



AUKUS-RI: The Answer for Indonesia's Future Maritime Challenges Over the North Natuna Sea?

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores Indonesia's maritime security challenges in the North Natuna Sea (NNS) amid rising tensions in the South China Sea, driven by major power rivalries, particularly China's assertiveness and the implications of the AUKUS trilateral security pact.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach: The research employs a literature review and meta-analysis to synthesise existing studies on Indonesia's defence policy and maritime strategy, offering a comprehensive examination of the nation's strategic responses to external pressures.

Findings: The findings reveal that Indonesia faces critical challenges in safeguarding its sovereignty over its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) due to China's aggressive territorial claims and military activities. Additionally, the emergence of AUKUS has encouraged Indonesia to reassess its security posture, indicating a potential pivot towards deeper defence cooperation with Western allies and modernising its military capabilities.

Originality/Value: This research contributes to the discourse on maritime security in Southeast Asia by addressing Indonesia's strategic options and examining the potential significance of an AUKUS-Republic of Indonesia partnership (AUKUSRI). It underscores the importance of adaptive measures to navigate an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

China's rising assertiveness in the South China Sea, particularly within Indonesia's exclusive economic zone in the North Natuna Sea, has significantly heightened tensions in the region (Adamy, 2022). The rapid modernisation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), coupled with its territorial claims within the contested nine-dash line, has compelled Indonesia to reassess its maritime security strategy. Notably, PLAN has aggressively enhanced its military capabilities through the acquisition of new aircraft carriers, submarines, and missile systems, backed by a reported military expenditure of 471 million USD in 2024, according to World Bank Group data (McGerty, 2024). This buildup has fuelled an arms race in the Asia Pacific, prompting neighbouring countries such as Vietnam with a defence budget of 7.9 billion USD by 2024 and the Philippines with an allocation of 35 billion USD for military modernisation to bolster their defences (De Castro, 2024). Indonesia, in parallel, has implemented a military modernisation plan valued at 125 billion USD in 2024 to avoid being strategically outpaced (Silalahi et al., 2023)..

Indonesia has primarily responded to these challenges through assertive diplomacy, exemplified by the renaming of the southern portion of the South China Sea to the North Natuna Sea and increased maritime patrols (Darajati, 2022). However, China's continued militarisation of the region, including the construction of artificial islands, persists as a significant threat to Indonesia's sovereignty. Meanwhile, the recent AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States has introduced a new dimension to the Asia Pacific security landscape. While primarily aimed at enhancing Australia's military capabilities, AUKUS has broader implications for Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia (Rogers, 2022). This research explores the potential for a new strategic framework, referred to as AUKUSRI, to address Indonesia's evolving maritime challenges amidst AUKUS developments and China's growing assertiveness.

Table 1: The cost of nuclear submarines – whole-of-programme costs (AUDbn)*

2023–24 to 2026–27	2027–28 to 2032–33	2033–34 to 2042–43	2043–44 to 2052–53	2053–54 to 2054–55	Contingency	Total (incl. contingency)
9.1	48.5	81.7	87.9	17.5	122.9	367.6

* Cost estimates are out-turned (in current prices) and are presented on a 2022–23 Budget FE3 price basis (as at March 2023). Costs represent upper-bound estimates. The information is presented in Australian Dollars and is subject to regular adjustments to cater for foreign exchange variations. Contingency is not allocated by year, but is triggered on the occurrence of a contingent event.

Source: Australian Parliamentary Budget Office

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Figure 1. AUKUS Submarine Funding in Latest Australian Defence Budget

The AUKUS agreement was formalised in San Diego, United States, on 13 March 2023, at the Point Loma Naval Base. This trilateral meeting involved the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, the President of the United States Joe Biden, and the Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, as part of the AUKUS trilateral security alliance (Austin, 2024). A significant outcome of this agreement is the plan to establish a new military base specialised in nuclear-powered submarines. Australia was chosen as the focus due to its efforts to upgrade and expand its military infrastructure. Consequently, under the AUKUS security pact signed in 2021, Australia plans to acquire the Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarine USS Colorado (SSN 788), manufactured in the United States, through the AUKUS partnership scheme (Marles, 2024). This decision is closely tied to countering China's increasing influence in the Asia Pacific region.

