

## Strategic Leadership of Indonesia's Presidents in the Post-Reform Era: Protecting Sovereignty in the South China Sea



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**ABSTRACT:** Post-Reformation, Indonesia faces significant geopolitical challenges in the South China Sea, an area with a high potential for conflict due to overlapping territorial claims, especially with China. This article analyzes the leadership strategies implemented by Indonesian presidents from the Reformation era to the present in dealing with this issue. Using a qualitative approach, this research explores the diplomatic and defence policies implemented to maintain regional sovereignty and stability. Abdurrahman Wahid to Joko Widodo have implemented various approaches, ranging from multilateral diplomacy within the ASEAN framework, building naval capabilities, to strengthening international cooperation. The results of the analysis show that although the leadership style and policy priorities of each president are different, there is continuity in the commitment to upholding international law, especially UNCLOS, and strengthening regional cooperation as the main foundation for facing this challenge. This article also highlights the future challenges and opportunities facing Indonesia in the context of evolving global political and security dynamics.

**KEYWORDS:** South China Sea, leadership strategy, Indonesia, post-Reformation, geopolitics

### INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea is one of the most crucial and contested areas in Southeast Asia. The presence of abundant natural resources, especially oil and gas, makes this area a major attraction for many surrounding countries (Arifin, 2021). The significant energy reserves in this sea have not only attracted the interest of Southeast Asian countries but have also attracted the attention of global powers such as China and the United States, which depend heavily on access to energy resources for their economic development and industrial survival (Buğrahan Bican, 2023).

Apart from its rich natural resources, the South China Sea also has high strategic value as a busy international shipping lane (Chenchen Chen et al., 2017). Every year, trillions of dollars of global trade pass through these waters, making them one of the busiest maritime routes in the world. This shipping lane is important for various countries, including countries far from this region, because it connects East Asia with Europe and the Middle East, as well as Pacific countries with the Indian Ocean (Danling Tang et al., 2023). Thus, stability and security in the South China Sea are critical issues that affect the global economy.

Furthermore, the geopolitical interests of various large countries are increasingly increasing tensions in this region. China, with its historical claims to most of the South China Sea, often confronts ASEAN countries that have overlapping claims (Danling Tang et al., 2023). In addition, the United States' military presence in the region as part of its strategy to balance Chinese power and maintain freedom of navigation adds complexity to the situation (Dapeng Zhao et al., 2020). This makes the South China Sea the centre of attention in international relations, where every step and policy taken by the countries involved can affect the balance of power and stability of the region as a whole.

Indonesia, as the largest archipelagic country with the second longest coastline in the world, has a vital interest in protecting its sovereignty. One of the main focus points is the Natuna Sea, an area directly bordering the South China Sea. This maritime border region is not only important because of its geographical position, but also because of the wealth of natural resources it contains (Fahlesa Munabari et al., 2021). Thus, monitoring and protecting the Natuna Sea has become an increasingly urgent task for Indonesia in implementing its maritime policies and maintaining the country's territorial integrity from potential external threats (Charles Pasaribu et al., 2023).

After the 1998 Reform era, Indonesia experienced significant changes in the domestic political order which opened up opportunities to strengthen its role and influence in the maritime region. Reforms change the political structure and empower the people, which in turn provides more freedom and transparency in governance. In the maritime context, this change allows the development of policies that are more competent and responsive to national needs and international challenges, as well as strengthening Indonesia's involvement in maritime diplomacy in the Southeast Asia region.

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However, besides opportunities, challenges are also inevitable (Renaldi Renaldi et al., 2023). In the Natuna Sea, Indonesia must face various threats related to sovereignty, such as illegal activities, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as potential disputes with neighbouring countries regarding maritime boundaries. This requires the Indonesian government to not only strengthen the capabilities of its navy and water guards but also adopt an effective foreign policy in establishing international cooperation (Silvia Dian Anggraini et al., 2018). In addition, improving maritime surveillance technology is also a priority to ensure the security and sustainable management of marine resources.

Indonesia's interests in the Natuna Sea are also closely related to geopolitical dynamics in the South China Sea. Conflicts of interest between China and ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, often create tensions that have the potential to disrupt regional stability (de Leon & Inez Z. Ponce de Leon, 2022). In this case, Indonesia seeks to play an important role as a mediator and stabilizer, through various multilateral forums such as ASEAN and other international meetings (Dewa Gede Sudika Mangku & Muhammad Adam Firdaus, 2022). Smooth and intelligent diplomacy is the key for Indonesia in balancing relations with China while maintaining sovereignty over its territory (Guoqiang Li & Li, 2017).

Moreover, strengthening Indonesia's position in the Natuna Sea is also in line with the vision of President Joko Widodo who introduced the concept of the World Maritime Axis (Siti Sarah et al., 2022). This concept aims to make Indonesia a centre of maritime activity that has full sovereignty, can protect its borders, and plays an active role in global maritime trade and security. Through improving maritime infrastructure, sustainable maritime economic development, and responding to security challenges, Indonesia continues to strive to maintain and strengthen its position as the strongest maritime country in the region. Integration of domestic and international policies is a crucial step to achieve this vision so that Indonesia can optimize its maritime potential for national prosperity and regional stability (Kaewkamol Pitakdumrongkit & Pitakdumrongkit, 2015).

### **Formulation of the problem**

This research aims to examine the strategic leadership of Indonesian Presidents in the post-Reformation era in protecting state sovereignty in the South China Sea region. Amid complex geopolitical dynamics, this research seeks to answer several critical questions that enable a deeper understanding of the leadership strategies implemented from time to time. The main questions to be answered through this research include: what strategies have each Indonesian President taken since the Reformation era in facing challenges in the South China Sea? Next, this research will explore the factors that influence maritime policies and dig deeper into the internal and external dynamics that impact strategic decisions. This study will not only highlight diplomatic and military approaches but also consider economic, social and technological aspects that play an important role in implementing maritime policy.

This research also aims to assess the effectiveness of the steps taken by the Indonesian government in maintaining sovereignty in the disputed areas of the South China Sea. Through critical analysis of various policies and initiatives, this research will evaluate whether the actions taken are delivering the desired results in terms of security, stability and management of maritime resources. This effectiveness will be measured by looking at the real impact on maritime conflicts, increasing naval capabilities, and diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries and regional powers. It is hoped that the findings from this research will provide valuable insight for policymakers and academics about the complexities of maintaining maritime sovereignty amidst global competition and changes in domestic politics, as well as provide strategic recommendations for the future of managing Indonesian maritime policy.

