

Indonesia's Maritime Diplomacy Strategy in The Natuna Sea (2014-2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the maritime diplomacy strategy carried out by Indonesia in maintaining Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna Islands. The maritime border in the Natuna Islands is vulnerable even though Indonesia has declared the area around the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as part of Indonesia's sovereign rights in accordance with the United Nations Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). As a result, the waters of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) recognized by UNCLOS are considered Chinese territory in the South China Sea. Qualitative methods with a descriptive approach are used in research to find the meaning and efforts of maritime diplomacy carried out by Indonesia with sources obtained through journals and research. The purpose of this research is to understand the strategy carried out by the Indonesian government in conducting maritime diplomacy in a cooperative, persuasive and coercive manner by taking diplomatic steps while inviting respect for Indonesia's sovereign rights. The result of this study is that Indonesia and China have made various diplomatic efforts to reduce disputes in the South China Sea.

Keywords: *Maritime diplomacy; Natuna Sea; Indonesia*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has thousands of islands surrounded by the ocean. This geographical condition makes Indonesia the largest archipelagic country in the world with a strategic location, which is flanked by two oceans and two continents. The territory of Indonesia is also a country where two-thirds of its territory consists of the ocean, on this basis, Indonesia must be able to make the most of this geostrategic location. To become a maritime country, Indonesia must be able to utilize its marine elements for the welfare of the people and the progress of its nation (F.Z, 2024)

Maritime diplomacy is an effort made by a country to strengthen its diplomatic relations with other countries in the context of the sea and marine. It includes a series of policies, strategies, and actions aimed at promoting the country's national interests in the marine and maritime fields. Maritime diplomacy can also be interpreted as the implementation of foreign policy that aims to optimize maritime potential, in order to fulfill

national interests in accordance with national provisions and international law (Investasi, 2023).

The Natuna Islands is one of Indonesia's maritime border areas with neighboring countries around the South China Sea. The status of the Natuna Islands and the surrounding waters is considered unproblematic by the world. The Indonesian government has issued an official stance that the Natuna Islands are Indonesia's maritime territory. In October 2014, the election of Joko Widodo as the 7th President of Indonesia revived the maritime spirit of the Indonesian nation. President Joko Widodo is determined to restore Indonesia's maritime glory by carrying out the concept of Indonesia as the World Maritime Axis.

The World Maritime Axis Policy contains five main pillars that make Indonesia a sovereign, advanced, independent, strong maritime country, and able to make a positive contribution to regional and world security and peace in accordance with national interests (Hendropriyono, 2019). The World Maritime Axis policy initiated by President Joko Widodo can be understood as a new direction and goal of Indonesia's national development and foreign policy. Natuna and its surrounding waters are part of Indonesia's territory and are not included in the territory claimed by China (Setiawan, 2020). However, this status has recently been challenged because several times China has shown itself through the activities of its fishermen and patrol boats around Natuna waters.

The activities of Chinese fishermen in Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) have emerged especially since the clashes in 2016. As a maritime neighbor in the South China Sea, China has shown an inconsistent policy, considering its surrounding waters as part of it based on a *nine-dash line* map submitted to the United Nations in 2009. The form of maritime diplomacy by the Indonesian Navy is in order to safeguard Indonesia's national interests from threats and disturbances to maritime security, as well as build recognition as the World Maritime Axis in the international arena (Laut, 2020).

Maritime diplomacy as an instrument for Indonesia to strengthen maritime defense and security and build recognition as a World Maritime Axis in the international world. The World Maritime Axis policy as a national economic development strategy often faces several challenges in terms of maritime security issues, including territorial border issues, terrorism at sea, *illegal fishing* activities, South China Sea conflicts and various other maritime security problems. There are important explanations that can help to understand and review the research raised, namely that maritime defense and security strength is a fundamental aspect in making Indonesia a maritime country. The Indonesian government has carried out various forms of diplomacy in overcoming conflicts in the Natuna Sea, such as military diplomacy, foreign political diplomacy through the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, diplomacy in the form of cooperation such as building the Jarkta Bandung high-speed train from China, and also conducting diplomacy through the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Indonesia's military diplomacy in handling conflicts in the Natuna Sea involves the use of military force to guarantee Indonesia's rights to the sea and exclusive areas. This can involve military operations, development and surveillance activities, as well as international treaties and agreements to guarantee Indonesia's maritime rights (arif, 2020) Indonesia's

foreign policy diplomacy through the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (KEM Luar Negeri) covers various aspects, including the development of international relations, crisis management, international agreements, and migration management. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (KEMENLU RI) is also responsible for developing and regulating Indonesia's foreign policy, including ensuring national interests and developing the national economy.

