Indonesia Military Power under the Increasing Threat of Conflict in the South China Sea

Muhammad Budiana, Muhammad Fedryansyah, Yusa Djuyandi, Ramadhan Pancasilawan

In the international maritime system, the South China Sea (SCS) region holds economic, political, and strategic values. However, it is also the source of longstanding disputes among the countries within the region. For Indonesia, potential conflicts in the SCS might arise not only from China's assertive territorial claims over the sea but also from fellow ASEAN countries. With the SCS waters contiguous to Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), protecting Indonesian national interests in the region become very crucial. However, it is not uncommon for Indonesian patrol vessels to face intimidation by other countries' vessels as they are protecting the national borders. In seeking to alleviate the conflict in the SCS, the Indonesian government mainly resorts to soft power and diplomacy. However, it is also viewed important for Indonesia to increase its hard power resources. In facing the growing threat of conflict in the SCS, Indonesian defense is deemed far from ready. Compared to China's military power, by considering total number of personnel and naval assets as indicators, Indonesia military power is far behind China. Indonesian patrol vessels often face military intervention from China's. It is believed that utilizing military power to its full potential would bring positive impact for Indonesia in handling the South China Sea conflicts.

Introduction

The South China Sea (SCS) is one of the most critical economic, political, strategic, and even military regions in the world. The waters are directly bordered by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. All of them have competing claims of territorial sovereignty in the region. Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. All of the claimant countries of the SCS provide different historical and judicial supports for their claims. The SCS is also rich in geographical potentials and natural resources. More than half of the total fishing vessels of the world pass through the waters, which serve as the commercial gateway of international shipping lines, especially the cross-sea trade routes connecting Europe, America, and Asia trade routes. The rapid economic growth throughout Asia has also contributed to the significance of the region in the world's geopolitics. As the region is becoming increasingly appealing, the potential for conflict is also growing.

The potential conflict among the countries in the region was heightened when the Chinese government asserted territorial claims, followed by the increasing military activities surrounding the region. Regilme (2018) revealed that many countries around the SCS, particularly in Southeast Asia, denied China's claim over the SCS and demanded that China stop its military activities in the region. China's assertive territorial claims and increasing military activity in the SCS are driven by a growing threat posed by the US military presence in Southeast Asia, also bolstered by the rapid growth of its economy Regilme (2018). In addition to increased efforts to reclaim land in SCS, China also keeps building infrastructure on the disputed islands. The country is also known to deploy its military in the region, strictly complying with the non-binding SCS Code of Conduct (COC) rather than joining a binding COC.

The Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, are expected to play a significant role in seeking to promote a resolution in the disputed region. With some part of the SCS within Indonesia's EEZ, China's assertive claim over the most part the South China Sea is deemed detrimental to Indonesia (Sinaga & Robertua, 2018). The South China Sea has a strategic position and vital to Indonesian political and economic sovereignty. Being Indonesia's outermost islands, Natuna waters lie in

the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and is contiguous with some parts of the SCS claimed by China. Based on this maritime jurisdiction, Indonesian authorities seized some Chinese fishing trawlers trespassing its EEZ (Weatherbee, 2016). One incident led to another. In March 2016, China's Coast Guard rammed one of the country's fishing boats, prying it free from the Indonesian authorities' patrol vessel (Weatherbee, 2016). A similar incident took place in June 2016. The Indonesian naval corvette (KRI Imam Bonjol 383), when trying to drive out a fishing vessel trespassing the North Natuna ZEE, was intimidated by a China's patrol vessel (Gumilang, 2016).

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The South China Sea region is bordered by many sovereign countries. A tension between Indonesia and China is only one case of border incident among many others. In February 2019, a Vietnamese government ship was also intimidated by an Indonesian naval vessel when it was about to capture a Vietnam's fishing vessel violating the sea boundary in Natuna (Tariden, 2019). China's territorial claim over the most part of the South China Sea has created friction and provocation, exacerbating the situation and heightening the tension among ASEAN countries within the region. In addressing the situation, it is crucial for the Indonesian government to wield soft power through diplomatic channels while also improving military power in order to prevent border incident with its neighboring countries. It is also important for Indonesian government to reflect on China's policy on the South China Sea which, according to Beukel (2010), since 2006 has maintained balance of soft power and hard power in exercising its power and influence in the region.

