



Indonesia's swift securitization of the Natuna Islands how Jakarta countered China's claims in the South China Sea

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ABSTRACT

After being a neutral actor for decades in the complex South China Sea (SCS) territorial disputes, Indonesia has seen itself compelled by China's assertiveness to become firmer about protecting its territorial sovereignty around the Natuna Islands (NI). Jakarta is alarmed by China's claims that it has undeniable historical fishing rights in the NI territorial waters because they undermine Indonesia's territorial sovereignty. Our analysis loosely adopts the securitization conceptual framework proposed by the Copenhagen School to reveal that Jakarta swiftly securitized the NI issue between 2014 and 2016. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper unpacks how the Indonesian printed mainstream media discussed the NI in recent years. By the end of 2016, the Indonesian media portrayed China's claims that it has historical fishing rights in the NI territorial waters as the most urgent national security threat to Indonesia, *i.e. the NI issue was securitized*. This analysis shows that the Indonesian people accepted Jakarta's security discourse, *i.e. Jakarta had successfully securitized* China's claims over the NI territorial waters. This paper makes a new contribution to the securitization literature by simultaneously analysing the Indonesian news and social media outlets.

KEYWORDS

Security; Securitization; Social media; Natuna Islands; South China Sea; Indonesia; China

Introduction

The power of discourse is to render 'right', 'legitimate', 'taken-for-granted', 'natural' specific ways of knowing, acting and organizing social life. More precisely, it makes 'real' that which it prescribes as 'meaningful'. Crucially, this rendering of 'right' silences other possibilities. (Fetherston, 2000, p. 190)

In the last two decades, disputes in the South China Sea (SCS) have grown both in number and intensity despite the different relevant state actors communicating extensively to mitigate them. At the core of the disputes are maritime claims that primarily pit China (and Taiwan) against the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and, to a lesser extent, Indonesia (Figure 1). China has been physically changing the SCS realities and producing an increasingly assertive discourse to legitimize and render indisputably right their territorial claims and silence those put forward by the rest of the claimants.

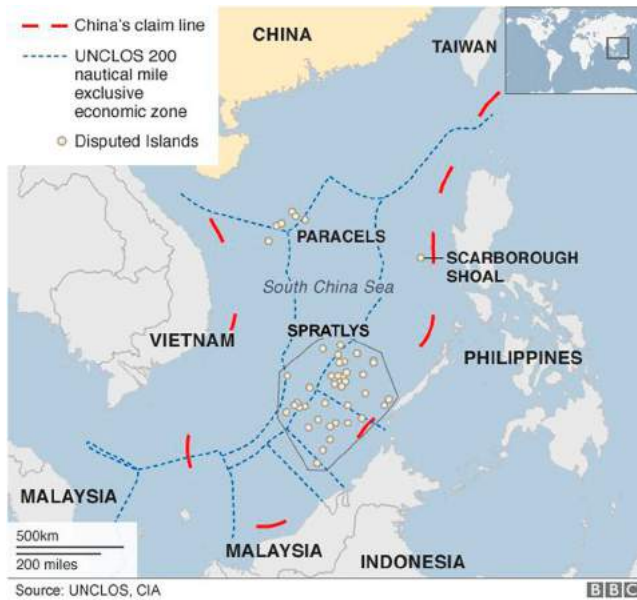


Figure 1. Map showing China's nine-dash line and Indonesia's territorial waters around the Natuna Islands. Photo: New York Times.

President Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' campaign aimed at reviving China's past glories and world status, and it has reinvigorated this assertive discourse and made it more antagonistic. This is because one of the foundations on which the 'Chinese Dream' flourishes is the preservation of China's territorial integrity, which includes Taiwan, Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, and the area within the nine-dash line in the SCS. Reasserting China's control over these territories is seen as a sacred duty by the Communist Party of China (CPC) that has to be successful, even if it entails military confrontations with other state actors (Wayne, 2008). Furthermore, as a rising economic and military powerhouse, China argues that its sovereignty over these territories is '100% legitimate and indisputable, leaving no negotiation space' for the competing claims of other state actors. More crucially, Beijing's assertiveness has woken up a dormant conflict with Jakarta over the sovereignty of the Natuna Islands (NI) territorial waters that now threatens to erupt into an outright military confrontation. Until recently, despite some tensions resulting from competing territorial claims, Indonesia declared itself as a non-claimant state in regards to the SCS disputes, offered to be an honest broker in these disputes (Heiduk, 2016, p. 34), and followed a China-friendly domestic and regional approach. This positive attitude was reflected, for instance, during Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2011, when the Indonesian administration endorsed an increased ASEAN integration with China (Aplianta, 2016, pp. 16–17). This China-friendly attitude has been increasingly undermined by Beijing's claims that some of the NI territorial waters are indisputably part of China's traditional fishing grounds. Therefore, China feels entitled to send its fishing fleets and modern coast guard to the region. Beijing's claims are based primarily on questionable historical evidence, which is neither recognized by Indonesia nor the UNCLOS.¹

Indonesia had already rejected Beijing's maritime claims in a muted manner, such as after an incident in the NI in June 2010 when Jakarta declared that the Chinese had 'no

clear explanation as to the legal basis' for their territorial claims delimited by the nine-dash line, line that clearly contravenes the UNCLOS 1982 (Supriyanto, 2012, p. 1). However, more recently, Indonesia has become more assertive about its stance concerning its disputes with China in the SCS, with declarations such as those made by former Indonesian President Widodo in an interview with the Yomiuri newspaper: 'China's claims to most the South China Sea have no legal basis in international law' (Widodo, 2014).