Following the formalisation of the AUKUS trilateral relationship in 2023, Australia received an unexpected visit from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in March 2024 in Canberra. This marked the first visit by a Chinese foreign minister to Australia in seven years, with the last visit occurring in 2017. The purpose of this visit was to improve bilateral relations, which had been tense and tenuous in recent years. The discussions primarily centred on fostering a stable relationship between Australia and China, emphasising the need for continuous efforts to achieve mutual understanding. The focus was on economic cooperation, identifying common ground, and managing differences (Engelbrecht, 2024). Nonetheless, despite these discussions, Australia's alignment under AUKUS suggests that its strategic stance will remain distinct, underscoring the persistent geopolitical competition between the two nations (Southgate, 2021).

Literature Review

This literature review aims to establish a robust theoretical foundation by examining various International Relations (IR) theories pertinent to Indonesia's maritime security challenges, particularly in relation to the North Natuna Sea (NNS) and the AUKUS trilateral agreement (Samy, 2023). By synthesising insights from realism, constructivism, and the concept of strategic autonomy, this framework elucidates Indonesia's responses to great power competition and evolving security dynamics..

Realism and Maritime Security Strategy

Realism, particularly its neoclassical variant, offers a valuable framework for analysing Indonesia's maritime security strategy. This perspective suggests that states operate within an anarchic international system, where survival and security take precedence, compelling them to accumulate power (Rider, 2017). As China's military

presence in the South China Sea grows, Indonesia faces a security dilemma: whether to strengthen its military capabilities to safeguard its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the North Natuna Sea or risk becoming a target of Chinese assertiveness (Dao, 2024). In this multipolar environment, smaller states like Indonesia must carefully navigate the complex rivalries between major powers to protect their national interests.

Indonesia's increasing defence expenditure, naval modernisation, and participation in joint military exercises with the United States and Australia reflect realism's assertion that states pursue balancing strategies to counter external threats (McGerty, 2024). The AUKUS agreement, which bolsters Australia's nuclear submarine capabilities, further complicates these dynamics by amplifying Indonesia's strategic need to align with Western powers in safeguarding its maritime interests (Adamy, 2022; Silalahi et al., 2023).

Constructivism and Indonesia's Foreign Policy Identity

Constructivism underscores the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping state behaviour, offering valuable insights into Indonesia's reluctance to formally align with AUKUS (Prayitno, 2021). Indonesia embeds the principle of "bebas aktif" (free and active) into its foreign policy, reflecting its identity as a non-aligned nation committed to maintaining neutrality amidst global power struggles. Indonesia demonstrates its dedication to fostering a stable regional order through inclusivity and cooperation by actively participating in ASEAN and advancing ASEAN-led initiatives such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) (Tene, 2023). This approach highlights Indonesia's preference for regional frameworks as alternatives to power-centric agreements like AUKUS. The AOIP further reflects Indonesia's cautious strategy to preserve ASEAN centrality while addressing evolving security challenges in the region (Southgate, 2021).

Strategic Autonomy in Defense Policy

The concept of strategic autonomy plays an increasingly crucial role in Indonesian defence policy, enhancing both realism and constructivism by emphasising Indonesia's commitment to maintaining independence in foreign policy decisions (Silalahi et al., 2023). Indonesia demonstrates this autonomy through its maritime security strategy in the North Natuna Sea, carefully balancing military ties with Western nations while avoiding direct alignment that could provoke China. Indonesia's reluctance to join AUKUS, alongside its active participation in joint military exercises and the modernisation of its defence capabilities, showcases this strategic approach (Samy, 2023).

By engaging in security dialogues and upholding its non-aligned stance, Indonesia positions itself as a vital actor in regional security, safeguarding its strategic autonomy. This integration of realism, constructivism, and strategic autonomy offers a comprehensive framework for analysing Indonesia's maritime security challenges in the North Natuna Sea. It equips analysts with essential tools to assess how Indonesia navigates great power competition while reinforcing regional stability (Adamy, 2022).

