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Indonesia and Southeast Asia's Maritime Security Environment

Tanushree Sarkar
Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science
Ramsaday College Amta, Howrah, Kolkata, India

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

I. INTRODUCTION

The maritime domain has re-emerged as the central theatre of twenty-first-century geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific, and nowhere is this more evident than in Southeast Asia, a region bound together — and periodically divided — by the sea. Situated between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, Southeast Asia hosts some of the world's busiest and most strategically consequential waterways, including the Straits of Malacca, Singapore, Sunda, and Lombok, through which a substantial share of global seaborne trade and energy shipments transit annually (Modern Diplomacy, 2023). At the geographic and geopolitical centre of this maritime space sits the Republic of Indonesia — the world's largest archipelagic state,

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comprising more than 17,000 islands, roughly 54,720 kilometres of coastline, and a maritime jurisdiction that exceeds its land territory several times over.

Since independence, Indonesian statecraft has continuously wrestled with the paradox described by its founding maritime strategists: the sea as both a unifying medium binding a fragmented archipelago into a single nation-state, and as a permeable frontier exposing the country to piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, and great-power intrusion. This tension was first articulated in the 1957 Djuanda Declaration, which asserted Indonesian sovereignty over the waters connecting its islands and became, in the words of Indonesian commentators, the nation's "second declaration of independence" (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia [UPI] Cibiru, 2023). Six decades later, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo revived and reframed this maritime consciousness through the doctrine of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), declaring at the 2014 East Asia Summit that Indonesia, as "a fulcrum between two oceans," was "obliged" to strengthen its maritime defences for the sake of both its own sovereignty and regional stability (Center for Strategic and International Studies [CSIS], 2014).

Contemporary developments have sharpened the urgency of this maritime consciousness. Since 2019, China Coast Guard and militia vessels have periodically intruded into Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the Natuna Islands, an area Indonesia designated the "North Natuna Sea" in 2017 precisely to underscore its jurisdiction. Indonesia's operational response — including the deployment of additional naval assets and fighter jets in early 2020, and joint military exercises such as the August 2023 ASEAN Solidarity Exercise (ASEX 01-Natuna) held in Natuna waters — illustrates both the persistence of the threat and the evolving character of Indonesia's posture toward it (globalsecurity.org, 2020).

1.1. The Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical lenses drawn from the maritime security and strategic-studies literature.

First, the study draws on classical geopolitical and sea-power theory, in the tradition of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett, which posits that command of the sea — understood as the capacity to use maritime space for one's own purposes while denying that use to an adversary — is a foundational component of national power. Indonesia's own strategic culture has domesticated this logic through the doctrine of Wawasan Nusantara (the "Archipelagic Outlook"), which holds that the archipelago's land, sea, and air constitute a single, indivisible politico-strategic unity (globalsecurity.org, 2011).

Second, the study employs the traditional/non-traditional security bifurcation common in Asian security studies. Traditional maritime security concerns interstate threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity — principally the South China Sea dispute — while non-traditional maritime security concerns encompass piracy, armed robbery, IUU fishing, trafficking in persons and narcotics, maritime terrorism, and environmental degradation (Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative [AMTI], 2021). Indonesia's own official conceptualisation, reflected in the Coordinating Ministry's 2019 Maritime Diplomacy White Book, explicitly recognises both dimensions (AMTI, 2021).

Third, the study draws on middle-power and hedging theory to interpret Indonesian strategic behaviour amid Sino-American competition. Several scholars characterise the GMF as a manifestation of Indonesia's "middle power strategy," designed to deepen economic engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) while preserving strategic space and continued United States engagement in the Indo-Pacific (Central European Journal of International and Security Studies [CEJISS], 2021; East Asia Forum, 2022). This hedging posture — economic engagement combined with sovereignty assertion — recurs throughout Indonesia's Natuna policy and is treated in this study as a structuring variable rather than an anomaly.

