papua, and East Timor. These experiences highlight the value of maritime mobility, surprise landings, and rapid island reinforcement, shaping the military's emphasis on archipelagic maneuver warfare. In addition, the use of amphibious operations during the Operation Seroja (invasion of East Timor in 1975) further demonstrated the strategic use of sea-based troop projection. These historical precedents have entrenched the importance of naval-landing interoperability and joint amphibious readiness in Indonesian defense planning. There was transition to external-facing amphibious capability post-2000s.

On the features of amphibious warfare capability, Indonesia maintains a robust amphibious warfare capability, primarily through its Marine Corps or Korps Marinir under the Indonesian Navy or TNI-AL. The country operates several Landing Platform Docks (LPDs), notably the Makassar-class and a wide range of landing craft, helicopters, and amphibious assault vehicles. These assets are designed for shore-to-shore operations, troop transport, and HADR missions. The Indonesian Marines are regularly trained in amphibious landing exercises and joint operations with international partners such as in Exercise Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT). Indonesia also invests in expanding its amphibious training infrastructure and procurement, underlining its ambition to be regionally self-reliant and operationally agile.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Indonesia's defense and official communications, amphibious warfare hold high strategic value in Indonesia's defense posture, primarily for territorial cohesion, regional presence, and crisis response. Official communications frame these capabilities as crucial for projecting force across the archipelago, reinforcing sovereignty in disputed maritime zones, and responding

to natural disasters, especially in remote island provinces. Amphibious readiness enables the TNI to deploy rapidly to areas affected by conflict, insurgency, or environmental crises. Furthermore, by enhancing its amphibious capabilities, Indonesia signals its commitment to maritime deterrence, multilateral cooperation, and regional leadership within ASEAN and Indo-Pacific frameworks.

Shifting political and security landscapes accompanied with instability in economic, social, and cultural spheres highlight the increasing significance of international diplomacy in shaping national strategies. In Indonesia's case, the Defense White Paper 2008 outlines a dual-layered approach to defence diplomacy. The first level focuses on military collaboration within ASEAN, strengthening ties among regional neighbors. The second extends beyond the region, involving strategic defence partnerships with key external states such as China, Australia, the United States, and South Korea (Pramono, 2021, p. 122).

## **(2) Malaysia and Its Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

Malaysia's military forces have undergone significant modernization in the last few decades, with an increasing emphasis on strengthening their amphibious warfare capabilities. Amphibious warfare, the military operation involving the movement of troops, vehicles, and equipment from sea to land, plays a crucial role in modern defense strategies, particularly for countries with extensive coastlines and strategic maritime interests. Malaysia, with its strategic location in Southeast Asia and access to both the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca, has a vested interest in developing effective amphibious capabilities to ensure national security, maintain sovereignty over its maritime territories, and respond to regional security challenges.

The Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF), through its Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN) and the Malaysian Army, have invested in amphibious warfare assets such as landing ships, amphibious assault vehicles, and specialized personnel. The Royal Malaysian Navy's fleet includes vessels capable of supporting amphibious operations, such as the strategic sealift ships and various landing craft. These assets are designed to transport military units and equipment from sea to shore, facilitating rapid deployment in both defense and humanitarian operations. The MAF's amphibious capabilities are not only vital for territorial defense but also for regional peacekeeping and disaster response, roles that Malaysia has actively participated in within ASEAN (Reynolds, 2025).

MAF has to be able to maintain superiority over Malaysia's maritime territory to defend the nation's maritime sovereignty. Maritime superiority also includes the Royal Malaysian Air Force's (RMAF) and the Royal Malaysian Navy's (RMN) ability to repel any encroachment into Malaysian maritime realm. This includes the control of port entry points and critical choke points such as the Straits of Malacca and Straits of Singapore as well as the sea lanes of communication between Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore (PMO, 2021, pp. 27-28).

The MAF's integrated amphibious warfare system includes a combination of landing ships, amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs), and specialized personnel trained for operations in coastal and littoral zones. These assets form a core component of Malaysia's defense posture and are essential in ensuring the country can protect its sovereignty and project force both within its national borders and across the broader Southeast Asian region. The ability to transition quickly from naval to land operations allows Malaysia to respond effectively to threats on its shores, whether they come from

external military aggression, or internal instability, such as insurgencies or territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Han, 2024).

Specialized personnel trained for amphibious operations are also a key investment for the MAF. Personnel, including the elite 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, undergo rigorous training to master the tactics and techniques required for effective amphibious warfare. This training encompasses everything from amphibious assault operations, such as beach landings, to handling complex logistics in littoral environments. The personnel are also trained to operate in harsh and rapidly changing conditions, preparing them for both combat operations and humanitarian tasks. In addition to traditional military duties, Malaysia's amphibious forces are also equipped to carry out peacekeeping and disaster relief missions, where their mobility and rapid response times are crucial for providing assistance in areas affected by natural disasters like tsunamis and flooding (SeaForce Editorial, 2025).

A cornerstone of the RMN's amphibious fleet is the Landing Ship Tank (LST) vessels. These ships are designed with a flat bottom and a ramp at the bow, which allows them to beach directly on the shore, making them ideal for amphibious assaults. The LSTs are capable of carrying large volumes of equipment, including tanks, armored vehicles, artillery, and infantry, directly from ship to land. With a carrying capacity of up to 1,500 tons of cargo, the LSTs enable Malaysia to move significant amounts of military hardware to the front lines rapidly. This capability is especially critical in the event of a large-scale conflict, where establishing a presence on key islands or coastal territories is essential for controlling strategic locations (totalmilitaryinsight.com, 2024c).

In addition to the LSTs, the RMN also operates a fleet of smaller, more agile landing craft. These vessels, such as the Landing Craft Mechanized (LCM) and Landing Craft Utility (LCU), are designed for more flexible and immediate amphibious operations. These landing crafts are capable of transporting lighter loads, such as infantry, light vehicles, and essential supplies, into more confined or remote coastal regions where larger vessels may have difficulty accessing. These crafts can operate on shallow waters and navigate through narrower channels, allowing the MAF to project forces into areas that are difficult to reach with larger amphibious ships. The ability to use landing craft in these situations is crucial for operations in smaller or isolated islands, which are common in Malaysia's extensive maritime territory (Naval News, 2025).

Within ASEAN, Malaysia has consistently supported initiatives aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and response mechanisms to emerging security threats. The MAF's amphibious warfare capabilities ensure that Malaysia can fulfill its obligations under various regional agreements and act as a stabilizing force in times of crisis. The ability to project power rapidly and efficiently allows Malaysia to contribute to the collective defense efforts of ASEAN and enhance the overall security environment in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, Malaysia's involvement in ASEAN-led humanitarian efforts, such as disaster relief missions and peacekeeping operations, highlights the broader value of its amphibious warfare assets, reinforcing its standing as a reliable and capable partner on regional security (The Star, 2025).

Another good point is that amphibious operations are not limited to Malaysia's own territory but extend to regional cooperation efforts. As a key member of the ASEAN, Malaysia is an active participant in regional disaster response and peacekeeping missions. The ability to deploy amphibious forces in such collaborative

efforts strengthens Malaysia’s position as a regional security and humanitarian leader. It also reinforces the importance of amphibious capabilities for multilateral operations, where rapid response and flexibility are often required to address the scale and complexity of natural disasters (Hussin, 2025).

## Instrument of Joint Readiness and Maritime Defense of Malaysia

**Table 4.2**

*Malaysia’s Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Malaysia’s Strategic Articulation / Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States’ Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amphibious warfare is articulated within “defense diplomacy” and “territorial integrity doctrine.</li> <li>-Highlighted in Malaysia’s Defence White Paper (2019) under “Strategic Environment,” acknowledging the need for maritime and littoral operations.</li> <li>-Amphibious capability seen as part of “joint operational readiness” for East Malaysia and offshore islands.</li> </ul>
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Malaysia adopts a quiet diplomacy approach but maintains de facto control over Spratly claims (Swallow Reef).</li> <li>-Amphibious presence supports domain awareness and control over contested maritime zones.</li> <li>-Emphasizes “freedom of navigation,” “rules-based order,” and non-escalatory defense posture.</li> </ul>
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Notable during Communist insurgency counter-operations and territorial defense in Sabah and Sarawak</li> <li>-Historical deployment of amphibious-like tactics in border security, not large-scale invasions.</li> <li>-Current doctrine influenced more by regional stability and sovereignty maintenance than offensive amphibious operations.</li> </ul>
Features/Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Naval Special Forces (PASKAL) and Royal Malaysian Navy conduct limited amphibious insertion operations.</li> <li>-Smaller amphibious-capable fleet: auxiliary ships with logistics landing capacity (e.g., KD Sri Indera Sakti).</li> </ul>

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Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Lack of a large-scale Marine Corps equivalent, but joint exercises with foreign marine units (e.g., USMC, Philippines' AFP).</li> <li>-Training in littoral and jungle-island environments (e.g., East Malaysia).</li> <li>-Supports defense of extended maritime zones and offshore outposts (Spratlys, Layang-Layang).</li> <li>-Aids in rapid deployment across the divided geography (Peninsular and Borneo Malaysia).</li> <li>-Enhances flexibility in HADR and non-traditional threat response (e.g., piracy, smuggling).</li> <li>-Symbolic presence in the South China Sea reinforces sovereign claims without escalation.</li> </ul>
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Source: Malaysia's Defence White Paper (Ministry of Defence, 2020)

With the standing for Malaysia, this structure allows for its strategic value of amphibious warfare, efficient mapping of how amphibious warfare is perceived, applied, and contextualized within ASEAN's defense posture and historical precedent.

Malaysia's defense strategy is developed based on the following principles: Interest-based, activist neutrality, aspired self-reliance, innovation and integration, good governance, concentric deterrence, comprehensive defense, and credible partnerships (MINDEF, 2020, pp. 40-41).

On the strategic articulation of amphibious warfare, Malaysia articulates amphibious warfare as part of its broader Joint and Integrated Armed Forces doctrine, emphasizing flexibility, mobility, and rapid deployment in defending its vast maritime domain. The Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) recognize the strategic need for amphibious readiness, especially in the defense of Sabah and Sarawak, and other coastal and island territories in East Malaysia. The development of joint amphibious task forces involving the Malaysian Army's 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade, the Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN), and the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) illustrates the country's intent to build capable expeditionary units. Amphibious doctrine is

increasingly integrated into the National Defence Policy and exercises, especially with an eye toward regional contingencies and internal security missions.

On the construction of relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse, Malaysia maintains a low-profile but assertive approach to the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea), where it has overlapping claims in the Spratly Islands, including control over Swallow Reef (Pulau Layang-Layang). Amphibious-capable units are viewed as essential in defending offshore installations and supporting rotational troop presence on these contested islands. The use of amphibious transport ships and the potential deployment of air-land-sea integrated forces underpin Malaysia's quiet deterrence posture. Public communications from defense officials avoid overt confrontation, but Malaysia's force readiness, naval patrols, and strategic infrastructure upgrades (e.g., airstrips on reefs) suggest that amphibious readiness is vital for securing maritime sovereignty and ensuring sustainment in extended territorial defense.

On privileged themes, Malaysia's amphibious experience is rooted in counterinsurgency operations during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and the Konfrontasi (1963-1966) with Indonesia, where forces had to navigate complex jungle-marine terrain. These historical cases emphasized the need for light, mobile, and rapidly deployable forces, the themes that persist in modern amphibious planning. In more recent years, the 2013 Lahad Datu incursion in Sabah highlighted vulnerabilities in coastal and island defense, prompting Malaysia to enhance its littoral quick reaction capabilities. The historical lesson is clear: Malaysia requires sea-land integrated responses for asymmetric threats, insurgencies, and maritime incursions, which is why amphibious tactics remain a core concern.

Malaysia's amphibious capability is led by the 10<sup>th</sup> Parachute Brigade, trained for rapid sea-to-shore operations, supported by the Royal Malaysian Navy's auxiliary ships and landing craft. The MAF has conducted amphibious training with partners such as the U.S. Marine Corps, and participates in regional amphibious-focused drills, including CARAT (or the Cooperation Afloat Readiness And Training). The RMN's multipurpose command support ships and future plans for dedicated amphibious platforms indicate growing commitment to this domain. Although Malaysia lacks a full-fledged Marine Corps, it is building an amphibious-ready force structure within its joint operations framework combining air, land, and naval components to support expeditionary or humanitarian deployments.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Malaysia's defense and official communications, amphibious warfare holds strategic value for Malaysia as it enables operational reach, maritime domain awareness, and crisis response, especially in the East Malaysian region and maritime zones of contention. It supports the country's defensive deterrence strategy, offering mobility and response options for counterterrorism, border security, and island reinforcement missions. In official communications, amphibious capabilities are often framed as tools for disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, and regional peacekeeping, aligning with Malaysia's traditionally moderate defense posture. However, beneath this diplomatic language is a clear military understanding that amphibious readiness is central to maintaining national security in an increasingly contested maritime environment.

### **(3) The Philippines and Its Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

With over 7,600 islands, the Philippines faces a distinct set of security concerns tied to its geography, especially along its coastlines and surrounding waters. Its

position in Southeast Asia places it at the center of several regional dynamics, including ongoing maritime disputes in the South China Sea, frequent natural hazards, and evolving defense cooperation within the region. Amphibious warfare remains a key element in the Philippine military's strategic approach, offering flexibility in crisis response, coastal defense, and territorial presence (Cabalza, 2024). This analysis looks into the country's development of amphibious capabilities, their role in national defense, and how they support broader efforts to uphold regional peace and security.

### **The Role of Amphibious Warfare in Philippine Defense Strategy**

Amphibious warfare is integral to the defense strategy of the Philippines due to its geographic characteristics and the security threats it faces. Just like Indonesia, as an archipelago, the Philippines is surrounded by vast maritime areas that are crucial for both national defense and economic interests. The ability to conduct amphibious operations allows the AFP to rapidly deploy forces, secure key coastal areas, and respond to territorial disputes, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises (Cabalza, 2024).

### **Amphibious Warfare Assets of the Philippines**

The Philippine Navy (PN), as the principal service responsible for amphibious warfare, operates a variety of amphibious vessels, landing ships, and specialized equipment to facilitate the deployment of troops and military resources (GlobalSecurity.org, 2024). One of the key assets in the Philippine Navy's amphibious arsenal is the Landing Ship Tank (LST), which is designed to transport large numbers of personnel, vehicles, and heavy equipment from sea to shore (Recuenco, 2024). These ships can navigate shallow waters, allowing them to land directly on beaches or in areas without port facilities. LSTs are particularly valuable for large-scale

amphibious operations, such as securing contested islands, establishing forward operating bases, and supporting humanitarian missions in remote coastal areas (Adroft Project, 2015).

A key element of the Philippine Armed Forces' amphibious capability is the deployment of Amphibious Assault Vehicles (AAVs), operated primarily by the Philippine Marines (Mangosing, 2019). These specialized vehicles are designed to provide rapid mobility from ship to shore, allowing troops to be deployed directly from sea to land. AAVs are capable of traveling across water and then transitioning to land, which allows for tactical operations even in rough terrain or unprepared beachheads (PDR, 2019). This makes them particularly important for shock operations, where surprise and speed are critical, and in environments where conventional land vehicles cannot operate. The Philippine Marines, who are trained for amphibious combat, use these vehicles to conduct beach landings, secure strategic coastal positions, and carry out offensive operations in hostile or contested areas (Mangosing, 2019).

One of the most pressing security concerns for the Philippines is the South China Sea, a maritime area rich in natural resources and vital trade routes, yet embroiled in territorial disputes involving multiple nations, including China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan (Reuters, 2025; Channel News Asia, 2025). The Philippines' claims in the South China Sea, particularly over islands like Scarborough Shoal and the Spratlys, have long been contested, and China's assertive territorial claims in the region pose significant challenges to the Philippines' territorial integrity (Walberg and Connell, 2025). Amphibious warfare allows the AFP to project power in these contested maritime areas, enabling the country to assert its presence and defend its rights over these territories (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024). The strategic importance of having the capability to rapidly deploy forces through amphibious

operations, such as landing on reefs or islands, cannot be overstated, especially as tensions continue to escalate in the region (Walberg and Connell, 2025).

In addition to territorial defense, amphibious warfare enhances the Philippines' capacity to respond to natural disasters, which the country is particularly vulnerable to due to its location in the Pacific Ring of Fire and the typhoon belt. The Philippines regularly faces devastating natural calamities, including earthquakes, typhoons, floods, and volcanic eruptions, which can overwhelm local infrastructure and hinder access to affected areas. Amphibious operations are essential in such circumstances, as they allow the military to swiftly deploy personnel and equipment to remote or inaccessible coastal areas. These capabilities ensure that the Philippine government can provide immediate relief and humanitarian aid, whether by airlifting supplies, evacuating citizens, or setting up temporary shelters and medical facilities (Reuters, 2025).

### **Flexibility in Response to Threats**

The Philippines' strategic location at the crossroads of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Ocean exposes it to a range of security challenges, including territorial disputes, transnational threats, and natural disasters. As geopolitical dynamics shift, especially with the increasing influence of countries like China in the South China Sea, the Philippines must remain agile and capable of adapting to changing circumstances (Cabalza, 2023a). Amphibious warfare capabilities provide the Philippines with a robust tool for asserting control over its maritime territories and responding to external interventions that threaten its sovereignty.

## **The South China Sea and Territorial Defense**

Amphibious warfare has become a critical capability for defending the Philippines' maritime interests, particularly in the South China Sea where sovereignty is under increasing pressure. China's growing presence, including military outposts on man-made islands, challenges the Philippines' control over various islands, reefs, and surrounding waters (Cabalza, 2023a). This militarization directly threatens the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and regional stability. With amphibious forces, the Philippines can respond swiftly, reinforcing its ability to defend and assert control over disputed territories.

The South China Sea remains central to the country's defense posture due to ongoing tensions over its valuable maritime features. These waters hold significant economic value, with resources such as oil, natural gas, and rich fishing grounds. The area also supports vital shipping lanes, critical to both regional economies and global commerce. However, Philippine sovereignty continues to face direct challenges, particularly from China's sweeping Nine-Dash Line claim. Beijing's buildup of military facilities and occupation of contested areas has increased friction, with clear implications for the Philippines' EEZ and national security (Cabalza, 2023a).

Adding to the strain, China maintains it has the right to allow limited fishing near certain islands, while barring access to official Philippine vessels military or otherwise within a 12-nautical-mile zone. This claim references an understanding reportedly made with former President Rodrigo Duterte (Rodeen, 2024).

## **Amphibious Warfare and Regional Cooperation**

The Philippines' investment in amphibious warfare also has broader regional implications, particularly in the context of ASEAN and other regional security

partnerships. As a member of ASEAN, the Philippines actively participates in multilateral security and humanitarian operations, where the ability to conduct amphibious operations enhances its contributions to regional peacekeeping and disaster relief missions (Roberto, 2024).

In recent years, the Philippines has participated in various joint training exercises with allies such as the United States and Australia, which focus on amphibious warfare tactics and interoperability. These exercises enable the Philippine military to enhance its amphibious capabilities, learn from the experiences of more advanced military forces, and improve its readiness for a range of scenarios, from combat operations to humanitarian aid delivery.

### **Regional Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Missions**

In addition to disaster relief, the Philippines' amphibious warfare capabilities enhance its ability to contribute to regional peacekeeping efforts. As part of ASEAN, the Philippines has consistently supported peacekeeping initiatives that aim to stabilize areas affected by conflict and ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid. The ability to deploy amphibious forces allows the Philippines to support ASEAN's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) missions, especially in the event of cross-border disasters or conflicts. This flexibility enables the Philippines to project power and influence, ensuring the region's security and readiness to act in the face of crises (Shead, 2017).

ASEAN also collaborates with external partners, including the United States, Australia, and other international powers, in conducting peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. The Philippines' investment in amphibious capabilities allows it to be an active and capable participant in these multilateral operations. For instance,

the Philippines has joined regional partners in combines training exercises, such as the Balikatan exercises with the United States (US Embassy, 2025), focusing on amphibious warfare tactics and humanitarian missions (Sadongdong, 2025b). These exercises improve the interoperability of the Philippine Armed Forces with U.S. military forces, as well as other international partners, ensuring smooth collaboration during real-world operations (Reuters,2025).

### **Expanding Regional Defense Cooperation**

The Philippines' investment in amphibious warfare is not limited to bilateral exercises. The growing importance of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia has led to the Philippines' participations in multilateral defense agreements, The country has played a key role in ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meetings (ADMM), a forum for fostering dialogue and collaboration on defense issues (ASEAN, 2024). Amphibious warfare is a critical aspect of these dialogues, as many ASEAN members face similar maritime security threats, particularly in the South China Sea. Through these platforms, the Philippines can strengthen its defense partnerships with neighboring countries, as well as with external partners such as Japan, South Korea, and the United States (Sadongdong, 2025a). The Philippine military has also engaged in joint operations with regional allies such as Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly in counterterrorism efforts and maritime security operations in the Sulu Sea and Sulawesi Sea.

The Archipelagic Coastal Defense Continuum (ACDC) Program represents a recent initiative focused on advancing amphibious warfare capabilities. Among its components are joint training on maritime domain awareness, exchanges involving subject matter experts, and field activities such as littoral zone reconnaissance. It also

includes Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) defense exercises, collaborative use of airspace via the Multifunctional Air Operations Center, and grassroots engagements with local communities to foster deeper ties between the U.S. and the Filipino people. These engagements not only reflect a shared historical bond but also contribute directly to the AFP's modernization goals, enhancing interoperability and joint readiness across diverse operational settings (Fischer, 2024).

### **Modernization of Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

To maintain its ability to effectively safeguard its maritime sovereignty and contribute to regional peace and security, the country has embarked on a comprehensive modernization of its amphibious warfare assets. This includes acquiring the Brahmos missile system (Cabalza, 2024). This modernization strategy focuses on enhancing the Philippine Navy's and Marine Corps' operational readiness, improving the speed and efficiency of amphibious deployments, and increasing the overall strategic reach of the country's military forces. This, as the country strengthens its diplomatic relations in oil trade (Cabalza, 2023b).

The Philippine Marine Corps has been investing in newer models of AAVs, which are equipped with advanced armor, enhanced propulsion systems, and improved navigational equipment. This modern equipment increases the AAVs' survivability in hostile environments and improves their ability to navigate across various coastal conditions (Rahmat, 2019). The modernization of these vehicles also contributes to the Philippine Marines' readiness to participate in multinational amphibious exercises and humanitarian relief efforts, improving their interoperability with regional partners such as the United States and Australia (Rahmat, 2019).

