

# Indonesia's Border Security Policy in the Natuna Islands (2014-2020)

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to describe Indonesia's border security policy in the Natuna Islands between 2014 and 2020. The state used to play an active role in moderating tensions in the South China Sea, yet paid less attention to its own security while the Natuna was one of the vulnerable borderlines. The rise of domestic interest orientation in the new presidency of Joko Widodo brought about the importance of border security. The research applied the qualitative method with a descriptive analysis. In order to understand the border security policy in the Natuna, the research applied Wendtian constructivist approach suggesting the role of identity and institution to analyze the state's behavior and policy in international politics. The research found that Indonesia increased military and defense capability as the form of its border security policy in the Natuna made up by deploying troops and military equipment, building defense infrastructure, and strengthening constabulary function and boarding patrols. Such border security policy portrays Indonesia's rising awareness as a maritime state amid the perceived regional structure of East Asia.

**Keywords:** Border Security Policy, Natuna Islands, Military and Defense Capability

## 1 Introduction

The region of East Asia (including Southeast Asia) was persistently challenged by a variety of issues for instance; border disputes [1], maritime competition [2], military balance [3], competing natural resource exploitation and strategic rivalry [4]. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Indonesia could own the property right over an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the waters of Natuna Islands. The Natuna lay in such a dynamic South China Sea (SCS) which was hosting tensions and conflicts between states. The East Asian states had been worrying about China's behavior since the state unilaterally claimed its traditional fishing ground marked by nine dash lines in the SCS, causing strained diplomatic relations [5]. While the Chinese claim affected Indonesia as it overlapped the EEZ, the zone propinquity to Vietnam's EEZ encouraged possible border offences.

In addition, the largest illegal fishing practiced by foreigners in Indonesia's water took place in the Natuna waters [6]. To Indonesia, such situation resulted in threats towards its security interest overseeing stability, sovereignty and maritime integrity dimension. During the leadership of Joko Widodo, Indonesia's foreign policy shifted from outward-looking to inward-looking orientation which focused on pursuing domestic interests [7] [8]. In term of security, the orientation was followed by the priority of national security interest especially

in the border. In 2017, Indonesia made a controversial yet popular move; renaming northern water of Natuna “the North Natuna Sea” instead of keeping up with the name of SCS. In the case of Natuna, most literature provides analysis on Indonesia’s security in power politics and institutional liberal perspective. Meanwhile, non-material determinants such as identity and institution affecting states’ behavior were yet to gain significant attention among scholars. The research was intended to narrow the gap.

The research was deemed necessary due to the fact that the Natuna was one of the Indonesia’s outermost islands within the SCS’ expanse in which tensions and conflicts between states as well as great powers’ rivalry were in existence. In addition to a sovereignty object, the area possessed such abundant natural resources like fish, oil and gas that the state would defend it with own resources from any possible threat. Understanding Indonesia’s border security policy, particularly in the Natuna, would help understand the state’s position in the SCS’ security dynamics and enrich security studies on East Asia. Furthermore, the research applied the constructivist approach which was an alternative to bridge neo-realist structure and neo-liberalist institution.

The paper provides the answer to what border security policy Indonesia issued in the Natuna between 2014 and 2020. The paper aims to describe the border security policy along with its implementation in response to the threats which was driven by the identity of archipelagic or maritime state and institution of sovereignty.

### 1.1 Theoretical framework

The research applied the constructivist approach developed by Alexander Wendt, attempting to analyze the concept of sovereignty and identity. The Wendtian approach harmonizes the analysis of structure (anarchy and power distribution), process (interaction and learning) and institution [9]. The approach embraces some assumptions; first, global politics is led by the actors’ idea, norm and value embedded with human inter-subjectivity aspect; second, structure (ideational structure) possesses constitutive effect, not only regulative to actors; and third, structure and agent (actor) constitute and affect each other [10]. The framework of constructivist approach can be seen as follows:

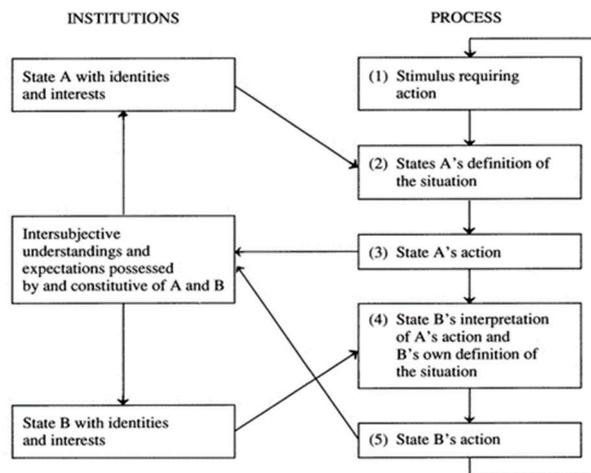


Fig 1. The Framework of Constructivist Approach [9]

