

## South China Sea Conflict and Indonesia's Strategy Toward Indonesia Emas 2045

Abdul Rivai Ras, Asep Iwa Soemantri, Bayu Asih Yulianto, Lukman Yudho Prakoso\*,  
Muhammad Risahdi

Universitas Pertahanan Republik Indonesia

Email: rivai.ras@idu.ac.id, asepiwa.soemantri@idu.ac.id, bayu.yulianto@idu.ac.id,  
lukman.prakoso@idu.ac.id\*, muhammad.risahdi@idu.ac.id

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
South China Sea, maritime security, Indonesia strategy, Indonesia Emas 2045, national sovereignty, maritime diplomacy..	The South China Sea represents a critically strategic maritime region, rich in natural resources and vital shipping lanes, yet plagued by complex territorial disputes. Although Indonesia maintains no territorial claims in the area, its Exclusive Economic Zone surrounding the Natuna Islands faces increasing challenges from unilateral claims and illegal fishing activities, directly impacting national sovereignty and maritime security. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of the South China Sea conflict and its implications for Indonesia's maritime strategy in achieving the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision. The research employs a qualitative descriptive approach through a comprehensive literature study, analyzing primary and secondary sources including government documents, international reports, and academic publications. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis and triangulation methods to ensure validity and reliability. The findings indicate that Indonesia faces significant challenges in the Natuna EEZ, with 67 incidents of foreign vessel violations recorded between April 2023 and January 2024, causing estimated economic losses of USD 120 million annually. Indonesia has responded through enhanced naval patrols, defense modernization, and active maritime diplomacy, resulting in a 40% increase in patrol activities since 2020 and improved regional cooperation. Effective management of South China Sea conflicts requires an integrated strategy combining military modernization, technological surveillance, and multilateral diplomacy. This comprehensive approach is essential for safeguarding Indonesia's maritime sovereignty and supporting the achievement of the Indonesia Emas 2045 vision as a developed and sovereign maritime nation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea (*Laut China Selatan* or *LCS*) is a strategic area of waters covering more than 3 million square kilometers and serves as the main shipping lane for about 30% of global trade (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). The region is also estimated to contain significant oil and natural gas reserves and is a major fishing area in Southeast Asia. However, the *LCS* is at the center of territorial disputes involving several countries, including China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, which claim most of the territory through the "nine-dash line" (Hidayat, 2024).

Indonesia is not among the countries claiming territory in the *LCS*. However, Indonesia has strategic interests in the region, especially in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the Natuna Islands. China's unilateral claim to part of Indonesia's EEZ in Natuna often causes

tensions and incidents involving Indonesian maritime security forces (Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

Tensions in the LCS have the potential to threaten Indonesia's regional stability and national sovereignty (Haryudi, Hadiano, & Risman, 2025; Raditio & Yeremia, 2022; Shobirin et al., 2023). The increase in patrols by the Indonesian Navy and Bakamla in Natuna is a strategic step to maintain territorial sovereignty and prevent potential escalation of conflict (Putra, 2022; Sandro, Imanuel, & Farand, 2024; Yusgiantoro, Siagian, Reksoprodjo, Gustin, & Asri, 2024). Moreover, the potential exploitation of natural resources in the region requires effective supervision and management to ensure sustainability and benefits to the country (Wang, Li, & Liu, 2021; Yang & Solangi, 2024).

The Golden Indonesia Vision 2045 aims to make Indonesia a developed, sovereign, and sustainable country by the age of 100 years of its independence. In the National Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPN) 2025–2045, this vision emphasizes national resilience, inclusive economic development, and sustainable natural resource management (National Development Planning Agency, 2025).

Asta Cita and the mission of the President of the Republic of Indonesia include ideals to realize a sovereign, independent, and personality-based Indonesia founded on mutual cooperation. In this context, conflict management in the LCS and strengthening maritime strategies are integral to efforts to achieve these goals (Chowdhury, Hamid, & Salleh, 2024, 2025; Li, Zhou, Qu, & Yuan, 2025). Strong maritime security supports national stability and strengthens Indonesia's position in the international arena.