1.2. The Statement of the Problem

Despite possessing one of the most elaborate legal-institutional frameworks for ocean governance in Southeast Asia — encompassing constitutional provisions, ratified international law, domestic statutes, and successive presidential

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regulations — Indonesia's maritime security posture remains empirically under-resourced and institutionally fragmented. The Minimum Essential Force programme, intended to bring the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) to a minimum credible deterrent capability by its planned 2023 conclusion, was assessed as it approached that horizon to remain significantly behind schedule, some fifteen years after implementation began (RSIS, 2023). Meanwhile, more than a dozen government agencies continue to exercise overlapping maritime jurisdiction, without the doctrine possessing a central strategic-policy hub comparable to a national security council for coordination (AMTI, 2019). The problem this study addresses, therefore, is the disjuncture between Indonesia's ambitious maritime doctrine — as expressed in the GMF, the Indonesian Ocean Policy, and the MEF programme — and the material, institutional, and diplomatic constraints that condition its implementation, set against a regional maritime security environment marked by resurgent great-power rivalry and non-traditional threats.

1.3. The Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several interconnected reasons. Academically, it contributes to the still-developing scholarly literature that integrates Indonesian constitutional and statutory law with strategic-studies analysis of maritime policy, a combination that existing scholarship — which tends to specialize either in international law or in security studies — has not fully achieved (Tandfonline, 2017). Policy-relevant, the study offers a systematic content analysis of primary legal-policy documents (constitutional provisions, statutes, presidential regulations) that can inform Indonesian policymakers, ASEAN institutions, and external partners such as India, Australia, Japan, and the United States as they calibrate maritime security cooperation with Jakarta. Regionally, because Indonesia is frequently described as the fulcrum, keystone, or "linchpin" of Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific maritime order, understanding its internal legal-political architecture has spillover value for comprehending ASEAN's collective capacity — or incapacity — to manage the South China Sea dispute and other maritime flashpoints (ASEAN, 2019). Finally, for India specifically, given New Delhi's Act East Policy and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision, a rigorous account of Indonesia's maritime security environment is directly relevant to India's own Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean strategic calculus (Gopal & Alverdian, 2021).

1.4. Research Questions

RQ1. What is the geostrategic importance of Indonesia in the Southeast Asian maritime region?
RQ2. What are the traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges confronting Indonesia?
RQ3. What are Indonesia's maritime interests and strategic priorities in safeguarding its territorial sovereignty and regional stability?
RQ4. How has Indonesia responded to maritime security challenges through the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), the Indonesian Ocean Policy (IOP), and the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) strategy?

1.5. Research Objectives

O1. To examine the geostrategic importance of Indonesia in the Southeast Asian maritime region.
O2. To analyze the traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges confronting Indonesia.
O3. To investigate Indonesia's maritime interests and strategic priorities in safeguarding its territorial sovereignty and regional stability.
O4. To examine Indonesia's policy responses to maritime security challenges through the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF), the Indonesian Ocean Policy (IOP), and the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) strategy.

1.6. The Delimitations of the Study

This study is delimited in the following respects. First, temporally, the analysis concentrates on the period from the 1945–1957 foundational era of Indonesian maritime claims through the end of 2023, with particular emphasis on the Jokowi presidency (2014–2023), during which the GMF, IOP, and MEF frameworks were formulated and

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progressively implemented. Second, thematically, the study is confined to state-centric maritime security — sovereignty, defence, and law enforcement at sea — and engages the blue economy, marine environmental governance, and fisheries policy only insofar as they intersect with security concerns; a dedicated economic or ecological analysis lies outside its scope. Third, geographically, while the study references the wider Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific context, its principal unit of analysis is Indonesia; comparative treatment of Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and other claimant states is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Fourth, methodologically, the study relies on secondary and documentary sources — laws, regulations, government white papers, and peer-reviewed and reputable policy literature — rather than on primary elite interviews or classified material, a limitation inherent to open-source content analysis.

II. THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

International Literature

East Asia Forum Editorial Desk (2022). Pouring Cold Water on Jokowi's Maritime Ambitions. Published by the Australian National University's East Asia Forum, this commentary critically assesses the durability of the Global Maritime Fulcrum following the 2022 renewal of the memorandum of understanding linking the GMF with China's Maritime Silk Road under the Belt and Road Initiative. The study contends that despite continued rhetorical commitment, the GMF had by 2022 receded from the centre of Indonesian foreign-policy discourse, overtaken by more immediate economic-development priorities; it nonetheless situates the GMF within a middle-power hedging strategy intended to balance economic cooperation with China against continued strategic engagement with the United States, Australia, Japan, and India (East Asia Forum, 2022).