The Wendtian approach belongs to systemic constructivism, just like neo-realism believing that international structure encourages states' behavior in addition to primacy of state actors in international politics. However, such structure does not exogenously exist as systemic approach analysts argue. Instead, it forms through institutional transformation of identity and interest [9]. The main principle of constructivism is that people (agents) tend to act to objects based on the meaning the objects possess to whom through an interaction process [9]. The interaction bears understanding and inter-subjective expectation (cross-cognitive). Basically, agents have beliefs and the interaction among which paves distribution of knowledge creating 'self' and 'other' and from which a collective meaning creates structure which generates actions. For instance, a state could act differently to an enemy and a friend since the enemy is perceived a threat, but the latter is not [9]. Anarchy and self-help are the structures created by such collective meaning, and so are identity and interest [9].

Unlike the neo-realist approach, the structures are not given, but created by the agents and vice versa. Neither are institutions the fruits of merely agents' rationalism as suggested by neo-liberalist approach, but created by inter-subjective understanding. With the collective meaning, the agents find identity and expectation of 'self'. According to the constructivist approach, only after finding its identity by defining a situation does an agent (state) realize its own interest. Since the agents and structure constitutively form, an institution is a set of relatively stable structure of identity and interest [9]. Such structure is often codified with rule and norm through both socialization process and collective knowledge formation [9].

Wendt [9] suggests that identity and interest be transformed through three distinctive ways. First, the institution of sovereignty. Sovereignty is a set of norm and practice created by inter-subjective understanding. With such practice, an agent can redefine another agent's power towards its security. In defending sovereignty in which role identity attaches, the agent has two alternatives; either a military power use or a collective confession over the sovereignty. Second, the evolution of cooperation. The evolution of cooperation slowly and incrementally takes place. In the Hobbesian world, cooperation hardly occurs as agents compete to each other for survival in a competitive security system. In the Lockean world, on the other hand, recognitions over sovereignty are existent, but so individualistic are agents that they can cooperate with collective acts and incentive guarantees. Suspicions and relative gains can, however, cause conflicts.

The security system formed in this world is an individualistic security system transformed by the sovereignty institution. Third, the international efforts to transform an egoistic identity to a collective identity. Due to the fact a role of identity is taken, the role can change provided that the agents meet a new social situation and a considerable cost of role changing. They commit self-reflections and implement a new practice in order to transform their current identity to a collective identity and security system. Both collective identity and security system form through three stages; a consensus on identity commitment, a denaturalization as identifying a new identity and aspiration, and a new practice.

The security system in East Asia was still far different from that in the European Union embracing a collective security system as a collective identity was present. With the absence of consensus over a collective identity, the security system of East Asia was still in the form of individualistic security system in which states, particularly great powers attempted to pursue their security interests or territorial integrity by risking other smaller states' interests. Such practice occurred despite cooperation among states and development of regional institution in the region. China's claim over its traditional fishing ground overlapping the EEZ of North Natuna Sea as well as its aggressive behavior in the SCS contributed to the

Indonesia's formation of identity, interest and behavior, and so did other issues such as frequent illegal fishing, unlawful crossings, disputes over borders and resources.

Indonesia long believed and embraced the concept of archipelagic state based on the UNCLOS recognizing the sovereignty over the EEZ. Therefore, the EEZ of North Natuna Sea belonged to Indonesia. In spite of the fact, the use of military power in the area as shows of force frequently took place. The norm and practice of sovereignty created Indonesia's identity as an archipelagic state which required itself to pursue its security interest. The state's border security policy by increasing military and defense capability in the Natuna aimed to create stability and remove threats, defend sovereignty over the EEZ of North Natuna Sea and increase maritime integrity amid self-help and anarchic structure of international politics.

## **2 Research Method**

The research applied qualitative approach with a descriptive analysis with which the sole variable or main object was both tracked and deeply described. Such variable referred to Indonesia's border security policy in the Natuna. Not only does the qualitative method suggest the narrative form of research, but it also embraces intrinsic contextual reliability with which the analyst could enjoy flexibility in the role, weight and meaning assigned to evidence [11]. The research employed numerous secondary data such as journal articles, research reports and other relevant sources. The data were analyzed through the Mile and Huberman's interactive model consisting of several steps intertwining and running after each other starting from data collection, reduction, display to conclusion drawing [12].