It is important for a country to wield both its soft and hard powers in managing potential border disputes since it is closely related to maintaining sovereignty. Even though diplomatic protest is the preferred course of action to avoid open conflict, with countries' patrol vessels continually violating and provoking, it brings up a question of vital importance, how effective is diplomacy in dealing with this problem? Do the intrusions by other countries' vessels stem from the inability of Indonesian patrol vessels to impose significant threat? In order to address the question, an analysis should be carried out on Indonesian defense strength in the midst of a growing threat of conflict in the South China Sea region.

To position this research within the general picture of current scholarly discussion on the issue, other related research papers are also

discussed in this paper. Based on some previous publications, it was revealed that diplomatic efforts are the preferred means undertaken by the Indonesian government in dealing with the SCS disputes, such as diplomatic channels. In addressing the conflict in the SCS, Indonesia is maintaining a non-hostile stance towards any neighboring country, including China. However, it is not unlikely that Indonesia may at any time take more aggressive measures(Aplianta, 2015; Connelly, 2016; Sinaga & Robertua, 2018) While Malaysia has taken the same course of action as Indonesia in dealing with the situation, that is by diplomatic bilateral negotiations, the Philippines has taken more confrontational approaches to China's actions in the South China Sea (Kreuzer, 21016). In other words, from a few studies, there have been no studies that analyze how the Indonesian defense forces in the Middle Threats South China Sea conflict.

Theoretical Framework
Defense
Every country has the right to protect itself and defend itself from any potential threat to its sovereignty. Without sovereignty, a country will have difficulty in determining its future. Maintaining national sovereignty could mean strengthening defense forces. According to Dönges & Hofmann (2018), defense is defined as "the act of shielding against an existential threat with military means." National defense is inextricably linked to the theory of deterrence, which suggests that a country's armed force should be at the ready to deter coercive actions from any adversaries. The idea of deterrence is intimately bound with military power in that a country devises a national defense strategy showcasing the military power in order to dissuade an adversary from taking an intrusive action (Buzan, 1987).

Similarly, Ate (2008) also stated that the main function of national defense is to protect national sovereignty and territorial integrity from external threats in the form of military aggression initiated by other countries. Based on the aforementioned idea of defense, it can be understood that superior military power contributes substantially to national defense. Therefore, superior military power by virtue of the number of personnel and the availability of modern weaponry would pose a significant threat to other countries. Conversely, a country without superior military power and strategy might find it difficult to deter any potential military threats from other countries.

Military warfare capability, as described by Tellis, Bially, Layne, & McPherson (2000), provides output in the form of national power. In order to realize it, the military must be able to utilize its national resources and turn them into special warfare capabilities. Military power, thus, depends on the state budget allocation to military expenditure, the total number of military personnel, military doctrine adhered to, effective training, military education, and organizational governance. In general, the framework that can be used to test military capability as a dimension of national power output can be assessed from the military capability to identify national resources received from the government (Strategic Resources); matters related to how the variables supporting these resources are then converted to effective capabilities (Conversion Capability); and finally, the ability of combat forces to understand the spectrum of war competencies that can reach to a greater or lesser degree (Combat Proficiency) (Tellis et al., 2000).

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In terms of strategic resources, military power is analyzed with respect to *Defense Budgets; Manpower; Military Infrastructure; Combat research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E) Institutions; Defense Industrial Base; Warfighting Inventory and Support*. In terms of *Conversion Capability*, factors concerning *threats and strategy*, *Structure of Civil-Military Relations, Foreign Military-to-Military Relations, Doctrine, Training, and Organization, Capacity for Innovation* become the indicators. Similarly, in terms of *Combat Proficiency*, there are a number of indicators that should be taken into account, such as military capabilities in irregular operations, such as ambush, hit-and-run, and snipping operations; coordinated infantry and artillery operations; coordinated deep attack; join warfare; adaptive warfare; Knowledge-based warfare; Multimission water control, limited sea control, and deep strike (Tellis et al., 2000).

