

## Indonesian Leadership Policies and Strategies In Facing The South China Sea Conflict

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### Abstract

*This research examines Indonesia's role in managing the South China Sea dispute using a conceptual framework of regional leadership that involves five models of leadership role impact. Indonesia's role in the South China Sea conflict is categorized as active but with limited impact. Despite Indonesia's active involvement in South China Sea conflict resolution efforts for over two decades, its impact has not reached the expected level. Indonesia has engaged in various cooperations and diplomacy that have successfully prevented open conflicts in the South China Sea region. Nevertheless, Indonesia's role in supporting internal solutions for the disputing parties remains limited due to several factors beyond Indonesia's control. These factors include the complexity of competition with China's power, low levels of trust among member states, a lack of technical cooperation in governing the South China Sea region, and the dilemmas of defense diplomacy with countries outside the region. This research highlights that Indonesia has the potential to act as a mediator and mediator in managing the South China Sea disputes, especially in non-traditional security issues such as Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU Fishing). Focusing on non-traditional security diplomacy may help minimize the impact of conflicts and enhance cooperation in the South China Sea region.*

**Keywords:** *Indonesia, Leadership, Policy, South China Sea Conflict, Strategy.*

## INTRODUCTION

This research will discuss Indonesia's leadership role in addressing the challenges arising from conflicts in the South China Sea. The Asian region exhibits several key issues, including border disputes between China and Taiwan, North and South Korea, and disputes centered in the South China Sea. The South China Sea disputes pose a serious threat to stability in the Southeast Asian region, involving six countries: China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia, competing to determine their territorial boundaries in the South China Sea waters. This issue has attracted the attention of various parties, especially Indonesia, which has committed to jointly managing and utilizing maritime resources in the South China Sea.

Several perspectives from academics, such as Usman, A. and Sukma, R. (1997, p62-79), Weatherbee, D (2010, p142-148), Djalal, H. (2001, p97-103), and Djalal, H. (2009, 175-188), state that Indonesia holds a primary position in the Southeast Asian region. Indonesia is seen as a consistent pioneer in addressing South China Sea disputes. Indonesia's efforts in facing South China Sea disputes involve diplomatic initiatives and cooperation from 1990 to 2016, both in bilateral and multilateral contexts. On a bilateral level, in 2005, Indonesia and China signed a strategic partnership cooperation agreement covering various areas such as diplomacy, politics, economics, infrastructure, natural resources, technology, and disaster management. This cooperation includes crucial points related to the implementation of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC) and an emphasis on peaceful solutions to South China Sea disputes.

In subsequent meetings in 2012, 2013, and 2015, Indonesia and China renewed their cooperation agreement, emphasizing both countries' commitment to peaceful solutions in addressing South China Sea disputes. Furthermore, in the latest strategic partnership agreement, Indonesia and China also focus on maritime cooperation through the establishment of the China-

Indonesia Maritime Cooperation Committee (MCC) and China-Indonesia Maritime Cooperation Fund (MCF). MCC and MCF aim to advance infrastructure, technological research, and navigation security in the South China Sea region.

In addition to bilateral efforts, Indonesia also plays a significant role in multilateral efforts to resolve South China Sea disputes through ASEAN. Indonesia and ASEAN seek cooperation with China and strive to create dispute resolution mechanisms that focus on trust-building measures (confidence-building measures-CBM) and friendship and cooperation agreements (Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia-TAC). These initiatives are designed to promote the formation of dispute resolution mechanisms for the parties involved.

However, Indonesia's leadership role in addressing South China Sea disputes is not without challenges. The primary challenge for Indonesia is the assertive stance shown by China in this conflict, including controversial territorial claims and military infrastructure development. This stance has led to tensions and threats to stability in the South China Sea region. Instances such as China's claim to Mischief Reef, the construction of military facilities on various islands and reefs, and strict monitoring in the South China Sea pose serious challenges to Indonesia in maintaining stability in the area.