While trying to remain on good terms with China, the Indonesian government and military became increasingly worried about China's assertive presence in Indonesian territorial waters and the resulting regional instability that this presence produced (Moeldoko, 2014). Given that the NI spread across 262,000 square kilometres of water, they represent a major logistical challenge for Indonesia to monitor and control effectively (Supriyanto, 2015, p. 1). Besides the rising tensions between Indonesia and China, other regional state-to-state tensions were worsened due to events, such as a rise in armed robberies and violent attacks in ports and waters along the coasts of the Philippines and Indonesia. These incidents fed off rising insecurity and growing conflicts between neighbouring states over marine resources, territorial sovereignty, and maritime jurisdictions (Morton, 2016, p. 4), ultimately leading to popular anti-China protests in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Beckman & Clive, 2014).

Taking into consideration this multi-national and multi-dimensional background, this paper has two objectives. First, to provide an analysis of the Indonesian mainstream printed media involving the tensions around the NI to show that between 2013 and 2016 a swift securitization has occurred. Second, to survey popular social media outlets to assess whether Jakarta's argument that China's claims represent an urgent national security threat for Indonesia has been accepted by the Indonesian people.

Before proceeding to present the findings of this research, it is important to describe the conceptual framework and methodology used in this paper, and situating Jakarta's discourse in its context to ensure that the interpretation news and comments is done appropriately.

Conceptual framework and methodology

To achieve its first objective, the description of the securitization of the NI issue by the Indonesian government, this paper loosely adopts the Copenhagen School's (CS) 'securitization' model and uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to unpack the Indonesian mainstream printed media covering the news involving the NI. Here, the term 'securitization' is primarily used in the sense of the social-constructivist discursive approach to security given to it by the CS, which argues that the securitization of issues allows state actors to discursively transform non-security issues into security ones and if deemed necessary, to legitimize extraordinary measures (Buzan, Weaver, & Wilde, 1998, p. 25).

To date, a large and growing body of literature has used CDA to understand the political processes in democratic countries (Fairclough, 2005) and in some non-democratic countries (Krause & Willias, 1997). Linguistic approaches, such as content, metaphor (Chilton, 1996), illocutionary (Vuori, 2008), and traditional journalistic text analysis (Richardson, 2007) in particular, are effective for the purpose of this research. CDA offers a methodological framework that considers both textual and contextual sources,

and allows for a dynamic interaction between the discourse and its audiences. Among the eclectic methodologies proposed in the literature on CDA, this work follows the adapted version of Fairclough's method proposed by Richardson (2007) to make it more effective for analysing newspapers. Fairclough's method facilitates the 'analysis of relationships between concrete language used and the wider social cultural structures and offers an effective model to define the relationship among three levels of discourse analysis: the actual text, discursive practices, and the larger social context' (McGregor, 2003). In summary, this work uses CDA and follows the securitization model proposed by the CS to dissect Indonesia's security discourse involving the NI to answer a number of key questions—who securitizes, what is securitized, why and how is it securitized—and to evaluate the degree of acceptance by the different audiences (Buzan et al., 1998).

To reveal the securitization process of the NI issues, the analysis describes the evolution between 2013 and 2016 of four constituent elements of the securitization model proposed by the CS—securitizing authority, referent objects, existential threats, and extraordinary measures. Securitizing authority refers to institutions, organizations, or individuals that have the status and the credibility needed to legitimately discuss security matters. The terms 'threat' and 'existential threat' are used in the analysis to describe issues that are explicitly or implicitly labelled as such by the securitizing actors, independently of whether they 'really' do represent threats or not. Similarly, the term 'referent object' is used for objectives that Jakarta describes in its discourse as fundamental for the Indonesian people and state, such as, for example, economic development and national security. The fourth constituent element describing the securitization process refers to the 'extraordinary' measures implemented by Jakarta to deal with the tensions in the NI waters. There were four selected-newspapers that represent official and influential publications, namely Kompas as an Indonesian language-national influencing public opinion newspaper and The Jakarta Post and Jakarta Globe as English-national newspapers, while Antara news is a government news outlet.

The second objective of this research, to assess if the securitization has been successful, is achieved by surveying the different Indonesian social media outlets and identifying how the popular voices changed over the same period, from 2013 to 2015. The audiences that Jakarta's security discourse targets can be divided into two major groups depending on their distinct reaction to the discourse (Balzaq, 2005): domestic and international. The domestic audiences can be further subdivided into the political-elite, intellectuals, and the general population, and the international audience can also be further subdivided. However, due to time and space limitations, this work only focuses on Jakarta's dominant audience, the general Indonesian population.

Research method

To develop an understanding of how Indonesia's public perception of the NI issue evolved between 2013 and 2016, numerous Twitter and Facebook accounts were surveyed, including @MailOnline, @Kompascom, @Jakartaglobe, @diplomatomagazine, and @abcnews. Keywords, such as tourism destination, underdevelopment, travel, territorial dispute, sovereignty, illegal fishing, and threat, amongst others, were used to identify relevant tweets and discussions. The coding scheme was divided into three descriptive categories: negative, pressure, and neutral/positive. Furthermore, given that the collocations of a

target word can provide valuable information about semantic preferences attached to it, the collocation lines for 'Natuna' were coded into three categories: (1) Negative Description, (2) Description of Pressure, and (3) Neutral/Positive Description. NodeXL was used to examine the frequency with which 'important' words were used in the social media, allowing the identification of the patterns of the use of relevant words over a given period of time.