Ocean & Coastal Management Journal Contributors (2023). Multilateral Cooperation against Maritime Piracy in the Straits of Malacca: From the RMSI to ReCAAP. This peer-reviewed study traces the evolution of multilateral counter-piracy cooperation in the Straits of Malacca from the abortive U.S.-proposed Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI) to the more durable Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). The authors find that ReCAAP's comparative success rests not on the creation of a supranational maritime police force or joint patrols within littoral states' territorial waters, but on structured information-sharing and cooperative capacity-building among Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and other regional partners (ScienceDirect, 2023).

National Literature

1. Gopal, P., & Alverdian, I. (2021). Maritime Security Cooperation Between India and Indonesia: Imperatives, Status and Prospects. Published in an Indian-edited peer-reviewed journal, this study — authored by a former Indian Navy officer and an Indonesian co-author — undertakes a bilateral assessment of India-Indonesia maritime security cooperation, encompassing coordinated naval patrols, the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region, and joint exercises conducted since 2016. The study situates bilateral cooperation within the broader imperatives of countering piracy, safeguarding SLOCs, and responding to Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, while noting institutional and capacity asymmetries that constrain the depth of cooperation (Gopal & Alverdian, 2021).

2. National Maritime Foundation of India (2017). Indonesia's New Ocean Policy: Analysing the External Dimension. Published in Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India — India's principal maritime-strategic-studies journal — this study analyses the external, foreign-policy dimension of the Indonesian Ocean Policy signed on 20 February 2017. It argues that beyond its domestic administrative purpose of coordinating maritime programmes across ministries, the IOP functions as a strategic narrative projecting Indonesia's regional and global maritime interests, addressing scholarly and policy audiences within India's strategic community that had previously criticised Indonesia for lacking an integrated ocean strategy (Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India, 2017).

2.1. The Research Gap

The existing literature exhibits three notable gaps that this study seeks to address. First, much of the literature treats Indonesia's constitutional and statutory legal architecture (the Djuanda Declaration, Article 25A of the 1945

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Constitution, Law No. 6/1996, and Law No. 32/2014) and its strategic-policy architecture (the GMF, IOP, and MEF) as separate objects of analysis situated in different disciplinary literatures — international law on one hand and strategic studies on the other — rather than integrating them within a single analytical framework, as this study attempts to do. Second, the literature reviewed here largely predates the most recent developments in the Natuna Sea dispute through 2023, leaving a temporal gap that this study fills through updated primary and secondary documentation covering the period up to the end of 2023. Third, few existing studies apply a systematic, quantifiable content-analysis methodology — of the kind employed in Section 4 below — to Indonesian maritime policy documents, defence budgets, and incident data, instead relying primarily on qualitative-narrative exposition. This study addresses that methodological gap by combining doctrinal-legal analysis with tabulated content analysis of policy pillars, defence expenditure, and non-traditional security incidents.

III. THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Method: Content Analysis

The study employs content analysis as its principal research method. Content analysis is a systematic, replicable technique for compressing textual material into fewer content categories based on explicit coding rules, permitting the researcher to make valid inferences from texts to their contexts of production and use. In this study, content analysis is applied to three categories of primary and secondary documents: (a) constitutional and statutory legal texts, including the 1945 Constitution as amended, Law No. 4/PRP/1960, Law No. 17/1985, Law No. 6/1996, and Law No. 32/2014; (b) executive policy instruments, including Presidential Decree/Regulation No. 16/2017 on the Indonesian Ocean Policy, the Coordinating Ministry's Maritime Diplomacy White Book (2019), and Presidential Regulation No. 85/2021 on Natuna security budgeting; and (c) empirical incident and expenditure data drawn from ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre annual and half-year reports, Indonesian defence-budget disclosures, and reputable news and policy-analysis sources (AMTI, RSIS, East Asia Forum, and comparable outlets). Each document was coded for the presence, frequency, and emphasis of five thematic categories: (1) sovereignty and territorial integrity, (2) maritime economic development, (3) institutional/administrative coordination, (4) defence and law-enforcement capability, and (5) international/regional cooperation. The frequency and salience of these categories across time periods form the basis of the tabulated analysis presented in Section 4.

