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THE ROLE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN INDONESIA'S CONTEMPORARY DEFENCE STRATEGY

Abstract. As the country with the largest area and population in Southeast Asia, Indonesia needs a coherent and functional defence strategy to help it navigates the fluid geopolitical environment in the Asia-Pacific region. Contemporary Indonesian defence strategy focuses on defending territorial integrity, arms modernization, as well as the need to address traditional and non-traditional security issues. In this paper, the writer argues that Indonesia's contemporary defence strategy is strongly influenced by concepts of national identity which have been instrumental in shaping the nation since its hard-won independence from colonial rule. These concepts include the sanctity of independence, geographic position as an archipelagic state, and the armed forces' unity with the people. This paper will analyze how these concepts shape Indonesia's defence strategy, which impacts on how Indonesia views its strategic environment and its foreign policy formulation. Lastly, this paper will give policy recommendations for Indonesia-Russia relations and defence cooperation for security in the Asia-Pacific region, based on an understanding of Indonesia's defence strategy.

Key words: Indonesia, national identity, defence strategy.

Introduction

Indonesia is the largest country in Southeast Asia, in both terms of area and population. The country's geopolitical posture in unique: it is located between "two continents and two oceans": Asia and Oceania, the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, its territory being an archipelago of 17508 islands spanning from Aceh near the Malay Peninsula to Papua, part of the Melanesian cultural sphere. Its population of 267 million also maintain high ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. What is now Indonesia coming from a series of Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic kingdoms which had strong political and economic influence in pre-colonial Southeast Asia, before falling under Dutch colonial rule and Japanese occupation. Indonesia declared its independence on August 17, 1945, but went on to resist colonial rule until 1949 [Vickers 2005:1-9].

Given Indonesia's unique geopolitical posture and the fluid surrounding external environment, it needs a well-prepared defence strategy to help it mitigate internal and external threats and challenges and protect the well-being of its large and diverse population. The Indonesian Armed Forces, named *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI) which was formed in October 1945 as a response to the persisting colonial threat, has underwent series of experience and adjustments, from facing internal and separatist rebellions threatening national unity, conflict with the Netherlands over West Irian and confrontation with Malaysia, and more contemporarily facing threats of terrorism and managing the raising geopolitical stakes in Southeast Asia [Gindarsah 2016:1-3].

In facing the challenges above, the author argues that Indonesia's conception of national identity strongly influences its contemporary national strategy. The body of the text will explain three important concepts in Indonesian identity: the sanctity of independence, its geographic position as an archipelagic state, and the armed forces' unity with the people. It will explain the history of these three concepts In Indonesia's nation-building history before linking it with Indonesia's contemporary defence strategy, which impacts on how Indonesia sees its strategic environment. In the conclusion, recommendations for Indonesia-Russia defence relations in the Asia-Pacific region will be given.

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The Sanctity of Independence: Independence or Death

The central talking point in Indonesian defence doctrine is the need to defend Indonesia's independence and protect the wellbeing of its population. This can be traced to Indonesia's long history against colonial struggle. Indonesia sees its independence as not being granted by colonial powers but being the result of "Indonesian armed struggle". After limited regional rebellions against colonial rule over centuries, Indonesian national conscience and a will to independence led to Indonesia declaring its independence on August 17, 1945, maximizing a vacuum of power caused by Japanese surrender just three days prior. However, Indonesia went on fighting for four more years against Dutch and British forces, which had not recognized Indonesian independence. Armed struggle and diplomacy eventually led to Indonesia's independence being acknowledged by the Netherlands on December 27, 1949 [Tyurin 2017.613-614]

Indonesia's view of its hard-won independence and resistance to foreign occupation also impacted its foreign policy since its formation years. Indonesia's first vice president, Mohammad Hatta noted this and not to take sides in the imminent Cold War. Hatta famously noted that as a nation striving for itself to attain its independence, it would be inappropriate if Indonesia can only take sides in the Cold War. Hatta's doctrine is known as "*bebas dan aktif"* (independent and active) which guides Indonesian foreign policy to this day. While the meaning of the concept has evolved through time, but essentially independent means that Indonesia is free from foreign powers' pressure and influence in taking its foreign policy steps, while active means Indonesia will actively support the pursuit of peace and security internationally, including in the fight against colonialism and imperialism [Yani and Montratama, 2017:1-15].