To be able to interpret the discourse that the Indonesian media produces in the same way that Indonesians do, it is necessary to provide some context to the text that we are going to analyse. That is, we need to briefly 'situate' the discourse (Richardson, 2007).

Situating Indonesia's security discourse

At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (Stritzel, 2011, p. 346)

Discourses shape and are shaped by the environment in which they develop (Richardson, 2007), and they are made significant by their embeddedness in their 'social relations of meaning and power' (Stritzel, 2007). Hence, to be effective, any CDA has to take into account the values, principles, and recent events in which Jakarta's security discourse involving the NI is embedded. Given that Indonesia's perceived threat to its territorial sovereignty in the SCS comes from China, it is useful to briefly describe Beijing's stand on the NI issue.

In his oath for office, Sun Yat-sen, the 'Father of the [Chinese] Nation' and the Republic of China's first president, called for China's territorial and peoples' unification, the unification of the Chinese nation (Yat-Sen, 1981, p. 2). President Sun Yat-sen's call for unity implicitly recognized that, at the time, the peoples to be blended within the new Chinese nationality had their own distinct ethnic identities and that the territories to be included in the Chinese state were not united. To bond these territorial and ethnic fractures, the Chinese leadership had to undertake intensive state and nation-building efforts, efforts in which, since the founding of the new China in 1949, the CPC has been mostly successful (P. Meyer, 2012).

When it comes to China's control of the areas that it claims in the SCS, it was weak during the first 50 years after New China was formed. In recent years, however, the CPC has become much more assertive about its claims in the region and has taken actions, such as building islands to reinforce its position there. If Beijing's official discourse involving the SCS disputes is to be understood literally, which we should because China is not flexible about its territorial claims, then it becomes clear that many of its claims are irreconcilable with those of other state actors, including Indonesia.

An example of how these competing claims are irreconcilable are the territorial claims made by the Republic of China (ROC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Whether from the perspective of history, geography, or international law, the Nansha (Spratly) Islands, Shisha (Paracel) Islands, Chungsha Islands (Macclesfield Bank), and Tungsha (Pratas) Islands, as well as their surrounding waters, are an inherent part of ROC territory and waters. The ROC enjoys all rights over them in accordance with international law. This is indisputable. (ROC, 2015)

Identical claims are made by the ‘other’ China, the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Another example of two obviously irreconcilable discourses occurs between the PRC and the Philippines. A PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson argued recently that ‘China has indisputable sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters’ (Can, 2016). In addition, the Chinese Foreign Minister declared that ‘China cannot accept Philippines’ claiming sovereignty over some S China Sea islands’ (Xinhua, 2011).

This statement does not give the Philippines any space to negotiate with the PRC, resulting in the Filipino counterpart rejecting China’s arguments:

China’s claims to sovereign rights and jurisdiction, and to ‘historic rights’, with respect to the maritime areas of the South China Sea encompassed by the so-called ‘nine-dash line’ are contrary to the convention and without lawful effect to the extent that they exceed the geographic and substantive limits of China’s maritime entitlements under UNCLOS. (Guardian, 2015)

If the PRC/ROC claims were to be understood literally and as final, which they should, then all the other countries affected would have no reason to engage in negotiations and a military confrontation would be unavoidable.

Findings: securitizing China’s claims in NI

To conduct the discourse analysis of how the NI issues were discussed by the Indonesian mainstream media, the following four prominent Indonesian newspapers were used: Kompas in Indonesian, The Jakarta Post and The Jakarta Globe in English, and Antara news in Indonesian and English. The focus will be on the news related to the NI that appeared in these news outlets between 2013 and 2016. As shown below, this analysis clearly indicates that during this period the tensions with China in the NI were securitized. Then, to assess the success of this securitization, two prominent social media outlets, Facebook and Twitter, were surveyed to identify how the Indonesian public’s opinion evolved between 2013 and 2016.

2013-2014: NI discussed in economic, cultural, and tourism terms

Except on a very few occasions, in 2013 and 2014, Indonesia’s discourse involving the NI did not have any significant security dimension to it, providing an ideal neutral reference point to explore if securitization occurred in subsequent years. The NI were extensively discussed in economic, cultural, and tourism terms. An example of such discourse is the declarations of Dahlan Iskan, Minister of State Enterprises, when he visited the Natuna and Anambas Islands to promote them as international tourist destinations (Kompas, 2014). In addition, the relationship between Indonesia and China was predominately friendly, which was reflected in the presidential telephone conversations between the Chinese and Indonesian Presidents, in which both expressed their desire to strengthen their strategic partnership as ‘good neighbors and good friends’ (JakartaGlobe, 2014a).

The positive Indonesia-China relations and, more significantly for this research, the fact that the NI and China’s claims in the region were not considered a security issue is clearly reflected in the fact that the four newspapers that were surveyed by this research published on average only one article per month discussing politics or security in 2013 and 2014 (Figures 2 and 3).