Furthermore, the Philippine Army's Army Reserve Command (ARESCOM) is also working to integrate more specialized amphibious units into its forces. These units are designed to support coastal defense operations and amphibious landings, reinforcing the Philippine Army's overall capability to engage in joint operations with the Philippine Navy and Marine Corps (Inquirer.net, 2023). By strengthening these forces, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) aims to ensure seamless integration between all services involved in amphibious warfare, allowing for more effective and efficient operations in both combat and humanitarian contexts.

### **Core Element of the PH Territorial Defense and Multilateral Defense Strategy**

**Table 4.3**

The Philippines' Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table

<b>Category</b>	<b>Philippines' Strategic Articulation / Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious warfare is explicitly embedded in the AFP Modernization Program (RA 7898 and RA 10349) and Philippine Navy Strategic Sail Plan 2020/2028. -Framed under "Archipelagic Defense Posture" and "Comprehensive Maritime Security." -Recognized as a critical capability for external defense, territorial defense, and joint force projection.
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Amphibious operations are constructed as vital in the context of Chinese incursions, gray zone tactics, and maritime militia threats. -Asserted in defense statements (e.g., DND, AFP, National Security Policy) as tools for sovereignty assertion and freedom of navigation enforcement. -Amphibious readiness often showcased in joint patrols and EDCA-facilitated exercises with the U.S. in the WPS.
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-Historical use of amphibious landings in World War II (Leyte Gulf, Lingayen) and counterinsurgency campaigns in Mindanao and Sulu archipelago.

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Features/Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amphibious strategy adapted for anti-terror operations in Marawi (2017), highlighting joint force coordination and urban littoral warfare.</li> <li>-Emphasis on defense of key terrain and dispersed island chains.</li> <li>-Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) is the dedicated amphibious force under the Navy.</li> <li>-Key assets include BRP Tarlac-class LPDs, small landing craft units, and air -sea integration with Philippine Army and Philippine Air Force.</li> <li>-Participates in multilateral amphibious exercises (e.g., Balikatan, Kamandag)</li> <li>-Capability improving via EDCA infrastructure and interoperability with U.S., Japan, Australia</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enables rapid deployment to contested maritime areas and forward island bases in the WPS (e.g., Kalayaan Island Group).</li> <li>- Supports external defense shift of the AFP from internal security focus.</li> <li>- Essential for joint and combined operations with allies, projecting presence and deterrence.</li> <li>- Boosts resilience and responsiveness in HADR, maritime law enforcement, and sovereignty patrols.</li> </ul>

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Sources: MCOC, Archipelagic Defense Concept by the Philippine Marine Corps, Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Strategy

This table synthesizes the Philippines’ strategic value of amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

On the strategic articulation of amphibious warfare, the Philippines articulates amphibious warfare as a core element of its territorial defense strategy as articulated in the Comprehensive Archipelagic Defense Strategy and PMC Operating Concept where amphibious forces is designed to become the rapidly deployable force. As an archipelagic state with over 7,000 islands, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) views amphibious operations as essential for ensuring inter-island mobility, force

projection, and rapid deployment in both internal and external security scenarios. Amphibious capability is emphasized in the development of the Joint Rapid Deployment Force and reinforced through the strategic doctrine of Active Archipelagic Defense which prioritizes joint-service interoperability between the Philippine Marine Corps (PMC), Navy, and Air Force. The Philippines regularly conducts amphibious exercises to simulate defense against incursions and to enhance operational readiness.

On the construction of relevance in WPS discourse, amphibious warfare is highly relevant in the Philippines' discourse on the WPS, where it maintains sovereign claims in the Kalayaan Island Group (Spratlys) and Scarborough Shoal. Given the increasing militarization by external factors particularly China, the AFP integrates amphibious operations into its strategic posture to assert presence, conduct maritime patrols, and ensure rotational deployment of troops and supplies to remote island outposts. Official statements from the Department of National Defense (DND) and AFP frequently cite the need for amphibious readiness to deter aggression, respond to potential conflict scenarios, and safeguard Philippine territorial waters. The construction of naval forward bases, use of beach-landing drills, and expansion of the Amphibious Ready Unit reflect how amphibious capability directly contributes to the country's maritime sovereignty efforts.

On the privileged themes, the Philippines has a long history of amphibious operations, from World War II island-hopping campaigns to counterinsurgency operations in the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao. These experiences underline key themes: the importance of mobility across sea-land terrain, joint force coordination, and the ability to insert and extract troops in contested littoral zones. The Philippine military's continued emphasis on amphibious training is shaped by these precedents,

especially the need to maintain control over coastal access points and react quickly to insurgent movements by sea. More recent lessons from the 2017 Battle of Marawi although urban in nature, is highlighted the logistical value of amphibious supply routes in protracted inland battles. These historical experiences sustain the relevance of amphibious operations in modern Philippine defense planning.

On its features or amphibious warfare capability, the Philippine Marine Corps, under the Navy, serves as the nation's principal amphibious force. Supported by a growing fleet of Landing Dock (LD) ships, including the BRP Tarlac-class vessels, the AFP possesses the capacity for beach landings, ship-to-shore troop movement, and disaster response operations/ The Marine Amphibious Ready Unit (MARU) and Marine Special Operations Group (MARSOG) are trained for both conventional and asymmetric amphibious missions. The Philippine Navy has also acquired multi-role landing craft, fast attack interdiction craft, and heliborne support, enhancing its expeditionary reach. Amphibious exercises like the *Kaagapay ng mga Mandirigma sa Dagat* (KAMANDAG) and Balikatan (with the U.S.) reinforce tactical and operational proficiency in sea-land transitions and interoperability with allies.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in the Philippines' defense and official communications, amphibious warfare is a strategic necessity for the Philippines due to its geopolitical vulnerability, island geography, and external maritime threats. It allows for the projection of force to protect remote territories, conduct humanitarian and disaster response missions, and assert national sovereignty in disputed maritime zones. In official communications, amphibious capacity is often presented as part of a broader deterrence framework, signaling the country's readiness to respond to gray-zone aggression and territorial encroachments. At the same time, the AFP emphasizes the dual-use nature of amphibious assets for both security and civilian missions. The

ability to conduct amphibious operations thus represents not only a military asset but also a symbol of resilience, sovereignty, and regional commitment to rules-based order in Southeast Asia.

The Archipelagic Coastal Defense Continuum (ACDC) serves as a bilateral platform aimed at enhancing coordination between the Philippine Marine Corps and the U.S. Marine Corps, particularly the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF). As explained by Col. Stuart Glenn, Commander of MEF (Forward), the program promotes collaboration at multiple levels from individual, unit, and organizational level that foster daily operational synergy with Philippine forces.

Exercises such as Balikatan, Kamandag, SAMA-SAMA, Marine Aviation Support Activity, and ACDC itself contribute to the ongoing cycle of training, reinforcing interoperability and improving joint capabilities over time. With continued support from both the Philippine government and its people, the U.S. Marine Corps remains committed to deepening its alliance with the Philippines and advancing the mutual goal of maintaining stability and freedom in the Indo-Pacific (Fischer, 2024).

#### **(4) Singapore and Its Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

Singapore's geographic location, perched at the crossroads of international shipping lanes, gives it both strategic importance and security vulnerabilities. The country is surrounded by the South China Sea to the east, the Straits of Malacca to the west, and the Singapore Strait to the south. These sea lanes are vital not only for Singapore's own trade and economic security but also for global shipping traffic, making the country a critical player in regional and global maritime security (Sg, 2024).

Given its small size and strategic location, Singapore's military doctrine places significant emphasis on maritime defense. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) considers the ability to secure its extensive coastline, defend key maritime chokepoints, and ensure unhindered access to international waters as crucial to maintaining national sovereignty. Amphibious warfare capabilities play a central role in achieving these objectives (Toh, 2016).

Singapore's amphibious capabilities not only bolster its own defense but also enhance its leadership role in regional security initiatives. By maintaining a highly capable amphibious force, Singapore can contribute to multilateral security efforts, such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and strengthen ties with key partners, including the United States, Australia, and Indonesia. Through joint military exercises, the country enhances its interoperability with these allies and improves collective responses to regional security crises (totalmilitaryinsight, 2024).

The Landing Ship Tank (LST) is one of the most important amphibious vessels in the RSN's arsenal (SG 101, 2023). These ships are designed to transport large quantities of personnel, military vehicles, and heavy equipment from ships to shore. The LSTs can navigate shallow waters, which allows them to land directly on beaches and operate in areas without port infrastructure. These ships are essential for large-scale amphibious operations, enabling Singapore to establish a beachhead, secure strategic islands, or deploy forces during humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) missions (SG 101, 2023).

The Endurance-class LPD is a specialized amphibious warfare vessel that combines both sea-based transport and combat operations. These ships are equipped with a well-deck, which allows them to launch smaller landing crafts and assault

vehicles directly into coastal areas. The Endurance-class LPDs are equipped with advanced command and control systems, allowing them to coordinate joint operations with the Singapore Army and Singapore Air Force. These ships can also serve as mobile command centers during operations, providing crucial logistical and operational support for extended campaigns (Naval Technology, 2019).

Singapore's Amphibious Assault Vehicles are a key component of its amphibious warfare strategy. These vehicles are designed to allow troops to disembark directly from amphibious vessels and land on hostile shores, where they can then maneuver across rugged or urban terrain. The AAVs used by the Singapore Army and Marine Corps are equipped with advanced armor for protection and mobility systems for operating in various environments, from beaches to urban landscapes (Lim, 2023).

### **Future of Amphibious Warfare in Singapore's Defense Strategy**

As Singapore continues to evolve its defense strategy in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics, the modernization of its amphibious warfare capabilities will remain essential for ensuring national security and regional stability. Singapore's strategic use of amphibious warfare enables it to project power, assert sovereignty, and contribute to peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts in Southeast Asia (Matthews and Timur, 2023).

Conflict has expanded beyond physical spaces, with the digital environment now serving as a major front for emerging threats. Activities in cyberspace increasingly affect real-world and these threats have become more complex, coordinated, and far-reaching. In response, Singapore's Ministry of Defence and the Singapore Armed Forces have established a fourth branch which is the Digital and Intelligence Service

(DIS). This new formation strengthens coordination across military branches to confront modern security challenges, particularly those rooted in the digital sphere. The DIS contributes critical functions such as intelligence gathering, secure communication, and digital defence infrastructure. With expertise that spans technical domains and disciplines like data science, psychology, linguistics, geography, and anthropology, the DIS plays a vital role in advancing the SAF’s push toward next-generation capabilities (SG 101, 2020).

Singapore’s investment in amphibious warfare not only bolsters its national defense but also underscores its commitment to maintaining a secure, stable, and cooperative environment in Southeast Asia, positioning itself as an active contributor to regional peace and security.

### **Flexible Tool for Expeditionary and Regional Security Cooperation of Singapore**

**Table 4.4**

*Singapore’s Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Singapore’s Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States’ Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious warfare is not emphasized as a primary doctrine but is addressed under “expeditionary capability,” “total defense,” and “military versatility.” -Articulated in Singapore’s Defence White Papers and the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) of the Republic of Singapore policy briefings as part of a “balanced, full-spectrum force” -Amphibious capabilities are positioned within broader concepts of jointness, force projection, and HADR response.
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Singapore takes a non-claimant, rules-based order approach to the WPS. -Amphibious capability is not framed for territorial conflict, but to support regional stability, naval cooperation, and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) security.

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Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Regular statements support UNCLOS, ASEAN centrality, and freedom of navigation, all indirectly supporting readiness.</li> <li>-No major historical amphibious campaigns involving Singapore</li> <li>-Instead, emphasis is on participation in multilateral maritime security operations and coalition missions (e.g., Gulf of Aden anti-piracy, tsunami relief missions).</li> <li>-Doctrine shaped by global security participation more than regional amphibious precedent.</li> </ul>
Features/Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No dedicated Marine Corps, but the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) have units trained in amphibious landings and littoral operations (e.g., Guards Units, Naval Diving Unit).</li> <li>-Assets include Endurance-class LPDs, configured for sealift, troop transport, and helicopter ops.</li> <li>-Focus on modular, rapidly deployable platforms to support HADR and coalition tasks.</li> <li>-Participates in exercises like CARAT, SIMBEX, and Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) involving amphibious elements.</li> <li>-Enhances expeditionary and coalition readiness for humanitarian missions and maritime interdiction.</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Supports Singapore's strategic role as a logistics and maritime hub in regional crises.</li> <li>-Provides flexibility for overseas defense commitments and protection of maritime chokepoints (e.g., Strait of Malacca).</li> <li>-Symbolizes Singapore's role as a responsible regional actor in security cooperation.</li> </ul>

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Source: Singapore Defence White Paper (2019)

This table synthesizes Singapore's strategic values of amphibious warfare, amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia. Singapore's Endurance-class landing ships are particularly notable for their versatility in regional operations, including humanitarian missions and crisis response.

On the strategic articulation of amphibious warfare: Singapore, while not possessing a traditional marine corps, articulates amphibious warfare through its broader commitment to joint operations, maritime security, and precision strike capabilities. The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) emphasizes high readiness and flexibility, recognizing those amphibious capabilities particularly in littoral operations, are essential in rapidly responding to threats, conducting evacuations, and protecting maritime trade. Singapore's Total Defence Strategy incorporates joint air-sea-land operations, and the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN), together with elite units such as the Naval Diving Unit (NDU) and Guardsmen, contributes to sea-to-shore operations in both peacetime and combat settings. While the SAF does not overtly label operations as amphibious warfare, it integrates its components in a way that effectively fulfills amphibious functions within a modern urban-littoral context.

On the construction of relevance in the WPS discourse, although Singapore is not a claimant in the WPS and South China Sea, it actively champions freedom of navigation, adherence to international law, and regional stability. Its discourse emphasizes the importance of a rules-based maritime order, and the SAF's amphibious-relevant capabilities contribute to multilateral deterrence and crisis response operations. Through its participation in ADMM-Plus maritime and HADR exercises, Singapore supports capacity-building efforts that include amphibious-type scenarios like non-combatant evacuation and beach landings. In doing so, Singapore indirectly underscores the value of flexible sea-land force projection, which reinforces its stance on ensuring safe and stable regional sea lanes critical to its trade-dependent economy.

On the privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, while Singapore has not engaged in large-scale historical amphibious conflicts

like its neighbors, its strategic learning is deeply informed by regional lessons from World War II notably the Japanese amphibious landing on Singapore Island in 1942, which highlighted the city's vulnerability to sea-based assault. This historical trauma influenced the SAF's development into a highly modernized, rapidly deployable defense force. Moreover, regional conflicts such as the Konfontasi and operations during the Vietnam War period underscored the need for interoperability, coastal surveillance, and littoral defense preparedness. These themes continue to inform SAF training, including joint amphibious drills and the integration of elite units in maritime interdictions and insertion operations.

On features of amphibious warfare capability, Singapore's amphibious-related capabilities are delivered primarily through its Guards Formation, an elite airborne and heliborne light infantry force alongside the Naval Diving Unit and Special Operations Task Force. These units are trained in littoral insertion, beach assaults, and naval boarding operations, with support from the RSN's Endurance-class Landing Ship Tasks (LSTs), which provide strategic sea lift and support for amphibious-like missions. The SAF's advanced C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) systems, naval drones, and air-sea-ground integration platforms enhance its ability to conduct complex sea-to-shore operations, even without a formal marine corps. Regular participation in multilateral exercises like Exercise Tiger Balm, CARAT, and ADMM-Plus ensures that Singapore maintains a cutting-edge amphibious support capability, especially in humanitarian and contingency scenarios.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Singapore's defense and official communications, amphibious warfare holds strategic utility for Singapore, not for offensive projection, but for defense, regional support, and crisis response. Its

strategic documents and public defense statements emphasize the importance of mobility, joint operations, and expeditionary support, especially for overseas deployments and regional disaster response missions. Amphibious-ready forces enhance Singapore's defense diplomacy by enabling it to play a stabilizing role in Southeast Asia. In official communications, amphibious-related capabilities are often highlighted during HADR missions such as tsunami or typhoon relief, as well as in showcasing Singapore's interoperability with partners like the U.S., Australia, and ASEAN neighbors. This subtle yet deliberate emphasis underscores Singapore's role as a smart power, leveraging amphibious competencies to support peace, cooperation, and strategic deterrence.

Singapore remains committed to promoting a regional security system that is open, inclusive, and grounded in international law. It actively engages with multilateral institutions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), and the United Nations (UN). These bodies help define how states interact, offering clear rules that ensure all countries can engage on equal footing, even during disputes or periods of tension. They also serve as venues for constructive cooperation, enabling states to address shared challenges that cross national boundaries (SG 101, 2025).

### **(5) Thailand and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Thailand, located at the heart of Southeast Asia, holds a strategic position along critical maritime and land routes that link the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Its geographic proximity to key regional players, such as China and India, as well as its access to vital maritime chokepoints, elevates the importance of robust defense capabilities. Among these, amphibious warfare plays a significant role in Thailand's

defense strategy, allowing the country to project power, secure its extensive coastlines, and defend vital maritime interests. As Thailand continues to modernize its military forces, the focus on amphibious warfare is critical not only for national defense but also for regional stability in the Southeast Asian region (Doppler, 2023).

The Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) have long emphasized the importance of maritime defense due to Thailand's location bordering both the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea. As a nation with significant coastlines and multiple islands, Thailand's defense strategy includes strengthening its amphibious capabilities (Bradford and Herrmann, 2021).

In the realm of amphibious warfare, the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) plays a central role in securing Thailand's coastline and projecting maritime power. The RTN operates several amphibious warfare vessels, including landing ships and specialized landing crafts, which enable the rapid deployment of troops, vehicles, and supplies to coastal areas. The RTN also plays a central role in securing Thailand's coastline and projecting maritime power. The RTN operates several amphibious warfare vessels, including landing ships and specialized landing crafts, which enable the rapid deployment of troops, vehicles, and supplies to coastal or island areas. These vessels are essential for Thailand's ability to quickly respond to regional tensions or humanitarian needs. The integration of amphibious warfare assets also allows the RTN to support regional security operations and engage in cooperative missions with other ASEAN members (Bradford and Herrmann, 2021; Saperstein, 2021).

The Royal Thai Marine Corps is equipped with specialized amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs), which enable troops to land directly from amphibious vessels and navigate rugged coastal terrains. These vehicles are equipped with advanced armor

and propulsion systems that enhance mobility and survivability in challenging environments (Grevalt, 2024).

As a founding member of the ASEAN and other multilateral security frameworks, Thailand has frequently participated in joint exercises and peacekeeping missions with regional and global partners. The ability to execute amphibious operations enhances Thailand's capacity to engage in cooperative security initiatives, such as disaster relief operations and humanitarian assistance missions in the region (totalmilitaryinsight, 2024c).

Thailand aims to strike a careful balance in its foreign relations with both China and the United States. This approach allows the country to benefit from its engagement with the two competing powers, while avoiding entanglement in their ongoing tensions (Fiscal Note, 2025, p. 18).

Thailand's focus on amphibious warfare is central to its defense strategy and regional security objectives. The country's amphibious capabilities provide the flexibility and mobility needed to respond to a wide range of security challenges, from territorial defense to humanitarian assistance. The integration of specialized amphibious assets, such as landing ships, assault vehicles, and the Royal Thai Marine Corps, enhances Thailand's readiness and allows for effective response in both military and non-military scenarios. As regional security dynamics continue to evolve, Thailand's investment in amphibious warfare will remain essential for maintaining its sovereignty, securing its maritime interests, and contributing to regional and global peace and stability (Bradford and Hermann, 2021).

## **Enabler for Coastal Defense of Thailand**

### **Table 4.5**

Contestation on the Strategic Relevance of Amphibious Warfare in ASEAN...70

*Thailand Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Thailand's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amphibious warfare is articulated within Thailand's "maritime security" and "territorial defense" frameworks, especially concerning the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea.</li> <li>-Thailand's defense documents recognize the importance of joint force readiness, including amphibious landings and expeditionary logistics.</li> <li>-Emphasized in Royal Thai Navy (RTN) modernization plans, especially through maritime domain awareness and sealift capacity.</li> </ul>
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Thailand is a non-claimant state and adopts a neutral, ASEAN-centric diplomatic approach in WPS issues.</li> <li>-Amphibious capabilities are not directly linked to WPS tensions but are positioned for regional cooperation, disaster response, and international exercises.</li> <li>-Thailand supports freedom of navigation and conflict de-escalation under the ASEAN framework.</li> </ul>
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Historical involvement in regional peacekeeping, coastal defense, and counterinsurgency near maritime borders.</li> <li>-Amphibious operations featured in joint naval drills, not in combat-heavy contexts.</li> <li>-Influenced by Cold War-era cooperation with U.S. in Southeast Asia.</li> </ul>
Features/Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Maintains a dedicated Marine Corps under the Royal Thai Navy.</li> <li>-Operates Endurance-type amphibious ships and the Chakri Naruebet aircraft carrier, which can support limited amphibious and helicopter ops.</li> <li>-Participates in regional exercises involving amphibious ops: Cobra Gold, SEACAT, and CARAT.</li> <li>-Marine units trained in coastal defense, island seizure, and littoral operations.</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Serves as a strategic tool for rapid deployment along Thailand's extensive coastline and island territories.</li> </ul>

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- Enhances Thailand's disaster response and HADR capability, especially in the Andaman Sea.
  - Supports bilateral and multilateral interoperability, especially with the U.S., Japan, and ASEAN partners.
  - Provides flexibility in managing border tensions, piracy, and maritime security threats.
- 

Sources: Defense and Security Landscape, 2025; Chambers, 2024; Editorial Team, 2025; Fiscal Note, 2025; The Phnom Penh Post, 2025; People's Army Newsletter, 2024

This table synthesizes Thailand's strategic value of amphibious warfare, amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the west Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

Thailand integrates amphibious warfare into its maritime defense and force projection strategy, particularly through the Royal Thai Marine Corps (RTMC), a branch under the Royal Thai Navy. Amphibious operations are articulated as key to defending Thailand's vast coastlines, conducting border security, and supporting regional peacekeeping missions. The concept of multi-domain integration is gaining ground, with amphibious readiness emphasized in military white papers and defense modernization plans. Thailand views its marines and amphibious transport capability as crucial for safeguarding maritime interests, particularly in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea. The RTMC regularly features in national exercises aimed at joint amphibious landings, humanitarian response, and coastal reinforcement.

Pertaining to the construction of relevance in the West Philippine Sea discourse, although not a claimant in the South China Sea disputes, Thailand plays a supportive diplomatic and security role in ASEAN. Its amphibious capabilities become relevant in the context of ASEAN defense cooperation and multilateral readiness,

particularly for maritime stability and non-traditional threats. Thailand's defense statements often focus on freedom of navigation and peaceful dispute resolution, but its participation in exercises like ADMM-Plus HADR and Maritime Security demonstrates how its amphibious forces can be mobilized for regional contingencies, including evacuation missions and sea-based humanitarian assistance. This helps position Thailand as a regional stabilizer capable of contributing to multilateral responses in crisis zones like the South China Sea.

On privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, Thailand's historical military engagements such as its role during World War II, the Vietnam War, and internal counterinsurgency operations, have reinforced the importance of sea-to-land mobility, logistics over water, and the use of marines in border and coastal security. The RTMC has a history of conducting operations along Thailand's southern coast, including counterinsurgency in the southern insurgency of Pattani and Narathiwat, where rapid insertion from sea-based platforms has strategic value. These historical lessons emphasize the need for flexibility, combined arms coordination, and joint command readiness, which continue to shape Thailand's modern amphibious doctrine and training exercises.

On Thailand's features or amphibious warfare capability, Thailand possesses a capable amphibious force through the Royal Thai Marine Corps, supported by the HTMS Angthong, a Makassar-class Landing Platform Dock (LPD), and smaller landing craft. The RTMC is trained for beach landings, littoral combat, and expeditionary missions, often in coordination with naval and air support. Thailand frequently hosts and participates in joint exercises such as Cobra Gold, which includes extensive amphibious training scenarios in collaboration with partners like the United States and South Korea. In recent years, Thailand has expanded its investment in amphibious

doctrine development, logistics, and inter-service integration, making its amphibious units some of the more advanced within ASEAN in terms of training and operational capacity.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Thailand's defense and official communications: Amphibious warfare is strategically valuable to Thailand as it enables defense in depth, particularly in coastal and island territories, while also serving in regional security and disaster response roles. Official communications from the Royal Thai Navy and Ministry of Defence highlight the amphibious force's utility not only in combat but in humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, and counterterrorism support. Thailand's ability to rapidly deploy marines and conduct joint sea-to-land operations bolsters its role as a regional partner in ensuring stability and responding to crises. As ASEAN security dynamics evolve, Thailand continues to use its amphibious capacity as a versatile instrument of national defense and regional diplomacy.

Thailand plays an increasingly assertive role in regional security affairs, engaging actively through ASEAN mechanisms and bilateral partnerships. It regularly hosts both joint and multinational military exercises and sends its forces to participate in similar activities abroad. Although much of its military hardware remains outdated, the Thai Ministry of Defence has prioritized modernization and capability enhancement. Since 2019, there has been a noticeable shift in strategy from relying heavily on external suppliers to fostering a domestic defence industry. Many recent acquisition agreements now feature provisions for joint production and the transfer of military technology. Through this approach, Thailand positions itself to become a credible defence manufacturer within the region (Fiscal Note, 2025, p. 18).

## **(6) Brunei Darussalam and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Brunei Darussalam, a small but strategically positioned nation located on the island of Borneo, plays a significant role in the security and stability of Southeast Asia. With a land area of just over 5,700 square kilometers and a coastline of about 160 kilometers along the South China Sea, Brunei's defense strategy focuses heavily on safeguarding its maritime interests. The nation's location near critical shipping lanes on the South China Sea makes it a vital player in regional maritime security. Consequently, Brunei's military capabilities, particularly its amphibious warfare assets, are essential for protecting its sovereignty, securing its coastal resources, and responding to regional security challenges (Information Department, 2024).

The Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) is responsible for defending the Sultanate of Brunei, and its military doctrine emphasizes the needs to defend the nation's land and maritime borders. Given Brunei's small size, the RBAF adopts a defensive strategy that maximizes the effectiveness of its resources, focusing on a capable, mobile, and versatile force. One of the core components of this strategy is the ability to carry out amphibious operations. Brunei's amphibious forces are crucial for ensuring the protection of its territory and maintaining control over its offshore assets, such as oil rigs and small islands in the South China Sea (Ministry of Defence, n.d.)

Brunei's amphibious warfare assets are primarily integrated into the Royal Brunei Navy (RBN), which plays a pivotal role in securing the nation's coastlines and maritime zones. The RBN is responsible for conducting naval operations, patrolling Brunei's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and responding to threats to its maritime sovereignty. The naval service also works closely with the Royal Brunei Land Force (RBLF) and the Royal Brunei Air Force (RBAirF) to execute joint operations, including amphibious assaults and humanitarian missions. This collaboration ensures that

Brunei remains well-equipped to handle various security and humanitarian challenges (Saileh, 2024).

Brunei Darussalam's approach to national defense centers on ensuring the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity across all levels of conflict. This effort requires constant awareness of both existing threats and the risks they carry. Since risk reflects a combination of potential impact and the likelihood of occurrence, it becomes essential to prioritize preparedness against those dangers that are both immediate and probable, without neglecting other possible threats. Although the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) must remain capable of responding to high-intensity warfare, it is more plausible that they will be tasked with addressing challenges at the lower end of the conflict scale. In response, the defense sector is expected to pursue adaptable solutions and capabilities that can handle routine security challenges but also scale quickly to meet the demands of more serious confrontations when required (MINDEF, 2021, p. 59).

Brunei's strategic interest in the South China Sea is rooted in the region's significance for global maritime trade and its proximity to Brunei's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Which is rich in marine resources, including oil and natural gas reserves. The South China Sea is one of the most contested maritime areas in the world, with several countries, including China, Malaysia, and the Philippines, asserting overlapping territorial claims (Daniel, 2024). As a small nation with limited military resources, Brunei recognizes the importance of leveraging its amphibious forces to safeguard its sovereignty in the face of growing tensions. Brunei can assert its territorial claims, especially in offshore areas that may be at risk of encroachment from more powerful regional actors by maintaining its amphibious capability (Oselin, 2024).

## Flexible Maritime Posture and Strategic Cooperation for Brunei

**Table 4.6**

*Brunei's Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Brunei's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious warfare is not prominently emphasized but fits within Brunei's maritime defense doctrine and whole-of-nation approach to territorial security. -Mentioned indirectly in Brunei's Defense White Paper (2007, 2011) as part of "operational mobility" and "border defense readiness." -Articulated more in terms of small-scale maritime insertion, surveillance, and defense of coastal/island assets.
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Brunei is a claimant in the South China Sea but maintains a quiet, diplomatic stance rooted in international law (UNCLOS) and ASEAN consensus. -Amphibious capability is not positioned for conflict but for patrols, deterrence, and for sovereignty support over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). -Relevance tied to maintaining maritime domain awareness, especially near Luconia Shoals.
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-No major historical amphibious operations. -Defense doctrine shaped more by post-independence self-defense and counterterrorism cooperation. -Themes relate to external defense assistance and ASEAN solidarity missions (e.g., peacekeeping, training).
Features/Amp hibious Warfare Capability	-No dedicated Marine Corps, but the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) include a Royal Brunei Navy (RBN) with light amphibious capabilities. -Uses fast patrol boats and landing craft for coastal patrol and troop movement. -Conducts joint amphibious training with partners (e.g., UK, Singapore, Malaysia, US). -Focuses on rapid reaction, small-unit insertion, and coastal defense.
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	-Supports sovereignty patrols and rapid deployment to remote maritime areas. -Enhances border security, counter-piracy, and anti-smuggling operations. -Valuable in HADR missions and multilateral peace support operations. -Reflects Brunei's defensive military posture and desire for strategic self-reliance while relying on partnerships for scale.

Sources: Ministry of Defence of Brunei Darussalam, 2022; Lee and Sims, 2024; Parameswaran, 2021

Brunei's defense posture emphasizes minimal deterrence and strategic cooperation rather than large-scale amphibious operations. Its participation in ASEAN defense initiatives, including joint exercises and maritime security frameworks, reflects its commitment to regional stability. Historically, Brunei's role in amphibious operations has been shaped by WWII-era campaigns, particularly the Battle of North Borneo, which involved amphibious landings by Allied Forces.

On Brunei's strategic articulation of amphibious warfare: Brunei Darussalam, though a small state with a modest military, acknowledges the importance of amphibious capability as part of its broader defense and sovereignty doctrine. Situated on the island of Borneo with a coastline along the South China Sea, Brunei incorporates amphibious elements in its national defense to secure its maritime borders, support coastal operations, and participate in multinational exercises. The Royal Brunei Armed Forces (RBAF) emphasize joint operations and mobility, particularly through the Royal Brunei Land Forces (RBLF) and Royal Brunei Navy (RBN). While Brunei does not maintain a dedicated marine corps, it trains select units in shore-to-sea interoperability, allowing for light amphibious functionality suited to its defensive needs and alliance-based strategy.

On the construction of relevance in West Philippine Sea discourse, Brunei is a claimant state in the South China Sea, particularly over parts of the Louisa Reef and Rifleman Bank, though it maintains a low-profile and diplomatic posture in regional disputes. Its amphibious relevance emerges through sovereignty assertion via presence, maritime surveillance, and defense of its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). While official communications avoid escalation, Brunei participates in ASEAN

multilateral exercises such as ADMM-Plus and CARAT, which involve amphibious components like shore landings and joint patrols. These exercises serve as indirect means for Brunei to build amphibious competency while reinforcing regional norms of peaceful dispute resolution and maritime defense preparedness.

On privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, Brunei's experience with amphibious-related operations is largely shaped by British military cooperation during and after its protectorate era. Historical operations, such as coastal responses to insurgency threats during the 1962 Brunei Revolt, involved British-led amphibious deployments, highlighting the need for rapid littoral mobility. These events reinforced the value of external defense partnerships, flexible deployment platforms, and the need for maritime-accessible ground forces. Though not directly involved in major amphibious campaigns, Brunei's military doctrine retains an understanding that territorial defense in a maritime environment requires shore-access flexibility, quick reinforcement, and joint operation readiness, all themes inherited from post-colonial military experiences.

On Brunei's features or amphibious warfare capability, Brunei's amphibious capabilities are modest but functional. The Royal Brunei Navy operates several fast patrol boats and multipurpose vessels, while the RBLF includes units trained in coastal deployment and rapid response. Though Brunei does not field amphibious assault ships or marine battalions, it benefits from frequent training with allied forces, such as the United States, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, who provide amphibious expertise and logistical support. Participation in Exercise CARAT and Exercise Pelican (with Singapore) routinely includes sea-to-land operations, beach landings, and joint HADR scenarios, enabling Brunei to maintain interoperability and amphibious readiness within its regional security framework.

Brunei Darussalam maintains its commitment to international obligations rooted in both legal and moral principles. This ongoing commitment guides MINDEF and RBAF in making decisions and taking actions that are consistent with accepted standards of responsibility and fairness (MINDEF, 2021, p. 52).

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Brunei's defense and official communications, amphibious warfare holds strategic value for Brunei in terms of sovereignty protection, EEZ monitoring, and coalition-based security engagement. Official defense narratives often frame amphibious training and participation in maritime exercises as means to enhance self-reliance, defensive agility, and regional cooperation. While Brunei's military is small, amphibious capabilities offer the flexibility to operate across its maritime terrain, respond to natural disasters, and contribute meaningfully to multilateral security operations. These capabilities strengthen Brunei's position as a responsible and proactive ASEAN member, capable of upholding its maritime interest and participating in regional collective security without overextending its resources.

### **(7) Vietnam and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Vietnam's defense strategy places significant emphasis on coastal and maritime defense. The country's 3,000-kilometer coastline and the South China Sea, which is rich in natural resources and vital trade routes, are considered critical to Vietnam's national security. With ongoing territorial disputes, particularly with China over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, Vietnam has invested in amphibious capabilities to ensure it can defend its territorial waters, secure vital sea lanes, and project power in its maritime domain. Amphibious warfare assets, including landing ships, assault vehicles, and amphibious infantry, are integral components of Vietnam's strategy to

maintain sovereignty over its islands and engage in territorial defense operations in the face of external threats (Hadjinata, et al, 2023).

### **Territorial Integrity and Maritime Claims**

At the core of Vietnam's coastal defense strategy is the need to protect its territorial integrity and assert its maritime claims, especially in the South China Sea, where there are competing territorial disputes with China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. This body of water is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas, and fisheries, and it also serves as one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world. Vietnam has long claimed sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands, both of which are strategically located in the South China Sea. The protection of these islands is seen as critical to the country's economic well-being and national security (Joseph, 2024).

Amphibious warfare is a key element of Vietnam's coastal defense strategy, particularly as the country faces the need to secure both offshore islands and its extensive coastline. The Vietnam People's Army (VPA) has invested in specialized amphibious vessels, such as Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) and Landing Ship Docks (LPDs), to facilitate rapid troop deployment to contested regions. These assets are crucial for ensuring that Vietnam can project force, defend strategic islands, and respond quickly to threats in its maritime domain. Amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs) also play a critical role in enabling troops to land directly on beaches, reinforcing Vietnam's ability to execute amphibious operations effectively (Seaforce, 2025).

### **Civil-Military Integration and Community Defense**

In addition to its military assets, Vietnam's coastal defense strategy incorporates a civil-military approach, where local communities, fishermen, and coastal populations play an active role in safeguarding the country's maritime interests. This approach is grounded in the belief that coastal communities are integral to the defense of Vietnam's vast maritime borders. For example, the Vietnamese government has mobilized civilian forces, such as coastal patrol units and local militia groups, to assist in monitoring and protecting vital maritime resources (Vuving, 2024).

### **Defense Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation**

While Vietnam's coastal defense strategy emphasizes self-reliance, it also recognizes the importance of regional cooperation and defense diplomacy. As an ASEAN member, Vietnam has been actively involved in multilateral initiatives aimed at promoting regional stability and security in Southeast Asia. This includes participating in joint military exercises, such as the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), and engaging in dialogues with other regional powers, including China, the United States, and India, to foster cooperation on maritime security issues (Joseph, 2024).

In the context of the South China Sea, Vietnam has been vocal in advocating for adherence to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Vietnam has called for the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes and the respect of each nation's maritime claims. Through these diplomatic channels, Vietnam seeks to enhance its position in the regional security landscape, building strategic partnerships and strengthening its defense relationships with key stakeholders (Yazhen, 2022).

### **Amphibious Warfare Assets and Capabilities**

The Vietnam People's Navy (VPN) and the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) play central roles in the country's amphibious warfare strategy. The VPN has been modernizing its fleet to enhance amphibious assault capabilities, focusing on acquiring versatile ships that can transport large numbers of troops, vehicles, and equipment. One of the key assets in this effort is the Landing Ship Tank (LST), which allows for the rapid deployment of forces to contested or remote coastal areas. These ships can land troops directly on beaches, making them effective for amphibious assaults and securing strategic islands or reefs in the South China Sea (Joseph, 2024).

### **Regional Security and the South China Sea**

Vietnam's strategic approach in the South China Sea has emphasized the importance of maintaining a capable and agile amphibious force. By positioning amphibious forces on islands and reefs in the region, Vietnam ensures that it can rapidly respond to any threats or incursions by external actors. This is particularly important in the face of China's ongoing militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea, which threatens to disrupt regional stability and security (Yazhen, 2022).

Vietnam's approach to amphibious warfare is a reflection of its strategic priorities and its commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty in the face of regional challenges. As the geopolitical dynamics in Southeast Asia continue to evolve, Vietnam's amphibious forces will remain a critical component of the country's defense strategy, enabling it to defend its interests, contribute to regional peacekeeping, and respond to both military and humanitarian needs (Yazhen, 2022).

Given today's shifting and often volatile global and regional security environment, Vietnam continues to assert a defence strategy grounded in peace and self-reliance. As outlined in the 2019 National Defence White Paper, the Communist

Party of Vietnam(CPV) and the State remain firm in resolving disputes through dialogue and adherence to international law. While diplomacy remains a priority, Vietnam also emphasizes building a strong defence capability to deter threats and respond decisively to acts of aggression. Looking ahead, the Vietnam People’s Army (VPA) will receive targeted investments to reinforce its position at the center of the nation’s defence framework. This effort supports the safeguarding of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests, while preserving the socialist orientation of the state. At the same time, Vietnam is deepening its international defence cooperation and diplomacy, aiming to promote peace and long-term stability both within the region and beyond (MOD, 2019).

### **Critical for Forward Defense of Vietnam**

Vietnam’s amphibious warfare capabilities are modest but growing, centered on its naval infantry, landing ships, and joint exercises, primarily focused on coastal defense and South China Sea operations. Below is an analytical table structured according to the specified columns:

**Table 4.7**

*Vietnam: Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Vietnam’s Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Amphibious warfare is central to Vietnam’s WPS posture, especially concerning its claims in the Spratly and Paracel Islands. -Cited as vital to countering Chinese maritime assertiveness, especially through forward presence, rapid deployment, and island resupply missions. -Defense policy positions amphibious operations as part of a “self-defense” and “deterrence by presence” strategy
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-Vietnam has a rich history of amphibious coastal operations, especially during the First and Second Indochina Wars, the 1974 Battle of the Paracel Islands, and the 1988 Johnson South Reef Skirmish.

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Features/ Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Themes include maritime resistance, island garrisoning, and asymmetric naval tactics.</li> <li>-Possesses Marine Infantry units under the Vietnam People’s Navy, trained in amphibious assault, island defense, and coastal warfare.</li> <li>-Amphibious transport platforms include Project 12418 Molniya-class ships, LSTs, and domestically produced landing craft.</li> <li>-Strengthening capability through partnerships (e.g., India, Russia, Japan), training, and surveillance tech.</li> <li>-Routinely conducts live-fire amphibious exercises in South Central Vietnam and offshore areas.</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Crucial to maintaining and defending Vietnam’s island outposts in the Spratlys and Paracels.</li> <li>-Acts as a force multiplier for defending sovereignty in disputed maritime zones.</li> <li>-Supports resupply, rotation, and reinforcement of remote garrisons under threat.</li> <li>-Integral to Vietnam’s “People’s War at Sea” doctrine, blending conventional and irregular tactics for maritime defense.</li> </ul>

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Sources: Vietnam National Defence (2019); Grossman and Sharman, 2019.

This table synthesizes Vietnam’s strategic value of amphibious warfare, amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

On its strategic value of amphibious warfare, Vietnam places high strategic emphasis on amphibious warfare, particularly within the context of its People’s War at Sea doctrine and the defense of its maritime sovereignty. The Vietnam People’s Army (VPA), through the Vietnam People’s Navy (VPN) and Marine Infantry, includes amphibious capabilities as critical for coastal defense island protection, and force projection across its more than 3,000 kilometers of coastline and island territories. Vietnam’s White Paper on Defense (2019) references all-people national defense, where amphibious forces are tasked with rapid response in coastal areas and disputed maritime zones. Amphibious warfare is framed not only as a conventional tool for

defending the homeland but also as a symbol of national resilience in the face of external aggression.

On the construction of relevance in the West Philippine Sea discourse, Vietnam is one of the most vocal ASEAN claimants in the South China Sea disputes, actively asserting its sovereignty over parts of the Spratly and Paracel Islands. Amphibious forces play a central role in rotational defense of these islands, with military outposts supported by landing craft, small amphibious ships, and marines. The VPA uses amphibious training and deployments as visible signals of readiness and deterrence, especially in the face of increasing pressure from Chinese maritime forces. Vietnam's defense statements and media coverage often highlight naval and amphibious patrols, positioning amphibious warfare not just as tactical utility, but as a strategic expression of national resolve and maritime claim enforcement.

On privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, Vietnam's experience in historical amphibious operations, particularly during the First and Second Indochina Wars, shaped its modern doctrine significantly. Operations such as the Tet Offensive, riverine assaults in the Mekong Delta, and coastal landings against South Vietnamese forces demonstrated the importance of integrating naval, ground, and guerilla units in amphibious-style warfare. These historical campaigns emphasized mobility, surprise, and flexible sea-land maneuvering, which remain central themes in Vietnam's training today. The legacy of asymmetric warfare and defense of coastal areas continues to influence Vietnam's current amphibious doctrine, particularly in scenarios involving island defense and hybrid warfare.

On Vietnam's features or amphibious warfare capability, it maintains a growing amphibious warfare capability through its naval infantry regiments, landing craft units,

and transport ships, including Russian-made Project 12418 fast-attack craft and Soviet-era landing ships. The Marine Infantry, trained under the Navy, is tasked with coastal defense, amphibious landings, and outpost reinforcement. Vietnam has invested in modernizing its landing ships, building indigenous amphibious vessels, and conducting frequent joint sea-land exercises, often staged in the Spratly archipelago. While its capabilities may not match those of larger regional powers, Vietnam's strategic placement of amphibious assets near disputed zones ensures a robust capacity for territorial defense and asymmetric countermeasures.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Vietnam's defense and official communications, amphibious warfare holds critical strategic value for Vietnam, especially in defending its island claims and ensuring maritime sovereignty. It is portrayed in official discourse as a defensive necessity in light of rising regional tensions, particularly with China. Vietnamese leaders emphasize the role of amphibious forces in maintaining national unity, deterrence, and the protection of sea lanes. Additionally, amphibious capability supports humanitarian missions, disaster response, and regional security cooperation. In the broader ASEAN context, Vietnam positions itself as a frontline maritime state, ready and capable of deploying amphibious forces to defend its interests and contribute to stability in the South China Sea.

Vietnam's 2019 National Defence White Paper reinforces its long-standing defense orientation grounded in peace and self-preservation. It identifies ongoing and emerging security challenges, along with changes in defense policy, command systems, and the internal organization of the Ministry of National Defence. The paper also highlights the evolving structure of the Vietnam People's Army and the Militia and Self-Defence Force, reflecting the country's effort to strengthen capabilities while

remaining transparent in its strategic direction and defense preparedness (VND, 2019).

### **(8) Laos and Its Amphibious Warfare Capabilities**

As a landlocked nation in Southeast Asia, Laos is often overlooked in discussions of amphibious warfare (Kirby, 2024). However, the strategic importance of amphibious capabilities in Laos should not be dismissed. Despite lacking access to the sea, Laos relies heavily on its internal waterways, particularly the Mekong River and its tributaries, for transportation, logistics, and national defense. Amphibious operations in Laos are primarily riverine in nature and support a range of missions including border security, counter-insurgency, disaster response, and regional peacekeeping (Alday, 2021).

There is limited publicly available information on Laos' amphibious warfare capabilities within ASEAN defense documents and security discourse.

Laos shares borders with five countries, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, and is traversed by the Mekong River, which serves as a vital artery for commerce and military logistics. Its terrain is mountainous and heavily forested, which presents challenges for ground movement and amplifies the importance of using rivers for troop and equipment mobility. In this context, amphibious warfare for Laos means leveraging its rivers for flexible troop deployment, supply chain support, and tactical maneuverability, particularly in border regions (Kang, 2022).

Amphibious operations in Laos are therefore predominantly river-based and tailored to suit the country's unique topography and security needs. Riverine warfare units are capable of conducting a range of tasks including border patrols, anti-

smuggling missions, environmental protection, disaster relief, and support for internal stability (Mercado, 2023).

