



Indonesian Diplomatic Strategy Management in Addressing the South China Sea Issues

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ABSTRACT: This research evaluates the geopolitical and environmental conditions of the South China Sea and proposes strategies for Indonesia in managing potential conflicts and resources in the region. Using qualitative methods that include literature reviews from official sources and academic studies, this research highlights the importance of active diplomacy, modernization of maritime defence, and sustainable management of natural resources. The results show that Indonesia must strengthen multilateral cooperation through ASEAN, increase naval capacity, and implement the blue economy. Recommendations also include developing maritime surveillance technology, improving infrastructure, and active participation in international forums such as the UN and implementing UNCLOS. Domestic efforts to increase public awareness and research collaboration are also considered essential for maintaining regional sovereignty and security.

KEYWORDS: Diplomacy, Geopolitical, Policy Strategy, South China Sea, Strategy Management,

INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea is one of the most contested and disputed maritime areas in the world (Macaraig & Fenton, 2021), with abundant natural resource reserves, including petroleum and natural gas, as well as strategic international trade routes, the South China Sea is the focus of global attention. It has become a point of conflict between various countries in Southeast Asia, especially claims from China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei (Dipua et al., 2020). Even though Indonesia is not directly involved in contested territorial claims, it has a crucial role in maintaining regional stability and security (Budiana et al., 2023).

As the largest archipelagic country in the world and one of the economic powers in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has a strategic interest in ensuring that the South China Sea remains a safe and conflict-free navigation route (Sarnawa & Islami, 2022). Located between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, Indonesia also plays a vital role in global trade routes that pass through the region (Fatima & Jamshed, 2020). To resolve the disputes that occurred, Indonesia adopted various diplomatic strategies aimed at maintaining its territorial sovereignty, promoting peace, and ensuring regional security and stability (Sarjito et al., 2022) (Leginosuko et al., 2021).

Indonesia's diplomatic approach to the South China Sea issue involves various aspects, including cooperation through ASEAN, bilateral and multilateral dialogue, as well as the use of maritime and defense diplomacy channels (Farid et al., 2023). Indonesia also actively encourages dispute resolution based on international law, mainly through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Anton et al., 2021). Amid complex geopolitical dynamics and pressure from various parties, Indonesia's diplomatic strategy is required to be flexible, proactive, and results-oriented.

RESEARCH GAPS

Although many studies have highlighted the disputes in the South China Sea and the role of several countries in dealing with them, several research gaps still require further exploration, especially regarding Indonesia's diplomatic strategy. First, an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of Indonesia's diplomatic strategy still needs to be improved. Many studies focus on the role of China, the United States, and other countries in Southeast Asia, but Indonesia's diplomatic approach in this context needs to be sufficiently explored. As the largest country in ASEAN with its strategic position, Indonesia's contribution and approach to resolving maritime disputes is very crucial. Second, although ASEAN's role in the South China Sea dispute has been widely discussed, research that emphasizes Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN regarding this issue still needs to be improved. How Indonesia encourages regional cooperation, facilitates dialogue, and strengthens ASEAN's position as a collective entity in dealing with



maritime claims requires further exploration. ASEAN has a vital role in ensuring regional security and stability, and as its most influential member, Indonesia is often the leading supporter of ASEAN collective policies. More in-depth research into how Indonesia maximizes its influence within ASEAN could provide a new perspective on the effectiveness of regional diplomacy. Third, there is a need to examine more deeply Indonesia's multilateral and bilateral approaches to the South China Sea issue. Although several studies have highlighted bilateral approaches with large countries such as China and the United States, a systematic study of how Indonesia balances bilateral and multilateral diplomacy still needs to be improved. Finally, there needs to be more research exploring the relationship between Indonesia's domestic political dynamics and its diplomatic strategic management in the South China Sea. How domestic policies, domestic political aspirations, and international pressure influence Indonesia's decisions in the international arena is an area that needs further investigation. Domestic politics often play an essential role in foreign policy, and understanding these dynamics can provide additional insight into the motivations and diplomatic steps taken by Indonesia.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Research that explores Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in the South China Sea dispute can provide various significant benefits for policymakers, academics, and the wider community. This research will deepen our understanding of Indonesian diplomacy by providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in the context of this dispute. In addition, this research will fill the gap in the literature by examining multilateral and bilateral approaches as well as the relationship between domestic political dynamics and foreign policy, thereby enriching academic knowledge about the dynamics of conflict and diplomacy in the Southeast Asian region. This research will also assess the effectiveness of Indonesia's regional diplomacy in maximizing its influence in ASEAN and maintaining regional stability. The results of the research will be helpful for policymakers to design more effective diplomatic strategies and provide recommendations to strengthen Indonesia's position in the international arena. In addition, this study provides a robust database and analytical framework for further research and helps academics and researchers in further exploration of similar topics. By understanding the dynamics of domestic politics that influence international diplomatic strategy, Indonesia can position itself more strategically in international negotiations and cooperation while contributing to increasing public awareness about the importance of diplomacy and foreign policy strategies in maintaining state sovereignty.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to explore Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in the South China Sea dispute. This research utilizes data sources from relevant academic articles, books, research reports, official government documents, theses, and dissertations, accessed through electronic databases such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, as well as university libraries and government documents. Inclusion criteria included articles published within the last five years, relevant to the topic, and peer-reviewed. The data collection procedure involved the identification of literature using specific keywords, initial selection by reading abstracts and conclusions, and organization in reference management software. Data analysis was carried out by coding and categorizing the contents of the articles, synthesizing the findings, critically evaluating the methodology and findings of each article, and compiling interpretations based on the synthesis to describe Indonesia's diplomatic strategy. Validity and reliability are maintained through theoretical triangulation and utilization of peer-reviewed sources. At the same time, research ethics are adhered to by giving credit to the original author and following reliable citation standards. This research seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of Indonesia's diplomatic strategy through a comprehensive and critical literature review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Strategic Management

