International Law Discourse in Southeast Asia

Volume 4 Issue 2 (July 2025), pp. 113-150
ISSN: 2830-0297 (Print) 2829-9655 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.15294/ildisea.v4i2.25028
Published biannually by the Faculty of Law, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia and managed by Southeast Asian Studies Center, Universitas Negeri Semarang, INDONESIA

Available online since December 13, 2025

Deterrence Effect in The Making: The Strategic Role of Indonesia's Maritime Law in ASEAN

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ABSTRACT: Indonesia's maritime influence constitutes a central pillar of security stability in Southeast Asia, particularly in the strategically significant waters of the Malacca Strait. This article examines Indonesia's contribution to regional deterrence through three core research questions: (1) How does the Indonesian Navy's capability shape its deterrence posture in the Malacca Strait? (2) What constraints hinder Indonesia from establishing a credible deterrence effect within the ASEAN security framework? and (3) How can Indonesia's strategic location and maritime diplomacy be optimized to enhance regional stability?. Using a qualitative methodology that integrates expert interviews and document analysis, the study finds that Indonesia's deterrence posture remains constrained by limited defense modernization, inconsistent strategic communication, and uneven policy execution. Furthermore, structural issues such as budgetary constraints and the consensus-based nature of ASEAN diplomacy have reduced Indonesia's ability to respond effectively to maritime provocations. Despite these challenges, Indonesia continues to act as a stabilizing anchor within ASEAN's maritime security architecture. The findings highlight that advancing naval capability, institutionalizing maritime diplomacy based on international law, and integrating legal and strategic frameworks are crucial to

building a layered deterrence effect. Ultimately, Indonesia's Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) vision can evolve into a coherent maritime defense doctrine—transforming maritime law from a regulatory instrument into a strategic tool that reinforces both national sovereignty and ASEAN's collective resilience in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific order.

KEYWRODS: Indonesia; Malacca Strait; maritime security; deterrence effect; ASEAN; defense strategy; regional stability

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic state with over 17,000 islands, holds a pivotal geographical position at the heart of Southeast Asia. Its territory spans several key maritime chokepoints including the Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, and Makassar Straits which makes the country a central actor in global trade routes and regional security dynamics. With an extensive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and a maritime domain that is both rich in resources and fraught with challenges, Indonesia occupies a strategic yet vulnerable position within ASEAN's maritime security architecture.[1]

As an archipelagic state, Indonesia's strategic position is reinforced by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, which establishes the rights and obligations of coastal states in managing their territorial waters and EEZ. Indonesia utilizes these provisions as the legal foundation to strengthen its maritime sovereignty claims while safeguarding vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) that underpin regional security.[2]

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[1] Djalal, H. (2019). Indonesia's maritime diplomacy: Navigating a changing Indo-Pacific. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 38*(3), 387–407.

[2] United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Montego Bay: United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

Figure 1. South China Sea Dispute[3]

Although Indonesia is not among the claimants in the South China Sea dispute, the stability of the region remains a critical national interest with direct implications for its security and economic well-being. In this regard, Indonesia's ability to project a deterrence effect—defined as the capacity to discourage threats through credible defensive or retaliatory power becomes a crucial aspect of its regional strategy.[4] Through a combination of diplomatic outreach, economic engagement, and defense posture, Indonesia seeks to reinforce ASEAN's role in upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific.[5]

Despite some progress in military modernization—especially in naval strength—and strategic initiatives like the "Global Maritime Fulcrum" that elevate maritime affairs as a national development priority[6], questions remain about Indonesia's capacity to serve as a credible regional balancer. Limitations in defense spending, technology, and a predominantly inward-looking security focus have cast doubt on its ability to sustain an effective deterrence posture.

These concerns are compounded by the growing frequency of non-traditional security threats in key maritime corridors such as the Malacca Strait. Issues like piracy, illicit trade, and rising geopolitical

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[3] BBC News. (2023). *What is the South China Sea dispute?* Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13748349

[4] Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics.* Norton & Company.

[5] Sukma, R. (2020). Indonesia and the emerging Indo-Pacific security architecture. *Indonesian Quarterly, 48*(1), 3–24.

[6] Laksmana, E. A. (2016). The domestic politics of Indonesia's approach to the South China Sea. *Contemporary Southeast Asia, 38*(3), 382–409. https://doi.org/10.1355/cs38-3d

tensions—particularly those associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—have heightened the region's security risks. Recent data from ReCAAP and Gard indicate a notable increase in maritime incidents within the Malacca and Singapore Straits, marking them as among the most volatile maritime zones in Asia.

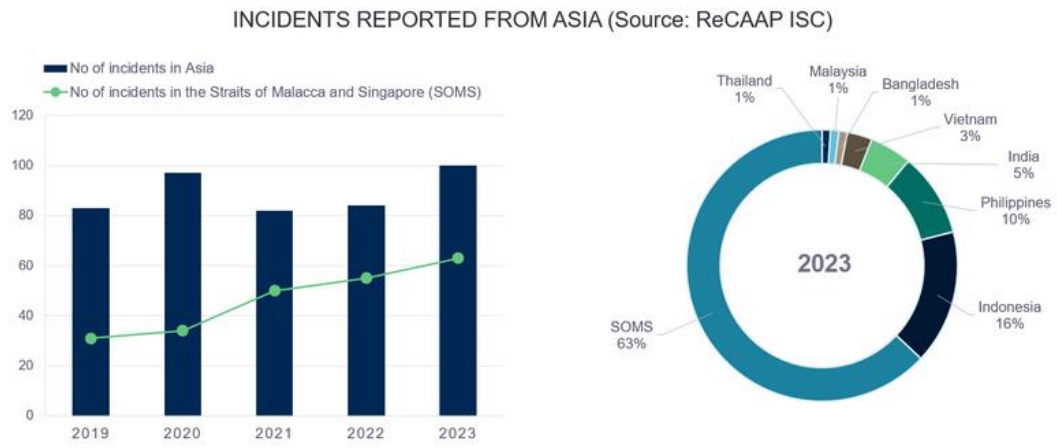

Figure 2. Piracy Trends in Asia: Rising Incidents in the Malacca Strait.[7]

Against this backdrop, this article aims to explore how Indonesia's maritime posture contributes to regional security in Southeast Asia. Specifically, the study investigates to what extent Indonesia's strengths and limitations shape its ability to produce a credible deterrence effect. By examining naval capabilities, defense strategies, and Indonesia's participation in regional security cooperation, this research assesses the country's potential to serve as a key pillar in maintaining maritime balance and stability in Southeast Asia.