At the multilateral level, Laos leverages ASEAN defense platforms to refine its amphibious and riverine practices. Through the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security, Lao officers participate in tabletop exercises and field workshops on waterborne border security and maritime search-and-rescue (Vientiane Times, 2024).

In matters of regional defense and security, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has pursued an independent approach to foreign relations, focusing on enhancing strategic and military cooperation to support its national development goals. It has actively participated in military exchanges with counterparts from countries such as China, Vietnam, Thailand, the United States, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and Russia. These engagements are reinforced through the presence of Defense Attaché offices both in Laos and in the partner nations. Beyond these states, Laos also maintains defense ties with countries including India, Japan, the Philippines, Cuba, South Korea, North Korea, France, and Australia. These relationships are built upon the foundation of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, which continue to guide the country's commitment to expanding international military cooperation (Boupha, 2020, p. 24).

**For Riverine Security of Laos**

**Table 4.8**

*Laos: Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Laos' Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States'	-As a landlocked country, Laos does not maintain or articulate amphibious warfare in its defense strategy.

Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Military focus is on border security, counterinsurgency, and land-based defense. -Any amphibious-related training or mention is symbolic and limited to riverine operations (e.g., Mekong River patrols).
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Laos is a non-claimant state and adopts a neutral, consensus-driven ASEAN position. -It emphasizes non-interference, peaceful resolution, and adherence to UNCLOS in official statements. -No link between its security posture and WPS amphibious discourse.
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-No historical amphibious operations due to geographical constraints. -Past military activity (e.g., during the Indochina Wars) focused on jungle warfare, guerilla tactics, and land-based operations.
Features / Amphibious Warfare Capability	-No navy or marine forces due to lack of maritime borders. -The Lao People's Army maintains riverine patrol units for internal security and Mekong border monitoring. -Occasionally engages in riverine security cooperation with Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia.
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	-No direct strategic value for amphibious warfare due to Laos' geography. -River-based patrols are useful for combatting trafficking, smuggling, and border incursions. Any joint amphibious training (e.g., with Vietnam) serves diplomatic and capacity-building purposes, not actual warfighting needs.

Sources: MilitarySphere.com, 2024; Vientiane Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting on ASEAN: Together for Peace, Security and Resilience, 2024; and Boupha, 2021.

This table synthesizes Laos' strategic value of amphibious warfare, potential amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

Laos, being a landlocked country, does not engage in traditional amphibious warfare and does not articulate amphibious capability as a defense priority in its military doctrine. The Lao People's Armed Forces (LPAF) focus predominantly on land-based operations, border security, and internal stability. However, Laos acknowledges

the importance of joint regional defense efforts, especially through ASEAN, where amphibious capability is discussed in the context of humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and riverine security. Its strategic articulation remains limited to non-combat support roles in multilateral exercises, with no current or planned force structure dedicated to amphibious warfare in the conventional military sense.

On the construction of relevance in West Philippine Sea discourse: Laos is not a claimant in the West Philippine Sea and does not maintain a naval presence there. Its relevance in the WPS discourse is primarily diplomatic and symbolic, supporting peaceful resolution through ASEAN consensus. In official ASEAN statements, Laos often supports the principles of freedom of navigations, non-interference, and adherence to international law, such as the UNCLOS. While amphibious warfare is not directly relevant to Laos in this context, the country acknowledges the need for regional readiness, including amphibious or coastal operations conducted by other ASEAN members, especially in joint HADR missions that might require logistical or downstream support from inland nations like Laos.

On the privileged themes, historically, Laos was a central theater in the Second Indochina War which was essentially the Vietnam War, but it did not experience traditional amphibious warfare due to its geography. However, it did experience extensive river-based and airborne troop movements, particularly along the Mekong River, which functions similarly to littoral environments in terms of mobility and strategic access. These experiences emphasized the need for mobility in terrain-divided regions, a theme that resonates with the logistical challenges in modern amphibious planning. While Laos has no history of naval landings, the importance of strategic insertion and rapid deployment in difficult terrain remains a guiding lesson in its current military structure.

On its features, or amphibious warfare capability, Laos lacks it due to its geographic constraints and strategic focus on land defense. The LPAF does not maintain any naval force and possesses only limited river patrol craft for domestic waterway security. Some units train in small-boat handling and riverine operations, mainly for operations along the Mekong River and its tributaries. These are primarily focused on counter-narcotics, smuggling, and civil-military support roles, not amphibious assault or expeditionary functions. Laos occasionally participates in regional exercises involving logistics, medical support, and flood response, allowing it to engage in joint operations without the need for direct amphibious capability.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Laos' defense and official communications, from a strategic standpoint, amphibious warfare holds minimal direct value for Laos, but its symbolic and cooperative value is recognized through regional security architecture. Laos Benefits from partnership-based preparedness, particularly in responding to natural disasters that may affect riverine areas or require downstream cooperation. Official communications from the Ministry of National Defense focus on non-traditional security threats, where Laos contributes by hosting training, sharing intelligence, or offering logistical access. While amphibious warfare is not part of its core capability, Laos remains an active ASEAN participant, supporting multilateral operations where amphibious-trained forces from other nations may transit through or coordinate with Laos in regional crisis scenarios.

Laos takes a broad-based view of security, aiming to strengthen its ability to address both current and future challenges. It emphasizes resolving disagreements and conflicts through peaceful dialogue, steering clear of coercion or force in any form. Promoting internal peace and stability calls for mutual respect, restraint, and confidence-building. The country upholds the importance of negotiation and respect

for each nation's sovereignty and territorial boundaries as key principles in maintaining harmony (Boupha, 2020, p. 21).

### **(9) Myanmar and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Myanmar's extensive coastline, stretching approximately 1,930 kilometers along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea, provides the nation with significant maritime interests and strategic considerations (Steyn, 2020). This coastal expanse not only facilitates vital trade routes but also grants access to rich offshore resources and necessitates robust defense mechanisms to protect territorial waters. Historically, Myanmar's military focus has been predominantly inland, addressing various internal conflicts and land-based security challenges. However, the evolving geopolitical landscape and the imperative to safeguard maritime domains have underscored the importance of developing comprehensive amphibious warfare capabilities (Marston, 2021).

#### **Amphibious Infantry and Marine Units**

The Myanmar Navy's Naval Infantry Battalion serves as the country's de facto marine force. Trained at the Kyaukphyu Naval Training Center these marines specialize in beach landings, coastal raids, and riverine operations. They utilize Type 63A amphibious light tanks, armed with a 85 mm gun and capable of swimming at 10 km/h, to spearhead assaults from ship to shore. Coordination with the Myanmar Army's Light Infantry Divisions allows for combined amphibious-ground offensives, particularly in the strategically sensitive Rakhine and Tanintharyi regions (Myoe, 2020).

#### **Naval Infantry Battalion Training and Operations**

The Myanmar Navy's Naval Infantry Battalion functions as the country's primary marine force, specializing in amphibious operations including beach landings, coastal raids, and riverine warfare. Training for these specialized units is conducted at naval facilities such as the Maung Shwe Lay Navy Base in Rakhine State. This base has been a focal point for naval training, although it has faced challenges, including its capture by the Arakan Army in September 2024, highlighting the volatile security situation in the region (Myoe, 2020).

### **Training and Foreign Cooperation**

To enhance proficiency, Myanmar conducts joint exercises with China's People's Liberation Army Navy and the Vietnamese People's Navy, focusing on amphibious assault tactics, landing craft operations, and disaster relief drills. Chinese advisors have assisted in establishing the Naval Amphibious Warfare School at Thanlyin, training officers in littoral reconnaissance hydrographic surveying, and combined arms coordination. Myanmar also participates in ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) maritime security workshops, sharing best practices in riverine interdiction and coastal patrol (Han, 2020).

### **Joint Exercises with China and Vietnam**

Myanmar engages in regular joint naval exercises with neighboring countries, notably China and Vietnam, to enhance interoperability and tactical expertise. In December 2023, Myanmar and China conducted joint drills focusing on air, missile, and maritime defense strategies. These exercises underscore the commitment of both nations to bolster their naval capabilities and address regional security challenges collaboratively (Maizland, 2022).

## Participation in ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Maritime Security Initiatives

Myanmar actively participates in regional defense forums such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus). In January 2023, Myanmar's defense ministry was invited to the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security meeting and tabletop exercise co-hosted by Thailand and the United States. These engagements provide platforms for Myanmar to collaborate with ASEAN member-states and dialogue partners, sharing best practices in riverine interdiction, coastal patrol operations, and enhancing collective maritime security efforts (Strangio, 2023). Modernization efforts have focused on land forces, but naval and air force expansions are underway. Yet, Myanmar's military remains oriented toward internal suppression rather than external defense (Wu, 2022).

### Tool For Internal Stability of Myanmar

**Table 4.9**

*Myanmar: Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Myanmar's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amphibious warfare is referenced in Myanmar Navy modernization programs, focused on coastal defense, sovereignty assertion, and riverine-littoral operations.</li> <li>-Myanmar articulates amphibious operations within the context of "defending national unity and territory," especially near maritime and insurgency-prone areas.</li> <li>-Strategic posture is inward-facing, supporting internal stability and counterinsurgency along coastal regions.</li> </ul>
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Myanmar adopts a neutral and low-profile stance on WPS disputes.</li> <li>-Supports ASEAN unity and peaceful resolution under UNCLOS, but does not link its amphibious capability to WPS dynamics.</li> <li>-Minimal diplomatic engagement in maritime disputes outside of its own borders.</li> </ul>

Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Myanmar has used amphibious-style operations to conduct counterinsurgency and suppression missions in the Rakhine coastal region and riverine delta zones.</li> <li>-Historical maritime operators are shaped by internal ethnic conflicts rather than interstate or regional wars.</li> </ul>
Features / Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Operates a modest navy with landing ships (LSTs), fast attack craft, and troop transport capabilities.</li> <li>-The Tatmadaw (Armed Forces) can deploy amphibious forces in coastal and delta operations.</li> <li>-No dedicated Marine Corps, but Navy-armed units and army forces are trained for littoral assaults and river crossings.</li> <li>-Conducts limited amphibious drills, primarily for domestic security operations.</li> </ul>
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Supports internal security, especially in coastal regions prone to insurgency and unrest (e.g., Rakhine, Ayeyarwady Delta).</li> <li>-Enables troop mobility and resupply in disaster response and humanitarian missions (e.g., cyclone relief).</li> <li>-Amphibious capability ensures sovereignty over Myanmar's long coastline and EEZ in the Bay of Bengal.</li> <li>-Offers strategic flexibility in maintaining maritime presence in a region with increasing Indian Ocean competition.</li> </ul>

Sources: Human Rights Council, 2023; Hein, 2022

This table synthesizes Myanmar's strategic value of amphibious warfare, amphibious warfare capabilities while linking them to ASEAN defense discourse, security dynamics in the West Philippine Sea, and historical themes that inform modern military strategies in Southeast Asia.

Myanmar includes amphibious warfare as part of its broader military modernization and maritime strategy, largely through the Tatmadaw's naval and light infantry capabilities. As a country with an extensive coastline along the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea, Myanmar views amphibious operations as essential for coastal defense, border protection, and internal security support especially in coastal states like Rakhine. Amphibious capability is articulated within the context of territorial

integrity, with emphasis on domestic stability and rapid troop mobility. The Tatmadaw has invested in developing landing craft, light transport vessels, and riverine operations units, though these are more focused on internal deployment rather than external expeditionary warfare.

One of the main internal strategies used by the military (Tatmadaw) is divide and rule, where the government intentionally encourages fragmentation among ethnic groups to weaken collective resistance. There is also persistent distrust between the state and ethnic minorities, many of whom feel marginalized politically and economically (Wu, 2022).

On the construction of relevance in the WPS discourse, Myanmar is not a claimant in the West Philippine Sea and typically maintains a neutral and non-interventionist stance on maritime disputes within ASEAN. It does not publicly tie its amphibious capabilities to the WPS discourse, focusing instead on non-traditional security cooperation, such as anti-piracy, humanitarian assistance, and maritime search-and-rescue operations. However, Myanmar does participate in ADMM-Plus maritime exercises that sometimes involve amphibious or sea-to-land components. These platforms allow the country to engage in regional security dialogues and demonstrate interoperability, even if its strategic focus remains largely inward-looking due to its ongoing conflicts and international scrutiny.

On privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, historically, Myanmar's exposure to amphibious operations stems from World War II, particularly the Allied and Japanese amphibious landings along the Bay of Bengal and in the Arakan campaign. These operations highlighted the strategic importance of coastal mobility and sea-land integration in warfare across Myanmar's rugged

maritime frontier. More recently, amphibious-style insertions have been used in internal security operations, such as troop deployments in Rakhine State or riverine counter-insurgency movements in Kachin and Shan regions. These cases underline themes of logistics flexibility, rapid coastal access, and the need for multi-terrain mobility, which influence how Myanmar perceives amphibious capabilities in relation to national cohesion and internal control.

On features of Myanmar, or its amphibious warfare capability, the country's amphibious warfare capability centers on the Myanmar Navy, which operates several landing craft utility (LCU) vessels, medium landing ships, and fast patrol boats. The Navy works in coordination with light infantry units, capable of conducting beach landings, river crossings, and maritime patrols. The development of indigenously-built amphibious vessels. Including the Anawrahta-class landing platform dock, signals an intent to boost maritime transport and deployment. However, Myanmar lacks a dedicated marine corps or specialized amphibious assault units, and much of its capability is geared toward domestic logistics, territorial waters defense, and internal troop movement, especially in conflict-affected coastal and riverine areas.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Myanmar's defense and official communications: For Myanmar, the strategic value of amphibious warfare lies primarily in its utility for domestic operations rather than international engagement. Amphibious capacity is critical for projecting state power in remote and often restive coastal regions, ensuring internal territorial control, and responding to natural disasters such as cyclones and coastal flooding. Official communications from the Tatmadaw emphasize sovereignty, stability, and modernization, framing amphibious capabilities within the context of state-building and territorial integrity. While Myanmar does not promote amphibious warfare as part of external deterrence, its steady investment in

naval infrastructure and sea-land mobility highlights its desire to secure its maritime frontiers and maintain strategic flexibility in internal conflict zones.

### **(10) Cambodia and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Cambodia is a country defined by its rivers, lakes, and limited coastline. With the Mekong River running through its heart and a modest 443 km coastline along the Gulf of Thailand, Cambodia has developed a niche but strategically important amphibious capability. While not a maritime heavyweight, Cambodia's approach to amphibious warfare, focused on riverine and coastal operations, plays a key role in internal security, border control, disaster response, and regional engagement.

#### **Amphibious Platforms and Capabilities**

Cambodia's amphibious capabilities are primarily centered around riverine and coastal operations, essential for safeguarding its extensive inland waterways and modest coastline. The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) have developed specialized unit adept in amphibious warfare, emphasizing swift deployment and versatility in littoral environments. Training and equipment are tailored to address the unique challenges of operating within the Mekong River system and along the Gulf of Thailand coast (The Cove, 2021).

#### **The Royal Cambodian Navy and Amphibious Operations**

The Royal Cambodian Navy (RCN) serves as the naval warfare branch of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, with a primary mission to safeguard the nation's territorial waters and riverine territories. It is tasked with protecting Cambodia's territorial waters and riverine territories. Though relatively small, the RCN operates a

fleet of patrol boats, fast attack craft, and landing craft suitable for amphibious and logistic missions. Amphibious operations in Cambodia are typically conducted by Naval Infantry or Special Forces units, who are trained in boarding operations, riverine raids, and coastal defense. The RCN works in close coordination with the Army and Gendarmerie for joint internal security missions and counter-smuggling patrols (The Cove, 2021; globalsecurity.org, 2021).

### **Amphibious Operations and Training**

Amphibious operations are a critical component of the RCN's strategic framework, primarily executed by Naval Infantry and Special Forces units. These specialized forces are proficient in boarding operations, riverine raids, and coastal defense tactics. To bolster their operational effectiveness, the RCN engages in collaborative training exercises with international partners. For instance, the annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise with the U.S. Navy focuses on enhancing skills in small boat operations, amphibious tactics, and maritime security measures (globalsecurity.org, 2022; Naval Construction Regiment Public Affairs, 2016).

According to the Kingdom of Cambodia's Defense White Paper, For the first time, DWP22 places substantial emphasis on the threats emerging from cyberspace and advanced technologies. This marks a significant shift for the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), which have traditionally focused on conventional, non-digital threats. The document acknowledges that cyber threats pose serious risks to vital national infrastructure, including power plants, water systems, and transportation networks. It highlights the urgency for the RCAF to respond, as global powers rapidly develop and deploy technologies such as artificial intelligence and 5G for military

advantage. To meet these challenges, the DWP22 calls for the establishment of a robust legal framework for cybersecurity, enhanced training of personnel, and structural reforms aimed at building a dedicated cyber defense capability (Kingdom of Cambodia, 2022).

## Peripheral Amphibious Readiness for Coastal Security of Cambodia

**Table 4.10**

*Cambodia: Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Cambodia's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cambodia's defense strategy includes maritime security and coastal defense, particularly in the Gulf of Thailand.</li> <li>-Amphibious warfare is not explicitly emphasized, but it is implicitly included under naval operations and joint force mobility.</li> <li>-Referenced in Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) modernization plans, especially regarding port security and EEZ enforcement.</li> </ul>
Codes: Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Cambodia is a non-claimant state and maintains a pro-China or non-confrontational stance on WPS disputes.</li> <li>-Avoids framing amphibious capabilities in WPS terms and often blocks or softens ASEAN statements critical of China.</li> <li>-Emphasizes dialogue, non-interference, and economic cooperation, rather than defense buildup.</li> </ul>
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA Features / Amphibious Warfare Capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Amphibious activity during the Khmer Rouge period and Vietnam-Cambodia conflict (1978-1989) mostly involved riverine and small-boat operations, not large-scale sea-to-land assaults.</li> <li>-Post-conflict era operations focus on coastal patrol, counter-smuggling, and maritime sovereignty assertion.</li> <li>-No Marine Corps, but the Royal Cambodian Navy (RCN) possesses patrol vessels and small landing craft for troop movement.</li> <li>-Naval forces trained for shoreline and riverine operations, mainly in Tonlé Sap and coastal provinces.</li> <li>-Limited amphibious lift capacity, but participates in bilateral naval drills (e.g., with China).</li> <li>-Infrastructure upgrades (e.g., Ream Naval Base) are controversial due to foreign influence concerns.</li> </ul>

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Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Supports coastal security, EEZ protection, and small-unit deployments for anti-piracy and smuggling interdiction.</li> <li>-Valuable in humanitarian assistance, flood relief, and island resupply operations.</li> <li>-Amphibious capability is more symbolic than operational, emphasizing stated presence in coastal waters.</li> <li>-Reflects Cambodia's preference for stability, regime protection, and defense diplomacy over offensive force projection.</li> </ul>
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Source: Kingdom of Cambodia, 2022

Themes in the table are broader interpretive patterns that transcend national lines and are informed by both regional strategic narratives and historical experience.

Cambodia's limited amphibious capacity meant no dedicated marine force, and naval capabilities were largely riverine and littoral. It is an ASEAN Non-Major Amphibious Contributor (ANMAC), with Peripheral Capability Framing (PCF), projecting how Cambodia as an ASEAN member-state, articulates the strategic value of amphibious warfare in defense documents.

On the strategic articulation of amphibious warfare: Cambodia articulates amphibious warfare in a limited and functional context, mainly related to coastal defense, border protection, and disaster response. With a modest coastline along the Gulf of Thailand, Cambodia's Royal Armed Forces (RCAF) have not developed an extensive amphibious doctrine. However, the Royal Cambodian Navy and marine-type forces under its military police and infantry units are trained for basic amphibious and riverine operations, especially around Sihanoukville, Cambodia's primary naval base. Amphibious capabilities are not emphasized as a major combat asset but rather integrated into logistics, training, and sovereignty patrols, aligning with Cambodia's focus on territorial stability and internal security.

On the construction of relevance in the West Philippine Sea discourse: Cambodia is not a claimant in the WPS and has historically aligned itself diplomatically with China, particularly in ASEAN discussions involving maritime disputes. As such, Cambodia does not highlight amphibious capabilities in relation to the WPS discourse. Its public statements focus more on ASEAN unity, non-interference, and regional dialogue, rather than joint deterrence or defense posturing. Nevertheless, Cambodia participates in ADMM-Plus and bilateral maritime exercises, which sometimes feature amphibious elements such as coastal landings, logistics over water or disaster scenarios which allow Cambodian forces to train in amphibious-like conditions under the banner of regional cooperation.

On privileged themes, historically, Cambodia's experience with amphibious warfare has been limited, but it was indirectly shaped by Vietnamese warfare has been limited, but it was indirectly shaped by Vietnamese and U.S. amphibious-style operations during the Cambodian Civil War and the Vietnam War, especially in the Mekong River region. Riverine warfare, including cross-border raids and troop insertions, played a key role in shaping Cambodia's understanding of mobility, flexibility, and terrain-sensitive tactics. These experiences influenced modern-day emphasis on river patrols, coastal troop movement, and the importance of transport capability across inland and maritime zones. The enduring theme from this history is the value of accessibility and control of waterways in national defense.

On its features or amphibious warfare capability, Cambodia possesses limited amphibious capabilities, primarily through the Royal Cambodian Navy, which operates small patrol craft, landing boats, and a few medium transport vessels. These are suited for coastal security, interdiction, and supporting troop movement across islands and riverine areas. The country does not have a designated marine corps, but some naval

infantry-type units are trained in shore landings, small-boat operations, and joint coastal defense drills. Cambodia occasionally conducts amphibious-themed exercises with partners such as China and Vietnam, though the scope remains basic and focused on logistics, anti-smuggling, and HADR scenarios rather than high-end amphibious assault operations.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Cambodia's defense and official communications: Amphibious warfare holds limited but practical strategic value on Cambodia's national defense planning. It is mostly seen in the context of securing territorial waters, supporting coastal development, and responding to natural disasters such as flooding and typhoons. Official defense communications rarely highlight amphibious operations as a core capability, but they do stress the importance of regional defense cooperation and inter-agency readiness. Amphibious elements are occasionally mentioned in the context of humanitarian assistance, counter-narcotics operations, and joint military exchanges, reinforcing Cambodia's role in ASEAN multilateralism, albeit with low-profile defense ambitions and limited investment in advanced maritime power projection.

Building a local defense industry in Cambodia will take time and face many obstacles, yet it offers clear strategic value. First, domestic arms production would give the country greater control over its security needs, especially during disruptions in global supply chains. Second, it could help Cambodia avoid overdependence on major powers, limiting its exposure to geopolitical pressures that might restrict access to critical defense technologies from rival states (Bong, 2022).