The application of such data analysis in the research is seen as following steps. First, collecting data. In this stage, data were gathered as many as possible relevant to the phenomenon investigate; the SCS' dynamics and Indonesia's stand in the region. Second, reducing data. Critical questions ought to be presented, so that data reduction could begin as not all data collected were useful. Only after a certain critical question was determined could data reduction be conducted. Such critical question related to Indonesia's security policy in the border adjacent to the SCS; the Natuna Islands. Third, displaying data. This stage was merely a structured information display within which the hypothesis began to arise. The emphasis on attempting to deepen such temporary finding was made afterwards.

The finding was that Indonesia increased its military capability as a border security policy in the Natuna. Fourth, drawing conclusion. Before verifying a conclusion, a set of intertwining activities; data collection, reduction and display ought to persist so that the configuration, meaning, plot, pattern and proposition of information become strong and valid. At this stage, the conclusion turned to a reliable finding. That Indonesia increased its military capability in the Natuna, which was previously tracked and supported with evidence, was finally confirmed.

## **3 Results and Discussion**

### **3.1 Results**

In order to pursue border security interest in the Natuna, Indonesia issued a border security policy in the form of military and defense capability improvement. Such border

policy was driven by the sovereignty practice in a regional individualistic security system and identity as an archipelagic or maritime state. The policy could be seen through some maneuvers such as deploying troops and military equipment, building defense infrastructure, and strengthening constabulary function and boarding patrols.

## **3.2 Discussion**

### **3.2.1 Deploying Troops and Military Equipment**

In order to secure the Natuna and maintain stability in the islands, Indonesia deployed troops and military equipment either for routines or when the escalations occurred. Since 2014, Indonesia already stationed 4 American-made Apache helicopters which were specially operated to defend the Natuna [13]. In August 2015, the Indonesian Navy and Air Force conducted a joint military exercise in responding Malaysia's move in building a lighthouse in Temajuk water, near Samba's district which was subject to Indonesia-Malaysia dispute [14]. The exercise involving 3 warships and a number of Hawk aircrafts aimed to improve the two-Armed Forces units' preparedness in such border area. In November 2015, Indonesia deployed 7 warships for routine patrol operation [15] and 14 warships in early 2016 and increased the number of Army personnel along with radars installment for surveillance and air defense in outermost islands of Natuna [16].

During 2016, Indonesia encountered several Chinese trawlers, protected by Chinese coastguard vessels, fishing illegally in the EEZ of North Natuna Sea which caused more tensions. In responding to the incidents on 23 June 2016, President Joko Widodo convened a limited meeting on the KRI Imam Bojol which previously chased the Chinese boats and captured the crews. The event was a signal that Indonesia was serious in defending its rights and sovereignty [17]. In October 2016, the Indonesian Air Force conducted a military exercise called Latihan Puncak Angkasa Yudha in the Natuna sky in order to improve combat capability in the air which was supposed to be a defense diplomacy following the Indonesian Navy tension with the Chinese coastguard [18].

In November 2016, the Indonesian Army conducted a military exercise which involved numerous Leopard battle tanks in Natuna as well [19]. In 2017, the Indonesian Armed Forces conducted a joint military exercise called Pasukan Pemukul Reaksi Cepat (War Exercise of the Rapid Reaction Attacker Troops) involving the Army, Navy and Air Force with more than 5 thousand personnel and a large amount of military equipment from each unit. The exercise was watched directly by Indonesian Governors and President Joko Widodo [20]. In early 2020, it was reported that 8 warships with various types and a number of F-16 fighter jets were operated for routine patrol activities and 6 hundred personnel of the Indonesian Armed Forces were stationed at Selat Lampa port, Ranai [21].

The Indonesian troops and military equipment deployment were an effort to increase military and defense capability in the Natuna. Through their presence, it brought a message to neighbors that the state would be ready to respond to any threat towards the islands and its waters. The sense of this move was becoming stronger aftermath a couple of President Joko Widodo's official visits on the warships stationed in the Natuna waters.

### **3.2.2 Building Defense Infrastructure**

In terms of defense infrastructure, Indonesia was experiencing significant defense infrastructure development in the Natuna. Since 2014, Indonesia had been constructing a Sukhoi base near Ranai airport in order to accommodate the operation of Russian-made Sukhoi Su-27 and Sukhoi Su-30 owned by the Indonesian Air Force [13]. The common problem faced by the Air Force was that it used to be difficult for the aircrafts to either land

or take off in the Natuna due to lacking of infrastructure. In addition, in 2016 the state designated an integrated military base at the edge of Selat Lampa of Natuna Besar which started operating in December 2018. The tri-service unit base was a medium-term strategic plan which could integrate inter-operations among the Indonesian Armed Forces' units and host a variety of military equipment. It would be one of five new Joint Regional Defense Commands in Indonesia whose function was mainly to provide deterrence effects against border threats [22].

