

The Implementation of Maritime Diplomacy as Indonesia's Effort to Counter Threats in the Exclusive Economic Zone

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Abstract. *As an archipelagic state, Indonesia possesses a strategic and resource-rich Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), yet remains vulnerable to sovereignty violations by foreign actors. These threats, particularly in the North Natuna Sea, have prompted the Indonesian government to implement maritime diplomacy as a non-military approach to safeguard its national interests. This article analyzes Indonesia's implementation of maritime diplomacy in addressing unilateral claims by China and other threats within its EEZ. Using a qualitative approach and literature studies, the study highlights diplomatic strategies such as official protests, multilateral cooperation, defense diplomacy, and the development of border regions. The findings suggest that maritime diplomacy has been effective in reinforcing Indonesia's legal position and international image, despite ongoing challenges in internal coordination and regional dynamics.*

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INTRODUCTION

As the largest archipelagic state in the world, comprising more than 17,000 islands straddling two oceans and two continents, Indonesia occupies a highly strategic geographical position along key international maritime routes (Pulungan, 2024). This unique location renders Indonesia's maritime territory, including its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), not only rich in natural resources such as fisheries, oil, and gas but also vulnerable to various geopolitical and security challenges.

The North Natuna Sea, which forms part of Indonesia's EEZ, has emerged as a critical flashpoint, frequently experiencing tensions stemming from the incursions of foreign vessels both civilian and military, especially those originating from claimant states in the South China Sea. Violations of Indonesia's sovereignty and sovereign rights in this region occur with notable regularity, despite the area being internationally recognized as falling within Indonesia's jurisdiction under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Suryadi et al., 2024).

In confronting the complex challenges of this region, Indonesia acknowledges that a solely military approach is insufficient to safeguard its national interests. Consequently, the Indonesian government has prioritized maritime diplomacy as a principal instrument of its foreign policy (Rosyidin, 2017). Maritime diplomacy is conceived as a soft power-based strategic approach that aims not only to defend sovereignty and affirm jurisdictional rights but also to foster

communication, cooperation, and mutual trust among international actors. Through diplomatic mechanisms, Indonesia seeks to resolve disputes peacefully, reject unilateral claims that contravene international law, and reinforce strategic partnerships with other nations in the Indo-Pacific region (Priamarizki, 2024).

According to Hakiem & Abidin (2025), Indonesia's maritime diplomacy constitutes an active contribution to regional stability and peace. By balancing national interests with multilateral principles, Indonesia positions itself as a key actor in upholding the openness of sea lanes, the supremacy of international law, and the functionality of regional dialogue mechanisms such as ASEAN and other Indo-Pacific fora. This approach reflects Indonesia's commitment to avoiding open confrontation while lawfully asserting its maritime rights (Pratomo & Kwik, 2020).

Against this background, this article aims to examine the implementation of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy as a strategic response to threats within its EEZ, particularly in the context of escalating tensions in the South China Sea and the North Natuna Sea. The discussion focuses on the diplomatic strategies employed by Indonesia, the challenges encountered in their implementation, and the extent to which maritime diplomacy has proven effective in strengthening Indonesia's position in an increasingly complex and competitive maritime landscape. By exploring these dimensions, the article seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role of diplomacy in safeguarding national sovereignty amid evolving regional security dynamics.

Understanding the dynamics of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy and its strategic approach in addressing threats within maritime zones particularly within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) requires a robust theoretical framework as the foundation for analysis (Rahayu et al., 2023). Theoretical review plays a crucial role in providing a scholarly perspective on the issues under investigation while also facilitating the linkage between empirical phenomena and relevant conceptual frameworks and theories. Therefore, prior to engaging in a more detailed discussion regarding policy implementation and case analysis, this section outlines the core concepts that inform the study's analytical lens, including theories of diplomacy, maritime security, and international relations. Accordingly, the theoretical framework serves as a critical cornerstone for constructing arguments and interpreting data and empirical findings in this research.