Strategic management plays a crucial role in providing long-term direction for organizations (Kabeyi, 2019), both in the business, government, and nonprofit sectors (Zheng et al., 2019). Through this process, organizations can establish a clear vision, mission, and goals (Steiss, 2019), as well as formulate concrete steps to achieve them (Hunger, 2020). This not only helps in better and informed decision-making but also enables efficient allocation of resources so that any investment of time, money, and workforce can be optimized to achieve strategic goals. Strategic management allows organizations to be better prepared to face changes and dynamics in the external environment (Haarhaus & Liening, 2020). With an in-depth analysis of conditions,

competition, and internal strengths and weaknesses, organizations can anticipate risks and design plans to manage them proactively. This reduces the negative impact of unexpected changes and allows organizations to make necessary adjustments to their strategies, thereby remaining relevant and competitive in the market (Darvishmotevali et al., 2020). Implementation of planned strategies not only creates clear direction but also increases motivation and coordination within the organization. The shared vision resulting from the strategy process can be a source of inspiration for employees, increase team spirit, and strengthen cooperation between individuals. Strategic management also includes regular monitoring of performance, ensuring that the strategies that have been formulated are implemented well, as well as providing a framework for effective change management. This entire process, from planning to evaluation, makes strategic management an essential tool for organizations seeking long-term success in a competitive and dynamic business environment.

Strategic management allows countries to carry out an in-depth analysis of the international and domestic environment (Hunger, 2020). Through this process, the government can identify potential threats and opportunities and design appropriate strategies to deal with and exploit the situation. For example, in the context of globalization and economic liberalization, countries need comprehensive strategies to compete in global markets, protecting domestic industries from unfair trade practices. This also applies to natural resource management, where good strategies will ensure sustainable and fair use for future generations (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). Strategic management can help in building national unity and integration, with the right strategy, the government can overcome differences and potential conflicts between ethnic, religious, or regional groups. Strategic programs designed to increase community participation and welfare can minimize social instability and strengthen a sense of nationality.

Claims and Disputes in the South China Sea

The South China Sea is located in the western part of the Pacific Ocean and is surrounded by several Southeast Asian and East Asian countries. Its geographic boundaries include China and Taiwan to the north, the Philippines to the east, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia to the south, and Vietnam and Cambodia to the west.



Figure 1. Map of the South China Sea

Source: www.nationsonline.org



The map illustrates the South China Sea, situated in Southeast Asia's portion of the western Pacific Ocean. This sea lies south of China, east and south of Vietnam, west of the Philippines, and north of Borneo (Kalimantan). The eastern coastline of the Malay Peninsula and the southern part of the Gulf of Thailand encircles it. Spanning approximately 3,700,000 square kilometres (1,350,000 square miles), the South China Sea's area surpasses that of India. The region is linked to the East China Sea via the Taiwan Strait and to the Philippine Sea through the Luzon Strait, both being marginal seas in the Pacific Ocean. Several nations border the South China Sea, including Malaysia (via Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia), Thailand (via the Gulf of Thailand), Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia (on Borneo). The South China Sea features numerous coral reefs, atolls, and small islands. Among the prominent archipelagos are the Paracel Islands, under Chinese control, and the Spratly Islands. The Spratly Islands are subject to entire claims by Taiwan, Vietnam, and China, with Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines each asserting claims to parts of the archipelago. (nationsonline.org, nd).