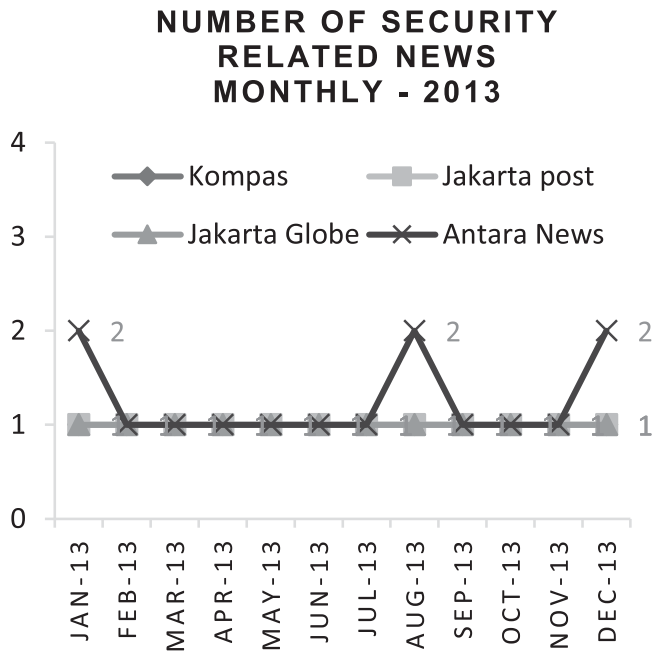


Figure 2. Natuna Islands news 2013.

There were, however, a number of news discussing the alleged illegal fishing activities by Chinese (and other countries) vessels in NI territorial waters (G. Galiartha, 2014) and the need to develop the economy of the islands to prevent other countries from occupying them (Aritonang, 2014). A significant event that resulted in Indonesian officials showing

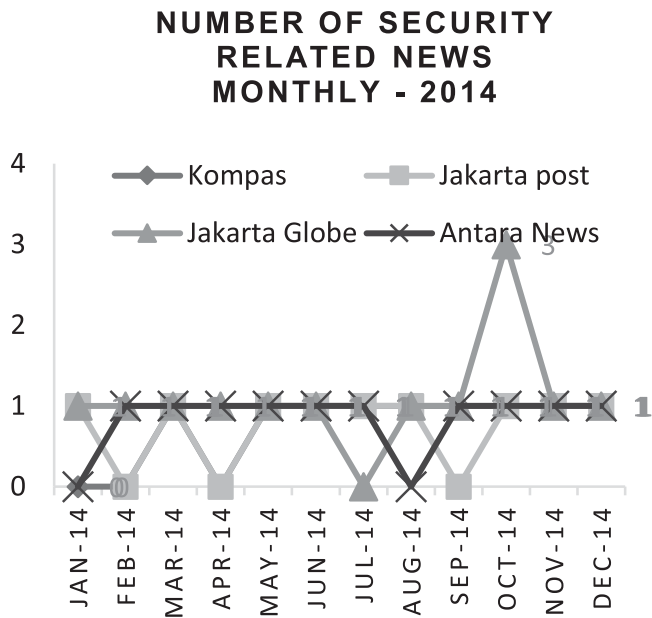


Figure 3. Natuna Islands news 2014.

some concern over China's intentions in the SCS was when Beijing redefined its nine-dash line in March 2014. This latest version of the nine-dash line included part of the NI territorial waters. While this was a very important declaration by Beijing, it was only mildly reported by Antara News under the headline 'Indonesia has conveyed objections to the Natuna map' (Panca, 2014), indicating a cautious approach by Jakarta when it came to discuss China's claims.

As it can be observed in Figure 3, by the end of 2014 the number of articles discussing politics and security issues started to increase, indicating that Indonesia's China-friendly approach was starting to fade away. In October 2014, the Jakarta Globe discussed on three occasions security-related issues, with headlines such as 'SBY Tells Troops: Indonesia an Asian Tiger in Ten Years', demanding Indonesia's military build-up to face up to China's challenges (JakartaGlobe, 2014b) and 'Chinese claims over the Spratly, Paracel and Maritime Security Threatens Indonesia' (Buol, 2014), explicitly discussing China as a threat to Indonesia's interests in the SCS. This more antagonistic discourse was further intensified in 2015.

2015: Sings of securitization in Jakarta's discourse

In 2015, following a significant increase in Beijing's verbal and physical assertiveness in the SCS, the Indonesian government became more vocal about its security and sovereignty concerns. China claimed most of the SCS—open waters, land formations, and seabed—and, more significantly, changed the facts on the ground by building islands where only sand bars and shoals existed. On three of these islands, Beijing has constructed large airfields and has placed significant military assets (O'Hanlon, 2015; JakartaPost, 2015). Beijing's assertive discourse and actions were perceived as threatening by Jakarta. Due to China's growing assertiveness, Jakarta felt that it could not continue to remain silent about the threat from China's claims involving the SCS and, particularly, its alleged historical fishing rights in the NI territorial waters, so Indonesia became more assertive in protecting its regional interests. This was reflected in the fact that the media increasingly ran articles discussing NI security and sovereignty issues in 2015.

Following the trend that started to emerge in late 2014, in 2015 Indonesian officials increasingly discussed the NI issues in the context of national sovereignty and security, and became more vocal and assertive about protecting them. Thus, the number of Indonesian news reports that discussed political and national security involving the NI and their adjacent territorial waters increased significantly in 2015 (Figure 4).

