


## THE ROLE OF ASEANAPOL IN TACKLING DRUG TRAFFICKING IN THAILAND

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<p><b>Info Article</b></p> <p>Received : 10 Januari 2023</p> <p>Revised : 07 Februari 2024</p> <p>Accepted : 02 Maret 2024</p> <p>Publication : 31 Maret 2024</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b></p> <p>This research is entitled The role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Police (ASEANAPOL) in combating drug trafficking in Thailand. This research aims to explore the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Police (ASEANAPOL) in combating drug trafficking in Thailand, focusing on regional cooperation, capacity building, and implementation of collaborative initiatives to tackle this transnational crime. This research employs a qualitative research approach, using desk research or literature study to collect and analyse data from various academic and official sources. The results show that ASEANAPOL has made significant contributions in combating drug trafficking in Thailand through several key initiatives. These include the establishment of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok, which enhances the capabilities of law enforcement agencies through training and capacity building. ASEANAPOL has also facilitated regional cooperation and information sharing through annual conferences and the development of technological systems such as the Electronic ASEANAPOL Database System (e-ADS). These efforts have strengthened regional cooperation, enhanced law enforcement operations, and fostered a coordinated response to drug trafficking, underscoring ASEANAPOL's critical role in ensuring security and stability in Southeast Asia.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Transnational crime is a phenomenon that has become a serious threat to global security. Over time, global security issues are not only related to the concept of a country's geographical security but also discusses the issue of human security. Human security also falls under non-traditional security issues. Non-traditional security is a broader concept of security issues that goes beyond military threats to a country's territorial integrity. It encompasses a wide range of non-military threats that can impact the well-being and security of states and societies such as Transnational Crime (Sary, 2022).

Transnational crimes are criminal activities related to violations of a country's domestic laws that are considered dangerous by individuals and/or crime syndicates around the world. It is crime is a very complex crime because it involves actors from various countries and is carried out through structured mechanisms. Human trafficking, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, cybercrime, money laundering, corruption, and violent crimes, such as terrorism and war crimes, fall under this category of criminal activity.

Transnational crime involves more than one country in its operations. This type of crime is growing and expanding, driven by globalization that facilitates the spread of criminal networks. One form of crime that falls into the category of transnational crime is drug trafficking. Globalization has accelerated international drug trafficking through increased mobility of people and goods, market integration, communication technology, and cross-border capital flows. All of these factors facilitate drug trafficking and make transnational crime more difficult to tackle (Himawan, 2024).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines drug trafficking as a global illicit trade involving the cultivation, production, distribution and sale of substances subject to drug prohibition laws. This crime typically generates enormous profits, encouraging traffickers to continually seek ways to meet the demand for these drugs (United Nations, 2024). According to a report by UNODC, based on 2014 data, the global drug trafficking market is estimated to be worth between US\$426 billion and US\$652 billion (Himawan, 2024).

The United Nations (UN) estimated that the number of people in the world using drugs illegally increased by 23% in the decade until 2021, to 296 million. The number of people suffering from drug addiction has jumped by 45%, to nearly 40 million people, over the same period. What's more striking about the report are two interconnected trends: the increasingly global nature of drug trafficking networks, and the rise of

synthetic drugs (The Economist, 2023). Global methamphetamine production, trade and use remain concentrated in East and Southeast Asia and North America, with the two subregions accounting for nearly 90 percent of methamphetamine seized globally in the 2017-2021 period. Based on seizure data, trade in these traditional markets appears to have stabilized at a high level in 2021, but is expanding to other regions (UNODC, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in late 2019 and continues until 2021 has direct and indirect impacts on the drug situation in the member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Prevalence data of drug users in ASEAN member countries are not available, so treatment data are used to reflect the situation of drug users. Among the commonly used addictive drugs, ATS (amphetamine-type stimulants) are the most abused by ASEAN drug users accepted for treatment, accounting for three-quarters of those who use ATS. The second most widely used substances are opiates/opioids and cannabis.

