IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 4, Issue 2, June 2024
Impact Factor: 7.53

Indonesia and Southeast Asia's Maritime Security Environment

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Abstract: *Indonesia occupies a uniquely consequential position within the Southeast Asian maritime security architecture, straddling the Indian and Pacific Oceans and controlling the principal sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that pass through the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok. As the world's largest archipelagic state, comprising more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia's maritime security environment is shaped by an intricate interplay of constitutional provisions, statutory law, executive policy, and shifting political leadership. This article undertakes a qualitative, document-based content analysis of Indonesia's maritime security architecture, situating it within the wider Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific strategic context. It traces the constitutional and legal foundations of Indonesian maritime sovereignty — from the 1957 Djuanda Declaration and Article 25A of the 1945 Constitution (as amended) to Law No. 17/1985 ratifying UNCLOS, Law No. 6/1996 on Indonesian Waters, and Law No. 32/2014 on Maritime Affairs — before analysing the principal policy instruments through which Indonesia has operationalised its maritime ambitions: the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) doctrine articulated by President Joko Widodo in 2014 and codified through Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 on the Indonesian Ocean Policy (IOP), and the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) defence-modernisation programme (2010–2023). Employing an explanatory research design, the study examines both traditional threats — principally the South China Sea/North Natuna Sea dispute with the People's Republic of China — and non-traditional threats, including piracy and armed robbery in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, transnational smuggling, and maritime terrorism. A content-analytic tabulation of policy documents, incident reports, and defence budgets reveals a persistent gap between doctrinal ambition and institutional-material capacity, alongside a recurring tension between Indonesia's economic interdependence with China and its sovereignty imperatives in the Natuna Sea. The findings indicate that while Indonesia has constructed a comparatively dense legal-institutional scaffolding for maritime governance, implementation continues to be constrained by bureaucratic fragmentation among more than a dozen maritime agencies, chronically low defence expenditure (under 1 percent of GDP for much of the past decade), and the volatility of great-power competition between the United States and China.*

Keywords: Indonesia, maritime security, Global Maritime Fulcrum, Indonesian Ocean Policy, Minimum Essential Force, South China Sea, Natuna, ASEAN, UNCLOS, archipelagic state