For example, in April 2015, six months after Jokowi became president, the Indonesian and US navies held joint military exercises around Batam Island, located about 300 miles from the NI (Kapoor & Fabi, 2015). Also, Indonesia announced plans to build more military posts in border areas to safeguard the archipelago's sovereignty and territorial integrity—especially in areas facing the SCS. The Indonesian National Development Planning Minister, Andrinof Chaniago, said he was working with the Defense Ministry on a comprehensive defense plan to be presented to President Joko Widodo (JakartaGlobe, 2015). For example, Indonesia's Air Force Chief stated that Natuna should be developed as a military fortress to become Indonesia's Pearl Harbour to ensure the protection of Indonesia's sovereignty (Mollman, 2015).

In 2015, the language used by the Indonesian political and security elites was still not explicit and direct in discussing the potential threat that China's expansionist ambitions in

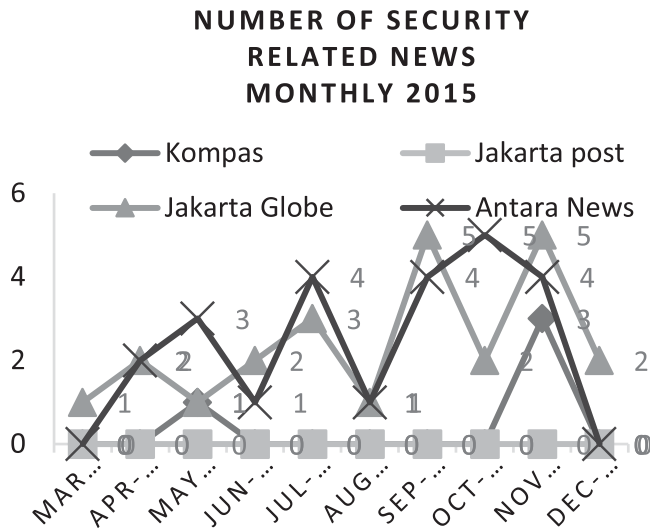


Figure 4. Natuna Islands news 2015.

the SCS posed to Indonesia. The elites used symbolic and ambiguous language to discuss their sovereignty and legal concerns, while intermixing them with the importance of maintaining good relations with China. President Jokowi reaffirmed Indonesia's neutrality in an interview published by the Jakarta Globe under the headline 'Jokowi Clarifies: Indonesia Still Neutral in S. China Sea Dispute' (Lumanauw, 2015).

Despite the nuanced language used by Jakarta, it increasingly acknowledged the challenges that China's advances in the NI territorial waters represented for Indonesian territorial integrity. For example, TNI commander Moeldoko made public statements about the potential for instability created by China, apparently without consultation with the foreign ministry (Connelly, 2015, pp. 10–13). Moeldoko demanded a much more assertive approach by Jakarta to protect Indonesia's interests around the Natunas, foreshadowing a reorientation of Jakarta's approach to this conflict with China (Hamilton, Natasha, & McRae, 2015, p. 14).

Like in 2014, the number of security-related articles run by Indonesian news outlets gradually increased and peaked in late 2015. Moreover, the articles also became increasingly explicit and assertive in their statements, such as under the headline in Kompas '14 the Indonesian navy warships watch in the South China Sea' (Hakim, 2015). In this news piece, the First Admiral TNI M Zainudin confirmed Indonesia's naval deployment in NI territorial waters. However, in an effort to avoid an escalation of the tensions, he denied that the deployment of the warships was due to conflict: 'We have no conflicts in the South China Sea. We are just protecting the sovereignty of and defending the Republic of Indonesia' (Hakim, 2015).

2016: Full securitization of China's claims in the NI territorial waters

By 2016, in particular after the incident with the Chinese coastguard in the NI waters in March of that year, China's claims within NI territorial waters were presented by Indonesian authorities as a major national security threat, i.e. the claims were *securitized*. This is reflected in the fact that during 2016, the Jakarta Post and Kompas published, respectively,

105 and 96 news reports (Figure 5) addressing Indonesia’s security concern over Beijing’s challenge of Indonesia’s sovereignty over the NI territorial waters.

As a consequence of China’s increased assertiveness, Indonesia went from being a neutral actor in the SCS disputes, to having to reject Beijing’s claims and flexing its political and military muscles. This change is identifiable at the highest levels of the Indonesian government, including President Joko Widodo. To express Indonesia’s full rejection of China’s claims over the NI waters, the president held a ministerial cabinet meeting on a warship at the NI on 24 June 2016. Under the headline ‘Indonesian president’s visit to Natuna Islands sends waters warning to China,’ President Joko Widodo unequivocally condemned China’s incursion in Indonesian waters and Evan Laksmana, a well-reputed Indonesian scholar, argued that:

Just because we are committed to maintaining a good relationship with China does not mean Indonesia is willing to sell out its waters. That is the delicate balance Jokowi is trying to tread - it needs to be made clear that the islands and waters surrounding the islands are ours. (Topsfield, 2016)

A second show of political and military force by President Joko Widodo was on 6 October 2016, when he chose to be absent from the important 71st Indonesian Military Anniversary to, instead, attend aerial military exercises by the Indonesian Airforce in the NI (F. Kuwado, 2016). During this exercise, the Indonesian Air Force gathered most of its combat aircraft to play out a scenario in which Indonesia had to recapture an island from a hostile force.

