

## Maritime Security in an Era of Geopolitical Rivalry: Strategic Implications of Great Power Competition in Indo-Pacific Sea Lanes

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### KEYWORDS

Maritime Security; Indo-Pacific; Great Power Rivalry; Strategic Sea Routes; Indonesia's National Strategy

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### ABSTRACT

The escalating geopolitical rivalry between major powers, particularly the United States and China, has profoundly reshaped the maritime security landscape of the Indo-Pacific region. Strategic sea lanes, such as the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, have become central arenas for this competition, creating a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment with direct implications for regional stability. This study analyzes the impact of this great power competition on Indonesia's maritime security and formulates an optimal national strategy. Employing a qualitative approach, the research utilizes a SWOT analysis strengthened by Internal Factor Analysis Summary (IFAS) and External Factor Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrices. The findings reveal that Indonesia is positioned in Quadrant I of the SWOT matrix, indicating significant internal strengths and substantial external opportunities. Consequently, a Strength-Opportunity (SO) strategy emerges as the most optimal choice. This strategy advocates for Indonesia to leverage its geostrategic position and diplomatic capital to lead regional cooperation, enhance maritime domain awareness through technology, and pursue adaptive defense diplomacy, thereby maintaining the stability of strategic sea lanes amidst great power rivalry.

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## INTRODUCTION

Maritime security is one of the main pillars of international stability in the era of globalization, especially for the Indo-Pacific region, which is the center of world economic growth and a major route of global trade. Ideally, the sea is seen as a common space (global commons) that guarantees freedom of navigation, shipping safety, and smooth international trade flows. Under these ideal conditions, countries that use sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) have a common interest in maintaining stability, preventing conflicts, and prioritizing maritime cooperation based on international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

However, the reality of Indo-Pacific maritime security shows conditions that are far from ideal. This region has actually become the epicenter of geopolitical rivalry of great powers, especially between the United States and China, which also involves their respective allies and strategic partners such as Japan, Australia, India, and ASEAN countries. The rivalry is reflected in the increased naval military presence, large-scale joint exercises, the construction of military bases, and the escalation of patrol activities and the enforcement of sovereignty claims in strategic maritime areas, particularly in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea is one of the busiest sea lanes in the world, with more than 30% of global trade and an estimated USD 3–5 trillion worth of international trade passing through the region each year. In addition to economic value, the region is also rich in natural resources, including oil and gas reserves estimated at 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. These strategic interests prompted China to make unilateral claims through the nine-dash line, which contradicted the claims of ASEAN countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. The 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruling in favor of the Philippines did not necessarily ease tensions, but was followed by an increase in Chinese military activity in the region.

In addition to the South China Sea, the Malacca Strait is also a strategic sea lane that has vital significance for global and regional maritime security. The strait connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, with more than 100,000 ships passing through each year, carrying about 25–30% of world trade and more than 60% of Chinese and Japanese energy imports. Ideally, the Strait of Malacca is managed cooperatively by coastal states (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) with the support of the international community. But in practice, the Strait of Malacca faces various security challenges, ranging from piracy, armed piracy, smuggling, to potential militarization due to increasing great power rivalries in the Indo-Pacific region.

International Maritime Bureau (IMB) data shows that although piracy rates in the Malacca Strait tend to decline compared to the early 2000s, the threat of maritime crime still persists and fluctuates. At the same time, the intensity of the presence of warships of major nations in the waters around Southeast Asia has increased significantly, both through Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) by the United States and Chinese military patrols and exercises. This condition creates a security dilemma for regional countries, including Indonesia, which seek to maintain neutrality while protecting their national interests.

Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic country and a global maritime axis, has a very crucial geostrategic position in the context of Indo-Pacific maritime security. Indonesia's territorial waters include a number of strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca, the Sunda Strait, the Lombok Strait, and the Makassar Strait, which are the main routes of global trade and military movement. Ideally, Indonesia plays a role as a regional stabilizer, guardian of sea lane security, and a driver of regional maritime cooperation through ASEAN and other multilateral mechanisms.

However, the facts on the ground show that Indonesia faces complex challenges in carrying out this role. The limitations of marine surveillance capabilities, the vastness of the water area, and the increasing non-traditional threats such as illegal fishing, narcotics smuggling, and transnational crime, are further exacerbated by global geopolitical dynamics. In addition, Indonesia also faces indirect pressure from the US-China rivalry, especially in border areas such as the North Natuna Sea, which intersects with China's unilateral claims.