Indonesia's diplomacy through ASEAN in handling the Natuna sea conflict involves the use of ASEAN mechanisms to address maritime issues and exclusive areas. This can involve conflict management through dialogue and negotiation, as well as development agreements and international treaties governing maritime relations between countries. ASEAN is also responsible for developing international relations and ensuring stability and security in Southeast Asia. Indonesia's foreign policy addresses the Natuna Sea conflict through a combination of diplomatic, legal, and military actions. Some important aspects include Indonesia's vocal diplomatic steps in asserting its sovereignty over the Natuna Sea through diplomatic channels. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has voiced its rejection of China's illegal fishing operations in Indonesian waters and stressed the importance of upholding international law, including the 1982 UNCLOS, in resolving the conflict (Kemaritiman, 2020).

Indonesia has also sought support from other countries, such as the United States, to counter China's assertiveness in the region. The country has made its interests known in various forums to protect its legitimate rights to Natuna waters against the nine-dash line (9DL) claim. Indonesia is also trying to diversify foreign investment sources to reduce its exposure to China. Indonesia's military actions have strengthened its military presence in the Natuna Islands to deter Chinese attacks. The country has built new military bases and increased maritime patrols to tackle illegal activities in Indonesian waters (F.Z, 2024).

Indonesia also plans to increase its fleet of submarines and naval corvettes to counter Chinese threats in the Natuna Sea. Economic measures: Indonesia seeks to manage its bilateral relationship with China by balancing economic and sovereignty interests. The country has reaffirmed its commitment not to trade sovereignty for investment and has sought to diversify foreign investment sources to reduce its exposure to China. Overall, Indonesia's foreign policy aims to protect its sovereignty over the Natuna Sea while maintaining a balance between economic interests and diplomatic relations with China.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. This approach aims to delve deeply into Indonesia's maritime diplomacy strategy in the Natuna Sea in facing various geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges. Descriptive-analytical research is used to identify the steps of maritime diplomacy that have been carried out. Analyze the effectiveness of maritime diplomacy strategies in maintaining Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna Sea. The data collection method uses Library Research Collecting secondary data from books, scientific journals, official government reports, diplomatic documents, and relevant media articles. Focus on maritime policy, international law of the

sea (UNCLOS), and documents related to Indonesia's strategy in the Natuna Sea. The data analysis in this study uses the Theory of Diplomacy Strategy, namely Evaluating concrete steps in international negotiations.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Research Result

Diplomacy is a process of international relations that uses communication and negotiation to achieve goals that are beneficial to the country and the world. The Natuna Sea is an area of strategic concern for Indonesia, not only because of its location at the forefront of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) but also because of the geopolitical challenges arising from China's unilateral claims through the Nine-Dash Line. Indonesia's maritime diplomacy strategy in the Natuna Sea aims to maintain territorial sovereignty, maintain sovereign rights to marine resources, and prevent the escalation of conflicts with other countries. The following is an in-depth elaboration of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy strategy. The Natuna Sea is located on a strategic international trade route and contains abundant natural resource potential, including fisheries and oil and gas reserves (Kemaritiman, 2020).

The main challenge in maritime diplomacy in the Natuna Sea is the existence of China's Nine-Dash Line Claim which overlaps with Indonesia's EEZ in North Natuna. In addition, there are many violations by foreign ships, both fishermen and coast guards from China. And there are regional tensions due to great power competition (US and China) in the South China Sea. Indonesia uses an adaptive approach to maritime diplomacy in maintaining sovereignty and managing disputes in the Natuna Sea. This approach includes cooperative, persuasive, and coercive (arif, 2020).