Maritime Diplomacy as an Instrument of Soft Power

Maritime diplomacy constitutes a fundamental pillar of a nation's soft power, operating as a strategic and non-coercive instrument through which states advance their national interests, strengthen their influence, and safeguard stability within the maritime domain. It reflects a deliberate use of diplomatic engagement at sea to project values, foster cooperation, and build trust without resorting to hard power measures such as military coercion. Joseph Nye conceptualizes soft power as the capacity of a state to shape the preferences of others and to achieve desired outcomes through attraction, persuasion, and legitimacy rather than through force or inducement. When this concept is applied to maritime affairs, diplomacy at sea becomes not merely a set of negotiations or naval gestures but an integrated approach that enhances a state's visibility, reputation, and credibility within the international system.

Within this context, maritime diplomacy manifests in a wide array of practices, ranging from active participation in multilateral cooperation frameworks, regional security dialogues, and treaty negotiations, to bilateral naval engagements, confidence-building measures, and humanitarian missions. It also involves active contributions to dispute resolution processes, including peaceful settlement of territorial or jurisdictional conflicts, which are often highly sensitive in maritime regions such as the South China Sea. Moreover, states frequently employ maritime diplomacy to strengthen their standing in global governance institutions, such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) or the United Nations, thereby enhancing both their legitimacy and bargaining power.

Equally important, maritime diplomacy functions as a tool to elevate a country's image, projecting it as a responsible, cooperative, and law-abiding actor in international maritime affairs. This image cultivation plays a crucial role in attracting partnerships, fostering economic relations, and gaining moral authority in addressing maritime security threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking, and environmental degradation. Thus, maritime diplomacy does not only secure tangible outcomes like treaties and alliances but also creates intangible benefits in the form of prestige, trust, and normative influence. Ultimately, by blending strategic interests with principles of cooperation and international law, maritime diplomacy becomes an essential mechanism through which states both protect their sovereignty and extend their influence beyond their immediate territorial waters. In doing so, it highlights the intersection between diplomacy, security, and global maritime governance, reaffirming the centrality of oceans not only as theaters of conflict but also as domains of collaboration, dialogue, and peacebuilding.

International Law of the Sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) establishes the legal basis for coastal states to delineate an EEZ extending up to 200 nautical miles from their baselines. Within this maritime area, states possess sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing natural resources. Threats to the EEZ commonly arise from illicit activities such as unauthorized fishing, unapproved resource extraction, and incursions by foreign vessels in violation of maritime boundaries. Despite its robust legal foundation, the EEZ is often confronted with complex challenges that threaten the ability of states to fully exercise their rights and responsibilities. Among the most pressing threats are illicit activities, including illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which undermines food security, depletes fish stocks, and damages marine ecosystems.

In addition, unapproved exploration or extraction of natural resources, such as oil, gas, or minerals, by foreign entities poses risks not only to national economic interests but also to environmental sustainability. Another recurrent challenge stems from incursions by foreign vessels that disregard or deliberately violate established maritime boundaries, creating potential flashpoints for conflict and undermining regional stability. These persistent threats highlight the critical importance of effective maritime governance, surveillance, and diplomacy in ensuring that the rights enshrined under UNCLOS are respected and enforced. They also underscore the necessity for international cooperation, as maritime security challenges often transcend national jurisdictions and require collective responses. Thus, the EEZ, while legally defined as a space of sovereign rights, also emerges as a contested domain where law, security, diplomacy, and geopolitics intersect.

Maritime Security and National Interests

Maritime security fundamentally refers to the protection of a state's maritime zones and interests from a broad spectrum of threats that may undermine national sovereignty, economic prosperity, and regional stability. These threats are traditionally categorized into two dimensions. On the one hand, traditional threats involve the use or projection of military force at sea, including potential naval confrontations, blockades, or coercive actions by rival states. On the other hand, non-traditional threats encompass a diverse range of illicit activities such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, smuggling of goods, human trafficking, piracy, terrorism at sea, and violations of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundaries by foreign vessels. While traditional threats remain a concern in contested maritime spaces, non-traditional threats have become increasingly salient in the twenty-first century, posing persistent challenges to the effective governance of maritime domains and the sustainable management of ocean resources.