The current maritime security situation in the Indo-Pacific reflects the character of the strategic environment of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity). Volatility can be seen from the rapid change in the security situation and the escalation of tensions. Uncertainty arises due to the difficulty of predicting the policy direction of the great powers. Complexity is reflected in the involvement of many actors with overlapping interests, while ambiguity arises from the blurring of boundaries between military and non-military threats. In

this context, maritime security strategies can no longer be static but must be adaptive, collaborative, and based on long-term national interests.

Based on this comprehensive description, the central problem addressed by this research is how Indonesia, in concert with other Indo-Pacific states, can formulate and implement an effective maritime security strategy to navigate great power rivalries and the pervasive uncertainty of the global strategic environment. While existing literature has extensively discussed the geopolitical dynamics of the region and the challenges faced by individual states, there is a discernible gap in studies that systematically combine a qualitative geopolitical analysis with a structured strategic management tool, such as the SWOT-IFAS/EFAS framework, to generate actionable policy recommendations for a specific country like Indonesia. This research aims to fill this gap. The urgency of this study lies in the immediate need for Indonesia to develop a coherent, proactive, and resilient strategy to protect its sovereignty and interests amidst escalating competition. The novelty of this research is its application of the IFAS and EFAS matrices to quantify and position Indonesia's strategic standing within the VUCA environment of the Indo-Pacific, moving beyond descriptive analysis to offer a prioritized, data-informed strategic direction. The primary purpose is to identify and evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Indonesia's maritime security and, based on this evaluation, to formulate the most suitable strategy for ensuring the stability of its strategic sea lanes and its national interests. The primary contribution of this study is to provide a strategic roadmap for Indonesian policymakers and a robust analytical framework for scholars examining the intersection of geopolitics and national strategy in the region. The intended benefit is to inform the development of a more adaptive, effective, and sovereignty-preserving Indonesian maritime security policy.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with strategic analysis methods to understand the impact of great power rivalry on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, especially its implications for Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to analyze geopolitical dynamics, maritime policy, and defense strategies in a contextual and comprehensive manner (Creswell, 2014). Research data is obtained through library research by utilizing secondary sources in the form of academic books, international journal articles, reports of international institutions, and relevant maritime defense and security policy documents (Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

Data analysis was carried out using a SWOT framework to identify internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) as well as external factors (opportunities and threats) that affect Indonesia's maritime security strategy (Gürel & Tat, 2017). Furthermore, these factors are analyzed through the IFAS and EFAS matrices to determine Indonesia's strategic position in the SWOT quadrant and formulate adaptive strategic alternatives in dealing with the VUCA strategic environment (David & David, 2017).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Identification of Strategic Factors SWOT of Indonesia's Maritime Security

The SWOT analysis is used to map the strategic condition of Indonesia's maritime security by identifying internal factors in the form of strengths and weaknesses, as well as external factors in the form of opportunities and threats. This identification is the basis for formulating an adaptive national strategy in the midst of increasing great power rivalries in the Indo-Pacific (David & David, 2017).

#### A. Strengths

- 1) Indonesia's Geostrategic Position as an Archipelagic Country. Indonesia has a very strong geostrategic position because it is located at the intersection of two oceans (the Indies and the Pacific) and two continents (Asia and Australia). Indonesia's territorial waters include a number of strategic choke points around the world such as the Strait of Malacca, Sunda Strait, Lombok Strait, and Makassar Strait, which are major global trade and energy routes (Bateman & Ho, 2019). This position provides strategic leverage for Indonesia in the management of the security of international sea lanes.
- 2) Status as an archipelagic country according to UNCLOS 1982. International recognition of Indonesia as an archipelagic country based on UNCLOS 1982 provides strong legal legitimacy in the management of marine areas, the Indonesian Archipelago Sea Lane (ALKI), as well as the regulation of international maritime traffic (UNCLOS, 1982; Djalal, 2018). This strengthens Indonesia's position in maintaining its maritime sovereignty and security.
- 3) Indonesia's Central Role in ASEAN. Indonesia has significant diplomatic power as the largest country in ASEAN and often plays an agenda-setter in regional security issues. The ASEAN Centrality approach allows Indonesia to encourage regional maritime cooperation mechanisms such as the ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) (Acharya, 2014).
- 4) National Commitment to the World Maritime Axis Vision. The World Maritime Axis policy affirms Indonesia's commitment to building national maritime power through strengthening infrastructure, maritime defense, and maritime diplomacy (Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs and Investment, 2019). This vision becomes a conceptual and policy force in facing maritime geopolitical dynamics.