Conflict

Etymologically, the word conflict is derived from Latin, *con* meaning together and *fligere* which means impact or collision. In general, conflict contains a series of contradictions and disagreements between individuals, from class conflict, opposition to international warfare (Setiadi & Kolip, 2011).

Fisher dan Kartikasari (2001) revealed that conflict can be defined as a social situation in which two or more groups have different goals or values. Furthermore, conflict is a type of interaction marked by a

clash or collision between conflicting interests, ideas, policies, programs, and personal or other fundamental issues (Plano, Riggs, & Robin, 1994). Clash of conflicted groups can be described as differences in opinion, rivalry, and disagreement between individuals, individual group, with individuals or groups of individuals, groups and the government (Surbakti, 2010).

There are many situations or conditions from which conflicts may arise, and there is no single explanation of why conflicts occur, as noted by Rahim (2001), the following common elements in conflict:

1. Conflict includes opposing interest between individuals or groups in a zero-sum situation;
2. Such opposed interest must be recognized for conflict to exist;
3. Conflict involves beliefs, by each side, that the other will thwart (or has already thwart) its interest;
4. Conflict is a process; it develops out of an existing relationship between individuals or groups and reflects their past interactions and the context in which these took place; and.
5. Imply actions by one or both sides that do, in fact, produce thwarting of others goals.

Based on the explanation above, it is safe to say that conflict is a process that reflects an interaction between individuals and groups with different interests that thwart each other in achieving their respective goals. In the context of relationship between countries, conflict may arise at any time. Conflict may arise from various reasons, such as different opinions, hostile attitudes, and certain types of diplomatic or military actions, such as territorial expansion, security measures, control of valuable resources, market access, prestige, unification with neighboring ethnic groups, world revolution, and overthrowing of a hostile government.

Method

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method, the use of this method is based on the reason that researchers want to try to look deeper into the strength of the Indonesian military in dealing with potential threats in the South China Sea. This study analyzes data sourced from secondary data, such as comparisons of military forces whose data are obtained from Global Fire Power and from other studies that discuss Indonesian defense forces and potential threats in the South China Sea. While the primary data in this study were obtained

from observations of reports concerning the occurrence of collisions between Indonesian patrol vessels and patrol vessels of other countries, especially China, on the border of the South China Sea. Once the data is obtained, the next step is to validate the data using triangulation techniques. This step is carried out so that this research is able to provide a precise or accurate analysis.

Discussion

With the increasing potential for conflict in the South China Sea, Indonesia is encouraged to take a more active role in promoting a resolution in the disputed region. The South China Sea is the site of several complex territorial disputes, including territorial disputes and maritime boundary dispute, which remain unresolved. Indonesia is maintaining a cautious stance in dealing with the South China Sea disputes (Wiranto, 2016: 8).

However, Indonesia cannot afford to be unguarded in dealing with the problem in the South China Sea. National defense is intended to assert Indonesia's territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea border. Especially from external threats such as in that intersect with China's claim.

At this point China makes the largest claim in the South China Sea, frequently causing tension among other claimant states. The tension between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea was heightened in 1974 when a military incident involving hostile fire took place, arising out of Spartly Island and Paracel Island disputes. In addition, the forced eviction of non-Chinese fishing vessels entering the waters added to the tension (Lunn, 2016).

China's policies on the disputed region are deemed detrimental to other countries around. Even China's policy in the South China Sea region has caused the United States to get involved as an outside force. China's increasingly aggressive behavior in the South China Sea has driven the US to protect its "national interest" in the region. China's rapid economic growth has led the country to take aggressive measures to achieve its ambitions, including by strengthening its military power. The South China Sea is a vital defense base for China in maintaining regional/national political stability.

