



The Strategy Of The Riau Islands Province In Facing Challenges As A State Border Area

1st Sekar Nur Wulandari
*Research and Innovation Department
Planning, Research and Development
Agency of Riau Islands Province
Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
wulandari.sekar09@gmail.com*

2nd Aliffisya Ummu Raihan
*Research and Innovation Department
Planning, Research and Development
Agency of Riau Islands Province
Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
aliffisyaraihan@gmail.com*

3rd Sartika Dewi Sasnita
*Research and Development Department
Research and Development Agency of
Tanjungpinang City
Tanjungpinang, Indonesia
sartikadewisasnita@gmail.com*

Abstract—The marine resources in Indonesia can potentially boost the country's economic development to realize the ideals of the Indonesian state as the world's maritime axis, especially in Riau Islands Province. This province has a strategic geographical location that provides competitive advantages in geoeconomics, geopolitics, and geostrategies. The province faces significant maritime security threats due to the high traffic volume in its waters. This puts the environment, natural resources, and maritime security at risk. To tackle these challenges, it is crucial to research the province's strategy as a border area of the state. The research aims to conduct a theoretical study of the maritime conditions especially the challenges faced by the Riau Islands Province as a border area in Indonesia and develop a strategy to deal with these challenges. The descriptive qualitative research method uses secondary data from previous journal articles, books, and state documents. Using a combination of empirical, policy, and literature approaches, it is concluded that the central and regional governments have not effectively enforced the law in the border areas due to limited facilities, infrastructure, and law enforcement personnel. Therefore, the Riau Archipelago Province's strategy includes optimizing maritime defense, carrying out maritime diplomacy, optimizing institutions responsible for maritime security, and improving the welfare of people on inhabited border islands by empowering them to have economic activities.

Keywords— *global maritime axis; maritime challenges; Riau Islands Province; state border areas*

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic country and shares borders with multiple nations. Its strategic location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans makes it vulnerable to complex maritime security issues, including managing access and utilizing marine resources with advanced technology. The marine sector is crucial for developing Indonesia's economy, including maritime transportation and resource extraction. However, maritime security issues such as boundary disputes, terrorism, piracy, illegal fishing, smuggling, and natural disasters make it challenging to maintain safety and stability in this region [1]. These issues pose a significant threat to the state, as they not only cause damage to the environment but also violate human rights while contributing to economic losses. As such, measures must be taken to address such cases and prevent their recurrence to safeguard the state's interests [2].

To achieve the status of a Global Maritime Axis, Indonesia must focus on restoring its identity as a maritime nation, protecting its maritime interests and security, utilizing its maritime potential for economic growth, establishing maritime highways for equalized prosperity, and practicing maritime diplomacy in external politics. This vision is set for the next five years, and it involves development in various

areas such as politics, socio-culture, defense and security, infrastructure, economy, and regulation [3].

The Riau Islands Province is a prime example of Indonesia's maritime identity. Positioned strategically on the country's trade route, the Riau Islands are a barrier and gateway to world trade. This is due to its location between the Malacca Strait, the Northern Natuna Sea, and the Karimata Strait and its borders with Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Moreover, the region is endowed with abundant natural resources, particularly in the fields of oil, gas, and maritime resources.

The Riau Islands Province has significant natural potential and could become a major economic growth center for Indonesia. With the motto "Berpancang Amanah, Bersauh Marwah" the Riau Islands Province is committed to developing its region into a center for national economic growth while upholding Malay Cultural values and promoting a prosperous, intelligent, and noble society.

Riau Islands, an Indonesian province, is renowned for possessing the highest quantity of islands and encompassing 96% of the adjacent ocean, thus serving as a miniature version of the country. With 1,796 islands, most uninhabited, the government has installed inscriptions to signify that these islands are rightfully recognized as part of Indonesian territory. The major islands serve as the country's borders.