METHODS

This study adopts a combined literature review (Hart, C., 2018) and meta-analysis (Mengist, W., Soromessa, T., & Legese, G., 2020) methodology to establish a comprehensive theoretical foundation and derive reliable conclusions regarding Indonesia's maritime security strategy in response to the AUKUS agreement. The literature review and meta-analysis systematically gather and evaluate a broad range of sources, including academic journals, U.S. Department of Defense reports, APSC Outlook volumes, World Bank data, and other credible news articles, to analyse the context and implications of the AUKUS agreement on Indonesia (Dao, 2024; McGerty, 2024). These sources are carefully selected based on criteria that prioritise original perspectives, empirical evidence, and authoritative analysis on Indonesia's strategic position and maritime security challenges. The review identifies key themes, conflict developments, and strategic insights essential for understanding Indonesia's responses to regional challenges (Engelbrecht, 2024; Rogers, 2022). By integrating these methodologies, this study provides a thorough examination of Indonesia's reactions to the AUKUS agreement and offers insights into how it might shape its future maritime security strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Understanding the complexities of Indonesia's responses to escalating tensions in the North Natuna Sea requires an exploration of the interplay between its strategic choices and the evolving geopolitical landscape, adopting theories and concepts of international relations discussed earlier (Adamy, 2022; Darajati, 2022). The dynamics of China's assertive maritime claims, combined with the implications of the AUKUS agreement, compel Indonesia to navigate a multifaceted security environment (Dao, 2024; Southgate, 2021). This context highlights the importance of analysing how Indonesia's maritime security strategies are influenced by its economic interests and diplomatic engagements. The subsequent analysis will illuminate the profound impacts of these tensions on

Indonesia's defence posture and its efforts to uphold regional stability while adhering to its foundational principles of sovereignty and non-alignment (Samy, 2023).

The Current Tension in the North Natuna Sea and Its Impact on Indonesia

Escalated Tensions: Western and Claimant Responses

The intensification of China's military presence in the South China Sea has exacerbated strategic competition in the region, significantly influencing Indonesia's security considerations in the North Natuna Sea (McGerty, 2024; De Castro, 2024). As China expands its military activities, the United States has escalated its Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) to challenge China's extensive territorial claims and uphold international maritime law (Engelbrecht, 2024). While these FONOPs indirectly enhance Indonesia's security by countering China's regional dominance, they also raise the risk of great-power rivalry affecting Indonesia's maritime domain (Rogers, 2022).

In response to China's assertiveness, regional actors such as the Philippines and Japan, in collaboration with the United States, have formed trilateral alliances aimed at counterbalancing Chinese influence (Southgate, 2021). These alliances, characterised by joint military exercises and enhanced defence cooperation, prioritise maritime security and territorial defence (Adamy, 2022; Marles, 2024).

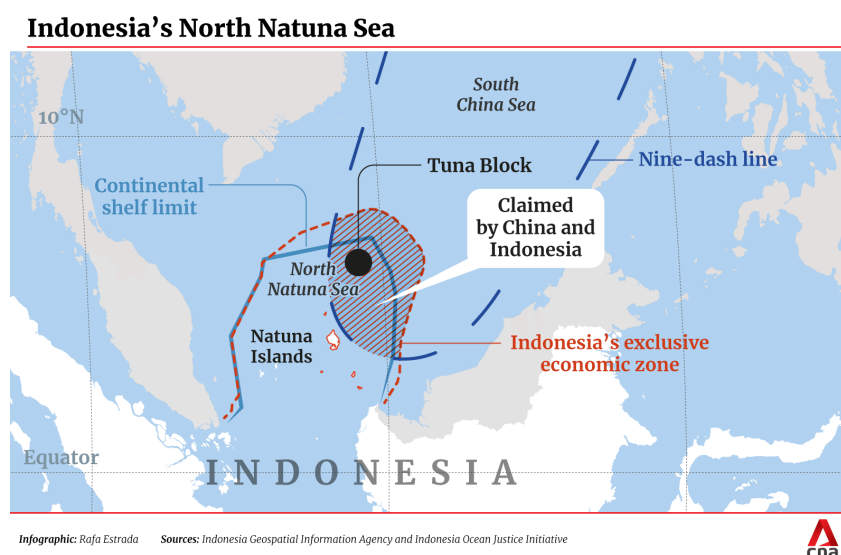


Figure 2. Indonesia's North Natuna Sea

Navigating the complex geopolitical landscape of the South China Sea poses a significant strategic challenge for Indonesia. As a proponent of strategic autonomy,

