

## Defense Diplomacy as a Strategic Instrument to Face China's Escalation in the North Natuna Sea

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### ABSTRACT

The urgency lies in the need for a more effective and integrated defense diplomacy strategy to create a real deterrence effect against China's offenses. Defense diplomacy must be able to bridge the gap between symbolic policy and concrete action, with credible military support and solid international cooperation. The purpose of this study is to analyze Defense Diplomacy as a Strategic Instrument to Face China's Escalation in the North Natuna Sea. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with a systematic literature review approach. The results of the study show that Indonesia's defense diplomacy in the North Natuna Sea is a comprehensive strategy that combines military power, international diplomacy, and legal approaches. Through increasing TNI interoperability, modernizing defense equipment, and cooperation with partner countries, Indonesia strengthens defense capabilities while asserting claims based on UNCLOS.

**INTRODUCTION**

The North Natuna Sea is a strategic area that is part of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). However, China's unilateral claims over the concept of the "nine-dash line" have caused tensions in the region, although the claim is not recognized by international law, including by the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration Award. The presence of China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels in these waters has disrupted Indonesia's natural resource survey and exploration activities, as happened in October 2024 when the CCG 5402 ship interfered with a seismic survey by PT Pertamina (Alvania Manek, B. G. 2023).

In response, Indonesia has adopted a defense diplomacy strategy that includes strengthening maritime security cooperation with countries such as Australia, Japan, and the United States, as well as enhancing military capabilities in the Natuna region. These measures aim to safeguard Indonesia's sovereignty and sovereign rights in the North Natuna Sea (Septari & Lumbantoruan 2022).

The following data shows the frequency of incidents between Indonesia and China in the North Natuna Sea:

**Table.1 Frequency of Violations incidents in the North Natuna Sea**

Year	Number of Incidents Recorded	Information
2020	3	Including incidents with fishing boats and CCGs
2021	2	Disruption to oil and gas surveys
2024	3	Disruption to seismic surveys by Pertamina

*Source : Kompas (2024)*

The data in Table 1 shows that the frequency of incidents of violations by China in the North Natuna Sea has remained consistent from year to year, with a peak in 2020 and increasing again in 2024, with three incidents involving fishing vessels and the China Coast Guard (CCG) each being affected. In 2021, although incidents had decreased to two, disruptions still occurred to Indonesia's strategic activities, such as oil and gas surveys. This trend shows that the escalation of threats from China is not temporary, but repetitive and structured, especially against Indonesia's economic interests. In this context, defense diplomacy is a very relevant strategic instrument to be applied, not only as a diplomatic reaction, but as a systematic effort to establish a bargaining position and strengthen international commitment to Indonesia's territorial sovereignty in the North Natuna Sea.

Indonesia has taken various lines of defense diplomacy to respond to the increasing escalation carried out by China in the North Natuna Sea region. One of the steps taken since 2022 is the preparation of a draft maritime cooperation agreement between the Maritime Security Agency of the Republic of Indonesia (Bakamla RI) and the China Coast Guard. However, until the end of 2024, this agreement has not reached the final stage because it is still in the process of long and complex discussions. These efforts show an initial commitment, but have not yet resulted in real changes on the ground (ANTARA News. 2024).

Furthermore, in 2024, Indonesia will hold several important bilateral meetings with the Chinese Coast Guard, which will be held in Jakarta and Hanoi. The meeting aims to discuss improving maritime security cooperation and the management of sensitive waters. Unfortunately, despite the communication forums that have been opened, Chinese Coast Guard vessels are still conducting patrols and violations in the area claimed to be part of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This shows that the diplomacy approach has not been effective enough to dampen provocative actions carried out by China (Reuters, 2024).

In addition to bilateral meetings, Indonesia has also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China regarding maritime security cooperation in 2024. This MoU includes capacity building, information exchange, and strengthening communication between coast guard agencies. However, even though this agreement has been ratified, disruption to survey and exploration activities by the China Coast Guard remains. Thus, although defense diplomacy measures have been carried out systematically and consistently, the results have not been able to stop China's aggressive activities in real terms (AP News, 2024).

This condition highlights that Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy, while important and appropriate in a sensitive regional context, still faces major challenges in its implementation. This requires strengthening synergy between diplomacy and military power, as well as support from regional strategic partners to ensure that Indonesia's sovereignty and sovereign rights in the North Natuna Sea are truly protected (Suara, 2024).