Therefore, Indonesia's leadership role in addressing South China Sea disputes is an interesting topic for further in-depth analysis, especially regarding the effectiveness of the steps taken by Indonesia. Although Indonesia has been active in managing South China Sea disputes for the past two decades, there are no clear signs of a comprehensive agreement on the shared management of the South China Sea by all parties involved.

## RESEARCH METHODS

In this research, a qualitative research method will be applied. According to Alan Bryman (2002), qualitative research is an approach that typically uses non-numeric data to delve into research issues. This method is deductive in nature, focusing on the analysis of the relationship between concepts and research data. This deductive approach will be built based on a specific analytical framework designed to explain the phenomenon under study. The sources of data that will be used include primary and secondary data. Primary data will be obtained through references from official sources, as well as the perspectives of experts with expertise related to Indonesia's role in maintaining regional security, the dynamics of South China Sea disputes, and the policy strategies implemented by Indonesia in dealing with South China Sea disputes. Meanwhile, secondary data will be obtained from existing literature, such as journals, articles, books, documents, and reliable newspapers that are relevant to the research topic. Data collection will be conducted through a literature review, where information will be obtained from written sources related to the research topic. The implementation of the deductive research method in this study will involve the development of a specific analytical framework, which will then be applied in the analysis of research data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first component of regional leadership is the initiation process. Regional leaders are expected to have the skills to initiate specific policies or strategies to achieve regional goals. Aspects to be considered by regional leaders in the initiation process involve meeting national interests as well as the interests of countries in the region. Substantial initiation processes can lead to diplomatic breakthroughs, increased cooperation, and the facilitation of new security

regimes. There are several foundations explaining Indonesia's involvement in dispute management efforts in the South China Sea. First, the legal basis is enshrined in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945). In the fourth paragraph of the preamble to the UUD 1945, it is stated that Indonesia will "participate in upholding world order based on independence, eternal peace, and social justice." Second, the operational basis for Indonesia's participation in world peace efforts is within the framework of Indonesia's Foreign Policy (PLNI), which adheres to the 'free and active' principle. Indonesia articulates that the principle of 'free and active' in Polugri is based on sovereignty, independence, justice, and prosperity. This 'free and active' principle is not neutrality but an effort to create world peace and order by encouraging states to be free, sovereign, and through cooperation and diplomacy. Third, the mandate of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regulates the establishment of territorial sea boundaries of 12 nautical miles, the right of innocent passage for archipelagic states with straits, a 24-mile additional zone, a 200-mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and a 200-mile continental shelf boundary. UNCLOS also stipulates that disputes must be resolved peacefully in accordance with the UN Charter. There are two dispute settlement procedures in UNCLOS, non-binding and binding. Non-binding dispute settlement allows disputing parties to choose the method of settlement they prefer, such as regional and bilateral cooperation agreements and conciliation. Conciliation is a negotiation mechanism involving the UN Secretary-General appointing a conciliation team as facilitators for the disputing states. Binding dispute settlement procedures are used when disputing parties cannot reach an agreement. In this case, parties can bring a claim and authorize the body established by UNCLOS, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the International Court of Justice, to render a decision on the dispute. Fourth, the framework of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DoC) and discussions on the Regional Code of Conduct (CoC). The DoC includes ten points of agreement, covering commitments to the principles of the UN Charter, UNCLOS, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC-ASEAN), the ASEAN Way, and other international laws that serve as fundamental principles in governing international relations. The DoC also emphasizes the importance of freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute settlement through negotiation, and cooperation in various fields, including maritime security.

Discussions on the CoC aim to regulate the behavior of states more effectively and create operational mechanisms for conflict prevention. The document includes conditions for the implementation of the DoC, guidelines for implementing the DoC, respect for international principles, refraining from the use of force, and peaceful dispute settlement. Indonesia has also been involved in facilitating informal Workshops on Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea for 26 years to assist parties involved in disputes in finding appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms. Indonesia's diplomatic efforts to support the management of the SOUTH CHINA SEA disputes also include efforts to build bilateral relations with China. China is a powerful country outside the region involved in territorial disputes in the South China Sea, and Indonesia has sought to establish constructive relations with China to achieve peace and stability in the region. In diplomatic relations between Indonesia and China, Indonesia always strives to incorporate security interests in the South China Sea region. This is considered important to bind China into cooperation, both at the multilateral and bilateral levels, to build trust among the parties involved in the management of disputes in the South China Sea.

