

Explaining Indonesia's Under-balancing: The Case of the Modernisation of the Air Force and the Navy

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Abstract

The current maritime challenges that Indonesia faced had not led to the development of the navy and air force. While theories of neoclassical realism highlighted the importance of domestic factors when determining responses at the strategic level, inefficiencies within the state bureaucracy had often been the bane of prudent policies. Our article attempts to engage with the neorealist concept of under-balancing to look at the reasons why there is stagnation in Indonesia's naval and air force development. The proponents of under-balancing blamed inefficient bureaucracy as the cause of the issue. Our study on Indonesia's naval and air force development indicated that inefficient bureaucracy was not the only driver of under-balancing. Looking at the agenda of naval and air force modernisation, this research argues the lack of commitment from the government, limited economic sources and the different modernisation priorities at the military unit level that had greatly contributed to the mismatch between systemic pressure and the response, in this case through naval and air force development, against it.

Keywords

Under-balancing, global maritime fulcrum, Indonesian armed forces, arms modernisation

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Introduction

At the 2014 East Asia Summit, President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) outlined his conception of a 'Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF)'. This new concept fundamentally represents a national vision to rebuild the country's archipelagic culture, while developing itself as a maritime power. Controlling some of the strategic sea lanes for global commerce, the administration in Jakarta seeks to play a central role in two vast maritime regions—the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Nonetheless, Indonesia is likely to face a complex nexus of traditional and non-traditional maritime security issues in the future. China's assertiveness in the South China Sea hints at potential conflict in the region. Moreover, maritime incursions by Chinese vessels into Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) occurred several times, the latest being September 2020. While maritime boundaries are highly contested, issues of illegal fishing and maritime piracy have overlapped with a rising demand for energy and marine resources. Recent events had also demonstrated that refugees from conflict-torn countries could strain bilateral relations and exacerbate regional vulnerabilities due to illegal migration and organised crimes. Furthermore, the sudden increase of maritime disputes and security concerns, particularly kidnappings for ransom attacks, in Sulu-Celebes Sea in 2016, due to the rise of terrorist networks in the domain triggered serious concerns for Indonesia.¹

These regional trends should have provided compelling reasons for Indonesia to exponentially increase its ability to safeguard its maritime terrain, particularly through the development of the navy and air force. Despite the grand nature of the concept, the GMF drew heavy criticisms for failing to deliver the expected outcomes, particularly in the defence and security realms (Laksmana, 2019a). The existence of the GMF doctrine did not automatically prioritise a strengthening of the navy and air force. In fact, Indonesia's military force structure enhancement still placed a strong emphasis on the army.² Such a circumstance certainly generated doubts over the country's ability to meet various maritime challenges.

While classical realism noted the zero-sum game nature of force development, our empirical findings indicate that Indonesia's naval and air force development does not reflect such a path. Why did Indonesia's naval and air force modernisation fail to respond to the systemic pressure adequately? Employing the lenses of under-balancing of neoclassical realism, our article aims to explain the gap between mounting external maritime challenges and the response towards them. Neoclassical realism postulated that systemic pressure alone is not enough to drive a state's behaviour. Domestic factors, in fact, serve as an intervening variable between the systemic pressure and the output responses. Then, the next question is—what are the domestic components that constituted under-balancing of Indonesia's naval and air force development?

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, our article dissects the role and implementation of GMF in building maritime force and Indonesia's naval and air force modernisation agenda. We contend that the absence of strong commitment has caused the GMF to do little in fostering maritime force build-up. The situation was also exacerbated with stagnant economic development and the agenda of

modernisation, which mainly aimed for rejuvenating obsolete weapon systems rather than to answer potential external challenges. We argue that these three factors have led to 'under-balancing' in naval and air force development. The lackadaisical guidance regarding the GMF agenda, slow economic growth and the different priority at the military unit level had generated under-balancing in the naval and air force development.

To elaborate our argument, this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the conceptual framework for the study. The discussion is then followed by an analysis on Indonesia's surrounding maritime challenges. We scrutinise the role of Jokowi's GMF in fostering maritime force development and naval and air force arms modernisation in the next two sections. The final section of this article will be the conclusion of our study and future outlook of naval and air force development.

Threat Balancing and Arms Modernisation

How do states respond to external challenges? Traditional realism has perceived military accumulation as the preferred action against potential threats. The use of military power in order to balance potential aggressors had become a standard behaviour to deter the ill-intention of assailants (Levy, 2003). Balancing appeared to be the best strategy to match systemic pressure and guarantee the survival in international anarchy (Waltz, 1979). According to this view, external challenges shaped the way states formulated their strategic policy.

However, the international system is not the only factor that shapes states' behaviour. Looking at systemic pressure alone provided little explanations on behaviour of states (Elman, 1996). Domestic variables and elite perceptions in reality influence strategic policy significantly (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 17). While states are expected to come up with an appropriate response against external challenges, on some occasions, states often do the reverse. Schweller (2004) had devised the term under-balancing to describe the inability of states to provide a prudent policy towards strategic threats.

While the international system encourages states to adopt the most competitive military technologies to counter external threats, not all are successful at developing effective military strategies to deal with their own vulnerabilities. Taliaferro (2006, p. 467) argued that these discrepancies occurred because of the individual states' inability to extract and mobilise resources or, in other words, due to the inability of bureaucracy to work properly. These can all be categorised under the banner of under-balancing (Yoo, 2012).

Meanwhile, arms modernisation has been perceived as a way to balance a potential aggressor's capability. Such a trend had been encouraged by a growth in the military industrial complex, as well as economic growth (Ball, 1993/1994; Bitzinger, 2010). Military acquisitions itself did not only serve operational purposes, such as to defend against potential aggressors or deter adversaries, but also to boost national pride (Art, 1980). Ball (1993/1994) argued that during the post-Cold War period, the rise of China and the waning influence of the USA had

contributed significantly towards encouraging countries in the region to upgrade their weapon systems.

The aforementioned discussion indicated that domestic factors act the intervening variable that caused ‘under-balancing’ response towards systemic pressure. Furthermore, arms modernisation did not just reflect the response against external challenges as various other factors had contributed to the armament expansion. Therefore, the concept of under-balancing provides us an understanding of a possible mismatch between systemic pressure and arms development. Proponents of under-balancing pointed at inefficient bureaucracy, particularly caused by the elites, as the culprit (Schweller, 2004; Yoo, 2012). This article aims to go further by not only looking at the elite-level policy but also at the unit-level policy, in this case, the navy and the air force arms modernisation, to understand Indonesia’s under-balancing naval and air force development. The next section will discuss Indonesia’s maritime challenges in order to provide a background on the external factors that affect the country’s defence posture building.