In addressing these multidimensional challenges, maritime diplomacy emerges as a pivotal strategy that allows states to safeguard their maritime security through peaceful, lawful, and cooperative means. Unlike hard-power approaches that rely heavily on military deterrence, maritime diplomacy emphasizes rule-based engagement, confidence-building, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. It operates through mechanisms such as joint patrols, bilateral or

multilateral naval exercises, the establishment of maritime domain awareness networks, treaty negotiations, and collaborative enforcement measures aimed at curbing transnational maritime crimes. By embedding maritime security efforts within a framework of diplomacy, states are better positioned to build trust, reduce the risk of conflict escalation, and cultivate long-term cooperation with both regional neighbors and extra-regional powers.

As Geoffrey Damayanti (2017) highlights, maritime diplomacy contributes not only to the maintenance of security but also to the broader promotion of stability and good order at sea. It reinforces the principle that oceans should serve as arenas of cooperation rather than conflict, where states advance their interests while simultaneously respecting international norms, particularly those established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In this way, maritime diplomacy functions as an indispensable bridge between national security imperatives and international legal obligations, ensuring that maritime governance remains anchored in legitimacy, predictability, and mutual respect (Busiega & Busiega, 2017).

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an exploratory and descriptive orientation, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in addressing threats within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), particularly in the North Natuna Sea. The research methodology employed is library research, involving the systematic collection and analysis of credible and relevant written sources. Data were gathered from a range of official government documents, including statements issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, annual reports from the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) and the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), as well as policies published by related state institutions. Additionally, reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and various maritime and Indo-Pacific security-focused think tanks were utilized. Academic publications in the form of peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, and previous empirical studies serve as critical references, providing both theoretical foundations and contextual insights. Moreover, national and international media coverage was critically examined as part of the secondary data to capture the evolving discourse surrounding the issue, including diverse responses to Indonesia's diplomatic actions. The analysis is conducted descriptively by highlighting the patterns in Indonesia's maritime diplomacy policies, forms of responses to territorial violations or provocations by foreign actors, and the extent of Indonesia's active engagement in regional forums and organizations such as ASEAN, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's diplomatic strategies, evaluate their effectiveness in safeguarding maritime sovereignty, and identify the persisting challenges within an increasingly complex regional geopolitical context (Fita, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the elaboration of the theoretical framework and the background of the issue, this section proceeds to the discussion stage, aiming to conduct an in-depth analysis of the implementation of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy in addressing threats within its maritime domain, particularly in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This discussion integrates empirical data, the dynamics of foreign policy, and the strategic approaches adopted by the Indonesian government within the theoretical framework previously outlined. Through this analysis, it is expected that a more comprehensive understanding will be obtained regarding the effectiveness of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy, encompassing its achievements, challenges, and accompanying geopolitical implications.

The Threat Context in Indonesia's EEZ

Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) constitutes a maritime area where Indonesia exercises sovereign rights for the exclusive exploitation of natural resources, as stipulated by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). According to Article 56 of UNCLOS, a coastal state has sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting natural resources within its EEZ, which may extend up to 200 nautical miles from its baseline. In Indonesia's case, this zone encompasses approximately 2.7 million square kilometers, making it one of the countries with the largest maritime territories globally.

One of the most strategically significant areas within Indonesia's EEZ is the North Natuna Sea, situated in the southern part of the South China Sea. This region is abundant in pelagic fish resources and possesses significant oil and gas reserves. The Geological Agency of the Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources estimates that the Natuna D-Alpha block contains approximately 222 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, positioning it as one of Southeast Asia's largest gas blocks (Badan Geologi Kementerian ESDM RI, 2019). Moreover, the area serves as a critical international shipping lane, thereby holding substantial economic and geopolitical value.