The integrated base was a home for the Indonesian Army, Navy and Air Force's smaller units as well as their facilities as following:

**Table 1.** Composition of the Indonesian Armed Forces and Facilities at the Natuna Integrated Base [23]

<b>Army</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>Air Force</b>	<b>Supporting Facilities</b>
Batalion Komposit (Composite Battalion), Kompi Zeni Tempur (Combat Engineer Company), Baterai Rudal Artileri Pertahanan Udara (Air Defense Artillery Unit), and Baterai Artileri Medan (Field Artillery Unit).	Pangkalan TNI Angkatan Laut (Naval Base), Kompi Komposit Marinir (Marine Composite Company), and Navy ports.	Pangkalan TNI Angkatan Udara (Air Force Base), integrated hanggar, and UAV squadron hanggar.	Mess and integrated military hospital.

Other functions of the integrated base would be evaluating the development of threats, developing relevant operational concepts and designing an integrated logistics support mechanism as well as building relationships with stakeholders [24]. Other supporting facilities such as water supply, electricity, improved communication, new roads and bridges were also constructed to support troops and heavy equipment mobilization within the Natuna [25]. Defense infrastructure was deemed necessary in order to succeed the border security policy in the Natuna with which the Indonesian Armed Forces would be able to execute its duty; defending the sovereignty and removing threats off the border. Increasing such infrastructure was meant to increase Indonesian military and defense capability in order to maintain a territorial integrity as an archipelagic state.

### 3.2.3 Strengthening Constabulary Function and Boarding Patrols

The effort to secure Natuna waters was not only carried out by the Indonesian Navy but also by the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) which was responsible for conducting security and safety patrols in Indonesia's territorial waters and the areas subject to the state's jurisdiction. The agency was transformed from previously known the Indonesian Maritime Security Coordinating Agency (Bakorkamla) in early tenure of President Joko Widodo to lead the maritime law enforcement operations [26]. The transformation aimed to strengthen constabulary function at sea. Though it was not a defense institution like the Navy, its personnel were militarily trained and equipped with security hardware's and according to the Indonesian law it could be a reserve component of defense

at sea in the event of war time. In addition, since constabulary function was shared by the Indonesian Police, Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fishery and other state institutions, the agency coordinated its policy and cooperated with them in term of violations in the Indonesian waters.

Indonesia had been carrying out patrols routine in order to prevent the violations mainly regarding illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities by foreigners and increasing its intensity provided that the tension arose in the EEZ of North Natuna Sea. During the patrols, Indonesia often encountered the Chinese and Vietnamese coastguards in the EEZ and forced them to leave the area. Indonesia chased the foreign vessels which operated in either territorial waters or EEZ of North Natuna Sea and captured their crews. Furthermore, Indonesia took a stricter measure by sinking the vessels despite some protests forwarded by foreign governments. Within a period of 2014 and 2019, Indonesia sank as many as 539 foreign vessels and most of which or 55 percent were owned by Vietnamese [27].

As the EEZ of North Natuna Sea was also claimed by other states, the tension could be inevitable. However, strict law enforcement without discrimination was the most appropriate maritime defense strategy regarding the conflict in the region [28]. The Patrols were the part of Indonesia's efforts to defend its sovereignty over the EEZ of North Natuna Sea including its resources in addition to territorial waters within its border security policy. Strengthening constabulary agencies and carrying out patrols also meant that the state was putting its effort to maintain its maritime integrity.

#### **4 Conclusions**

The identity of an archipelagic or maritime state and institution of sovereignty in a regional individualistic security system were determinants of Indonesia's border security policy in the Natuna. The border security policy was purposively issued to create stability and remove threats, defend sovereignty over the EEZ of North Natuna Sea and maintain maritime integrity. Such policy took shape in the form of military and defense capability increase which was indicated by deploying troops and military equipment, building defense infrastructure and strengthening constabulary function and boarding patrols.

The Indonesia's border security policy in the Natuna can be seen as a rising national awareness about its status as a maritime state consisting of a great number of islands and a large body of water territory including the right of EEZ exploitation. Inasmuch as the maritime borders are the most vulnerable areas, it is important that the state secure them. In the case of Natuna, despite its border security policy, the tension and violations still recur in the North Natuna Sea meaning that Indonesia's defense capability building is still progressing.

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