Indonesia’s Maritime Challenges

Unresolved border issues still remain at the forefront of Indonesia’s own security concerns. According to an official document outlining border management, Indonesia is still involved in bilateral territorial disputes over three land borders and seven maritime regions (see Figure 1) (Border Management Authority, 2011, pp. 1–2). The 2008 Defence White Paper also discusses the significance of 92 small islands that are used for national defence, in which 12 of these are deemed as top priorities—including Nipah (Riau Islands Province), Sebatik (North Kalimantan Province) and Sekatung (Riau Islands Province) islands (Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 56).

The long-standing disputes over the South China Sea in this context is thus increasingly seen by Indonesian policymakers within the purview of its overall border insecurity. While the exact geographic limits of the disputed maritime region are poorly defined, therein lies various overlapping claims made by various littoral states (see Table 1). Despite being a non-claimant state, the South China Sea disputes potentially pose a challenge to Indonesia’s archipelagic entitlement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). One interpretation of the Chinese nine-dashed line suggests that China’s extended demarcation of territory may include Indonesia’s sovereign rights over the EEZ near the Natuna Islands (Gindarsah, 2015a).

In addition to having a rich marine resource, considerable natural gas reserves are believed to lie below the Natuna seabed. With a rising domestic demand, the Indonesian government had classified offshore gas fields—including the Natuna Block D-Alpha—as vital for the country’s energy security. Moreover, although Indonesia had not been vocal over China’s dredging operations in the Spratly Islands chain, concerns over destructive offshore activities in the marine ecosystem was a growing concern among Indonesian policymakers and public at large.

Another major problem is illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. As fish stocks become depleted in Southeast Asia, foreign fishing vessels often venture

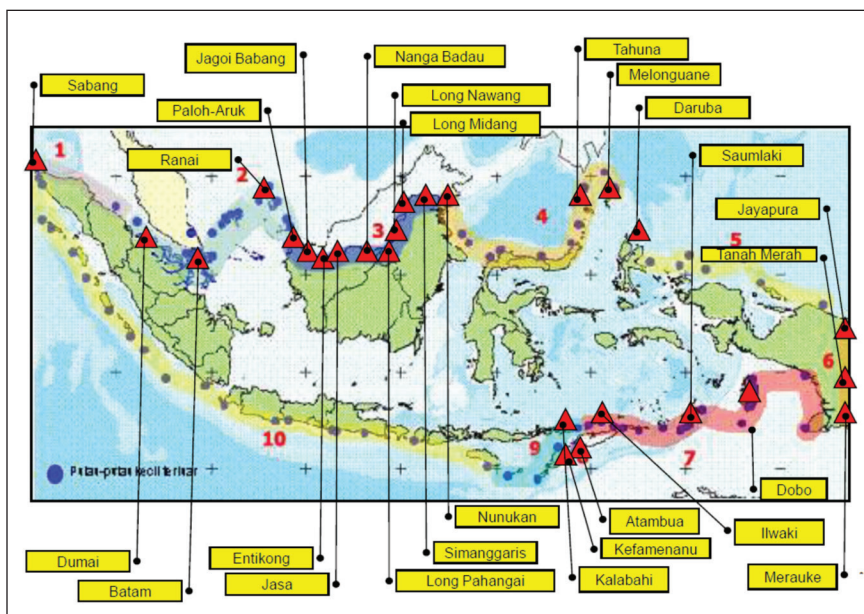


Figure 1. Indonesia's Unresolved Land and Maritime Borders, 2020

Source: Border Management Authority (BNPP).

Table 1. Maritime Boundaries in the South China Sea

Country	Territorial Sea	EEZ	Continental Shelf
Brunei–Malaysia	No	No	No
Indonesia–Malaysia	Yes	No	Yes
Indonesia–Vietnam	Not Required	Yes	Yes
Indonesia–China	Not Required	No	No
Malaysia–Philippines	No	No	No
Malaysia–Vietnam	Not Required	No	No
China–Vietnam	Yes	Yes (partial)	Yes (partial)
Philippines–China	Not Required	No	No

Source: Adapted from Bateman et al. (2009, p. 16).

further afield into the territory of neighbouring countries. It is not uncommon for Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese fishing vessels, among others, to stray into Indonesian seas in search of more abundant fishing grounds (see Figure 2). From 2001 to 2013, according to an independent estimate, Indonesia had lost approximately US\$520 billion due to rampant illegal fishing in its waters (*Tempo*, 2014).

According to the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Affairs, the Natuna waters remained the most vulnerable area to illegal fishing (*Media Indonesia*, 2010). However, the risk of targeting Thai and Vietnamese fishing boats is unlikely to be significant as compared to Chinese-owned ships. Past incidents in the Natuna

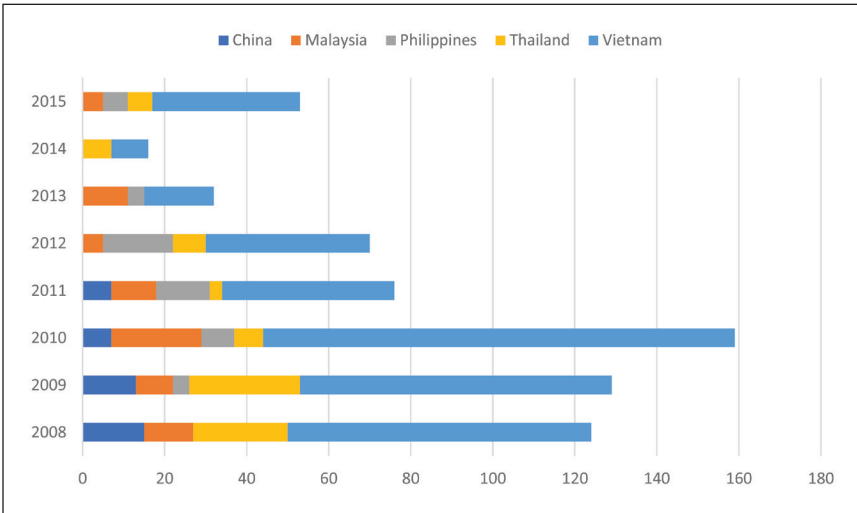


Figure 2. Captured Illegal Fishing Boats Based on Country of Origin

Source: Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries.³

waters, where Chinese coastguards subverted Indonesian attempts at capturing illegal fishermen, had alarmed defence officials in Jakarta. Although the Chinese government has voiced 'serious concerns' over Indonesia's sinking of its fishing vessels at one point in time, the sinking of *Gui Xei Yu 12,661* back in May 2015 for illegal poaching is an example of Indonesia acting cautiously but independently.⁴

Furthermore, tackling piracy or robberies at sea remains a challenging task for Indonesia. Despite a decline in attacks against merchant ships navigating through Indonesian waters from 2012 to 2015, there was an increase in incidents in nearby maritime regions—most notably the Malacca Straits and South China Sea (see Figure 3). Commercial vessels are particularly at risk when they make slow passage through narrow and congested waterways or where maritime security patrols are rare. These incidents occur in a variety of ways, ranging from unarmed robbery to hostage-taking or ship hijacking. Incidents at sea can be associated with the economic slowdowns in regional countries—including Indonesia. Although the number of reported attacks in Malacca Straits have been relatively low in the past few years, piracy still haunts Indonesian waters in general (see Figure 3).

