



Fortifying Indonesia Borders: An Approach to Recalibrate Indonesia Defense Diplomacy in ASEAN

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Abstract. Indonesia confronts a multitude of issues and challenges in both its terrestrial and maritime border regions on an annual basis, starting from border settlement with its nine neighboring countries, securing borders from illegal activities and other security issues, the growing discourse of global dynamic and traditional threats from other countries. To solve such problems, Indonesia needs to collaborate the efforts with other countries either through bilateral or multilateral approaches. Thus, Indonesia has utilized ASEAN as one of the defense diplomacy platforms to discuss the maritime security matters faced by Indonesia of other ASEAN members. If “ASEAN Way” (a practice of non-interference) as a unique diplomatic engagement used in ASEAN, which has been deemed to be ineffective in solving the problem in this region by outsiders, in fact, it sometimes also hinders Indonesia in some ways to gain a fast solution for its border problems, and this is believed sometimes affecting Indonesia defense diplomacy for its national interest objectives. Hence, Indonesia must undertake a recalibration of its defense diplomacy efforts to ensure the security of its borders while concurrently upholding the “ASEAN Way,” a principle unanimously endorsed by all ASEAN member states.

Keywords: Maritime Border Issues, Global Dynamic, ASEAN Way, Defence Diplomacy.

1 Introduction

As the biggest archipelagic country in the world, Indonesia faces numerous Indonesia grapples with an array of issues and challenges in its terrestrial and maritime border regions vis-à-vis neighboring countries, and the resolution of border disputes stands out as a critical concern for Indonesia's national security and sovereignty [1]. Indeed, Indonesia shares maritime borders with ten countries, namely: Australia, the Philippines, India, Malaysia, the Republic of Palau, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. And there are nine border points that have not yet been properly resolved with nations including Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, India, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and the Republic of Palau [2].

Of course, securing the 17.000 islands and an area of waters reaching 3,110,000 km² is not an easy work for Indonesia. For several decades Indonesia had struggled for settling its borders with several neighbouring countries, either on land or at sea. And so

do the tasks to secure its borders from some illegal activities such as diverse trans-boundary criminal activities occurring in the vicinity of maritime border areas and other non-traditional threats, such as illegal activities [3]. To solve the border issues, Indonesia government commits to be active in ASEAN multilateral cooperation. However, the ASEAN principle of diplomatic engagement, known as “ASEAN Way”, is sometime paradoxical with the reality of Indonesia national interest [4]. Thus, in order to better understand all challenges being faced by Indonesia regarding its border, we try to examine How Indonesia need to stay in line with the “ASEAN Way” but able to recalibrate its defence diplomacy regarding its national interest objectives and then consider the implications of the defence diplomacy through ASEAN.

2 The Growing Strategic Discourse

The growing discourse of regional and global dynamic change indicates the trends in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific security issues have been centred recently upon territorial and maritime rights contestation in South China Sea between some ASEAN member countries with China and the intensifying US-China rivalry in this region. Furthermore, the tensions between the United States and China over the SCS have gradually simmered up to a strategic level [5]. The South China Sea, situated in close proximity to Indonesia, has emerged as a pivotal battleground for strategic competition between major global powers.

However, owing to the practical circumstances and the evolving, increasingly intricate threats in the region, which have transitioned from traditional to non-traditional, a blend of diverse diplomatic efforts and techniques is now employed concurrently. The choice of approach depends on the specific situation and the interests of the respective states involved. Within the ASEAN context, prevailing security conditions have compelled the region's states to shift their strategy from a sequence of traditional diplomatic methods to prioritizing defense techniques in addressing these threats and challenges [6]. As a result, for Indonesia, active military involvement in upholding security remains crucial, alongside engaging in diplomatic interactions with external powers.

Indeed, the security challenges confronting the nations of Southeast Asia today revolve around the task of establishing a stable yet inherently unpredictable environment. It is imperative to acknowledge that the ongoing discussion surrounding the concept of security has significantly expanded the discourse on regional security cooperation. Consequently, Indonesia is compelled to delve more profoundly into the realm of multilateral diplomacy, with the aim of not only safeguarding but also advancing its national interests on the international stage.

3 The Covid-19 Impact on Indonesia Recent Security Issues

This regional and global situation is worsened by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic since March 2020, in the face of the global pandemic, nations worldwide have grappled with the far-reaching repercussions of the virus, and devastating not only the

public health but impacted vastly the economy, security, government-policy, community-life, education, unemployment, and many other aspects. While, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has exerted considerable pressure on Indonesia's defense expenditures. Consequently, the Indonesian government is faced with a dual challenge: first, it must reassess its defense strategy priorities, and second, it must redirect its focus to address both traditional and non-traditional security threats that could emerge within its border regions.

As the COVID-19 pandemic persists into the current year, continuing to strain both the healthcare system and the economy, the Indonesian government has made the deliberate choice to prioritize financial allocations for relief efforts. This decision, while essential for addressing immediate needs, places a considerable burden on the defense budget. Consequently, numerous defense activities, including overseas education and training initiatives, strategic dialogues, participation in military exercises, and a range of other programs, have been either canceled or suspended. Moreover, this budgetary constraint could potentially impact the realization of the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) target. It is undeniable that the funding shortfall has presented significant challenges to Indonesia's defense diplomacy efforts in grappling with this formidable issue [7].