With such explicit actions, Jokowi asserted Jakarta’s intention to take any measures deemed necessary to protect Indonesia’s territorial integrity in the face of potential external aggression (Aspinall, 2016, p. 74) and send a clear message, to both Beijing and the Indonesian people, that Indonesia was not willing to negotiate its sovereignty over the NI territorial waters (Wijaya, 2016).

In addition, a coordinated move by the ministries of the Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Maritime Affairs and Fisheries confirmed that China’s claim to the NI represented a

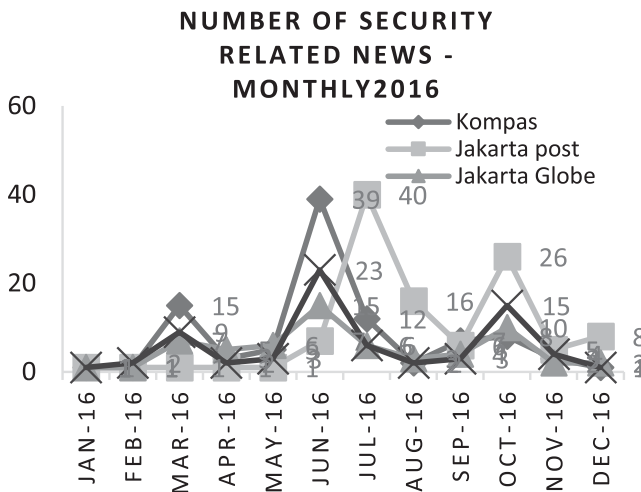


Figure 5. Natuna Island news 2016. Note: different scale than previous figures.

challenge to Indonesia’s sovereignty, further consolidating its securitization. To counter this existential threat, Jakarta allocated a large budget to upgrade the military installations responsible for the protection of Indonesia’s interests in the SCS (Japantimes, 2016). The funds should be used to ‘strengthen the naval base in Natuna Islands’ to reinforce Indonesia’s sovereignty (Tashandra, 2016) and to upgrade the Riau Islands Police station and increase its personnel from 5000 to 12,000 to ensure that it can cope with the challenges presented by China’s assertive moves in the NI waters (Fadli, 2017). Figure 6 reflects this sharp increase of Indonesia’s spending in military spending, in particular for military bases, and securing its territorial waters by cracking down on illegal fishing vessels.

Jakarta’s security discourse became particularly assertive and explicit after a confrontation between the Chinese and Indonesian coastguards when a Chinese fishing trawler entered Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone around the NI. Susi, Indonesia’s popular Marine and Fisheries Minister, declared that while this was not the first time that Chinese fishing vessels had illegally intruded into Indonesian territorial waters, this latest incident was more serious than the previous ones because it also involved the aggressive intervention of the Chinese coastguard (Kompas, 2016a). A spokesman from Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry summarized the incident as the result of China making three serious mistakes:

The first mistake, the Chinese coastguard vessels violated Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) ... Furthermore, Chinese coastguard vessels violated Indonesia’s law enforcement exclusive rights in Indonesia’s EEZ ... Lastly, the Chinese coastguard vessel violated Indonesia’s territorial sovereignty. (Kompas, 2016b)

These are serious and explicit accusations that illustrate the magnitude of the confrontation between Beijing and Jakarta involving the NI.

In addition, Jakarta did not just make accusations, but also took actions to make sure that Beijing would take good note of its stance. Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Retno

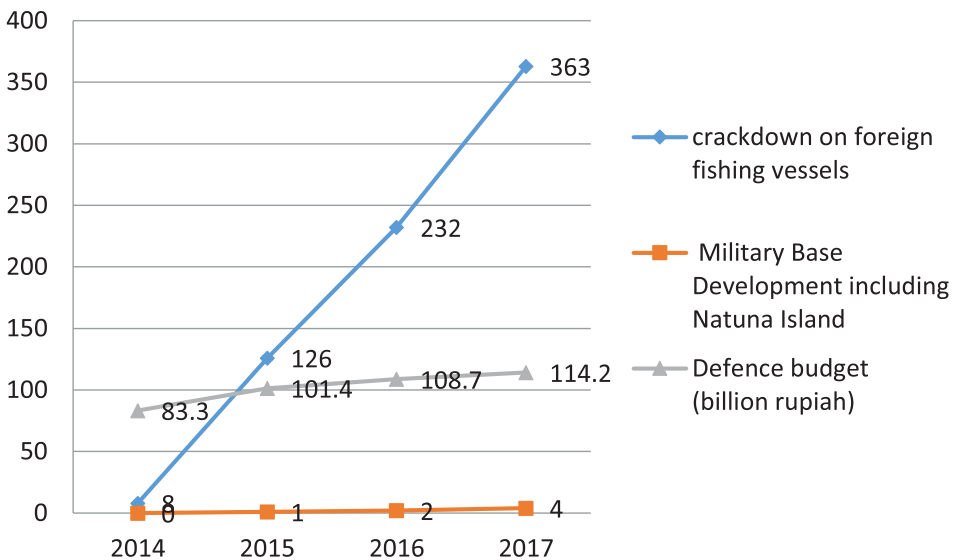


Figure 6. Trend of Indonesia’s spending to protect the Outer Islands, including NI.