For Indonesia, piracy is a domestic issue that can be tackled internally without foreign interference. Aside from coordinated sea-patrols among the littoral states, Indonesia is hesitant to take part in multilateral efforts beyond the ASEAN framework or established laws of the sea, including that of the Japan-sponsored Regional Co-operation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships (ReCAAP) in Asia. With a view to safeguard the country's maritime domain, the current administration in Jakarta has recently established a new Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) to better coordinate joint sea patrols between the Indonesian Navy and other marine law enforcement agencies (*The Jakarta Post*, 2014a). Nonetheless, the Bakamla is still underfunded and

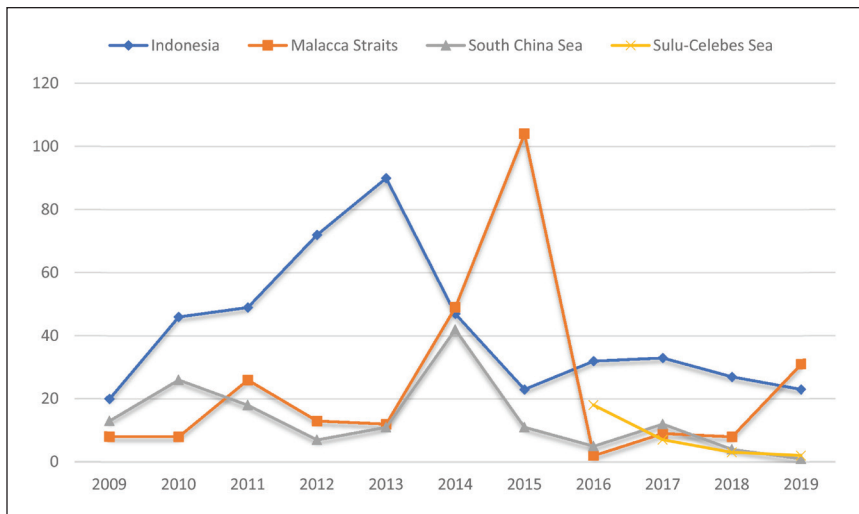


Figure 3. Reported Attacks in Indonesian Waters and Sea-Borders

Source: Adopted from ReCAAP's Annual Reports (2019).

underequipped, not to mention the hierarchical issues between the head of Bakamla and the chief of the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) and the overlapping legal framework.⁵ This unfortunate circumstance will certainly undermine Indonesia's ability in combating piracy and preventing maritime intrusions.

Recently, the Sulu-Celebes Sea has turned into a hotbed for maritime security challenges, particularly kidnapping. The Sulu-Celebes Sea case caught public attention in 2016 as the number of attacks had soared to 18 incidents (see Figure 3). The Indonesian government with its Malaysian and Philippine counterparts responded to the issue by launching a Trilateral Security Cooperation, a maritime cooperation to tackle security challenges in the Sulu-Celebes Sea, in June 2017. Government officials voiced their concern of the area becoming a 'new Somalia' or a foothold for the Islamic State terrorist group. Improved communication and information exchange among Indonesian, Malaysian and Filipino navies due to the formation of the trilateral patrol has curbed the maritime security challenges in the Sulu-Celebes Sea (Storey, 2018). The number of attacks has been steadily declining. However, the continuation of the trilateral maritime patrol remains hazy as the three countries have not yet agreed upon the details of the operation procedures beyond their own domains, particularly between the Philippines and Malaysia.⁶

Given the significant impact of sea-borne trade disruptions to regional and global economies, the Indonesian government is deeply concerned with the potential of external intrusion in the management of its sea lanes of commerce. In the past, it strongly opposed the US concept of the Regional Maritime Security Initiative, particularly with regard to the prospect of deploying special operation forces and unilateral interdiction at Indonesian seas.⁷ Even before that, Indonesian policymakers had been displeased with the USA and India's joint naval escorts for

'high-value' commercial vessels transiting in the Malacca Straits (Young & Valencia, 2003). Today, the Indonesian naval officers continue to perceive extra-regional naval presence as a challenge to the country's control over its maritime domains.

Nonetheless, Indonesia's maritime domain is increasingly exposed to the evolving geopolitical interests of major powers. Japan and China have been increasingly concerned over the security of their energy supplies from the Middle East and Eastern Africa. The latest National Defence Program Guidelines highlighted Japanese ambition to develop a 'realist and threat-oriented' defence posture. The guidelines specifically seek to enhance the country's military capabilities for a wide spectrum of engagements beyond the country's territories, including Southeast Asian sea lanes and the Indian Ocean. In addition, Japan seemed to be paying attention to the development in the Sulu-Celebes Sea as any disruptions in the domain will jeopardise Tokyo's maritime trade route.

Likewise, as part of the 'New Maritime Silk Road' initiative, China has been seeking the options to secure its sea lanes of commerce, spanning from the coast of mainland China through the littorals of the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits, across the Indian Ocean to the littorals of the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. In recent years, it has funded the construction of deep seaports in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan that would serve as hubs and links for regional trade, while enabling the Chinese Navy to push for a forward naval presence along vital sea lanes.⁸ The persisting maritime disputes in East Asia have long-term implications on Indonesia's aspiration for strategic stability. The growing capabilities of the Chinese Navy and increased maritime presence in the South China Sea have been a contributing factor towards competitive naval acquisitions in East Asia—a regional trend that is closely observed by Indonesian defence planners.

We can conclude Indonesia is facing a complex yet challenging maritime environment based on the aforementioned discussion. As mentioned before, President Jokowi proposed GMF agenda that reflected his ambition to propel maritime development, including maritime force. Nonetheless, such effort has not maximised Indonesia's response towards external maritime challenges. In the next two sections, we will assess the impacts of GMF towards maritime force development and naval and air force modernisation consecutively.