II. REASSESSING DETERRENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: INDONESIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY AMID ASEAN NORMS AND LEGAL CONSTRAINTS

The concept of deterrence, rooted in classical strategic thought

[7] Gard. (2024, April 16). Is the decline in global piracy over? *Gard's Insights*. Retrieved from https://gard.no/insights/is-the-decline-in-global-piracy-over/

developed by scholars like Schelling[8] and Freedman[9], is based on the premise that a state can discourage adversaries from initiating aggression by making the costs of such actions outweigh the benefits. At its core, deterrence theory relies on three fundamental pillars: capability, credibility, and communication. Capability refers to a state's military or strategic ability to implement threats; credibility relates to the adversary's belief that the state is willing to follow through with its threats; and communication concerns the clear transmission of strategic intent and red lines to potential aggressors[10].

However, the direct application of deterrence theory in Southeast Asia—particularly within ASEAN—requires a more nuanced and context-sensitive approach. The region operates under a distinct set of norms collectively known as the "ASEAN Way," which emphasizes non-intervention, consensus-based decision-making, and quiet diplomacy in conflict resolution.[11] These characteristics shape a strategic environment markedly different from the more rigid and explicit deterrence frameworks developed in Western security contexts.

In Indonesia's case, the first pillar—capability—faces several structural constraints. While efforts to modernize the Indonesian Navy (TNI-AL) have elevated the country to a middle-power maritime status (green-water navy), its operational reach and firepower remain significantly below that of blue-water navies like China's. As Laksmana[12] notes, Indonesia has primarily adopted a deterrence-by-denial approach—seeking to reduce vulnerabilities through maritime domain awareness, deployment of coastal missile systems, and trilateral patrols with Malaysia and the Philippines—rather than pursuing deterrence-by-punishment strategies.

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[8] Schelling, T. C. (1966). *Arms and influence. The Henry L. Stimson lectures series.* New Haven: Yale University Press

[9] Freedman, L. (2004). *Deterrence*. Polity Press.

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796673

[12] Laksmana, E. A. (2016). The domestic politics of Indonesia's approach to the South China Sea. *Contemporary Southeast Asia, 38*(3), 382–409. https://doi.org/10.1355/cs38-3d

The second pillar, credibility, also presents challenges. Classical deterrence theory demands consistent and resolute responses to threats against national interests. In practice, however, Indonesia tends to favor cautious diplomacy, aligning with ASEAN's normative framework. For example, despite President Joko Widodo's symbolic reaffirmation of sovereignty during his 2016 visit to the Natuna Islands, subsequent maritime violations have typically been addressed through diplomatic notes rather than sustained military presence or assertive patrol operations[13]. This inconsistency may generate ambiguity, thereby weakening Indonesia's deterrence posture in the eyes of external actors.

The third component—communication—has also seen limited optimization. Western deterrence literature highlights the importance of clearly signaling national interests and strategic intentions. Yet, ASEAN states generally prefer indirect communication, often relying on joint communiqués or multilateral platforms such as the ADMM-Plus.[14] While this style aligns with regional diplomatic norms, it may be misinterpreted or overlooked by major powers like China or the United States, which are more accustomed to direct and explicit signaling.

Recognizing these contextual differences, scholars such as Acharya[15] and Jones[16] have argued that deterrence in Southeast Asia requires a fourth pillar: regional norms. These norms serve as filters that shape how external actors perceive a state's capability, credibility, and communication efforts. Accordingly, the success of Indonesia's deterrence strategy hinges on how well its maritime defense policies and diplomacy align with the normative expectations of the region. For instance, Indonesia's military modernization efforts should be

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[13] Widodo, J. (2016, June 23). President Jokowi visits Natuna Islands to assert sovereignty. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved from https://time.com

[14] Tan, S. S. (2016). The ADMM-Plus: Defense diplomacy in a diverse region. *Asia Policy, 22*, 70–75. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/asp.2016.0024

[15] Acharya, A. (2001). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203393345

[16] Jones, L. (2012). ASEAN, sovereignty and intervention in Southeast Asia. *Asian Security, 8*(3), 1–27.

framed as part of defense diplomacy rather than as aggressive posturing, thereby avoiding alarm among neighboring ASEAN states.

In addition to military and diplomatic aspects, the dimension of international law also plays a critical role in strengthening the credibility of Indonesia's deterrence strategy. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982—particularly Article 56 on coastal states' rights within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)—provides Indonesia with the legal foundation to enforce jurisdiction over illegal activities such as unauthorized fishing and navigation violations. Thus, adherence to international maritime law becomes an integral component of Indonesia's maritime defense strategy, complementing its military capabilities and diplomatic initiatives.[17]

Pillar	Indonesia's Indicators	ASEAN-Specific Characteristics
Capability	Size and readiness of naval forces, maritime surveillance network, coastal missiles	Must avoid creating perceptions of threat among neighboring countries
Credibility	Policy consistency, historical responses to maritime incidents	Assessed through the lens of norms favoring avoidance of open conflict
Communication	Clarity of strategic interests, participation in military exercises	Often indirect and requires contextual interpretation
ASEAN Norms	Commitment to non-intervention and consensus	Violations may provoke resistance and erode regional legitimacy

Figure 3. Classical Deterrence Pillars and ASEAN Norms

Indonesia's struggle to establish a credible maritime deterrence posture within the ASEAN region extends beyond structural limitations. It is also closely tied to strategic direction, foreign policy consistency, and the effectiveness of its strategic messaging. At present, Indonesia's naval capabilities remain largely characterized by a green-water navy model, which inherently restricts the country's ability to project power beyond its immediate territorial waters. This constraint is reflected in the limited number of large-tonnage frigates and destroyers, which are insufficient for sustained operations in key strategic areas such as the Malacca Strait or the northern Natuna Sea.

[17] United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Montego Bay: United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf

In terms of credibility, Indonesia has yet to demonstrate a consistent response to violations of its maritime zones. For instance, while the 2016 Natuna incident prompted strong official statements, subsequent breaches by foreign vessels have often been met with restrained and diplomatically driven actions. Such inconsistencies may foster perceptions among potential adversaries that Indonesia's deterrent threats lack reliability or follow-through.

Additionally, Indonesia's strategic communication regarding deterrence remains underdeveloped—both in the substance of its messaging and the platforms through which those messages are conveyed. To date, Indonesia lacks a well-articulated and documented strategic narrative that clearly delineates its maritime red lines, especially toward external powers such as China. Although its cautious and normative communication style aligns with ASEAN's diplomatic norms, this approach has proven inadequate when engaging major powers accustomed to more assertive and unambiguous signals of intent.

This assessment is further supported by an interview with a senior officer in the Indonesian Navy who noted, *"It's not just about the number of ships, but how quickly we can respond in high-risk areas like the Malacca Strait. At present, we do not yet have that level of responsiveness."* This statement reflects real operational challenges—such as limited logistics, fleet readiness, and radar coverage—that hinder Indonesia's ability to deliver a timely and credible deterrent presence in maritime hotspots.

