

Empirical Approach in Border Defense in the North Natuna Sea

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Abstract

This research explores an empiricist approach in the context of border defense in the North Natuna Sea, an area rich in strategic natural resources that requires intensive protection to maintain Indonesia's national and economic security. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach, with a focus on the analysis of literature studies that include scientific publications, government reports, and policy documents related to the use of field data in the context of defense. The results of this study show that an empirical approach is the main foundation in the formation of Indonesian policies related to the North Natuna Sea, supported by learning from previous conflict experiences such as the cases of Sipadan and Ligitan Islands. By leveraging strong field evidence, Indonesia ensures that every step taken is based on accurate and verified data. This approach not only enhances Indonesia's legal legitimacy in safeguarding its territorial sovereignty, but also provides a solid foundation for maintaining regional stability and national security in strategic areas such as North Natuna.

Keywords: Border Defense, Empirical Approach, North Natuna Sea

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the largest archipelagic countries in the world, with a diversity of cultures, languages, natural resources, ethnic groups, and beliefs. This condition creates a variety of threats to national security. Geographically, Indonesia shares borders with three neighboring countries: Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor Leste. In the maritime sector, Indonesia borders ten countries, including India, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Palau, Australia, Timor Leste, and Papua New Guinea (Novianto et al., 2020). Indonesia's geographical conditions create special challenges in the context of national security, especially in border areas.

The potential threat through this geographical factor makes Indonesia have to prepare itself both in terms of regulations, facilities, and infrastructure that support the creation of an effective and comprehensive national security concept in the border area. The most obvious threat in the border area is the threat of sovereignty, for example, the claim of the North Natuna Sea which is an area directly adjacent to Indonesia. Sovereignty is a goal that each country wants to aim for in relation to the goals that the state wants to achieve. Indonesia's sovereignty in the North Natuna Sea relates to claims to waters, islands, and exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the region (Ardila & Putra, 2021).

The dispute in the North Natuna region involves several countries in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. Efforts to resolve these disputes have involved negotiations, international arbitration, and regional dialogue, but there are still ongoing tensions and disagreements (Anugerah, 2021). This certainly needs to be a concern for the Indonesian government because if it is not handled thoroughly, the potential threat to the integrity of the Indonesian nation and state will increase. Therefore, it is very important for Indonesia to resolve this wisely and find sustainable solutions to maintain stability and territorial sovereignty. This is important given the conflict in the North Natuna Sea, where various overlapping claims and regional tensions can affect Indonesia's national security. A careful and

measured approach to conflict resolution will be key to ensuring Indonesia's security and sovereignty in its maritime border areas. China claims the North Natuna Sea area based on the Nine-Dash Line, which it considers a historical boundary, even though the claim contradicts the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which stipulates that the North Natuna Sea is within Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as far as 200 nautical miles from the coastline (Adhi, 2021). The escalation of this conflict has heated up again, especially after the incident on October 5, 2024, when the China Coast Guard (CCG) 5402 ship disrupted oil and gas exploration by the Geo Coral ship from Norway for Pertamina (Damarjati, 2024). Despite a statement of cooperation between Indonesia and China on November 9, 2024 regarding the management of overlapping areas, Chinese ship activities in the North Natuna Sea continue to trigger tensions. The presence of these ships threatens Indonesia's maritime sovereignty, poses the risk of losing control over this strategic area, and interferes with the exploitation of economic resources, especially oil and gas, which are important to Indonesia's national interests (Aura, 2024).

A deep understanding of the dynamics and complexity of disputes in the North Natuna Sea is important for Indonesia to develop more effective strategies in safeguarding its sovereignty and national interests in the North Natuna Sea region, as well as contributing to regional peace and stability. A deep understanding of the dynamics and complexity of disputes in the North Natuna Sea is crucial for Indonesia. This allows Indonesia to develop more effective strategies in safeguarding its sovereignty and national interests in the region, as well as contributing to regional peace and stability.

Previous research relevant to this research covers various perspectives on diplomatic, security, and policy challenges in handling conflicts in the North Natuna Sea. Research by Adikara and Munandar (2021) shows that Indonesia's maritime defense diplomacy faces major challenges, including a lack of coordination between agencies and weak bilateral and multilateral relations with countries involved in direct conflicts, which has an impact on frequent incidents of violations by foreign ships. Sugianto et al. (2021) discuss maritime security disturbances such as fish theft, expulsion of Indonesian fishermen, and confrontations between security forces, and emphasize the importance of synergy between defense-security forces to maintain stability in the region. Hadiwijaya (2022) highlighted the need for a strong maritime defense strategy to support Indonesia's vision as a World Maritime Axis, but noted that the current implementation is constrained by the limitations of K4IPP technology, the power of the Indonesian Navy that is not yet optimal, and the infrastructure that is still inadequate, despite efforts through the New Defense Posture program by the Ministry of Defense.