However, Indonesia's initiatives in managing the South China Sea (SCS) disputes through cooperation and diplomacy have faced several obstacles. One of the hindering factors is the more active efforts made by China in approaching the countries involved in the disputes. In 2012, the meetings of ASEAN member states' foreign ministers faced difficulties in reaching a joint statement on China's actions in the South China Sea. The host of the meeting, Cambodia, refused to criticize China's territorial claims and reclamation actions in the South China Sea, and

there were strong suspicions that China asked Cambodia not to bring the issue of territorial disputes in the South China Sea into the ASEAN meeting's agenda. To address this situation, Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, engaged in continuous diplomacy for 72 hours to achieve a joint statement. In 2016, when the Philippines hosted the 31st ASEAN Summit, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte announced a fishing ban in the waters of Scarborough Shoal as an effort to ease tensions between China and the Philippines after the Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012. This decision drew criticism as it was seen that the Philippines disregarded the efforts of the previous leader, Benigno S. Aquino III, to claim Scarborough Shoal. Duterte argued that normalizing relations between the Philippines and China was more important to drive economic progress for both countries. For the South China Sea Exclusive Economic Zone (SCS EEZ) disputes, the Philippines and China agreed to consolidate bilaterally.

Based on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) data published by the Australia & New Zealand Banking Group Research (ANZ) in 2016, China's investment in Southeast Asia has been on the rise since 1990 until 2016. Of the total development capital needs in Southeast Asia, which is around 26 trillion dollars, China was able to meet 6.8% of this capital requirement. China is one of the top 10 countries investing in ASEAN, after the European Union, Japan, the United States, China, and South Korea. Therefore, China's investment power has the potential to influence diplomacy and China's influence in interacting with Southeast Asian countries involved in the South China Sea disputes. The second component in framing the issue is the effective involvement of regional leaders in determining how the issue and problems are framed as shared concerns and interests. Security issues in the South China Sea encompass a range of complex issues, including sovereignty issues, boundary disputes, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU Fishing), piracy, human smuggling, illegal drug trade, and other transnational crimes. Indonesia pays special attention to the issue of IUU Fishing as it reflects the country's interests in the maritime region of Asia, especially in the South China Sea.

Indonesia's greater involvement in the IUU Fishing issue coincided with the significant agenda of President Joko Widodo, who was elected as the seventh leader of Indonesia in 2014. Although the Indonesian government under the leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had previously made efforts to address IUU Fishing, President Joko Widodo provided a clearer focus. The Global Maritime Fulcrum (Poros Maritim Dunia - PMD) agenda promoted by President Joko Widodo has two dimensions of interest: strategic and economic. The strategic dimension is to strengthen Indonesia's maritime power, while the economic dimension includes the development of infrastructure that enhances maritime connectivity throughout Indonesia's region. The government's main consideration is the potential marine resources of Indonesia and the impact of IUU Fishing cases that threaten Indonesia's sovereignty, sustainability, and the well-being of its maritime communities.

According to the Directorate General of Marine and Fisheries Resources Surveillance of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (Ditjen PSDKP), IUU Fishing figures have continued to increase from 2005 to 2014. IUU Fishing crimes are not only committed by Foreign Fishing Vessels (KIA) but also by Indonesian Fishing Vessels (KII). Indonesia suffers total losses of 300 trillion rupiahs per year due to IUU Fishing. Waters around West Kalimantan, the Natuna Islands, and Riau, which are the intersection of Indonesia's EEZ and the South China Sea, are some of the prominent points where KIA engage in illegal fishing activities. Countries involved in IUU Fishing in this region include China, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Cambodia. These losses are not only felt by Indonesian fishermen but also by fishermen from neighboring countries. According to Jianwei Li and Ramses Amer (2015), a sustainability crisis of fishery resources has emerged due to excessive fish catches, exceeding the natural production capacity that has occurred for a considerable time. This is driven by the increasing demand for fish consumption by the populations of countries around the South China Sea