As stated by Dönges & Hofmann (2018), that a country's actions by military means to protect the country's existence against any threats. Thus, national defense is inextricably linked to the theory of deter-

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rence, meaning that a country's armed force should be at the ready to deter coercive actions from any adversaries. The idea of deterrence goes hand in hand with military power in that a state devises a military strategy to deter any adversaries intending to take aggressive actions (Buzan, 1987). Indonesian national defense is based on its military power by virtue of its total number of military personnel available and strength. In addition, Indonesian military power is also measured based on the total number of weapons available and weapon technology.

Indonesian military power can be examined by taking into account the dimensions of Strategic Resources and Combat Proficiency. According to the release issued by the Global Firepower, Indonesia military power in 2019 is ranked 16th of 137 countries with the index number of 0.2804. This is far behind when compared to China, which is ranked 3rd with the index number of 0,0673. Judging from the numbers, it is safe to say that Indonesian military power is far behind compared to other countries with potential conflicts in the South China Sea region. Following is the elaboration of Indonesia's defense forces compared to China, which is a major force in the potential for conflict in the South China Sea region, according to the aspects measured by Global Firepower.

a. Defense budget

In terms of a defense budget, we can see the comparison of Indonesian and China military powers. According to Global Firepower's report in 2019, Indonesian defense budget reached 6,9 billion US dollars. Meanwhile, China allocated 224 billion US dollars to its defense. This comparison suggests China's greater commitment compared to Indonesia's.

The budget allocated by the Indonesian government to its military spending is not sufficient. Based on GFP's data, Indonesia allocated 6,9 US$ billion to its defense, which is equivalent to Rp 98 trillion at the exchange rate of Rp 14 thousand/US dollar. The budget size ranked Indonesia as the country with second-largest defense budget after Singapore, with the budget size of US$ 9,7 billion (Rp 135 trillion).

The budget size does not reflect that Indonesia's military strength is no better than countries that have the potential for conflict in the South China Sea. Based on GFP's data, Indonesia's military power is ranked 15th of 157 countries and 1st among ASEAN countries.

b. Manpower

Head-to-head comparison of Indonesia and China military powers is presented in the following table, using indicators issued by Global Firepower.

Table 1. Comparison of Indonesia and China Military Personnel Strength

Indicators	Indonesia	China
Total population	262,787,403	1,384,688,986
Available manpower	130,868,127 (49,8%)	752,855,402 (54,4%)
Fit-for-service	108,620,545 (41,3%)	621,105,706 (44,9%)
Reaching military age annually	4,450,339 (1,7%)	19,614,518 (1,4%)
Total military personnel	estimated* 800,000 (0.3%)	estimated* 2,693,000 (0.2%)
Active personnel	400.000 (0,2%)	2,183,000 (0,2%)
Reserve personnel	400.000 (0,2%)	510.000 (0,0%)

Adapted from Global Firepower (2019)

Based on the table, it can be seen the comparison between the strength of Indonesian military personnel with China's. In terms of a total number of military personnel, the estimated number issued by the Global Firepower suggest that Indonesian military personnel is 800,000. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese military personnel is 2,692,000. In other words, China's total number of military personnel is three times larger than Indonesia's.

However, the potential for Indonesian military personnel is higher compared to the number of China's population who have the opportunity to become military personnel. With a large number of the total population, China is ranked as one of the countries with the largest number of military personnel. Therefore, in the context of potential conflicts in the South China Sea region, China seems to have great strength so that there are efforts that claim and increase its military power in the South China Sea Region. This dominance was driven by the emergence of Chinese military insecurity from American military dominance in the Southeast Asian region, bolstered by the rise of China's economy Regilme (2018). In addition to increased efforts to reclaim land in SCS, China also keeps building infrastructure on disputed islands. The country is also known to deploy its military in the region.

3. Logistic

Regarding the completeness of military infrastructure, the data presented by Global Firepower describes several indicators. The data is the basis for comparing the military forces of Indonesia and China. The following table shows a comparison between the two countries.