### **Research Objectives**

This research aims to analyze the policies and leadership strategies of the Indonesian President regarding the issue of sovereignty in the South China Sea. In this process, various strategies adopted by every Indonesian President since the post-Reformation era will be evaluated in dealing with emerging challenges in the region. The main focus is on diplomatic and military approaches, as well as Indonesia's interactions with neighbouring countries and global powers in a maritime context. Apart from that, this research also seeks to identify factors that influence decision-making within the maritime policy framework, both from a political, economic, technological and social perspective.

Apart from policy analysis, this research also evaluates the challenges and opportunities faced in implementing maritime policy by Indonesia. This assessment includes an assessment of the effectiveness of the steps taken by the Indonesian government in maintaining its maritime sovereignty, including increasing naval capabilities and managing diplomatic relations. Based on historical analysis and contemporary conditions, this research will formulate strategic recommendations aimed at strengthening Indonesia's maritime policy in the future. The findings from this research are expected to provide a comprehensive view that supports Indonesia's efforts to manage the South China Sea region effectively and sustainably.

### **Research Gaps**

Although much research has been conducted on maritime conflict and policy in the South China Sea, most studies tend to focus on large countries such as China, the United States, and ASEAN member states collectively. However, there is a lack of research that specifically analyzes the leadership policies of heads of state, especially in Indonesia, as well as the challenges and

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opportunities faced specifically by Indonesia. In addition, previous studies often only emphasize one aspect, such as the diplomatic or military approach, without looking at the integration of various policies implemented by Indonesian leaders from time to time.

This research offers novelty by providing a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the Indonesian President's leadership policies and strategies regarding the issue of sovereignty in the South China Sea. This research not only discusses diplomatic and military approaches but also evaluates the implementation of maritime policy from various perspectives, including political, economic, technological and social. Apart from that, this research also provides strategic recommendations based on historical analysis and contemporary conditions. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide new, more comprehensive and strategic insights for strengthening Indonesia's maritime policy in the future.

### **Research methods**

This research will use a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore Indonesia's leadership policies in the South China Sea. Case studies were chosen because they allow researchers to explore in-depth and understand the specific context and dynamics of policies implemented by Indonesian leaders throughout the relevant period. This approach provides flexibility in answering research questions by taking a broader perspective, especially related to maritime policy and the complex dynamics of international relations in the region.

To complete the analysis, this research will also use document analysis which includes various main data sources such as policy documents, official government reports, and related news from various media. Policy documents and official government reports will provide an overview of the strategies and approaches taken by the Indonesian government formally, while related news will help in understanding the socio-political context and public response to the policies implemented. This combination will allow research to not only evaluate policies theoretically but also look at their implementation and impact in practice.

### **Benefits of research**

This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Indonesian maritime policy in the post-Reformation era. Significant political and economic changes after the Reformation have had major implications for Indonesian maritime policy, both in the national and international context. Through this research, it is hoped that it will be possible to reveal how the Indonesian government responds to emerging challenges and opportunities, as well as navigate the complexities of maintaining maritime sovereignty amidst increasingly intensive global and regional competition. A qualitative approach using the case study method can provide a more comprehensive picture of the decision-making process and policy implementation in this sector. In addition, this research aims to provide information that can be used by policymakers in formulating more effective strategies to protect Indonesia's sovereignty. With an in-depth analysis of maritime policy and its relationship with geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics, the results of this research can be an important reference for decision-makers. Accurate and detailed information about policies that have been implemented and their impact will help in designing strategies that are sustainable, effective and adaptive to changing situations in the field. This is crucial considering the important role of maritime in maintaining national security and Indonesia's economic stability.

It is also hoped that this research can add to the scientific literature regarding strategic leadership and maritime security in the Southeast Asia region. Strategic leadership in the maritime context describes how countries in this region, especially Indonesia, position themselves and interact with each other to maintain and develop their maritime potential. Through in-depth study, this research will make a significant contribution to the academic understanding of how maritime policy is implemented in the field, as well as the challenges faced in this process. It will be a valuable resource for other researchers interested in the study of maritime policy and international relations in Southeast Asia.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Leadership strategy is an approach designed by leaders to achieve organizational goals effectively and efficiently. This strategy involves various aspects, ranging from the organization's vision and mission to special techniques in motivating and directing the team (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). A good leadership strategy must consider various factors such as organizational culture, team members' strengths and weaknesses, and market dynamics or the external environment. One of the main elements of a leadership strategy is a clear vision and mission (Cameron, 2012). The vision is a long-term picture of where the organization wants to go, while the mission is the concrete steps that will be taken to achieve that vision. An effective leader can communicate this vision and mission in an inspiring way so that all team members are motivated and know the direction they want to go together. Visionary leadership is very important in creating a collaborative spirit and dedication to a common goal (Kezar, 2008).

Leaders need to identify and maximize team strengths. This is done through an in-depth assessment of the skills and talents of individuals within the team. By placing team members in positions where they can excel and grow their skills, leaders create a positive and productive work environment. Apart from that, a good leader must also be able to recognize and overcome existing weaknesses, either through additional training or adjusting work strategies. Leadership strategies cannot be separated from the dynamic external environmental context (Avolio, 2007). Leaders must have the adaptive ability to change strategies in line with

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market changes or other relevant external dynamics. This requires good analytical skills as well as flexibility in decision-making. A leadership strategy that can adapt to change will ensure that the organization remains relevant and competitive.

Reform in Indonesia began in the late 1990s, as a response to widespread disappointment with the New Order regime under the leadership of Soeharto who had been in power for 32 years (Pekuwaly, 2012). The New Order period was marked by widespread authoritarianism, corruption, collusion and nepotism (KKN), as well as widening economic inequality. The Asian economic crisis in 1997 made things worse, causing inflation, unemployment and poverty to soar drastically (Sirot, 2020). Popular dissatisfaction, especially among students and pro-democracy groups, escalated and prompted large-scale demonstrations that took place in various cities.