maritime region. The South China Sea maritime region is the main source of fulfilling 77% of fish consumption needs for its surrounding populations. In 2014, fish consumption increased, including by 1.7% in China, 3.8% in Malaysia, 2.6% in the Philippines, 2% in Indonesia, and 2% in Vietnam. This situation has forced many fishermen to venture into other areas to find fish sources as the fish stocks in their nearby waters continue to decline. Such activities have also led KIA fishermen to be involved in IUU Fishing cases in the territorial waters of other countries or in disputed areas in the South China Sea.

In its development, Indonesia has been actively promoting the prevention of IUU Fishing as a regional security threat. In the annual workshops held by countries involved in the South China Sea disputes, the IUU Fishing issue has not yet received sufficient attention. Issues of sovereignty and boundary disputes tend to be the primary focus. Indonesia has engaged in bilateral cooperation efforts to address IUU Fishing cases with countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. The third component is the consideration of interests in the context of regional security. Regional leaders need to consider the relevance of their countries' interests with those of other member states. Regional leaders must actively try to direct other countries toward specific policies. Effective policies are those capable of accommodating different interests without diminishing or eliminating the national interests of each country. In Indonesia's Basic Foreign Policy Position of 2014, issued by the Foreign Policy Review and Development Agency (BPPK Kemlu, 2014), Indonesia's position in the South China Sea disputes includes:

- a. Indonesia's commitment to create a South China Sea region that is safe, peaceful, and stable through various diplomatic efforts.
- b. Indonesia is not a claimant state in the South China Sea disputes. Indonesia considers China's 'nine-dash line claim' to lack a strong basis in international law and to be contrary to the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982.
- c. Indonesia's diplomacy in the South China Sea region is carried out through two tracks: inter-governmental (G-to-G, First Track) and non-inter-governmental (Non G-to-G, Second Track). G-to-G diplomacy is carried out within the ASEAN framework, with efforts to encourage the formation of ASEAN+China. Indonesia has proposed the establishment of norms that regulate the behavior of countries involved in disputes, such as the ASEAN-China Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC) and the ASEAN-China Conduct of Parties in South China Sea (CoC) proposal. Second Track Diplomacy is carried out through workshops, such as The Workshop on Managing Potential Conflict in the South China Sea (SCS Workshop).

Referring to this document, Indonesia's involvement in managing the South China Sea disputes is an initiative to create a safe, peaceful, and stable South China Sea region through diplomacy and cooperation. Indonesia's cooperative efforts aim to prevent open conflicts in the South China Sea region. Indonesia positions itself as a mediator for countries involved in the disputes. This is clearly seen in the annual organization of The Workshop on Managing Potential Conflict in the South China Sea (SCS Workshop), which has been held every year since 1990.

However, as time has progressed, Indonesia has begun to shift its approach to managing the South China Sea from a persuasive (honest broker) approach to a more proactive approach in conflict prevention. This shift is related to incidents in the Natuna Islands and a response to the dynamic strategic environment in the maritime region. Incidents in the Natuna Islands involved Indonesian Navy vessels having to deal with fishing boats and Chinese Coast Guard vessels at various times. On June 23, 2016, Indonesian President Joko Widodo visited Big Natuna Island and sent a strong signal to the Chinese government regarding the Natuna incidents. Indonesia began to take serious action to ensure the security of its maritime waters.

Additionally, another factor influencing the change in Indonesia's policy direction is its response to developments in the strategic environment in the maritime region. The Indonesian Ministry of Defense's Minimum Essential Force (MEF) document (Kemhan, 2015a) examines three key factors affecting security stability in the region: the development of China's military power, the strategic policies of the United States in the region, and the South China Sea disputes. This document emphasizes that the South China Sea disputes pose a threat to Indonesia's security and the region. Indonesia's policy shift indicates that Indonesia is now more active in ensuring the security of its maritime waters and its national interests in the South China Sea region.