Table 2. Strength Comparison of Indonesian and Chinese Military Infrastructure

Indicators	Indonesia	China
Labor force	126,100,000	806,700,000
Merchant marine strength	8.782	4.287
Major ports/hubs/terminals	14	16
Roadway coverage	437,759 km	3,860,800 km
Railway coverage	5.042 km	86.000 km
Usable airport	673	507

Adapted from Global Firepower (2019)

Though Indonesian military power is still behind China, Indonesia still has the best military force among ASEAN countries. Even the role of Indonesia in dealing with conflicts in the South China Sea region continues to be carried out by increasing its military power and diplomatic approach.

4. Naval strength

Considering the potential conflicts that occur in the South China Sea region are included in the category of maritime territory, the military power between Indonesia and China can be focused on the naval power owned by each country. The following details the comparative power of the Indonesian and Chinese navies based on data reported by Global Firepower.

Based on the table, it can be seen that the assets owned by the Indonesian navy are still far behind compared to China. The most striking comparison is in terms of the availability of submarines. Despite being the largest archipelagic country in the world, Indonesia owns only 5 submarines available. The number is very low compared to China's. China's naval strength is estimated to have 76 units of submarines available. This, of course, contributes to China's assertive territorial claims and land reclamation efforts in the SCS.

Table 3. Comparison of Indonesia and China Naval Strength

Naval Assets	Indonesia	China
Aircraft carriers	0	1
Frigates	8	52
Destroyers	0	33
Corvettes	24	42
Submarines	5	76
Patrol vessels	139	192
Mine warfare	11	33
Total assets	221	714

Adapted from Global Firepower (2019)

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Judging by the data, Indonesia's defense in the SCS is insufficient. This refers to the idea that national defense is in the sense of deterrence or being prepared to counteract the opponent's physical strength (read: China) insufficient. Military strength with indicators of personnel and assets of the Indonesian navy, still far below China. An idea proposed by (Buzan, 1987), which stated that the national defense strategy should be able to showcase military power to prevent aggressive actions by external adversaries, can be used to draw a conclusion about Indonesia's defense strategy against China's claims in the South China Sea region. With insufficient military power, it is impossible for Indonesia to pose any significant threat against China.

Indonesian government support for its military power is part of the country's grand strategy, envisioning the concept of Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (RPJMN) 2015–2019. Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF) is envisioned as "intensifying Indonesia's maritime diplomacy to promote the resolution of the country's border disputes with 10 neighboring countries, maintaining Indonesia's territorial integrity, maritime sovereignty, safety, and social welfare in its outer islands, and safeguarding the national resources and exclusive economic zones by: (a) implementing maritime and land border negotiations; (b) implementing the Global Maritime Fulcrum doctrine; (c) disseminating the information including the border agreement negotiations limit the transmission power of radio. "

Therefore, it can be seen that the policies chosen by the government are related to problems at the border, such as in the South China Sea

region, more directed at increasing soft power. The government clearly emphasizes on maritime diplomacy efforts in promoting the resolution of the country's border disputes 10 neighboring countries. No official policy aimed at strengthening military power (hard power) has been formulated.

Besides being based on the 2015-2019 RPJMN, the National Defense Implementation Policy 2015-2019 can also be referred. This document is a national defense development policy that directs the formation of the National Defense Posture with active defensive principles in order to support the realization of Indonesia as the Global Maritime Fulcrum. To see the implementation of the policy, three aspects can be used, including the national defense strategy, military defense posture, and TNI doctrine (Sisriadi, 2016). In the aspect of national defense strategy, there is an emphasis on the consideration of threats, in other words substantively procedural compared to considerations of the geographical constellation. in the aspect of military defense posture, it accommodates more static aspects (strength, ability, and degree of strength) than geography. Lastly, the aspect of military doctrine which gives a clearer picture of the merging of the three units in a joint task force, the composition of which is adjusted to the characteristics of the threat and the type of operation to be carried out

Based on this explanation, Indonesia's military strength is among the best in the world. Even compared with other countries with interest in the South China Sea region, Indonesia is second only to China, which has a large number of military personnel. However, Indonesia military power is highly regarded in the international arena. Even in the Indonesian defense system, especially in dealing with the South China Sea conflict, Indonesia has prepared a whole military defense. The increasing defense budget allocation would give the Indonesian military more freedom to improve its defense equipment.