In May 1998, increasingly intense demonstrations and social unrest forced Suharto to resign, ending the New Order era. BJ Habibie was then appointed interim president and initiated a series of important reforms (Soebhan, 2000). This included constitutional amendments that strengthened democracy and human rights, as well as holding the first free general elections in 1999 which were won by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) under the leadership of Megawati Sukarnoputri. Decentralization efforts are also being made to give more authority to regional governments to create more responsive and transparent governance (Huda, 2017).

The impact of the Reformation in Indonesia is very significant. Democratization brought major changes in the political structure with the birth of multiparty democracy (Klaudia & Wartha, 2020). Press freedom and freedom of expression have increased significantly although challenges remain. The legal system and law enforcement are also undergoing reform to become more accountable. The role of civil society in monitoring the government and advocating for people's rights is increasingly strengthening (Yusriadi, 2018). Even though it still faces challenges such as corruption, inequality, and human rights issues, the Reformation is an important milestone in Indonesia's history that paved the way for a more democratic and just country.

The South China Sea is a strategic area with very high economic and geopolitical importance. This area contains abundant oil and gas reserves and very important international shipping lanes, where an estimated one-third of the world's shipping lanes pass through the region (Kanaev Evgeny Alexandrovich et al., 2015). Tensions in the South China Sea increased especially after China made extensive territorial claims, covering almost the entire South China Sea, using the "Nine-Dash Line" concept. This claim clashes with similar claims from several ASEAN member countries, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. This situation creates complex geopolitical dynamics and often triggers military tensions (Kanaev Evgeny & Kanaev, 2013).

Even though Indonesia is not a claimant in the South China Sea, it has an interest in maintaining regional sovereignty and stability, especially in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the Natuna Islands which intersects with China's nine-dash line claim (B. Irianto & Sutrisno Sutrisno, 2024). During the Reformation period after 1998, the Indonesian government had to face various domestic challenges (Haning, 2018) while seeking a more active and strategic role and policies on the international stage. An active diplomatic approach known as "free and active" remains the cornerstone, emphasizing the importance of resolving conflicts through international law, in particular the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Through political reform and democratization, Indonesia can be more vocal in advocating regional peace and stability in international forums such as ASEAN and the UN. Indonesian leadership often emphasizes the importance of diplomatic steps and multilateral dialogue to avoid escalation of conflict in the South China Sea. This is in line with reform values that prioritize transparency, democracy and a law-based approach. However, challenges remain, especially in maintaining sovereignty and national interests amidst increasingly complex geopolitical dynamics in the region.

After the reform, Indonesian presidents have adopted various strategic policies to maintain sovereignty in the South China Sea. In the era of President Abdurrahman Wahid's administration (1999-2001), multilateral approaches to diplomacy and dialogue were emphasized. Wahid is active in the ASEAN forum and tries to strengthen bilateral relations with neighbouring countries to create an atmosphere of peace and stability in the region. Although his government's main focus was economic recovery and domestic political stability, concern for the international situation remained, with an emphasis on the principle of non-alignment and resolving disputes through legal channels.

The reign of President Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001-2004) added a new dimension to Indonesia's strategy in the South China Sea. Megawati's policies tend to encourage intensive bilateral economic and diplomatic cooperation, especially with China. This can be seen from the signing of various economic and maritime cooperation agreements, although many parties criticize that this policy does not discuss security and sovereignty aspects in depth. However, Megawati remains committed to encouraging conflict resolution through ASEAN and supports the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC).

Entering the era of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014), policies became more proactive and comprehensive. SBY strengthened the multilateral framework through ASEAN and introduced the concept of "dynamic equilibrium" to maintain the balance of power in Southeast Asia. Increasing the defence budget and military modernization are priorities to ensure maritime sovereignty, including in the South China Sea region (Hartati, 2021). SBY also initiated various joint military exercises with friendly countries and was active in international diplomacy to support the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as a basis for resolving disputes.

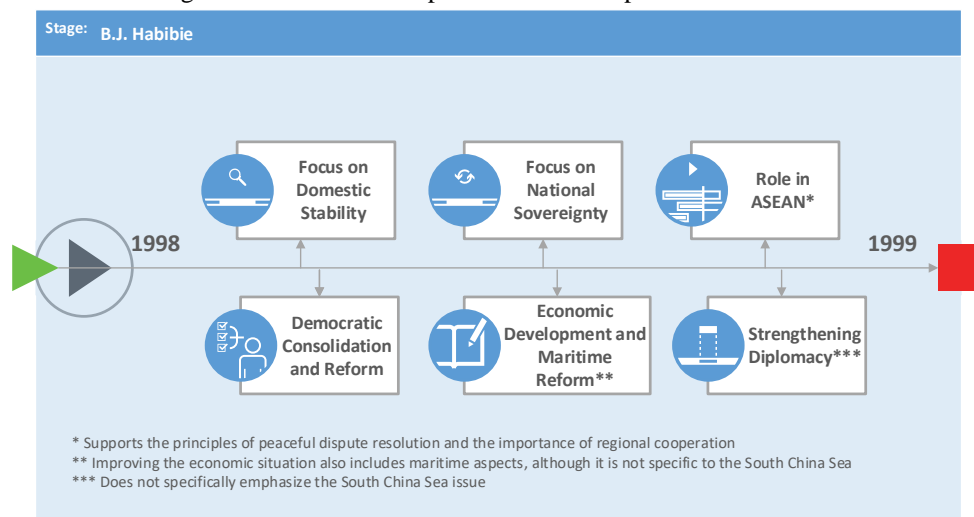
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Under the leadership of President Joko Widodo (2014-present), concrete steps to maintain sovereignty in the South China Sea have been increasingly strengthened. Jokowi emphasized the importance of developing Indonesia's maritime power as the "World Maritime Axis". Modernization of the naval fleet, more active maritime patrols, and military presence in the Natuna Islands have been intensified to ward off all forms of threats (Sitanggang, 2021). This policy also goes hand in hand with a strong diplomatic approach, where Indonesia firmly rejects China's nine-dash line claims in international forums and fully supports international maritime law. The government is also encouraging multi-stakeholder maritime initiatives, including cooperation in maritime security and maritime economic development with ASEAN countries and other strategic partners.