Global Maritime Fulcrum: National Aspiration and Impact

President Jokowi's intention of pushing forward maritime development under the framework of GMF drew enthusiastic responses as such a move indicated an opportunity for great powers to forge deeper cooperation with Indonesia. For example, GMF generated a momentum for the USA to strengthen its engagement with Indonesia, particularly Jakarta's potential in playing a leading role in the Indo-Asia-Pacific Rim (Quirk & Bradford, 2015). The birth of GMF also provided the right moment to foster relations with China as Beijing introduced its new engagement strategy through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was incorporated into the Chinese constitution in 2017 (Lalisang & Candra, 2020). Moreover, the focus on maritime development seemed in line with Indonesia's

interest in the Indo-Pacific concept (Anwar, 2020).⁹ In terms of maritime force, the fifth pillar of GMF aimed for developing the country's maritime defence forces.¹⁰

Indonesia's new GMF envisages the development of a formidable naval power in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesian policymakers had begun to ponder an ambitious naval posture for the world's largest archipelagic country. With recent fatal incidents involving military aircraft, civilian experts and parliamentarians have called for an accelerated military modernisation process (*Berita Satu*, 2020). In a view to bolster the country's naval capability development, Indonesian defence planners could possibly adopt a concept of 'force ratio' that is tied to four strategic factors—actual conflict, geographical space, balance of power and defence technology.

Although GMF supposedly fostered Indonesia's maritime force development, the concept had not been transformed into a coherent development programme. There are three major reasons that attenuated GMF. First, President Jokowi only treated the concept as a political campaign jargon in the run up to his presidential election back in 2014. Furthermore, the president emphasised mostly on development projects and left the defence policy and civil–military relations on 'autopilot', passing such authority to his retired army general cliques (Laksmana, 2019d). Rather than focusing on naval force advancement, Indonesia's defence policy fixated on organisational expansion to solve the flux of non-job military officers, not to mention expansion of cooperation with various ministries (Laksmana, 2019c; Sebastian et al., 2018).

The domination of army generals in Jokowi's inner circle certainly affected the formulation of Indonesia's defence policy.¹¹ Indonesia's Defence White Paper in 2016 still placed internal security as its priority. The emphasis on internal security had placed greater emphasis on the army as the preferred force. From time to time, the army has been the dominant service, above and beyond that of the navy and air force. Jokowi's maritime vision had failed to alter this discrepancy. In terms of armament spending, the army had received a large amount of funds under Jokowi's first-term presidency (see Figure 4).

The domestic warfare-oriented vision was further encouraged when newly appointed Defence Minister and former Jokowi's presidential race rival, Prabowo Subianto, visited TNI headquarters on 30 October 2019. During the visit, he outlined the urgency in tackling internal security threats, particularly those in Papua. Former Defence Minister Ryamisard Ryacudu (2014–2019) also highlighted the importance of guarding against foreign infiltration via proxies and urged the military to focus on internal threats like the infiltration of 'LGBT elements' (Haripin, 2016).

Second, even predating GMF, Indonesia's defence budgets over the years have been suboptimal, barely sufficient to cover the expenses for daily operations and major acquisitions. Furthermore, its manpower component still dominates the defence budget. The largest sum of the 2020 defence budget (at 40%) had gone into the human resources department to cover salaries, personnel expenditure and welfare for ministry employees. Expenditure on goods and maintenance of existing defence equipment, including spending on new equipment, had absorbed 30% and 25%, respectively, from the total budget. Leftover amounts had gone

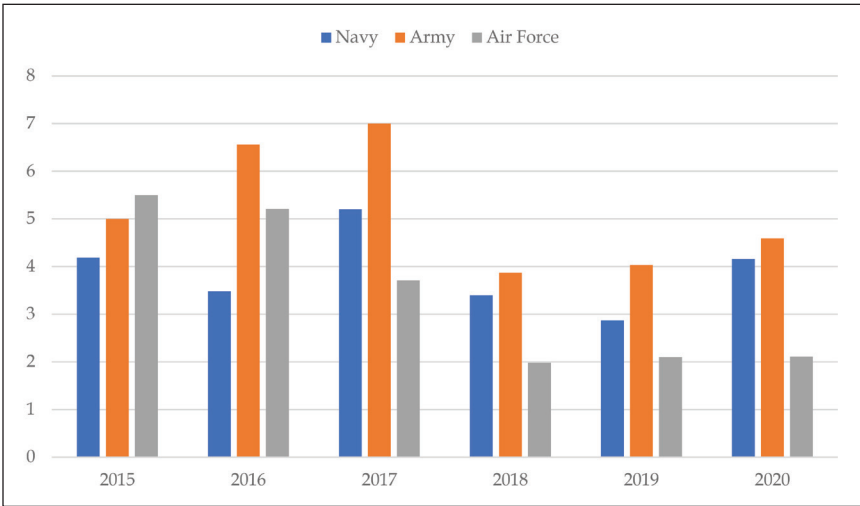


Figure 4. Indonesia's Arms Modernisation Funds (in trillions IDR)

Source: 'Less military money going to new weapons', *The Jakarta Post* (11 November 2019).

into research and development.¹² In addition, the existing budget failed to fully cover the day-to-day operational costs of the Indonesian military. For example, the Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU) can only operate 40% of the service's total aircraft due to limited operational funds, forcing the air force to underuse its planes' flying sequence.¹³ As a result, the TNI AU is forced to carefully select its aircraft training syllabus.

During his presidential campaign back in 2014, President Joko Widodo promised to increase Indonesia's defence budget. The president underlined that the government can only afford the increment if annual economic growth reaches at least 7% growth. Given the fact that Indonesia's economic growth in the past 5 years had not met the 7% target, defence budget has been relatively stagnant (see Figure 5).

Third, the lack of commitment was also exacerbated by the absence of a proper blueprint for the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) agenda. Although some ministries have produced policies that seemed in line with GMF jargon, the arrangements were either short-lived or independently executed. The development of outer islands policy by the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries was an example of the disconnection. Through Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, the Indonesian government, in 2017, launched a programme called the Integrated Maritime and Fishery Centre Development Programme (*Program Pembangunan Sentra Kelautan dan Perikanan Terpadu/PSKPT*) to expedite development in the outer islands. Natuna (Riau Islands province) and Saumlaki (Maluku province) became the first two locations that received attention. The project seeks to empower local businesses in Natuna and Saumlaki through educating local fishermen (Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, 2017). However, government's efforts aimed at improving the infrastructure of the outer

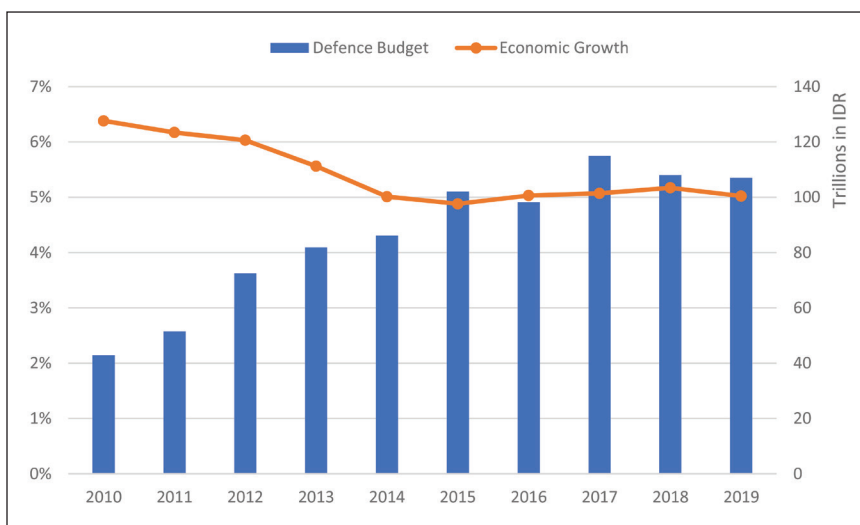


Figure 5. Indonesia's Defence Budget and Economic Growth

Source: Dataset collated from various public records.

islands received some criticism due to the absence of an integrated programme that connects development in all outer islands. Thus, development was only conducted partially (*Republika*, 2019).