The South China Sea region is rich in natural resources such as oil and natural gas, which are estimated to have significant reserves (Xu et al., 2022), making it a hotly contested exploration target. In addition, this region is one of the most productive fisheries in the world, supporting the lives of millions of regional residents. High biodiversity also makes coral reefs in this area a vital ecosystem for marine life (Wang et al., 2021). The South China Sea is a vital shipping lane with trade value reaching trillions of dollars annually (Zhou et al., 2020), so it has enormous geopolitical significance. Control of this route provides significant strategic influence, making it crucial in the context of maritime security and regional stability. Territorial disputes in this region not only reflect claims over land and resources but also involve issues of national sovereignty, military power, and global power dynamics between major countries and the Asia Pacific region.

The South China Sea has been an arena for interaction and trade between nations for centuries. Since ancient times, these waters have been explored by sailors and traders from various civilizations, including China, India, and Arabia, who used these sea routes to trade spices, silk, and other luxury goods (Kwa & Han, 2023). In the 14th century, the Majapahit maritime empire from Indonesia also controlled most of these waters and established its influence through a robust naval fleet (Wiranto, 2020). The South China Sea is an integral part of the maritime route network known as the Maritime Silk Road, connecting the Western and Eastern worlds in international trade (Xie et al., 2020).

European explorers first arrived in this region in the 16th century, starting with Portuguese expeditions that opened the door to other colonial powers such as Spain, England, and the Netherlands (Zavala, 2022). European influence in the South China Sea region introduced new dynamics in resource control and exploitation, with various colonial countries establishing their trading posts and colonies (Hägerdal, 2024). Finance and trade became a primary focus, with the development of ports such as Malacca and Manila becoming essential trading hubs in the region.

In the 20th century, the South China Sea began to become the focus of more serious territorial disputes (Østhagen, 2020), especially after the discovery of oil and natural gas reserves (Ye et al., 2020). After World War II, various countries in the region began claiming parts of the waters and islands based on their respective historical and geographical investigations. China specifically asserts its historical claims through **the "Nine-Dash Line "** that covers almost the entire South China Sea. At the same time, other countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei also make their territorial claims. These tensions have increased over time due to the significant economic, strategic, and military value of this region, making it one of the geopolitical hotspots of the modern world.

Table 1. Events in the South China Sea

No	Year Period	Incident	Details
1	Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods	Maritime Trade Routes	Before the colonial era, fishermen from various Southeast Asian countries, Chinese, and other traders who traversed maritime trade routes used the sea and islands in the South China Sea. However, formal claims to these territories are rarely stated or strictly enforced.
2	Post-World War II Period	Claims started to appear	After World War II, claims to islands in the South China Sea began to emerge more formally. Under the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco, Japan renounced its claims to islands occupied



			during the war. However, the treaty did not specifically stipulate to whom the territory should be ceded, paving the way for overlapping claims. (<i>iv. San Francisco Peace Treaty, ND</i>)
3	1970s	Claims and Escalations	In the 1970s, the discovery of potential natural resources such as oil and natural gas on the seabed of the South China Sea increased tensions, prompting countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam to claim sovereignty over various islands and coral reefs. China has also begun to aggressively assert its claims based on the so-called "nine-dash line", which describes a vast territorial claim covering most of the South China Sea.
4	1980 to 1990s	Conflict and Confrontation	Open conflict began to occur, including fighting between China and Vietnam around the Spratly and Paracel Islands. These battles often involve patrol ships and armed troops, showing how serious these countries are about defending their claims.
5	2000s	Diplomacy and Rising Tensions	In the early 21st century, ASEAN tried to facilitate negotiations for a peaceful settlement of overlapping claims, but concrete progress was limited. Meanwhile, China continues to expand its physical presence on several islands, even building artificial islands and military facilities. This has sparked international concern and added to tensions with neighbouring countries and global powers such as the United States.
6	2010s to Present	Current Situation	In recent years, the situation in the South China Sea has remained tense, with regular incidents between military and civilian vessels. The United States has stepped up freedom of navigation patrols in the region, challenging China's claims and supporting its regional allies. At the same time, multilateral negotiations continue, but a long-term solution acceptable to all parties remains challenging to achieve.

Source: Obtained from various sources

The table above shows that tensions in the South China Sea have been ongoing for several decades, involving several countries, such as China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. Negotiations between ASEAN and China regarding the South China Sea continue, although they have yet to reach a final agreement. This development reflects the dynamism and complexity of diplomacy and geopolitics in the region.