The proportion of ATS users varies between 68% to 82% annually. About 15% are opiate/opioid users while cannabis users account for 5% of all drug users, ranging from 3% to 6% annually. Across the ASEAN population, 92.0 drug users were treated per 100,000 in 2021, which increased by 21.4% from 2020. From that data, 69% were ATS users, opiate/opioid users accounted for 25%, and 3.5% were cannabis users. The number of drug users treated in 2021 is greater than in 2015 with an increase rate of 243.5%. The most opioid-related cases were reported by Malaysia, followed by Thailand, Myanmar, Singapore and Laos (ASEAN-Narco, 2021).

Drug production and trafficking in Southeast Asia is a significant and complicated issue. The region is a major producer and transit point for illegal drugs, with most supplies of methamphetamine and other drugs passing through the region. Southeast Asia is a major producer of illegal drugs, particularly opium, heroin and methamphetamine. The production and smuggling of these drugs are often carried out by organized crime groups and has been going on since the 19th century (Himawan, 2024).

There are two main routes used for drug trafficking in Southeast Asia: the southern route that passes through Thailand and is used to distribute drugs to other countries, and the northern route that passes through China and is used to export drugs to other regions (Himawan, 2024). The drug trade in Southeast Asia is highly profitable, with the region generating at least \$71 billion in annual revenue (Thanh-Luong, 2022). Drug traffickers have shifted their operations to maritime routes, using boats and ships to smuggle drugs across the Andaman Sea and other regional waters. These routes are difficult to monitor

due to the large number of fishing boats and lack of effective border controls. The Golden Triangle, an area bordering Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, is a major hub for drug production and trafficking.

Thailand has faced problems as an illicit drug market and trafficking route from the Golden Triangle area. Large quantities of Methamphetamine (Yaba) tablets, crystal meth (Ice), heroin, ketamine, and cannabis are found getting imported into Thailand, most commonly to the Northern border provinces and still rising every year. Drugs from overseas such as ecstasy originating from Europe and cocaine from South America are also being traded into Thailand.

Drug traffickers use a number of diverse routes and methods to do their trade, for instance, seaports, airports, shipping outposts including border checkpoints and natural border crossings (DPR, 2023). Overall, drug trafficking in Southeast Asia is a significant and complicated problem that requires sustained efforts from law enforcement agencies and regional cooperation to combat it effectively. One regional organization that has a role in combating transnational crime particularly drug trafficking in Southeast Asia is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Police (ASEANAPOL).

ASEANAPOL was established in 1981, the organization has the main objectives of promoting regional cooperation, combating transnational crime, and enhancing capacity building. ASEANAPOL facilitates cooperation among member states to face common security challenges and enhance regional stability. The organization focuses on preventing and combating transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and human trafficking through collaborative efforts among member states.

In addition, ASEANAPOL also provides training and capacity building programs for law enforcement agencies to enhance their ability to combat transnational crime (ASEANAPOL, 2013). ASEANAPOL has also been working with Thailand as one of the countries with high drug trafficking cases in the region. ASEANAPOL's cooperation with Thailand plays an important role in combating drug trafficking. Despite facing various challenges, ASEANAPOL continues to strengthen its efforts in maintaining regional security and stability.

Through many initiatives, ASEANAPOL continues to tackle the drug trafficking in Thailand. Therefore, this research is titled: The Role of ASEANAPOL in Tackling Drug Trafficking in Thailand.

## **METHOD**

In this research, the author uses a qualitative type of research to be able to answer research questions. The data collection technique used by the author in this research is library research or literature study. Library research or literature study is a method related to collecting library data, reading, studying, recording and analyzing various research materials (Zed, 2023). Sugiyono (2018) explains that the aim of literature study is to conduct theoretical studies, references and various other scientific literature that have a correlation with the research question.

Literature study is a method of studying various references including books or previous research results to obtain a theoretical basis for the main problem. Furthermore, this research uses a qualitative descriptive analysis technique. Qualitative descriptive analysis technique is a data analysis method used to collect, process, analyze, and present data descriptively. In qualitative descriptive analysis, data is obtained from sources that cannot be measured by numbers, such as interviews, observations, and documentation. This data is then presented in narrative, graphical, or matrix form to provide a clearer picture of the phenomenon under study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Drug trafficking is one of the issues that has become a concern for ASEAN member countries, this can be seen from the existence of a joint declaration that has been signed by the heads of state of ASEAN members with the aim of preventing and eradicating the circulation and trafficking of drugs in the ASEAN region. This declaration is called The Declaration of ASEAN Concord of February 24, 1976. However, this declaration is not enough to be a solution in handling drug trafficking cases in Southeast Asia. For this reason, following the declaration, a body called the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Police (ASEANAPOL) was formed (Pamungkas, 2017).

