

# The North Natuna Sea Renamed as Geopolitics of Indonesia in Natuna

**Yugolastarob Komeini**

University of Pembangunan Nasional “veteran” Jakarta, Indonesia  
[yugolastarob@gmail.com](mailto:yugolastarob@gmail.com)

**Nurmasari Situmeang**

University of Pembangunan Nasional “veteran” Jakarta, Indonesia  
[nurmasing@yahoo.com](mailto:nurmasing@yahoo.com)

**Fadra**

University of Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Religious)  
[fadra@dsn.moestopo.ac.id](mailto:fadra@dsn.moestopo.ac.id)

**Abstract:** This study provides the analysis of the dynamic of strategic feature in South China Sea, especially China’s nine-dash line policy. This study extends to Indonesia’s response through the geopolitical policy to protect sovereignty and marine sources in Natuna. Certain international reports, together with several official document and literatures will be gained to collect some data to give a picture of the analysis. The main findings in this analysis explain that history factor used by China finally impacts Indonesia sovereignty and marine sources in Natuna. Strategically, Indonesia responses those threats through name changing and new map to protect its interests as geopolitical step. The result of this study highlights that adaptation on the geopolitic development means the preparation to calculate the national interest, especially related to great powers rivalry.

**KEYWORD:** Strategic Feature, Indonesia, Natuna, Geopolitics.

## I. INTRODUCTION

China’s nine-dash line policy which covers almost all South China Sea territorial, according to Beijing, reflects and is justified by the experience of historic surveying expeditions, fishing, and naval activities dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Claims to this area are also reflected in a 1947 map drawn by the defunct Kuomintang government and reaffirmed in official maps published by the People’s Republic of China from 1949-present (Chapman, 2014: 6). The South China Sea (SCS) is becoming an increasingly contentious source of geopolitical tension due to its significance as an international trade route, possessor of potentially significant oil and natural gas resources (Chapman, 2014: 1, Korkut, 2017: 445). South China Sea region is considered as strategic and geopolitical developments that presents the pattern of conflict once the conflict of interests (Scott, 2013: 54). The pattern itself gives a picture of strategic feature in Southeast Asia region and geopolitics response, including Indonesia. The paper will analyze the dynamic of strategic feature in South China Sea, especially China’s nine-dash line policy. This study extends to Indonesia’s response through the geopolitical policy to protect sovereignty and marine source in Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) of Indonesia in Natuna which is near South China Sea which also covered by China’s nine-dash line.

At the centre of the disputes are the hardening positions of a number of claimant states. At the same time, there is growing tension between a rising China, poised to exercise greater influence in the region, and the United States as the ‘status quo’ power determined to preserve its presence in a region of growing strategic salience. Simply put, the South China Sea is becoming a potential flash-point, both because of the unresolved territorial disputes among claimant states, and also as a result of pending great-power rivalry between the United States and China (Yuan, 2012: 4).

For an archipelagic country not involved in territorial claims, Indonesia’s territorial territory in Natuna is adjacent to the

hot sphere of conflict, namely the South China Sea. The impact of it lies on intensified activity, including: naming islands and features; conducting marine survey and exploration activities which affects Indonesia's territorial sovereignty violations by China, not only through affirmations in the nine-dash line policy where Natuna is included, but also the illegal exploration of Chinese fishermen in the Natuna region.

### **Structural Feature of Middle Power in Maintaining International Order**

Almost all research focuses on rivalry between China-US or China with claimant states. Not many have discussed the urgency or response of Indonesia in anticipating the impact of the conflict. China's nine-dash line is a geopolitical policy aimed at securing China's backyard, but directly, threatening Indonesia's sovereignty.

The basis of Unclos 1982, confirms that the need for Indonesia to secure the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In fact, foreign military activities in EEZs of Indonesia, at times perceived to obstruct and endanger navigation and over-flights, resulting in serious incidents several times.

Related to the above issues, strategic studies emphasize the development of political structures that lead to the development and interaction between countries that produce strategic features and technology as an instrument of strength. Strategic features and technologies formed in the interaction between actors illustrate the relationship of anarchy and balance form of power to each other (Buzan, 1987: 2).