Cross-border interactions can be classified as formal or informal and either occur spontaneously or organized. When transitioning from informal to formal cooperation, it is essential to consider the specific characteristics of the regions involved and the challenges that may arise during the integration process. Consequently, building a secure and well-defended nation with effective border control is a complex undertaking that requires careful consideration [4]. It requires considerable effort and a smart approach to overcome the obstacles faced by the Indonesian government, particularly in the border regions. The government's strategy for border development is crucial to resolving various issues affecting citizens, government, and the state as a whole. The problems in these areas extend beyond military defense and involve more than just weapons, warships, and soldiers. The Riau Islands border region presents both opportunities and challenges that require efficient management and collaboration among all government entities, with the public playing a key role in supporting these efforts.

Given this context, the author is keen on researching how the Riau Islands Province is dealing with challenges as a border region of Indonesia. The primary objectives of this study are to 1) Carry out a theoretical study of maritime conditions, , with a focus on the challenges faced by the Riau Islands Province as a border area of Indonesia, and 2)

Develop strategies to address these challenges as border areas.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach aims to describe phenomena in natural and human engineering terms. Descriptive research does not manipulate or alter the variables studied, it pays more attention to the characteristics, qualities, and interrelationships between subjects [5]. Qualitative descriptive data collection is carried out through observations, interviews and documentation. Then an in-depth analysis of the research objects based on the theory and the concepts used. The researchers also analyze the core of the problem and phenomena studied and then give recommendations of thought in the form of findings or results of research on the problem studied.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Strategic Position of the Indonesian Sea in the Riau Islands Province

The Republic of Indonesia's strategic location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans provides abundant marine resources that can be harnessed for national development [2]. Being an archipelagic nation that follows the archipelago outlook concept (*Wawasan Nusantara*), Indonesia shares maritime borders with 10 neighboring countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, India, Papua New Guinea, The Philippines, Vietnam, Palau, Australia, Thailand, and Timor Leste. However, the border agreements between these countries are yet to be fully completed, and there is still much work to be done in this regard [6].

Riau Islands Province in Indonesia is known as one of archipelagic province and its many islands, with Tanjungpinang as its capital city. The province shares borders with Bangka Belitung and Jambi Islands Provinces to the South, Malaysia and West Kalimantan Province to the East, Vietnam and Cambodia to the North, and Singapore, Malaysia, and Riau Province to the West. As of 2020, Riau Islands had a population of 2,064,564 people, with a density of 252 people per square kilometer. Most of the population, 58%, resides in Batam City [7]. The Riau Islands province comprises 5 regencies, 2 cities, 52 sub-districts, and 299 villages, with 2,408 large and small islands. However, 30 percent of these islands remain unnamed and uninhabited. The region's total area is 8,201.72 km², with 96 percent of it being covered by the ocean and only 4 percent being land. There are 19 outermost or foremost islands located across various regencies and cities. Only four outermost and foremost islands are inhabited, namely Nipah Island, Senoa Island, Subi Kecil Island, and Karimun Anak Island.

The waters of Karimun Regency and Batam City hold significant importance as they are located near the Malacca Strait, which is one of the busiest trade and shipping routes worldwide. The strait connects the Indian and Pacific oceans, passing through the South China Sea. This route is the shortest path for oil-producing countries in the Middle East to trade with oil-using countries in Southeast and East Asia. Every year, tens of thousands of large-capacity ships cross the Malacca Strait for economic purposes. It is also the second-largest oil choke point globally, after the Strait of Hormuz.

Moreover, Natuna Regency possesses large economic potential for its natural resources such as oil and gas, while Anambas Islands Regency, Batam City, Karimun Regency, and Bintan Regency are strategically positioned, making the Riau Islands an attractive region in Indonesia. The Indonesian government must pay attention to the Riau Islands from various aspects, mainly the defense and security sector and the economy, due to its advantageous position.

A defense and security orientation that relies on defense equipment and authorized officials by prioritizing improving community welfare and managing natural resources on the islands to improve the economic sector [8]. In general, the prosperity approach is to raise the standard of living of local communities [9]. This enables the realization of harmonious, peaceful coexistence with neighboring countries along the border areas.