In the context of defending Indonesia's maritime territory, *Das Sein* pointed out that currently the North Natuna Sea continues to escalate due to the presence of Chinese Coast Guard ships that repeatedly violate Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) area. Although the government has undertaken various approaches to defense diplomacy, such as bilateral meetings and the signing of MoUs, the reality on the ground shows that violations continue to occur and there are no concrete results yet capable of containing China's aggressiveness. Meanwhile, *das Sollen* demanded the effectiveness of a defense diplomacy strategy that is not only symbolic or administrative, but is able to create real deterrence against sovereignty violations. This is where the gap lies: there is an imbalance between the diplomatic policies that have been carried out and the actual results on the ground that have not been able to create maximum stability and protection for Indonesia's maritime territory in the North Natuna Sea. Taking these dynamics into account, defense diplomacy becomes a strategic instrument for Indonesia to confront China's escalation in the North Natuna Sea, through an approach that combines military power and international diplomacy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of China's escalation in the North Natuna Sea, defense diplomacy can be seen as a crucial strategic instrument to strengthen Indonesia's position both in terms of security and international diplomacy. As stated by Cottey and Forster (2009), defense diplomacy is the use of military and defense resources to support a country's foreign and security policy through cooperation, joint training, and exchange of military information. In the case of Indonesia, efforts to establish bilateral relations and conduct joint military exercises with partner countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia demonstrate the practical application of this concept. Sarjito and Perwita (2024) explained that modern defense diplomacy includes three main elements, namely confidence building measures, capacity building, and defense industry development. Indonesia's action in inviting other countries for joint exercises and strengthening the capabilities of Bakamla and the Indonesian Navy in securing Natuna waters is a form of confidence building and capacity building that is in line with the strategy of preventing conflict and maintaining regional stability. Furthermore, as stated by Syawfi (2009), the goal of defense diplomacy is to pursue national interests, strengthen foreign relations, and reduce uncertainty through strategic communication. In this context, Indonesia's defense diplomacy is not only a passive defense tool, but also a strategic means to suppress China's dominance in a peaceful and measured manner, while maintaining the principles of sovereignty and international cooperation.

### *Minilateralism*

In the face of China's escalation in the North Natuna Sea, *the minilateralism* approach can be a complementary strategy within the framework of Indonesia's defense diplomacy. The concept of minilateralism, as explained by Moisés Naím (2009), refers to collaboration between a small group of countries to respond to specific issues more quickly and effectively than traditional multilateral forums. In the context of the Indo-Pacific region, this approach has become particularly relevant given the need for a rapid strategic response to the changing dynamics of maritime security. Koga (2022) shows that minilateralism allows countries with aligned interests and views to devise a common strategy in response to China's increasing influence and provocative actions in the regional region. This can be seen in trilateral or quadrilateral cooperation initiatives involving Indonesia with countries such as the United States, Japan, and Australia in joint military exercises, increased interoperability, and maritime information exchange. According to Satake (2023), the minilateral approach not only speeds up the decision-making process, but also allows for more specific security strategy adjustments to regional threats such as China's aggressive actions in the North Natuna Sea. Therefore, minilateralism is a strategic instrument that is in line with Indonesia's defense diplomacy in building collective capabilities and strengthening bargaining positions in the midst of geopolitical competition in the region.

Based on the causal relationship between dependent variables and independent variable, the researcher has provided a framework generated for this research below:

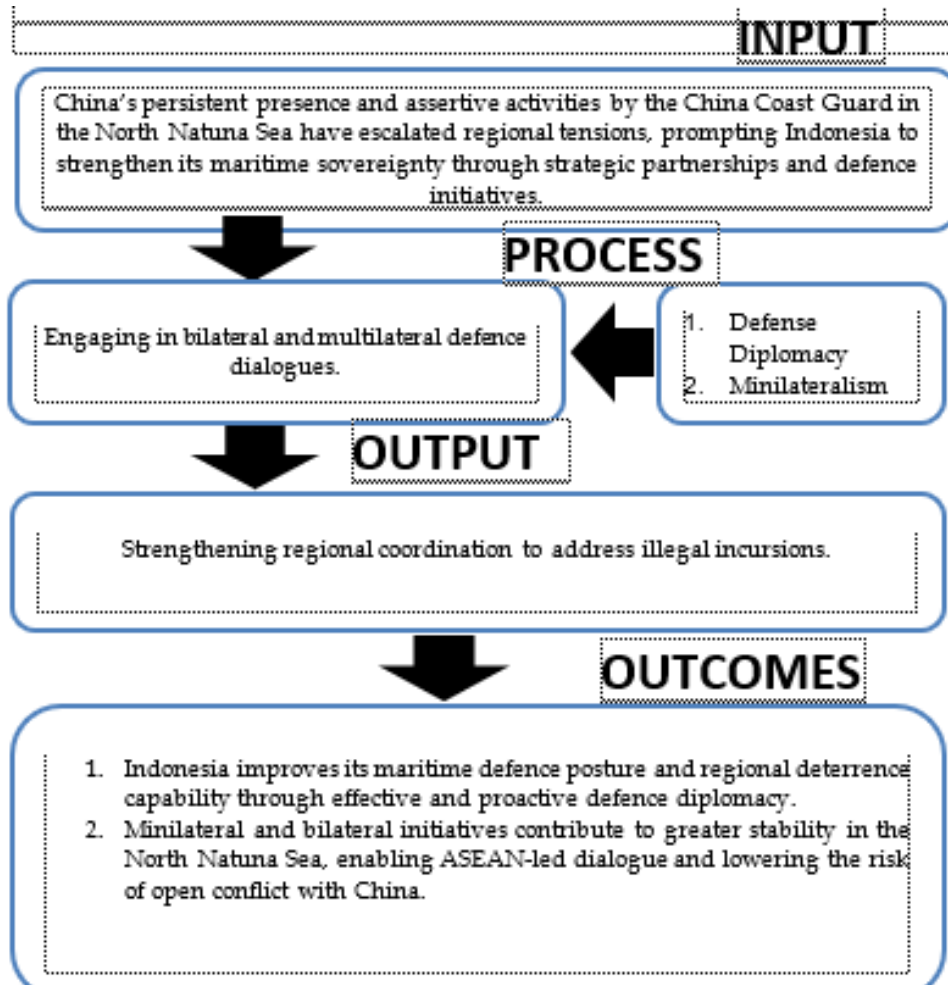
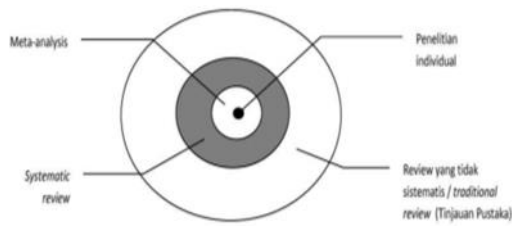


Figure.1 Framework

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, evaluate, and synthesise previous scholarly works related to defence diplomacy and strategic responses to China's maritime assertiveness, particularly in the context of the North Natuna Sea. The SLR process follows a structured approach: defining research questions, developing a review protocol, conducting systematic searches of academic databases, selecting relevant studies, extracting key data, and integrating the findings. Through this method, the study aims to build a comprehensive understanding of how defence diplomacy especially in minilateral and bilateral forms has been utilised by Indonesia and other regional actors as a strategic tool to manage tensions, deter aggression, and reinforce maritime sovereignty in contested waters.



Gambar 3. Kedudukan Metodologi Systematic Review dalam Metodologi yang Lain

### Figure 2. SLR Systematic

Journal Source : (Siswanto, 2010)

The SLR process identifies, evaluates, and synthesises all relevant prior research concerning defence diplomacy and strategic approaches to maritime security, particularly in response to China’s escalating presence in the North Natuna Sea. This includes collecting and analysing data from scholarly sources such as Google Scholar, Mendeley, and ResearchGate, ensuring that the reviewed studies are both nationally and internationally indexed. The core steps in this review consist of formulating research questions, conducting structured literature searches, selecting relevant academic articles, analysing qualitative insights, applying quality control measures, and compiling the final report. The SLR method proves valuable in synthesising theoretical and practical perspectives on defence diplomacy, offering a balanced foundation for understanding how strategic diplomatic instruments are employed to safeguard Indonesia’s maritime sovereignty (Siswanto, 2010).

## Systematic Literature Review

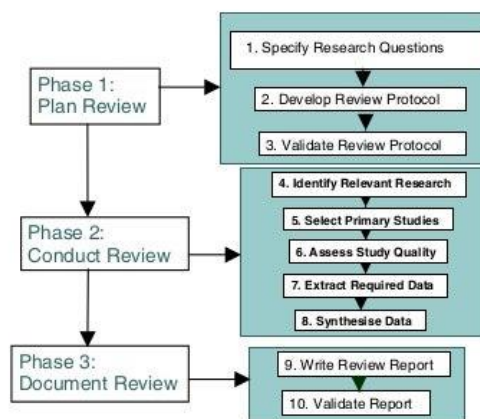


Fig. 1. Systematic literature review process.