Research Design: Explanatory Research Design

The study adopts an explanatory (rather than purely descriptive or exploratory) research design. Whereas a descriptive design would be limited to cataloguing Indonesia's maritime laws and policies, and an exploratory design would be appropriate for a wholly under-researched phenomenon, an explanatory design is suited to this study's objective of establishing why and how a demonstrable gap has emerged between Indonesia's maritime-security doctrine and its implementation capacity. The explanatory design proceeds in three analytical stages: first, establishing the descriptive baseline of Indonesia's legal-constitutional and policy architecture (Sections 1 and 4.1); second, testing this baseline against empirical indicators of implementation — defence expenditure, incident data, and institutional capacity (Section 4.2–4.4); and third, offering causal-explanatory interpretation of the observed gap with reference to bureaucratic fragmentation, resource constraints, and great-power hedging dynamics (Sections 4.5 and 5).

Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study were collected through a structured desk-review procedure encompassing four steps. First, primary legal-constitutional texts (the 1945 Constitution, relevant statutes, and presidential regulations) were identified through Indonesian government legal databases and corroborating secondary summaries in peer-reviewed and think-tank literature (AMTI, RSIS,

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IV. THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. Constitutional, Statutory, and Political Foundations

Table 1 presents the chronological legal-constitutional architecture underpinning Indonesian maritime sovereignty, coded according to the study's content-analysis protocol. The table demonstrates a clear evolutionary pattern: from an initial, essentially declaratory assertion of sovereignty (1957) toward progressively more binding domestic legislation (1960, 1985, 1996), constitutional entrenchment (2000 amendment), and finally comprehensive administrative-institutional consolidation (2014–2017).

Table 1. Chronological Legal-Constitutional Architecture of Indonesian Maritime Sovereignty (1945–2022)

Year	Instrument	Core Content	Thematic Emphasis (coded)
1945	1945 Constitution (original text)	Establishes the unitary Republic of Indonesia (NKRI); no explicit maritime-territorial clause.	Sovereignty (implicit)
1957	Djuanda Declaration (13 Dec. 1957)	Prime Minister Djuanda Kartawidjaja declares waters surrounding, between, and connecting Indonesia's islands to be a single unified national territory, rejecting the colonial-era Territoriale Zeeën en Maritieme Kringen Ordonnantie 1939, which limited each island to a 3-nautical-mile sea band.	Sovereignty (dominant)
1960	Law No. 4/Prp/1960 on Indonesian Waters	Ratifies the Djuanda Declaration into domestic statute; expands claimed territory roughly 2.5-fold, from about 2,027,087 km2 to 5,193,250 km2; establishes straight baselines.	Sovereignty
1982/1985	UNCLOS (1982) / Law No. 17/1985	Indonesia ratifies UNCLOS through Law No. 17/1985, internationally codifying the archipelagic-state regime and confirming a 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone measured from archipelagic baselines, including the waters north of the Natuna Islands.	Sovereignty; International cooperation
1996	Law No. 6/1996 on Indonesian Territorial Waters	Details the territorial sea, archipelagic waters, and baseline system in domestic implementing legislation, superseding earlier ordinances.	Sovereignty; Administrative
2000	Second Amendment to 1945 Constitution, Chapter IXA, Article 25A	Entrenches, for the first time at constitutional level, that "The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is an archipelagic state characterised by a Nusantara identity, the boundaries and rights of which are determined by law."	Sovereignty (constitutional)
2005	Presidential Decree No. 81/2005	Establishes Bakorkamla (Maritime Security Coordinating Board), the precursor coordinating body for maritime law enforcement.	Institutional coordination
2007	Law No. 17/2007 on the National Long-Term Development Plan	Introduces marine and fisheries resources as a driver of national development, foreshadowing later ocean-economy policy.	Economic development
2008	Law No. 17/2008 on Maritime Navigation	Establishes navigational-safety and sea-and-coast-guard (Kesatuan Penjaga Laut dan Pantai) requirements under the Ministry of Transportation.	Institutional; Defence/law enforcement
2014	Law No. 32/2014 on	Consolidates scattered maritime legislation into a single	Institutional;

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Year	Instrument	Core Content	Thematic Emphasis (coded)
	Marine Affairs (signed 17 Oct. 2014)	law; establishes Bakamla (Maritime Security Agency/Coast Guard) with a stronger mandate than Bakorkamla.	Defence/law enforcement
2015	Presidential Regulation No. 10/2015	Creates the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs (later Maritime and Investment Affairs, 2019) to coordinate seven ministries/agencies.	Institutional coordination
2017	Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017, Indonesian Ocean Policy (Kebijakan Kelautan Indonesia)	Codifies the Global Maritime Fulcrum into the first comprehensive national ocean-governance framework since 1945, structured around seven pillars.	All five categories
2021	Presidential Regulation No. 85/2021	Budgets approximately IDR 12.2 trillion for Natuna maritime-security reinforcement, targeting 40.59% completion of Navy equipment needs and 44.17% for Bakamla.	Defence/law enforcement
2022	Presidential Regulation No. 34/2022	Further refines national ocean-policy implementation arrangements.	Institutional; Economic

Sources: UPI Cibiru (2023); globalsecurity.org (2011); AMTI (2021); PEMSEA (n.d.); United Nations Ocean Governance Study (2023); RSIS (2018).