However, this region of Indonesia's EEZ has become a focal point of geopolitical tension, particularly due to claims made by the People's Republic of China (PRC). China asserts a sweeping claim over almost the entire South China Sea through its so-called "nine-dash line" a claim that lacks recognition under international law. This assertion overlaps with Indonesia's EEZ in the North Natuna Sea, despite Indonesia's consistent position that there is no legitimate overlapping claim between the two states, as Indonesia does not recognize the nine-dash line as a valid legal basis for territorial claims. This stance has been reiterated in various official statements by Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including a diplomatic note submitted to the United Nations in May 2020, which rejected China's historical claim and asserted its inconsistency with the 1982 UNCLOS.



Figure 1. Make a Suitable Name on The Picture

China's claim has also been de facto nullified by the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague on 12 July 2016 in the case brought by the Philippines. The tribunal concluded that China's historical claims lacked legal foundation and were contrary to UNCLOS provisions. Although China refused to acknowledge the decision, the ruling set an important precedent for ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, in defending their maritime sovereignty.

Despite Indonesia's robust legal standing, threats to its EEZ persist in practice. Several incursions have been recorded in recent years. For instance, between December 2019 and early January 2020, dozens of Chinese fishing vessels, escorted by Chinese Coast Guard ships, entered Indonesia's EEZ in the North Natuna Sea. In response, President Joko Widodo firmly declared that "there is no compromise on sovereignty" and ordered the deployment of military forces and intensified maritime patrols.

In addition, data from the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla RI) indicated that in 2021 alone, there were more than 40 recorded violations by foreign vessels, the majority originating from China and Vietnam. These vessels often exploited regional tensions to engage in

unlawful activities such as illegal fishing or unauthorized oceanographic data collection (Kurekin et al., 2019).

Threats in Indonesia’s EEZ are not limited to illegal fishermen; they also include the use of semi-military force by foreign states, such as the deployment of armed coast guard escorts or the presence of military survey vessels, which destabilize the region and challenge Indonesia’s jurisdiction. Such actions not only contravene international law but also elevate the risk of open conflict. It is important to emphasize that, despite these tensions, Indonesia has consistently adopted a firm yet peaceful diplomatic path. This approach reflects Indonesia’s independent and active foreign policy doctrine and its commitment to resolving disputes through international legal mechanisms. It also demonstrates that maritime sovereignty is not upheld solely through military strength but through clear legal positioning and strategic diplomacy.

The data provided by Bakamla RI regarding violations in the South China Sea over the past six years:

Table 1. Violations In the South China Sea

Year	Number of Violations	Involved Countries	Type of Violations
2019	32	China, Philippines	Illegal fishing, survey
2020	40	China	Illegal fishing, coast guard, intrusion
2021	42	China, Vietnam	Illegal fishing, territorial surveillance
2022	38	China	Intrusion and deterrence
2023	35	China, Vietnam	Illegal fishing, unfriendly military activity.

Indonesia’s Diplomatic Measures

Diplomatic Protests and Official Statements

Diplomatic protest serves as a vital instrument within the state’s diplomatic apparatus to formally express objections to another state’s actions deemed as violations of sovereignty or territorial integrity. In the context of maritime disputes between Indonesia and China, Indonesia has consistently employed this mechanism in response to China’s activities or territorial claims within Indonesia’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Submission of Diplomatic Notes

A diplomatic note constitutes an official document delivered by one state to another, expressing formal objection to actions perceived as infringing upon international law or the state’s sovereignty. The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regularly submits diplomatic notes to the Chinese government each time there are indications of violations such as unauthorized exploration, drilling, or patrols conducted by Chinese vessels within Indonesia’s EEZ. These notes function not only as formal records of Indonesia’s stance but also as a manifestation of its commitment to safeguarding its maritime sovereign rights. Furthermore, they may serve as legal evidence in international forums should the dispute escalate into formal adjudication.