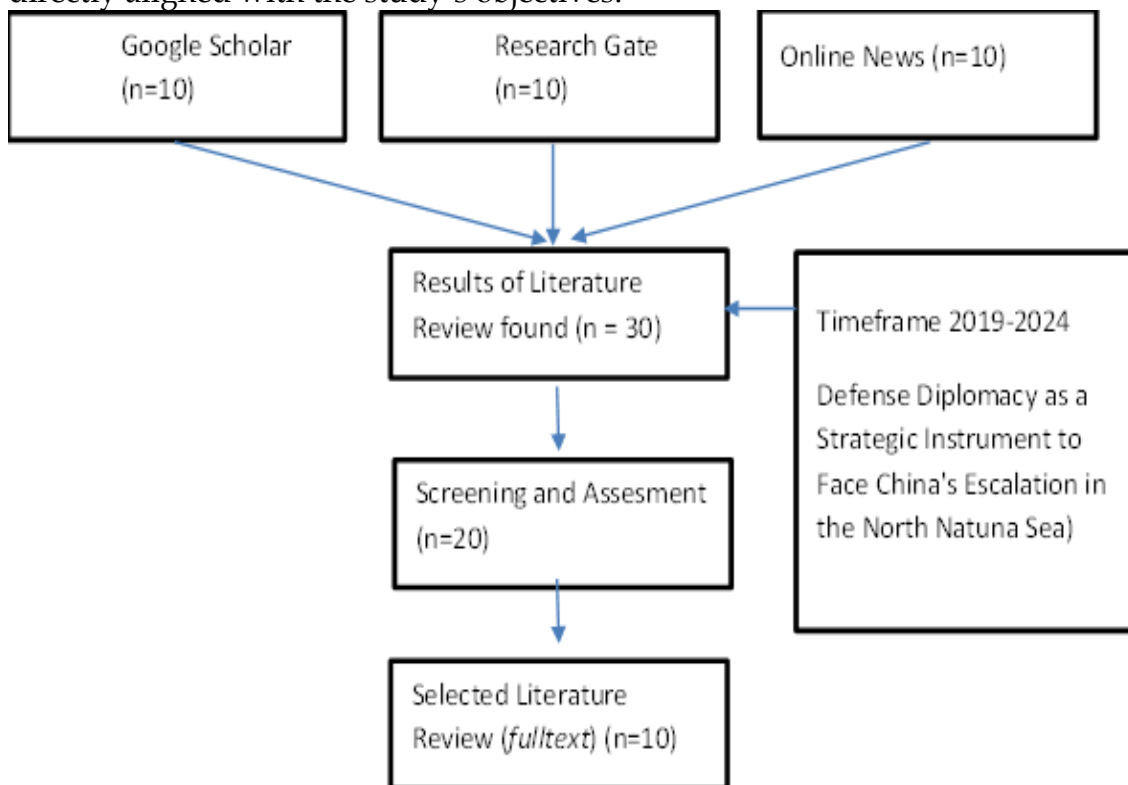
### Figure 3. SLR Process

Journal Source : (Siswanto, 2010)

### Stages of Data Collection in SLR

This research is designed to answer strategic questions related to Indonesia's use of defence diplomacy as a means to address and counter China's maritime escalation in the North Natuna Sea. Systematic literature searches were conducted through credible sources such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate using keywords including "defence diplomacy," "China Coast Guard," "North Natuna Sea," and "maritime security strategy." To ensure data quality, the study prioritised journal articles indexed nationally and internationally. Literature selection and screening were based on the relevance to the research question and the methodological robustness of each publication.

In the final stages, data analysis and synthesis were conducted to identify key themes such as Indonesia's diplomatic posture, patterns of regional defence cooperation, and the role of unilateralism in strengthening maritime security. These findings were summarised to develop strategic insights into how defence diplomacy has been employed to deter encroachments, preserve sovereignty, and reduce the risk of open conflict. The journal selection process involved systematic steps to ensure the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed sources directly aligned with the study's objectives.



**Figure 4. Steps of Literature Review**

*Source : Data Processed by Researchers, 2024*

Based on the diagram presented, the literature review process focuses on analysing Indonesia’s use of defence diplomacy as a strategic response to China’s growing assertiveness in the North Natuna Sea. The review incorporated sources from Google Scholar (n=10), ResearchGate (n=10), and online news portals (n=10), resulting in 30 relevant studies identified within the timeframe of 2019–2024. These studies were further screened and assessed for quality and relevance, narrowing the selection to 20 items, with 10 full-text sources selected for in-depth analysis.

This process highlights the rigorous approach undertaken to ensure the literature directly supports the research aim evaluating the effectiveness and limitations of Indonesia’s defence diplomacy in addressing maritime security threats posed by China. The selected sources provided comprehensive insight into diplomatic negotiations, regional cooperation, and the evolving dynamics of maritime defence strategy in the Natuna region.

## RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis and search of journals and online news, the researcher conducted mapping to facilitate the literature review process presented in the following table:

**Table 2. Previous Research**

No.	Researcher & Year (APA)	Heading	Methodology	Key Findings
1.	Sarjito, A. (2024)	<i>Securing the North Natuna Sea: Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy Strategy</i>	Qualitative; Document Analysis & Member Interviews	Emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive and adaptive defense diplomacy strategy to secure the North Natuna Sea.
2.	Santoso, T. I. (2022)	<i>China's Aggressive Action in the Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone of the North Natuna Sea: Perspective of the TNI's Main Tasks</i>	Qualitative; Case Study	Recommend increased interoperability between TNI units and related institutions to deal with Chinese aggressiveness in the ZEEI.
3.	Kusuma, W. S., Halkis, M., & Yusgiantoro, P. (2022)	<i>Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy against Territorial Violations by</i>	Qualitative; Case Study	Showing that military exercises can serve as a form of defense diplomacy to

		<i>China in the Waters of the Natuna Islands through the Implementation of the 2016 Yudha Air Force Angkasa Peak Exercise</i>		assert territorial sovereignty.
4.	Khairunnisa, D. K. (2017)	<i>Indonesian Defense Diplomacy in Facing the Threat of Chinese Claims in the Natuna Waters for the Period of 2014-2016</i>	Qualitative; Policy analysis	Explained Indonesia's defense diplomacy efforts to improve maritime defense in the Natuna waters in the face of Chinese claims.
5.	Manek, B. G. A. (2023)	<i>Indonesia's Air Defense Strategy: The North Natuna Sea Dispute Case</i>	Qualitative; document analysis	Suggested the implementation of the A2/AD strategy to deal with China's strategic operations in the North Natuna Sea.

Source : Data Processed from Various Sources, 2024

**Table 3. Research Grouping**

No	Results of Analysis	Correlated	Not Correlated
1	Role of Defense Diplomacy in Mitigating Tensions in the Natuna Sea	7 Research	3 Research
2	Strategies for Strengthening Indonesia's Maritime Sovereignty	4 Research	6 Research

Source : Data Processed by Researchers from Various Sources, 2024

### ***Role of Defense Diplomacy in Mitigating Tensions in the Natuna Sea***

The role of defense diplomacy in mitigating tensions in the North Natuna Sea is a critical aspect of Indonesia's strategy to safeguard its maritime sovereignty in the face of escalating challenges, particularly from China. This region has become a flashpoint of geopolitical tension due to conflicting territorial claims, notably over the waters surrounding the Natuna Islands. Indonesia's defense diplomacy seeks to strike a balance between maintaining sovereignty, engaging in peaceful diplomacy, and enhancing its defense capabilities to deter any potential escalation of conflicts. The approach incorporates a comprehensive range of diplomatic, military, and economic measures designed to protect Indonesia's interests in the Natuna Sea.

Indonesia's defense diplomacy strategy is built on the principle of active engagement, particularly through multilateral forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as direct bilateral discussions with involved parties like China. According to Sarjito (2024), the success of this defense diplomacy hinges on its adaptability and comprehensive nature, addressing not only military concerns but also diplomatic and economic factors. Sarjito's study highlights the importance of building strong relationships with regional partners and international stakeholders, which can act as a deterrent against aggressive actions in Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The research emphasizes that Indonesia's approach involves a mix of traditional diplomacy, leveraging international law, and military readiness, which together help mitigate tensions without resorting to confrontation.

An essential component of Indonesia's defense diplomacy is the enhancement of its military interoperability, particularly within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). Santoso (2022) explores this aspect in detail, particularly how the TNI has adapted its operational capabilities to respond effectively to Chinese provocations in the Natuna Sea. He suggests that the TNI's growing focus on enhancing interoperability with other state agencies, such as the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is crucial in formulating a coordinated response to external threats. The integration of military forces and civilian institutions ensures that Indonesia can present a united front when engaging in diplomatic negotiations or responding to maritime incursions. This coordinated strategy, according to Santoso, not only strengthens Indonesia's deterrent capabilities but also reinforces its commitment to peaceful dispute resolution through diplomatic channels.