Existing scholarly work has extensively documented the geopolitical dimensions of LCS conflicts. Studies by Hidayat (2024) and the Council on Foreign Relations (2024) have analyzed regional power dynamics and legal frameworks governing maritime disputes. Meanwhile, research by Marliani and Cahyadi (2024) highlights the economic and environmental impacts of Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in Indonesia's Natuna waters. However, a significant research gap persists in comprehensively examining how the evolving LCS conflict specifically influences Indonesia's strategic positioning toward achieving the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision. Previous studies have predominantly focused on either immediate security concerns or long-term development planning in isolation, lacking integrative analysis that connects contemporary geopolitical challenges with Indonesia's century-long developmental aspirations.

The urgency of this research stems from escalating tensions in the LCS and the imperative to safeguard Indonesia's national interests during a critical period of national development. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach, systematically analyzing the interplay between LCS conflict dynamics and Indonesia's comprehensive strategy framework for realizing the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision. This research provides a forward-looking perspective that bridges immediate security challenges with long-term national strategic objectives.

Based on this background, the formulation of the problem in this study is: How do the dynamics of the conflict in the South China Sea affect Indonesia's national interests, especially in the Natuna region? What strategies can Indonesia implement to maintain maritime sovereignty and security in the LCS to support the vision of a Golden Indonesia 2045? What

role do diplomacy and international cooperation play in managing disputes in the LCS and strengthening Indonesia's position as a maritime country?

The objective of this research is to analyze the implications of LCS conflict dynamics on Indonesia's national interests and to formulate comprehensive strategies aligned with the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision. The benefits of this study include providing evidence-based policy recommendations for maritime security and diplomacy, contributing to academic discourse on maritime conflict management, and supporting strategic planning for national development. This research aims to identify optimal pathways for balancing sovereignty protection with sustainable development goals, ensuring that maritime security challenges become catalysts for strengthened national resilience rather than obstacles to progress.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to analyze the South China Sea (LCS) conflict and Indonesia's strategy toward Golden Indonesia 2045. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of the research was to understand social, political, and maritime security phenomena in depth rather than measure quantitative variables (Creswell, 2014). Data were collected through literature studies, official government documents, reports from international institutions, scientific journals, and academic publications related to maritime security and national strategy. Additionally, secondary data such as marine trade statistics, patrol vessel volumes, incidents of territorial violations, and maritime economic indicators were used to strengthen the analysis (National Development Planning Agency, 2025).

Data analysis was carried out qualitatively with a thematic approach, grouping information based on key issues such as national sovereignty, maritime diplomacy, maritime security, and the implementation of strategies toward the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision. Data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of information, comparing data from government documents, international reports, and academic literature (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The study also examined Indonesia's strategic policies, including modernization of defense equipment, maritime patrols, and regional diplomacy, to assess their effectiveness and implications for national sovereignty. This method provided a comprehensive overview of the LCS conflict dynamics, its impact on Indonesia, and strategies applicable to strengthening Indonesia's regional and global position. The results are intended as academic and policy references supporting sustainable maritime development aligned with the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Dynamics of the South China Sea Conflict

The South China Sea (LCS) is a strategic area of waters rich in natural resources and international shipping lanes. It is estimated that there are around 11 billion barrels of oil reserves and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the region (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). However, the region has also been at the center of territorial disputes between several countries, including China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. China claims almost the entire territory of the LCS through the "nine-dash line", which contradicts the claims of other countries and is not recognized by international law (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025).

### 2. Indonesia's Position in the LCS Conflict

Indonesia does not claim territory in the LCS, but has strategic interests in the Natuna Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In October 2024, a Chinese coast guard vessel interfered with an energy survey by state company Pertamina in Indonesia's EEZ, which was later successfully expelled by Indonesian security forces (Reuters, 2024). This incident shows a challenge to Indonesia's sovereignty in the region.

### 3. Impact on Indonesia's Maritime Security

Indonesia's maritime security in the LCS, particularly around Natuna, faces threats from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities (IUU fishing). Research by Marliani and Cahyadi (2024) shows that IUU fishing activities in Natuna are increasing, with foreign vessels, especially from China, often entering Indonesia's EEZ without a permit. This is detrimental to the national economy and damages marine ecosystems.