Research on the empirical approach to border defense in the North Natuna Sea is important because it is able to provide accurate field data to design effective defense policies. The region is rich in strategic natural resources, requiring careful protection to ensure Indonesia's national and economic security. In the context of rising tensions in the North Natuna Sea, the study also helps Indonesia to better understand and respond to regional dynamics, while contributing to international diplomacy and cooperation through data-driven solutions that are acceptable to various parties involved in disputes.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the empiricism approach in border defense in the North Natuna Sea. The descriptive qualitative approach is a research method used to understand the phenomenon being studied in depth and detail (Sugiyono, 2018). This research focuses on the analysis of relevant literature studies, literature studies will include scientific publications, government reports, and policy documents related to the use of field data

in defense contexts. The collected data will be analyzed to identify key patterns and themes in the empiricist approach, providing insights into how the use of this data affects national defense policy. The results of the analysis will be presented in an in-depth report, including key findings and recommendations for the development of more effective defense strategies in the region

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics in the North Natuna Sea Area

The North Natuna Sea area has border-related issues involving a number of countries. Indonesia's problem with China in the North Natuna Sea is due to China's unilateral claims related to territorial boundaries. On February 25, 1992, the PRC claimed with the Nine Dash line (NDL) which entered the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Indonesia. China's unilateral claim is based solely on historical grounds and does not fall into international law. Meanwhile, Indonesia also has a history of Natuna Waters as a connecting area between the archipelago and regions in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Furthermore, according to UNCLOS, Indonesia already has sovereign rights in the waters of the North Natuna Sea in the form of EEZs and the Continental Shelf (Ardila & Putra, 2021). This is the background for the conflicts that occurred in the North Natuna Sea.

The security dynamics in the North Natuna Sea dispute since 2009 until now show that the parties involved in the dispute are not trying to maintain the status quo. Instead, some countries seek to threaten the status quo through provocative actions on the ground, such as sending fishing boats and warships to territories claimed by other countries, resulting in confrontations followed by diplomatic tensions. Although ASEAN is trying to push for an agreement to the Code of Conduct (CoC), there is an impression that China only wants a CoC that meets its own interests without considering the interests of ASEAN countries that also claim the region. The complexity of the North Natuna Sea dispute involving many parties will threaten Indonesia's national interests, both in political aspects, such as regional stability, and in economic aspects, such as the security of Indonesia's energy supply derived from gas resources in the North Natuna Sea Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). (Prabowo, 2013)

Specifically, Indonesia has never once claimed to have interests in the North Natuna Sea area. However, the firm claims made by the Chinese government in 2012 to the entire North Natuna Sea, including all islands and archipelagos within the national territorial zone, also pose a threat to Indonesia's sovereignty and interests, especially in the Natuna territorial waters. With the firm claims by the Chinese government, not only Indonesia's sovereignty over the Natuna Islands is threatened, but also all Indonesian national interests based on the principle of archipelago insight and the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, which are highly respected in their existence. Even without a firm claim from the Chinese government, the traditional rights of Indonesian fishermen around the waters of Natuna have been threatened. Therefore, the Indonesian government needs to increase surveillance in border areas, including Natuna waters, as part of efforts to maintain Indonesia's state sovereignty (Arif et al., 2020).

Empirical Approach in Border Defense in the North Natuna Sea

Border areas between countries are not only a concern in the context of politics and defense, but also play an important role as a cultural meeting point. The cultural identity of the people in the border area is seen as an integral part of the sustainability of the border. This shows that the cultural approach has significant relevance in efforts to strengthen national border defense. The existence of cultural similarities in Natuna, as well as its relationship with the history of other regions in Indonesia, is an important factor in protecting borders from other countries' claims. Factors such as history and culture have also played a central role in the

deliberations of international courts, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in resolving territorial disputes such as Sipadan and Ligitan Islands (Safitri et al., 2024).

Indonesia's policy in the North Natuna Sea Area was formed on the basis of comprehensive considerations, including experience in handling conflicts in border areas over the past few years. These experiences not only serve as a source of knowledge, but also enrich the skills and abilities to respond to emerging challenges. Thus, Indonesia's maritime policy not only responds to physical security aspects, but also pays attention to the cultural and historical dimensions that affect the dynamics of the border region as a whole.

The process of gathering information which is then considered in taking a policy is also related to efforts to seek absolute knowledge. In philosophy, there are three models of approaches in seeking knowledge, namely, rationalism, empiricism and scientific methods. These three approaches are commonly known as a methodology in seeking knowledge (Masykur, 2019). The empiricism model is an approach that holds that. Human knowledge is not obtained through abstract rational reasoning but through concrete experience. Empiricism is the basic attitude of all forms of scientific research, this approach emphasizes that knowledge must be based on empirical observation. In the policy formulation process, experience and concrete evidence can help policymakers understand the situation. The results of empirical observations can be considered in making appropriate policies (Vera & Hambali, 2021).