## **11. Timor-Leste**

Timor-Leste's admission into the ASEAN marks a significant milestone in the country's post-independence journey. As the newest and 11<sup>th</sup> member of the ASEAN, Timor-Leste brings with it a unique historical experience, having transitioned from a former Portuguese colony to an independent nation in 2002, after years of Indonesian occupation and international peacekeeping efforts. Its membership reflects ASEAN's commitment to inclusivity and regional solidarity, and provides Timor-Leste with an opportunity to deepen its integration into Southeast Asia's political, economic, and socio-cultural systems (Hagerdal, 2017).

Timor-Leste's path to ASEAN membership has been gradual and deliberate. Since applying for membership in 2011, the country has worked to meet the three pillars of ASEAN, political-security, economic, and socio-cultural communities. It has participated as an observer in ASEAN meetings and actively engaged in regional dialogues. With technical support from ASEAN member-states and partners, Timor-Leste has strengthened its institutions, infrastructure, and policies in preparation for full membership. Its inclusion now symbolizes the completion of ASEAN's geographic footprint in Southeast Asia (Hoong, 2025).

Joining ASEAN offers Timor-Leste several strategic benefits. Economically, it opens the door to greater trade opportunities, regional investments, and participation in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which promotes economic integration and competitiveness. Politically, it enhances Timor-Leste's diplomatic presence and provides a platform to participate in regional security dialogues and multilateral cooperation. Culturally and socially, ASEAN membership fosters greater exchange of knowledge, education, and people-to-people connections, important for a young nation still consolidating its identity (Roknifard, 2025; Soares, 2025; Cardoso, 2023; and Fundasaun Mahein, 2023).

Despite the opportunities, Timor-Leste faces challenges in aligning with ASEAN's complex systems and requirements. As one of the least developed countries in the region, it must continue to build its capacity to engage effectively in ASEAN's bureaucratic and policy processes. Infrastructure gaps, limited human resources, and economic dependence on oil revenues may affect how quickly the country can fully benefit from ASEAN programs. Nonetheless, ASEAN's principle of unity in diversity and its consensus-based approach provide space for Timor-Leste to grow at its own pace while contributing to the regional community (Soares, 2025; Cardoso, 2023; and Fundasaun Mahein, 2023).

### **Timor-Leste and Its Amphibious Warfare**

Amphibious warfare has significantly influenced the modern history of Timor-Leste, despite the country's limited military capacity. Its geographic location on the island of Timor, with extensive coastlines and strategic proximity to major sea routes, has made it a key site for seaborne military operations. While Timor-Leste does not have a history of conducting large-scale amphibious operations itself, it has been the target and host of two major amphibious campaigns: the Indonesia invasion in 1975 and the multinational peacekeeping intervention in 1999 (Leandro, et al, 2023).

### **Capability for Survival and Regional Cooperation for Timor-Leste**

**Table 4.11**

*Timor-Leste: Amphibious Warfare - Strategic Articulation Table*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Timor-Leste's Strategic Articulation/Details</b>
Codes: ASEAN Member States' Strategic Articulation of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious warfare is modestly referenced in Timor-Leste's National Defence Strategy as part of maritime domain protection and mobility. -Not framed in offensive terms, but as part of sovereign maritime presence and logistic flexibility.

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Codes:	-Defense policy promotes self-reliant coastal defense and capacity-building in maritime security.
Construction of Relevance in West Philippine Sea Discourse	-Timor-Leste holds no territorial claims in the South China Sea, and takes a neutral, ASEAN aligned position. -Supports international maritime law (UNCLOS) and peaceful dispute resolution, but does not frame amphibious capabilities in relation to WPS. -Relevance is more about regional solidarity and security cooperation, not direct involvement.
Privileged Themes from Historical Amphibious Operations in SEA	-Historical experience with amphibious intervention during the 199 INTERFRET (International Force East Timor) peacekeeping mission. -Amphibious landings by foreign forces (Australia-led) helped restore order after Indonesian withdrawal. -These events inform Timor-Leste's view of amphibious forces as tools for stabilization and support.
Features / Amphibious Warfare Capability	-No Marine Corps or advanced amphibious fleet. -The F-FDTL Naval Component (Timor-Leste Navy) operates small patrol boats for coastal monitoring and EEZ enforcement. -Limited amphibious transport capability, but works closely with Australia, Portugal, and ASEAN partners for training and maritime security drills. Infrastructure and capacity development are still in early stages.
Strategic Value of Amphibious Warfare	-Amphibious capacity provides flexibility for island resupply, disaster response, and troop movement along Timor-Leste's rugged coast. -Seen as part of national resilience and maritime sovereignty. -Important in bilateral/multilateral security cooperation, particularly with Australia under the Defence Cooperation Program. -Supports state-building, search and rescue, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) more than conventional warfare.

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Source: MilitarySphere.com, 2024; Timor-Leste Strategic Plan 2011-2030

On the strategic articulation of amphibious warfare, as a maritime nation with a long coastline, Timor-Leste recognizes the importance of coastal defense and maritime mobility in its national security strategy. While not yet a full ASEAN member (currently in the accession process), Timor-Leste has begun articulating the relevance of amphibious-type capabilities within its broader defense development plans. The F-FDTL, which stands for the Timor-Leste Armed Forces or *Falintil-Forças de Defesa de*

*Timor-Leste*, and Falintil stands for *Forças Armadas de Libertagao de Timor-Leste*, includes a Naval Component, which is primarily focused on maritime patrol, search and rescue, and protecting territorial waters. Though lacking a formal amphibious doctrine, the nation's defense planning acknowledges the need for sea-to-shore transport, especially in response to natural disasters and territorial monitoring in isolated coastal and island communities.

On the construction of relevance in the West Philippine Sea discourse, Timor-Leste is not a party to the WPS dispute and typically adopts a neutral and cooperative stance on regional maritime tensions. However, as a would-be member of ASEAN, it aligns itself with ASEAN's principles of peaceful dispute resolution, freedom of navigation, and respect for international law, including UNCLOS. While Timor-Leste does not project amphibious capabilities into the West Philippine Sea narrative, it sees value in participating in regional maritime dialogues and capacity-building programs that involve amphibious components, such as humanitarian response and maritime security training. These engagements help it gradually build credibility and interoperability with regional navies.

On privileged themes from historical amphibious operations in Southeast Asia, Timor-Leste's modern military thinking is shaped by its struggle for independence, which involved maritime landings and evacuations by both Indonesian and Australian forces during the late 1990s. The INTERFRET mission (1999) led by Australia featured significant amphibious landings in Dili and surrounding coastal areas, which highlighted the strategic importance of sea-based operations in peacekeeping and state-building. These historical episodes reinforced themes of strategic access, coastal vulnerability, and the importance of having resilient maritime logistics and sea-to-land transport capabilities and the lessons that continue to inform the country's

current approach to defense development, particularly in partnership with international forces.

On features of amphibious warfare capability, Timor-Leste's current amphibious capabilities are minimal and defensive in nature. The main Component of the F-FDTL operates a handful of patrol vessels, notably the Guardian-class patrol boats donated by Australia, but lacks amphibious landing ships or dedicated marine infantry. However, some army units received basic amphibious and boat-handling training, especially for inter-island deployment and disaster relief missions in the wet season. With assistance from partners like Australia, Portugal, and the United States, Timor-Leste has conducted joint exercises that simulate sea-to-shore operations, boosting its modest capacity to perform amphibious-like tasks in a national defense or humanitarian context.

On the strategic value of amphibious warfare in Timor-Leste's defense and official communications: For Timor-Leste, amphibious warfare holds strategic utility not in combat projection, but in national resilience, maritime sovereignty, and coastal access. The government emphasizes the need for amphibious readiness to reach isolated communities, support emergency response, and protect maritime resources, particularly in the Timor Sea. While its official communications rarely use the term amphibious warfare, the goals of maritime mobility, joint sea-land operations, and international cooperation underscore the implicit value of these capabilities. As Timor-Leste moves closer to ASEAN membership, improving its amphibious and littoral competencies will be key to demonstrating regional security responsibility and operational interoperability.

Timor-Leste does not have a publicly released Defense White Paper in the same way that some other countries do. However, Timor-Leste’s approach to defense and security is contained in its Strategic Development 2011-2030. This focuses on peace-building, state-building, and addressing the immediate needs of its people. It faces challenges in its development, including the need for economic diversification beyond its reliance on oil and gas, and the need to address social and economic inequalities.

To support the discourse analysis of amphibious warfare within ASEAN, this study organized and interpreted qualitative data through thematic coding of official documents, policy statements, and military publications. The analysis sought to uncover how language constructs meanings around amphibious capabilities, linking them to national security priorities, regional norms, and external alignments. The following tables present the results of this analytical process: the first outlines open codes and initial labels; the second organizes these into broader themes; and the third offers a cross-country comparison. These tables function not only as a synthesis of the empirical material but also as evidence of the discursive patterns shaping how amphibious warfare is framed and contested in the region. They underpin the argument that amphibious capability is not merely operational, but embedded in competing strategic narratives across Southeast Asia.

**Table 4.12**

*Open Coding and Initial Labels of Data*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Transcript Segment</b>	<b>Open Code</b>	<b>Initial Label</b>
Philippines	a. “Amphibious landing capabilities are critical in reclaiming and defending territories...”	Territorial Reclamation Capability	Archipelagic Defense Posture

	<p>b. "The creation of a Marine Amphibious Ready Unit (MARU) will ensure rapid response..."</p> <p>c. "4 AAVs and 3 MPACs boost littoral readiness."</p>	<p>Rapid Amphibious Readiness Platform Expansion</p>	<p>Strategic Deterrence Force Capability Modernization</p>
Indonesia	<p>a. "Korps Marinir continues to expand its landing platform capabilities..."</p> <p>b. "CARAT 2024 exercise involved joint amphibious drills in Natuna waters."</p>	<p>Marine Force Expansion</p> <p>Multilateral Amphibious Engagement</p>	<p>Maritime Sovereignty Tool</p> <p>Regional Cooperation Asset</p>
Malaysia	<p>a. "Amphibious operations in Sabah/Sarawak reinforce joint maritime security."</p> <p>b. "Naval Special Forces trained for rapid insertion in coastal zones."</p>	<p>Amphibious Border Readiness</p> <p>Amphibious Special Operations</p>	<p>Integrated National Defense</p> <p>Rapid Reaction Doctrine</p>
Singapore	<p>a. "Despite lacking a marine corps, Singapore utilizes its LPDs for expeditionary readiness."</p> <p>b. "Total Defence concept integrates amphibious capability..."</p>	<p>Naval Substitution Model</p> <p>Strategic Integration of Amphibious Roles</p>	<p>Flexible Amphibious Force</p> <p>Whole-of-Nation Readiness</p>
Thailand	<p>a. "Cobra Gold features amphibious scenarios to improve coalition operations."</p> <p>b. "Amphibious forces assist in coastal and disaster relief."</p>	<p>Amphibious Multilateral Training</p> <p>Domestic Amphibious Utility</p>	<p>Cooperative Defense Platform</p> <p>Dual-Use Force</p>
Vietnam	<p>a. "Naval infantry trained to deploy rapidly in South China Sea flashpoints."</p> <p>b. "Focus on Spratly reinforcement through maritime mobility."</p>	<p>Forward Amphibious Posture</p> <p>Island Support Operations</p>	<p>Dispute Zone Defense</p> <p>Maritime Territorial Defense</p>
Brunei	<p>a. "Light landing craft used for coastal defense and counter-terrorism."</p> <p>b. "Strategic partnerships ensure amphibious interoperability."</p>	<p>Small-Craft Amphibious Use</p> <p>External Interoperability Focus</p>	<p>Minimal Deterrence Posture</p> <p>Defense via Cooperation</p>
Cambodia	<p>a. "Royal Cambodian Navy develops symbolic amphibious capability through joint drills."</p>	<p>Symbolic Amphibious Development</p>	<p>Diplomacy-Oriented Capability</p>
Laos	<p>a. "Riverine operations support anti-smuggling and cross-border patrols."</p>	<p>Inland Amphibious Policing</p>	<p>Law Enforcement Support</p>

Myanmar	a. “Amphibious platforms enable internal force mobility amid insurgent threats.”	Amphibious Logistics for Regime Security	Internal Security Utility
Timor-Leste	a. “Amphibious development is tied to civil-military coordination and ASEAN participation.”	Symbolic Regional Capability	Strategic Legitimacy Development

Source: Made by the Author

The table above presents the open coding process derived from selected transcript segments of official defense statements and military publications across ASEAN member states. Each segment was assigned an open code to capture the dominant concept reflected in the discourse, followed by an initial label that identifies the broader strategic role attributed to amphibious capabilities. The coding reveals a wide variation in how ASEAN states articulate amphibious utility. Countries like the Philippines and Indonesia highlight territorial defense and rapid force projection, while others such as Malaysia and Singapore emphasize integration within broader defense frameworks or national resilience models. Meanwhile, states with more limited amphibious platforms, such as Brunei or Cambodia, reference symbolic or cooperative functions. This variation underscores the differing defense priorities and strategic contexts in which amphibious warfare is situated across the region.

**Table 4.13**

*Coding of Recurring Patterns*

This table clusters the codes (themes) across countries using common terminologies for amphibious warfare discourse in official communications and defense documents.

<b>Recurring Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Countries Where Evident</b>
Archipelagic and Maritime Defense	Use of amphibious forces to secure archipelagic territory, maritime sovereignty, and island chains	Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam

Rapid Deployment and Mobility	Emphasis on amphibious capabilities for quick crisis response and maneuverability	Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia
Joint and Multilateral Readiness	Integration with allies through amphibious exercises and interoperability initiatives	Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia
Power Projection and Strategic Posturing	Amphibious capacity used as a signal of strength or influence beyond borders	Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore
Internal Security and Domestic Logistics	Amphibious or riverine forces deployed for internal counterinsurgency or domestic disaster response	Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia
Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR)	Amphibious logistics used in peacetime operations, disaster response, and humanitarian missions	Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Timor-Leste
Doctrine Modernization and Capability Building	Emphasis on force transformation, updated amphibious doctrines, or acquisitions	Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand
Limited or Peripheral Amphibious Readiness	Countries with symbolic, minimal, or nascent amphibious capacity often for signaling or support roles	Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Brunei

Source: Made by the Author

The table consolidates recurring thematic patterns from the initial coding by clustering them under shared conceptual categories. It identifies the most salient values attributed to amphibious warfare across ASEAN states, such as archipelagic defense, rapid deployment, multilateral cooperation, power projection, and humanitarian operations. For example, the theme of "Archipelagic and Maritime Defense" prominently emerges in countries with expansive coastlines or maritime disputes, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Meanwhile, smaller or landlocked states exhibit themes such as "Limited Amphibious Readiness" or "Internal Security Utility," reflecting their more constrained capabilities or domestic priorities. This thematic grouping illustrates how strategic narratives are shaped by geography, threat perception, and institutional roles within regional security discourse.

The following table provides a comparative overview of the distribution of thematic codes across ASEAN states. Using a presence/absence matrix, it highlights the extent to which each country's discourse reflects specific articulations of amphibious warfare. The matrix reveals clustering patterns; for instance, countries with a shared maritime geography such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, tend to emphasize themes like archipelagic defense and rapid deployment. In contrast, states like Myanmar and Laos, with inland security concerns, focus on amphibious platforms for internal mobility and border enforcement. The matrix also reveals a group of states with limited amphibious capacities such as Brunei, Cambodia, and Timor-Leste, whose narratives center on symbolic roles or external partnerships. This comparative mapping allows for a clearer understanding of how material capacity, geographic context, and geopolitical alignment inform the discursive construction of amphibious warfare across Southeast Asia.

**Table 4.14**

*Comparison and Clustering of Codes Across Countries.*

Each theme (code) is marked with an "X" to indicate which ASEAN country exhibits that specific articulated value of amphibious warfare based on discourse evidence:

Code No.	Theme / Code	ID	PH	MY	SG	TH	VN	BN	MM	KH	LA	TL
1	Archipelagic and Maritime Defense	X	X	X			X					
2	Rapid Deployment and Mobility	X	X		X	X						
3	Joint and Multilateral Readiness	X	X	X	X	X						
4	Power Projection and Strategic Posturing	X			X		X					

5	Internal Security and Domestic Logistics					X	X	X
6	Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR)			X	X	X		X
7	Doctrine Modernization and Capability Building	X	X			X		
8	Limited or Peripheral Amphibious Readiness					X	X	X

Source: Made by the Author

**Legend:**

- ID – Indonesia
- PH – Philippines
- MY – Malaysia
- SG – Singapore
- TH – Thailand
- VN – Vietnam
- BN – Brunei
- MM – Myanmar
- KH – Cambodia
- LA – Laos
- TL – Timor-Leste

Interpretation of patterns and discourse logic based on the comparison and clustering of codes across ASEAN member states

1. Countries with strong archipelagic or maritime orientation (Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam)

a. These states consistently articulate amphibious warfare as a strategic enabler for defending maritime sovereignty and ensuring access to far-flung islands.

b. The Philippines and Indonesia, being archipelagic nations with complex territorial disputes, invest in amphibious platforms for rapid deployment, deterrence, and sovereignty assertion.

c. Vietnam, although not an archipelagic state, focuses its amphibious value on forward defense and small-island reinforcement, particularly in the Spratlys.

2. Middle-tier states with emphasis on joint operations and mobility (Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore)

a. Malaysia frames amphibious warfare within joint maritime defense and disaster response, integrating special forces and amphibious craft into wider naval operations.

b. Thailand uses its amphibious capabilities mainly for coastal defense and participation in regional exercises, with less emphasis on external projection.

c. Singapore, lacking a Marine Corps, integrates amphibious elements through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief logistics, joint training, and crisis response scenarios, consistent with its Total Defence strategy.

3. Small states with minimal or symbolic amphibious capabilities (Brunei, Cambodia, Timor-Leste)

a. Brunei and Cambodia articulate amphibious value in symbolic and cooperative terms, such as using landing craft for exercises or coastal defense signaling.

b. Timor-Leste lacks a formal amphibious doctrine but positions maritime cooperation and patrol functions as essential for resilience and regional cooperation, especially in coordination with Australia.

4. States framing amphibious warfare for internal security (Myanmar, Laos)

a. Myanmar's amphibious logistics support counterinsurgency operations and domestic movement in conflict-prone coastal regions, rather than external operations.

b. Laos, being landlocked, substitutes amphibious value with riverine security and joint Mekong patrols, indicating an internal stability framework rather than external maritime posturing.

#### 5. Shared discourse trends across ASEAN

a. Amphibious warfare is not uniformly doctrinal but is shaped by geography, security threats, strategic partners, and operational roles.

b. Most countries position amphibious capability within joint force structure, regional cooperation, or internal logistical support, instead of large-scale expeditionary operations.

c. The framing language is often defensive and cooperative, with limited references to offensive or power projection beyond sovereign territory, except in countries with maritime disputes such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

Connecting the interpretative pattern to the articulated strategic value of amphibious warfare that you have finalized for each ASEAN country. Below is a direct alignment between the findings and the dominant discourse patterns and coding results:

#### **1. Indonesia – Strategic Enabler of Archipelagic Defense and Maritime Sovereignty**

a. The discourse emphasizes amphibious warfare as central to archipelagic defense, sovereignty projection, and strategic chokepoint security.

b. This aligns with repeated references to the Global Maritime Fulcrum, large-scale amphibious capability development, and regional presence.

c. Coded themes: Maritime sovereignty projection, island reinforcement, and deterrence.

#### **2. Malaysia – Instrument of Joint Readiness and Maritime Defense**

a. Amphibious elements are framed within naval jointness and special operations for both defense and disaster support.

b. The focus is on interoperability, coastal readiness, and multilateral exercises like Bersama Lima.

c. Coded themes: Joint readiness, maritime defense, and support operations.

### **3. Philippines – Core Element of Territorial Defense and Archipelagic Defense Strategy**

a. Official discourse consistently links amphibious warfare to territorial integrity, WPS (West Philippine Sea) disputes, and modernization.

b. The Marine Amphibious Ready Unit (MARU), AAVs, and Balikatan exercises point to an embedded doctrinal role.

c. Coded themes: Littoral operations, rapid deployment, deterrence posture.

### **4. Singapore – Flexible Tool for Expeditionary and Regional Security Cooperation**

a. Although lacking a Marine Corps, Singapore integrates amphibious readiness via HADR, logistics, and bilateral/multilateral training.

b. Total Defence doctrine broadens the use of amphibious capability to cover non-traditional threats and regional cooperation.

c. Coded themes: Interoperability, HADR logistics, civil-military readiness.

### **5. Thailand – Enabler for Coastal Defense**

a. Amphibious discourse in Thailand centers on the Royal Thai Marines' mobility and coastal defense.

b. Cobra Gold exercises serve as the primary venue for amphibious proficiency in multilateral contexts.

c. Coded themes: Coastal security, logistics, joint training.

## **6. Brunei – Flexible Maritime Posture and Strategic Cooperation**

a. The limited amphibious capacity is framed as part of strategic partnerships and mobility for internal stability.

b. Amphibious operations are symbolic, but White Paper includes scenarios of cooperation and defense diplomacy.

c. Coded themes: Minimal deterrence, cooperative posture, strategic flexibility.

## **7. Vietnam – Forward Defense**

a. Amphibious capability, while limited, is embedded in military doctrine for forward reinforcement and island defense, particularly in the South China Sea.

b. Historical doctrine and current deployments to Spratly outposts support this framing.

c. Coded themes: Island defense, forward reinforcement, historical doctrine.

## **8. Laos – For Riverine Security**

a. Amphibious discourse is replaced by references to riverine patrols for internal stability, using Mekong waterways as security corridors.

b. No power projection is present in the framing.

c. Coded themes: Riverine stability, joint patrols, internal security.

## **9. Myanmar – Tool for Internal Stability**

a. Amphibious vessels support logistics in internal conflict areas and are not discussed in an external security context.

b. Counterinsurgency and terrain navigation dominate the utility framing.

c. Coded themes: Internal security, coastal logistics, domestic projection.

## **10. Cambodia – Peripheral Amphibious Readiness for Coastal Security**

a. Discourse is minimal and symbolic; landing craft are used in exercises with foreign navies or for coastal utility.

b. Amphibious forces serve more as signals of sovereignty than serious defense platforms.

c. Coded themes: Symbolic projection, logistics, foreign cooperation.

## **11. Timor-Leste – Capability for Survival and Regional Cooperation**

a. Lacking amphibious doctrine, Timor-Leste articulates maritime domain awareness and cooperation with partners (especially Australia) as key to survival and national resilience.

b. Emphasis is placed on HADR, regional maritime patrols, and defensive sovereignty.

c. Coded themes: Maritime awareness, regional resilience, HADR support.