#### B. Weaknesses (Kelemahan)

- 1) Limited Maritime Law Supervision and Enforcement Capabilities. The vastness of Indonesia's maritime area has not been fully balanced with adequate maritime surveillance capabilities. The limitations of patrol fleets, coastal radar, and Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) systems cause security gaps that are vulnerable to being exploited by state and non-state actors (Till, 2018).
- 2) Institutional Fragmentation of Maritime Security. The involvement of many institutions in maritime security—such as the Indonesian Navy, Bakamla, Polair, and KKP—still faces coordination challenges and overlapping authority (Mukhtar & Prakoso, 2020). This fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of responses to complex maritime threats.
- 3) Limitations of the Maritime Defense Budget. Indonesia's defense budget is relatively small compared to the challenges and area of the sea area that must be secured. This condition

limits the modernization of marine defense equipment and the development of advanced maritime surveillance technology (IISS, 2023).

- 4) Dependence on Regional Stability. The security of Indonesia's sea lanes is highly dependent on regional stability. The escalation of conflicts between major powers has the potential to have a direct impact on Indonesia's national security even though Indonesia adheres to the principle of a free and active foreign policy (Weatherbee, 2016).

### C. Opportunities (Peluang)

- 1) Strengthening Regional Maritime Security Cooperation. Increasing awareness of the importance of maritime security opens up opportunities for Indonesia to strengthen regional cooperation through joint patrols, information exchange, and capacity building, especially in the Strait of Malacca and the ASEAN region (Storey, 2020).
- 2) Development of Maritime Technology and Digitalization. Technological advances such as satellites, maritime drones, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics provide opportunities for Indonesia to increase MDA more effectively and efficiently (Levy, 2022).
- 3) Indonesia's role as a Mediator and Confidence Builder. Indonesia's relative neutrality in the US-China rivalry opens up diplomatic opportunities to play a role as a mediator, confidence-building actor, and strategic balancer in the Indo-Pacific region (Laksmana, 2021).
- 4) International Support for the Safety of Sea Lanes. The global interest in the stability of SLOCs is driving international support in the form of technical assistance, joint exercises, and maritime capacity building for coastal countries such as Indonesia (OECD, 2020).

### D. Threats

- 1) Escalation of Great Power Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Strategic competition between the United States and China increases the risk of open conflict and grey zone conflict at sea, including around the North Natuna Sea and the ALKI route (Fravel, 2020).
- 2) Militarization of the South China Sea. The construction of military bases and the deployment of weapons systems by China in the South China Sea increase tensions and potentially disrupt the stability of the region's maritime security (CSIS, 2022).
- 3) Persistent Non-Traditional Threats. Piracy, narcotics smuggling, illegal fishing, and transnational crime remain real threats that drain Indonesia's maritime security resources (UNODC, 2021).
- 4) VUCA Strategic Environment. The uncertainty of large-power policies, the complexity of actors, and the ambiguity of threats increase the risk of strategic miscalculations that can have an impact on Indonesia's national security (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017).

## 2. Preparation of IFAS and EFAS Matrices and Strategy Determination

### A. Matriks IFAS (Internal Factor Analysis Summary)

The IFAS matrix is used to assess internal factors in the form of strengths and weaknesses of Indonesia's maritime security. Weights are given based on the level of importance (total = 1), the rating shows the condition of Indonesia's response (1 = very weak, 4 = very strong).

**Table 1.** IFAS Table on Indonesian Maritime Security

Internal Factors	Weight	Rating	Score
Strengths			
Indonesia's geostrategic position (global choke points)	0,15	4	0,60
Status of archipelagic countries (UNCLOS 1982)	0,10	4	0,40
Indonesia's Leadership in ASEAN	0,10	3	0,30

<b>Internal Factors</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Vision of the World Maritime Axis</b>	0,10	3	0,30
Subtotal Strengths	<b>0,45</b>		<b>1,60</b>
Weaknesses			
<b>Limitations of supervision and MDA</b>	0,15	2	0,30
<b>Institutional fragmentation of maritime security</b>	0,15	2	0,30
<b>Limitations of the maritime defense budget</b>	0,15	2	0,30
<b>Dependency of regional stability</b>	0,10	2	0,20
Subtotal Weaknesses	<b>0,55</b>		<b>1,10</b>
Total IFAS Score	<b>1,00</b>		<b>2,70</b>

IFAS Interpretation: A value of 2.70 (>2.5) indicates that internally Indonesia is quite strong, but still overshadowed by significant structural weakness (David & David, 2017).

