



The Dynamics of The China Maritime Militia Conflict In South China Sea On Sovereignty Indonesian Countries And ASEAN Region Countries

Jefferson Benyamin¹, Hikmat Zakky Almubaroq²

^{1,2} Fakultas Manajemen Pertahanan, Universitas Pertahanan Republik Indonesia, Bogor
*Corresponding author, e-mail: jeffersonbenyamin@gmail.com

Abstract

The South China Sea is a strategic water area and is rich in natural resources. The South China Sea dispute is the hottest dispute in the 21st century, in which China and most ASEAN members are involved indirectly. China's unilateral claim of ownership of the South China Sea area using the nine dash line principle and maritime power has triggered a response from surrounding countries, including Indonesia. For Indonesia itself, its main concern in this conflict is to maintain the security of its country and protect the vulnerable island of Natuna. In this study, we will discuss the dynamics of the China Maritime Militia conflict in the South China Sea against the sovereignty of the Indonesian state and ASEAN countries. This study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach where the data sources used are journals, articles, books and other relevant sources. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that the disputes that occurred in the South China Sea were disputes between countries, because the actors were not only claiming countries but also other countries with an interest in the region. Therefore, the strategy taken in efforts to resolve the China Maritime Militia dispute in the South China Sea is to strengthen the capacity of maritime security enforcement and command for various Indonesian maritime law enforcement agencies, and take a free and active approach that is manifested in support and participation in regional organizations such as ASEAN.

Keywords: South China Sea, China Maritime Militia, Indonesia, ASEAN

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Introduction

The problems faced by the international world in 2020 do not seem to be just a pandemic issue that is still a public concern at this time. The strategic issues that are now developing in the international world have shifted from America and Europe-centric to the Asia Pacific Region. In the realm of international politics, the Asia Pacific region is starting to emerge as a significant strategic center. This is due to the region's increasing dependence on the Maritime Communications Line (Shafiq, 2014). Increased dependence raises the notion of the value of an area and its potential. One of the issues that arise in the Asia Pacific Region that needs attention is the issue of the South China Sea.

The South China Sea is a strategic water area, and is rich in natural resources. As a strategic water area, the South China Sea has benefit values from various parts. Namely from the aspect of the interests of shipping traffic lanes, political aspects, defense and security aspects, or economic aspects in the form of natural resource wealth. From the political, defense and security aspects, this area is also a transit and operational location for military ships and aircraft. Meanwhile, from the aspect of natural resources, the South China Sea, which is a continental shelf area, contains abundant oil and gas resources. The South China Sea issue has complicated dispute cases, including territorial disputes and maritime boundary disputes, which until now

have not been resolved (Wiranto, 2016). The territorial sovereignty ownership dispute in the South China Sea actually refers to the sea and land areas in the two Paracel and Spratly archipelagos. Regional countries that participate in the South China Sea conflict, namely the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia generally use historical and geographical grounds in fighting over ownership of the sea area and two groups of islands in the South China Sea area (Hansen, 2011).

To assert its geopolitical claims in the South China Sea area, China uses an unusual method, namely using the fishing industry as a reserve force called China Maritime Militia. By making the status of civilian fishing vessels double as Chinese troops. According to Western political experts, China has a maritime militia, consisting of thousands of secret forces used to regulate the South China Sea. The squad was called the Little Blue Man. The Chinese-controlled maritime militia consists of hundreds of ships and thousands of crew members arranged in a fleet in the disputed South China Sea.

The military modernization carried out by China shows a very significant development with an emphasis on the Navy (People Liberation Army Navy / PLA Navy). Modernization was carried out not only in terms of quantity but also quality through a series of acquisitions and construction of warships, submarines, aircraft carriers to providing civilian ships as secret forces. This incident shows that China currently has more attention in the maritime area with the ambition of building a strong and modern Navy (Valencia, 2019). The Chinese government then responded by providing an official statement that the act of militarization by building several military installations was carried out only as an effort to defend its territory from threats (Mark J. Valencia, 2019).

