



e-ISSN: 3109-6425
p-ISSN: 3109-6433

Proceeding Jakarta Geopolitical Forum

Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional Republik Indonesia (LEMHANNAS RI)

Volume 8 | 2024

WEB : <https://proceeding.lemhannas.com/index.php/jgf>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55960/jgf.v8i1.276>

Conference Paper

INDONESIA'S STRATEGIC POSTURE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: BALANCING MARITIME DEFENCE, DIPLOMACY, AND REGIONAL STABILITY

Muhammad Herindra

Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, Indonesia

Abstract.

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a critical geopolitical and geoeconomic arena, shaped by strategic sea lanes, abundant natural resources, and intensifying power rivalries among major states. As the world's largest archipelagic nation, Indonesia occupies a central position in this maritime domain, facing both opportunities and challenges in safeguarding its national interests. This study examines Indonesia's evolving defence strategy, grounded in the principles of non-alignment and sovereign autonomy, and its efforts to address maritime security threats through a dual approach of defence modernisation and regional diplomacy. Adopting a qualitative content analysis method, the study draws on policy documents, strategic doctrines, and expert literature to explore Indonesia's responses to disputes in the North Natuna Sea and South China Sea. The findings reveal how Indonesia combines naval capability development with confidence-building measures, ASEAN engagement, and a "friendly neighbour" policy to manage regional tensions while upholding international law. This balanced posture not only enhances Indonesia's maritime security but also contributes to broader Indo-Pacific peace, cooperation, and resilience.

Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Herindra
Email: m.herindra@gmail.com

Article History:

Received : 23-04-2024
Revised : 17-05-2024
Accepted : 28-06-2024

This article, authored by Muhammad Herindra, is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that proper credit is given to the original author(s), the title of the work, the journal citation, and the corresponding DOI. The selection and peer-review of this article were conducted under the responsibility of the JGF Conference Committee.



Published by Lemhannas Press.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific; maritime security; defence strategy; naval modernisation; regional diplomacy; strategic autonomy; international law

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific occupies a pivotal position as a region defined by strategic sea lanes and abundant natural resources, placing it at the centre of global geopolitical competition (1). Major powers, including the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and France, actively pursue influence in the region, attracted by its role as a critical international trade route and as a contested space where military and economic interests converge. Located at the core of this dynamic maritime domain, Indonesia holds a unique strategic advantage as the world's largest archipelagic state (2). This positioning creates both opportunities and challenges. Guided by principles of non-alignment and a firm commitment to national sovereignty, Indonesia continues to strengthen its geopolitical and defence posture (3). Key measures include modernising naval capabilities, expanding maritime patrol operations, and participating in multilateral military exercises, all directed at safeguarding territorial integrity and ensuring the freedom and security of navigation along vital Indo-Pacific Sea lanes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Studies

Indonesia's defence strategy operates within the framework of an independent and active foreign policy (4). This approach enables flexibility in international security affairs, permitting selective engagement without binding commitments. By fostering defence partnerships with countries including Australia and the United States, Indonesia advances strategic cooperation while deliberately avoiding formal military alliances. This policy of non-alignment preserves national autonomy in navigating the shifting power dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. To implement this strategic posture, Indonesian defence policy prioritises naval modernisation, the expansion of maritime patrols, and participation in multilateral military exercises. These measures enhance deterrence, improve maritime domain awareness, and project strategic presence across key sea lanes. The overarching objective is to assert regional influence while safeguarding the freedom and security of international navigation through essential Indo-Pacific maritime corridors

Empirical Studies

Recent developments in the North Natuna Sea illustrate the persistence of potential conflicts arising from overlapping maritime claims and foreign intrusions into Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (5). Increased sightings of foreign coast guard and fishing vessels have led to a rise in maritime patrol operations and legal enforcement actions. Such incidents emphasise the need to maintain a strong maritime presence to uphold sovereign rights under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS) (6).

Disputes in the South China Sea continue to heighten regional tensions (7). The assertive behaviour of several claimant states, including expansive maritime claims and the militarisation of disputed features, has generated increased strategic uncertainty. In response, Indonesia engages actively in regional forums, participates in joint naval exercises, and lodges diplomatic protests as key instruments to manage tensions and reinforce adherence to international legal norms. These empirical observations demonstrate the complexity of balancing strategic deterrence, legal assertion, and the pursuit of regional stability in contested maritime zones.

Methods

The study applies a qualitative content analysis to examine Indonesia's defence and maritime policies, strategic doctrines, and regional diplomacy in addressing Indo-Pacific geopolitical challenges (8). Sources include national policy documents, defence white papers, official speeches, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed publications from the past decade, selected for relevance to maritime strategy, regional security, non-alignment, and responses to disputes in the North Natuna Sea and South China Sea. The analysis focuses on the relationship between defence modernisation, maritime sovereignty, and multilateral diplomacy, assessing how Indonesia operationalises sovereignty, non-alignment, and cooperation amid intensifying competition. Conducted over one year, the research ensures credibility through triangulation with government releases, ASEAN records, and expert-reviewed literature.