In Indonesia's defence policy, this means that Indonesia will not take part in any military alliances with foreign powers, not allow the possibility of foreign military bases housed in Indonesian territory. This is beneficial for Indonesia in facing the imminent geopolitical feud between the United States and China is Asia-Pacific. In contrast with some other Southeast Asian countries which have defence arrangements with external powers, Indonesia's flexible engagement has caused Indonesia to be able to cooperate with many countries without having to dependent on one [Shekhar 2018:200-204]:. Indonesia purchases arms from various sources, such as the United States, Russia, China, and other European and Asian countries, while the Indonesian military have been involved in military exercises with both the US and Russia in the past year [Parameswaran, 2021]. This is also guided by Indonesian historical experience, where despite of some deviances from the independent and active foreign policy in the past (being closer to the socialist world during the late Sukarno era and closer to the West under Suharto), sudden geopolitical shifts such as Indonesia's souring ties with the Soviet Union after the communist coup and the US-imposed embargo due to human rights violations in East Timor have further provided a lesson for Indonesia not to depend on one external power.

Indonesia's independent and active principle benefits its position as a regional leader and *de facto* engine of political-security cooperation within ASEAN. It was Indonesia who initiated the ASEAN Political-Security Community, by Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda in 2002, and nine years later Indonesia invited two of the world's most powerful militaries, the United States and Russia, into the East Asia Summit when it was held in Indonesia [Natalegawa 2018:96]. This shows how Indonesia's strategic options are wide and not only limited to the US and China While some Southeast Asian, including Indonesian scholars have proposed a "security alignment with the United States and economic alignment with China" [Yani and Montratama 2017:169-175; Hamilton-Hart and McRae 2015:2-4], the writer sees this as inappropriate given the present multipolar structure in Southeast Asia instead of the bipolarity of Cold War Europe, and powers like Russia should not be ignored. This shows how Indonesia's independent and active foreign policy is a boost for both its domestic defence strategy (enabling it to choose multiple powers for cooperation and arms procurement) as well as its regional defence diplomacy (a leverage for Southeast Asia to avoid the trap of choosing between the US and China).

Indonesia's Position as an Archipelagic State

As described above, Indonesia's uniquely large archipelagic territory has caused the sea to become an important factor in Indonesian strategic thinking. This has been voiced by early Indonesian leaders, which saw the sea not as a separator but instead a connector «to unite» the islands. The Indonesian vocabulary for homeland is *tanah air,* combining the words *tanah,* meaning land, and *air,* meaning water – indicating the interconnectedness of Indonesia's land and maritime territories. Indonesian maritime territory is also important for global traffic with the Malacca Strait being one of the busiest straits in the world. Therefore, control for Indonesia's sea lanes have become a contentious issue for Indonesian diplomacy. Indonesian diplomats Mochtar Kusumaatmadja and Hasjim Djalal advanced Indonesia's aspiration to have its internal, large waters recognized as part of its territory to the United Nations. Eventually, the UN Convention for the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) recognized Indonesia's sovereignty over its whole internal waters, but Indonesia had to provide special regulated sea lanes for international traffic [Anwar 1989:45-54, Butcher and Elson 2017:312-319].

However, in Indonesia's defence strategy the sea has initially gained lesser importance due to Indonesia's combat experience being focused with internal rebellions at land. While Indonesia initially became one of the most powerful Asian navies in the early 1960s (during the West Irian campaign) with Soviet help, Indonesia's navy fell into neglect during the New Order (Suharto) era. It was only in 2014 after President Joko Widodo came to power when Indonesia attempted to recognize its huge maritime potential and identity. President Widodo, popularly known as "Jokowi" envisioned Indonesia as a "global maritime fulcrum" which encouraged the strengthening of Indonesian maritime power, strengthening connectivity between islands, and the unraveling of Indonesia's economic maritime potential. A special "coordinating ministry" for maritime affairs was also formed during the Jokowi administration. [Burhanuddin, 2015:10-15] However, into Jokowi's second term, the concept has fallen into oblivion with other issues and developments taking central stage [Laksmana, 2019]

Despite of Jokowi's fading concept, Indonesia's position as a maritime state is still important for its position in Southeast Asian geopolitics. In the probably most contagious issue in Southeast Asian geopolitics, the South China Sea, Indonesia has shown diplomatic leverage despite not being a claimant state in the issue. Indonesia's official map showed the name "North Natuna Sea" for the area surrounding the Natuna Islands adjacent to Chinese territorial claims. President Jokowi, despite of Indonesia's expanding economic ties with China, has stated that he would not recognize China's nine-dash line claims, viewing it as "baseless" [Pakpahan 2018:5]. In addition, as a sign of diplomatic gesture, President Jokowi came aboard an Indonesian navy ship to show Indonesia's sovereignty over the North Natuna Sea, and strengthened Indonesia's Coast Guard capability to prevent Chinese naval incursions into Indonesian maritime territory. Besides problems of sovereignty, Indonesia has also tackled problems of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in its territorial waters, with around foreign vessels being sunk for IUU fishing in Indonesian waters.