Indonesia must balance its engagement with U.S.-led defence initiatives while avoiding the perception of aligning too closely with any single power. The escalation of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) and the formation of regional alliances further complicate Indonesia's diplomatic efforts, risking entanglement in broader geopolitical rivalries and destabilisation of its maritime borders. Indonesia's reluctance to formally join these alliances underscores its concerns over escalating regional tensions and its commitment to maintaining its role as a mediator and leader within ASEAN, advocating for peaceful dispute resolution. However, trilateral alliances between the United States, Japan, and the Philippines threaten to undermine ASEAN's centrality in addressing South China Sea disputes. This strategic dilemma forces Indonesia to weigh the benefits of closer security ties with Western powers, which could provoke China, against the limitations of ASEAN-centric solutions, which may appear inadequate in countering China's military expansion. Consequently, while Western FONOPs and regional alliances help to counterbalance China's influence, they also complicate Indonesia's diplomatic and security strategies, requiring a reassessment of its position within the broader Asia-Pacific security framework.

The Conflict's Direct Impact on Indonesia

The conflict in the North Natuna Sea, driven by China's incursions into Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and broader disputes in the South China Sea, has significantly impacted Indonesia's maritime security, economic interests, and defence strategy (Darajati, 2022). A critical concern is the surge in Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing by Chinese vessels, often escorted by China's Coast Guard, which frequently violates Indonesia's EEZ (Engelbrecht, 2024). This illegal activity has resulted in substantial economic losses, particularly in the fisheries sector, which depends on sustainable marine resource management (Silalahi et al., 2023).

In response, Indonesia has intensified naval patrols, deployed additional resources to secure its maritime borders, and participated in joint military exercises with partners such as Australia, the United States, and ASEAN members (Samy, 2023). These exercises enhance interoperability and readiness to address illegal fishing, piracy, and territorial incursions while signalling Indonesia's commitment to collective security without direct alignment with specific geopolitical blocs (Prayitno, 2021).

Indonesia's proactive measures mark a shift from passive diplomacy to active deterrence, strengthening its naval capabilities and seeking international support to prevent further incursions (Adamy, 2022). The North Natuna Sea's strategic significance, with its abundant hydrocarbon resources, necessitates a robust maritime defence posture, further reflected in Indonesia's acquisition of advanced weaponry, including submarines

and fighter jets (Silalahi et al., 2023). These actions underscore Indonesia's determination to modernise its military and assert its role as a regional leader capable of projecting power in the South China Sea (Southgate, 2021). Consequently, the conflict has driven Indonesia to enhance its military capabilities, participate in collective security initiatives, and redefine its position within the Asia-Pacific security framework (Tene, 2023).

Indonesia's Response to the AUKUS Agreement

Concern over Regional Stability

The AUKUS agreement, a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, has generated significant apprehension across Southeast Asia, with Indonesia particularly concerned about its potential implications for regional stability (Southgate, 2021). By focusing on enhancing military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific, including the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, the agreement has raised fears among ASEAN member states about its potential to disrupt the delicate balance of power and provoke a new arms race (Adamy, 2022). The introduction of nuclear-powered submarines into the Asia-Pacific further complicates an already tense South China Sea, adding to the geopolitical challenges faced by the region (Marles, 2024; Rogers, 2022).



Figure 3. The Geopolitics Map of the Asia-Pacific

Several ASEAN countries, including Malaysia and Vietnam, have expressed concerns that AUKUS might heighten tensions between China and the U.S.-led security framework. Although Indonesia has not officially opposed the agreement, it has voiced apprehensions about how AUKUS could reshape Southeast Asia's strategic environment, potentially entangling the region in a deeper power struggle between China and Western

allies. Malaysian officials have warned of escalating military tensions in the South China Sea, where China perceives itself as being encircled by U.S. and allied forces. Similarly, while Vietnam cautiously views AUKUS as a counterbalance to China, it remains wary of the broader implications for regional stability and ASEAN cohesion. These differing responses highlight Indonesia's challenge in navigating an increasingly polarised security landscape.