The outbreak of Covid-19 has significantly impacted various governmental institutions, with the Ministry of Defense being no exception. Indonesia's defense budget has seen a reduction, plummeting from 131.18 trillion rupiah (\$9 billion) to 122.44 trillion rupiah (\$8.4 billion). This budgetary adjustment entailed a reallocation of funds, diverting resources initially earmarked for arms and ammunition acquisitions towards covering expenditures associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, this has placed additional constraints on Indonesia's capacity to engage in defense diplomacy endeavors [7].

4 Defence Diplomacy as an Important Tool

There are some mechanisms implemented in ASEAN to conduct a defence diplomacy such as through the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Additionally, the ADMM-Plus involves Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States, all of which serve as ASEAN counterparts. These entities serve as complementary components to the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) [8]. Within these forums, ASEAN member states engage in dialogues with their counterparts, primarily focusing on defense and security matters, with a particular emphasis on maritime issues. In order to adjust its traditional defence diplomacy, after examining the growing of strategic discourse, some new approaches need Indonesia reconsideration to utilise ASEAN as a better platform. Therefore, there are some suggested key-principles of diplomacy that Indonesia needs to improve or to recalibrate its defence diplomacy for the future:

4.1 Reinforcing Preventive Diplomacy

ASEAN has garnered recognition as one of the most successful regional organizations in Asia due to its effective dissemination of the "ASEAN Way," characterized by the norm of non-interference. This approach has extended its influence to the wider Asian region through mechanisms such as the ARF, ASEAN Plus 3, and the East Asian Summit [9]. While "the ASEAN way" is occasionally criticized for potentially contributing to inaction by other organizations, it remains a cornerstone approach that Indonesia and fellow ASEAN members continue to endorse. They view it as a flexible and pragmatic framework suitable for addressing both short-term and long-term challenges [10].

However, Indonesia still can leverage its role in ASEAN to solve the border security issues and other territorial disputes in the SCS by adopting the principle of "ASEAN Way," however, Indonesia must assume a pivotal role in the region to further enhance its international credibility.

4.2 Working More Collaboratively with Defence Partner

The promotion of cooperation stands at the core of the Indonesia's approach to ASEAN and other organisations. This cooperation applies not only to Indonesia's long-standing friends and partners that share its values, but also to cooperate with "third countries," as well as enhancing cooperation within regional multilateral organizations, such as ASEAN, and many other regional and international organisations [11]. Therefore, Indonesia needs to promote flexible and pragmatic cooperation as part of Indonesia's long-term efforts to enhance its strategic autonomy and promote its interests in the region.

4.3 Inclusive Defence Cooperation

The principle of Indonesia, known as "bebas dan aktif" or "free and active" foreign policy, has served as the cornerstone of Indonesian foreign policy for more than six decades. In the era where the world polarization shift from unipolar to multipolar, the interpretation of that "Free and Active" foreign policy, is considered by the Indonesian Government, is still relevant to face the current strategic discourse [12]. Therefore, Indonesia must continue to play more role in developing the ASEAN cooperation and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The concept of inclusive defence cooperation must be hold to all partners with a strong balance, so that Indonesia will always be able to develop a habit of dialogue to prioritize peaceful dispute resolution and achieve its national interest.

4.4 Foreign Policy in Defence Procurement

Since the post-cold war, Indonesia military procurement has been a balance between the West and East [13]. And since the Military equipment embargo imposed by the US against Indonesia in 1999, Indonesia has learned that it cannot rely on any blocks or countries to improve its military equipment. Moreover, Indonesia must rigorously con-

front organizational challenges, which encompass the domains of doctrinal development, personnel management, and the broader strategic planning systems [14]. Thus, Indonesia needs to show the international society that no country can dictate its foreign policy. Hence, in improving Indonesia military capability and to better its defence diplomacy, Indonesia must not be hesitate to apply its free and active foreign policy in any forum.

4.5 Shifting to a More Outward-Looking Diplomacy

Since Indonesia's government recent foreign policy is believed to be more inward-looking by many international communities, therefore, Indonesia needs to show that its defence diplomacy is more outward- looking and It is imperative for Indonesia to safeguard its diplomatic standing within the region. This is particularly relevant because insular foreign policies, to some extent, have raised international concerns regarding Indonesia's approach to managing disputes with neighboring states.

4.6 Leveraging Mutual Trust

Mutual trust is a significant factor for Indonesia defence diplomacy to collaborate within ASEAN and its partners in regards to border security. Promoting mutual trust among ASEAN member states serves as a catalyst, enabling a cohesive stance during interactions with partner nations. Furthermore, it nurtures a common understanding between ASEAN nations and their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific region, notably China, concerning the governance of the South China Sea. Ultimately, the cultivation of mutual trust and shared concerns among all stakeholders within the partnership holds the potential to alleviate tensions in the region, especially concerning the South China Sea dispute and other maritime issues. Collaborative efforts can then be directed towards the resolution of these challenges.

5 Conclusion

To respond effectively all the challenges faced in Indonesian borders and commitment with the ASEAN principles, then the six key-factors to be highlighted above is taken as policy recommendation is importance in its implementation and as opportunity for Indonesia international cooperation to improve its defence diplomacy. Therefore, the commitment to adopt the "ASEAN Way" should be applied by Indonesia in all ASEAN forum, yet, putting forward Indonesia national interest is the primary objective of Indonesia defence diplomacy. Not to forget, capability and capacity building are a must to implement for Indonesia to succeed all the efforts to solve its border issues through defence diplomacy.

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