Maintaining the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia (RI) is a complex and multifaceted task that requires a strong leadership strategy. National sovereignty is the right and authority of a country to regulate all policies and affairs within its territory without interference from outside parties. Handling the conflict in the South China Sea is one of the big challenges for every post-Reform Indonesian president. Each president has a different approach and strategy in dealing with this issue. The following is an explanation of the steps and policies of several Indonesian presidents in handling the conflict in the South China Sea.

### Leadership of President BJ Habibie (1998-1999)

During the administration of President BJ Habibie (1998-1999), the South China Sea issue did not receive as much attention as it did in the following years. Habibie's relatively short term in office made him focus more on various pressing domestic issues, such as the economic crisis, democratic transition and restoration of political stability in Indonesia. When Habibie led, his main priority was overcoming the economic and political crisis that was hitting Indonesia. Therefore, foreign issues, including the South China Sea dispute, do not receive significant attention compared to domestic problems.



**Figure 1. B.J. Habibie's Leadership Strategy**

Source: Obtained from various sources

As an active member of ASEAN, Indonesia under Habibie's leadership continues to support regional efforts to create stability and security, including in the South China Sea. In this context, although not a major concern, Indonesia supports the principles of peaceful dispute resolution and the importance of regional cooperation. Habibie understands that regional stability can help national recovery and development, so support for ASEAN remains an important element in Indonesia's foreign policy.

Habibie's government placed greater emphasis on the process of democratic consolidation and reform in various fields. This primary focus on political stability and institutional reform does not remove maritime and border issues from Indonesia's foreign policy agenda. Despite this, the South China Sea issue is not a top priority, driven more by the urgency of pressing domestic reforms. However, foreign policy continues to promote the principles of peace and cooperation.

Even though it did not specifically target the South China Sea, Indonesian diplomacy in the Habibie era still supported a multilateral approach and respect for international law, including UNCLOS. This diplomatic approach is an important basis for Indonesia's subsequent maritime policy. Habibie understood the importance of a multilateral approach in creating regional stability and security, which became the forerunner of Indonesia's diplomatic path in the future.

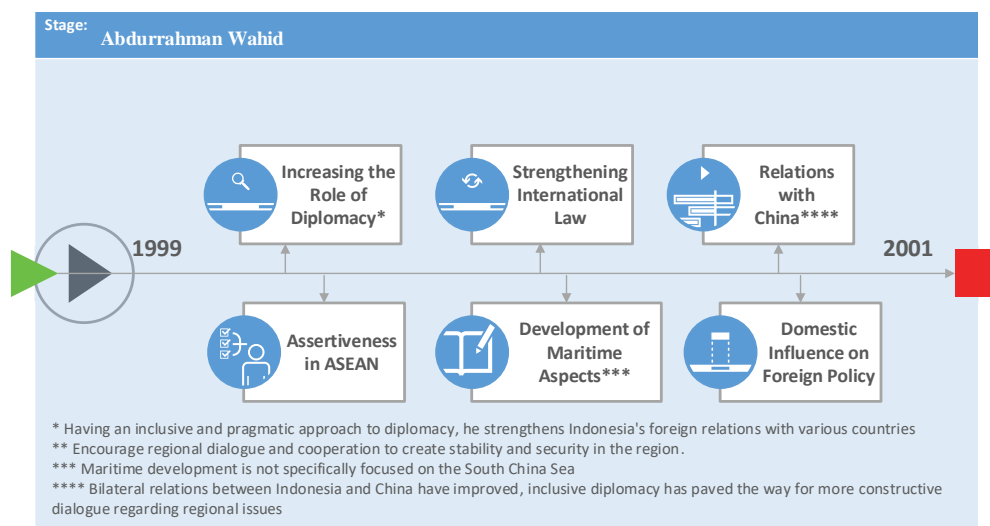
Habibie prioritized national sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this context, maritime issues remained important, even though the South China Sea was not the main focus at that time. Efforts to improve the economic situation also include maritime aspects, including increasing maritime capabilities and the security of Indonesia's waters in general. As a result of this policy, Indonesia began to build the foundations that its successors would later focus more on in facing challenges in the South China Sea. Although the South China Sea issue was not the main focus during Habibie's administration, the principles developed by Indonesia in the context of regional cooperation and peaceful dispute resolution remained an important basis. This was then continued and

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deepened by subsequent governments as tensions increased in the South China Sea region and Indonesia's strategic role in regional geopolitical dynamics.

### Leadership of President Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001)

During the reign of President Abdurrahman Wahid, better known as Gus Dur, the South China Sea issue began to receive more attention in Indonesia's foreign policy. This occurs as tensions increase in the region. However, the period of Abdurrahman Wahid's reign was also marked by a strong focus on domestic issues, including the democratization process, economic reform, and resolving internal conflicts. However, Gus Dur succeeded in integrating maritime issues into his foreign policy agenda without ignoring urgent domestic needs.



**Figure 2. Abdurrahman Wahid Leadership Strategy**

Source: Obtained from various sources

Gus Dur had an inclusive and pragmatic approach to diplomacy. As a leader known for his openness, he strengthened Indonesia's foreign relations with various countries, including China, while maintaining a commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea. The diplomacy he carries out does not only focus on bilateral strengthening but also strengthens Indonesia's position in the international arena.

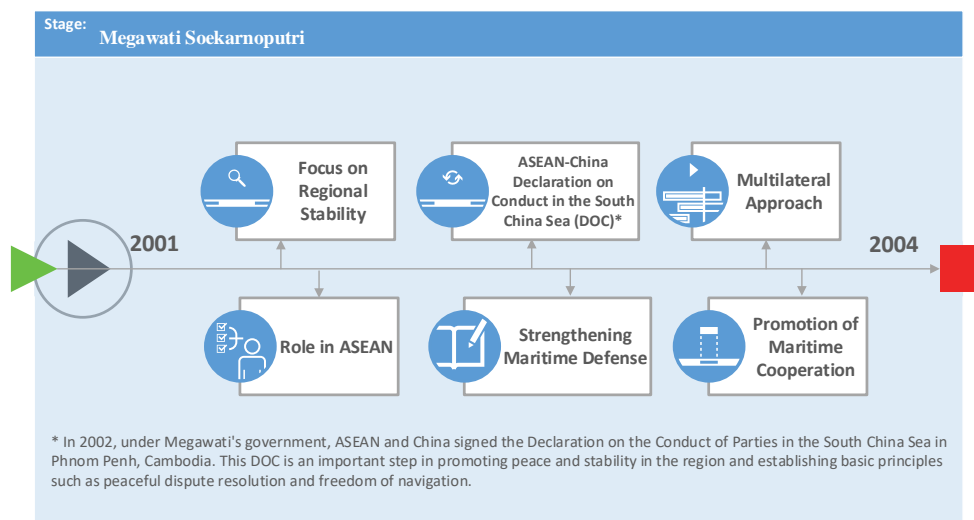
Indonesia, under Gus Dur's leadership, remains an active player in ASEAN and supports multilateral efforts to resolve disputes in the South China Sea. Indonesia encourages regional dialogue and cooperation to create stability and security in the region. This firmness reflects Indonesia's commitment to promoting regional peace and ensuring that ASEAN remains the main platform for multilateral dispute resolution.