The belief is that improving the islands' economy will provide a source of livelihood, which will strengthen security defenses. The 1,402 uninhabited islands in the Riau Islands should be managed based on their potential to increase the income of the community, region, and country.

Investment security for islands located on borders is crucial, along with providing public amenities such as ports, roads, buildings, and healthcare facilities on the mainland [10]. Furthermore, islands near neighboring countries can also be transformed into tourist destinations, like Nipah Island in Batam, which faces Singapore's skyscrapers. Nipah Island is approximately 5 hectares in size during high tide and only 27 km from Singapore. Likewise, the distance between Nipah Island and Belakang Padang Island, Batam is also only 27 km. Nipah Island had almost disappeared due to excessive sand extraction in the past, but the government conducted reclamation to expand the island that had shrunk due to illegal sand mining in 2004 to revive it. Today, Nipah Island is being expanded to develop its residents' economy, defense, and livelihoods. The development of Nipah Island is a move to present Indonesia in the best light while increasing regional and national revenues.

There are additional opportunities for maritime development on islands located near neighboring countries. This includes the potential for fishing port services, cold storage facilities, and fish auctions. In Natuna's border area, both a fishing port and a cold storage facility have already been constructed, but the fish auction has yet to begin. Transforming an uninhabited island into a productive area is challenging but can be accomplished with dedicated effort. By utilizing technology-based management strategies for these frontier islands, Indonesia can accelerate President Joko Widodo's vision of building a strong, advanced, and authoritative maritime nation [11].

For example, the Riau Islands' borders in the Philip Strait and Malacca Strait have the potential to generate money. Hundreds of ships pass through these waters every day. Retribution from boat parking is one source of income, in addition to derivative businesses such as providing clean water, food and fuel. Cross-border trade through border areas in the Riau Islands can also generate rupiah. Islands bordering neighboring countries can provide crew needs. The ship will not dock if there is no life on the island. The island is only useful as a national border if it is not managed for economic activities.

Other maritime potentials on islands bordering neighboring countries, such as fishing port services, cold storage, and fish auctions, can also be worked on. In the border area in Natuna, the fishing port and cold storage have been built, but the fish auction is not yet running. Managing an island without life into a productive area is not easy, but it can be realized with seriousness. Technology-based management of frontier islands will accelerate the realization of President Joko Widodo's vision of building Indonesia as a strong, advanced, and authoritative maritime nation.

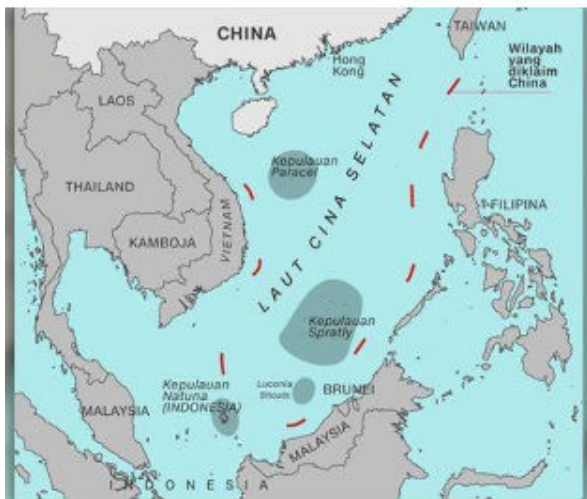
B. Challenges faced by Riau Islands as A Border Region

It's important to recognize that the Riau Islands Province in Indonesia serves as a critical entry point to the country, boasting an impressive 19 out of the 92 frontier islands in the area. This province is vital in protecting Indonesia's sovereignty, as 17 percent of the nation's major islands fall within its jurisdiction.

Developing the border areas poses a significant challenge due to numerous obstacles. These include limited sea transportation to and from the 19 border islands, lack of access to clean water on the frontier islands, and other natural factors that hinder development.