Interpretation: The data in Table 1 reveal a distinctive Indonesian legal pattern in which sovereignty assertion (1957, 1960, 1985, 1996, 2000) substantially precedes institutional-administrative capacity-building (2005, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2021). This sequencing has important implications: Indonesia's legal claim to its archipelagic waters and EEZ is exceptionally well-entrenched — reinforced by constitutional status since 2000 and by UNCLOS ratification since 1985 — yet the institutional apparatus for enforcing that claim (Bakamla, the Coordinating Ministry, and the TNI's naval and coast guard assets) was not meaningfully consolidated until nearly three decades later. This finding directly informs the interpretation of the GMF and MEF programmes discussed in Section 4.4, which can be read as belated attempts to close this sovereignty-capacity gap.

4.2. Geostrategic Importance of Indonesia (RQ1)

Indonesia's geostrategic salience in Southeast Asia's maritime order rests on four content-analytically identifiable dimensions, summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Dimensions of Indonesia's Geostrategic Importance in Southeast Asia

Dimension	Empirical Indicator	Strategic Significance
Archipelagic scale	More than 17,000 islands; c. 5.8 million km2 of maritime jurisdiction (territorial sea + EEZ + archipelagic waters).	Largest archipelagic state in the world; anchors the legal concept of the 'archipelagic state' in UNCLOS Part IV, itself substantially shaped by Indonesian diplomacy.
Chokepoint control	Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok; the Malacca-Singapore Strait alone carries an estimated 90,000 merchant vessels and roughly 60% of global maritime trade annually.	Indonesia is a co-littoral guardian, with Malaysia and Singapore, of one of the world's most strategically vital SLOCs, and sole sovereign over the Sunda and Lombok alternate routes.
Indo-Pacific	Sole state bordering both the Indian and Pacific Oceans	Positions Indonesia as a pivotal actor

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Dimension	Empirical Indicator	Strategic Significance
fulcrum position	among Southeast Asian states; described by then-U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis in 2018 as the 'maritime fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific area.'	for both Indian Ocean (India, Australia) and Pacific (China, Japan, United States) strategic calculations.
ASEAN centrality anchor	Indonesia is ASEAN's largest member state by population, economy, and territory, and a principal architect of the 2019 ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.	Indonesian diplomatic leadership is widely regarded as indispensable to ASEAN's collective capacity to manage South China Sea negotiations and Code of Conduct talks.

Sources: Modern Diplomacy (2023); CSIS (2014); ASEAN (2019).

Interpretation: The data support an affirmative answer to RQ1. Indonesia's geostrategic importance is not merely rhetorical but structurally embedded in the physical geography of Southeast Asian trade and security: no alternative regional actor simultaneously controls comparable chokepoint infrastructure, archipelagic scale, and inter-oceanic positioning. This structural centrality explains why external powers — the United States, China, India, Japan, and Australia — have each sought closer maritime engagement with Jakarta, and why Indonesian policy pronouncements, however imperfectly implemented, attract disproportionate international attention relative to the country's actual naval order of battle.

4.3. Traditional and Non-Traditional Maritime Security Challenges (RQ2)

4.3.1. Traditional Security Challenges: The North Natuna Sea Dispute

The dominant traditional security challenge confronting Indonesia is the intersection of China's 'nine-dash line' with Indonesia's EEZ and continental shelf north of the Natuna Islands. Although Indonesia is not one of the six claimant parties to the broader South China Sea territorial dispute and has consistently maintained that it is a 'non-claimant state,' China's expansive maritime claims overlap with Indonesia's UNCLOS-derived EEZ, producing recurrent operational friction (The Geopolitics, 2023; Wilson Center, 2023). Table 3 tabulates major documented incidents and policy milestones in this dispute through 2023.