The government has identified the South China Sea as a vulnerable point for national security threats. The Natuna waters are considered a potential area of vulnerability for security. Dispute conditions could escalate into open conflicts in that region. In response to incidents in the Natuna Islands, Indonesia firmly asserts its intention to defend the EEZ territorial claim as a step to ensure Indonesia's maritime sovereignty. In this case, through the TNI MEF document, the government states the need for military modernization as a precautionary measure against potential conflict developments.

In the context of analyzing the role of regional leadership in the component of considering regional security interests, particularly in South China Sea security, Indonesia's policy shift in handling South China Sea disputes and its connection to disputes over EEZ sovereignty claims in the South China Sea indicates that Indonesia's relevance to the interests of countries involved in disputes is the same. It pertains to territorial boundary and maritime sovereignty issues. However, there are concerns that this approach may increase the intensity of conflicts in the South China Sea. Issues related to territorial boundaries and traditional sovereignty can trigger armed conflicts, where countries may tend to choose a confrontational path to achieve their goals. Indonesia, as the only country highlighting non-traditional security (IUU Fishing) issues in the South China Sea region, has a significant opportunity to act as a mediator in resolving South China Sea disputes, even though IUU Fishing issues have not yet received sufficient attention from the countries involved in the disputes.

The fourth component involves institutional development, including the leader's ability to formulate a vision related to shared issues or interests and develop management mechanisms to address these issues and achieve common interests. This may include the formation of formal or informal intergovernmental organizations aimed at managing regional security issues. Indonesia has successfully established informal institutions, such as workshops with the theme "The Workshop on Managing Potential Conflict in the South China Sea (SCS Workshop)." The SCS Workshop aims to promote cooperation, dialogue, and mutual trust among the parties involved in the South China Sea disputes. Thus, Indonesia has played an active role in forming regional institutions to manage South China Sea disputes.

The last component involves the deployment of power. Regional leadership involves the use of power resources, including the military, to achieve agreements, cooperation, and acceptance from member states to share security interests and support regional security problem-solving mechanisms. The ideal posture is to use "soft power" and combine preferences and ideas to reach agreements and cooperation without using military force as a coercive means. International defense cooperation is an essential part of safeguarding Indonesia's national security. Defense cooperation serves not only to support national interests but also to demonstrate Indonesia's involvement in global peace efforts as an international community member. In the "active and independent" political framework, Indonesia will maintain the principle of being a non-aligned country that does not form alliances with any other nations.

International defense cooperation aims to build mutual trust among nations with principles of respecting sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and making cooperation a means of achieving common interests and preventing conflicts between countries. Such

cooperation also includes efforts to enhance the professionalism of the TNI soldiers through education, training, and cooperation in the defense industry. Through international defense cooperation, Indonesia contributes to defense diplomacy as a tool to achieve national interests and create a safe, conducive, and stable environment in the South China Sea region. However, it's crucial to consider that defense cooperation with countries outside the region or not involved in South China Sea disputes may potentially lead to a power imbalance in the South China Sea, raising concerns that could result in anticipatory actions and military build-up. Ultimately, this could contradict regional efforts to create a peaceful zone in the South China Sea maritime area. Therefore, the government needs to be cautious in forming defense cooperation with countries outside the region or not involved in South China Sea disputes to minimize the potential for conflict.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, when we refer back to the conceptual framework of leadership with five models of regional leadership role impact, Indonesia's role in the South China Sea dispute management efforts can be categorized as active but with limited impact. Indonesia's role falls into the second category, where it is present and active, but its impact is not substantial. Indonesia's active engagement in this context is reflected in the numerous cooperations and diplomacy it has undertaken during its twenty-six years of involvement in South China Sea dispute management efforts. The success of this is evidenced by the absence of open conflicts in the South China Sea region during that period. However, Indonesia's role has limited impact, constrained by several factors beyond Indonesia's control. Some of these constraining factors include confrontation with China's power, a low level of trust among member states, a lack of technical cooperation in managing the South China Sea region, and dilemmas in defense diplomacy with countries outside the region.

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