After the Declaration of ASEAN Concord of February 24, 1976 was signed by the respective heads of state of the five forming countries which included Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, ASEANAPOL was officially established in 1981. The organization has the main objectives of promoting regional cooperation, combating transnational crime, and enhancing capacity building. ASEANAPOL facilitates cooperation among member states to face common security challenges and enhance regional stability. The organization focuses on preventing and

combating transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and human trafficking through collaborative efforts among member states (ASEANAPOL, 2013).

ASEANAPOL stands on a framework of cooperation called ASEANAPOL at the Regional Counter Narcotics which is based on the legal instrument of the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia which also established on February 24, 1976. This agreement came into force when ASEAN countries ratified it on June 21, 1976. In 1996, ASEANAPOL held its first meeting where each ASEAN head of state discussed the topic of cooperation in the field of transnational crime. Furthermore, in 1997, each ASEAN country adopted a document that aimed to create a drug-free ASEAN region. This document is called ASEAN Vision 2020 (Pamungkas, 2017).

The cooperation between ASEANAPOL and Thailand has made significant progress over the years, with the main objective of strengthening regional collaboration in combating transnational crimes, especially drug trafficking. Since ASEANAPOL was established in 1981, Thailand, as one of the founding members, has been playing a key role in building cooperation and facilitating information exchange among member states. In the early period, the main focus was on building a strong foundation of cooperation to face the challenges of drug trafficking.

In the 2000's ASEANAPOL began to play a role in addressing drug trafficking in ASEAN member states, including Thailand through capacity building and training. This capacity building aims to develop the capacity of investigators across ASEAN member states. One of the capacity buildings that has been conducted is the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. ILEA Bangkok is a joint effort between the Royal Thai Government and the Government of the United States of America, and it operates in cooperation with ASEANAPOL. ILEA was established to enhance the effectiveness of regional cooperation against transnational financial crimes, alien smuggling, and drug trafficking. The Academy provides a core curriculum of management and technical instruction for criminal justice managers to develop their skills in combating these crimes (ASEANAPOL, 2016).

In terms of impact on drug trafficking, ILEA has provided training and capacity building programs for law enforcement agencies in Thailand and other ASEAN member states to enhance their ability to combat drug trafficking. Through these programs, ILEA has strengthened regional cooperation among law enforcement agencies in Southeast Asia in combating drug trafficking and other transnational crimes. In addition, ILEA has

promoted information exchange among law enforcement agencies to prevent and combat drug trafficking more effectively.

Regarding the impact on cooperation between Thailand and ASEANAPOL, ILEA has strengthened cooperation by providing a platform for law enforcement agencies to share best practices and coordinate efforts in tackling drug trafficking. In addition, ILEA has improved information exchange among ASEANAPOL member states, enabling them, including Thailand itself to prevent and combat drug trafficking more effectively. Furthermore, the ILEA Bangkok training program assists law enforcement agencies in Thailand in allocating resources more effectively, ensuring that they are better equipped to combat drug trafficking. In addition, the training program also increases public support for law enforcement agencies in Thailand, which in turn promotes a more effective response to drug trafficking (ILEA BANGKOK, 2024).

ASEANAPOL also organizes conferences related to drug trafficking which are held every year in rotation in its member countries. The ASEANAPOL conference held in Thailand under the theme "Enhancing Harmonization to Ensure Regional Peace and Sustainable Stability" in 2017 successfully served as an important platform to strengthen regional cooperation in combating drug trafficking (Thanh-Luong, 2022). The event was attended by National Police Chiefs from ASEAN member states as well as dialogue partners and international observers. This event involved plenary sessions, workshops, and an in-depth training program, enabling the exchange of knowledge and best practices among law enforcement agencies. The highlight of the conference was the signing of a joint communiqué affirming the collective commitment to enhance cooperation and coordination in confronting the challenges of drug trafficking. By highlighting the importance of regional collaboration and the need for sustained efforts, the conference successfully affirmed ASEANAPOL's role as a key player in ensuring security and stability in the Southeast Asian region, and underscored the concrete steps needed to combat drug trafficking more effectively (Thanh-Luong, 2022).