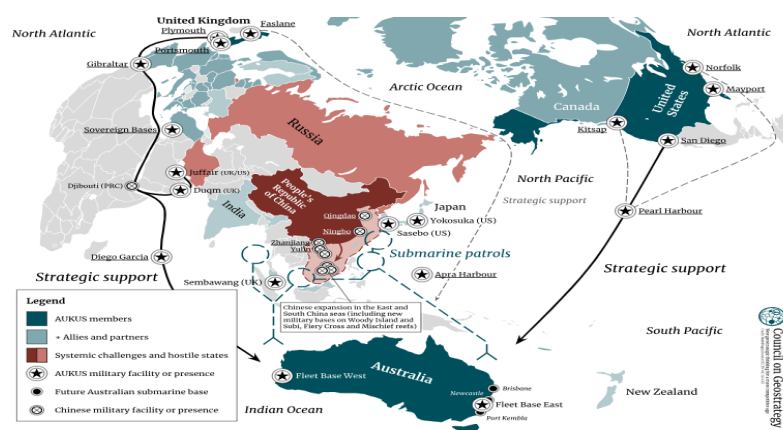


Figure 4. The Geopolitics of AUKUS

From Indonesia's perspective, AUKUS presents a strategic dilemma. While Indonesia values Australia as a key security partner, particularly in maritime security, and recognises the potential benefits of enhanced Australian defence capabilities for regional stability, it remains concerned that AUKUS could undermine ASEAN-led mechanisms that prioritise neutrality and non-alignment (Prayitno, 2021). Indonesia's opposition to nuclear weapons proliferation further complicates its stance, as nuclear-powered submarines risk blurring the line between conventional and nuclear deterrence (Adamy, 2022). Additionally, AUKUS poses challenges to Indonesia's diplomatic relations with China, requiring careful navigation to avoid heightened tensions (Rogers, 2022). This cautious response reflects Indonesia's broader objective of preserving strategic autonomy while contributing to a stable Asia-Pacific region (Silalahi et al., 2023). Although Indonesia acknowledges the potential security advantages, it remains deeply apprehensive about AUKUS's implications for regional stability, ASEAN cohesion, and its relationship with China (Southgate, 2021; Engelbrecht, 2024).

Emphasis on ASEAN-led Regional Architecture

Indonesia's response to AUKUS highlights its steadfast commitment to ASEAN-led mechanisms for regional stability and its aim to prevent the dominance of external powers in Southeast Asia. As a founding member of ASEAN, Indonesia has consistently championed the organisation as the primary platform for addressing regional security

issues. The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) serves as a key framework promoted by Indonesia, prioritising cooperation, inclusivity, and adherence to international law, particularly in managing disputes in the South China Sea. For Indonesia, the AOIP offers a viable alternative to polarising security arrangements like AUKUS, which risk dividing the region and diminishing ASEAN's role as a mediator in regional disputes.

The future of Indonesia's maritime security strategy will depend on its ability to adapt to a rapidly evolving regional security landscape marked by escalating tensions, great-power competition, and shifting international alliances. As the Asia-Pacific emerges as a focal point of geopolitical contention, Indonesia must carefully navigate its relations with major powers, including China, the United States, and Australia, while maintaining its non-alignment principles. Central to this strategy is the utilisation of ASEAN-led frameworks, such as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), to promote regional stability and cooperation. At the same time, Indonesia is committed to strengthening its naval capabilities, particularly in contested areas like the North Natuna Sea, through increased defence spending and collaboration with key partners. By balancing diplomacy with defence, Indonesia seeks to safeguard its maritime interests, preserve its sovereignty, and ensure security in an increasingly contested Asia-Pacific region.

Indonesia has actively collaborated with its ASEAN counterparts to address concerns regarding AUKUS while reaffirming ASEAN's central role in regional security discussions. During ASEAN meetings, Indonesia has underscored the importance of maintaining unity and promoting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) as the most effective framework for managing great-power competition in the Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, Indonesia has encouraged ASEAN members to view AUKUS as a complementary arrangement rather than a conflicting one, emphasising that ASEAN can continue to play a leading role in ensuring peace and stability in the region if it remains united and proactive.

Will AUKUSRI be the Answer?

The Possibility of "AUKUSRI"

While Indonesia has not expressed interest in formally joining AUKUS, evolving security dynamics and potential shifts in domestic politics could lead to deeper engagement with AUKUS partners. The victory of Prabowo Subianto in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election may signal a shift in Indonesia's security policy, as Prabowo has consistently advocated for a more robust defence posture and closer ties

with Western powers, including Australia and the United States, to strengthen Indonesia's position in the Asia-Pacific (Sulaiman, 2023). Under his leadership, Indonesia might adopt a more proactive role in regional security, potentially expanding its defence partnerships with AUKUS members.