The absence of GMF blueprint impacted the maritime force development. Jokowi's aspiration of fostering maritime development had showed very little advancement in strengthening the country's maritime force. Such a concept had, indeed, brought some changes to the underfunded Indonesian Navy.¹⁴ Although the TNI has undergone three organisational and structural expansions between October 2014 and June 2020, these advancements did not exclusively address external threats, let alone combat Indonesia's maritime challenges. In fact, structural expansions had led to a situation whereby an oversupply of manpower caused by promotional logjams were absorbed into the services (Gindarsah, 2019; Laksmiana, 2019b). Furthermore, the expansion of the army's territorial structure hints at a continued domination of the service (Santoso, 2016).¹⁵ The addition of the third navy fleet (Koarmada III), a third marine division and a third air force operation command (Koopsau III) did not indicate exclusive naval and air force reinforcement. This is due to the fact that the army's strategic reserve command (Kostrad) had also gained a third division in addition to the above-mentioned new territorial offices. Although the president had accelerated the military modernisation agendas, the plan was already in place years before. The formation of a joint regional defence command (Kogabwilhan) had been established by the previous President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (2004–2014) Presidential Regulation no.10/2010. The formation of Koarmada III, third marine division, Koopsau III and third Kostrad division were also outlined by the MEF rather than GMF.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, we can see domestic factors have been impeding GMF development, which fits into neoclassical realism's

under-balancing conception. However, in reality, the concept failed to deliver its promised agenda. Based on the above-mentioned discussion, we can see that domestic factors have been impeding GMF development, which fits into neoclassical realism's 'under-balancing' conception. The fact that naval and air force modernisation continued without significant influence of GMF provided an intriguing scene. What is the objective of naval and air force modernisation? Answering this question is vital to provide us the complete picture in explaining Indonesia's 'under-balancing' maritime force development.

Arms Modernisation Trends: Air and Naval Forces

This section provides us with an assessment of Indonesia's naval and air power development. Acquisition of new equipment from foreign and domestic sources, purchase of second-hand military platforms and upgrade of existing armament, either to equip them with better technology and/or to stretch their service lifespans, constituted military modernisation strategy. It is no doubt that adoption of modern technology plays a crucial part in enhancing the navy and air force capability. However, Indonesia's bootstrapped defence budget requires the two services to forgo full-scale arms modernisation approach. In the following, we will discuss the existing development as well as the future enhancement plans.

TNI AL (Indonesian Navy)

In Southeast Asia, the TNI-AL is the largest naval force with regard to the number of manpower and naval platforms. Currently, its order-of-battle comprises three naval groups—the First Fleet (Koarmada I) in Jakarta, the Second Fleet (Koarmada 2) in Surabaya and the Third Fleet (Koarmada 3) in Sorong—each with combat taskforce, maritime patrol elements and auxiliary vessels. However, there are two major issues. *First*, predominated by logistics and transport ships, the Navy's combat and patrol task forces consist only four tactical submarines, 11 frigates and 20 missile-armed corvettes, as well as various types of coastal combatants (see Figure 6). The TNI-AL's existing force level is still far from ideal in safeguarding the country's approximately 6 million sq. km maritime domain.

Second, a close examination of their service records shows that a majority or 59% of naval systems have been in operation for over three decades (see Figure 7). Indonesia's Marine Corps, for instance, still relies on a fleet of outdated PT-76 tanks for amphibious operations. Due to the limited funding for new procurements, the navy seeks to refurbish and upgrade the existing arsenal it still considers relevant in the foreseeable future—including upgrading the Ahmad Yani-class frigates. This trend highlights the slow pace of Indonesia's military modernisation over the past 15 years, despite acquisitions of larger sealift vessels and ocean-going warships (Gindarsah, 2015b).

Based on the country's Long-Term Development Plan 2005–2025, Indonesian defence planners seek to 'acquire naval capabilities to uphold the good order

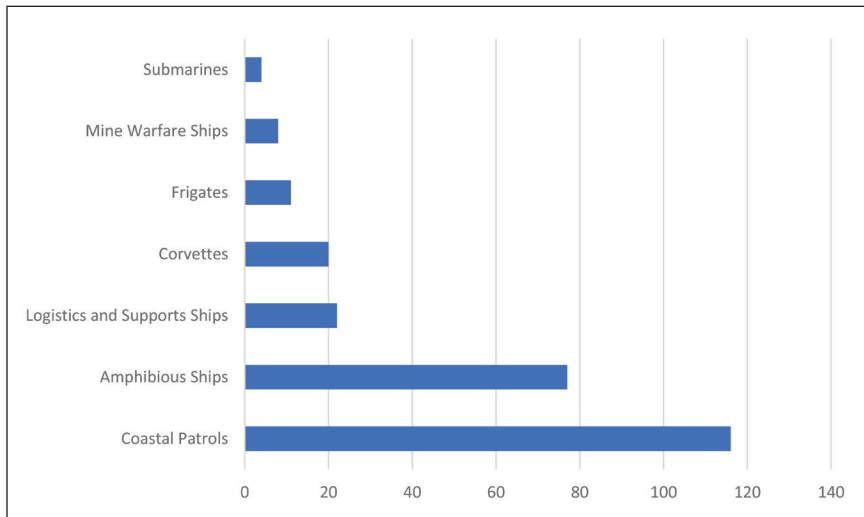


Figure 6. Current Force Structure of the Indonesian Navy

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (2019, p. 277).