### B. Matriks EFAS (External Factor Analysis Summary)

The EFAS matrix assesses the external opportunities and threats faced by Indonesia.

**Table 2.** EFAS Table of Indonesian Maritime Security

<b>External Factors</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Shoes</b>
Opportunities			
<b>Regional maritime security cooperation</b>	0,15	4	0,60
<b>Advances in maritime surveillance technology</b>	0,10	3	0,30
<b>Indonesia's role as a mediator</b>	0,10	3	0,30
<b>International support on SLOCs</b>	0,10	3	0,30
Subtotal Opportunities	<b>0,45</b>		<b>1,50</b>
Threats			
<b>U.S.-China Rivalry</b>	0,20	2	0,40
<b>Militarization of the South China Sea</b>	0,15	2	0,30
<b>Non-traditional maritime threats</b>	0,10	2	0,20
<b>VUCA's strategic environment</b>	0,10	2	0,20
Subtotal Threats	<b>0,55</b>		<b>1,10</b>
Total EFAS Score	<b>1,00</b>		<b>2,60</b>

EFAS Interpretation: A value of 2.60 indicates that Indonesia faces great external opportunities, but geopolitical threats remain dominant and structural (Bueger & Edmunds, 2017).

### C. SWOT Quadrant Positioning

- 1) IFAS score = 2.70 (strong)
- 2) EFAS score = 2.60 (great chance)

Indonesia's Strategic Position is in Quadrant I (SO – Aggressive Strategy)

This means that Indonesia is in a relatively strong condition and has opportunities, so the right strategy is to maximize national strength to seize external opportunities, not defensively.

### D. Alternative Indonesian Maritime Security Strategy

- 1) SO (Strength–Opportunity) Strategy → Key Strategy
  - a. Leverage Indonesia's geostrategic position to lead regional maritime security cooperation.
  - b. Integrating the World Maritime Axis with an ASEAN-based Indo-Pacific security architecture.
  - c. Strengthening Maritime Domain Awareness based on technology and international cooperation.

- 2) Strategi WO (Weakness–Opportunity)
  - a. Institutional reform of maritime security through the integration of command and coordination.
  - b. The use of international assistance to increase the capacity of defense equipment and maritime human resources.
- 3) Strategi ST (Strength–Threat)
  - a. Defense diplomacy is active to mitigate the escalation of the US-China rivalry.
  - b. Strengthening the presence of the Indonesian Navy in a measurable manner in strategic areas such as Natuna.
- 4) WT (Weakness–Threat) Strategy
  - a. Pendekatan minimum deterrence dan confidence-building measures.
  - b. Focus on protecting national interests without getting caught up in a big power bloc.

#### **E. Choosing the Best Strategy**

Based on the position of Quadrant I and the results of the IFAS-EFAS analysis, the best strategy for Indonesia is the SO (Strength–Opportunity) Strategy. This strategy is most relevant to confronting the geopolitical rivalry of the Indo-Pacific because:

- 1) Enabling Indonesia to be proactive without losing the principle of free and active
- 2) Maximizing Indonesia's geographical and diplomatic advantage
- 3) Avoiding the pitfalls of direct military escalation
- 4) Adaptive to the strategic environment of VUCA

The SO strategy places Indonesia as a regional stabilizer, not as a polarized party in a great power rivalry.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Geopolitical rivalries between major powers in the Indo-Pacific region have made maritime security an increasingly complex and dynamic strategic issue. Strategic sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea not only serve as the lifeblood of global trade but also as an arena for the competition of military, economic, and political interests. The results of the SWOT analysis, strengthened through the IFAS and EFAS matrix, show that Indonesia is in a strategic position in Quadrant I, which reflects its relatively large internal strengths and external opportunities in facing maritime security challenges in the midst of a VUCA strategic environment. Based on these results, the most appropriate strategy for Indonesia is the Strength–Opportunity (SO) strategy. Indonesia needs to maximize its geostrategic position and regional leadership by strengthening ASEAN-based maritime security cooperation, increasing Maritime Domain Awareness through the use of digital technology, and optimizing free, active, and adaptive defense diplomacy. In addition, the reform of maritime security institutional governance and capacity building of the Indonesian Navy and Bakamla are crucial steps to ensure the sovereignty, stability, and security of Indonesia's strategic sea lanes amid the Indo-Pacific geopolitical rivalry.

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