Furthermore, Kusuma, Halkis, and Yusciantoro (2022) argue that military exercises, such as the TNI AU's *Latihan Puncak Angkasa Yudha* in 2016, play a dual role in defense diplomacy. While these exercises primarily enhance military readiness, they also serve as a diplomatic tool, signaling Indonesia's firm stance on its territorial integrity. These military drills, often conducted in the proximity of contested areas like the Natuna Sea, serve as a reminder of Indonesia's readiness to defend its waters, while simultaneously providing a platform for diplomatic engagement with regional and global powers. By demonstrating its military capabilities through visible, large-scale exercises, Indonesia signals to

China and other stakeholders that it is committed to protecting its sovereignty, without resorting to outright aggression.

Indonesia's defense diplomacy also extends to international legal frameworks, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Khairunnisa (2017) highlights that Indonesia consistently emphasizes its legal rights under UNCLOS to safeguard its territorial claims in the Natuna Sea. The application of international law serves as a cornerstone of Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, providing legitimacy to its claims and actions in the face of external challenges. Indonesia's strategic use of international law allows it to present a reasoned argument in global forums, promoting peaceful conflict resolution while reinforcing its rights over its maritime territories. This approach is especially important in countering China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, which have been at the heart of regional tensions.

The integration of defense diplomacy and international law is not only a reactive measure but also a proactive strategy to prevent further escalation of tensions. Fibrianto et al. (2022) argue that Indonesia's use of defense diplomacy has successfully fostered stronger regional cooperation, particularly with ASEAN nations. This cooperation is critical in creating a collective security framework that can address maritime threats more effectively. For instance, joint naval patrols and information-sharing agreements within ASEAN contribute to a more coordinated response to incursions by foreign vessels in the Natuna Sea. By fostering unity and collaboration with neighboring countries, Indonesia strengthens its position on the international stage and enhances its ability to manage tensions without compromising its national interests.

In addition to military and diplomatic measures, Indonesia's defense diplomacy is also increasingly focusing on the role of defense technology. Manek (2023) proposes that Indonesia's investment in advanced defense technologies, such as air and sea surveillance systems, plays a vital role in monitoring and securing its maritime boundaries. The use of cutting-edge technology not only strengthens Indonesia's defense capabilities but also serves as a diplomatic tool, demonstrating Indonesia's capacity to manage its own security in the face of external threats. Such technological advancements enhance Indonesia's ability to monitor the vast expanse of the Natuna Sea, providing real-time data that supports both military operations and diplomatic negotiations.

Moreover, Indonesia's defense diplomacy has significant economic and social dimensions. As part of its broader strategy to strengthen national security, the government has been promoting initiatives aimed at developing the local economy in the Natuna Islands, which directly impacts regional stability. By fostering economic development through infrastructure projects and local community engagement, Indonesia can strengthen its territorial claims and create a more stable environment that is less susceptible to external interference. Pandoe et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of social defense strategies in the Natuna Islands, highlighting how local communities can contribute to national defense efforts by being active participants in regional security initiatives. This community engagement, supported by defense diplomacy, plays a vital role in ensuring long-term stability in the region.

In conclusion, the role of defense diplomacy in mitigating tensions in the Natuna Sea is multifaceted, incorporating military readiness, legal frameworks, international cooperation, and economic strategies. As the geopolitical landscape in the South China Sea continues to evolve, Indonesia's defense diplomacy will remain a central pillar of its efforts to safeguard its sovereignty while promoting peaceful coexistence in the region. By integrating various elements of diplomacy, Indonesia is able to maintain a delicate balance between national defense and international cooperation, ensuring that its territorial claims are respected while fostering stability in the face of external challenges. The ongoing success of this strategy depends on its ability to adapt to new challenges and leverage both hard and soft power to advance Indonesia's interests in the Natuna Sea.

### **Strategies for Strengthening Indonesia's Maritime Sovereignty**

Indonesia's maritime sovereignty, particularly in the Natuna Sea, has increasingly become a focal point in the country's defense and diplomatic strategy. As tensions rise due to China's expanding territorial claims and activities in the South China Sea, Indonesia faces significant challenges in safeguarding its maritime borders, protecting its economic interests, and asserting its sovereignty. One of the most strategic areas of focus is the Natuna Sea, a region rich in natural resources and strategically located in the heart of Southeast Asia's maritime routes.

The Indonesian government has responded to these challenges with a combination of defense diplomacy, military readiness, and diplomatic initiatives. A core element in strengthening Indonesia's maritime sovereignty is the use of defense diplomacy, which includes enhancing relationships with international partners and establishing a strong, unified defense posture to deter external threats. As discussed in various studies, Indonesia's approach to defense diplomacy in the Natuna Sea emphasizes the integration of military exercises, international partnerships, and a robust defense strategy to assert Indonesia's claims and rights over the area.