Even though Indonesia is not directly involved in territorial disputes in the South China Sea (None et al. et al., 2022), this country is still affected by it because it has a significant interest in the stability of this maritime region. The area around the Natuna Islands, part of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), sometimes overlaps with China's 'nine-dash line' claim. This led to several incidents in which Chinese fishing and coast guard vessels entered Indonesia's EEZ waters, sparking diplomatic tensions. Indonesia emphasizes that there are no overlapping claims with China around Natuna while pushing for a peaceful settlement and enforcement of international law such as UNCLOS (Octavian et al. et al., 2023). To protect its sovereignty, Indonesia is increasing its military presence around the Natuna Islands and strengthening its defence capacity. As an influential country in ASEAN, Indonesia also plays an active role in mediation and dialogue between member countries and China to maintain regional stability



and minimize the potential for conflict. Thus, even though it is not directly involved, Indonesia remains vigilant and carries out various diplomatic efforts and increased defence to maintain national interests and regional stability in the South China Sea.

Indonesia's role in ASEAN regarding the South China Sea

Indonesia plays a central role in ASEAN regarding disputes in the South China Sea by prioritizing diplomacy and mediation to maintain regional stability and peace. As one of the founding countries of ASEAN, Indonesia is often trusted to be a communication bridge between member countries involved in territorial claims and China. The approach taken is to encourage dispute resolution through peaceful dialogue and an international legal framework, primarily through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Yusa Djuyandi et al., 2020). Apart from that, Indonesia is also active in fighting for the preparation and implementation of a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea, which is expected to develop clear rules and reduce the risk of conflict in disputed waters. Indonesia also strengthens its role by holding and facilitating multilateral meetings involving ASEAN countries and China to discuss ways to deal with maritime security issues. Through forums such as the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum, Indonesia continues to promote the importance of regional peace and stability. It works to ensure that the South China Sea remains a safe and peaceful open waterway for all countries (Yulia Rimapradesi et al., 2023). These steps show Indonesia's commitment to strengthening ASEAN and maintaining the balance of power in the Southeast Asia region.

Table 2. Indonesia's role regarding the South China Sea issue

No	Year Period	Indonesia's role	Details
1	190-1991	Initiation of a Workshop for Managing Conflict	Indonesia started a "Workshop on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea" in the 1990s. This workshop involves various stakeholders from conflicting countries to have an informal dialogue on how to manage and reduce conflict.
2	2002	Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea – DoC	Indonesia plays an active role in helping to formulate and agree on the DoC between ASEAN and China. This declaration is the first step towards preparing a more comprehensive Code of Conduct (CoC).
3	2011	Initial Stage of CoC Discussion	Indonesia took the initiative in facilitating the first discussions of the CoC, with a vision to create a more binding framework for all parties to maintain responsible behaviour in the South China Sea.
4	2016	Ratification of the Indonesian Sea Map	Indonesia published a revision of its nautical map that strengthens its claim of sovereignty over the waters around the Natuna Islands. This is a response to rising tensions and China's excessive claims in the South China Sea.
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6.	2018	Strengthening Maritime Patrols	Indonesia has begun strengthening its maritime patrols around the North Natuna Islands to protect its maritime rights and sovereignty from foreign ships' illegal activities.
7.	2019	Multilateral Diplomacy in the ASEAN Summit	Indonesia continues to voice the importance of stability and peace in the South China Sea at ASEAN summits in various years, including 2019. In various communiqués and joint



			statements, Indonesia encourages a peaceful settlement based on international law, including UNCLOS.
8.	2020	Increased Diplomacy Efforts	Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi 2020 strengthened diplomatic efforts to reduce maritime tensions. Indonesia actively participates in discussions on maritime-coastal issues and maritime security in various international forums.
9.	2021	Participation in CoC Discussions	Indonesia continues to play a proactive role in the Code of Conduct (CoC) negotiations through various ASEAN meetings to accelerate its finalization and implementation. Indonesia proposed several drafts to ensure the CoC provides clear and binding guidance.
10.	2023	Involvement in ASEAN Chairmanship	When Indonesia assumes the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023, it will prioritize handling the South China Sea dispute as an influential agenda item, facilitating more dialogue and stability initiatives to address regional issues.
11.	2023	Consistency in Multilateral Diplomacy	Indonesia continues to participate in forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) every year to encourage cooperative diplomacy and multilateralism in dispute resolution.