Reflecting on the dispute over the Sipadan and Ligitan islands, Indonesia must be present in Natuna by empowering Natuna. Empowering Natuna is one of the ways used in the context of resolving traditional claim conflicts Fishing Ground on Indonesia's EEZ in Natuna. The empowerment consists of two things, namely physical and non-physical empowerment. physically empowering is by carrying out development in Natuna. The Ministry of Defense through a study paper on the country's defense strategy in facing the North Natuna Sea, wrote that in order to increase the sense of nationalism of the Natuna people, the central government collaborates with ministries or institutions and the local government of Natuna district, to synergize in improving the nation's character as part of the mental revolution shown through the awareness of defending the country in accordance with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. (Wahyuni, 2019)

In response to developments in the dispute in the North Natuna Sea region, the Government of Indonesia took a major step forward in maritime policy by launching the 2017 New Map of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, in response to China's claims to parts of its territory. This map was approved on July 14, 2017 by the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs together with 21 other relevant ministries and state institutions. In this map, the waters north of Natuna Island (Riau Islands) which are under the jurisdiction of Indonesia are named the North Natuna Sea, replacing the previous name, the South China Sea (Wardana, 2020).

The renewal of the Map of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia was carried out for four main reasons. First, because of the territorial sea border agreement that has been agreed between Indonesia and Singapore on the West and East sides. In addition, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundary agreement between Indonesia and the Philippines, which was approved and ratified in May 2017, will also come into effect soon. Second, international arbitration awards between the Philippines and China regarding disputes in the South China Sea have affected international legal norms, affirming that uninhabited islets or reefs have no rights to EEZs and continental shelves. Third, the names used in the management of natural resources in the northern region of Natuna Island have been implemented since the 1970s based on the direction of the cardinals, such as the North Natuna Block, South Natuna Block, East Natuna Block, and Southeast Natuna Block. Fourth, this update also aims to clarify claims in the Strait of Malacca by simplifying the boundary lines used (Muhaimin, 2020).

In addition to the above policy, the Government of Indonesia also uses a military diplomacy strategy as a step to reduce potential disputes in the waters of North Natuna in order to maintain the security of Natuna waters. It includes the implementation of joint military exercises and the development of national military capabilities aimed at achieving a balanced force and focuses on improving military equipment and supporting infrastructure in the field of defense. Furthermore, the Government of Indonesia implements naval diplomacy strategies, such as the Coalition Building, with efforts to manufacture, develop, and trade military equipment with various countries, especially in the ASEAN region and countries around the world (Arif et al., 2020).

One of the main strategies put forward in responding to the dynamics of the conflict in the North Natuna Sea is through bilateral meetings such as the ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum) and the AMF (ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime), which involve ASEAN countries and dialogue partners similar to the East Asia Summit (EAS), including the United States, Russia, Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, and New Zealand. Indonesia prioritizes a negotiation approach within the ASEAN-China framework, while emphasizing its unwillingness to engage in bilateral negotiations between countries involved in the dispute (Sitompul, 2022).

The implementation of the *Jakstranas* (General Policy on State Defense) in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 8 of 2021 is a strategic foundation in Indonesia's defense efforts against potential threats in the North Natuna Sea. The prosecutor set guidelines for the management of the country's defense system, focusing on improving defense capabilities through the concept of defense of large islands, building the TNI posture, revitalizing the defense industry, and increasing international cooperation in the field of defense and non-military capabilities. Strengthening the role of the National Border Management Agency (BNDP) as an institution tasked with formulating policies and coordinating budget needs and development in border areas is key in ensuring security and sovereignty in the North Natuna region (Setiowati et al., 2021).

By integrating all these efforts, Indonesia not only seeks to maintain regional stability and national security in the North Natuna Sea, but also strengthens its position in regional and international diplomacy. Indonesia's multilateral approach through forums such as ASEAN and EAS, as well as the implementation of a solid defense policy, are the main foundations in responding to the complex challenges faced in this strategic region.

CONCLUSION

The empiricist approach to border defense in the North Natuna Sea underscores the importance of fact-based data collection to support strategic decision-making. Experience in dealing with previous border disputes provides practical knowledge that can be used to identify threat patterns, evaluate the effectiveness of previous strategies, and design more relevant and contextual policies. The empowerment of the Natuna community is a crucial factor, where the development of the nation's character and the increase in the spirit of nationalism can strengthen social resilience as a form of national defense. In addition, civil-military cooperation was also identified as a strategic step to integrate local resources with the country's defense capabilities, creating synergies in maintaining maritime security. The implementation of this data-based policy can help Indonesia defend its maritime sovereignty more effectively, safeguard its economic interests, and assert its rights to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

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