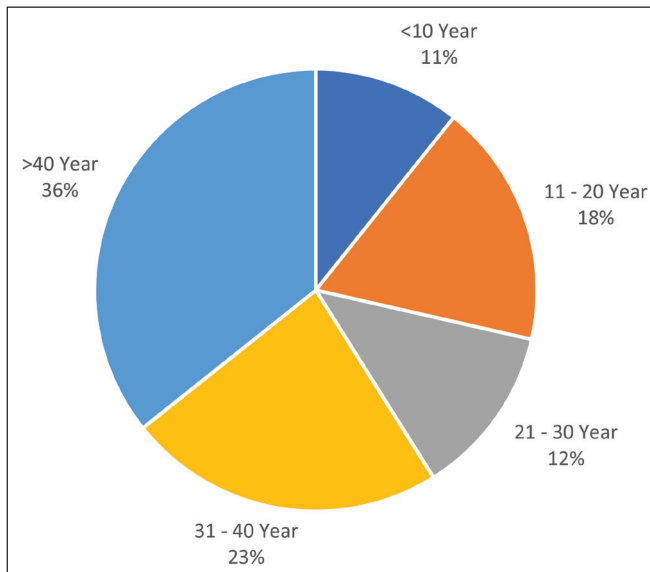


Figure 7. Service Terms of Indonesia's Naval Systems

Source: Data set collated from various public records.

throughout the archipelagic seas'.¹⁶ This vision has been operationalised in the country's defence planning guidelines. Among the strategic blueprints is the publication of the TNI-AL's future force structure in 2006. The document envisions the development of a 'green-water navy' with capabilities beyond coastal defence

and adequate power projection to operate in the high seas. Central to this strategic objective is the creation of the so-called Integrated Fleet Weapon Systems (*Sistem Senjata Armada Terpadu* or SSAT), consisting of warships, patrol fleets, naval aviation, marine forces and naval bases (Indonesian Navy, 2006).

Under the framework of the MEF, the TNI-AL’s organisational aspiration had been further tailored into the Ministry of Defence’s long-term military modernisation plans. Between 2010 and 2024, the development of Indonesia’s naval forces rests on a combination of ‘capability-based’ and ‘task-based’ planning to ensure a stable transition process towards the expected force structure (Ministry of Defence, 2007, pp. 83–88). During this period, the Indonesian Navy has to maintain, at least, a naval combat and maritime patrol task force to safeguard the country’s internal waters (Soebijanto, 2006). Based on its long-term force planning, the TNI-AL will operate a total of 274 ships, 137 fixed and rotary aircraft, three division-equivalent marine forces and 11 strategic naval bases (Muna, 2014). Figure 8 presents Indonesia’s future naval assets, based on key elements of an integrated fleet system.

With defence spending less than 1% of the gross domestic product (GDP), the first cornerstone of Indonesia’s naval defence plan (2010–2014) seeks to tackle low-intensity but frequent internal conflicts—such as insurgency, terrorism and transnational security issues. The second stage (2015–2019) would require a budget allocation of roughly 1.5% of GDP to sustain forward naval deployment with a focus on safeguarding Indonesia’s vast territories. Spurred by larger military spending (approximately 2.5% of the GDP), the third phase (2020–2024) principally envisages the country procuring naval capabilities to balance against regional military threats. In the longer term, the Indonesian ‘green-water’ navy

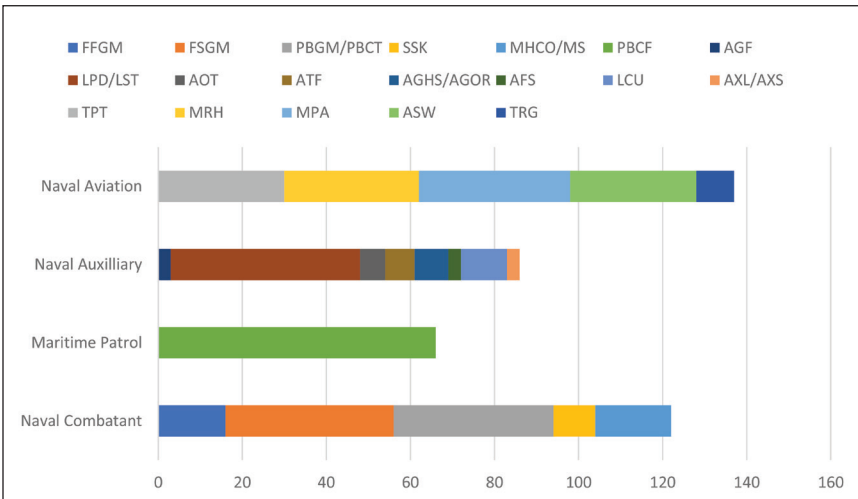


Figure 8. Future Force Structure of Indonesia’s ‘Green-Water’ Navy

Source: Rencana Pembangunan Kekuatan TNI-AL Jangka Panjang [Indonesia’s Naval Development Plans], 2005–2024 (Jakarta: Naval Headquarters, 2006).

will incorporate latest defence technologies into its naval doctrine and weapons systems. Naval arms build-up programmes are likely to require a defence budget of above 3.5% of the country's GDP.

The current administration in Jakarta has also recently published a Mid-Term Development Blueprint. Here, it aims at increasing Indonesia's defence expenditures from the current 0.9% of GDP to 1.5% by 2019 (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2014, p. 77). This ambitious plan envisages a significant growth of the Indonesian defence budget from nearly US\$7 billion in 2014 to approximately US\$20 billion by 2020. Assuming that the country achieves economic growth of over 5% for the next 5 years, the Indonesian government will have to increase its defence budget by an average of around 16% annually in real terms to reach the expected level of spending (*Jane's Defence Weekly*, 2014).

TNI AU (Indonesian Air Force)

Since its inception, TNI AU's role has been relegated merely as a supporting force within the Indonesian military. Moreover, the 1965 coup¹⁷ had, to some extent, tarnished the reputation of the service politically. The US embargo, following the 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre¹⁸ and the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, had further crippled the air force. As an avid user of American products, the embargo robbed the TNI AU's ability to provide logistical support and maintenance services for its platforms, notably its US-made F-5s and F-16s. The financial crisis meanwhile forced Indonesia to scrap its defence development as the government had to prioritise other sectors, causing acute budget restraints for the military. The air force consequently lost the opportunity to upgrade its equipment due to the shrinking budget.

The bitter lesson of US embargo forced Indonesia to find alternative sources of procurement in the form of Russian-made Sukhoi fighters in 2003. The Indonesian government acquired two SU-27s and 3 Su-30s via a countertrade deal. The country's stable economy since the mid-2000s had allowed the air force to rejuvenate and rebuild. The obsolete F-5s had been gradually scrapped and grounded entirely in 2016. TNI AU also added 16 T-50s from Korea in 2015 and ordered a few surveillance and transport aircraft from PT DI, an Indonesian aircraft company. The removal of US embargo in 2005 further facilitated TNI AU's rejuvenation plan. In addition, the introduction of the MEF and its implementation, starting since 2009, had galvanised the need for a reinvigoration of antiquated platforms of the service.