Strategy studies in the region that involve many actors will lead to inter-state interaction by using political steps as a strategy so that the atmosphere of development or dynamics of politics and security will lead to strategic features that apply in certain issues.

Strategic features that develop as a result of the political goals of the country that shape the political structure and the impact of inter-state interactions that describe conflicts of interest will be the main characteristic of the issue or character of certain political structures in an issue or issue development in the region.

The strategic objectives of a politically-run country are inseparable from geopolitical interests in an area that is considered important and provides a great political and security interest, especially by countries with global ambitions. Interaction between countries that have global ambition is running geopolitical steps so that the interaction is folded in the political structure between countries that compete produce strategic features and impact on the deployment of military technological strength.

Geopolitics emphasis on new power distribution, changes in the area of strategy, and the changes in the area or zone of potential conflict. In an international system, geopolitics is not constant but becomes a variable that explains changes in the geographical distribution and service economy, as well as natural resources. As a variable, geopolitics affects and specify a country geostrategy. Geostrategy became the rationale for how a country trying to projecting military power and directing the activities of diplomacy. In other words, geostrategy is an interpretation and response to the condition of a country's geopolitics (Grygiel, 2006: 22-23).

When states take into account the geopolitical situation and pursue a geostrategy that reflects it-that is, when they control centers of resources and lines of communications-they increase and maintain their position of power. When state fails to, or choose not to, extend its control over resources and routes, other states are likely to fill the vacuum (Grygiel, 2006: 23).

In the context of strategic, communications line or route linking one country to another. Criteria relations between nations covered by the exchange of commercial, clash of military and information exchange a country will have difficulty in maintaining his power if the state is unable to control the centers of resources and communication lines geographic, and consequential inability to retain influence at once his power against other countries.

Geopolitical context describes the territorial strategic value, both in terms of sovereignty, functionality or content of natural resources there. This has an impact on territorial added value that has profound implications for geoeconomy. It was encouraging every state to increase the influence and use his power through control of territory or geostrategy. Geopolitical interests, according to Colin Gray, the linkages between elements of geography, and political strategy, namely: "...all politics is geopolitics..all strategy is geostrategy." Connection between geography, strategy and politics provides a very significant consequences, especially for the country. Associated with the South China Sea conflict, geopolitical also spoke about the geography in the inward-looking dimension, where geography is defined as all forms, shapes and body, which resides in the sovereign territory of a country. Moreover, the conflict cannot be separated from the function of the geographic of South China Sea which is strategically important for sea line of transportation.

Theoretically, geopolitical competition is reshaping the global economy and unravelling global power relationships and governance which are changing the rules for competition between countries and even the arenas in which these frictions play out. It shows a world where: (Leonard, 2015: 3).

1. The pursuit of power is as important as the pursuit of profit, with increasing state presence in economies.
2. Economic warfare is undermining economic integration

## II. THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Natuna is a salient territory of Indonesia which is quite busy talked about especially when China's increasingly offensive presence in the South China Sea region. The Natuna area adjacent to the South China Sea makes the area particularly vulnerable, especially when China claims ownership of Natuna. To that end, Indonesia realizes that the threat of sovereignty is happening today. This form of threat of sovereignty requires a handling. Geopolitical measures to secure sovereignty and protect marine sources are undertaken by avoiding confrontational measures.

This paper is expected to explain Indonesia's "soft" step that has a positive impact as well as illustrates Indonesia's steps in dealing with the threat of sovereignty by adapting to geopolitical developments in the South China Sea.

## III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In February 1992, China's National People's Congress (NPC), the country's putative legislature, passed the Law of Territorial Waters and Contiguous Zone that claims complete control over the land features in the South China Sea and their adjacent waters and asserts that it has power to exercise jurisdiction over its territories (Yuan, 2012: 13). China's unilateral claim has long been the country's old plan to take control of the country's backyard.