Source: Obtained from Various Sources

The table above shows Indonesia's role through continued involvement; Indonesia builds stability and security in the South China Sea region in a constructive manner and based on international law. Indonesia faces the South China Sea issue by adopting a foreign policy that emphasizes the principle of maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity while being committed to peaceful diplomacy (Ahmad Mustofa, 2022). This policy aims to create regional stability and maritime security and increase cooperation with countries in Southeast Asia and beyond. Through an approach that emphasizes diplomatic dispute resolution, Indonesia actively participates in regional forums such as ASEAN and strengthens bilateral relations with various countries (Ajeng et al. et al., 2023). To secure its maritime interests, Indonesia emphasizes maritime diplomacy and defence diplomacy. This step is realized through joint military exercises, joint maritime patrols, and the exchange of intelligence information with friendly countries. The aim is to build maritime capacity, increase the interoperability of the Indonesian Navy, and strengthen the security presence in the South China Sea region. This is in line with efforts to maintain freedom of navigation and ensure the peaceful handling of disputes by international law (Anak et al. Amandha, 2022).

At the domestic level, economic and political stability have a significant influence on Indonesia's foreign policy in the South China Sea. The government seeks to ensure that maritime policy is aligned with the national development agenda, which includes the exploration of natural resources, transportation routes, and empowerment of maritime communities. With internal solid stability, Indonesia can focus more on implementing a proactive and coordinated maritime strategy. Indonesia also strengthens its position through bilateral and multilateral relations and bases its steps on the principles of international law, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Sarjito et al., 2022). Through international cooperation, Indonesia seeks consensus and support for its approach in the South China Sea. Upholding rights to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and strengthening claims through international legal channels provides legitimacy to Indonesia's actions (B. et al., 2024). Through this combination of strategies, Indonesia seeks to maintain stability and security in the South China Sea while continuing to fight for national interests and support peaceful and fair dispute resolution.

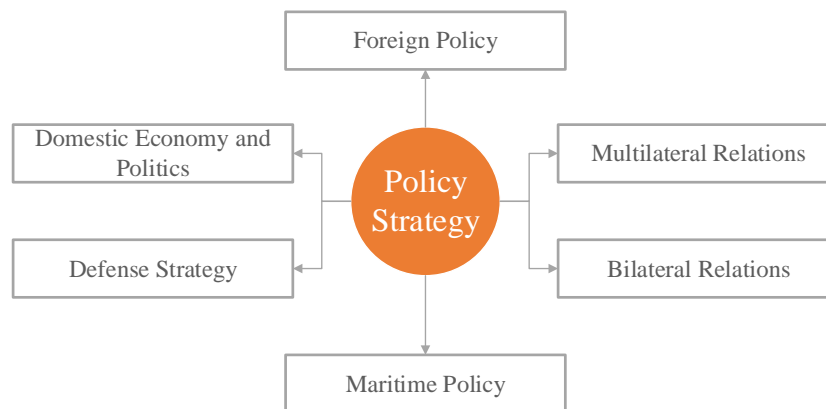


Figure 2. Indonesian Policy Strategy

Source: Research Data, 2024

Foreign Policy

Indonesia's foreign policy has various significant benefits that have a direct impact on domestic policy, especially in terms of security stability, economic development, and improving international reputation. Good foreign policy can help maintain order and state sovereignty, as well as ensure that Indonesia remains respected and recognized in the international community. Through solid diplomatic relations, Indonesia can gain support on global issues and take advantage of opportunities to improve the nation's welfare. One of the main benefits of an effective foreign policy is improved national security. Through cooperation with other countries, Indonesia can increase its defence capacity, organize joint military training, and share intelligence information to face common security threats. This also applies to maritime security, where collaboration with friendly countries can help secure vital maritime trade routes and reduce illegal activities such as piracy and smuggling.

Indonesia faces the South China Sea issue by adopting a foreign policy that emphasizes the principle of maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity through peaceful diplomacy (Charles Pasaribu et al., 2023). This policy aims to create regional stability and maritime security and increase cooperation with countries in Southeast Asia and beyond (Dewa et al. Firdaus, 2022). Through an approach that emphasizes diplomatic dispute resolution, Indonesia actively participates in regional forums such as ASEAN and strengthens bilateral relations with various countries. To secure its maritime interests, Indonesia emphasizes maritime diplomacy and defence diplomacy. This step is realized through joint military exercises, joint maritime patrols, and the exchange of intelligence information with friendly countries (Fahlesa Munabari et al., 2021). The aim is to build maritime capacity, increase the interoperability of the Indonesian Navy, and strengthen the security presence in the South China Sea region. This is in line with efforts to maintain freedom of navigation and ensure the peaceful handling of disputes by international law.