Out of the seven regencies and cities in the Riau Islands, five are separate islands. Tanjungpinang City is the only location that shares a landmass with Bintan Regency. Natuna Regency, situated in the north of Indonesia, shares borders with three other countries: Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia, as well as the South China Sea. Natuna's geopolitical and geostrategic position has become even more crucial due to recent conflicts in the South China Sea, with China claiming the area. Indonesia has built a joint defense base in Natuna to address these challenges and established the Region I Joint Command Base in Tanjungpinang City in 2019.

Marine security is multifaceted, encompassing boundary disputes, terrorism, piracy, illegal fishing, smuggling, and natural disasters [12].



Source: CNN Indonesia, 2015

Fig. 1. China's "Nine DSash Line" concept

The Indonesian Government is actively protecting its precious marine areas through a comprehensive approach that includes marine conservation, pollution control, disaster management, and preventative measures. These crucial steps

are necessary to counteract the negative impact of harmful activities such as illegal fishing, marine waste dumping, and oil tanker accidents, which significantly threaten Indonesia's marine territories [3].

Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) offers many untapped potential for exploration across various sectors, such as aquaculture, fisheries processing, high-seas energy resource exploration, and capture fisheries. Unfortunately, the lack of extensive exploration in these areas has allowed foreign vessels to exploit Indonesia's marine resources illegally. Recent media reports of foreign-flagged ships being arrested highlight the significant value of Indonesia's marine wealth, which could greatly benefit the community's welfare if fully utilized.

The North Natuna region is strategically significant, yet it remains highly susceptible to Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) activities, especially IUU fishing [13]. Furthermore, foreign vessels frequently breach aviation regulations within the national airspace, particularly the Natuna area. This vulnerability is exacerbated by China's assertion of its Nine Dash Line in the South China Sea, which encompasses the North Natuna region within its boundaries. Consequently, China's claim challenges Indonesia's sovereignty over the area [8].

On April 8, 2021, CNN Indonesia reported that a US F18 Honet fighter plane flew over Natuna waters due to the conflict in the South China Sea. Not only once, violations by foreign aircraft often occur, the National Air Operations Command (Kohanudnas) recorded at least more than 800 violations occurring in national airspace and most of them were detected passing over Natuna waters [14]. Table 1 shows the number of violations committed in the North Natuna Sea airspace in 2019.

TABLE I. NUMBER OF NATIONAL AIRSPACE VIOLATIONS IN 2020

COUNTRY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	TOTAL
Singapore	177	119	161	112	123	126	30	848
Cayman								
France								
Malta				1				1
Australia			1					1
USA	1	6	1	1	2	2		13
Ethiopia								
New Zealand								
Thailand								
San Marino								
Japan								
Swiss								
Qatar			1					1
China								
Philippines			1					1
Bermuda								
x								
TOTAL	178	125	165	114	125	128	30	865

Source: Komando Operasi Udara Nasional

C. Strategies in Facing Challenges

Developing border areas effectively requires consideration of three key approaches: security, welfare, and environmentally friendly practices. Investing in these areas

will create a prosperous border region that serves as a strong defense for maintaining Indonesia's sovereignty.

Traditionally, border areas have been viewed as solely a frontline defense strategy. Therefore, the only approach currently utilized for managing the border is focused solely on the security approach. However, neighboring countries like Malaysia have successfully implemented both prosperity and security approaches to develop their border regions. It is time for Indonesia to adopt a similar approach and prioritize developing its border areas.

A prosperity approach is essential for the development of border areas. This presents opportunities for locals to transform their villages into advanced areas through human resource development including education and economic growth [15]. The local government must prioritize policies that support development efforts to overcome the underdevelopment of border regions [2]. We can create a more prosperous and thriving border region by seeing these areas as large and developed cities rather than poor fishermen's settlements. Border areas are no longer overlooked and underdeveloped residential areas but are becoming Indonesia's main focus of development.