Gus Dur and his government strongly support the principles of international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as a basis for resolving disputes in the South China Sea. This support for international law is in line with Indonesia's foreign policy which prioritizes peaceful dispute resolution. The application of international law is the main basis for maintaining the sovereignty and integrity of Indonesia's maritime territory.

Although not specifically focused on the South China Sea, Gus Dur's government understands the importance of managing maritime areas and natural resources. Efforts to strengthen maritime capabilities and water sovereignty remain ongoing. Apart from that, bilateral relations between Indonesia and China experienced improvement during Gus Dur's reign. This inclusive diplomacy paves the way for more constructive dialogue regarding regional issues, including the South China Sea. The focus on domestic issues such as political stability and civil-military relations, as well as internal conflicts, also influences foreign policy. Nevertheless, the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity are still strictly maintained.

### Leadership of President Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001-2004)

During the administration of President Megawati Soekarnoputri, the issue of the South China Sea began to surface, although it did not reach the intensity of the following administration. However, several strategic policies and diplomatic steps taken at that time showed that Indonesia had begun to pay attention to the dynamics in the region. This policy is not only focused on foreign aspects but also touches on domestic elements that are essential to strengthening national sovereignty and security (Suharti & Sugiarto, 2020).



**Figure 3. Megawati Soekarnoputri Leadership Strategy**

Source: Obtained from various sources

Megawati's focus on regional stability is one of the main points of her foreign policy. He emphasized the importance of maintaining stability and security in the Southeast Asia region, including the South China Sea. Indonesia under his leadership not only emphasizes diplomatic dialogue but also actively participates in various international and regional forums to ensure that maritime security issues receive the necessary attention. Megawati realizes that regional stability is the foundation for economic growth and political peace in Southeast Asia.

As an active member of ASEAN, Indonesia plays an important role in driving initiatives to strengthen regional cooperation. Megawati's government encourages ASEAN to unite in creating and maintaining stable and safe maritime security. This can be seen in Indonesia's efforts to advocate for a peaceful resolution of the South China Sea dispute. Megawati's government is also vocal in stating that dialogue and cooperation between countries are the keys to creating a safe and stable region.

The culmination of Megawati's diplomatic efforts was seen in the ASEAN-China Declaration on Behavior in the South China Sea (DOC) which was signed in 2002. The DOC was a historical step in promoting peace and stability in this region. This Declaration sets out several basic principles such as the peaceful resolution of disputes and freedom of navigation that must be respected by all parties. The successful signing of the DOC reflects Indonesia's central role in regional diplomacy and Megawati's commitment to maritime stability and security.

The multilateral approach is one of the pillars of Megawati's policy in dealing with the South China Sea issue. This approach not only prioritizes dialogue between ASEAN countries and China but also involves various international actors in creating constructive dialogue. In each of these forums, Megawati always emphasizes the importance of respecting the principles of international law as contained in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is the legal framework for dealing with various maritime issues.

Megawati's understanding of the importance of strengthening maritime defence is not limited to diplomatic aspects alone. At the domestic level, his government has begun to increase Indonesia's maritime capabilities to protect its territorial waters. These steps include increasing patrols in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and strengthening the navy. Strengthening the fleet and maritime technology is intended to ensure that Indonesia can face threats and maintain the sovereignty of its territorial waters more effectively. Apart from emphasizing peaceful solutions to disputes, Megawati's government also advocates maritime cooperation in the economic sector and resource exploitation. This includes cooperation between countries bordering the South China Sea in exploiting marine resources for the common good. Megawati's government realizes that regional economic prosperity can be achieved through collaboration and sustainable use of maritime resources. This step shows how foreign and domestic policies can work together to create long-term benefits for Indonesia and the Southeast Asian region.

Through these various steps, Megawati's government has laid an important foundation in dealing with the South China Sea issue. Its policies imply a holistic and long-term vision in managing maritime challenges while strengthening Indonesia's position in the regional and international arena.

### Leadership of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014)

During the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), Indonesia faced various challenges related to the South China Sea. In dealing with this issue, the SBY government emphasized the need for a diplomatic and regional approach. From 2004 to 2014, SBY attempted to resolve disputes through dialogue and negotiation and played an active role in regional forums such as ASEAN. One of the main focuses of this policy is to encourage the preparation of a Code of Conduct (CoC) in the South China Sea so that each party can maintain peace and stability.

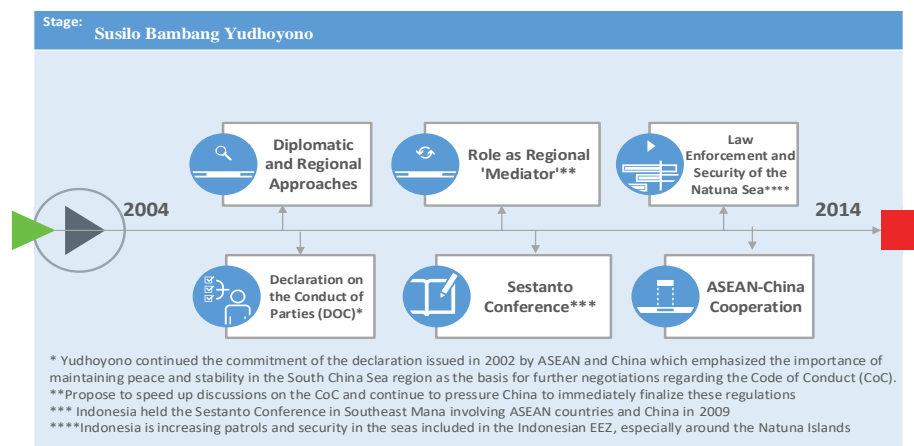


Figure 4. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono Leadership Strategy