1. Cooperative Diplomacy

Indonesia creates cooperation with other countries through cooperative diplomacy in the bilateral, regional, and multilateral scope. This approach prioritizes dialogue, understanding, and collaboration to achieve common goals. Through ASEAN, Indonesia plays an active role in the discussion of the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea to reduce the risk of conflict in the region. Indonesia builds a regional consensus to enforce international law based on the 1982 UNCLOS. Indonesia carries out joint security operations through the ASEAN Maritime Security Initiative (AMSI) initiative. Indonesia participates in trilateral patrols with Malaysia and the Philippines in waters adjacent to Natuna. Indonesia held joint military exercises with partner countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia. Indonesia supports maritime economic development programs through foreign investment in the Natuna infrastructure sector. Indonesia uses international organizations such as the United Nations and the IMO (International Maritime Organization) to voice its position regarding the Natuna Sea (F.Z, 2024).

2. Persuasive Diplomacy

Persuasive diplomacy aims to influence the views, decisions, or actions of the other party through communication, negotiation, and the delivery of strong arguments. Indonesia uses bilateral dialogue to discuss technical issues such as EEZ violations and the

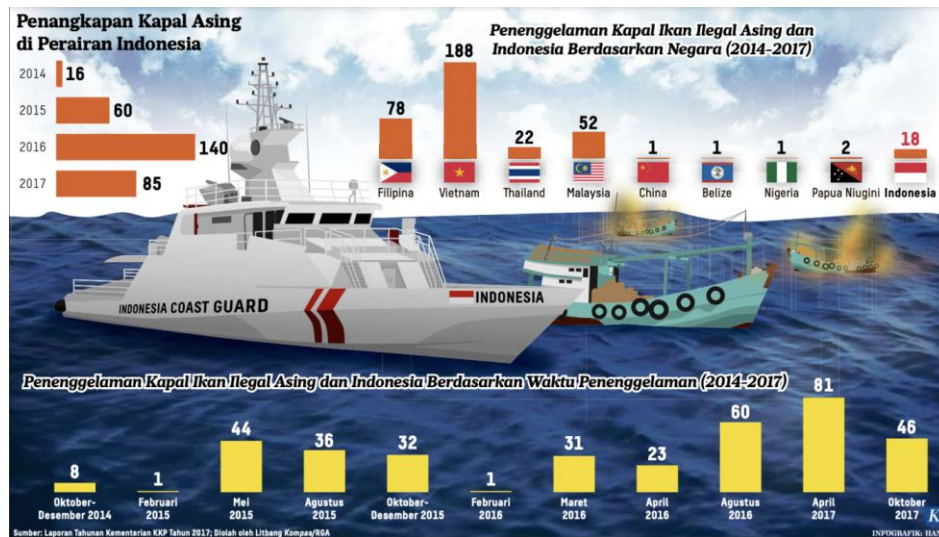
implementation of UNCLOS in an effort to approach peace with China. The government ensures that this dialogue does not weaken Indonesia's legal position regarding sovereignty in Natuna. In addition, Indonesia is in communication with ASEAN partners to ensure solidarity in facing regional challenges in the South China Sea.

This diplomacy avoids the escalation of conflicts through an approach that emphasizes common interests, such as regional economic stability. Indonesia also leverages public diplomacy to educate the international community about its position in the Natuna Sea through publications, conferences, and the media (F.Z, 2024). The government conveyed the narrative that Indonesia is a country that respects international law, thus gathering global support. In addition, Indonesia is increasing the involvement of local fishermen by empowering them as key actors in the Natuna region through the provision of subsidies and legal protection. Fishermen's activities are used as a form of de facto claim to the area.

3. Coercive Diplomacy

Coercive diplomacy involves the use of military, economic, and symbolic forms of pressure to force other parties to respect or comply with Indonesia's interests. Indonesia increased the intensity of patrols by the Indonesian Navy, Bakamla, and Polairud in the Natuna area to strengthen the military presence. The government built an integrated military base in North Natuna to show its readiness to maintain its territorial sovereignty. In addition, Indonesia held joint military exercises involving allied countries to send a signal that Indonesia does not stand alone. Exercises such as the Komodo Exercise demonstrate Indonesia's defense capabilities in the Natuna Sea.

In the aspect of law enforcement of the sea, Indonesia arrested and sank foreign ships that violated the boundaries of the EEZ, as was done during the era of Minister Susi Pudjiastuti. The government also uses legal approaches and coercive measures to reduce illegal activities in Indonesian waters. In addition, Indonesia is carrying out joint maritime operations between the TNI, Bakamla, and KKP to ensure that maritime sovereignty is maintained. In the economic realm, Indonesia signals that China's economic activity in the Natuna region can be limited if violations continue. The government uses economic leverage to influence the attitude of other countries towards illegal claims in the Natuna Sea.