### 4. Indonesia's Strategy Towards a Golden Indonesia 2045

The Golden Indonesia Vision 2045 aims to make Indonesia a developed country on the 100th anniversary of its independence. To achieve this goal, Indonesia needs to strengthen the maritime sector through modernization of the main tools of the weapon system (alutsista), increased maritime security patrols, and effective maritime diplomacy. According to the National Development Planning Agency (2025), strengthening the maritime sector is one of the main pillars in achieving this vision.

### 5. Strategic Policy and Implementation

The Indonesian government has taken strategic steps to strengthen maritime sovereignty in the LCS. One of them is to increase patrols by the Indonesian Navy and the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) in the Natuna area. In addition, Indonesia is also active in international forums to voice national interests and seek peaceful solutions to disputes in the LCS.

### 6. Challenges and Recommendations

Despite efforts to strengthen maritime security, challenges such as IUU fishing, unilateral claims by other countries, and limited defense equipment remain obstacles. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the capacity of defense personnel, strengthen maritime diplomacy, and regional cooperation to maintain sovereignty and security in the LCS.

The South China Sea (LCS) is a strategic area rich in natural resources and international shipping lanes. The region is estimated to have oil reserves of 11 billion barrels and natural gas of about 190 trillion cubic feet, making it a strategic target for surrounding countries (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Conflicts in the LCS are not only territorial disputes, but also concern global economic, geopolitical and maritime security. China claims almost the entire territory of the LCS through the "nine-dash line", contrary to the claims of other countries and international law. Indonesia, although it does not claim territory in the LCS, has strategic interests in the Natuna Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which is prone to become a source of tension due to China's unilateral claims (Hidayat, 2024).

#### 1. Impact on Indonesia's Maritime Security

Indonesia's maritime security, particularly in Natuna, faces a real threat from IUU fishing and territorial boundary violations. IOJI data (2024) shows that from April 2023 to January 2024, there were 67 incidents of foreign vessel violations in the Natuna EEZ, the majority of which were from China, with 82% of them being IUU fishing activities. Economic losses due to IUU fishing in this region are estimated to reach USD 120 million per year, in addition to

ecological impacts in the form of a decrease in fish stocks of up to 15% per year (Marliani & Cahyadi, 2024). This shows that non-traditional maritime threats are just as important as traditional threats such as invasion or military conflict.

## 2. Indonesia's Strategy to Deal with LCS Conflict

The Golden Indonesia Vision 2045 emphasizes Indonesia as a developed, sovereign, and sustainable country. To achieve this vision, the maritime sector must be strengthened through the modernization of defense equipment, increased maritime security patrols, and active maritime diplomacy. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense (2025) shows a 40% increase in patrols in Natuna since 2020, including the operation of fast patrol boats and satellite monitoring vessels. This fleet modernization supports the strategy of strengthening national sovereignty in the Natuna EEZ.

In addition to the military aspect, maritime diplomacy is an important pillar. Indonesia is active in the ASEAN forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), prioritizing peaceful dispute resolution through multilateral dialogue (Kaloko, 2024). In April 2025, a memorandum of understanding between the Indonesian and Chinese coast guards was signed to reduce incidents and improve maritime safety (AP News, 2025).

## 3. In-Depth Analysis

The thematic analysis shows that Indonesia's strategy should focus on three aspects: security, economy, and diplomacy. In terms of security, the increased capacity of the Indonesian Navy and Bakamla shows a direct response to the threat of IUU fishing and unilateral claims. However, the limitations of monitoring technology and the number of fleets are still obstacles. Data shows that 72% of territorial violations occur in areas that are difficult to reach by patrol vessels, hence the need for increased use of satellites, drones, and AI technologies for real-time monitoring (Panggabean et al., 2025).

From the economic side, the optimization of the Natuna EEZ has the potential to increase state revenue through the exploitation of marine resources legally and sustainably. However, without effective oversight, this potential is threatened. Technology-based approaches, including satellite monitoring systems and international collaboration, can reduce IUU fishing activities by up to 50% in the next five years (Marliani & Cahyadi, 2024).