Source: Obtained from various sources

President SBY also continued Indonesia's commitment to the 2002 Declaration, namely the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties (DOC). This document was published by ASEAN and China and emphasizes the importance of stability in the region as a basis for further negotiations regarding the CoC (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). The continuation of the DOC is the foundation for future steps in formulating more binding rules for handling maritime disputes in the South China Sea. In 2010, Indonesia under SBY often acted as a regional mediator in this dispute. The Indonesian government proposes to accelerate CoC discussions and continues to pressure China to immediately finalize these regulations. SBY is trying to speed up this process by involving all relevant parties to reach an agreement that can guarantee security stability.

In 2009, as a concrete effort to maintain regional stability and collaboration, Indonesia held the Sestanto Conference in the Southeast Asia region. This conference involves ASEAN countries and China to promote joint maritime management in the South China Sea. This step is expected to encourage closer cooperation between countries in dealing with complex and sensitive maritime issues. Apart from dealing with issues at the diplomatic level, the SBY government also emphasizes law enforcement and securing Indonesia's territorial waters. From 2008 to 2013, Indonesia increased patrols and security in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), especially around the Natuna Islands. This step was taken to prevent illegal fishing activities and violations of territorial waters. In 2012, Indonesia also actively encouraged ASEAN and China to commit to developing and implementing the CoC, with the ultimate aim of maintaining regional stability and security through international cooperation and diplomacy.

**Leadership (2014-2024)**

President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has faced the South China Sea issue with a balanced approach, including diplomacy, maritime law enforcement and strengthening maritime defence. In 2014, after being elected President of Indonesia, Jokowi began to emphasize the vision of a "World Maritime Axis" in his campaigns and policies (Sitanggang, 2021). This vision aims to make Indonesia a centre for global maritime activities, which not only involves trade but also law enforcement and maritime sovereignty. Through this vision, President Jokowi shows his commitment to strengthening Indonesia's position in the maritime sector and responding to challenges in the South China Sea.

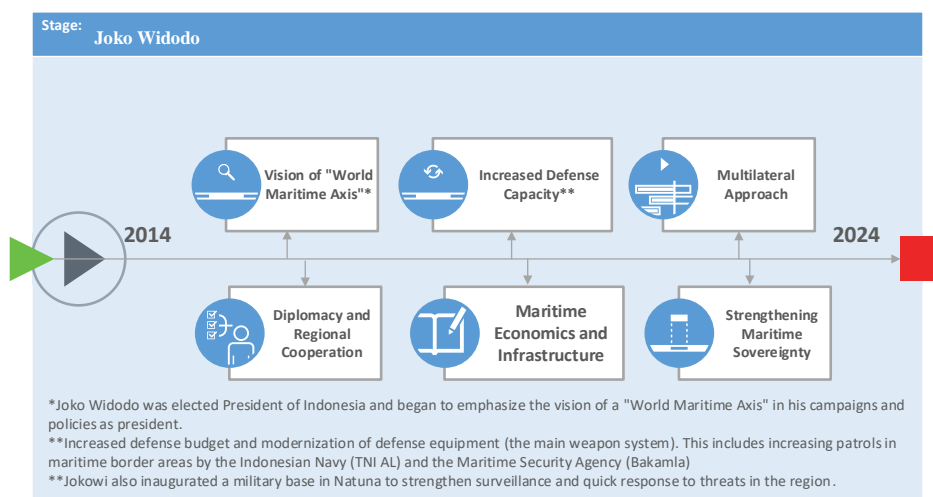


Figure 5. Joko Widodo Leadership Strategy

Source: Obtained from various sources



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One of the significant steps taken is strengthening maritime sovereignty in the waters of the North Natuna Sea, part of Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which intersects with the South China Sea. Firm steps such as the arrest and sinking of foreign vessels fishing illegally show that the government does not tolerate violations of Indonesia's maritime sovereignty (Manoppo, nd). In the realm of diplomacy, Jokowi plays an active role in international forums, especially ASEAN, to promote the peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea by supporting the implementation of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and accelerating the preparation of the Code of Conduct (CoC) between ASEAN and China.

To strengthen maritime defence capabilities, the Jokowi government increased the defence budget and modernized defence equipment (the main weapon system). This includes increased patrols in maritime border areas by the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) and the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) (Wijaya et al., 2016). In addition, Jokowi inaugurated a military base in Natuna to strengthen surveillance and quick response to threats in the region. With this, the government is trying to ensure that Indonesia has adequate capacity to maintain its sovereignty and protect its maritime resources.

As part of the vision of the "World Maritime Axis," President Jokowi is encouraging the development of maritime infrastructure, such as ports and maritime highways, to integrate Indonesia's maritime regions and optimize the maritime economic potential, including around the North Natuna Sea. This program also aims to improve the welfare of coastal communities and fishermen who are often affected by illegal activities in the South China Sea. Apart from that, Jokowi supports the involvement of various international parties in overcoming tensions in the South China Sea, including cooperation with large countries such as the United States, Japan and Australia. (Permatasari, 2022). This approach reflects an effort to maintain a balance between maintaining national sovereignty, promoting regional cooperation, and avoiding actions that could exacerbate tensions in the region.

In 2016, President Jokowi inaugurated an integrated military base in Natuna, a strategic step aimed at strengthening Indonesia's maritime defence in the North Natuna Sea area which is in direct contact with the South China Sea (Hidayat & Srifauzi, 2023). The inauguration comes as part of the government's efforts to improve maritime security and sovereignty in the region, which is often subject to illegal activities, such as illegal fishing by foreign vessels. This military base in Natuna has quite complete facilities, including docks, airstrips and various other supporting infrastructure needed for military operations. The existence of this military base allows the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL) and the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla) to carry out more intensive and effective patrols in maritime border areas, as well as provide a quick response if there is a threat or violation of state sovereignty.