The border area is important for maintaining Indonesia's sovereignty [5]. To safeguard Indonesian land in border areas, several measures must be taken. The most pressing issue is the rampant illegal fishing by foreign fishermen in the waters surrounding the Riau Islands. The lengthy coastline of the Riau Islands which shares borders with other nations poses a challenge regarding comprehensive monitoring. Ensuring security at every point would present its own set of challenges.

In addition to the border area in the form of an ocean, another difficulty faced is guarding the 19 leading islands in the Riau Islands which are the boundaries between Indonesia and neighboring countries. Regrettably, some of these islands are uninhabited due to the absence of a dependable potable water supply.

Establishing settlements with access to clean water reserves is the most imperative and efficient means of safeguarding the border islands [16]. Prioritizing the well-being of those residing on border islands is of utmost importance. Ensuring consistent access to food and other essentials is critical in preventing residents from seeking out better distribution centers elsewhere. Without reliable supplies of basic necessities, individuals may find themselves compelled to move away from their current location.

There are multiple strategies to enhance the standing of border islands and mitigate any disputes from neighboring countries over the territory. One such approach is cultivating the islands, which can be achieved by converting the land into agricultural fields or, if farming is not feasible, it can be achieved by transforming the island into a tourist destination. Border islands are often blessed with stunning natural scenery, including awe-inspiring vistas of neighboring countries' glittering lights, and they provide ample opportunities for fishing. By capitalizing on these potentials, border islands can generate economic value and activity, thereby reducing the chances of disagreements over their ownership.

Therefore, several strategies now need to be designed and implemented by the Riau Islands Provincial Government. The ultimate goal is of course to build prosperity on the front lines of the republic in Riau Islands. In addition, the security aspect must also be considered because it is on these frontier islands that the point of Indonesian sovereignty must be upheld. In order to ensure the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia and improve the interoperability of command systems and control of border security operations, it is crucial to enhance the interoperability of regulations, software, hardware, and information systems, including the brainware, of the Indonesian State Army (TNI) in border areas [11]. Furthermore, with an environmentally friendly approach, the development pattern in the border area must not damage the environmental order. The hope is that resolving domestic issues will help achieve the goal of becoming a Global Maritime Axis country [17].

Recently, there has been a shift in the orientation towards developing border areas to an outward-looking approach. The emphasis is now on constructing these regions to face outward, toward neighboring nations, aiming to capitalize on opportunities and boost the regional economy. This move is part of a broader endeavor to enhance the welfare of people and is viewed as a complementary measure to conventional security strategies.

It is of utmost importance that we align our marine regulations with all relevant laws and rules. This necessitates ensuring that the enforcement measures taken by Bakamla in sea areas strictly adhere to regulations. As a responsible state, we have to comply with and abide by these provisions.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Central and Regional Governments have not been maximized in law enforcement in the state border areas. The lack of adequate facilities, infrastructure, and personnel has greatly hindered the ability of law enforcement to effectively carry out their duties in the state's border regions.

For this reason, the Riau Islands Province strategy in the various challenges it faces as a state border area area includes:

- Optimizing sea defense to enhance the efficiency of sea defense systems and strengthen Indonesia's sovereignty in its maritime waters, especially in the North Natuna Sea boundary, a conflict-prone region.
- Facilitate diplomatic relations regarding maritime affairs, both domestically and internationally.
- Optimizing the duties and functions of institutions responsible for marine security,
- Enhance the welfare of people inhabiting outer border islands by providing economic opportunities. By facilitating economic activities, these regions can experience growth and development, which will ultimately lead to improved quality of life for their residents.

The author suggests several recommendations in offering some insights on the matter at hand. Firstly, it is essential for institutions and agencies that are dedicated to improving marine security to address the current issues at sea. Secondly, the government should prioritize establishing diplomatic relations, particularly in Indonesia's EEZ area, to forestall

any unwarranted claims from other nations. Lastly, there is a pressing need for more extensive research on the potential and challenges of the outermost border islands of each Regency in the Riau Islands.

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