### ***Defense Diplomacy and Indonesia's Strategic Engagements***

Sarjito's (2024) research titled *Securing the North Natuna Sea: Indonesia's Defense Diplomacy Strategy* underscores the importance of a comprehensive and adaptive defense diplomacy strategy. According to Sarjito, Indonesia's engagement in defense diplomacy serves not only to safeguard its territorial integrity but also to strengthen its global standing. By fostering stronger military-to-military relationships with key international allies and regional partners, such as the United States, Australia, and ASEAN member states, Indonesia aims to create a deterrence against aggressive actions in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This strategy includes joint military training, exchange programs, and the deployment of defense assets in the Natuna Sea.

This diplomatic approach aligns with Kusuma et al. (2022) who argue that military exercises, like the *Puncak Angkasa Yudha* (2016), serve as essential tools in demonstrating Indonesia's readiness to defend its maritime territories. Such exercises not only strengthen Indonesia's military capabilities but also send a strong signal to both regional and international actors regarding Indonesia's firm stance on the Natuna Sea dispute. Kusuma et al. (2022) found that such military training, coupled with strategic diplomacy, functions as an effective form of defense diplomacy, emphasizing sovereignty while fostering international cooperation in defense and security.

### ***Military Modernization and Strategic Defense Postures***

A key element in strengthening Indonesia's maritime sovereignty is military modernization. The Indonesian military, particularly the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL), has been at the forefront of securing Indonesia's maritime borders. Santoso's (2022) study, *Aksi Agresivitas Cina Pada Zona Ekonomi Eksklusif Indonesia Laut Natuna Utara: Perspektif Tugas Pokok TNI*, highlights the growing need for interoperability among the various branches of Indonesia's military. Santoso stresses the importance of improving coordination between the Indonesian Navy, Air Force, and Army to address China's increasing presence in the region, particularly in Indonesia's EEZ.

A major focus of Indonesia's military response to China's actions is the enhancement of defense technology and the modernization of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). This includes the development of advanced surveillance systems, the acquisition of modern naval vessels, and the improvement of Indonesia's air and sea defense capabilities. The development of Air Defense (A2/AD) systems, as recommended by Manek (2023) in *Strategi Pertahanan Udara Indonesia: Kasus Sengketa Laut Natuna Utara*, serves as an essential strategy in countering external threats, particularly China's growing influence in the region. By developing and deploying these systems, Indonesia aims to increase its military presence and deterrence capacity in the Natuna Sea. The A2/AD strategy involves the deployment of advanced air and missile defense systems, designed to prevent adversaries from operating freely within the region.

Manek (2023) also advocates for increasing the operational readiness of the Indonesian Navy and Air Force. His research highlights the importance of equipping these forces with modern platforms capable of countering China's growing naval and air presence in the region. This is particularly critical in the Natuna Sea, where China has frequently engaged in provocative activities that challenge Indonesia's maritime sovereignty.

### ***Interagency Collaboration and National Defense Synergy***

A vital component in safeguarding Indonesia's maritime sovereignty is the strengthening of interagency collaboration. Fibrianto et al. (2022) emphasize the need for greater cooperation between Indonesia's military, government agencies, and local communities. As noted in their research, the successful management of Indonesia's maritime borders requires the combined efforts of various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Defense, the National Police, and local governments in Natuna. Enhanced cooperation ensures that defense initiatives are well-coordinated and effective.

The collaboration between military agencies and other institutions helps to optimize the use of resources and intelligence in responding to threats in Indonesia's EEZ. For example, joint operations between the TNI and the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) provide comprehensive surveillance and enforcement of Indonesia's maritime claims. This is crucial in deterring illegal activities, such as illegal fishing, which is a major concern in the Natuna Sea. Fibrianto et al. (2022) argue that enhancing the interoperability of Indonesia's defense agencies is essential for maintaining control over these critical maritime zones.

Moreover, the involvement of local communities in border defense is also emphasized. Local residents in the Natuna region play an important role in identifying and reporting suspicious activities. Community-based surveillance programs, supported by the military, contribute to the broader efforts of securing the region and reinforcing Indonesia's maritime claims. Pandoe et al. (2021) highlight the importance of social defense strategies and community empowerment in addressing the challenges of securing Indonesia's maritime frontiers.