Figure 4. Malacca Strait[18]

Given these challenges, Indonesia's future approach must be more comprehensive, coherent, and responsive to the evolving regional context. Strengthening its position as a key maritime security actor in ASEAN will require balancing national interests with prevailing regional norms, while enhancing transparency and assertiveness in strategic communication. Only through such efforts can Indonesia solidify its deterrent posture and play a leading role in maintaining maritime stability across Southeast Asia.

III. METHODS

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews and document analysis to evaluate two core dimensions: (1) the current state of Indonesia's naval strength, defense strategy, and regional partnerships; and (2) the extent to which Indonesia's deterrence effect is established within the ASEAN security landscape, with a particular emphasis on the Malacca Strait as a representative strategic maritime zone. Grounded in an interpretive qualitative approach and inductive reasoning as outlined by Creswell[19], the research employs an embedded single-case study design to allow for a deep contextual examination.

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews and document analysis to evaluate two core dimensions: (1) the current state of Indonesia's naval strength, defense strategy, and regional partnerships; and (2) the extent to which Indonesia's deterrence effect is established within the ASEAN security landscape, with a particular emphasis on the Malacca Strait as a representative strategic maritime zone. Grounded in an interpretive qualitative approach and inductive reasoning as outlined

[18] Inside Supply Management. (2023, November). The Strait of Malacca's global supply chain implications. *Institute for Supply Management*. Retrieved from https://www.ismworld.org

[19] Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

by Creswell[20], the research employs an embedded single-case study design to allow for a deep contextual examination.

Primary data were collected through purposive in-depth interviews with four key informants directly involved in or knowledgeable about maritime security issues: a defense analyst from a national think tank, a senior officer from the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL), a Southeast Asian regional security expert from academia, and a diplomat from Indonesia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs engaged in ASEAN maritime negotiations. These face-to-face interviews were conducted between February and April 2025, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview protocol was structured around three main clusters: (1) naval capabilities and readiness (including MEF implementation and joint exercises); (2) regional defense strategy and diplomacy (such as the ADMM and trilateral maritime cooperation); and (3) perceptions of deterrence and responses to external actors, particularly China.

In addition to primary data, the research draws on a wide range of secondary sources, including strategic policy documents such as Law No. 34/2004 on Defense, the Global Maritime Fulcrum Doctrine, Indonesia's 2015 and 2024 Defense White Papers, ADMM proceedings, and reports from ReCAAP and trilateral maritime patrol initiatives.

The analytical process began with verbatim transcription of the interviews, followed by member checking to ensure accurate interpretation of the data. Open coding was conducted using NVivo software, which was then refined through axial coding into several thematic categories including hard capability, soft capability, coalition-building, and non-traditional threats. Data were further analyzed using thematic analysis based on the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke[21], resulting in four major themes: fleet readiness,

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[20] Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

[21] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

maritime diplomacy, threat perception, and institutional constraints. The validity of the findings was reinforced through source triangulation and peer debriefing with two senior researchers in the field of maritime security.

Limitations of this research include the relatively small sample size of informants and the geographic focus on the Malacca Strait, which may not fully represent the dynamics in other key maritime zones such as the Lombok and Makassar Straits. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, anonymizing identities, and securing all data through encryption to protect confidentiality.

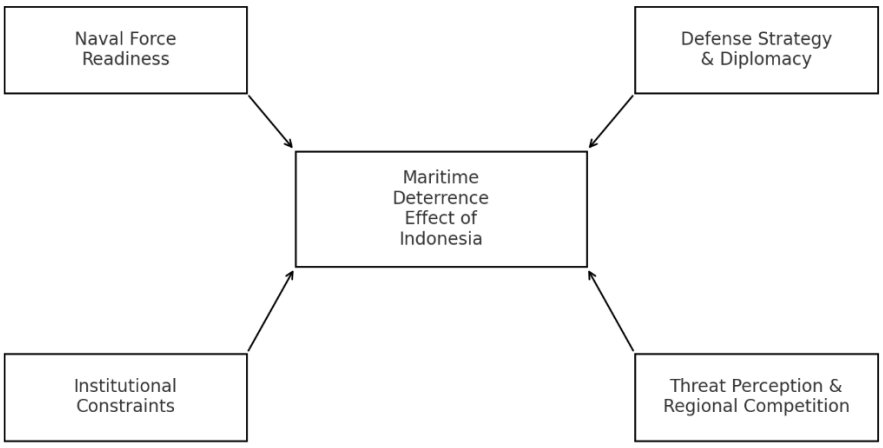

Figure 5. Relationship Among Deterrence Themes (Author's Illustration, 2025)

To illustrate the interconnections among key findings, Figure 5 presents a visual representation of the four central themes identified in the research—fleet preparedness, defense and diplomatic strategies, threat perception and regional competition, and institutional barriers—that collectively shape Indonesia's maritime deterrence effect. The diagram demonstrates that these elements

function not in isolation but as an interdependent system influencing Indonesia's ability to project credible deterrence within ASEAN's maritime domain.

IV. REGIONAL STRATEGIC CONTEXT: CHINA'S INTERESTS AND INDONESIA'S MARITIME ROLE IN ASEAN

China has increasingly asserted its strategic influence in Southeast Asia through a coordinated blend of economic, military, and diplomatic efforts. A major focal point of this influence is the Malacca Strait—one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, linking East Asia with South Asia, Europe, and Africa. Economically, Beijing has mobilized substantial investments via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and creating alternative logistical routes. These initiatives include the development of strategic ports in Malaysia and Cambodia, along with Thailand's Land Bridge project, which offers a potential bypass of the Malacca Strait[22].

[22] Vernou, J. (2024). The Belt and Road Initiative and Southeast Asian maritime routes: Strategic leverage through infrastructure. *Journal of Asian Geopolitics, 7*(1), 45–66. https://doi.org/10.1142/S2591729320500029

Figure 6. China's Belt & Road Initiative[23]

In parallel with economic measures, China has expanded its military footprint by modernizing its blue-water navy and increasing patrol activities in the South China Sea—activities that directly impact security in the Malacca Strait[24]. On the diplomatic front, China engages both bilaterally and through multilateral frameworks such as the ASEAN–China Free Trade Area and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, enhancing its strategic influence while promoting sensitive issues outside of ASEAN's consensus-based architecture[25].

In response to this expansion, Indonesia under President Joko Widodo launched the *Global Maritime Fulcrum* (GMF) initiative—a national vision to reestablish Indonesia's maritime identity and influence. GMF is structured around five key pillars: fostering maritime culture, managing marine resources, building infrastructure and connectivity, strengthening maritime diplomacy, and enhancing maritime defense capabilities. As a framework for deterrence, GMF holds strategic potential for positioning Indonesia as a regional stabilizer. However, its implementation reveals persistent gaps between strategic rhetoric and operational reality.