Table 3. Chronology of the North Natuna Sea (South China Sea) Dispute, 2017–2023

Date	Event	Indonesian Response
Dec. 2019 – Jan. 2020	Chinese fishing vessels, escorted by China Coast Guard ships, enter Indonesia's EEZ near Natuna.	Indonesia doubles naval presence; deploys four F-16 fighter jets; President Jokowi visits Natuna and declares sovereignty 'non-negotiable.'
Mid-2017 (renaming)	Indonesia officially renames waters north of the Natuna Islands the 'North Natuna Sea' on national maps.	Reasserts EEZ jurisdiction; China calls the move 'unconducive' to regional stability.
Aug. 2023	Indonesia conducts ASEAN Solidarity Exercise (ASEX 01-Natuna), a joint combined military exercise with ASEAN states in Natuna waters.	Demonstrates multilateral deterrence posture and interoperability among Southeast Asian militaries.

Sources: globalsecurity.org/RFA (2020); Modern Diplomacy (2023).

4.3.2. Non-Traditional Security Challenges: Piracy and Armed Robbery

The principal non-traditional maritime security challenge, as tracked by the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), is piracy and armed robbery in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore (SOMS) and in Indonesian ports and anchorages. Table 4 presents incident data for the first half of 2023.

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Table 4. Piracy and Armed Robbery Incidents in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, H1 2023

Period	Incidents in SOMS	Broader Asia-Region Trend	Notes
Jan–Jun 2023	41 incidents in SOMS	61 incidents Asia-wide (H1 2023)	Six incidents recorded in Indonesian ports/anchorages in H1 2023.

Sources: The Diplomat (2023).

Interpretation: The data in Tables 3 and 4 jointly answer RQ2. Traditional security challenges are characterised by low-frequency, high-intensity confrontations involving state actors (China Coast Guard, Indonesian Navy/Bakamla) with clear sovereignty stakes, while non-traditional challenges are characterised by high-frequency, comparatively low-intensity criminal activity — opportunistic theft rather than violent hijacking — whose volume can fluctuate over time. Both challenge types nonetheless share a common structural driver: the sheer scale of Indonesia's maritime domain relative to its law-enforcement and surveillance capacity, discussed further in Section 4.4.

4.4. Policy Responses: GMF, IOP, and MEF (RQ3–RQ4)

4.4.1. The Global Maritime Fulcrum and the Indonesian Ocean Policy

President Jokowi's Global Maritime Fulcrum, first announced at the Ninth East Asia Summit in Naypyidaw on 13 November 2014, rests on five core pillars — maritime culture, maritime resources, maritime infrastructure and connectivity, maritime diplomacy, and maritime defence — later supplemented by two auxiliary pillars of maritime governance and maritime environment (Pacific Forum, 2023; AMTI, 2017). Table 5 codes the frequency with which each pillar received institutional-implementation follow-through, based on the content analysis of policy documents and secondary literature.

Table 5. Content-Analytic Assessment of Global Maritime Fulcrum Pillar Implementation

GMF Pillar	Key Implementing Instrument(s)	Implementation Assessment (coded)
Maritime culture	Public diplomacy; Nusantara Day observance; educational curricula references.	Low-medium: largely symbolic; limited statutory instantiation.
Maritime resources	Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries programmes; anti-IUU fishing enforcement (2014–2019 vessel-sinking campaign).	Medium-high: visible early enforcement action, later moderated.
Maritime infrastructure/connectivity	Tol Laut (Sea Toll Road) programme connecting Belawan, Tanjung Priok, Tanjung Perak, Makassar, and Sorong; supported partly through Chinese BRI-linked financing.	High: most materially realised pillar, reflected in inter-island shipping infrastructure.
Maritime diplomacy	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (2019); Code of Conduct negotiations; bilateral coast guard MOUs (India).	Medium: active diplomatic engagement, but negotiated outcomes (COC) remain unfinalised.
Maritime defence	Bakamla elevation (2014); Law No. 32/2014; MEF programme (2010–2023).	Medium-low: institutional creation outpaced material capability delivery (see 4.4.2).
Maritime governance (auxiliary)	Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017 (IOP); Coordinating Ministry for Maritime and Investment Affairs.	Medium-high: principal institutional-coordination achievement of the GMF era.
Maritime environment (auxiliary)	Blue-economy initiatives; marine-protected-area expansion.	Medium: significant declaratory commitment, uneven enforcement.