*Research Question 2. How is the relevance of amphibious warfare constructed in the discourse surrounding ASEAN security dynamics in the context of the West Philippine Sea?*

The relevance of amphibious warfare in ASEAN security dynamics, particularly in the context of the West Philippine Sea, is constructed through an increasing focus on maritime territorial defense and power projection capabilities. So, such relevance is constructed through carefully framed narratives that emphasize defense, deterrence, and regional stability. The territorial disputes involving China and several ASEAN members, including the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, have highlighted the strategic need for forces capable of asserting sovereignty over islands and offshore territories. Amphibious warfare, which combines naval and land capabilities

for operations in contested littoral zones, is seen as crucial in enabling smaller states to defend their claims and respond swiftly to incursions (Poling, 2020). In this context, amphibious forces provide a critical bridge between maritime security and land-based sovereignty assertions.

In official statements, military exercises, and policy documents, amphibious warfare is often portrayed as a flexible and essential capability for responding to maritime threats, asserting territorial defense, and maintaining a credible presence in contested waters.

Within ASEAN, where the norms of non-interference and peaceful dispute resolution are strongly upheld, amphibious operations are typically framed not as tools of aggression, but as instruments for safeguarding sovereignty, enhancing interoperability, and contributing to collective maritime security.

ASEAN discourse frames amphibious capability development not merely as preparation for outright conflict but as a form of strategic deterrence and crisis management. Amphibious forces are portrayed as instruments of rapid response, capable of reinforcing outposts, evacuating civilians, and establishing a presence in remote contested areas. Given the geographic features of the South China Sea characterized by small islands, reefs, and atolls, amphibious operations are especially relevant (Batongbacal, 2019). The ability to operate effectively in such environments is increasingly viewed as necessary to avoid being strategically outmaneuvered by larger powers like China, which has militarized artificial islands in the region.

At the same time, ASEAN security discourse often tempers the military focus by emphasizing amphibious forces' dual-use capabilities. Amphibious units are presented as vital not only for territorial defense but also for humanitarian assistance

and disaster response (HADR) operations, a crucial framing given ASEAN's sensitivity to accusations of militarizing the region (Storey, 2021). Exercises like the Philippines' Balikatan and Indonesia's Komodo emphasize amphibious capabilities for disaster relief, search and rescue, and non-traditional security challenges, reinforcing the legitimacy of investing in these forces while mitigating fears of escalation. This is evident in activities like the Philippines-U.S. Balikatan exercises, where amphibious landings are highlighted as part of joint training in rapid response and contested area operations. Such discourse constructs amphibious warfare as a necessary and defensive response to grey-zone tactics and the increasing presence of Chinese coast guard and maritime militia in the West Philippine Sea. While some ASEAN members, such as the Philippines and Vietnam, actively integrate this narrative into their strategic communications, others remain more cautious, reflecting the bloc's divergent security interests. Through this discursive framing, amphibious warfare gains legitimacy in the region not as a provocation, but as a pragmatic approach to upholding national and regional maritime sovereignty in an evolving security environment.

Moreover, amphibious warfare's relevance is strengthened through ASEAN's growing emphasis on interoperability and multilateral cooperation. Regular joint exercises with external partners such as the United States, Japan, and Australia have showcased amphibious operations as a means to foster regional security collaboration (Grossman, 2022). Through multilateral amphibious drills, ASEAN states project an image of collective resilience and shared commitment to international norms, particularly freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea. Such activities construct amphibious warfare not as an isolated national endeavor, but as part of a broader cooperative security architecture.

Amphibious capabilities are also increasingly tied to narratives of resilience and sovereignty protection within individual ASEAN states. For instance, the Philippines has prioritized the modernization of its Philippine Marine Corps, including the acquisition of new landing platforms and amphibious assault vehicles (Department of National Defense, 2020). These developments are framed as necessary steps to uphold national integrity and to assert the country's rights under the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling, which invalidated much of China's expansive maritime claims. Amphibious warfare, therefore, becomes a national symbol of legal, moral, and territorial defense.

Regional security scholars and policymakers often link amphibious warfare to the broader contest over rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. The capability to defend maritime rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and to resist coercive tactics depends not just on diplomatic strategies but on credible operational capacities, including amphibious operations (Cronin, 2020). In this way, amphibious warfare is not merely a technical military matter but a political statement about ASEAN states' commitment to a legal and stable maritime order.

In other words, amphibious warfare's relevance in ASEAN security discourse is constructed through multiple overlapping frames: as a deterrent to coercive actions, a humanitarian response asset, a tool for regional cooperation, a symbol of national sovereignty, and an expression of support for international law. As maritime tensions persist in the West Philippine Sea, amphibious forces represent both a practical operational necessity and a strategic narrative tool, reinforcing ASEAN's efforts to navigate the complex balance between national defense and regional stability.

Between 2019 and 2024, ASEAN member states have increasingly emphasized the strategic value of amphibious warfare in their defense strategies and official communications, particularly in response to regional conflicts and maritime security challenges. This focus reflects a broader recognition of the need for versatile and rapid-response capabilities to address both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the region.

The Philippines has notably advanced its amphibious capabilities through the acquisition of new landing platform docks (LPDs). In 2022, the Philippine Navy signed a contract with PT PAL Indonesia for two new 124-meter LPDs, enhancing its sealift and amphibious assault capacities. These vessels are part of the Horizon 2 phase of the Revised AFP Modernization Program, aimed at bolstering the country's maritime defense posture (Philippine Navy new 124-meter Landing Platform Dock, 2024). Additionally, the Philippines has actively participated in joint military exercises such as Balikatan, which in 2024 included amphibious assault training with U.S. forces, underscoring the importance of interoperability and readiness in amphibious operations (Philippine Army Trains with US Army Against for Amphibious Assault during Balikatan 2024 Exercise, 2024).

Malaysia has also recognized the strategic importance of amphibious capabilities. The 10th Parachute Brigade (10 PARA BDE) has been restructured into a hybrid airborne-marine unit, capable of conducting amphibious operations. This transformation reflects Malaysia's commitment to enhancing its rapid deployment and coastal defense capabilities, particularly in light of ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea (10th Parachute Brigade (Malaysia), 2024).

At the regional level, ASEAN has acknowledged the need for cohesive defense cooperation to address maritime security challenges. The Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Defence Cooperation for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN emphasizes the importance of promoting maritime security, safety, and freedom of navigation, and calls for the early conclusion of an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (Fact Sheet: Joint Declaration of the ASEAN Defence Ministers on Defence Cooperation for a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN, 2020). While not explicitly mentioning amphibious warfare, the declaration underscores the necessity of enhancing maritime capabilities among member states.

Furthermore, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus have served as platforms for member states to discuss and coordinate defense strategies, including maritime security. The 2024 ADMM emphasized the need for a secure and resilient region, highlighting the importance of strengthening partnerships and enhancing capacity-building to mitigate emerging risks (ADMM and ADMM-Plus 2024: ASEAN's Blueprint for a Secure and Resilient Region, 2024). These discussions contribute to a collective understanding of the strategic value of amphibious capabilities in maintaining regional stability.

The strategic emphasis on amphibious warfare among ASEAN member states is further influenced by external geopolitical dynamics. Incidents such as China's deployment of naval warship groups into the South and East China Seas have heightened regional tensions and underscored the need for robust maritime defense capabilities (China's new move sparks open war' warning, 2024). In response, ASEAN member states have sought to enhance their amphibious and maritime capabilities to safeguard their territorial integrity and contribute to regional security.

### **Differing Threat Perceptions (China vs. Non-State Threats)**

A significant point of divergence among ASEAN member-states in the discourse on amphibious warfare stems from their varying threat perceptions, particularly the divide between those primarily concerned with China's assertiveness in the South China Sea and those focused on non-traditional threats such as terrorism, piracy, and climate-related disasters. Countries like Vietnam and the Philippines view China's militarization of artificial islands and assertive maritime claims as direct threats to their sovereignty. In this context, amphibious warfare is conceptualized as part of a broader deterrence strategy aimed at safeguarding territorial integrity and projecting credible maritime defense capabilities.

In contrast, other ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and even Malaysia to some extent, place more emphasis on internal security challenges, transnational crime, and regional stability. These states often perceive external state-based threats as less imminent, leading to a strategic culture that prioritizes land-based defense or internal policing functions over maritime expeditionary capabilities. For these nations, amphibious warfare remains peripheral, occasionally mentioned in the context of humanitarian operations or civil-military missions, but not framed as a response to interstate tensions or external aggression.

This divergence is further exacerbated by the principle of non-interference that underpins ASEAN's political culture. Countries with closer economic or political ties to China may be reluctant to endorse or invest in capabilities that could be construed as provocative. As a result, amphibious warfare, particularly when associated with deterrence or territorial defense, becomes a contested idea promoted by some as

essential to maritime sovereignty, and sidelined by others as unnecessarily escalatory or outside their core security concerns.

Moreover, differing threat perceptions influence the degree of urgency and depth with which amphibious warfare is institutionalized within national doctrines. For example, while Vietnam's defense white papers consistently emphasize territorial integrity and military readiness in maritime zones, others like Laos or Myanmar rarely address maritime disputes or amphibious strategies, reflecting their landlocked geography or internal priorities. This divergence complicates efforts to forge a unified ASEAN defense posture, as member-states operate under fundamentally different security assumptions.

In the end, these inconsistent threat perceptions dilute the momentum for regional amphibious cooperation. While shared concerns like maritime piracy or disaster response provide some overlap, the lack of consensus on how to address state-based maritime threats, particularly involving China, limits ASEAN's ability to institutionalize amphibious warfare as a common strategic priority. This fragmentation underscores the broader challenge of aligning national instruments within a collective security framework.

As a final point, between 2019 and 2024, ASEAN member states have increasingly articulated the strategic value of amphibious warfare through defense acquisitions, military restructuring, and regional cooperation initiatives. These efforts reflect a collective recognition of the importance of amphibious capabilities in addressing regional conflicts and maintaining maritime security. As geopolitical dynamics continue to evolve, ASEAN's focus on enhancing amphibious warfare capabilities is likely to remain a critical component of its defense strategy.

With all points considered, the strategic relevance of amphibious warfare within ASEAN remains a subject of contention, shaped by divergent national defense postures, evolving regional security doctrines, and the collective commitment to ASEAN centrality and peaceful dispute resolution in the South China Sea (SCS). While amphibious capabilities have traditionally been associated with force projection, rapid deployment, and littoral dominance, their alignment with ASEAN's security paradigm is contested on several fronts.

## **1. ASEAN Norms vs. Military Posturing**

ASEAN's foundational documents, such as the ASEAN Charter, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), prioritize peaceful resolution of disputes, non-intervention, and regional stability. These norms implicitly discourage overt military posturing, including amphibious exercises that may be perceived as escalatory. The AOIP, in particular, advocates for an inclusive and rules-based order, emphasizing dialogue and cooperation over deterrence through force.

In this light, amphibious warfare, a doctrine closely tied to offensive or expeditionary operations, is viewed by some member states as antithetical to ASEAN's diplomatic ethos. For instance, the conduct of amphibious landing drills in contested maritime spaces, such as those involving external powers like the U.S. or China, often elicits concern about undermining ASEAN unity or provoking retaliatory behavior.

## **2. Divergent Military Doctrines Within ASEAN**

ASEAN member-states exhibit diverse strategic cultures and military doctrines, resulting in uneven prioritization of amphibious capabilities. Indonesia and the

Philippines, both archipelagic states with extensive coastlines, have actively pursued modernization of their Marine forces to support maritime security and territorial defense, particularly amid growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. Conversely, landlocked or mainland states such as Laos and Cambodia have little strategic incentive to invest in amphibious warfare, and often align more closely with China's non-confrontational narrative.

This divergence creates a structural contestation within ASEAN: while some members perceive amphibious warfare as critical for safeguarding maritime claims and deterring coercion, others see it as a destabilizing force that could compromise the principle of ASEAN neutrality and provoke external entanglement.

### **3. ASEAN's Limited Collective Defense Mechanism**

Unlike NATO or other security alliances, ASEAN lacks a mutual defense pact or integrated command structure that could justify large-scale amphibious operations under a collective security framework. The ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025 underscores the importance of confidence-building measures, capacity-building, and maritime domain awareness, but falls short of endorsing warfighting capabilities such as amphibious assault.

As such, the regional institutional architecture does not currently support a unified amphibious warfare doctrine. Critics argue that enhancing such capabilities at the national level risks eroding trust among members and contradicts ASEAN's vision of a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN).

#### **4. Strategic Utility vs. Symbolism**

Proponents of amphibious capability development argue that in the face of gray-zone coercion land reclamation, and maritime militia operations in the South China Sea, amphibious forces serve not as instruments of aggression but as flexible tools for crisis response, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and sovereignty assertion. For example, the Philippines' Balikatan exercises with the U.S. increasingly feature amphibious drills in response to illegal maritime encroachments, positioning such operations within a defensive and lawful framework. Nevertheless, the symbolic nature of amphibious landings, often associated with invasion or occupation, challenges ASEAN's narrative of peaceful engagement.

To understand how amphibious warfare is discursively positioned within the broader security narratives of ASEAN member states, the table below presents the initial coding results drawn from selected policy statements, official pronouncements, and related strategic documents. Each entry identifies the source state, a quoted or paraphrased textual extract, and the corresponding initial codes that reflect how relevance is constructed. These initial codes capture recurring themes such as sovereignty defense, humanitarian response, symbolic posturing, and regional cooperation. Tracing how states invoke amphibious capabilities in varying contexts from legal signaling and multilateral exercises to disaster response and internal security enabled the researcher to reveal the diverse linguistic framings that embed amphibious operations within each country's strategic vocabulary. This phase of coding forms the empirical foundation for subsequent thematic clustering and comparative analysis, offering insights into the layered meanings and strategic roles attributed to amphibious capacity across the region.

**Table 4.15***Initial Coding of Relevance Construction in ASEAN Security Discourse*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Source State</b>	<b>Quoted or Paraphrased Extract</b>	<b>Initial Code</b>
1	Philippines	"The MARU concept ensures rapid deployment to remote islands in the West Philippine Sea."	Sovereignty defense, rapid deployment
2	Vietnam	"Naval infantry are stationed to reinforce forward island outposts."	Island defense, forward presence
3	Malaysia	"Framed amphibious readiness within disaster relief, peace support, and regional coordination."	Dual-use framing, disaster response
4	Thailand	"Cobra Gold exercises enhance regional readiness and interoperability."	Multilateral engagement, capacity-building
5	Indonesia	"Global Maritime Fulcrum emphasizes sea control and sovereignty via naval modernization."	Sovereignty assertion, modernization
6	Myanmar	"Navy uses amphibious vessels for logistics in conflict-prone coastal states."	Internal logistics, stability operations
7	Laos	"River patrols serve as substitutes for amphibious capabilities along the Mekong."	Internal security, riverine substitution
8	Brunei	"Strategic posture maintains light landing craft for cooperative and symbolic roles."	Symbolic capability, strategic cooperation
9	Cambodia	"Limited amphibious platforms are used for joint symbolic training."	Symbolic engagement, regime signaling
10	Timor-Leste	"Security policy emphasizes maritime resilience through joint patrols with Australia."	Regional cooperation, resilience framing
11	Singapore	"Amphibious operations integrated into total defense through logistics and HADR."	HADR logistics, integrated readiness
12	Philippines	"Amphibious investment supports sovereignty claim after arbitral ruling."	Legal signaling, sovereignty assertion
13	Vietnam	"Defense posture supports peaceful means but includes force readiness in the South China Sea."	Defensive preparedness, cautious deterrence
14	Malaysia	"Use of maritime mobility instead of amphibious warfare in defense white paper."	Strategic language moderation
15	Indonesia	"Exercises with the US such as CARAT involve joint landing operations in Natuna."	Joint exercise, regional signaling

Source: Made by the Author

## **Collation of Codes into Themes Across ASEAN States**

### **1. Sovereignty Protection and Maritime Security**

a. The Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam link amphibious capabilities to territorial integrity, forward island defense, and sovereignty assertion.

b. Statements emphasize readiness for contested maritime spaces, including the Spratlys and West Philippine Sea.

### **2. Strategic Flexibility and Non-Combat Utility**

a. Malaysia and Thailand emphasize amphibious operations as dual-use assets for both defense and disaster response.

b. This aligns amphibious development with ASEAN's preference for non-aggressive, cooperative defense postures.

### **3. Regional and Multilateral Interoperability**

a. Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Indonesia stress participation in multilateral exercises such as Balikatan, Cobra Gold, and CARAT.

b. These engagements reinforce readiness, legitimacy, and regional trust-building.

### **4. Discursive Caution and Norm Sensitivity**

a. Vietnam, Malaysia, and others often substitute the term "amphibious warfare" with less provocative language like "maritime mobility" or "rapid response."

b. This reflects ASEAN's diplomatic culture of non-escalation and political balance.

### **5. Internal Security and Logistical Utility**

a. Myanmar and Laos frame amphibious or riverine capabilities as tools for domestic movement, counter-insurgency, and joint border patrols.

b. These internal-oriented uses show amphibious platforms as extensions of domestic security policy.

## **6. Symbolism and Political Messaging**

a. The Philippines uses amphibious modernization to reinforce sovereignty claims post-2016 arbitral ruling.

b. Brunei and Cambodia employ amphibious exercises symbolically to signal participation in regional norms and partnerships.

## **7. Balance of Power and Strategic Signaling**

a. Amphibious development is partly framed as a reaction to major power presence in the region, especially China and the United States.

b. Several ASEAN states use capability acquisition and exercises to signal deterrence and align with preferred partners.

Selective Coding and Identifying Central Discursive Framing. This process identifies the overarching discursive logics that organize the thematic content across the ASEAN states.

### **1. Sovereignty-Centered Frame**

a. Amphibious capabilities are presented as integral to defending maritime sovereignty, particularly for archipelagic and coastal states (e.g., the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia).

b. The logic links military capability to territorial legitimacy and legal-political signaling.

### **2. Dual-Use and Civil-Military Cooperation Frame**

a. Amphibious forces are framed for both combat and humanitarian missions, especially in Malaysia and Thailand.

b. This narrative justifies modernization while aligning with ASEAN norms of cooperation and non-aggression.

3. Regional Interoperability Frame

a. Multilateral exercises like Balikatan and Cobra Gold reinforce discourse on strategic partnership, readiness, and alignment with regional security goals.

b. The logic here is mutual capacity-building and trust-building.

4. Discursive Minimization and Non-Offensive Language Frame

a. Countries like Malaysia and Vietnam avoid overtly aggressive language, preferring terms such as mobility and maritime readiness.

b. This reflects ASEAN's diplomatic culture and sensitivity to regional tensions.

5. Strategic Balancing Frame

a. Amphibious development is occasionally contextualized as a response to geopolitical tensions, particularly the influence of China and the United States.

b. The relevance is constructed as defensive preparedness and balancing within a multipolar environment.

6. Symbolic Sovereignty Projection Frame

a. Especially in the Philippines, investments in amphibious warfare are used to signal legal commitment to maritime claims (e.g., post-2016 arbitral ruling).

b. This includes visible exercises, equipment acquisition, and rhetoric on maritime presence.

## **Pattern Recognition Across States**

Clustering of states based on recurring patterns in their strategic discourse:

1. Assertive Sovereignty Claimants: Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia

Amphibious capabilities strongly tied to contested maritime areas and active deterrence.

2. Dual-Use Framing States: Malaysia, Thailand

Emphasis on HADR and maritime security, with amphibious capacity integrated into peaceful cooperation narratives.

3. Symbolic or Cooperative Users: Brunei, Cambodia, Timor-Leste

Use amphibious language for signaling partnerships, regional inclusion, or basic logistical capacity.

4. Internally-Oriented Users: Myanmar, Laos

Amphibious or riverine capabilities tied to domestic movement, counterinsurgency, and border management.

**Strategic Relevance of Amphibious Warfare as Constructed in ASEAN Discourse: Interpretation of patterns and Discourse**

To sum up all the foregoing discussions about the strategic relevance of amphibious warfare constructed in the discourse of ASEAN, it becomes clear that this relevance is shaped by a complex interaction of political realities, defense needs, and regional norms. The issue gains particular prominence in the context of the West Philippine Sea, where overlapping claims and persistent tensions drive how states present and justify the development of amphibious capabilities.

In several ASEAN countries, amphibious warfare is viewed as an essential part of protecting sovereignty. For the Philippines and Vietnam, these capabilities are linked directly to the defense of maritime territory and island features. Official statements in the Philippines often associate amphibious forces with securing distant outposts and maintaining a visible presence in contested waters. Vietnam takes a

more reserved approach in language but still integrates amphibious-type units into its broader posture for island defense and national protection.

Other states in the region emphasize the flexibility of amphibious capabilities by framing them for dual use both for combat and non-combat roles. Malaysia and Thailand, in particular, highlight their relevance for humanitarian assistance and disaster response. This framing allows these countries to pursue capability development without attracting concern over possible military escalation. It also fits neatly within ASEAN's broader tradition of promoting non-threatening, cooperative defense strategies.

Multilateral military exercises further reinforce the strategic value of amphibious operations. Activities such as Cobra Gold and Balikatan offer both practical benefits and symbolic meaning. These exercises demonstrate operational readiness and shared security goals while projecting an image of responsible defense cooperation. By participating in these engagements, ASEAN states position their amphibious forces within a regional framework of collaboration rather than unilateral military buildup.

ASEAN discourse also reflects an awareness of political limits. The region's long-standing principles of non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes discourage overt military posturing. Because of this, many states adopt careful language when discussing amphibious capabilities. They often use terms such as maritime mobility or rapid deployment instead of explicitly referring to amphibious warfare. Vietnam and Malaysia frequently take this approach, using general terminology to avoid attracting diplomatic scrutiny.

The actions of larger powers, especially China and the United States, shape how amphibious modernization is discussed. Some ASEAN states present their defense improvements as part of a balancing act in response to the presence of these major

actors. Amphibious capabilities serve in this context as both a sign of national preparedness and a signal to external audiences. Such investments reflect how each country positions itself within a changing security environment.

Beyond operational value, amphibious warfare carries symbolic importance. These capabilities communicate national determination and reinforce legal commitments to maritime sovereignty. For example, the Philippines continues to invest in landing platforms and amphibious training as part of its strategy to uphold maritime claims, particularly following the 2016 arbitral ruling. This investment signals that the state is both prepared to defend its interests and committed to a rules-based order.

Finally, regional cooperation adds another layer to the relevance of amphibious forces. Joint exercises with partners such as the United States, Australia, and Japan help strengthen regional security ties. Through these engagements, amphibious operations are framed as vital components of a shared regional vision centered on peace, stability, and freedom of navigation.