Multilateral Relations

Indonesia's multilateral relations in responding to the South China Sea are essential to maintain regional stability and protect national interests. The South China Sea, which is geopolitically strategic and rich in natural resources, is often a source of tension due to the territorial claims of various countries, including China (Gani et al. et al., 2022). Even though Indonesia is not one of the principal claimants, Natuna waters are often involved in disputes because Indonesia insists that the EEZ there is part of its sovereignty based on UNCLOS (Khoirur et al., 2023). In this case, Indonesia plays an active role through various multilateral forums such as ASEAN and international organizations to address this issue. At the diplomatic level, Indonesia encourages dispute resolution through peaceful means and dialogue. In ASEAN, Indonesia helped push for a Code of Conduct (CoC) to create a dispute resolution mechanism and build trust between countries. Apart from that, Indonesia is also increasing maritime cooperation in the region in the fields of security, maritime law enforcement, and environmental protection (Qurotul 'Aini Septi Farida & Qurotul 'Aini Septi Farida, 2022).

Indonesia's activeness in international organizations shows its commitment to supporting international law related to maritime claims and dispute resolution, including (1) ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and ADMM-Plus, which are critical annual forums in the context of defence cooperation in the Southeast Asia region (Rafyoga et al., 2023). Through this forum,



ASEAN member countries discuss various regional security issues. One of the main topics discussed was maritime defence and security cooperation, considering the importance of maintaining stability and security in these resource-rich waters. This meeting also involves dialogue partners such as China, the United States, Japan, and other countries to discuss critical issues in the South China Sea, find diplomatic solutions, and strengthen multilateral cooperation to prevent conflict in this region. (2) ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), one of the main dialogue forums in the Asia-Pacific region which focuses on regional security issues. This meeting is also held every year. Representatives from ASEAN member countries and dialogue partners discussed issues affecting regional stability. Issues discussed include maritime security, conflict prevention, and various other security challenges in the South China Sea. ARF serves as an essential platform for the exchange of views and strengthening diplomatic relations between countries in the region to create an atmosphere conducive to mutual peace and security. (3) The ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit is a high-level meeting involving ASEAN member countries and three main partners, namely China, Japan, and South Korea. Leaders from these countries gathered to discuss various areas of cooperation, including economic, social, and security. A particular focus that year was security and stability in the region, especially regarding the South China Sea. The discussion includes steps to manage disputes, increase maritime cooperation, and build mechanisms to prevent conflict and maintain peace in these waters.

Bilateral Relations

Indonesia's bilateral relations with various countries in dealing with the South China Sea issue are very strategic to maintain regional stability and protect national interests. Even though Indonesia is not the principal claimant in this dispute, Natuna waters are often a point of dispute with China, which claims most of the South China Sea through the Nine-Dash Line (Renaldi Renaldi et al., 2023). In dealing with this issue, Indonesia has established bilateral relations with several key countries, such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and other countries, to strengthen its position and security in this region (Silvia et al. et al., 2018). One form of cooperation carried out is through joint military exercises and maritime patrols to ensure freedom of navigation and water security (Siniša et al., 2023).

Indonesia actively participates in various meetings and initiatives with countries in Southeast Asia and countries outside the Southeast Asia region, both in a multilateral framework through ASEAN and in bilateral meetings. The following are several examples of meetings and initiatives involving Indonesia and Southeast Asian countries regarding maritime security and the South China Sea: (1) Bilateral Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and the Philippines in 2016, the issues discussed were maritime cooperation and fisheries management, as well as issues in the South China Sea. (2) Trilateral Maritime Patrol Agreement (TMP) between Indonesia and Malaysia in June 2017; the focus of the meeting was increasing coordinated maritime patrols to fight cross-border crime and maintain water security in the Sulu Sea and Sulawesi Sea. (3) Joint Commission for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC), the issues discussed are economic, social, and cultural cooperation, including maritime security in intersecting waters. (4) Vietnam-Indonesia Bilateral Cooperation, the issues discussed include cooperation in various fields including trade, investment, and maritime security and fisheries in the South China Sea. (5) Meeting between Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and US Defense Minister Lloyd Austin in 2021, the issues discussed were maritime defence and security cooperation as well as regional challenges in the South China Sea. (6). The Garuda Shield Joint Military Exercise aims to increase interoperability between the armed forces of the two countries in the fields of maritime defence and security. (7) Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's visit to Indonesia in 2020, the issues discussed were economic and security cooperation, including maritime security in the South China Sea. Previously, in 2016, Japan handed over several patrol boats to Indonesia to improve maritime security. (8) Indonesia-Australia Ministerial Council on Law and Security (MCM), the issues discussed were regional security and maritime security in the South China Sea. (9) Bilateral meeting between Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in 2021, the issues discussed were economic and security cooperation as well as tensions in the South China Sea. (10) Indonesia-China Maritime Cooperation Committee in 2019, discussing maritime and maritime cooperation and expressing concerns regarding the Nine-Dash Line claim.