Source : Kompas (January 17, 2020)

DISCUSSION

In the 2014-2024 period, the conflict in the Natuna Sea between Indonesia and China was related to competing sovereignty claims over the region. China claims most of the Natuna Sea as part of its territory called the "nine-dash line," which Indonesia rejects because it contradicts the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Cooperation efforts between Indonesia and China in handling conflicts in the Natuna Sea can be recorded in several steps, namely conducting dialogue and diplomacy. Despite tensions, Indonesia and China continue to communicate through dialogue and diplomacy.

The two countries regularly hold high-level meetings to discuss bilateral issues, including maritime issues. Development of Bilateral Relations Indonesia and China also continue to develop their bilateral relations in various fields, including trade, investment, and culture. Building stronger ties beyond conflict issues can help reduce tensions in the Natuna Sea. The Regional Collaboration between Indonesia and China is also involved in regional forums such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the East Asia Summit. Through these forums, they can work with neighboring countries and other regional partners to find peaceful solutions to conflicts in the Natuna Sea. Although no formal agreement has been reached between Indonesia and China regarding territorial claims in the Natuna Sea, the two may have reached an informal agreement or chosen to delay the temporary settlement of issues that sparked tensions. Indonesia's Maritime Law Enforcement increases the military presence and maritime law enforcement in the Natuna Sea region to defend its sovereignty claims and assert its territorial sovereignty.

A form of cooperation between Indonesia and China in terms of building a Chinese lighthouse project, namely a high-speed train. The Indonesia-China high-speed train project is a collaboration between the two countries to build a transportation system. high-speed trains in Indonesia. The main objective of this project is to improve transportation infrastructure in Indonesia, which is expected to support economic growth, reduce traffic

congestion, and shorten travel time between cities. The project is planned to be one of the largest in Indonesia in terms of transportation infrastructure. This involves the construction of a high-speed rail line of significant length and connecting several major cities on the island of Java. China has the technology and experience in building a high-speed train system, with the world's largest high-speed rail network. In this cooperation, China usually provides technology, investment, and other resources for these projects.



Source : KCIC.CO.ID (March 12, 2024)

These high-speed train projects involve large investments, and usually involve loans from the Chinese side, either in the form of direct loans or private investment. The financial and financial requirements of this project are one of the main concerns, because it can affect the sustainability of the project and the country's debt burden. The project involves the transfer of technology from China to Indonesia in terms of planning, design, and construction of the high-speed rail line. Technical teams from both countries usually work together to ensure that the technology applied complies with safety and reliability standards. The project also pays attention to the environmental and social impacts it may cause, such as land acquisition, eviction, and environmental management. The government and related parties must ensure that this project is carried out with consideration for environmental sustainability and the welfare of the local community. The progress of this project may vary depending on factors such as political changes, technical issues, and financial constraints. Effective project monitoring and management is essential to ensure good progress and project completion on schedule.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's maritime diplomacy strategy in the Natuna Sea is a combination of legal, military, multilateral, economic, and public approaches. This effort aims to maintain territorial sovereignty while mitigating tensions in the region. Despite the challenges still faced, Indonesia must continue to strengthen this diplomatic approach to ensure that the

Natuna Sea remains an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in the Natuna Sea aims to uphold the country's sovereignty over the waters, which are often disputed with neighboring countries, especially China. Indonesia has adopted a consistent approach in fighting for its maritime rights in accordance with international law, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in the Natuna Sea also involves cooperation with neighboring and regional countries in strengthening maritime security, promoting peace, and preventing unwanted incidents in these waters. President Jokowi's administration has taken steps to strengthen defense capacity in the Natuna Sea region, including increasing military presence and improving defense infrastructure. Indonesia also strengthens its commitment to multilateral cooperation in addressing maritime issues, including through active participation in relevant regional and international forums. Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in the Natuna Sea also emphasizes the importance of preserving natural resources in the region, especially in the context of protecting the marine environment and the sustainability of marine ecosystems. Overall, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in the Natuna Sea during President Jokowi's administration for the 2014-2024 period reflects Indonesia's commitment to upholding sovereignty, fighting for maritime rights in accordance with international law, and promoting regional stability and cooperation in the region.

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