Marsudi, met Chinese embassy representatives in Jakarta to express Indonesia’s dismay about the incident and clarify ‘that the Natuna waters are constitutional Indonesian territory’ (F. J. Kuwado, 2016a). To ensure that the entire world (BBC, 2016), and China in particular, would understand that Indonesia was not willing to negotiate the sovereignty of the NI, one week after the incident with the Chinese coastguard, President Jokowi held a cabinet meeting with 10 ministers and numerous high-ranking officials on an Indonesian navy ship in the NI territorial waters (Djumena, 2016). During this meeting, President Joko Widodo expressed his intention to do everything that was needed to safeguard Indonesia’s national integrity as well as its maritime rights from China’s aggressive incursions (Indrayani, 2016, p. 481; Morton, 2016).

In, summary, until late 2014, the NI had been mainly discussed by the mainstream Indonesian media in economic, cultural, and tourism terms, and then, in 2015, they were increasingly addressed as being a security challenge due to China’s ambitions in the region. By 2016, the Indonesian media discussed China’s claims and actions in the NI as an urgent national security matter, i.e. *China’s claims in the NI had been fully securitized*. This securitization is also reflected in the sharp increase of the number of security-related articles appeared in Indonesian newspapers between 2013 and 2016 (Figure 7).

After showing that between 2013 and 2016 Jakarta had swiftly securitized China’s claims in the NI territorial waters, this discussion will now assess whether this securitizing discourse had been accepted by the Indonesian people. To assess how the Indonesian public’s opinion evolved between 2013 and 2016 in response to Jakarta’s security discourse, numerous relevant Facebook and Twitter entries and discussions were surveyed.

Social media discussions confirm the successful securitization of China’s claims in the NI

To assess Jakarta’s success in convincing Indonesians that China’s claims to parts of the NI territorial waters represent a national security threat, we have conducted a survey of the

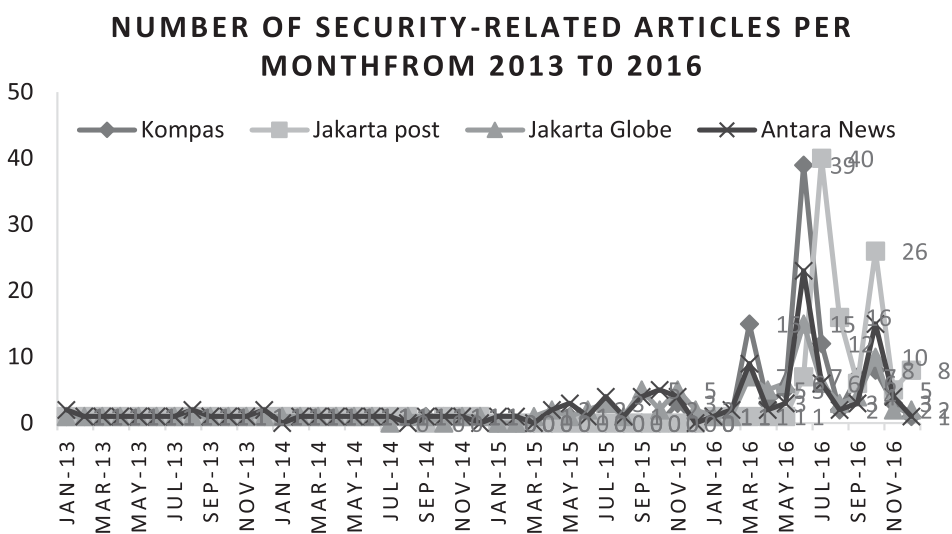


Figure 7. Securitization of Natuna Island from 2013 to 2016.

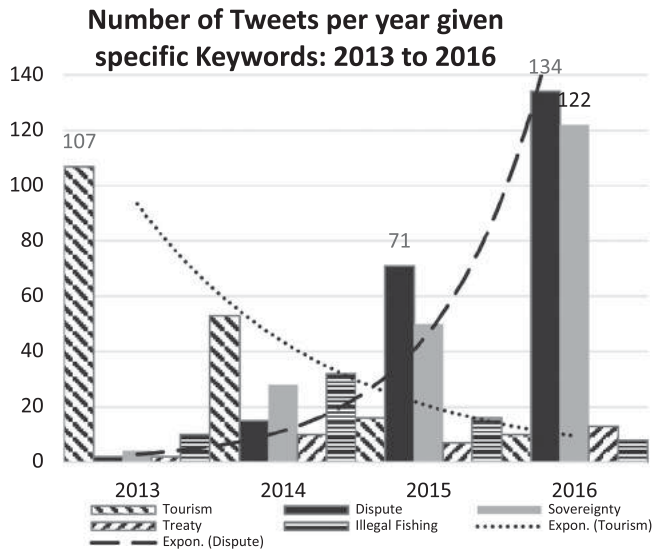


Figure 8. Twitter and Facebook trends from 2013 to 2016.

reactions to the mainstream news found in Indonesian social media outlets. This quantitative survey has been organized by using a series of positive (tourism, economy, culture ...) and negative or security-related (threat, illegal fishing, dispute ...) keywords.

After plotting the number of tweets for the two groups of keywords (positive and negative) over the period from 2013 to 2016, two clear trends appeared (Figure 8). First, the positive group had its maxima in 2013 and rapidly decreased to reach its minima in late 2016. The second trend is that the negative/security-related group had its minima in 2013, to then increase in 2014 and 2015, and rapidly reach its maxima in late 2016. These two reverse trends explicitly show that the Indonesian people perceived the NI as a cultural, tourism, and economic issue (positive keywords) in 2013, but then rapidly changing their view and perceiving them as being the object of national security threats by the end of 2016. Hence, Indonesia’s media had been successful in convincing the Indonesian people that the Chinese aspirations in the NI waters represent an urgent national security threat.