China's unilateral claim of ownership of the South China Sea area using the nine dash line principle and maritime power has triggered a response from surrounding countries, including Indonesia. The territory of which is the Natuna waters is included in China's nine dash line claim. The Indonesian government, through the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Retno Marsudi, explained that the claim did not have a strong basis and explained that the Natuna waters were part of Indonesian territory (Mangosing, 2018). For Indonesia itself, the main concern in this conflict is to maintain the security of its country and protect the vulnerable island of Natuna. Therefore, the author is interested in researching the dynamics of the China Maritime Militia conflict in the South China Sea against the sovereignty of the Indonesian state and ASEAN countries. Although Indonesia's position is not a claimant country, Indonesia also has an interest in protecting its territory, namely the North Natuna Sea area which is claimed by China through a map based on a nine dash line.

Literature Review

This paper is a development of several previous research results by journal articles the title is Understanding China's Perspective in Efforts to Settle the South China Sea Dispute wrote about China's views in order to predict its political policies related to efforts to resolve disputes peacefully and develop cooperation in the region (Farhana, 2014); Dynamics of South China Sea Issues: Analysis of Chinese Foreign Policy Sources in Disputes which wrote about China's foreign policy behavior in the South China Sea conflict, by analyzing internal factors and external factors that influence China's foreign policy (A. B. Darmawan, 2018); PRC Strategy in Conflict Dynamics in the South China Sea which wrote that the research was focused on plans and actions for liberalizing China's political economy to facing the rivalry of big countries which is correlated with the dynamics of the South China Sea conflict (Priangani & Hattu, 2020).

Based on the three studies above, the authors are interested in writing about the dynamics of the China maritime militia conflict in the South China Sea against the sovereignty of the Indonesian state and ASEAN countries, as well as the strategies undertaken by the Indonesian government in anticipating the South China Sea conflict.

Method

The research method used in this paper is to use data collection methods through literature study (Zed, 2008). Literature study is a series of activities related to the methods of collecting library data, reading and taking notes, and processing research materials. The stages that must be taken by the author in library research are as follows:

1. Collect research materials. The material collected is in the form of information or empirical data sourced from books, journals, results of official and scientific research reports and literature on the South China Sea conflict
2. Reading library materials. In reading research material, the reader must dig deeply into the reading material so as to find new ideas related to the research title
3. Make research notes. Recording research material is said to be the most important stage because all the material that has been read must draw a conclusion in the form of a report
4. Processing research notes. All materials that have been read are then processed or analyzed to get a conclusion drawn up in the form of a research report

Data analysis in this study was carried out through descriptive analysis method, which is defined as an effort to collect and compile data, then analyze the data so as to produce a comprehensive conclusion.

Results and Discussion

History, Posture, Policy and Strategy of China Maritime Militia

The People's Republic of China (PRC) describes militia as an armed mass organization consisting of the civilian population and armed Chinese trained soldiers called the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) by the US Department of Defense (Luo & Panter, 2021). China's militia system existed before the Chinese Communist Party came to power. However, at that time maritime militia members who were outside the population around the coast were not fully exercised until the Chinese Communist Party began to own and exercise greater control over the coastline in the 1950s.

Initially, the Chinese Communist Party targeted fishing communities to create fishing groups and work units, exercise strict organizational control, and carry out political education (A.S Erickson & Kennedy, 2021). The end of the Chinese civil war around 1949 pushed China through the Chinese Communist Party to change a new strategy. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong, China is trying to defend its country's coastline from Nationalist forces that have retreated to Taiwan and other small islands off the coast. Thus, the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party view the formation of an organized maritime militia to deal with possible threats as an easy and quick solution.

Over time, the Chinese maritime militia in the PRC military planning tasked with assisting the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy by carrying out security and logistics functions in war. They receive training from the PLA Navy and CCG in carrying out tasks including carrying out border patrol, surveillance and reconnaissance, communications, sea transportation, search/rescue, as well as supporting PLA Navy operations in times of conflict. In carrying out its mission, asserting that the South China Sea claims and China's maritime militia are separate organizations from the PLA Navy and China Coast Guard (CCG) (Haver, 2021).