Maritime Policy

Maritime policy plays a vital role in maintaining state sovereignty, especially for Indonesia, which is the largest archipelagic country in the world. Through maritime policy, countries can enforce their sovereign rights and jurisdiction by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), including the management of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and continental shelf (Siti Sarah et al., 2022). Maritime policy also enables law enforcement at sea to counter illegal activities such as illegal fishing,



smuggling, and other criminal activities through maritime patrols and advanced surveillance technology. In addition, maritime policy plays a role in preserving the marine environment, preventing pollution, and protecting biodiversity, which is very important for the sustainability of marine natural resources (Tamarell et al. et al., 2022).

The maritime policy supports the development of infrastructure such as ports, ships, and maritime security facilities, which strengthens the country's defence capacity and supports the national economy through increasing trade flows and other maritime activities (Yulia Rimapradesi et al., 2023). Strengthening maritime defence and security includes strategies to strengthen the Navy and other maritime security forces, including the procurement of warships, military exercises, and the development of surveillance technology. The existence of solid military forces in maritime areas is essential to prevent and respond to external threats (Yusa Djuyandi et al., 2020). International collaboration and diplomacy are also important aspects of maritime policy, involving cooperation in the areas of security, trade, and environmental conservation. This includes joint military exercises, the exchange of intelligence information, and international agreements on fisheries management or marine protection. In addition, good maritime policies empower coastal communities through economic development, education, and increased welfare so that they can play an active role in protecting territorial waters.

Defense Strategy

Indonesia needs a robust and comprehensive defence strategy, considering its unique geographic, economic, and geopolitical challenges. As the largest archipelagic country in the world, with more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia must ensure its sovereignty over its vast territory and diverse topography. Borders that are vulnerable to intrusion and crucial international trade routes must be secured to maintain economic stability and national security. In addition, the enormous potential of marine resources requires protection from illegal exploitation and international conflict. Non-traditional threats such as terrorism and radicalism also require special attention in Indonesia's defence strategy (Anak et al. Amanda, 2022). Threats from terror groups, both domestic and international, require adequate capabilities for mitigation and rapid response. Defence diplomacy and cooperation with friendly countries are increasingly important. Regional and global relations through joint military exercises and security agreements can strengthen Indonesia's position in the international arena and ensure its neutrality and integrity. Indonesia must be able to maintain its position amidst global competition without losing national sovereignty and integrity (Tamarell et al. et al., 2022).

Indonesia's defence strategy in the South China Sea is becoming increasingly crucial, considering the increasing regional tensions and overlapping claims involving several countries (Macaraig & Fenton, 2021). The South China Sea region has strategic value, both from an economic and military perspective, because it is an important international trade route and is rich in natural resources. To maintain its sovereignty, Indonesia needs a strong military presence in this region, especially around the Natuna Islands, which are often hot spots in regional conflicts. It is believed that the deployment of military personnel and defence infrastructure in this region can increase Indonesia's ability to uphold its maritime sovereignty.

Procurement of Main Weapon System Equipment (Alutsista) is an essential element in strengthening Indonesia's defence capabilities in the South China Sea. Investments in patrol ships, submarines, and maritime reconnaissance aircraft, such as UAVs (uncrewed aerial vehicles), can improve early detection capabilities and rapid response to any acts of aggression. Modernization of the warship fleet, such as frigates and destroyers, is also needed to ensure that the Indonesian Navy can face various threats more efficiently. With the latest military technology, Indonesia can increase its presence and surveillance in disputed areas. Defence cooperation and military diplomacy with friendly countries in the Southeast Asia region and internationally are also part of the defence strategy in the South China Sea. Indonesia can strengthen its relations with ASEAN member countries through joint military exercises, as well as strengthen cooperation with large countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia to provide a balance of power in the region. Joint war training and intelligence sharing can increase the preparedness and capability of the Indonesian Armed Forces in facing contingency situations.