In addition to the initiatives discussed above, ASEANAPOL also cooperates with Thailand in dealing with drug trafficking through the development of technology systems such as e-ADS (Electronic ASEANAPOL Database System), ASEANAPOL Database System Technical Committee (ADSTC), ASEANAPOL Contact Officers, and ASEANAPOL Communication and Coordination Protocol for Crisis Management (ACCPCM) (Pamungkas, 2017). The e-ADS stands as a vital tool in enhancing regional cooperation among ASEAN Police Forces by facilitating the efficient exchange of

criminal information. Under the vigilant oversight of the ASEANAPOL Database System Technical Committee (ADSTC) and coordinated through ASEANAPOL Contact Officers, e-ADS ensures seamless communication and cooperation among member countries (ASEANAPOL, 2023).

The system's continuous improvements, notably the development of e-ADS 2.0, have significantly enhanced its functionality, security, and user experience. With specialized modules for crime reporting, intelligence sharing, database management, and information retrieval, e-ADS supports law enforcement agencies in managing and combating transnational crime more effectively. The benefits of e-ADS are substantial: it promotes enhanced regional cooperation, improves information sharing, increases the efficiency of law enforcement operations, and supports better decision-making through access to real-time data and intelligence. Additionally, the ASEANAPOL Communication and Coordination Protocol for Crisis Management (ACCPCM) ensures a robust framework for crisis response, further solidifying ASEANAPOL's role in maintaining regional security and stability. Overall, e-ADS exemplifies a modern, efficient approach to transnational crime management, fostering a collaborative environment that significantly enhances the region's ability to tackle complex security challenges (ASEANAPOL, 2023)

## **CONCLUSION**

Transnational crime, particularly drug trafficking, poses a severe threat to both global and regional security. Over time, this threat has evolved beyond traditional security concerns to encompass broader non-traditional security issues, impacting human security and societal well-being. Drug trafficking is a prime example of a complex transnational crime, facilitated by globalization and involving intricate international networks. The Southeast Asian region, notably Thailand, faces significant challenges as both a producer and transit point for illegal drugs.

ASEANAPOL, established in 1981, has been instrumental in addressing these challenges through regional cooperation and capacity-building initiatives. As one of the founding members, Thailand has played a pivotal role in ASEANAPOL's efforts to combat drug trafficking. The establishment of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok has been particularly impactful, providing critical training and fostering stronger regional cooperation among law enforcement agencies. ILEA's

programs have enhanced the capabilities of these agencies, promoting effective resource allocation and increasing public support for law enforcement efforts.

The ASEANAPOL conference held in Thailand in 2017 further demonstrated the organization's commitment to regional collaboration. The conference, under the theme "Enhancing Harmonization to Ensure Regional Peace and Sustainable Stability," brought together national police chiefs, dialogue partners, and international observers to discuss and address the latest trends and challenges in drug trafficking. The signing of a joint communiqué underscored the collective resolve to strengthen cooperation and coordination in combating drug trafficking. ASEANAPOL also developed a technology system such as e-ADS (Electronic ASEANAPOL Database System), ASEANAPOL Database System Technical Committee (ADSTC), ASEANAPOL Contact Officers, and ASEANAPOL Communication and Coordination Protocol for Crisis Management (ACCPCM) to foster stronger regional cooperation among law enforcement agencies in combating transnational crime, particularly drug trafficking.

In conclusion, ASEANAPOL's collaborative efforts with Thailand exemplify a robust regional approach to tackling the complex issue of drug trafficking. Through continuous capacity building, information sharing, and strategic conferences, ASEANAPOL has reinforced its role as a key player in ensuring security and stability in Southeast Asia. The organization's initiatives highlight the importance of sustained regional cooperation in effectively addressing transnational crimes and promoting a safer, more secure region.

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