### ***Legal and Diplomatic Measures***

Alongside military and defense efforts, Indonesia has also pursued legal avenues to defend its maritime sovereignty. One such measure is the firm rejection of China's "nine-dash line," which claims vast areas of the South China Sea, including parts of the Natuna Sea. As outlined by Khairunnisa (2017) in her research on Indonesia's defense diplomacy, legal frameworks, such as international maritime law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), have been instrumental in strengthening Indonesia's position in the dispute. Indonesia has consistently emphasized its position through diplomatic channels, including ASEAN, and sought support from international bodies such as the United Nations. This legal and diplomatic strategy is aimed at reaffirming Indonesia's rights under international law and protecting its maritime interests from external encroachments.

In conclusion, Indonesia's strategy to strengthen its maritime sovereignty in the Natuna Sea involves a multi-faceted approach that combines defense diplomacy, military modernization, interagency collaboration, and legal advocacy. By enhancing its military readiness and fostering stronger international alliances, Indonesia aims to protect its territorial integrity against external threats, particularly from China. These strategies, supported by the findings of previous research, emphasize the importance of a comprehensive and

adaptive approach to securing Indonesia's maritime borders, ensuring that the Natuna Sea remains a vital part of the nation's economic and security interests. Through continuous efforts in these areas, Indonesia can enhance its sovereignty and safeguard its maritime domain in the face of growing regional challenges.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Indonesia's defense diplomacy plays a very important role in easing tensions in the North Natuna Sea, by combining a comprehensive range of approaches, ranging from military power to international diplomacy. This strategy includes increasing the interoperability of the TNI with related agencies, conducting military exercises that demonstrate the country's readiness to defend territorial sovereignty, and the use of international law such as UNCLOS to strengthen Indonesia's claims. In addition, Indonesia also utilizes cutting-edge defense technology to improve maritime surveillance and security capabilities. This approach does not only rely on military power, but also involves regional cooperation, such as through ASEAN, as well as economic development efforts in the Natuna region to strengthen social stability. Thus, Indonesia's defense diplomacy not only focuses on conflict prevention, but also strengthens the country's position in maintaining its sovereignty and territorial security in the midst of increasingly complex geopolitical challenges. The success of this strategy depends heavily on its ability to adapt to the dynamics of the situation and utilize various aspects of state strength, both hard and soft, in safeguarding Indonesia's national interests in the Natuna Sea.

Indonesia's strategy in strengthening maritime sovereignty, particularly in the Natuna Sea, is an integrated effort that includes defense diplomacy, military modernization, cross-agency collaboration, and international legal approaches. In the face of China's increasing unilateral claims and aggressive activities in the region, Indonesia is leveraging defense diplomacy through military cooperation with partner countries such as the US and Australia, as well as the implementation of joint military exercises as a signal of readiness. The modernization of the TNI, especially the Indonesian Navy and the Air Force, is also strengthened through the procurement of advanced surveillance technology, air defense systems (A2/AD), and increased combat preparedness. In addition, the synergy between the TNI, Bakamla, the Ministry of Defense, and local communities in Natuna strengthens the overall maritime security response. The role of the community in community-based supervision is an important part of maintaining the country's maritime boundaries. On the other hand, the legal approach through the rejection of the nine-dash line claim and the strengthening of Indonesia's position under UNCLOS demonstrates Indonesia's commitment to upholding international law. With this comprehensive and adaptive strategy, Indonesia is not only strengthening its defense, but also strengthening its diplomatic position in safeguarding the Natuna Sea as an integral part of sovereignty and national interests.

The government needs to strengthen the synergy between defense diplomacy, defense modernization, and international law enforcement with a more integrated and sustainable approach. Priority must be given to improving the capabilities of the Indonesian Navy and the Air Force, including the procurement of patrol boats, reconnaissance aircraft, and advanced air defense systems, as well as increasing interoperability between agencies such as the TNI, Bakamla, and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. In addition, it is necessary to expand the coastal community empowerment program in Natuna as part of the universal defense system, as well as strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position in international forums such as ASEAN and the United Nations to affirm sovereign rights in accordance with UNCLOS.

### ADVANCED RESEARCH

Further research on *Defense Diplomacy as a Strategic Instrument to Counter China's Escalation in the North Natuna Sea* needs to expand its scope by considering the direct involvement of other regional actors such as ASEAN, the United States, and China, in order to understand the multilateral dynamics that affect Indonesia's response. In addition, the focus that has been dominant on the military aspect needs to be balanced with non-military approaches such as economic diplomacy, civil maritime cooperation, and the role of non-state actors in strengthening maritime sovereignty. The resilience of Indonesia's defense diplomacy to changes in domestic politics and international pressures also needs to be analyzed, including its effectiveness in maintaining long-term stability. Follow-up studies should also examine the international community's perception of Indonesia's response as well as the long-term impact of the strategies implemented on the stability of the North Natuna Sea region.

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