The stronger military diplomacy carried out by each country, the greater is the possibility for open conflict to manifest in the South China Sea region. With every country showcasing its military power, the world is filled with fear. As long as a military power is not limited, the potential for war is likely to increase. Therefore, based on the explanation above, the potential for conflict in the South China Sea region is highly likely. As expressed by Fisher dan Kartikasari (2001) that as long as there are differences in objectives between the two groups, conflicts will definitely occur. By seeing the potential in the South China

Sea, each country has an interest in being able to play a greater role in the region. So that when interests collide, conflicts will take place. As long as friction has not sparked the fires of conflict, Indonesia has strengthened its military strength to be able to play a deeper role in the South China Sea area. Fisher dan Kartikasari (2001) explained that conflict situations can occur due to disputes over territories, territorial boundaries, valuable resources, legitimacy of the authorities, political ideology, ethnic differences based on race or religion, or on other matters. The South China Sea Region is a situation of territories in which natural resources are located so that they become mutually tangent between countries that have an interest in it. But in the situation of the South China Sea, disputes that arise are not always military in nature, but the potential for using military methods is always open if substantial differences between parties are not resolved.

The new strategic environment has pushed Indonesia to adopt various new policies in political and security matters. Indonesia can no longer see the South China Sea Area as not only a matter of bilateral cooperation. Changes in the constellation of conflicts in the South China Sea are encouraging countries in the region, including ASEAN members including Indonesia, to pay more attention to regional security issues. In particular, the increasing disputes in the South China Sea region involving ASEAN countries such as Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam. Disputes arising from the South China Sea conflict have led to bilateral conflicts and disputes between countries raising fears of a possible military conflict, in which several ASEAN member countries were involved.

The competing claims taking place in the South China Sea clearly affect the Southeast Asian regional security. In this context, ASEAN as the most important regional organization plays a central role to maintain the political stability in Southeast Asia. ASEAN's role in this matter can be realized through the implementation of negotiations to mediate the countries involved. One of these important roles has been played by Indonesia. Various attempts have been made to reduce conflict in regional disputes in the South China Sea. However, strong nationalist sentiment, especially among the countries involved, has impacted the diplomacy process due to the strengthening of national interests. The road to cooperation among the countries involved is difficult and many times met with a dead-end (Bateman, 2011). The form of diplomacy exercised in the South China Sea is a complex one,

interrelated and interdependent on one side, but also conflictual on the other. Therefore, diplomacy has a central role in the dynamics of international politics in the South China Sea region. Another form of diplomacy is the role of military power.

In addition to what was explained about the military strength developed in diplomacy in the South China Sea Region. One form of the active role of the Indonesian government in alleviating the conflicts in the South China Sea is not always by showcasing its military power. However, the role of Indonesia at this time is to contribute ideas by optimizing the resources of all the parties involved. Among others, Indonesia initiated the formation of a joint patrol in the South China Sea (Wahyudi, 2016). With the joint patrol proposed by the Indonesian government, fellow ASEAN countries work together to achieve Conflict De-escalation In this case, the Indonesian government helps solve the South China Sea problem together, in the sense that the pattern of handling conflicts in the South China Sea region carried out by Indonesia was emphasizing the pattern of persuasive relations abroad.

Conclusion

The role of Indonesia in handling the South China Sea conflict is very important because, up to this point, the active role of the Indonesian government in alleviating in the South China Sea conflicts is not always by displaying military power. In doing so, the Indonesian government mainly resorts to soft power approaches, namely by providing ideas to optimize the diplomatic resources of all the parties involved. However, if the emphasis is on the defense sector, Indonesia's role can still be categorized as weak, because the military strength with indicators of the number of Indonesian naval personnel and assets is still far below that of China. The national defense strategy should ideally be able to showcase military power to deter aggressive or arbitrary actions of other parties (foreign countries), but for now Indonesia, with military power far behind China, certainly cannot pose significant threats to China's military strength.

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