Prabowo's defence policy prioritises modernising Indonesia's military and enhancing maritime security in response to rising tensions in the South China Sea. Recent arms acquisitions, including advanced fighter jets and submarines from Western countries, highlight Indonesia's deepening defence ties with AUKUS members despite not being part of the formal pact (Adamy, 2022; Silalahi et al., 2023). Additionally, Indonesia's participation in joint military exercises, such as the annual Garuda Shield with the United States, signals a growing alignment in defence objectives (Samy, 2023). While formal participation in AUKUS remains politically sensitive due to Indonesia's non-aligned stance, deeper collaboration with AUKUS members appears increasingly plausible.

Evolving defence needs and the limitations of ASEAN mechanisms in addressing China's assertiveness may push Indonesia toward closer security partnerships (Prayitno, 2021). Prabowo's presidency could act as a catalyst for recalibrating Indonesia's security policy, balancing ASEAN-centric approaches with pragmatic defence cooperation with Western powers. Although formal participation in AUKUS is unlikely in the short term, shifting geopolitical dynamics and leadership priorities could lead to enhanced maritime security cooperation with AUKUS members (Rogers, 2022; Southgate, 2021).

Re-defining the Boundary of Indonesia's Free and Active Foreign Policy

Indonesia actively upholds its non-alignment principle and "free and active" foreign policy, which prevents closer alignment with AUKUS. Rooted in neutrality and independence, this policy demonstrates Indonesia's longstanding effort to remain impartial in global conflicts (Prayitno, 2021). However, the emerging AUKUSRI framework provides an opportunity for Indonesia to engage more robustly in regional defence while still adhering to its foreign policy principles (Silalahi et al., 2023). By advancing the Defence Cooperation Agreement with Australia, Indonesia signals a move toward deeper collaboration with regional partners (Southgate, 2021).

Indonesia faces the challenge of balancing this engagement without compromising its foundational "free and active" stance. By redefining this policy, Indonesia can pursue strategic defence partnerships without aligning with any specific bloc. Through AUKUSRI, Indonesia can strengthen maritime security and deterrence in the North Natuna Sea while maintaining its sovereignty and diplomatic independence (Adamy,

2022). Rather than abandoning non-alignment, Indonesia adapts this policy to address the complexities of an interconnected global defence environment (Rogers, 2022).

Indonesia must determine whether it can safeguard its non-alignment while engaging in defence initiatives that intersect with major powers' security interests. By implementing the AUKUSRI framework with clearly defined parameters, Indonesia can uphold its strategic autonomy while enhancing security against external threats, particularly China's assertiveness, without compromising its neutrality (Engelbrecht, 2024; Silalahi et al., 2023). These parameters ensure Indonesia balances its robust defence cooperation with its unwavering commitment to an independent foreign policy.

Non-binding Military Commitments

Indonesia's participation in AUKUSRI should prioritise non-binding military commitments, avoiding alliances that could compel the nation to take sides in international conflicts. This approach is critical to preserving Indonesia's sovereignty, enabling it to make independent decisions that align with its national interests. By steering clear of binding obligations to specific military blocs, Indonesia can maintain greater flexibility and adaptability in navigating its foreign relations amidst shifting global dynamics. Additionally, this independence reinforces national pride and confidence, allowing Indonesia to assert its role on the world stage without being constrained by the agendas of more powerful allies. It also empowers the country to engage in diplomatic dialogues that reflect its unique position and aspirations.

Focus on Maritime Security and Regional Stability

Cooperation under AUKUSRI should prioritise critical areas such as maritime security, counter-piracy, and environmental protection within the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the North Natuna Sea. Focusing on these pressing issues ensures that Indonesia's collaboration aligns with its direct national interests, avoiding entanglement in broader geopolitical rivalries involving AUKUS members and powers like China. This targeted approach not only enhances regional stability but also strengthens Indonesia's commitment to safeguarding its maritime resources and territorial integrity. By addressing these priorities, Indonesia can play a proactive role in fostering a secure and sustainable maritime environment for all nations in the region.