Official Statements from the Government of Indonesia

In addition to issuing diplomatic notes, the Government of Indonesia frequently delivers official statements through spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or other relevant officials to reinforce its position. These statements are typically presented during press briefings or disseminated through formal publications aimed at clarifying Indonesia’s standpoint to the international community.

Such statements underscore Indonesia’s assertion that China’s claimed areas do not overlap with Indonesia’s EEZ as defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982. Indonesia explicitly rejects China’s so-called “historical claims” often

justified by the “nine-dash line,” on the grounds that UNCLOS does not recognize such claims. Instead, Indonesia bases its maritime entitlements on clear, measurable principles of international maritime law.

Emphasis on Compliance with International Law

Through diplomatic protests and official statements, Indonesia reiterates the importance of resolving disputes in accordance with international law, particularly UNCLOS, which has been ratified by both Indonesia and China. Indonesia affirms that unilateral actions disregarding established international legal norms pose a threat to regional stability and bilateral relations.

Objectives and Effectiveness of Diplomatic Protests

Diplomatic protests are intended to de-escalate potential conflicts, uphold national sovereignty, and strengthen Indonesia’s diplomatic posture both regionally and globally. While such protests may not yield immediate behavioral changes from the opposing party, they serve as essential documentation and a powerful political signal of Indonesia’s firm resolve to defend its territorial rights. Moreover, Indonesia actively engages in multilateral forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to promote peaceful resolutions in the South China Sea. Indonesia also advocates for the formulation of a Code of Conduct (CoC) between ASEAN and China.

Defense Diplomacy and Security Cooperation

To reinforce its sovereignty and ensure the security of its maritime territory, Indonesia has adopted an active defense diplomacy strategy through partnerships with key strategic allies, including the United States, Japan, and Australia. These partnerships encompass various components such as joint military exercises, maritime intelligence sharing, and capacity-building for Indonesia’s maritime enforcement agencies.

Through these joint exercises, Indonesian security forces enhance their technical capabilities and interoperability in addressing diverse maritime threats, including territorial intrusions, smuggling, and piracy. In addition, Indonesia benefits from advanced training programs and technological assistance such as radar systems and patrol vessels that significantly improve its maritime surveillance and law enforcement effectiveness.

Such defense cooperation not only bolsters Indonesia’s military preparedness but also enhances its diplomatic influence by fostering a robust network of regional and global partnerships in navigating Indo-Pacific security dynamics. Consequently, defense diplomacy and security cooperation represent strategic pillars in Indonesia’s efforts to maintain maritime stability and sovereignty amidst shifting geopolitical conditions.

Economic Diplomacy and Border Area Development

Economic diplomacy constitutes a crucial strategic approach through which Indonesia reinforces its sovereignty and state presence in border regions, particularly around the Natuna Islands and surrounding areas. Through the development of infrastructure such as ports, airports, roads, and communication facilities the government aims not only to improve the welfare of local communities but also to assert its control and presence in areas prone to territorial disputes.

This infrastructural development stimulates local economic growth by fostering key sectors such as marine industries, fisheries, tourism, and trade, ultimately creating employment opportunities and improving livelihoods in frontier regions. Beyond the economic dimension, such infrastructure also serves a symbolic diplomatic function by demonstrating Indonesia’s concrete commitment to the Natuna territory in the face of overlapping claims.

Furthermore, the presence of adequate facilities enhances security capabilities by facilitating the rapid mobilization of personnel and logistical resources, thereby enabling more effective surveillance and patrol operations in the North Natuna Sea. These efforts align with national programs such as “Indonesia-Centric Development” and “Global Maritime Fulcrum,”

which prioritize border and maritime development as strategic means to protect sovereignty while maximizing the economic potential of Indonesia's marine territory.

Evaluation of the Implementation of Maritime Diplomacy

After examining various strategies and forms of implementation undertaken by Indonesia in its maritime diplomacy which particularly in addressing challenges in its territorial waters, notably the South China Sea. It is essential to assess the effectiveness of these policies. The evaluation aims to measure the extent of success achieved and to identify persistent challenges. Through such an assessment, Indonesia's position in the realm of international diplomacy can be better understood, while also highlighting the aspects that require strengthening to support national sovereignty and regional stability. This evaluation encompasses two main aspects: the achievements and the challenges encountered throughout the execution of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy.