In its May 2009 *note verbale*, Beijing reiterates its position that China "has indisputable sovereignty over the islands of the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof. The above position is consistently held by the Chinese Government, and is widely known by the international community." China also attached to its diplomatic note a well-known map with the contested nine-dashed line (the Chinese call it the traditional maritime boundary line or *chuantong haijiang xian*) (Yuan, 2012: 14, Burgess, 2003: 8). As the International Crisis Group notes in a recent report, "China has yet to publicly clarify the legal status of the so-called nine-dashed line that appears on most Chinese maps, encompassing most of the South China Sea (Yuan, 2012: 15).

This problem is then coldly responded by China. The country considers that historical factors are factors that must be recognized by other countries. China does not use a clear legal basis to support its unilateral claim, while on the other hand, the South China Sea is full of interests, both in Southeast Asia and other countries outside Asia.

There were actually serious protests by other States after the 2009 claim. Here, one has to note the previous discussion that acquiescence of maritime claims is different from the acquiescence of land claims because, unlike land claims, the interests involved are barely bilateral and many states share a common interest in maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight in the particular sea area. This is especially true in the case of the SCS, given its large proportion of global shipping that passes through this area and proximity to the Malacca Strait. This means that the position of global shipping power States, such as the United States, is of significance (Korkut and Kang, 2017: 443).

The China-US conflict, as well as China with other countries in Southeast Asia, especially claimant states are starting to emerge. China with political and historical steps, while the US continues to echo the freedom of navigation. While countries like Vietnam and the Philippines remain on sovereignty issues.

And finally, U.S. insistence on freedom of navigation and its right to carry military activities in the South China Sea, including within coastal states' EEZs, is increasingly being challenged by China as it views U.S. surveillance and intelligence gathering a serious threat to its national security. This last point is becoming more contentious as China and the United States find themselves in more frequent maritime encounters in the Western Pacific. Granted, both Beijing and Washington accept that freedom of navigation pertains to areas of high seas and within the EEZs of states. However, the two countries hold different interpretations of the scope and the nature of activities in these areas, and the extent to which such activities are allowed under international law (Yuan, 2012: 12).

This becomes strategic feature which plays and decides the political structures among states' interaction. Conditions explain how conflicts of interest are the main characteristic of an ever-expanding conflict. China with a nine-dash line, while the US with freedom of navigation, as well as issues of sovereignty that form a strategic feature in the development of the South China Sea conflict.

It is undeniable that China's move in the region is closely linked to the expanding geopolitical and geo-strategic influence of the country, especially the strengthening and expansion of influence in Asia where the United States has an important role. On the other hand, the US did not want to lose influence. For that country took the countries that have a position opposite to China. Steps of alliance and international law are an option.

The alliance with Southeast Asian countries, particularly the US claimant states, has conducted joint military exercises and strengthened political ties, while China, drastically, built military bases, especially in the Spratly Islands. The increasing intensity of military technology use in the region, making the impact of the conflict continue to grow. China remains consistent with its geopolitical moves, while other nations continue to reject China's presence in the South China Sea.

Indonesia now has uncontested sovereignty over the Natuna Islands in the southern part of the South China Sea and, as a result, a 200-mile zone (or even shelf area beyond that) may extend into what is understood as being the Spratly Island area. One estimate of the ocean areas disputed by the various claimants is over 2,045,000 square kilometers (Yuan, 2012: 13). This consequences arose as the impact of nine-dash line policy of Cina, which covers Natuna's sea.

Geopolitical China through the nine-dash line became the country's reference to continue to control the area that became the world's trade routes. Fatal, the area is also used as a fishing area by Chinese fishermen.

A Chinese fishing vessel encroached into Natuna waters and was arrested by an Indonesian patrol boat. However, a Chinese patrol vessel quickly appeared and intervened to free the Chinese fishing boat. The Indonesian Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries announced this episode to the press and protested to Beijing. Beijing's Foreign Ministry responded by stating that the Chinese fishermen were doing their regular work on their "traditional fishing ground" (Suryadinata, 2017: 3). The words "traditional fishing ground" arose as a justification over China nine-dash line policy based on historical factor.