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[23] Nayal, M., Gonen, E., & Chaudhary, R. D. (2021). China's Belt and Road Initiative: Contours, implications, and alternatives. Maritime India. https://maritimeindia.org/your-actual-article-url

[24] de Swielande, T. S. (2011). China and the South China Sea: A new security dilemma? *Studia Diplomatica, 64*(3), 7–20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26531491

[25] Jones, L. (2012). ASEAN, sovereignty and intervention in Southeast Asia. *Asian Security, 8*(3), 1–27.

Figure 7. Indonesia's Naval Capability Overview, 2024–2025.
(Source: Compiled by the author)

Indonesia's naval development plan initially targeted the acquisition of 274 vessels by 2024, including 110 combat ships, 66 patrol boats, and 98 support vessels. Yet, according to data from the Ministry of Defense, only about 160 ships were operational by 2025, with most being aging, low-tonnage vessels[26]. Budgetary constraints exacerbate the issue: from a total national defense budget of IDR 155 trillion in 2025, the Navy receives just IDR 20 trillion—insufficient for both maintaining existing fleets and procuring new assets[27].

This shortfall highlights a significant capability gap—not only in the number of vessels but also in the quality and endurance required for extended operations in strategic zones like the Malacca Strait. Moreover, many of the operational ships are outdated and technically limited, restricting their capacity for long-range force projection.

Indonesia's flagship GMF program, the Sea Toll (*Tol Laut*), shows progress in quantitative terms. Shipping routes increased from just three in 2015 to 39 by 2024, with over 24,000 TEUs in cargo volume.

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[26] Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia. (2024). *Strategic plan of the Ministry of Defense 2020–2024*. Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia.

[27] Rizka, D. A. (2025, January 3). *Navy budget allocation has not reached defense target*. Kompas.id. Retrieved from https://www.kompas.id

However, logistics efficiency remains suboptimal, as many vessels still depend on subsidies and frequently return empty, reflecting ongoing imbalances in inter-island trade[28].

In terms of defense credibility, Indonesia continues to face challenges. While President Widodo's 2016 visit to the Natuna Islands signaled a firm stance against China's maritime claims, subsequent violations by foreign vessels were largely met with diplomatic notes rather than sustained military presence[29]. This inconsistency raises doubts about Indonesia's deterrent resolve in the eyes of external actors.

Indonesia's strategic communications also remain normative and indirect. Forums like ADMM-Plus and the East Asia Summit are used to voice national concerns, but the deterrence signals sent are often too subtle to register effectively with great powers accustomed to explicit "red lines"[30].

Given these conditions, Indonesia must adopt a more assertive and coordinated approach. First, it should diversify foreign investment sources to reduce reliance on China by expanding partnerships with Japan, South Korea, the United States, and the European Union. Second, GMF performance should be assessed through measurable indicators such as ship readiness rates, coastal radar effectiveness, and the self-sufficiency of sea toll routes. Third, Indonesia should strengthen ASEAN as a collective counterweight to Chinese dominance while advancing minilateral security partnerships, including trilateral patrols and joint SAR exercises. Lastly, the government should develop a coherent maritime strategic narrative, clearly defining national interest zones, and institutionalize it through periodic publication of defense white papers.

By implementing these measures, Indonesia can move beyond symbolic gestures and towards building a robust maritime posture

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[28] Statistics Indonesia. (2024). *Indonesian sea transportation statistics 2023/2024*. Statistics Indonesia (BPS).

[29] Widodo, J. (2016, June 23). President Jokowi visits Natuna Islands to assert sovereignty. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved from https://time.com

[30] Acharya, A. (2001). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203393345

aligned with its Global Maritime Fulcrum vision—one capable of projecting credible deterrence and contributing meaningfully to regional stability amid rising Chinese influence.

This vision is rooted in the Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine, introduced by President Joko Widodo in 2014 as Indonesia's long-term strategy to establish itself as a leading maritime power in Southeast Asia[31]. The GMF integrates elements of maritime defense, economy, and diplomacy, aiming to transform Indonesia's geographical advantage into strategic strength. However, despite its comprehensive scope, the doctrine has yet to fully realize the deterrence capacity it initially envisioned. A closer examination reveals a substantial gap between rhetorical commitment and practical implementation, underscoring the need for more coherent policies, stronger institutional coordination, and measurable outcomes to actualize its strategic intent.

From a capability standpoint, Indonesia continues to face structural constraints in naval development. According to the Ministry of Defense's 2020–2024 Strategic Plan, the country aimed to procure 274 vessels, including 110 combat ships, 66 patrol boats, and 98 auxiliary vessels. However, by the first quarter of 2025, only about 160 operational ships were in service. Alarmingly, only seven of these fall under the category of large surface vessels such as frigates or destroyers—critical assets for power projection in key areas like the Malacca Strait and the northern Natuna Sea[32]. Similarly, the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) has fallen short of its procurement goals, having commissioned just 12 out of the targeted 30 new 80-meter patrol vessels.

These limitations are closely tied to fiscal challenges. Of the national defense budget of IDR 155 trillion in 2025, the Navy receives only around IDR 20 trillion, roughly 13% of the total. Most of this is

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[31] Laksmana, E. A. (2016). The domestic politics of Indonesia's approach to the South China Sea. *Contemporary Southeast Asia, 38*(3), 382–409. https://doi.org/10.1355/cs38-3d

[32] Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia. (2024). *Strategic plan of the Ministry of Defense 2020–2024*. Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia.

allocated to maintenance and operational costs, leaving little room for new hardware modernization[33]. As a result, the Navy's combat readiness rate remains stagnant at 45%, far below the 70% benchmark set by the GMF agenda.

On the issue of credibility, Indonesia has struggled to demonstrate a consistent response pattern to maritime threats. For instance, although President Widodo made a strong political gesture by visiting the Natuna Islands in 2016, subsequent maritime patrols and enforcement efforts failed to persist. The "Integrated Natuna Patrol" initiative, launched after the incident, was terminated after six months due to operational funding cuts. Similarly, enforcement actions against illegal fishing have declined. Between 2015 and 2017, over 125 foreign vessels were sunk, but this number dropped to only 23 during the 2021–2024 period[34]. This inconsistency may lead adversaries to question Indonesia's resolve in defending its maritime red lines, thereby weakening its deterrence posture.

In terms of communication and diplomacy, Indonesia remains actively engaged in regional security dialogues such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). However, its strategic messaging around deterrence has remained largely normative and lacks assertive clarity. Phrases like "collective security" and "dialogue space" dominate official discourse, while firm declarations about territorial defense priorities are missing. As of 2025, Indonesia has yet to publish a defense white paper explicitly identifying its maritime strategic zones[35]. A senior official from the Ministry of Defense emphasized the urgent need for a unified strategic narrative that clearly conveys Indonesia's boundaries and non-negotiable interests to ASEAN partners and

[33] Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. (2025). *Financial note and the draft state budget 2025*. Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia.

[34] Liss, C. (2018a). Maritime security in Southeast Asia: Assessing Indonesia's responses. *Maritime Affairs, 14*(2), 1–17.