The nearly two hundred thousand fishing vessels that comprise the Chinese maritime militia are not officially integrated into the PLA Navy, but they operate in conjunction with the armed forces to promote the PRC's strategic objectives in the South China Sea and East China Sea (A.S Erickson & Kennedy, 2015). China has a large commercial fishing sector, with fourteen million people working in the industry. The fishermen are tasked with maintaining their profession and receiving military training and political education to mobilize and promote China's interests in the maritime world. In carrying out their duties, China's maritime militia is equipped with sophisticated electronic equipment. The equipment includes communication

and radar systems that can strengthen PLAN performance and improve communication with other agencies such as the CCG.

The Influence of the Presence of China Maritime Militia on the ASEAN Region

The Chinese Maritime Militia plays an important supporting role for the PRC in the East and South China Seas. They play an active role not only in the largest territorial water fishing fleet, but also in the world's largest distant waters, catching fish globally. Amid rising tensions in the South China Sea and East China Sea, new attention is being paid to the development of maritime militias. The development sparked a reaction from the surrounding countries. Not only overlapping claims but extending to the Southeast Asia Region.

As China continues to expand its military presence in disputed areas of the South China Sea, Vietnam has been trying to balance that action. These actions are carried out through a combination of defense diplomacy and military modernization. First, Vietnam prioritizes active defense rather than carrying out an offensive military operation strategy (Grossman, 2018). Second, the key to Vietnam's military planning is the concept of "all people's war", which means the mobilization of the entire population to protect the country. The main principle of this concept is the ability to carry out asymmetric warfare against the enemy. This approach invites to take advantage of the weak military strength to exploit the weakness of the stronger military strength.

Vietnam also has principles and guidelines on how to wage war in the South China Sea, and has acquired many useful weapons systems to support these efforts. Vietnam also stated that the Air Force could even be used if at all possible. Especially, if you are in a scenario where Vietnam must counterattack. The Philippine government has set up a South China Sea task force, which has confirmed that more ships and aircraft will be deployed to protect the country's maritime territory and resources (ABC News, 2021). President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered authorities to continue "sovereign patrols" in what the Philippines calls the West Philippine Sea. In addition, Duterte has also intensified operations against illegal fishing in his territorial waters.

The efforts of Vietnam and the Philippines in maintaining their territorial sovereignty are evidence of the security dilemma faced by the two countries as claimant states. Each country, both Vietnam and the Philippines, has strengthened their national defense by increasing their military strength in response to the operation of China's maritime militia in the South China Sea Region. This can also be seen in the Southeast Asia Region when other countries in the region are trying to spend a budget to finance their defense programs. Some of the increase in weapons development that occurred in the region, for example, the operation of China's first aircraft carrier, the procurement of Kilo-class submarines by Vietnam, the addition of Philippine Navy warships from the ex-U.S.

The response of the two countries with the largest claims to the South China Sea invites the solidarity of ASEAN countries. If analyzed according to the theory of Balance of Power, ASEAN is the key to the creation of Balance of Power in the Region. As an external partner of ASEAN, China is expected to establish communication to make peace efforts in order to maintain regional security stability. However, ASEAN has limitations in resolving these disputes due to the principle of non-intervention which has been mutually agreed upon in the ASEAN Charter. The emergence of the United States in response to Chinese military militia operations also raises its own concerns. ASEAN's weakness in handling or bridging the conflict is feared to make the United States take over in the name of international peace.

The best solution that can be done by ASEAN is through the ASEAN Strategic Partnership (ANSP). Disputes in the South China Sea are essentially a maritime domain. All claimant states have navies operating in the waters of the South China Sea. Navy in the region has a dialogue mechanism in the form of ASEAN Navy Chief Meeting (ANCM) activities, to discuss strategic issues related to China Maritime Militia in the South China Sea, it is hoped that it can develop the concept of joint sea operations in the region, as well as produce a special engagement rule in the South China Sea disputed area.