Taken together, these various frames show that ASEAN states construct the relevance of amphibious warfare through a mix of national defense objectives, regional identity, and diplomatic strategy. While levels of emphasis differ, the core idea remains consistent: amphibious capabilities matter not only for combat readiness but also for their ability to support humanitarian goals, reinforce sovereignty, and contribute to a cooperative security environment in Southeast Asia.

*Research Question 3: What privileged themes emerge from Historical Instances and Contestation in ASEAN Amphibious Discourse*

## **Amphibious Warfare in Southeast Asia: Expansion, Context, and Strategic Evolution**

### **Expansion and Scholarly Context**

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The resurgence of amphibious warfare capabilities in Southeast Asia must be understood in light of the region's unique geography and evolving security environment. Archipelagic states face distinct challenges in projecting authority over dispersed maritime zones, necessitating mobile and flexible forces capable of operating across sea and land interfaces (Till, 2009). Historically, amphibious operations were central during World War II and decolonisation struggles in the region. Today, these capabilities have been redefined by contemporary strategic realities, including maritime disputes, natural disasters, and non-traditional security threats (Kraft, 2019; Roberts, 2017).

The South China Sea dispute, in particular, has served as a catalyst for enhancing amphibious forces as states seek credible deterrence and sustained presence in contested maritime features (Storey, 2013; Batongbacal, 2024). Amphibious platforms, ranging from landing ships to marine infantry units, serve both symbolic and practical roles in reinforcing sovereignty claims (Koh, 2014). Yet, these developments occur within a normative framework that values peaceful dispute resolution and ASEAN unity, creating a tension between capability development and diplomatic cohesion (Roberts, 2017).

This dynamic is further complicated by the strategic ambitions of external powers. The United States maintains longstanding military ties with several ASEAN countries, using joint exercises such as Balikatan to strengthen amphibious interoperability and demonstrate commitment to regional security (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 2023). Simultaneously, China's modernization of its amphibious fleet and assertive maritime militia operations present strategic challenges that drive ASEAN states to recalibrate their amphibious posture (Gady, 2021; Erickson & Martinson, 2019). Therefore, amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia cannot be solely analysed

through traditional security paradigms centred on material capabilities. Instead, it must be situated within broader discursive processes where national identities, regional norms, and geopolitical signalling intersect. This article's constructivist approach offers a lens to unpack these complexities (Kraft, 2019).

### **Amphibious Warfare in Historical and Strategic Context**

Amphibious warfare has a long and significant history in Southeast Asia, shaped by the region's archipelagic geography and its colonial and post-colonial struggles. During World War II, amphibious operations were a critical component of military campaigns throughout the Pacific, including in Southeast Asia. The island-hopping strategy employed by Allied forces underscored the strategic importance of sea-to-land force projection in archipelagic and littoral environments (Till, 2009). Amphibious assaults in the Philippines, Malaya, and Indonesia highlighted the challenges and operational demands of maritime-ground integration in contested territories.

In the post-war period and during the Cold War, amphibious capabilities in Southeast Asia were closely linked to internal security operations and counterinsurgency. The Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975 exemplified the use of large-scale amphibious deployments to project power domestically and in contested borderlands (Sambhi, 2015). Similarly, the Philippine Marine Corps and the Malaysian Armed Forces utilised amphibious forces for counterinsurgency and to maintain control over remote coastal and island areas vulnerable to insurgent activity. These operations underscored amphibious warfare's utility beyond conventional interstate conflict, framing it as a key enabler of internal stability and sovereignty enforcement (Kraft, 2019).

## **Cold War and Internal Security Focus**

During the Cold War, amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia transitioned from conventional amphibious assaults to applications in counterinsurgency and internal security. Indonesia's 1975 amphibious invasion of East Timor remains a seminal example of employing amphibious forces for territorial control in a contested borderland (Sambhi, 2015). The Philippine Marine Corps conducted amphibious operations to counter communist and separatist insurgencies, leveraging the mobility afforded by naval sealift to reach isolated coastal and island strongholds. Malaysia similarly used amphibious forces to patrol and secure offshore territories vulnerable to infiltration and smuggling (Roberts, 2017).

## **Post-Cold War Transformation: Multifunctionality and Hybrid Threats**

The post-Cold War period witnessed significant changes in the character of conflict and security challenges facing Southeast Asia. The proliferation of hybrid threats, maritime disputes, and non-traditional security issues necessitated a reconfiguration of amphibious warfare. Modern amphibious doctrines emphasise rapid deployment, flexibility, and dual-use capabilities, integrating combat readiness with humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and maritime law enforcement (Koh, 2014; Kraft, 2019).

The catastrophic 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami highlighted deficiencies in regional humanitarian response, prompting investments in amphibious platforms such as Indonesia's Makassar-class Landing Platform Docks (LPDs). These assets enhance sealift capacity for disaster relief and civil-military operations across vast maritime spaces (Gady, 2021). The Philippine Navy's Tarlac-class Strategic Sealift Vessels (SSVs) similarly serve multifunctional roles, facilitating combat operations and disaster

response, notably during Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Thailand's and Singapore's amphibious assets have been employed in multinational humanitarian exercises, reinforcing their peacetime utility (Koh, 2014).

Simultaneously, amphibious forces are increasingly involved in counterterrorism and maritime security tasks, reflecting the hybrid nature of littoral threats in the region. The ability to rapidly deploy marines to remote islands supports interdiction efforts against piracy, smuggling, and insurgency (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).

### **External Influence and Strategic Significance**

Great power competition, particularly between the United States and China, profoundly influences ASEAN states' amphibious development. The United States promotes amphibious interoperability and capacity-building through joint exercises such as Balikatan, emphasising their role in upholding a rules-based maritime order and regional stability (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 2023; Storey, 2013). China's naval expansion, especially its Type 071 and Type 075 amphibious vessels, increases its ability to project power in contested maritime zones, complicating ASEAN's strategic environment (Gady, 2021). China's hybrid maritime tactics involving maritime militia further introduce ambiguity and raise operational challenges for ASEAN militaries (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).

Amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia remains a strategic imperative shaped by geography, historical experience, and evolving security dynamics. Its role has evolved from large-scale amphibious assaults to multifunctional operations addressing sovereignty, internal security, humanitarian assistance, and hybrid threats. Balancing national amphibious capability development with ASEAN's regional norms and great power dynamics presents ongoing challenges and opportunities. As amphibious

forces continue to develop, their integration within cooperative security frameworks will be critical to sustaining regional stability.

### **Contestation of Amphibious Warfare in ASEAN**

In response to Research Question 3, this section identifies the core themes that shape ASEAN’s contemporary amphibious rhetoric and doctrinal formation. These themes reflect deeply rooted historical experiences and enduring contestations among member states.

**Table 4.16**

*Contesting Assumptions in Global Amphibious Doctrine*

<b>Global Assumption</b>	<b>ASEAN Contestation</b>	<b>Evidence</b>
Archipelagic states require Marine Corps	Not all develop formal amphibious doctrine	Malaysia is just recently emerging
Doctrine = capability	Capability exists without articulated doctrine	Vietnam
History leads to military doctrine	Not always; some countries develop amphibious capability even if with different historical experiences	Thailand, Malaysia
Political logic follows military need	ASEAN norms shape articulation more than threat	Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei

Source: Made by the Author

A comprehensive review of strategic documents, policy briefs, and military statements from ASEAN member states was conducted to extract references to amphibious warfare. The language was examined for recurring frames such as maritime defense, amphibious capability, rapid deployment, humanitarian roles, and joint operations. From these sources, discursive variations were coded to reflect how each state defines or avoids defining amphibious warfare.

For instance, the Philippines articulates amphibious warfare explicitly in terms of territorial defense, rooted in a legacy of archipelagic security and military cooperation with the United States. Its Philippine Marine Corps is doctrinally integrated into national defense and regularly conducts amphibious exercises such as Balikatan. Similarly, Indonesia's Korps Marinir plays a central role in maritime defense, especially around the Natuna Islands. Though not always doctrinally articulated in published documents, the capability is operationalized and reinforced through procurement strategies tied to the Global Maritime Fulcrum vision.

Vietnam demonstrates clear operational practice. The deployment of naval infantry in contested waters, particularly in the Spratlys, aligns with its People's War at Sea strategy and counter-landing doctrines. Thailand and Malaysia reflect more restrained and cooperative framing. Thailand's Royal Thai Marines participate in multilateral exercises like Cobra Gold, with amphibious roles couched in humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR). Malaysia, while investing in platforms such as hovercraft, lacks formal doctrine and often emphasizes littoral defense within multilateral contexts like FPDA.

Countries such as Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Timor-Leste, and Myanmar articulate minimal or symbolic references to amphibious warfare. Singapore integrates amphibious logistics into its Total Defence framework but without a marine corps. Myanmar's amphibious activities support internal security and coastal access, not external projection. Laos, being landlocked, focuses on riverine security and regional patrols. From these diverse framings, key codes were developed:

- Sovereignty and deterrence
- Strategic flexibility
- Humanitarian cooperation (HADR)
- Regional/multilateral signaling
- Symbolic or minimal capability

- Internal logistics and mobility
- Maritime rapid deployment

These codes were then clustered and reinterpreted against dominant military assumptions in global amphibious doctrine. The findings contest four privileged assumptions:

### **1. Doctrinal Divergence in ASEAN**

The emergence of privileged themes in ASEAN's amphibious discourse is closely tied to ongoing doctrinal contestation. This contestation is driven by regional norms, national defense identities, varying levels of amphibious capability, and differing interpretations of maritime threats (Collin & Gaspers, 2020; Storey, 2021). While some ASEAN countries embrace amphibious warfare as a doctrinal and operational necessity, others remain cautious, shaping their defense narratives around less provocative terminology such as rapid deployment or humanitarian response (RSIS, 2023).

Not all ASEAN states articulate amphibious warfare as a core military doctrine. Landlocked or continentally focused states such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar exhibit negligible amphibious orientation. Brunei and Singapore, despite maritime orientation, do not maintain marine corps structures and instead focus on naval and special operations with limited amphibious framing (IISS, 2023). These exclusions highlight the uneven doctrinal prioritization of amphibious capabilities within ASEAN.

The following states form the core of the regional amphibious conversation: the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia. Each exhibits varied doctrinal approaches, operational investments, and thematic emphases shaped by historical experience and strategic needs.

#### **Table 4.17**

## *Amphibious Doctrine, Force Type, and Policy/Doctrinal Reference*

<b>ASEAN Member-State</b>	<b>Doctrinal Category</b>	<b>Force Type</b>	<b>Policy/Doctrinal Reference</b>
Philippines	Explicit	Philippine Marine Corps	ACDC 2021, Balikatan Exercises/ IPE
Indonesia	Explicit	Korps Marinir (Marine Corps)	Indonesia's MEF Blueprint (Newsham & Koh, 2015)
Vietnam	Explicit	Naval Infantry (Marine-like)	Vietnam's Defense Strategy (Phuong, 2010), Active Defense Concept, People's War at Sea - Counter landing Strategies (Grossman & Nguyen, 2018)
Thailand	Emerging	It lack clear references to mobility, posture and doctrine	Thailand's Defense and Security Landscape (2025)
Malaysia	Moderate	Malaysia references amphibious operations in its security architecture but lacks consistent doctrinal framing.	Littoral Defense (Defense Security Asia, 2025)

Source: Made by the Author

### **Criteria for Assigning Doctrinal Categories**

Vietnam and Indonesia fall into the *explicit* category. Vietnam's 2019 Defence White Paper strongly links sovereignty, mobility, and capability development, showing how amphibious functions are embedded across strategic goals, even if the term itself is sparingly used. Indonesia similarly integrates amphibious warfare into its national defense vision, using it for deterrence, maritime enforcement, and regional security engagement.

The Philippines also qualifies as explicit. It views amphibious capabilities as central to defending its scattered islands, modernizing the military, and enhancing joint operations. Strategic documents consistently connect amphibious platforms to broader goals of deterrence, alliance coordination, and crisis response.

Malaysia and Singapore are classified as *moderate*. Malaysia references amphibious operations in its security architecture but lacks consistent doctrinal framing. Amphibious roles appear more in response to internal or practical needs, such as countering threats in Sabah’s ESSCOM region and responding to floods. Singapore, despite having highly capable platforms and participating in regional missions, focuses its doctrine more on regional cooperation and military professionalism than on amphibious maneuver.

Thailand falls under the *emerging* category. While it possesses amphibious assets and engages in regional exercises, its defence white papers lack clear references to mobility, posture, or doctrine related to amphibious operations. Amphibious functions are mostly implied through internal security tasks and disaster relief.

The implicit category applies to states with no amphibious units, doctrine, or meaningful strategic framing. In these cases, such as Laos or Cambodia and Myanmar, internal security concerns take precedence, and there is no evidence of amphibious planning or capability.

These categories help clarify not only the presence or absence of amphibious doctrine but also the degree to which states are actually applying or developing it. The assessment rests on what states do, what they say in their strategic documents, and what they are preparing to do based on capability trends.

**Table 4.18**

*Doctrinal Categories and Indicators*

<b>Label</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Key Indicators</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
Explicit	Publicly articulated amphibious doctrine guiding force	Formal doctrinal documents; dedicated marine	The state possesses a clear and codified doctrine on amphibious warfare.

	development and operations	corps; regular strategic-level amphibious exercises	Amphibious operations are central to its military strategy and regularly practiced. Example: <i>Philippines</i>
Implicit	Amphibious elements exist but are not strongly operationalized; usually embedded in ideological or historical military frameworks	Limited deployments; symbolic or defensive amphibious units; politically or historically influenced framing	The state has no amphibious units and minimal and the doctrinal basis for amphibious operations. Example: <i>Laos</i>
Moderate	Amphibious forces exist and participate in training, but doctrine is not well-developed or publicized	Medium-sized forces; participation in multilateral exercises; limited articulation in strategic documents	There is capability and some practice, but the doctrinal rationale is weak or vague. Example: <i>Malaysia</i>
Emerging	State signals intent to develop amphibious capabilities through acquisition, structural changes, or exploratory policy	Procurement of amphibious platforms; formation of new units; doctrinal discussions; early-stage exercises	Amphibious capability is not yet mature, but the trajectory indicates a growing focus. Example: <i>Thailand</i>

Source: Made by the Author

**Table 4.19**

*Thematic Emphasis of ASEAN Amphibious Warfare*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Thematic Emphasis</b>	<b>Force Structure</b>	<b>Capabilities and Amphibious Exercises</b>
Philippines	Sovereignty assertion, territorial defense, rapid response	Philippine Marine Corps	LD/ AAV/Balikatan exercises, island defense
Indonesia	Strategic flexibility, maritime deterrence, expeditionary	Korps Marinir	Natuna drills, LPD utilization

Vietnam	Island defense, deterrence, strategic ambiguity	Naval Infantry	Spratly fortification, rapid reaction, counter-landing capabilities
Thailand	Humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, regional security	Royal Thai Marine Corps	Cobra Gold, CARAT, Cope Tiger and Strike 23 with China Exercises, AAV and LPD acquisition
Malaysia	Multilateral cooperation, flexible defense, rapid response and littoral defense	Navy amphibious elements	FPDA exercises, limited amphibious assets like hovercraft.

Source: Made by the Author

These thematic categories such as sovereignty defense, flexibility, deterrence, humanitarian assistance, and multilateralism emerged from both regional histories and evolving strategic demands (Tan, 2022).

## 2. Political Sensitivities

The framing of amphibious capabilities within ASEAN is shaped not just by operational needs but by political considerations. For countries like the Philippines, amphibious capabilities are overtly tied to sovereignty and defense postures. For others, including Vietnam and Indonesia, the emphasis lies in strategic ambiguity maintaining capability without overtly signaling militarization.

Thailand and Malaysia tend to downplay offensive postures, framing amphibious capabilities as tools for humanitarian assistance and multilateral cooperation. This variation demonstrates a doctrinal divergence rooted in historical legacies, threat perceptions, and foreign policy orientations.

Political sensitivities further complicate the discourse. ASEAN's foundational principles of non-interference and neutrality limit the overt articulation of force

projection. Memories of colonialism and military authoritarianism add caution to any defense posture perceived as aggressive (ASEAN Charter, 2007).

Exercises involving external powers, such as Balikatan or FPDA, must be balanced with regional diplomatic postures. While these drills increase operational readiness and signal resolve, they also risk undermining ASEAN consensus and stoking intra-regional hedging behaviors.

### **3. Historical Experiences and Strategic Preference**

The belief that historical experiences directly influence strategic preferences assumes that past conflicts continue to define how states conceptualize and justify their amphibious capabilities. Events such as colonial occupations, battles over maritime territories, or campaigns to defend islands are often seen as formative in shaping present doctrines. The Philippines, for example, has constructed its amphibious posture around a legacy of archipelagic defense and long-standing military cooperation with the United States. This experience has contributed to its emphasis on territorial protection and the institutional development of a forward-deployed marine force. Vietnam similarly draws from its historical experience, particularly the “People’s War at Sea,” in shaping its maritime strategy that blends conventional deterrence with asymmetric coastal defense. These cases demonstrate how historical narratives can reinforce the role of amphibious forces as tools for national resilience, rapid deployment, and deterrence.

However, a closer examination suggests that history alone does not uniformly dictate strategic direction. Thailand and Malaysia, with limited or no significant legacy of maritime conflict, have opted for a different framing of amphibious capabilities. Their focus on humanitarian response and multilateral cooperation reveals a strategic

outlook less anchored in past wars and more shaped by contemporary regional dynamics. This divergence indicates that while historical experience offers a foundation for strategic thinking, it does not exert an absolute influence. Rather, the interpretation of history, filtered through political priorities and security environments, plays an equally important role in shaping doctrine.

#### **4. Amphibious Warfare and Geography**

Geographic determinism is often regarded as a self-evident principle in shaping amphibious warfare doctrine. It assumes that archipelagic states, by the nature of their geography, are expected to develop amphibious capabilities. This perspective treats location as destiny, suggesting that physical terrain directly influences military organization and planning. However, this study challenges that notion. It reveals that geography, while influential, does not independently account for doctrinal development. For example, Malaysia and Singapore are maritime nations, yet neither maintains a dedicated marine corps nor articulates a formal amphibious doctrine. On the other hand, Vietnam, despite being primarily a continental state, has prioritized amphibious-type capabilities, particularly in relation to island defense. These cases show that doctrinal choices are not solely shaped by geography but are also informed by strategic culture, political intent, and resource allocation. Terrain may offer strategic context, but it does not singularly define military priorities.

#### **Additional Historical and Strategic Themes**

Looking at the broader picture, several themes run through how amphibious warfare is framed across Southeast Asia. These themes reflect historical experience

and contemporary realities that shape national defense planning and regional narratives.

Joint operations and inter-service coordination play a foundational role. Past campaigns, such as the Incheon landing during the Korean War, demonstrate that naval, air, and land components must work seamlessly. Given the region's archipelagic layout, states are building systems that enable real-time coordination across service branches (Till, 2013). Today, the principles of amphibious warfare whether executed as a raid, assault, demonstration, withdrawal, or crisis response, it continue to be integral to military planning and execution. Amphibious operations involve joint forces and remain essential in contemporary strategic and operational contexts (Heck, Friedman, & Mills, 2023).

Geography significantly influences military doctrine, particularly for archipelagic states that rely on amphibious operations to secure dispersed islands, control vital maritime chokepoints, and protect their exclusive economic zones. A thorough understanding of geography can determine the success or failure of amphibious operations and is therefore crucial in the planning process (Ezrahayu, Dindin, & Zaini, n.d.).

Sustainment after initial landings remains a persistent theme. Amphibious operations rely on robust logistics networks to maintain momentum. ASEAN militaries increasingly prioritize logistical platforms and sustainment infrastructure (United States Marine Corps, n.d. p.24)

The element of surprise continues to hold strategic value. As surveillance and cyber capabilities evolve, deception now includes electronic warfare, information denial, and misinformation. These modern techniques expand on older lessons about misdirection and concealment. In the example of the landing at Inchon during the

Korean War, the assault was successful largely due to surprise and boldness (United States Marine Corps, n.d. p.9)

The Grenada campaign highlighted the critical importance of terrain awareness and adaptation in amphibious operations. During the invasion of Grenada in 1983, U.S. forces suffered early setbacks due to poor intelligence and a lack of detailed terrain familiarity, relying on tourist maps for navigation and tactical planning. This shortfall led to miscalculations, such as the Rangers parachuting directly into a concentrated enemy defense at Point Salines, resulting in increased casualties and a delayed advance. Furthermore, lost communications and disjointed unit arrivals partly because of the unfamiliar and challenging terrain exposed vulnerabilities in coordination. Despite eventual success, the operation highlighted that even overwhelming firepower and manpower can be compromised without accurate terrain knowledge and preparation (Malkasian, 2002, p.90)

Multinational cooperation is another enduring strand. The legacy of coalition operations continues through modern-day exercises like Balikatan and Indo Pacific Endeavor. The success of amphibious operations relies heavily on effective coordination across multiple military services and, increasingly, with multinational partners. Given the complex nature of operations conducted in littoral zones, synchronization among forces is essential from the outset. In multinational contexts, such doctrinal alignment becomes indispensable, enabling cohesive strategic planning, coordinated sustainment, and operational unity across diverse military and institutional actors (Johanningsmeier, 2019, p.11)

Amphibious drills also function as strategic messaging. In light of gray-zone tactics and maritime disputes, visible deployments signal commitment to national defense while avoiding escalatory rhetoric. This balance enables deterrence without

departing from ASEAN's diplomatic norms. Amphibious coalition exercises serve as deliberate acts of strategic messaging by demonstrating unity, capability, and shared commitment among partner nations.

These exercises are not only military drills but visible signals to potential adversaries that regional security is built on cooperation and interoperability. When conducted in response to external pressure, such as Chinese actions in contested areas, multilateral exercises convey resolve and deterrence without direct confrontation. The message becomes stronger when exercises involve key regional players like Japan, Australia, India, and the United States, especially in sensitive locations like the East or South China Sea. The presence and coordination of these forces show that any unilateral aggression will face a collective response, thus shaping the strategic environment through posture and presence (Newsham, 2015).

### **Summary of Privileged Themes**

Amphibious warfare in ASEAN reflects a contested strategic concept shaped by varied doctrines, political sensitivities, and historical experiences. While countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia contribute to an active amphibious discourse, others either downplay or avoid the term altogether. Some prioritize sovereignty and deterrence, while others frame capabilities around humanitarian roles or regional cooperation. Historical legacies influence doctrine but do not solely determine it, as seen in states that shift focus based on present strategic needs. Geography also does not dictate outcomes, with some maritime nations lacking formal amphibious forces. Overall, ASEAN's amphibious rhetoric reveals diverse national priorities and evolving military identities.