[35] Thayer, C. A. (2012). Southeast Asia: Patterns of security cooperation. *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*.

external actors[36].

The 2023 Exercise Komodo case further illustrates the limitations of Indonesia's deterrence approach. Despite the successful organization of a multinational drill with participation from 17 countries, critical deterrence scenarios such as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) operations were excluded. This reflects Indonesia's ongoing emphasis on confidence-building rather than preparing for real, high-stakes contingencies.

The deficiencies in Indonesia's maritime capability, credibility, and communication have substantial implications for its position in ASEAN's regional security architecture. Without urgent improvements, external powers such as China may exploit these gaps—through infrastructure initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative or military assertiveness in the South China Sea[37]. Conversely, if Indonesia can strengthen all three dimensions in a coordinated and consistent manner, it will be better positioned to serve as a regional stabilizer and enhance ASEAN's capacity to manage maritime security challenges.

Several strategic policy recommendations are warranted. First, Indonesia should publish transparent and periodic GMF performance indicators, including fleet readiness rates, active patrol frequency, and coastal radar coverage. Second, the defense budget allocation for the Navy should be increased to at least 25% of the total by 2030. Third, multilateral drills such as Exercise Komodo should be expanded to include A2/AD scenarios and the protection of critical chokepoints like the Malacca Strait. Lastly, a comprehensive defense white paper should be published, outlining national maritime interests and supporting the expansion of minilateral security frameworks like the Indonesia–Malaysia–Philippines trilateral patrol, potentially extending operations to the Lombok and Makassar Straits.

By executing these strategies with consistency and precision, the

[36] (Personal Communication, 10 February 2025).

[37] Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796673

Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) can evolve beyond a policy vision into a robust maritime defense doctrine—empowering Indonesia to fulfill its role as a regional anchor of stability within ASEAN. This transformation, however, must be reflected not only in strategic planning but also in tangible contributions to regional maritime security.

In this regard, Indonesia plays a crucial role in safeguarding sea lines of communication across the ASEAN region, particularly in the strategically vital Strait of Malacca—one of the busiest and most important shipping routes in Southeast Asia. While much of the discourse has centered on Indonesia's involvement in the Natuna Sea and South China Sea, the Malacca Strait provides a critical lens through which to assess the operational effectiveness of Indonesia's regional security commitments and its capacity to translate strategic intent into action.

In terms of joint maritime exercises, Indonesia has demonstrated leadership through its active participation in activities conducted throughout the Malacca Strait. One tangible contribution is its involvement in the "Malacca Straits Patrol" (MSP) initiative, a trilateral security arrangement with Malaysia and Singapore. The program encompasses coordinated patrols and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. However, most of these exercises remain limited to confidence-building measures and have yet to incorporate more advanced deterrence scenarios such as anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategies[38].

From an operational coordination perspective, Indonesia maintains close maritime security cooperation with Malaysia and Singapore, including participation in the establishment of the maritime information centre based in Changi, Singapore. Nonetheless, this cooperation still faces several operational challenges—particularly concerning the integration of maritime surveillance systems and the

[38] Liss, C. (2018b). Indonesia's maritime security cooperation in the South China Sea: Building capacity, but facing limitations. *Asian Politics & Policy, 10*(1), 100–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/aspp.12340

limited number and readiness of Indonesian patrol vessels. Several reports indicate that Indonesia's patrol coverage lags behind Singapore in both frequency and geographic scope, largely due to logistical constraints and underdeveloped maritime infrastructure[39].

Law enforcement effectiveness in the Malacca Strait also presents a dynamic picture. According to ReCAAP 2025, approximately 63% of Asia's maritime incidents occur in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. Although the number of piracy incidents declined between 2024 and 2025—largely attributed to Indonesia's increased maritime patrols and coordination between the Indonesian Navy and relevant agencies—enforcement remains inconsistent across the region. This decline may not represent a sustainable deterrent unless supported by improvements in surveillance systems and rapid response capabilities.

A gap analysis reveals that Indonesia's role in the Malacca Strait illustrates a duality between its diplomatic leadership and material limitations. On one hand, Indonesia spearheads maritime diplomacy within ASEAN through platforms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). On the other hand, limitations in patrol vessel availability, cross-sector radar integration, and rapid response operations highlight a clear capability gap that must be addressed to establish a credible deterrent posture.

To enhance its strategic presence in the Malacca Strait, Indonesia must consider several key policy recommendations. First, the government should expand its fleet of fast patrol vessels deployed along western Sumatra and integrate unmanned coastal surveillance systems, such as drones. Second, data from agencies including Bakamla and the Indonesian Navy should be centralized into a national maritime command centre that directly interfaces with the MSP coordination hub in Singapore. Third, annual naval exercises in the Malacca Strait must incorporate simulations of gray-zone threats,

[39] ReCAAP ISC. (2025). *Annual report 2024: Piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia*. Retrieved from https://www.recaap.org

such as incursions by maritime militias or potential sabotage against port infrastructure.

By reinforcing its strategic commitment to the Malacca Strait, Indonesia can not only enhance the protection of its own territorial waters but also contribute significantly to a stable, threat-resilient ASEAN maritime environment—mitigating both conventional and non-conventional maritime risks.

V. LAW AND SECURITY APPROACH IN THE STRAIT OF MALACCA

To build a credible deterrence effect and maintain regional maritime stability, particularly along the vital Strait of Malacca. As the world's largest archipelagic state and one of the principal guardians of the global Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), Indonesia employs its maritime law not merely as a regulatory instrument but as a strategic tool that shapes defense budgeting, foreign policy, and maritime security governance. This integrated approach demonstrates that maritime law functions as a multidimensional deterrence instrument—combining capability development through defense financing, confidence-building through legal diplomacy and regional cooperation, and legitimacy enhancement through maritime law enforcement. Within this framework, Indonesia's maritime legal architecture contributes to ASEAN's regional stability by harmonizing national sovereignty with international maritime norms and the broader interests of collective security.

1. Budgetary Dimension: Law as an Instrument of Defense Capability

From the budgetary dimension, Law No. 17 of 2003 on State Finance and Law No. 1 of 2004 on State Treasury serve as the legal foundations for allocating national resources to support the defense and maritime security sectors. These legal instruments provide legitimacy for financing maritime patrol operations, modernizing the fleets of the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) and the Maritime Security

Agency (Bakamla), as well as enhancing technology-based maritime surveillance systems. Through this legal framework, Indonesia establishes a capability-based deterrence effect, whereby the nation's maritime surveillance capacity and operational presence send a clear signal to both state and non-state actors that any violation of sovereignty will be met with firm and proportional responses. In other words, state financial law not only regulates expenditures but also functions as the foundation of a defense policy oriented toward threat prevention.[40]

2. Foreign Policy Dimension: Maritime Diplomacy as a Deterrent Mechanism

In the realm of foreign policy, Indonesia's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 and its active participation within the ASEAN cooperation framework demonstrate a legal strategy that operates in tandem with diplomacy. Through forums such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum and the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement (TCA) with Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia utilizes its legal legitimacy to strengthen cooperative patrols, intelligence sharing, and joint law enforcement in the Strait of Malacca.