The air force then procured more SU-27s and Su-30s to form a Sukhoi squadron.¹⁹ In 2015, Indonesia received the first batch of 24 refurbished F-16s from the USA with the last few fighters arriving in 2018. TNI AU also bought EMB-314s in 2016 to boost its surveillance capabilities and the pilot training programme. In addition to these manned aircraft, the service embarked on unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology. TNI AU, first, adopted the UAV machinery in 2013 by procuring the Aerostar TUAV.²⁰ Then, four Chinese-origin Wing Loongs and two CH-4Bs were procured in 2018 and 2019, respectively. TNI AU initially utilised the UAV only for reconnaissance purposes, while the

CH-4B acquisition added strike capability for the air force’s UAV squad (see Figure 9). Unlike the TNI AL, only about one-third of TNI AU’s platforms have seen operation for over three decades (see Figure 10). Nonetheless, we should note that most of the current procurements of the service started in the late 1980s or the early 1990s.

Under the MEF programme, the TNI AU aims to procure at least 128 jet fighters by 2024 (see Figure 11). The air force currently operates 85 fighters. In order to reach its target, the Indonesian government had recently announced the plan to procure 11 SU-35s contracted at US\$1.14 billion (Grevatt, 2019). The deal involved a countertrade mechanism out of which half of the deal would be compensated in the form of raw materials, like rubber and palm oil products (*Kumparan*, 2019). If the deal goes through, Indonesia will be the first operator in Southeast Asia and the second in Asia, besides China. In addition to the SU-35s, the TNI AU Chief ACM Yuyu Sutisna (2018-now) announced his plan to strengthen its posture with two squadrons or 32 F-16 Viper Block 72s (*Antara*, 2019a).

Prior to the SU-35s and F-16 Viper’s acquisition plans, Indonesia and South Korea announced the Korean Fighter Experiment/Indonesian Fighter Experiment (KFX/IFX) project, with a target to produce 4.5 generation jet fighters in December 2015. The project had been halted due to license issues and stalled negotiations over transfer of technology disputes. Although the procurement process seemed to be showing promising progress, the completion of the MEF might be delayed. The overall completion for TNI AU’s MEF programme until March 2019 had only reached 44.4% of the target. TNI AU initially planned to acquire two squadrons of F-16 Vipers in 2020. However, until August 2021, the air force has not yet finalised the deal. The same scenario applies to the SU-35s plan. Besides expanding its striking power, improving airlift capabilities will be another focus of the air force.²¹

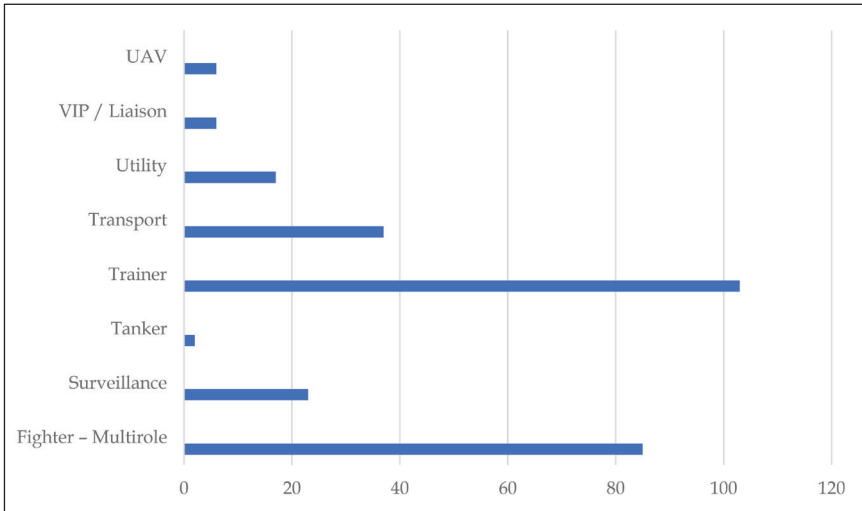


Figure 9. Current Force Structure of the Indonesian Air Force

Source: Data set collected from various public records, as of 25 November 2019.

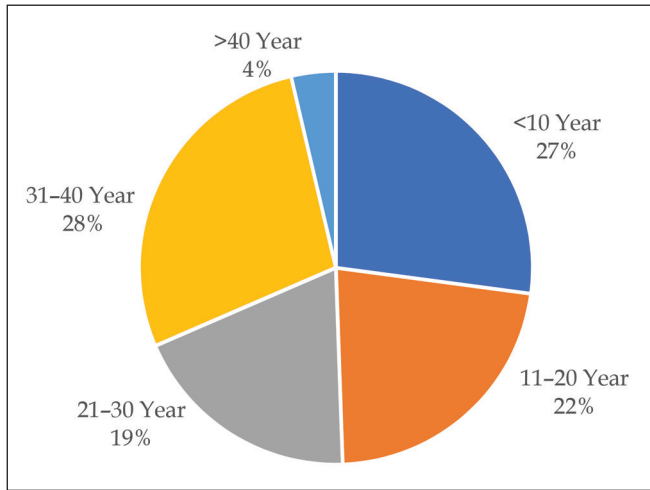


Figure 10. Service Terms of TNI AU's Aircrafts

Source: Data set collected from various public records.

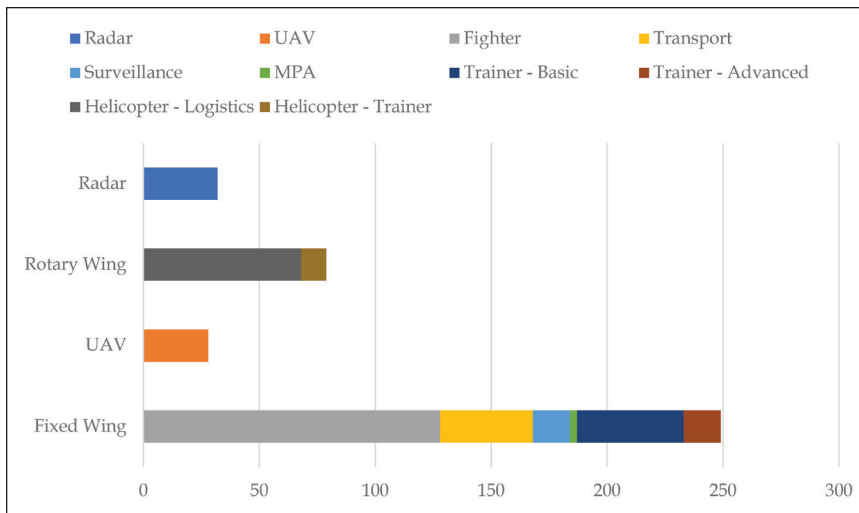


Figure 11. Future Force Structure of TNI-AU 2024

Source: 'Rethinking TNI AU's Arms Procurement: A Long-run Projection', *RSIS Policy Report*, 9 July 2014.