The construction of a modern military base and improvement of defence infrastructure in the Natuna Islands region are also strategic steps to strengthen defence in the South China Sea. This base not only functions as a place for placing defence equipment but also as a logistics, refuelling, and maintenance centre. Thus, the existence of this military base will maximize the effectiveness of military operations in the area. Overall, with a comprehensive approach, including proper procurement of defence equipment and strategic international cooperation, Indonesia can ensure a strong defence in the South China Sea.



Domestic Economy and Politics

Maintaining sovereignty in the South China Sea requires a holistic approach that does not only depend on military power but must also involve domestic economic and political aspects. Investment in maritime infrastructure development and the development of sea-based areas or blue economy could be a strategic step (Wang et al., 2021). Good infrastructure supports logistics and maritime operations, while sea-based economic sectors such as fisheries, maritime tourism, and marine energy enable increased welfare of coastal communities. In addition, establishing foreign investment and international cooperation in the maritime sector will strengthen economic interests and international support for efforts to maintain sovereignty (Gani et al. et al., 2022).

The importance of diversifying the local economy in coastal areas and outer islands must be addressed. By encouraging sectors such as agriculture, creative industry, and manufacturing in these regions, social and economic stability in these regions will be maintained, which ultimately strengthen national defence capabilities. Apart from that, domestic political stability is very crucial. Political consolidation and harmony between various government agencies and political parties in supporting maritime defence policies must be realized. This also includes updating and enforcing strict regulatory laws to protect Indonesia's national interests in territorial waters. Public awareness and participation in maintaining maritime sovereignty need to be increased through education and public campaigns. An aware public will be more proactive in reporting illegal activities and supporting government efforts. Apart from that, maritime diplomacy also plays a vital role in promoting Indonesia's views and positions in international forums such as ASEAN and the UN. This diplomacy can also include establishing and strengthening strategic alliances with friendly countries that have similar interests. Human resource development through education and training in the maritime and defence fields is an essential element in this strategy. By having qualified and competent personnel, Indonesia can manage and defend its maritime territory more effectively. This overall approach, which integrates military power with solid economic policies and strong political support, will provide a solid foundation for facing challenges in the South China Sea.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of a comprehensive diplomatic approach, both bilateral and multilateral, in facing challenges in the South China Sea region. This research emphasizes that Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN is very crucial, considering Indonesia's geographical position, which does not directly touch the conflict areas in the South China Sea but still has urgent strategic interests. In this case, Indonesia can play a role as a mediator and dialogue facilitator to create regional stability and security. In addition, a sustainable economic and political approach is needed to strengthen Indonesia's position in resolving this conflict. Investment in maritime infrastructure development, development of blue economy areas, and improving the welfare of coastal communities are essential elements in this strategy. A stable political approach and consolidation between government agencies and political parties in supporting maritime policy must also be addressed.

Indonesia's maritime diplomacy must focus on increasing public awareness and participation, as well as involving them in maintaining maritime sovereignty. In addition, Indonesia needs to promote its views and positions in international forums such as ASEAN and the UN, as well as establish strategic alliances with friendly countries. Human resource development and training in the maritime and defence fields are the keys to increasing the effectiveness of Indonesia's maritime defence. Overall, the findings of this research indicate that Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in overcoming the South China Sea issue must be holistic, integrating diplomatic, economic, political, and human resource aspects. This integrated approach will enable Indonesia to play a more significant role in creating stability and peace in the South China Sea region.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Indonesia needs to adopt an integrated and multi-dimensional approach to address the South China Sea issue. First, active diplomacy and multilateral cooperation must be strengthened, especially with ASEAN, to create consensus and standard policies and encourage the completion of the South China Sea Code of Conduct. Close bilateral relations with major countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia, and the European Union are also essential to gain international support. Second, maritime defence and security capacity needs to be increased through the modernization of the navy and coast guard, as well as joint military exercises with friendly countries and increased intelligence cooperation. Third, natural resource management must be directed at the sustainable development of the blue economy and preservation of the marine environment, with strict supervision of illegal fishing using advanced surveillance technology.



In addition, improving maritime infrastructure, such as the development of ports and maritime facilities, as well as the use of maritime surveillance technology, is essential. In addition, an active role in international forums such as the UN, as well as the implementation of UNCLOS, can help advocate for peaceful solutions based on international law. Domestically, increasing public awareness and support through education and the involvement of local governments is very important for the security and preservation of the marine environment. Research and development collaboration with universities and research institutions, as well as education and training for diplomats and military personnel, can strengthen Indonesia's ability to handle maritime and geopolitical issues. With these strategies, Indonesia can maintain its territorial sovereignty and contribute to regional stability and security.

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