Respect for ASEAN Centrality

AUKUSRI must prioritise ASEAN's central role in regional affairs, aligning with Indonesia's commitment to ASEAN centrality. By engaging in trilateral or

multilateral defence cooperation while ensuring ASEAN remains the primary driver of regional security, Indonesia can solidify its leadership within Southeast Asia. This strategy safeguards Indonesia's autonomy and prevents foreign powers from overshadowing ASEAN's collective decision-making. Furthermore, it strengthens ties with neighbouring countries, fostering a cohesive regional framework based on trust and collaboration. Upholding ASEAN centrality promotes stability and unity among member states, ensuring security initiatives remain inclusive and representative of diverse interests.

Technological and Capacity-Building Cooperation

AUKUSRI should prioritise technological transfers, joint training programs, and capacity-building initiatives focused on cyber defence, intelligence sharing, and naval capabilities. These efforts would significantly strengthen Indonesia's defence capabilities while enabling it to remain independent of AUKUS's broader strategic objectives, which often focus on counterbalancing China's influence. By investing in these areas, Indonesia enhances its military readiness, fosters innovation, and promotes skill development within its defence sector. This approach ensures that Indonesia is well-equipped to address emerging threats while maintaining a self-reliant defence posture tailored to its unique security needs.

Strategic Flexibility and Multilateralism

Indonesia should prioritise strategic flexibility by engaging in defence cooperation with a diverse range of global powers, including China, Russia, and other regional partners, beyond AUKUS members. This openness ensures that Indonesia's foreign policy remains adaptable and responsive to shifting geopolitical dynamics while preserving its autonomy. A multifaceted approach allows Indonesia to cultivate diverse partnerships that expand its strategic options without over-reliance on any single bloc. By balancing relationships with multiple powers, Indonesia can navigate complex international dynamics more effectively while safeguarding its national interests.

No Permanent Foreign Military Presence

A crucial consideration for Indonesia is preventing the establishment of permanent foreign military bases or deployments on its territory. While joint exercises and collaborative training can strengthen defence capabilities, long-term military stationing risks compromising Indonesia's sovereignty and neutrality. By firmly setting this parameter, Indonesia can safeguard its territorial integrity while pursuing necessary defence collaborations. This approach not only protects national

interests but also reassures citizens of the government's commitment to maintaining independence from foreign military influence.

Consultative Mechanism

Establishing a consultative mechanism between Indonesia and AUKUSRI members is essential to enable Indonesia to effectively shape the scope and nature of cooperation. Regular high-level dialogues would provide a platform for Indonesia to voice its concerns and preferences regarding defence strategies in the region. Such proactive engagement preserves Indonesia's strategic autonomy while fostering collaborative relationships with AUKUS members. By actively participating in these discussions, Indonesia can influence outcomes that align with its national priorities and contribute meaningfully to regional security initiatives.

In summary, Indonesia's formal participation in AUKUS is unlikely soon, but an AUKUSRI framework offers a balanced approach to enhancing regional defence while upholding non-alignment, neutrality, and strategic autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia faces significant challenges in the North Natuna Sea due to intensified regional competition and China's increased military presence. The escalation of U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) and the formation of regional alliances have heightened tensions, complicating Indonesia's diplomatic and security strategies. In response, Indonesia has strengthened its maritime defences and participated in joint military exercises to safeguard its national interests. While the AUKUS agreement seeks to enhance military capabilities in the Asia-Pacific, it raises concerns about regional stability and ASEAN's role. Indonesia values improved defence cooperation but remains cautious of actions that might undermine ASEAN-led mechanisms or escalate tensions. The proposed "AUKUSRI" framework offers a balanced approach, enabling Indonesia to participate in regional defence initiatives while maintaining non-alignment and preserving its strategic autonomy.

While this study offers valuable insights into Indonesia's challenges and strategies in the North Natuna Sea, certain limitations require consideration. The analysis may not fully capture the long-term implications of evolving geopolitical dynamics or the precision of theoretical development in maritime security strategies. Future research should explore these aspects further, particularly the application of international relations theories within Indonesia's unique context. Moreover, the findings can inform policymakers and the public by providing actionable recommendations to strengthen

Indonesia's position internationally. Subsequent studies should aim to expand understanding of Indonesia's challenges while proposing practical solutions to enhance regional security and stability.

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