The Effect of the Existence of China Maritime Militia on Indonesia

Indonesia is a natural leader in ASEAN. As the country with the largest and most populous economy, Indonesia is an anchor for geopolitical stability in Southeast Asia. Situated in the strategic Malacca Strait and the disputed South China Sea, this geographical context presents Indonesia with emerging threats from claimants' gray zone operations in the South China Sea. Claiming countries, in particular China, have used maritime militias in various recent conflicts. Driven by China's huge domestic market demand for fish, Chinese fishermen (who are also military militias) have sought to exploit fish stocks further from China's shores, often illegally. In many cases, this illegal fishing activity has led to confrontations with local coast guards, many in Indonesian waters (Kuek, 2019)

Thus, there is a clear confluence of economic demand and observable geopolitical shifts in China's defenses against its fishermen at sea. This seems very relevant in the case of Indonesia, because although Indonesia is not a claimant state over disputed islands in the South China Sea, part of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) overlaps with the Nine Dash Lines claimed by China (Pradana, 2017) with the Chinese government openly recognizing Indonesia's sovereignty over the Natuna Islands, there is no major threat of a military confrontation over the disputed lands between the two countries. However, these overlapping EEZs can give rise to potential sources of future maritime conflicts and confrontations that have spawned several incidents in the past. Such conditions provide room for China's maritime militia to play an important role in the operation.

In the defense sector, the presence of China's maritime militia also encourages Indonesia to think about solutions to the low budget in the defense sector. The Indonesian Minister of Defense, Prabowo Subianto in the first meeting with the DPR commission said that to overcome the classic problem of budget shortages in the defense sector, the policy of "total people's defense" could be a solution. He argues that Indonesia must prepare all elements to deal with possible threats to national security. He explained that it has become an Indonesian doctrine that everyone must also contribute to protecting national security through the universal people's defense and security system (Sishankamrata) (Darmawan, 2019). On various occasions, President Joko Widodo has stated that he will not tolerate violations of state sovereignty at sea. But he also doesn't want to undermine the importance of good relations with China. Therefore, maintaining a balance between the two is Indonesia's priority.

Indonesia's Strategy in Maintaining the Sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia in the midst of the South China Sea Conflict

TNI Military Exercise Series in Natuna

The Indonesian government through the TNI responded to provocative efforts by holding military exercises in Natuna waters (Purnomo, 2017). One of the training activities carried out is the 2016 Angkasa Yudha exercise. The Angkasa Yudha exercise will initially be held in Tanjung Pandan, Belitung Regency. However, President Joko Widodo ordered the location of the training to be changed to the Natuna Islands, Riau Islands Province.

The shift from the training ground to the Natuna Islands as a training ground is inseparable from a series of incidents involving Chinese ships and KRI Imam Bonjol that occurred in the Natuna waters. The scenarios applied in this exercise are air combat scenarios, strategic air attack operations (OSUS), offensive counter air operations (OLUO), direct air strikes (SUL), aerial fire assistance (BTU), and logistics deployment in the form of a cargo delivery system. CDS) and helicopter boxes (Ziyadi, 2016).

This exercise was also witnessed directly by President Joko Widodo who came with the ranks of the Ministers to review this exercise (Utama, 2016). The presence of the President in this exercise has shown how this exercise is intended to show the readiness of Indonesia, especially the TNI in dealing with all forms of threats in Indonesian territory, especially Natuna which is often entered by paramilitary forces disguised as fishermen sent from the South China Sea region.

South China Sea Name Change in New Map of Indonesia

The Indonesian government in 2017 through the Coordinating Ministry for Maritime Affairs issued a new map and immediately registered this new map with the United Nations, especially the International Hydrographic Organization (Suastha, 2017). This new map change came after several confrontations involving fishermen and Indonesian security authorities in the Natuna waters that had sparked protests from both countries. In this new map there is a change in the name of the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea.

The change in the name of the South China Sea in the new map issued by the Indonesian government received protests from the Chinese government. The Chinese government through the spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Geng Shuang stated that the effort to change the name of the South China Sea carried out by the Indonesian government was an act that was not conducive and not in accordance with geographical naming standards (Haq, 2017)

The Indonesian government did not respond to the protests raised by the Chinese government. The naming of marine areas is the right of an archipelagic state that must be respected by other countries. Indonesia has been recognized as an archipelagic country in the 1982 UNCLOS which emphasized Indonesia's right to define boundaries and name its sea areas and the naming of the North Natuna Sea was carried out in the Indonesian maritime jurisdiction, and not the South China Sea as a whole (Sinaga, 2017)

Construction of Indonesian Military Base in Natuna

The Indonesian government during the era of President Joko Widodo's leadership has placed security issues in the South China Sea as one of the strategic defense issues as stated in the Defense White Paper issued by the Ministry of Defense. During the era of President Joko Widodo's leadership, Indonesia's defense budget experienced a significant increase compared to the defense budget in the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's leadership (Nasution, 2019). To strengthen Indonesia's defense in the border areas, the House of Representatives has agreed to budget for building a military base in Natuna to anticipate threats that arise from the South China Sea, especially China (Indrawan, 2015).