In his speech when inaugurating the base, Jokowi emphasized that the construction of defence infrastructure in Natuna was the government's real commitment to safeguarding Indonesia's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Abdurrahman, 2022). He also emphasized the importance of modernizing defence equipment and increasing the readiness of military personnel to face various maritime security challenges. Apart from the defence aspect, the construction of a military base in Natuna is also expected to have a positive impact on the local economy. The presence of these military installations brings job opportunities and improvements to civil infrastructure around the Natuna area, which in turn can improve the welfare of the local community. This step is by Jokowi's "World Maritime Axis" vision, which not only focuses on security aspects but also economic development and welfare of maritime communities.

Firm steps in protecting the sovereignty of Indonesian waters were taken by the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Susi Pudjiastuti, who served from 2014 to 2019 under President Joko Widodo's administration. One of the most prominent policies is the sinking of foreign vessels caught fishing illegally in Indonesian waters. This policy aims to enforce the law, demonstrate maritime sovereignty, protect marine ecosystems, and support the local fishing economy (Sungkar, 2022). Thousands of illegal ships from various countries have been sunk as a form of firm action to provide a deterrent effect. This step is also based on national and international laws governing maritime violations and illegal fishing.

Apart from sinking ships, Susi Pudjiastuti also implemented various other policies to strengthen Indonesia's maritime and fisheries sectors, such as limiting fishing permits for foreign vessels, banning destructive fishing gear, and increasing maritime patrols with cooperation between Bakamla, the Indonesian Navy and other institutions. other law enforcement. These policies are part of the broader vision of the government under the leadership of President Joko Widodo to make Indonesia the "World Maritime Axis" (Yusa Djuyandi et al., 2020). Susi Pudjiastuti's active support and implementation is an important pillar in realizing this vision, ensuring that Indonesia's water resources can be utilized sustainably and enjoyed by future generations.

Firm steps in protecting the sovereignty of Indonesian waters were taken by the Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Susi Pudjiastuti, who served from 2014 to 2019 under President Joko Widodo's administration. One of the most prominent policies is the sinking of foreign vessels found to be fishing illegally in Indonesian waters. This policy aims to enforce the law, demonstrate maritime sovereignty, protect marine ecosystems, and support the local fishing economy. Thousands of illegal ships from various countries have been sunk as a form of firm action to provide a deterrent effect. This step is also based on national and international laws governing maritime violations and illegal fishing.

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"World Maritime Axis." Susi Pudjiastuti's active support and implementation is an important pillar in realizing this vision, ensuring that Indonesia's water resources can be utilized sustainably and enjoyed by future generations.

President Joko Widodo is known as one of the leaders who is very firm in demonstrating Indonesia's sovereignty in the Natuna Sea, which is part of the South China Sea. Its policies and actions reflect a strong commitment to defending Indonesia's maritime rights, especially against claims that other countries, such as China, consider illegitimate. Jokowi's firm stance in dealing with the issue of sovereignty is demonstrated through various diplomatic and operational steps in the field. In June 2016, Jokowi took perhaps the most symbolic and historic step in (Manyanua et al., 2023) his leadership, even compared to previous presidents, namely by holding a limited cabinet meeting on an Indonesian warship in Natuna waters. This is not a move usually taken by a country's leader, and of course, it attracted international attention. The meeting not only functions as a high-level decision-making forum but also as a strong symbol of Indonesia's commitment to defending its territory from unilateral claims or intrusion from other countries. Jokowi's actions are very important amidst increasing tensions with China regarding maritime border conflicts in the South China Sea. With this step, Indonesia is sending a clear message that it is ready to defend its maritime sovereignty by any means necessary. This step also supports the diplomatic and legal efforts that Indonesia has taken in various international forums, emphasizing that Indonesia is not a passive party in protecting its territorial waters.

### Leadership Style Analysis

The diverse approach reflects the flexibility and adaptation required in the leadership of a large country like Indonesia, which must deal with a variety of domestic and international challenges. From the perspective of leadership science, we can analyze the leadership style of each president in the context of policies related to the South China Sea as follows:

**Table 1. Leadership Style Regarding the South China Sea**

No	President's name	Leadership Style
1	BJ Habibie	<p><b>Technocratic:</b></p> <p>BJ Habibie is known as a leader who is very oriented towards science and technology. Before becoming president, he was an accomplished engineer and had a strong academic background, especially in aeronautical engineering. His technocratic leadership style leads to decision-making based on technical understanding and scientific data. Regarding foreign policy, including the South China Sea issue, Habibie tends to take a more pragmatic approach and is based on scientific analysis.</p> <p><b>Reformers:</b></p> <p>Habibie served as president during a critical transition period from the New Order regime to the reform era. He is known as a figure who brought about many significant changes in a short time. Habibie's main focus was on political reform, inclusive in the context of opening up press freedom, decentralizing government, and releasing political prisoners. Despite his short tenure, he attempted to push for greater transparency and democracy, which also influenced his foreign policy.</p>
2	Abdurrahman Wahid	<p><b>Transformational:</b></p> <p>Abdurrahman Wahid is a figure who has a big vision about democracy, freedom and pluralism. He focuses on inspiring society and bringing about changes in Indonesia's mindset and socio-political structure. Gus Dur prefers to create an environment where people are called to contribute to major change, rather than acting on specific issues such as the South China Sea. This makes its foreign policy more flexible but places less emphasis on military aspects or confrontation.</p> <p><b>Visionary:</b></p> <p>Gus Dur's leadership was strongly influenced by the mission to reform domestic politics and strengthen national reconciliation. This means that foreign policy, including the South China Sea issue, is not among his top priorities. The focus is more on strengthening democracy at home and creating stable and peaceful diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries.</p>
3	Megawati Sukarnoputri	<p><b>Situational:</b></p> <p>Megawati understood the importance of domestic stability and attempted to adapt her leadership to the needs of the time. Amid the political and economic transition, Megawati is focusing more on policies that can improve domestic conditions. His</p>