This approach establishes a confidence-based deterrence, wherein deterrent effects arise from coordinated legal frameworks and regional diplomatic collaboration. By positioning itself as a rule shaper in ASEAN's maritime governance, Indonesia extends its strategic influence without relying solely on military strength. This form of legal diplomacy underscores that maritime sovereignty can be safeguarded through international legal legitimacy reinforced by mutual trust among states.

3. Defense and Security Dimension: The Supremacy of Law in

[40] Chairil, T. (2023, November 21). *Assessing Indonesia's maritime governance capacity: Priorities and challenges.* Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). https://amti.csis.org/assessing-indonesias-maritime-governance-capacity-priorities-and-challenges/

Maritime Control

From the perspective of defense and security, Law No. 17 of 2008 on Shipping and Law No. 27 of 2007 on the Management of Coastal Areas and Small Islands provide both the legal boundaries and the authority for maritime law enforcement agencies to operate within Indonesia's national jurisdiction. Based on these legal foundations, Indonesia possesses the necessary legal instruments to combat piracy, smuggling, and other illicit activities in the Strait of Malacca. This demonstrates that the supremacy of law at sea reinforces legitimacy-based deterrence. When law enforcement actions are grounded in legally valid and internationally recognized regulations, the resulting deterrent effect not only discourages criminal actors but also strengthens Indonesia's legitimacy in the eyes of the international community as a maritime nation governed by the rule of law. The existence of the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla)—a civilian institution working in coordination with the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL)—further enhances the synergy between military and civil legal approaches, representing a modern and adaptive deterrence strategy against multidimensional threats.

4. Integration of Law, Policy, and Defense as Pillars of Deterrence

Overall, Indonesia's maritime legal system forms three fundamental pillars of deterrence: capability, confidence, and legitimacy. These three dimensions operate simultaneously to build Indonesia's strategic position within ASEAN. Through legal instruments, defense budgeting policies are directed toward building tangible maritime capabilities; through diplomatic instruments, law functions as a bridge of trust among nations; and through defense instruments, law provides the legitimate basis for coercive and preventive actions. Thus, Indonesia's maritime law is not merely an administrative framework—it is a strategic defense instrument. It integrates economic, political, and security interests within a unified legal architecture capable of generating a multi-layered deterrence effect. This positions Indonesia not only as a guardian of the Strait of Malacca but also as a key stabilizing force in the broader ASEAN

maritime security architecture.

VI. INDONESIA'S MARITIME CAPABILITIES AND THE DETERRENCE EFFECT

According to the Global Firepower Index (GFP) 2025, Indonesia ranks as the top military power in Southeast Asia, followed by Vietnam, Thailand, and Myanmar. This ranking is derived from over 60 weighted indicators, including active personnel numbers, defense inventory, and logistical capacity[41]. However, a high ranking does not necessarily equate to an effective maritime deterrence posture. To assess whether Indonesia's naval modernization efforts have translated into stronger deterrence, three critical dimensions must be examined: force projection, interoperability, and command readiness.

Country	GFP Ranking 2025	PowerIndex
Indonesia	8	0.2557
Vietnam	12	0.4024
Thailand	14	0.4536
Myanmar	18	0.6735
Philippines	19	0.6987
Malaysia	20	0.7429
Singapore	15	0.5271
Cambodia	37	20.752
Laos	40	22.663

Figure 7. Military Capabilities in ASEAN, 2025[42]

First, force projection. Since 2015, Indonesia has procured the SIGMA-class 10514 frigate, ordered the Nagapasa-class submarines, and launched a Blue Water Navy initiative with ambitions to acquire Iver Huitfeldt-class destroyers. Despite increased fleet tonnage, Indonesia's naval inventory remains largely composed of mid-sized

[41] Global Firepower. (2025). *Countries ranking in Asia 2025*. Retrieved from https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-asia.php

[42] *Ibid*

patrol vessels and corvettes geared toward coastal defense. Due to logistical limitations—averaging only 15 days at sea without replenishment—the ability to sustain naval presence in distant choke points, such as the northern Malacca Strait or the South China Sea, remains limited compared to blue-water navies[43]. This illustrates that hardware upgrades alone have yet to overcome the constraints of operational range and endurance—two key elements of credible deterrence.

Second, interoperability and command networks. The GFP does not account for how well Indonesia's naval vessels, maritime patrol aircraft, and coastal radar systems communicate with one another or integrate with ASEAN partners. In practice, the Combat Management Systems (CMS) installed on newer vessels are sourced from various manufacturers—such as Thales for SIGMA frigates and Hanwha for Nagapasa submarines—leading to interoperability issues. Furthermore, integration with the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) information center in Changi still relies on Automatic Identification System (AIS) data and VHF radio channels, lacking a satellite-based common operational picture. These gaps impede the cueing speed and target hand-off needed for immediate deterrent responses[44].

Third, command readiness and operational tempo. Indonesia's 2025 defense budget stands at IDR 155 trillion, roughly 0.8% of GDP—far below the global average of 2% and significantly lower than China's estimated 1.6% of GDP, despite China's defense budget being over 13 times larger in real terms[45]. As a result, approximately 68% of the Navy's budget is consumed by operations and maintenance, leaving minimal resources for high-intensity naval training exercises such as live-fire drills, A2/AD simulations, or sub-surface warfare. Frigate deployment cycles average 90–110 days annually, falling short of the NATO standard of 180 days. Without a high operational tempo and consistent advanced training, Indonesia's deterrent threat may lack

[43] International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2025). *The Military Balance 2025*. Routledge.

[44] Laksmana, E. A. (2022a). Fit for purpose? Can Southeast Asian minilateralism deter? *Asia Policy, 17*(4), 1–56.

[45] SIPRI. (2025). *SIPRI military expenditure database*. Retrieved from https://www.sipri.org

credibility, particularly when adversaries can track ship movements using open-source tools.

Deterrence Implications. While a top position in the GFP index may offer symbolic reassurance, rational adversaries evaluate deterrence based on a state's demonstrated ability to project force at the right place and time. Without enhanced endurance, integrated systems, and sustained operational readiness, naval modernization risks becoming a "paper deterrent." To address this, Indonesia should implement the following strategic measures:

1. Enhance at-sea replenishment capabilities by acquiring support tankers to allow frigates and submarines to operate for over 30 days without returning to base.
2. Standardize Combat Management Systems and secure data links to ensure new units are immediately compatible with Bakamla networks and the MSP fusion center, thereby reducing response times to under 15 minutes.
3. Dedicate a minimum of 120 days of combat sailing per vessel annually, and incorporate A2/AD modules and sub-surface tracking into joint exercises such as MNEK or Garuda Shield.