Unclear territorial boundaries caused Chinese fishermen to enter the waters of EEZ Indonesia. This not only affects the loss of marine resources, but also the sovereignty of Indonesia where the Chinese nine-dash line includes Natuna waters.

On 14 July 2017 Deputy Minister of Maritime Affairs Arif Havas Oegroseno officially launched the new map of the Republic of Indonesia, pointing out that the Natuna Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has been renamed as "Laut Natuna Utara" (North Natuna Sea). The area is part of the South China Sea. Moreover, the Natuna EEZ lies partially within China's "Nine-Dash Line", which has not been recognized by Indonesia. The new map, prepared over nine months from October 2016, was signed by 21 Indonesian ministers and state agencies (Suryadinata, 2017: 2). The renaming is also a signal to China of the seriousness of Indonesia's concerns about the sovereignty of its EEZ around the Natunas (Suryadinata, 2017: 5)

Naming the North Natuna Sea by Indonesia is intended to clarify the waters of the South China Sea which has been claimed China unilaterally through the nine-dash line. Therefore, the response of Indonesia is carried out through the change of name of some areas of South China Sea which became the territory of EEZ Indonesia as a form of territorial clarity as well as the attitude of Indonesia that does not recognize unilateral claim of China.

China's unilateral claim to the South China Sea via nine-dash line has consequences on sovereign claims that have an impact on strengthening China's position that does not see the limits of EEZ of Indonesia. If this is left then it will cause concern to the absence of recognition of the Indonesian territorial boundary in the South China Sea or northern Natuna. This is evident from the attitude of China that still affirms the nine-dash-line as the traditional waters of China since the first.

The consequence is also seen in Chinese fishermen who often do fishing activities by entering the territorial waters of Indonesia in Natuna. This fact was also attributed to the presence of Chinese military and coast guardians operating in the Natuna region for more than 18 months. This then indicates that China's threat to Indonesia lies in Indonesia's marine resources.

The incident in Natuna in 2016 has occurred 3 times, ie on March 19, May 28, and June 16. The incident led to a confrontation between Indonesian and Chinese ships, as Chinese fishing boats engaged in fishing activities around the Natuna Archipelago under the guard of the country's coastal surveillance boats.

Therefore, the protection of ZEE's sovereignty and marine resources in the Indonesian border region of Natuna is the main reason. Indonesia's geopolitical step through the change of name to North Natuna Sea as well as renewing the map of Indonesian territory that has not been updated since 2005, became a brilliant geopolitical strategy in protecting the territorial sovereignty and marine resources without triggering military confrontation.

On the other hand, Indonesia will avoid entering into the alliance and will continue in relations with both US and Chinese countries. Indonesia places on importance, with ASEAN at its core, to maintain regional stability and to facilitate cooperation. With the strengthening of regional institutions, Indonesia hopes to "engage and limit" China and the US (Natasha, 2015: 1).

The geopolitical step is undertaken by Indonesia through the official announcement of North Natuna Names in accordance with the standards set by the International Hydrographic Organization and the provisions of the Electronic Navigational Chart, which affirms Indonesia's sovereignty from the perspective of international law.

What Indonesia has done is a geopolitical step that should be addressed by other countries, especially China. Something that no need to be criticized but appreciated by those countries that are politically opposed to China on the South China Sea issue. This is because Indonesia's geopolitical policy actually lies in the strengthening and recognition of the world associated with the jurisdiction of Indonesia's EEZ in Natuna as an entity of Indonesian sovereignty and the rejection of the presence of foreign parties in the territory of the Republic of Indonesia.

There is no reason China can use to protest or reject what Indonesia is doing. The re-naming of Indonesia's sovereign territory to North Natuna Sea is not only on the political level in Indonesia's relations with China, but also to reinforce the implementation of the World Maritime Fulcrum policy as well as Indonesia's ability to protect the sovereignty of the state, especially sovereignty and marine resources of Indonesia in EEZ of North Natuna Sea.

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