Formation of the Integrated TNI Unit and the Joint Regional Defense Command

After the construction of the military base and its supporting facilities for the military base, the Government's next program is to form an integrated TNI unit and the Joint Regional Defense Command. The purpose of establishing this integrated TNI unit is to provide deterrence against any threats in the Natuna region. The development of an integrated TNI unit will develop into a permanent and integrated organization in one command and equipped with a network-centric warfare-based operating control system (Astunggoro, 2018).

To support the operations of the integrated TNI units, several operational support facilities have been built such as hospitals, three-dimensional TNI integrative hangars, piers for the Indonesian Navy's port facilities and Indonesian Air Force radar facilities (Permana, 2018). After the three TNI dimensions have been fully integrated, the next stage is the construction of the Joint Regional Defense Command (KOGABWILHAN). The formation of KOGABWILHAN was planned during the time of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was succeeded by President Joko Widodo.

The elements that are considered in the formation of KOGABWILHAN include the position of the Commander in Chief, along with all his staff, followed by elements of the implementing unit. This joint command consists of three combined regions, namely west, center and east (Putra, E, 2015). The basis for the formation of KOGABWILHAN has been inaugurated in the form of Presidential Decree 62/2016 with the structure of KOGABWILHAN which will be led by a three-star high-ranking officer. With a two-star High Officer as deputy and six one-star rank assistants (Erickson, 2018)

The establishment of an integrated TNI unit and the Joint Regional Defense Command has shown how the Indonesian government is not only focusing its efforts on maintaining the

security of the South China Sea only by building military bases and supporting facilities, but also establishing a structure that operates these military bases. With the construction of a military base accompanied by an integrated TNI unit and the formed Regional Joint Command, the operational activities of the military base will be consolidated and directed under one leadership command.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the South China Sea is an area of struggle for economic, strategic and political interests by the countries of Indonesia and ASEAN. Given the close relationship between the involvement of China's maritime militia operations and the issue of the South China Sea, every country that borders direct waters needs to respond wisely. ASEAN needs to play its role as a mediator to maintain regional stability. Indonesia also needs to address this potential threat. The strategy can be carried out by strengthening the capacity of maritime security enforcement and commands for various Indonesian maritime law enforcement agencies triggered by foreign countries. Indonesia's foreign policy has emphasized a free and active approach which is manifested in support and participation in regional organizations such as ASEAN. Thus, Indonesia can continue to strive to achieve national interests while maintaining peace.

Indonesia often positions itself as a regional leader in ASEAN, placing regional organizations as a cornerstone in its efforts on the international stage. If there is a prolonged conflict in the ASEAN Region and the South China Sea, Indonesia can play an active role in maintaining peace through ASEAN's natural leaders. So far, Indonesia has been actively trying to maintain regional peace stability and has been a pioneer, such as in the internal conflict in Myanmar. However, Indonesia must also pay attention to the EEZ which overlaps with China's nine dash line and considers this a threat to sovereignty.

The Indonesian government under the leadership of President Joko Widodo pays special attention to potential conflicts that will occur in the South China Sea as stated in the Indonesian Defense White Paper released by the Ministry of Defense. In this case, the strategy initiated by the Indonesian government is quite good, although it is less aggressive in protecting the Natuna islands and Indonesian sovereignty. The Indonesian government has paid special attention to this issue. The Indonesian government, which is facing a security dilemma situation, tries to provide an effective response and does not trigger an escalation of the conflict into an open conflict because the Indonesian side is trying to maintain good relations with all countries, especially China and also to maintain the stability of conditions as a form of implementation of the Indonesian Foreign Policy which active free.

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