Aspect	Current Condition	Challenges	Recommendations
1. Force Projection	Indonesia has acquired SIGMA-class frigates and Nagapasa-class submarines, with plans to procure Iver Huitfeldt-class destroyers under the Blue Water Navy Program.	Operational endurance and range remain limited due to insufficient replenishment-at-sea capabilities and a lack of support vessels.	Enhance at-sea replenishment capacity and acquire additional support tankers to enable sustained operations exceeding 30 days without homeport dependence.
2. Interoperability & Command Network	The Navy uses CMS from diverse vendors (e.g., Thales, Hanwha), with poor cross-platform integration and slow synchronization with MSP and ASEAN counterparts.	Fragmented CMS and the absence of standardized encrypted data-links lead to delayed reaction times and hinder regional interoperability.	Unify CMS platforms and adopt standardized encrypted communication systems to ensure seamless coordination with Bakamla, MSP fusion centers, and ASEAN partners; aim to reduce data-link delay to under 15 minutes.
3. Command Readiness	Defense budget stands at only 0.8% of GDP, with 68% of the Navy's budget allocated to operations and maintenance; average sailing duration is 90–110 days annually.	Training is limited, operational tempo is low, and high-intensity exercises such as live-fire and sub-surface combat are lacking.	Commit to a minimum of 120 combat sailing days per vessel annually; incorporate A2/AD modules and sub-surface tracking in MNEK and Garuda Shield joint exercises.
4. Deterrence Implication	Indonesia ranks high in the GFP index, but actual deterrence is weakened by symbolic modernization and short deployment durations.	Without operational presence and full capability deployment, modernization efforts remain symbolic.	Convert symbolic upgrades into real deterrence by improving operational reach, enhancing interoperability, increasing training frequency, and sustaining longer deployments.

Figure 8. Evaluation of Indonesia's Maritime Deterrence. *(Source: Compiled by the author)*

If these reforms are adopted, Indonesia's naval modernization would be reflected not only in global rankings but also in the real-world calculus of potential adversaries—ultimately reinforcing Indonesia's maritime deterrence posture in Southeast Asia. However, achieving this outcome requires overcoming persistent structural and operational challenges that continue to constrain Indonesia's maritime capacity.

Despite continuous efforts to strengthen its maritime posture, Indonesia still faces multiple barriers that hinder the realization of a comprehensive deterrence effect in the region. These enduring limitations carry significant strategic implications, as external actors—particularly China—may exploit such weaknesses, thereby diminishing Indonesia's bargaining power and strategic leverage within ASEAN.

a) Capability Gaps and Their Consequences

Indonesia operates approximately 160 active naval vessels, in contrast to China's fleet of over 370 surface combatants[46]. This stark disparity enables Beijing to maintain an over-the-horizon presence in key maritime chokepoints, such as the Malacca Strait, without facing equivalent resistance. If left unaddressed, this capability gap may result in Indonesia's diminished control over critical sea lanes, thereby undermining its maritime deterrence credibility among ASEAN states.

b) Budget Constraints and Operational Trade-offs

The 2025 defense budget for Indonesia's Ministry of Defense was reduced by 5.65%, from IDR 175 trillion to IDR 165.2 trillion[47]. This reduction has forced the Navy to choose between maintaining older vessels or investing in new platforms—an operational trade-off that has slowed patrol frequency. In 2024, the average patrol rate in Indonesia's western maritime sector was four sorties per week—significantly lower than Singapore's ten[48]. This decline in presence inadvertently creates room for transnational crimes to proliferate, precisely when joint patrols are most needed.

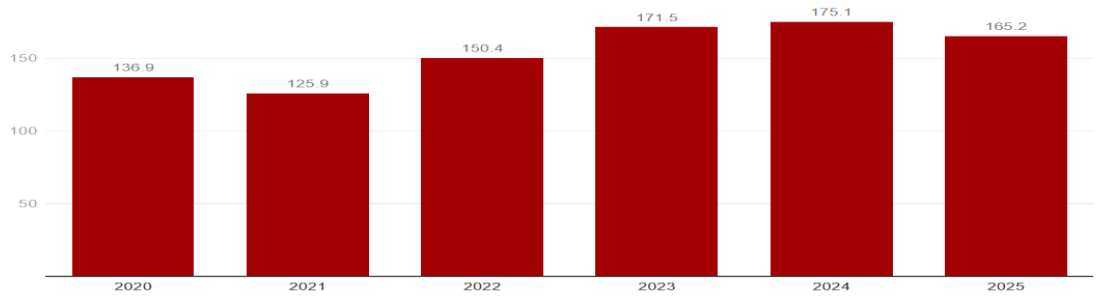

Figure 9: Ministry of Defense Spending 2020-2025. *(Source: Compiled by the author)*

c) ASEAN Structural Barriers and Indonesia's Bargaining Position

ASEAN's principles of non-interference and consensus-based

[46] International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2025). *The Military Balance 2025*. Routledge.

[47] Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia. (2025). *Financial note and the draft state budget 2025*. Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia.

[48] ReCAAP ISC. (2025). *Annual report 2024: Piracy and armed robbery against ships in Asia*. Retrieved from https://www.recaap.org

decision-making delay collective responses to maritime crises. For instance, during the 2020 Natuna incident, ASEAN's joint statement was released three weeks after the event—allowing China to frame it as a bilateral dispute. Indonesia's reliance on consensus dilutes its strategic leverage, as maritime enforcement proposals are often stalled by implicit vetoes from member states economically aligned with Beijing[49].

d) Non-Traditional Threats: Piracy, Smuggling, and Environmental Degradation

The surge in cases of subsidized fuel smuggling and wildlife trafficking reveals how criminal networks exploit weak state presence in remote waters. Beyond economic damage, these activities provide safe havens for transnational crime syndicates that are difficult to eliminate. Strategically, rising non-traditional threats divert resources and attention from Indonesia's deterrence agenda vis-à-vis state-based threats.

e) Strategic Implications

1. Exploitation by External Powers – China can escalate "gray zone" operations, such as deploying Coast Guard escorts for survey ships, knowing Indonesia's military responses are constrained by logistical and political limits.
2. Reduced Negotiating Power – In South China Sea Code of Conduct talks, Jakarta struggles to galvanize firm support when its deterrence capabilities are seen as insufficient to bear the costs of escalation.
3. ASEAN Fragmentation Risk – Disparities in maritime enforcement between Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia fuel perceptions of unequal burden-sharing, opening the door for divide-and-rule tactics by major powers.

f) Mitigation Strategies

[49] Acharya, A. (2014). *Constructing a security community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the problem of regional order* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796673

1. Flexible Budget Allocation – Establish a maritime contingency fund amounting to 0.2% of GDP to rapidly scale up patrol sorties during crisis periods.
2. ASEAN Minus X" Command Consolidation – Promote a minilateral format such as "ASEAN 3" (Indonesia–Malaysia–Singapore) to enable rapid responses in the Malacca Strait without full consensus.
3. Capability Partnerships – Initiate leasing agreements for MALE drones and logistics tankers with Japan and Australia, focusing on enhancing operational availability over the next 3–5 years.