		<p>situational approach allows him to be flexible in dealing with international issues such as the South China Sea, with his top priority often being domestic economic and political stability.</p> <p>Diplomatic: In foreign affairs, Megawati tends to emphasize diplomacy and efforts for peaceful resolution. He seeks to maintain good relations with neighbouring countries and promote regional stability through dialogue. This makes its policy in the South China Sea more about seeking peaceful paths and avoiding direct military confrontation.</p>
4	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY)	<p>Rational: SBY is known as a very analytical and data-based leader. He relies on in-depth study before making decisions that could affect domestic or international politics. On the South China Sea issue, SBY tends to avoid actions that could trigger conflict and prefers a careful and measured approach.</p> <p>Consensual: SBY is a strong supporter of multilateral diplomacy. He is very active in ASEAN and other international organizations to resolve maritime disputes and regional issues through diplomacy and consensus. This approach allows Indonesia to play a constructive role in regional stabilization efforts and facilitate dialogue between disputing countries in the South China Sea.</p>
5.	Joko Widodo (Jokowi)	<p>Pragmatics: Jokowi tends to act immediately based on what is considered most effective and pragmatic in the national interest. This is reflected in maritime policies that include increasing military presence in the Natuna region, which is often the centre of attention in the context of the South China Sea dispute. He is also famous for strong symbolic actions such as direct inspections of Natuna waters to demonstrate Indonesia's sovereignty.</p> <p>Decisional: Jokowi is a leader who is quick in making decisions, especially those concerning national interests and territorial sovereignty. He demonstrated courage in decision-making, did not hesitate to use military force if necessary, and was ready to take a more confrontational position if threatened. This approach emphasizes Indonesia's firm stance in maintaining sovereignty in its territorial waters.</p>

Source: Research Results, 2024

Based on the study of the leadership styles of each president above, the author will then formulate approaches and lessons that can provide valuable insight for determining the right strategy for future leadership.

**Table 2. South China Sea Approaches, Lessons and Strategies in the Future**

No	President's name	Approach	Lesson	South China Sea Strategy In the future
1	BJ Habibie	Habibie emphasized the importance of science and technology in national development. Although his tenure was short, he had a vision to improve the country's technical and scientific capabilities.	Technical and scientifically based aspects, such as maritime mapping and international legal studies, are very important to strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position.	A technocratic approach can be applied by strengthening scientific and legal-based arguments in international diplomacy. Preparing comprehensive studies and data will provide a strong basis for negotiations.
2	Abdurrahman Wahid	Gus Dur is known for his inclusive attitude and respect for diversity. He often prioritizes dialogue and cooperation.	An approach that prioritizes international dialogue and cooperation can strengthen Indonesia's position in the eyes of the world.	Inclusive diplomacy and open dialogue with various stakeholders can help reduce tensions and find peaceful solutions.

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3	Megawati Soekarnoputri	Megawati tends to take a moderate and pragmatic approach, focusing on internal stability.	A moderate approach and a focus on balance between national and regional interests is essential.	Focusing on pragmatic diplomacy through bilateral and regional channels, as well as ensuring balanced policies between domestic interests and international relations.
4	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY)	SBY is known for his moderate approach and skills in multilateral diplomacy. He is actively involved in various international forums.	Multilateral diplomacy and active involvement in international organizations can increase support and legitimacy for Indonesia's claims.	Active in multilateral forums such as ASEAN to seek international support and strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic position.
5	Joko Widodo	Jokowi focuses on infrastructure development and increasing maritime capabilities. He has also strengthened the Indonesian navy.	Strengthen maritime infrastructure and military capabilities to ensure monitoring and protection of state sovereignty.	Strong maritime infrastructure and power are important to secure a country's territory and sovereignty.

**Source:** Research Results, 2024

### CONCLUSION

To secure strategic interests in the South China Sea, each Indonesian president has taken a unique approach that reflects his or her leadership style and priorities. Starting from the BJ Habibie era to the Joko Widodo administration, the policies implemented reflect efforts to maintain sovereignty and strengthen Indonesia's position amidst complex regional dynamics. This variation in strategy shows adaptability and a strong commitment to ensuring national interests remain protected in a region fraught with tension.

When viewed as a whole, the leadership style of each president shows how their character and priorities, as well as the political and situational context they face, influence their policies regarding the South China Sea: (1) Abdurahman Wahid has a Transformational and Visionary leadership style: prioritizing values the value of democracy and internal reform, which rules out military confrontation. (2) Megawati has a situational and diplomatic leadership style: trying to balance domestic stability with foreign diplomacy. (3) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has a Rational and Consensual leadership style: taking a data-based and consensus approach through multilateral involvement. (4) Jokowi has a Pragmatic and Decisional leadership style: prioritizing fast and effective action to defend national interests and regional sovereignty.

### STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Indonesia's future leadership strategy in dealing with the South China Sea issue must take inspiration from the style and approach of previous presidents. In matters of diplomacy, the Active Multilateral Diplomacy model implemented by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) is very relevant, where Indonesia takes an active role in ASEAN and various international organizations to build solidarity and collective strength in facing regional challenges. Furthermore, the technocratic and scientifically based approach promoted by BJ Habibie is important to strengthen arguments with scientific data and comprehensive international legal studies. At the same time, Jokowi's approach of emphasizing Maritime Strength and Infrastructure must be continued to ensure supervision and protection of Indonesia's territorial waters.

Adopting Gus Dur's inclusiveness and dialogue approach will provide understanding for negotiations and peaceful solutions with all stakeholders. The importance of the moderate and pragmatic approach implemented by Megawati, by maintaining a balance between internal and external interests, should not be ignored. By combining these elements, Indonesia can effectively defend its sovereignty while building harmonious and constructive relations with neighbouring countries and the international community. This strategy will strengthen Indonesia's position in the geopolitical dynamics of the South China Sea while contributing to regional peace and stability.

The importance of continued leadership in South China Sea policy can be realized through strengthening the coherence of a clear and comprehensive foreign policy, improving the quality of multilateral diplomacy through an active role in ASEAN and other international forums, as well as continued investment in maritime defence by modernizing equipment and personnel training. The development of maritime infrastructure such as ports and advanced surveillance facilities also needs to be considered, while strategic research related to maritime policy must be supported to produce quality data. International cooperation with friendly countries, as well as education and public campaigns to increase public awareness about the importance of maritime sovereignty, are also key. Efficient coordination between government agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense,

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Indonesian Navy, and the Maritime Security Agency, as well as regular policy evaluation and adaptation, ensures effective and responsive policy implementation to the latest dynamics in the South China Sea and the broader geopolitical environment. wide.

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