Results and Discussion

In confronting potential flashpoints like the North Natuna Sea, Indonesia implements a defence policy that integrates military preparedness with diplomatic initiatives. The deployment of both military and non-military assets supports a layered approach to national defence. At the same time, the pursuit of confidence-building measures helps reduce misperceptions and prevent escalation. These dual-track efforts recognise that security depends as much on diplomacy and unity as on hard power.

The North Natuna Sea holds dual strategic value, both territorial and economic. Rich in oil and gas potential, the area presents an attractive economic prospect. However, Indonesia refrains from exploiting these resources at the expense of regional peace. Current efforts focus on maintaining maritime stability, ensuring that defence readiness supports diplomatic engagement, rather than replacing it. This strategy positions Indonesia as a proponent of peace, international law, and cooperative growth in

the Indo-Pacific.

The situation in the South China Sea further reinforces the importance of a peaceful, law-based approach. Sustaining regional stability and fostering economic development require adherence to international norms and cooperative mechanisms. Indonesia actively promotes peaceful dispute resolution, particularly through ASEAN frameworks and international diplomatic engagement, while retaining a readiness to defend territorial integrity.

As a leading ASEAN member, Indonesia advances maritime security and promotes the blue economy. Defence forums serve as platforms to develop practical strategies, encourage military cooperation, and refine national doctrines. Through enhanced training, robust defence development, and diplomatic coordination, Indonesia contributes actively to regional resilience. Discussion outcomes from high-level forums reaffirm the importance of regional collaboration. The exchange of ideas and strategic perspectives reinforces shared commitment to a secure Indo-Pacific. Recommendations from these engagements emphasize the need for continued modernisation, expanded defence diplomacy, and unified responses to emerging maritime challenges. The collective commitment to peace, security, and sovereignty defines Indonesia's strategic posture in an increasingly contested region.

Conclusion

Indonesia's strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific reflects a careful balance between defence preparedness and diplomatic engagement. Rooted in non-alignment and an independent foreign policy, Indonesia maintains autonomy while engaging in selective partnerships that enhance regional cooperation. Through naval modernisation, expanded patrols, and participation in multilateral exercises, Indonesia reinforces its ability to protect national interests and ensure freedom of navigation. In addressing territorial disputes in areas like the North Natuna Sea and the South China Sea, Indonesia prioritises stability over resource exploitation, demonstrating a commitment to peace and legal norms. This dual-track approach, combining military capacity with active diplomacy, positions Indonesia as a key regional actor that promotes maritime security, economic resilience, and cooperative development. As geopolitical competition grows, Indonesia continues to pursue a strategy that safeguards sovereignty, fosters collaboration, and upholds the Indo-Pacific as a region of peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

Acknowledgments

The author extends sincere gratitude to Kementerian Pertahanan Republik Indonesia and Lembaga Ketahanan Republik Indonesia for their invaluable support throughout the various stages of developing this article

References

1. Hakata K, Cannon BJ. The Indo-Pacific as an Emerging Geography of Strategies. In: Indo-Pacific Strategies [Internet]. Routledge; 2022. p. 3–21. Available from: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003206934-1/indo-pacific-emerging-geography-strategies-kei-hakata-brendon-cannon>
2. Rochwulaningsih Y, Sulistiyono ST, Masruroh NN, Maulany NN. Marine policy basis of Indonesia as a maritime state: The importance of integrated economy. *Mar Policy*. 2019;108:103602.
3. Herindra M. Jakarta Geopolitical Forum VIII/2024. 2024 [cited 2025 Jul 30]. Maritime Security and Challenges in the Region. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZZbl7yOXno>
4. Oktaviano D, Mahroza J, Risman H. Indonesia Defense Strategy Towards Indo-Pacific (Case Study: The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific). *Int Aff Glob Strateg*. 2020;80(2020):21–9. Available from: <https://iiste.org>
5. Qurbani ID, Sari MYAR, Yanto A, Hikmah F. About an Oil and Natural Gas Mining Treaty in The High Seas of The North Natuna Region with Economic, Legal and Environmental Aspects. *Juridical Trib Comp Int Law*. 2024;14(2):301–20. Available from: <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1304790>
6. Shih YC. Ocean Governance in Practice: A Study of The Application of Marine Science and Technology Research Techniques to Maritime Law Enforcement in Taiwan. *Mar Policy*. 2024;163:106081.
7. Mia MR, Tao JL, Anderson CD. The South China Sea Dispute and Regional Response. *Quest J Manag Soc Sci*. 2024;6(1):74–86. Available from: <https://nepjol.info/index.php>
8. Krippendorff K. Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. SAGE Publications; 2018. 472 p. Available from: <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/mono/content-analysis-4e/toc>