By directly linking budgetary, capability, and normative constraints to on-the-ground strategic outcomes, Indonesia can more effectively prioritize investments and diplomatic initiatives that yield meaningful deterrence—while reinforcing its leadership in Southeast Asia.

VII. STRATEGIC CONSTRAINTS AND INDONESIA'S MARITIME INFLUENCE IN REGIONAL SECURITY

Indonesia's maritime influence is shaped not only by formal policies such as the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) but also by its state behavior from 2014 to 2025. This behavior reflects a calibrated assertiveness, a commitment to multilateralism, and a selective approach to military modernization—underlining Indonesia's broader intent to safeguard sovereignty, strengthen regional cooperation, and reinforce maritime deterrence.

Between 2014 and 2025, Indonesia's assertiveness in maritime defense has been inconsistent. The GMF's 2014 declaration marked a key turning point, followed by robust actions in the 2016 Natuna I incident, including naval deployment and a presidential visit to the disputed area—aligned with GMF pillars on sovereignty protection and maritime defense. However, subsequent responses diminished. For example, the 2020 Natuna II patrol lasted only six months, and

enforcement against illegal Vietnamese vessels in the Arafura Sea in 2023 involved only 13 interdictions. These patterns suggest a "stop-and-go" posture influenced by operational budget cuts.

In the multilateral arena, Indonesia has taken an active role in ASEAN maritime security, initiating over 60% of collaborative programs between 2015 and 2025. Yet, only around 35% of these initiatives were fully implemented. This gap has created a vacuum that external actors—such as China—have filled via parallel regional initiatives, thereby weakening Indonesia's influence within ASEAN's security architecture.

The tension between diplomacy and deterrence is another hallmark of Indonesia's strategic behavior. The decision to delay the publication of its defense white paper in 2023–2024 to maintain diplomatic sensitivity during Code of Conduct talks with China illustrates this dilemma. The delay undermined Indonesia's ability to clearly communicate its maritime "red lines," reducing strategic clarity—a core element of deterrence.

Indonesia has actively engaged in addressing non-traditional threats such as piracy and smuggling through trilateral patrols in the Malacca Strait, which have successfully reduced incidents of piracy over the past decade. However, these achievements remain uneven across Indonesia's maritime domain. Persistent security gaps—particularly in the Natuna–Karimata corridor—continue to be exploited by smuggling syndicates and other transnational actors, revealing inconsistencies in the country's overall deterrence coverage across strategic maritime zones.

Building on this observation, it becomes evident that despite a series of strategic initiatives, Indonesia continues to face substantial obstacles in developing a credible and sustainable maritime deterrence posture. One of the most pressing issues is the limited operational endurance of naval vessels, which are generally capable of patrolling for less than 15 days without resupply. This constraint creates vulnerabilities that external powers can exploit to operate beyond Indonesia's maritime surveillance reach. Moreover, a 5.65%

reduction in the defense budget for 2025 has led to a decrease in both patrol frequency and combat training exercises—further opening space for gray-zone tactics, particularly by major powers.

On the diplomatic front, ASEAN's consensus-based decision-making process—while aimed at maintaining unity—often slows collective action during maritime crises. Implicit vetoes from certain member states can hinder timely responses and enable external actors such as China to apply divide-and-rule strategies.

These limitations carry several strategic implications: a greater likelihood of escalation in maritime gray zones, reduced leverage for Indonesia in international negotiations, and a weakening of ASEAN solidarity.

To address these issues, Indonesia should consider proposing an "ASEAN Minus X" mechanism as an emergency response format for maritime contingencies, especially in critical zones like the Malacca Strait. Moreover, the government could explore strategic logistics partnerships, such as leasing tanker vessels from Japan and Australia, to enhance operational reach. Finally, establishing a transparency dashboard to monitor patrol sorties and law enforcement operations in the Natuna–Malacca corridor would enhance accountability and reinforce the credibility of Indonesia's deterrence efforts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that Indonesia's maritime influence plays a pivotal role in sustaining regional security and shaping ASEAN's maritime order. Yet, the deterrence posture of Indonesia remains constrained by limitations in strategic depth, operational endurance, and legal consolidation. Since the launch of the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) in 2014, Indonesia has consistently demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding maritime sovereignty and promoting cooperative security through naval modernization, multilateral diplomacy, and coordinated patrols in strategic corridors such as the Strait of Malacca and the North Natuna Sea.

However, structural and strategic challenges continue to hinder the full realization of Indonesia's deterrence potential. From a capability perspective, budgetary constraints and uneven defense allocations weaken the sustainability of naval operations. Meanwhile, inconsistent responses to maritime incursions and ambiguous strategic communication—particularly in relation to China—have undermined the credibility of Indonesia's deterrence signaling. Furthermore, ASEAN's consensus-based mechanism has delayed collective responses to external provocations, leaving room for extra-regional powers to exploit institutional inertia and weaken regional cohesion.

Despite these constraints, Indonesia remains a stabilizing anchor in Southeast Asia's maritime security architecture. By integrating *calibrated assertiveness*, *inclusive diplomacy*, and *reform-oriented mechanisms* such as the ASEAN Minus X formula, Indonesia can elevate its deterrence posture from a reactive to a proactive stance. This requires not only continuity in naval modernization and consistency in maritime diplomacy, but also strengthened transparency, inter-agency coordination, and accountability in maritime security operations.

Moreover, the legal dimension of deterrence should not be overlooked. In addressing the broader maritime security challenges of the Indo-Pacific, Indonesia must reinforce its legal legitimacy through stronger alignment with international maritime law. The full implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, combined with active participation in the negotiation of a binding Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea, would significantly enhance Indonesia's strategic credibility and diplomatic leverage.

In sum, while Indonesia's maritime strength constitutes a central pillar of regional stability, achieving the status of a credible balancing maritime power in Southeast Asia depends on three interlinked pillars:

1. the strengthening of defense capability through sustainable

budgeting,

2. the institutionalization of maritime diplomacy based on international law, and
3. the integration of legal and strategic frameworks to produce a layered deterrence effect.

Through this multidimensional approach, Indonesia can transform its maritime law from a regulatory framework into a strategic instrument—one that not only safeguards national sovereignty but also reinforces ASEAN's collective resilience in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific order.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

COMPETING INTEREST

The author(s) will be asked to sign this statement once the submission has been accepted.

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HISTORY OF ARTICLE

Submitted : May 16, 2025
Revised : September 9, 2025; October 9, 2025; October 30, 2025
Accepted : December 1, 2025
Published : December 13, 2025