Achievements

Indonesia has recorded several notable achievements in the implementation of its maritime diplomacy, achievements that not only contribute to the protection of its sovereign interests but also reinforce its role as a stabilizing force in the wider region. These accomplishments highlight Indonesia's ability to balance national priorities with broader regional concerns, positioning the country as both a defender of maritime rights and a promoter of cooperative engagement. Through carefully calibrated strategies, Indonesia has strengthened its legal, diplomatic, and geopolitical standing, thereby advancing its national interests without resorting to coercive means.

First, Indonesia has succeeded in maintaining a neutral stance in the South China Sea, one of the world's most contentious maritime regions involving several major powers such as China, the United States, and ASEAN claimant states. Rather than aligning itself with any particular bloc, Indonesia has refrained from direct involvement in open conflicts, choosing instead to emphasize the principles of peace, dialogue, and non-alignment. This posture has enabled Indonesia to preserve constructive relations with all parties, while simultaneously acting as a credible mediator in regional disputes. Indonesia's neutrality is not a passive choice but a strategic one, as it allows the country to avoid entanglement in great-power rivalries while maintaining diplomatic flexibility to advocate for rule-based order and regional stability.

Second, Indonesia has successfully asserted its legal position by making consistent use of international legal mechanisms, particularly through reference to the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). By framing its maritime claims and actions within this widely accepted legal framework, Indonesia has fortified the legitimacy of its rights over its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and strengthened its standing in the international community. This reliance on UNCLOS not only demonstrates Indonesia's commitment to upholding international law but also provides a powerful counterweight against unilateral claims that undermine regional order. Through this legal approach, Indonesia has managed to reinforce its sovereign rights, avoid escalation of disputes, and demonstrate that adherence to law remains the most effective pathway to securing maritime interests.

Third, Indonesia's diplomatic initiatives have steadily elevated its profile on the global stage, particularly within the evolving strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific. By promoting maritime cooperation through multilateral forums such as ASEAN, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and the United Nations, Indonesia has secured recognition from international partners and organizations as a pivotal actor in safeguarding maritime security. This acknowledgment is reflected not only in growing support for Indonesia's maritime initiatives but also in its enhanced influence in shaping regional norms and frameworks, such as the promotion of ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Indonesia's diplomatic achievements thus extend beyond defending its own maritime domain; they contribute to the construction of a broader cooperative security architecture that benefits the entire region.

Taken together, these accomplishments illustrate how Indonesia's maritime diplomacy operates as both a national strategy and a regional public good. By maintaining neutrality in conflict-prone areas, strengthening its legal legitimacy through UNCLOS, and expanding its influence within international forums, Indonesia has demonstrated its capacity to manage complex maritime challenges while promoting peace and stability. These achievements underscore the effectiveness of diplomacy as a non-coercive instrument in advancing national interests, reinforcing Indonesia's identity as a maritime nation, and contributing to the long-term security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region.

Challenges

Nonetheless, the implementation of Indonesia's maritime diplomacy is not without significant challenges that complicate the pursuit of national objectives and the preservation of regional stability. One of the most pressing issues lies in the lack of cohesive coordination among domestic institutions tasked with maritime affairs. Key actors such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL), the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries each possess distinct mandates, yet their activities are often fragmented and poorly synchronized. This insufficient inter-agency synergy reduces the efficiency of policy execution, creates overlaps in jurisdiction, and hinders the timely formulation of unified responses to rapidly evolving maritime incidents. In practice, such institutional fragmentation not only slows decision-making but also weakens Indonesia's credibility in projecting a consistent maritime strategy both at home and abroad.