Sources: Pacific Forum (2023); AMTI (2017, 2019); CEJISS (2021); Muslim Politics Review (2023); Jurnal Lemhannas RI (2023).

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A representative political articulation of the GMF's underlying logic is captured in Jokowi's own words at the 2014 East Asia Summit:

"As a maritime country, Indonesia must assert itself as a force between the two oceans: the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean… we are obliged, as a fulcrum between two oceans, to bolster our maritime defences both to protect our own sovereignty and for regional safety of navigation and maritime security."

— President Joko Widodo, East Asia Summit, Naypyidaw, 13 November 2014, as reported in CSIS (2014) and AMTI (2017)

Scholars have, however, been divided on the durability of this articulation. Laksmana (2019), writing for AMTI, characterised the GMF as a 'post-mortem' case study, arguing that Jokowi's government failed to use the doctrine as a baseline for coordinated South China Sea policy and never resolved the institutional fragmentation among the more than a dozen agencies exercising maritime jurisdiction. A later analysis (Munabari & Sellita, 2023) similarly describes a 'reorientation' in which the GMF's overt maritime-security discourse gave way, particularly after 2019, to a narrower economic-transformation narrative — even as the underlying Indonesian Ocean Policy instruments (Presidential Regulation No. 16/2017, subsequently refined by Presidential Regulation No. 34/2022) remained formally in force as of 2023.

4.4.2. The Minimum Essential Force

The Minimum Essential Force (MEF), introduced under a 2008 presidential directive and formally launched in 2010, was designed to bring the TNI to a minimum credible deterrent capability — defined as the ability to respond simultaneously to two flashpoints — across three five-year phases (2010–2014, 2015–2019, 2020–2023), with an initial budget allocation of approximately IDR 156 trillion (about USD 16 billion) (Cove Army, n.d.). Table 6 summarises MEF implementation data through 2023.

Table 6. Minimum Essential Force (MEF) Implementation Indicators, 2010–2023

Indicator	Value/Finding	Source
MEF planning horizon	2010–2023 (three five-year phases)	Cove Army (n.d.); IRJEMS (n.d.)
Defence expenditure (recent years)	Consistently below 1% of GDP for the preceding five years; target range of 1.5–2% of GDP envisioned but not reached	Cove Army (n.d.); SP's Land Forces (n.d.)
Natuna-specific budget (2021)	IDR 12.2 trillion under Presidential Regulation No. 85/2021, targeting 40.59% Navy equipment adequacy and 44.17% Bakamla adequacy	Modern Diplomacy (2023), citing CNN Indonesia (2021)

Interpretation: The MEF data in Table 6 provide the clearest empirical evidence of the doctrine-capacity gap identified in the Statement of the Problem. Despite an ambitious three-phase structure explicitly designed around the 'Green Water Navy' concept for littoral defence (SP's Land Forces, n.d.), assessments made as the programme approached its planned 2023 conclusion indicated that it remained significantly short of its targets, a shortfall attributable to sustained defence expenditure below 1 percent of GDP, competing domestic development priorities, and the post-pandemic fiscal environment (RSIS, 2023). This persistent gap between the MEF's stated ambition and its material delivery is the clearest empirical illustration of the doctrine-capacity asymmetry that structures this study's central argument.

4.5. Integrated Discussion

Read together, Tables 1 through 6 support a consistent explanatory narrative. Indonesia's sovereignty claims over its archipelagic waters and EEZ are exceptionally robust in legal-constitutional terms — arguably among the strongest in Southeast Asia — owing to a sequence of mutually reinforcing instruments running from the Djuanda Declaration through UNCLOS ratification to constitutional entrenchment in Article 25A. This legal robustness, however, has not been matched by proportionate institutional and material capacity: the proliferation of maritime agencies (Bakamla, the

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TNI Navy, the Sea and Coast Guard Unit, the Directorate General of Marine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance, and others) has produced coordination costs that successive Coordinating Ministries and the 2017 Indonesian Ocean Policy have only partially resolved (AMTI, 2019). Defence expenditure has remained structurally below the levels required to fully realise the Minimum Essential Force, let alone project sustained deterrence against a great power such as China. Meanwhile, Indonesia's deep and growing economic interdependence with China — reflected in substantial bilateral trade and Chinese investment concentrated significantly in the nickel-processing sector central to Indonesia's downstreaming strategy — constrains the degree to which Jakarta can convert its strong legal position into sustained diplomatic or military pressure over the Natuna Sea (CEJISS, 2021). The result is the hedging posture observed throughout the empirical record: simultaneous naval reinforcement and coast guard patrols on one hand, and continued economic engagement with Beijing on the other. This is not, this study argues, strategic incoherence so much as a rational middle-power adaptation to a structural asymmetry between Indonesia's legal entitlements and its material capabilities — precisely the dynamic anticipated by middle-power and hedging theory in the conceptual framework (Section 1.1).

V. THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In concise form, the study's findings, organised by research question, are as follows:

RQ1 (Geostrategic importance): Indonesia's importance is structurally, not merely rhetorically, grounded — it is the world's largest archipelagic state, co-guardian of the Malacca-Singapore Strait (carrying c. 60% of global maritime trade), the only Southeast Asian state bordering both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and ASEAN's largest member, jointly authoring the 2019 ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

RQ2 (Traditional and non-traditional challenges): The dominant traditional challenge is the North Natuna Sea/South China Sea dispute with China, manifest in recurring EEZ incursions (2019–2023) despite Indonesia's non-claimant status; the dominant non-traditional challenge is piracy and armed robbery in the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, which ReCAAP-coordinated multilateral cooperation has helped to contain but not eliminate, indicating that non-traditional threats require sustained rather than episodic attention.

RQ3 (Interests and priorities): Indonesia's strategic priorities cluster around five consistent themes across the legal-policy record — sovereignty/territorial integrity, economic development of maritime resources, institutional coordination, defence/law-enforcement capability, and regional/international cooperation — with sovereignty assertion historically preceding and outpacing institutional-material capacity-building by several decades.

RQ4 (Policy responses): The Global Maritime Fulcrum (2014) and its codification in the Indonesian Ocean Policy (2017) achieved uneven pillar-by-pillar implementation, with infrastructure connectivity (Tol Laut) and institutional coordination (the Coordinating Ministry) the most materially realised, and maritime defence the least; the Minimum Essential Force (2010–2023) remained significantly behind its target schedule as it approached its planned conclusion, underscoring a persistent capability gap between doctrinal ambition and material delivery.

Cross-cutting finding: A persistent asymmetry exists between Indonesia's exceptionally strong legal-constitutional maritime sovereignty architecture (Djuanda Declaration → UNCLOS ratification → Article 25A → Law No. 32/2014) and its comparatively underdeveloped institutional-material implementation capacity (sub-1%-of-GDP defence spending; fragmented multi-agency jurisdiction), producing a rational but fragile hedging posture vis-à-vis China that combines sovereignty assertion with continued economic and diplomatic engagement.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine Indonesia's and, by extension, Southeast Asia's maritime security environment through an integrated analysis of constitutional provisions, statutory law, executive policy, and empirical security data. The evidence assembled here demonstrates that Indonesia possesses one of the most legally elaborate maritime-sovereignty architectures in the world — a claim traceable in an unbroken doctrinal line from the 1957 Djuanda Declaration through UNCLOS ratification in 1985, statutory codification in 1996 and 2014, and constitutional entrenchment in

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Article 25A since 2000. Yet the empirical record — spanning defence-budget execution, agency fragmentation, and recurring Natuna Sea confrontations — reveals that legal sovereignty has consistently outpaced institutional and material capacity to enforce it. The Global Maritime Fulcrum and its codifying Indonesian Ocean Policy represented an ambitious attempt to close this gap through an integrated, multi-pillar national strategy, achieving genuine success in infrastructure connectivity and institutional coordination while under-delivering on maritime defence; the Minimum Essential Force programme pursued the defence dimension directly but remained significantly behind its planned targets as it approached its scheduled 2023 conclusion, underscoring the persistence of the doctrine-capacity gap this study has documented.

Indonesia's experience is illustrative of a broader Southeast Asian pattern in which archipelagic and littoral states possess robust UNCLOS-based legal entitlements that nonetheless require sustained material investment, institutional coherence, and skilful middle-power diplomacy to translate into effective maritime security. As great-power competition between the United States and China continues, and as non-traditional threats such as piracy demonstrate their capacity for resurgence, Indonesia's capacity to reconcile its deep economic interdependence with China against its sovereignty imperatives in the Natuna Sea will remain a defining test — not only of Indonesian statecraft, but of ASEAN's collective ability to preserve a stable, rules-based maritime order in one of the world's most consequential maritime regions.

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