In terms of diplomacy, the multilateral approach allows Indonesia to strengthen its bargaining position in international forums and maintain regional stability. The balance between the use of military force and active diplomacy is an effective strategy in dealing with Chinese pressure, while still upholding international law of the sea under the 1982 UNCLOS.

## 4. Important Findings

- a. Indonesia has a strategic interest in the Natuna EEZ, even though it does not claim the LCS area.
- b. IUU fishing activities are a significant threat to Indonesia's marine economy and ecology.
- c. Modernization of defense equipment and improved patrols are effective, but still require advanced monitoring technology.



- d. Active maritime diplomacy through ASEAN and IORA is proving important to reduce tensions and promote a peaceful settlement.
- e. The integration of security, economic, and diplomatic strategies is key to supporting the vision of a Golden Indonesia 2045.

Based on these findings, Indonesia's strategy must be holistic, combining military, technological, economic, and diplomatic aspects to deal with the dynamics of conflict in the LCS in a sustainable manner.

This study confirms that the South China Sea (LCS) is a strategic area that has a significant impact on Indonesia's sovereignty, security, and national development. Although Indonesia does not claim territory in the LCS, its interests in the Natuna Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) make the region vulnerable to the threat of unilateral claims, territorial boundary violations, and IUU fishing activities. Data shows that from April 2023 to January 2024, there were 67 incidents of foreign vessel violations in the Natuna EEZ, with the majority coming from Chinese ships, which caused economic losses of around USD 120 million per year and a decrease in fish stocks of up to 15% per year (Marliani & Cahyadi, 2024; YOJI, 2024).

The research analysis also shows that Indonesia's efforts to strengthen maritime security have increased, including through the modernization of the TNI Navy and Bakamla fleets, the strengthening of maritime security patrols, and the use of monitoring technology such as satellites and drones. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Defense (2025), security patrols in the Natuna region have increased by about 40% since 2020, which contributes to reducing incidents of territorial violations, although there are still capacity limitations, especially in remote areas that are difficult to reach.

In addition to the military aspect, maritime diplomacy is also a key factor in maintaining regional stability. Indonesia is active in international forums such as ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) to encourage peaceful settlement of disputes, as well as strengthen bargaining positions in the regional arena. A memorandum of understanding between the Indonesian and Chinese coast guards in April 2025 is proof that effective diplomacy can de-escalate tensions and improve maritime safety (AP News, 2025; Scott, 2024).

Overall, this study finds that Indonesia's strategy towards a Golden Indonesia 2045 must integrate three main pillars: security, economy, and diplomacy. Adequate military power and modernization of defense equipment, combined with cutting-edge monitoring technology, are absolute prerequisites for dealing with non-traditional threats such as IUU fishing and unilateral claims. Meanwhile, active maritime diplomacy based on international law is an important instrument to ensure regional stability and prevent the escalation of conflicts. The integration of these three pillars supports the achievement of Indonesia's vision as a developed, sovereign, and influential country by 2045.

## CONCLUSION

This study finds that the South China Sea (*LCS*) conflict significantly affected Indonesia's sovereignty and national development, especially in the Natuna EEZ, where China's unilateral claims and illegal fishing have caused economic and security challenges. Despite Indonesia's status as a non-claimant in the territorial disputes, it faced numerous violations and a decline in fish stocks, prompting enhanced maritime patrols and technological upgrades. Indonesia's

integrated strategy toward *Golden Indonesia 2045* combines military modernization, maritime diplomacy through ASEAN and IORA, and a 2025 Indonesia-China coast guard agreement to protect sovereignty while promoting sustainable development. For future research, it is suggested to investigate the long-term impacts of Indonesia-China diplomatic engagements on Indonesia's maritime sovereignty and regional power balance, including the effectiveness of multilateral forums in mitigating conflict while supporting Indonesia's development goals. This would provide deeper insights into balancing economic cooperation and security imperatives amid shifting geopolitical dynamics.

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