A further challenge arises from the asymmetry of power between Indonesia and China, particularly in military and economic terms. While Indonesia emphasizes diplomacy, dialogue, and adherence to international law, China continues to assert expansive claims in the South China Sea, backed by its considerable defense budget, advanced naval capabilities, and economic leverage. This imbalance presents Indonesia with a strategic dilemma: on the one hand, it seeks to defend its maritime rights firmly; on the other, it must avoid provoking unnecessary escalation with a far stronger power. Consequently, Indonesia's options are often constrained, as unilateral measures to counter Chinese activities are limited in effectiveness, necessitating reliance on regional cooperation and international law as primary instruments of resistance.

In addition to these bilateral challenges, the role of ASEAN as a regional organization introduces another layer of complexity. While ASEAN provides an important diplomatic platform for dialogue and cooperation, its effectiveness is constrained by the principle of consensus, which often prevents the formation of a unified stance on sensitive issues like the South China Sea dispute. Divergent national interests, economic dependencies, and varying levels of strategic alignment with external powers lead to fragmented policy positions among ASEAN member states. This lack of cohesion not only diminishes ASEAN's bargaining power in negotiations with China but also reduces its capacity to serve as a credible mediator in regional conflict resolution. For Indonesia, which has long championed ASEAN centrality, this situation creates additional hurdles in advancing its maritime diplomacy agenda.

Taken together, these challenges underscore the structural, strategic, and institutional limitations that Indonesia must contend with in its pursuit of maritime diplomacy. Institutional fragmentation undermines internal coherence, asymmetry of power with China limits external maneuverability, and ASEAN's structural weaknesses dilute collective regional influence. Unless these constraints are systematically addressed, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy risks being less effective in safeguarding sovereignty, securing resources, and contributing meaningfully to regional stability. Strengthening inter-agency integration, enhancing national defense and maritime capabilities, and revitalizing ASEAN's role in regional security architecture are therefore essential prerequisites to ensure that Indonesia's maritime diplomacy can achieve its full potential in an increasingly contested maritime environment.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of maritime diplomacy constitutes a strategic measure undertaken by Indonesia to respond to the diverse challenges that threaten its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). As one of the world's largest archipelagic states, Indonesia faces persistent pressures from foreign incursions, illegal fishing, and competing claims over maritime jurisdiction. By prioritizing diplomacy over coercive approaches, Indonesia underscores its role as a peace-oriented nation that seeks to safeguard national sovereignty and maritime resources while maintaining regional stability. Maritime diplomacy in practice is reflected through a combination of bilateral, multilateral, and symbolic engagements. Bilateral negotiations allow Indonesia to directly address disputes with neighboring states, while multilateral forums such as ASEAN and the United Nations provide broader platforms to consolidate support, enhance legitimacy, and project Indonesia's leadership in maritime affairs. Symbolic diplomacy, including naval presence operations and public diplomatic statements, further reinforces Indonesia's sovereign claims and signals determination to both domestic constituencies and international counterparts. These various approaches collectively serve to strengthen Indonesia's image as a responsible actor in the international maritime order. Nevertheless, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy encounters significant challenges. The persistence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, incursions by foreign coast guards or naval vessels, and overlapping maritime claims illustrate the limitations of diplomatic efforts when not accompanied by effective enforcement and strong institutional coordination. Moreover, the complexity of geopolitical dynamics in contested waters, such as the North Natuna Sea, highlights the delicate balance that Indonesia must maintain between diplomacy, deterrence, and the pursuit of long-term cooperation with regional and global partners. Despite these obstacles, Indonesia's maritime diplomacy reflects a consistent commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, adherence to international law, and the defense of sovereign rights over maritime resources.

SUGGESTION

Going forward, strengthening national and regional coordination will be essential to ensure that maritime diplomacy is conducted in a more effective and sustainable manner. This includes enhancing inter-agency cooperation, improving maritime domain awareness, and fostering deeper partnerships with regional stakeholders. By integrating diplomacy with broader elements of national power, Indonesia can consolidate its position as a leading maritime nation, ensuring both the protection of its maritime domain and its contribution to regional peace, security, and sustainable development.

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