Here, we can see Indonesia's naval and air force modernisation primarily aimed at rejuvenating the obsolete platforms. The period of economic austerity, following the 1997 crisis, forced both the navy and the air force to cramp its arms spending and confined them to use outdated platforms. Furthermore, the replacement of these obsolete armaments seemed employing a patchwork approach due to the

country's financial constraint. The circumstance, consequently, hinted that Indonesia's naval and air force modernisation did not act as a proper response towards systemic pressure. The recent procurement of TNI AU is an example of the imbalance. Instead of focusing on improvement of surveillance capability, which is helpful to combat maritime illegal activities and maintain Indonesia's border integrity, the service channelled its financial resources to replace its various obsolete aircraft. We can also conclude that domestic factors play a dominant role in shaping the response, in this case, naval and air force arms modernisation, towards the external environment.

Conclusion and Future Outlook

The absence of proper guidance and different agenda prioritisation had significantly shaped Indonesia's under-balancing naval and air force development. Jokowi's GMF concept that supposedly stimulated maritime force advancement in the end only did little in fostering the agenda. Jokowi's overemphasis on development projects made the president pay limited attention to other sectors, including maritime defence. The situation was also exacerbated by the decision to outsource defence policy to his retired army general clique. These elements certainly constitute the inefficient bureaucracy of which neoclassical realism pointed out as the cause of under-balancing. Nonetheless, our discussion revealed inefficient bureaucracy was not the only factor that triggered the mismatch between systemic pressure and the response towards it.

The different agenda of naval and air force arms modernisation also played an instrumental part in causing under-balancing of naval and air force development. Indonesia's arms modernisation primarily aims to rejuvenate its obsolete armament, particularly sea and air platforms. The combination of an arms embargo and economic crisis in the late 1990s had compelled Indonesia to scrap its arms modernisation agenda, leaving its military no choice but to rely on obsolete armaments. The ongoing arms modernisation under the MEF framework primarily aims at solving the obsolescence issue, while catching up with existing technologies. External threats were not a major priority in Indonesia's naval and air force development.

Although the initial objectives of the navy focused on replacing obsolete platforms, the future of Indonesia's maritime force development presents certain promise. The Indonesian government appears to adopt a 'twofold strategy' aimed at preserving national security and regional stability. First, Indonesia has been at the forefront of regional efforts on confidence building in the maritime domain. The TNI AL hosts the KOMODO biennial multilateral exercise, initiated first in 2014, which included both the USA and China in the last three trainings. Although the TNI AU rarely engages in overseas multilateral exercises, the service has been regularly doing joint trainings with neighbouring and regional states, such as Australia, Singapore and Malaysia.

Second, Indonesian policymakers had anticipated defensive measures to counter 'strategic surprises' in the country's maritime borders. Although the

prospect of a maritime conflict remains low for the foreseeable future, recent events have suggested that security threats in the maritime domain may surface abruptly. The sudden increase in maritime incidents in the Sulu-Celebes Sea in 2016 was an example of this case. Through Joint Training (Latgab), the TNI also hinted at the military's intention of improving interoperability among its services. The 2018 and 2019 exercises focused on developing and testing the network-centric warfare capability of the armed forces.

The direct implementation of Jokowi's maritime vision, however, remains hazy. So far, the president only expedited delayed expansion projects with no novel proposals of enhancing its maritime force. Furthermore, combating internal security threats in Papua, reiterated by the newly appointed Defence Minister Prabowo, may result in the perpetuation of army dominance within TNI. In addition, the slow progress of the MEF programme presented yet another challenge for the TNI. The failure to catch up will further delay the procurement of modern technology. This will undermine the military's ability to tackle security threats and to keep the maritime domain safe.

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Notes

1. The formation of the Trilateral Cooperative Arrangement between Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines in July 2016 managed to reduce the number of kidnap-for-ransom incidents in the Sulu-Celebes Sea.
2. For example, a report by *The Jakarta Post* newspaper indicated that the Indonesian army has been consistently receiving the biggest share of arms modernisation funds since 2015 (see Ghaliya, 2019).
3. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries only provided us with data till 2015.
4. Besides the *Gui Xei Yu* 12,661 ship, the Indonesian government sunk 40 other foreign-built ships. The Chinese ship was actually taken into custody on 20 June 2009 for fishing in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) near Natuna region (*The Jakarta Post*, 2015).
5. To maximise its operationality, ideally, Bakamla is required to add nine ships per year. The limited budget, however, only allows the institution to add three ships per year (*Kompas*, 2019).
6. Interview with an anonymous Bakamla officer, Jakarta, 1 November 2019.
7. Indonesian former navy chief, for instance, said that the idea of deploying special operation troops under the Regional Maritime Security Initiative was 'baseless' (*The Jakarta Post*, 2004).

8. Although those ports have the potential to support Chinese military presence, so far, they only cater to commercial activities.
9. While the countries interpret Indo-Pacific differently, in general, the region refers to the triangular area between Japan, Australia and India (Anwar, 2020).
10. The other four pillars are (a) rebuild Indonesia's maritime culture; (b) maintain and manage marine resources; (c) prioritise maritime infrastructure and connectivity development; and (d) eliminate the source of conflicts at sea (*The Jakarta Post*, 2014b).
11. Jokowi also appointed Ryamizard Ryacudu and Prabowo Subianto, retired army generals, consecutively to be his Minister of Defence for the president's first- and second-term presidencies.
12. The formation of Special Operations (Koopsus) also contributed towards maintaining lavish spending on the manpower component (Ghaliya, 2019).
13. Interview with anonymous defence ministry officer.
14. See Koh (2015) for study on potential impacts of the Minimum Essential Force (MEF) to the Indonesian Navy.
15. In 2019, the Indonesian Army announced a plan to add 31 new district command offices in the eastern part of Indonesia, notably in Papua and Ambon (*Antara*, 2019b).
16. See Law No. 17/2007 on Long-term National Development Plan, 2005–2025, p. IV.1.4, point 4.
17. A failed coup had been attempted against President Sukarno on 30 September 1965, followed by the kidnapping and killing of high-ranking generals, allegedly conducted by the Indonesian Communist Party, although real evidence was never brought into light. The New Order regime government, led by President Suharto, controversially accused the former Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU) Chief, the late Air Marshal Omar Dani (1962–1965), of supporting the movement. This accusation led to a loss of credibility for the TNI AU.
18. The Indonesian military opened fire towards a group of protesters in the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, East Timor, on 12 November 1991. Following the incident, the USA ceased all military ties with Indonesia in 1999 but resumed relations in 2005.
19. Air Squadron 11, which is based in Sultan Hasanuddin Airbase in Makassar, South Sulawesi Province, has been operating the Sukhoi fighters.
20. The exact number is not known to the public.
21. Interview with anonymous defence ministry officer, Jakarta, 29 October 2019.

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