



Paragunboat Diplomacy: Indonesia's Contemporary Maritime Diplomacy vis-à-vis Disputes at Sea

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Abstract

Power projection at sea has become common in the South China Sea. As a non-claimant state, Indonesia's attempts to safeguard its sovereign jurisdiction in the North Natuna Seas have been met with assertiveness. With the rise in tensions, the utilization of militaristic hard power assets is perceived as non-strategic due to the coercive signals it transmits to adversaries. Consequently, a rising trend is identified, in which states are orienting to the use of civilian fleets such as maritime constabulary forces and coast guards, as alternative means to assert their authority over disputed waters. This qualitative research takes an interpretive stance and assesses secondary data from the Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative and the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency between 2018-2022. It inquires about Indonesia's contemporary maritime diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis assertiveness in contested waters and concludes that Indonesia employs 'paragunboat diplomacy,' a term outlining a state's preferences over maritime constabulary forces to manage international relations at sea. Paragunboat diplomacy benefits from a non-confrontational posture and tactical flexibility, which fits into Indonesia's strategic position as a non-claimant state to the South China Sea and ensures the solidification of Indonesia's claims in the North Natuna Seas.

Keywords: Power projection, South China Sea, Indonesia, Maritime constabulary forces, Paragunboat diplomacy