Aside from the contestation reflected in the privileged themes, additional patterns further shape how amphibious warfare is understood across Southeast Asia. Amphibious warfare in the region is influenced by geography, historical experience, and evolving strategic demands, with emphasis placed on joint force coordination, logistical sustainment, and terrain awareness. Multinational exercises and modern amphibious drills function not only as platforms for operational readiness but also as instruments of strategic messaging and regional deterrence within ASEAN's cooperative security framework. These themes collectively shape how Southeast Asian countries develop and frame amphibious warfare not only as tools for combat but as instruments of policy, diplomacy, and regional identity.

### **National Framings and Capability Developments**

The analysis reveals significant variation in how ASEAN member states frame amphibious warfare within their national security doctrines and develop corresponding capabilities. These divergences reflect differences in geography, threat perceptions, political priorities, and external partnerships. This section examines six key ASEAN states with notable amphibious forces: Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand.

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic state, consistently frames amphibious warfare as integral to defending its vast maritime domain. Under the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) doctrine, amphibious capabilities enable rapid response to external threats and internal instability, reflecting Indonesia's ambition to project authority over remote islands and assert sovereignty in contested zones such as the Natuna Islands. Amphibious units have participated in sovereignty patrols and

multilateral humanitarian exercises, projecting Indonesia's dual role as defender and regional security contributor (Sambhi, 2020).

The procurement of five Makassar-class Landing Platform Docks (LPDs), including a hospital ship variant, underscores Indonesia's focus on multifunctional amphibious platforms capable of supporting disaster relief, troop deployments, and logistical operations. Indonesia's *Gerakan Poros Maritim Dunia* (Global Maritime Fulcrum) strategy explicitly integrates amphibious capacity into broader efforts to secure sea lines of communication and promote maritime governance (Sambhi, 2020).

The Philippines' amphibious posture reflects a transition from an internal security focus to a stronger external defense orientation, especially following the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling on the South China Sea (Batongbacal, 2016). The Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) has emerged as a central actor, conducting rotational deployments to the Kalayaan Island Group and participating in joint exercises with the United States, such as *Balikatan* (Kraft, 2020).

The acquisition of the Tarlac-class Strategic Sealift Vessels (SSVs), built in Indonesia, marks a significant modernization effort. These vessels support troop transport, command and control, and humanitarian operations, having proven their utility during the 2017 Marawi siege and disaster response to Typhoon Haiyan (Mogato, 2016). The Department of National Defense frames amphibious forces as crucial for sovereignty protection, disaster relief, and alliance interoperability, reflecting the country's complex security environment and strategic partnerships (Kraft, 2020).

Singapore does not face direct territorial threats but invests heavily in amphibious capabilities as part of a broader deterrence and forward defence strategy. Its four Endurance-class LPDs are highly versatile, supporting logistics, helicopter operations, medical evacuation, and expeditionary missions. Singapore emphasises

interoperability with partners such as the United States and Australia, conducting regular joint exercises to enhance amphibious readiness (Gady, 2023).

Strategic documents from Singapore's Ministry of Defence articulate amphibious readiness within a framework of rules-based maritime order and regional stability. The planned replacement of the Endurance-class with a next-generation Joint Multi-Mission Ship (JMMS) signals ongoing commitment to maintaining cutting-edge amphibious capabilities that can support extended-range and multi-domain operations (Gady, 2023).

Vietnam maintains a restrained public discourse on amphibious warfare but has invested in coastal defence capabilities including fast-attack craft, small landing ships, and its Marine Brigade 147. Amphibious development is framed through the lens of asymmetric defence and historical resistance to external coercion, particularly regarding China's maritime assertiveness (Truong, 2022).

Vietnamese marines conduct regular island defense exercises emphasizing rapid reinforcement and combined arms coordination. The military's discreet modernization and infrastructure upgrades in the Spratly Islands demonstrate a functional shift towards enhanced amphibious capacity for sovereignty assertion (Truong, 2022).

Malaysia maintains a modest amphibious posture, with presence on Layang-Layang Island and periodic amphibious training. Its 2020 Defence White Paper focuses on maritime surveillance and law enforcement, reflecting a risk-averse approach that prioritizes sovereignty patrols and disaster response over power projection. Malaysia's prolonged Multi-Role Support Ship (MRSS) procurement program signals intent to bolster sealift and amphibious logistics capabilities (Parameswaran, 2018).

Thailand's amphibious forces, including the HTMS Ang Thong and recently acquired Type 071E landing platform from China, are primarily tasked with disaster relief and internal security operations. Thailand's participation in multilateral exercises such as Cobra Gold indicates recognition of amphibious capabilities in joint operations but doctrinally remains cautious regarding power projection (Liu, 2023).

The amphibious capability development in ASEAN reflects a regional "creep" of expeditionary forces normalizing within national defence portfolios. Most coastal states are acquiring dual-use maritime platforms capable of combat, disaster relief, and presence missions. This trend illustrates growing recognition of amphibious forces as flexible tools for sovereignty enforcement, regional engagement, and crisis response. However, significant doctrinal and strategic divergences persist, driven by national threat perceptions, geography, and political priorities. This variation complicates ASEAN's ability to develop a coherent regional amphibious framework, underscoring challenges for interoperability and confidence building (Roberts, 2021).

### **Regional Narratives and the ASEAN Framework**

Amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia exists within the broader institutional and normative framework of ASEAN, which profoundly shapes how member states articulate their military capabilities. ASEAN's foundational principles such as non-interference, peaceful dispute resolution, and consensus-building, create a unique regional security environment where overt militarization is cautiously managed, and cooperative security is emphasized.

ASEAN's Political-Security Community (APSC) Blueprint underscores the importance of transparency, confidence-building measures, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Military capabilities, including amphibious forces, are therefore

framed within a narrative of restraint and cooperation rather than aggression. Official ASEAN documents frequently highlight the role of militaries in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), reflecting shared regional vulnerabilities to natural disasters (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016).

However, the ASEAN framework notably lacks explicit policies or guidelines concerning amphibious warfare capabilities, deployments, or doctrinal development. This institutional silence generates a normative ambiguity around amphibious operations, particularly when conducted in disputed maritime zones like the South China Sea (Roberts, 2020).

In the absence of unified regional policies, ASEAN member states have pursued bilateral and minilateral arrangements to address amphibious capability development and operational cooperation. Examples include the following: The Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the Philippines and the United States, which facilitates joint amphibious exercises and capacity building (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Newsroom, 2024); Vietnam's growing defence partnerships with India and Japan, involving maritime and amphibious training exchanges (National Institute for Defense Studies [NIDS], 2021); and Indonesia's increasing security cooperation with Australia, including joint amphibious exercises (Sambhi, 2021). These partnerships enable capability enhancement but also raise questions about ASEAN's collective cohesion and perceived neutrality, as states balance external alignment with regional commitments.

ASEAN's approach to amphibious warfare is characterized by strategic ambiguity which is a deliberate vagueness in security postures designed to balance deterrence and diplomacy (Chong, 2021). This ambiguity complicates efforts to

establish transparency norms for amphibious operations, such as notification of exercises or rules for deployment in disputed waters.

Moreover, there is no consensus on shared definitions for amphibious platforms with dual military–civilian roles, or on protocols for joint humanitarian or disaster relief missions involving amphibious forces. This normative gap heightens the risk of misinterpretation and unintended escalation, particularly amid great power competition (RSIS, 2021).

ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meetings (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus have introduced confidence-building measures focusing on maritime domain awareness, joint exercises, and information sharing. Amphibious elements have featured in some simulations and disaster relief drills. Nevertheless, doctrinal convergence and interoperability related specifically to amphibious warfare remain limited (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022).

The diversity of strategic cultures and security priorities within ASEAN further hampers the emergence of a unified amphibious framework. While Singapore emphasizes expeditionary and multinational amphibious roles, the Philippines and Vietnam focus on deterrence and sovereignty, and Indonesia prioritizes civil–military presence and logistics. This variation presents challenges for coordinated responses to maritime security threats.

Despite these challenges, shared concerns such as piracy, illegal fishing, and natural disasters provide potential avenues for ASEAN-wide amphibious cooperation. Multilateral exercises and joint HADR operations could serve as starting points for developing common standards, protocols, and operational interoperability. However, ASEAN currently lacks institutional mechanisms or formal arrangements for

coordinated amphibious mission planning, leaving cooperation dependent on bilateral initiatives and external partnerships.

### **Amphibious Forces in Hybrid and Grey Zone Threats**

The strategic utility of amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia increasingly intersects with the region's experience of hybrid threats and grey zone coercion, which blur the lines between peace and conflict. These challenges involve non-traditional tactics, legal ambiguity, and the use of civilian and paramilitary assets to assert influence without triggering full-scale warfare. Amphibious forces have become vital components of national responses to this evolving security environment, offering flexible, visible platforms for deterrence, presence, and rapid reinforcement.

China's employment of maritime militia vessels, coast guard cutters, and fishing fleets in disputed areas of the South China Sea exemplifies grey zone tactics. These assets operate with quasi-military functions, enforcing sovereignty claims and deterring rival claimants while avoiding open combat. This maritime coercion challenges ASEAN states' amphibious doctrines, which traditionally focus on clear military roles and conventional combat (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).

In response, ASEAN states maintain amphibious ships and marine units as credible seaward mobility and deterrence tools. Amphibious platforms enable rapid reinforcement of outposts, sustain marine detachments, and provide logistic support, thereby projecting sovereignty without overt militarization. For example, the Philippines regularly deploys amphibious vessels such as the BRP Tarlac and BRP Davao del Sur to Pagasa Island for presence missions that calibrate assertiveness and risk. Indonesia's KRI Semarang operates alongside patrol aircraft and corvettes

to uphold administrative control over the Natuna EEZ while avoiding escalation (Erickson & Martinson, 2019).

Unlike submarines or fighter jets, amphibious ships and marine units provide highly visible symbols of national presence in disputed waters. Their multifunctional roles, spanning disaster relief and sovereignty patrols, create an ambiguous posture that can be interpreted variably by regional actors. This ambiguity offers strategic flexibility but risks misperception and escalation if communications are unclear (Chong, 2021).

Thailand's HTMS Ang Thong, for instance, is routinely deployed in humanitarian and engineering missions within multilateral exercises like Cobra Gold, signaling Thailand's commitment to regional cooperation and internal security. Singapore's Endurance-class landing platform docks primarily support strategic mobility and training with allies, balancing deterrence and diplomacy. Malaysia's development of the Multi-Role Support Ship aims to improve rapid deployment capability for Sabah and Spratly waters, reflecting a cautious but purposeful approach.

ASEAN documents such as the *ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific* and the *Political-Security Community Blueprint* affirm commitments to maritime cooperation and disaster relief but notably omit clear protocols on amphibious operations or grey zone engagements. There is no regional agreement on prior notification of amphibious landings, transparency standards for military construction on disputed features, or shared definitions for platforms with dual-use capabilities (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022).

This normative gap fuels strategic uncertainty, as one state's humanitarian ship might be viewed as a veiled military instrument by another. Medical teams aboard amphibious vessels could be interpreted as precursors to construction or militarization.

Without clear confidence-building mechanisms or doctrinal coordination, amphibious operations risk unintended escalation amid ongoing great power competition.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meetings (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus have made some progress through joint exercises, simulations, and maritime domain awareness initiatives, yet amphibious doctrinal coordination remains weak. Most amphibious activities are classified as disaster response or bilateral training, with little formal integration into regional grey zone frameworks (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022).

Differences in strategic culture compound these challenges. Singapore emphasizes expeditionary and multinational amphibious roles, while Indonesia focuses on civil-military presence, and the Philippines and Vietnam prioritize deterrence and sovereignty assertion. This divergence complicates ASEAN-wide interoperability and the establishment of shared operational standards.

The evolving role of amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia is intricately connected to the strategic signaling and influence of great powers, notably China and the United States. Their naval ambitions and security partnerships significantly shape ASEAN states' amphibious capabilities, doctrines, and operational postures. This dynamic presents both opportunities and challenges for ASEAN's agency in navigating a complex geopolitical environment.

### **China's Naval Expansion and Strategic Signaling**

China's rapid naval modernization, including the introduction of large amphibious vessels such as the Type 071 landing platform dock and the Type 075 amphibious assault ship, represents a significant escalation in its capacity to project power in the Indo-Pacific. These platforms enable Beijing to support amphibious operations,

sustain forces on contested features in the South China Sea, and conduct large-scale military exercises in the maritime domain (Gady, n.d.).

China frames these vessels primarily as dual-use assets for disaster relief, logistical support, and sovereignty enforcement. However, ASEAN states perceive their offensive potential with concern, particularly given China's assertive behavior in disputed waters and its hybrid maritime tactics involving maritime militia and paramilitary forces (Gady, n.d.). The visibility of these amphibious ships in proximity to ASEAN littoral states contributes to shifting regional threat perceptions and compels ASEAN navies to enhance their amphibious postures.

In contrast, the United States leverages amphibious warfare as a core element of its strategy to maintain regional balance and uphold freedom of navigation. U.S. security cooperation with ASEAN members is manifested through joint exercises, training, and arms transfers that focus on amphibious interoperability and expeditionary capabilities.

The 2023 Balikatan exercise, for example, included live-fire amphibious landings near contested areas, demonstrating alliance commitments to deterrence and rapid response. Other partners such as Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom have also increased amphibious engagements with Southeast Asian states, primarily within humanitarian assistance and disaster relief contexts but with implicit strategic signaling effects (Graham, 2022).

For ASEAN, the presence of competing great powers introduces a complex balancing challenge. Member states benefit from exposure to advanced amphibious capabilities without binding alliance commitments, allowing them to cultivate strategic autonomy. However, the lack of a cohesive regional framework for transparency and

normative clarity regarding amphibious operations complicates ASEAN's ability to manage strategic ambiguity and prevent escalation.

ASEAN's institutional architecture has yet to explicitly incorporate amphibious warfare into its security cooperation mechanisms. The ongoing negotiations on the South China Sea Code of Conduct, while focused on conventional naval activity, provide limited guidance on amphibious deployments. This institutional gap constrains ASEAN's ability to assert collective agency over amphibious security dynamics in its maritime domain.

There is an urgent need for ASEAN to engage in norm-building initiatives to manage amphibious warfare's strategic implications. Voluntary transparency measures, advance notifications of amphibious exercises, and shared definitions of dual-use platforms could reduce misunderstandings and build confidence.

Academic institutions and Track 1.5 diplomatic forums offer promising venues for generating practical frameworks for interoperability, notification thresholds, and mission clarity. Such efforts could enhance ASEAN's strategic autonomy by framing amphibious warfare not solely as a source of competition but as a tool for cooperative security and resilience (Caballero-Anthony, 2016).

**Chapter V**  
**SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS OF**  
**THE STUDY**

**Summary**

This study examined how ASEAN member states construct the relevance of amphibious warfare in their defense discourse. It answered three main questions. First, how ASEAN countries articulate the strategic value of amphibious warfare. Second, how its relevance is shaped in the context of the West Philippine Sea. Third, what dominant themes emerge from its historical and present-day use that shape modern strategies in the region.

Discourse analysis was used as the main method. It involved examining official statements, modernization programs, joint declarations, published exercises, and related policy materials. The analysis included a comparison of defense narratives and military doctrines. From these, common patterns and divergences were drawn out.

The scope covered all 11 ASEAN member states. Among them, five have notable amphibious capabilities: the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia. Others like Singapore, Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar have limited or no amphibious force but still present some form of strategic framing, either through silence, alliance posture, or internal orientation.

The Philippines values amphibious warfare the most explicitly. It is embedded in the AFP Modernization Program and is central to the Philippine Marine Corps' mission, especially in the West Philippine Sea. Indonesia, being the world's largest archipelagic state, gives strong implicit support through its Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine.

Its Marine Corps regularly trains for amphibious operations. Vietnam maintains amphibious-type units under its Naval Infantry, using them mainly for island and coastal defense, though it avoids aggressive labeling. Thailand operates a dedicated Marine Corps. It joins regular amphibious drills like Cobra Gold and supports a moderate doctrine that connects amphibious readiness to regional security and disaster response. Malaysia, while lacking a marine corps, includes limited amphibious capacity through its navy and FPDA exercises. Its approach is mostly aligned with multilateral engagement and rapid response roles.

Singapore has no marine corps and does not articulate amphibious warfare doctrinally, but retains elite naval and special operations forces with tactical amphibious ability. Brunei, with small defense forces, does not prioritize this capability. Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar all have primarily land-based forces and internal security priorities. Amphibious warfare does not appear in their defense discourse, reflecting limited capacity, landlocked geography (in Laos), or internal political focus.

The results showed that the Philippines and Indonesia have the most doctrinal and operational emphasis on amphibious warfare. Their status as archipelagic states, along with active maritime disputes, explains their focused investment in amphibious modernization particularly in landing platforms, marine forces, and joint interoperability. Vietnam maintains amphibious capabilities through its Naval Infantry, though it avoids the term in official doctrine to prevent provoking tensions. Thailand, through the Royal Thai Marine Corps, also trains and equips for amphibious missions, mainly for national defense and regional exercises such as Cobra Gold. Malaysia has limited amphibious forces but engages in joint operations and defense partnerships under arrangements like the FPDA.

In answering the second research question, the study found that amphibious warfare is constructed within ASEAN discourse as a flexible and legitimate capability. It is portrayed as part of a defensive posture, primarily aimed at upholding sovereignty, supporting humanitarian operations, and participating in cooperative security. The discourse avoids framing these forces as offensive or escalatory, aligning instead with ASEAN's principles of peaceful resolution and non-interference.

For the third question, several key themes emerged: the link between geography and amphibious necessity, the symbolic use of amphibious forces in asserting maritime claims, the role of multilateral exercises in validating capability, and the tension between national defense imperatives and ASEAN norms. Amphibious warfare is both a practical response to regional threats and a discursive tool for expressing resilience and sovereignty.

The study found that amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia is not uniformly prioritized but is increasingly relevant among countries with maritime disputes or coastal vulnerabilities. Its role in ASEAN security is shaped not only by material capability but also by how states choose to talk about, justify, and frame its use. As tensions in the West Philippine Sea persist, amphibious forces are likely to remain central to how some ASEAN states prepare for both crisis and cooperation.

## **Conclusions**

Amphibious warfare holds a complex yet significant place within Southeast Asia's evolving security landscape. Its relevance stems not only from material capabilities but also from how states frame and justify its use within national and regional narratives. Traditionally associated with offensive operations, amphibious warfare in the ASEAN context is increasingly linked to defense, sovereignty protection,

humanitarian assistance, and strategic flexibility. This reconceptualization allows states to maintain deterrence while avoiding overt provocation, aligning with ASEAN's norms of non-interference and peaceful conflict resolution.

Across the region, approaches to amphibious capability vary. Archipelagic states such as the Philippines and Indonesia prioritize it as a core component of territorial defense and mobility. Vietnam also values amphibious forces but avoids direct reference to prevent escalation. Singapore focuses on interoperability, while Thailand and Malaysia adopt more cautious, measured approaches. Other states either downplay its role or quietly maintain limited capabilities. These divergences reflect differences in geography, military tradition, external threats, and domestic priorities.

The lack of shared institutional frameworks or doctrinal transparency adds to the strategic ambiguity surrounding amphibious operations. This ambiguity offers room for flexibility, but it also increases the potential for misperception. At the same time, external factors such as China's maritime expansion and U.S. involvement in regional exercises, further shape how ASEAN states perceive and develop their amphibious forces. Navigating between great power influence and regional autonomy remains a delicate balance for many.

To address emerging maritime challenges and strengthen regional security, ASEAN must enhance cooperation on amphibious-related issues. Transparent doctrines, multilateral exercises focused on humanitarian and hybrid scenarios, and shared norms for dual-use platforms can help reduce tensions and build trust.

In the end, amphibious warfare in Southeast Asia serves as both a practical and symbolic instrument. It reflects how states respond to maritime insecurity, internal demands, and geopolitical pressures. Its future will depend on ASEAN's ability to align

national imperatives with collective stability through coordination, dialogue, and strategic foresight.

## **Recommendations**

This study revealed that while amphibious warfare is not uniformly emphasized across ASEAN, it plays a growing and strategic role in the defense planning of several member states. Moving forward, The following is recommended to strengthen regional capacity, minimize risks of misperception, and reinforce ASEAN's central role in maritime security:

1. For ASEAN states with archipelagic geography or unresolved maritime disputes, amphibious capability should continue to receive attention. Investments should not focus solely on platforms but also on training, sustainment, logistics, and interagency coordination. Education and doctrine should incorporate terrain-specific considerations, particularly in coastal, littoral, and riverine environments. Countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam must integrate amphibious thinking into broader defense planning, combining readiness with calibrated signaling. For others like Malaysia and Thailand, multilateral exercises such as FPDA and Cobra Gold remain useful avenues for building capacity and maintaining credibility without increasing tensions. Smaller or land-focused states, including Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, could explore the utility of amphibious forces in disaster relief and humanitarian missions. This framing allows for gradual development while remaining consistent with ASEAN norms.

2. At the regional level, ASEAN can play a more active role in fostering doctrinal alignment and confidence-building. Though a unified amphibious strategy may not be feasible, shared principles for maritime humanitarian response, joint training

frameworks, and regionally adapted best practices can support coordination. Establishing voluntary transparency mechanisms such as prior notification of amphibious exercises and shared information on deployments would enhance trust and reduce the risks of miscalculation. These steps could be embedded within the existing ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting and its related platforms.

3. As external actors such as China, the United States, Japan, and Australia expand their amphibious engagements in the region, ASEAN must navigate these partnerships carefully. Joint exercises and capacity-building initiatives should support regional goals while preserving strategic autonomy and cohesion. Dialogue mechanisms for both formal and informal dialogue can help manage differences in doctrine and intent, particularly when dealing with dual-use platforms and hybrid operations.

4. Future research should examine the influence of external powers on how Southeast Asian militaries frame and employ amphibious capabilities. Attention should also be given to how rhetoric, doctrine, and operational patterns shift across countries and over time. Historical lessons, including those related to joint operations, deception, and logistics, remain underutilized in current doctrine. Understanding how Southeast Asian militaries selectively draw from past experiences can offer insights into present dynamics and future planning. As Timor-Leste moves toward full ASEAN membership, its evolving role in maritime cooperation and amphibious preparedness should also be included in further analysis.

5. Promote clarity around the strategic purpose of amphibious operations such as improving regional preparedness, and enhancing cooperation with partners will help ASEAN states maintain credible deterrence while supporting a stable and inclusive maritime order

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