However, Indonesia's navy capability is still hindered with several problems. Despite the Indonesian Navy having the tenth most ships globally, however its combat capabilities have been questioned by several experts [Collin 2015:434]. Problems such as outdated technology, lack of maintenance, sinking of the Nanggala ship in 2021, limitations in crucial areas such as sea control and sea denial as well as the possibility of missing the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) target set for 2024 have plagued the Indonesian Navy. Therefore, the Indonesian Navy needs to strengthen its combat capabilities to at least ensure the Navy capable to protect the Indonesian archipelago and position itself as a firm green-water navy. In its relations with Russia, naval exercises and procurement can be one of the ways for the Indonesian Navy to strengthen its capability, given Russia's navy is one of the world's strongest.

The Army's Unity with the People

Indonesia has a huge cultural diversity. The national language, Indonesian, is derived from various local languages used by local peoples. The over 700 ethnic groups in Indonesia speak

in various local languages in addition to *bahasa Indonesia.* Despite Indonesia having the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia recognizes six religions to be equal and official. Since independence, Indonesia has faced problems of separatist movements, internal and local revolts, and ethnic tensions. Therefore, keeping the unity of Indonesia's diverse population is a key point in Indonesia's defence strategy. This justifies the philosophical unity between the armed forces and the people. The Indonesian Constitution states that every Indonesian citizen is obliged to take part in defending the country [DPR RI]. This is known as the universal defence and security system (*sishankamrata – sistem pertahanan keamanan rakyat semesta*)

Indonesia does not implement compulsory military service. However, Indonesia sees the promotion of patriotism and eagerness to defend the country (*bela negara*) as important for every citizen, so that they see Indonesia as a part of their identity and would contribute and defend the country, regardless they are involved in the military or not. This is crucial given Indonesian history is filled as separatist movements which have threatened the country's unity and even existence. This included the South Moluccas Republic *(Republik Maluku Selatan*), the Indonesian Revolutionary Government (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia/PRRI-Permesta*) in the Sukarno era, followed by the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) and Independent Papua Organization (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*) founded during the Suharto era, as well as religious-based conflicts and threats such as the DI/TII Islamist rebellion in the Sukarno era, religious conflicts in various Indonesian regions triggered after the fall of Suharto in 1998, and more recently, the threat of perverted religious teaching which can be a bulwark for radicalism, extremism and terrorism in contemporary Indonesia [Habir et. al. 2015:93-98].

However, on the other hand, the armed forces have faced criticism from various human rights and non-governmental organizations due to human rights violations. A majority of these violations occurred during the military dictatorship of Suharto (1966-1998), despite an increase of army-related human rights violations in the past few years [Azhar 2014]. A major issue of contention is the province of Papua, where some Oceanian countries and international non-governmental organizations have reported human rights violations committed by the army against civilians and criticized the army's presence in Papua. While Indonesian army presence is necessary to ensure the safety and security as part of its territory and there is a threat of armed violent groups (*kelompok kriminal bersenjata*) in the region, the armed forces should focus on eliminating latent threats and avoid indiscriminate targeting to ensure support among the local and national population, in order to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position in the Papua issue.

Conclusion

In midst of the tense geopolitical situation in Asia-Pacific, Indonesia is equipping its defence strategy to counter traditional and non-traditional threats in the region. It is evident that Indonesia's national values and historical experience continue to influence its contemporary defence strategy: Indonesia's sanctity of its hard-won independence effects on how it avoids military alliances and discourages foreign military presence in the region, its position as an archipelagic state has strengthened the importance of sea power in its defence strategy, despite of various setbacks in navy modernization, and lastly, the army's unity with the people has enabled it to view the unity and security of its large and diverse population as important, therefore seeing threats of radicalism and separatism as damaging national unity.

Knowing Indonesia's defence strategy, Indonesia-Russia relations in contemporary Asian geopolitics hold strong relevance. Indonesia-Russia relations is necessary to avoid the possibility of bipolarity between the US and China in the region which would only bring benefits for the two countries and marginalizing other important countries, including Indonesia and Russia. In addition, Indonesia and Russia can learn from each other in various sectors, such as arms sales, military training, counter-terrorism operations, regional confidence building measures, and importantly protecting the unity of a diverse population. With ASEAN and Indonesia, included in the Greater Eurasia concept proposed by Russia, Indonesia should take this opportunity given the shared goals of both Indonesia and Russia for multipolarity and regional stability. Therefore, a

multi-layered diplomatic network between Russia and Indonesia should be able to serve these interests.

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