This fundamental change in the social media discourse is also reflected in the word clouds for 2013, 2015, and 2016 shown in Figure 9. These two tendencies indicate that in 2013–2014 the Indonesian public opinion perceived the NI in terms of tourism, culture, and

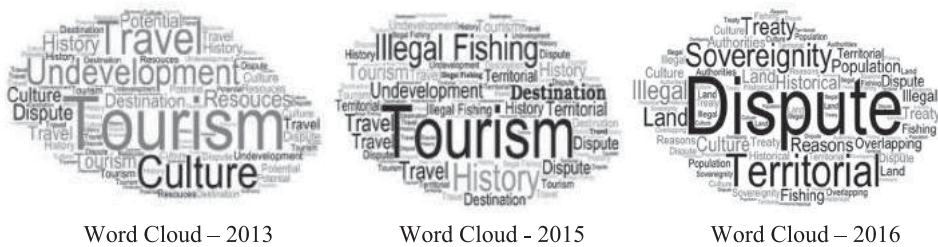


Figure 9. Social media keyword cloud evolution from 2013 to 2016—Successful securitization.

economic development, and not as a security issue. Then, after 2015, and particularly, after the incident with the Chinese coastguard in March 2016 in the NI territorial waters, the Indonesian people discussed the NI in terms of security, sovereignty, and illegal fishing.

The fact that by the end of 2016 the discourses in news outlets and social media were dominated by security-related keywords—such as territorial dispute, illegal fishing, and sovereignty—confirms that *Jakarta had successfully securitized the NI issue*.

Conclusion

Just a few years ago, Indonesia was a supportive partner to China's presence in Southeast Asia and played the role of a 'honest broker' to help defuse tensions between China and the different claimants in the SCS. More recently, however, China's assertive discourse and forceful actions in the Natuna Islands' territorial waters have forced Indonesia to stand up to China's advances and become more assertive in protecting its territorial sovereignty in the NI. The seriousness of this confrontation is reflected in the fact that Susi, Indonesia's popular Marine and Fisheries Minister, threatened to bring China to the International Court of Justice (BBC-Indonesia, 2016).

By loosely adopting the *securitization* conceptual framework proposed by the CS and combining it with CDA, this paper describes how Jakarta successfully securitized the issue of China's claims to have historical fishing rights in the territorial waters of the NI. A securitization process has been identified by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to analyse the discourse produced by the Indonesian mainstream media involving the NI between 2013 and 2016. The results show that until the end of 2014, the NI were discussed in the media almost exclusively in cultural, social, and economic terms, to then increasingly being presented as being threatened by China's territorial claims in 2015. Finally, in 2016, the Indonesian mainstream media explicitly framed China's claims as threats to Indonesia's territorial integrity and, thus, as an urgent national security threat, i.e. between 2013 and 2016, Jakarta *securitized* China's claims to have historical fishing rights in the NI waters.

To assess whether Jakarta's securitization discourse had been successful in convincing the Indonesian people that China's claims in NI represented an existential threat, this analysis surveyed numerous popular Facebook and Twitter blogs between 2013 and 2016. The analysis showed a clear resonance between the official and social media discourses, confirming that Jakarta was successful in convincing the Indonesian people that China's challenge in the NI represented an urgent national security threat, i.e. Jakarta *successfully securitized* the NI issue. By combining the analysis of the Indonesian news and social media outlets, this paper makes a new contribution to the securitization literature. The new form of technologies, like the internet and its various applications and communication tools such as e-mail, blogs and social media web sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, can contribute to the new technique on securitization analysis which provide citizens in repressed countries opportunities to participate in communication discourse (Shirazi, 2013).

To defuse its tensions with China, the Indonesian government needs to consistently reject China's traditional fishing grounds argument, develop the NI economy, and improve their marine and military infrastructure. It seems that Jakarta is already moving in this direction, which is reflected in the fact that President Jokowi and the relevant ministers intend to make the economic development of the NI an 'urgent priority for the

country' (Antaranews, 2016) and that a significant military build-up in the region is planned. Hopefully these plans will not just be empty political rhetoric. It goes without saying that Jakarta must make sure that its vital relations with China do not significantly deteriorate because of the NI dispute. For this purpose, Jakarta and Beijing should approach their legal battle in a flexible and creative way (Eilenberg, 2012), and avoid unnecessary and costly confrontations. China is, after all, Indonesia's main trading partner, with exports amounting to 15 billion dollars, or 10% of Indonesia's total exports (BPS, 2017).

Future research should address two key issues that were beyond the scope of this research. One is to provide insight into why there is a significant gap between what the Indonesian political and military elites think and what they can express in public. At times, there seems to be a significant discrepancy between the two. The second issue, which is a significantly more challenging one to analyse, is to explain why China has started to ignore its own traditional approach to diplomacy, which seeks to achieve harmonious international relations, and increasingly adopts a brute force approach in its disputes in the SCS. This issue was briefly discussed in an article published in *The Diplomat* under the headline 'China's Non-Chinese Approach to the South China Sea' (P. Meyer, 2016), but clearly needs further research.

Note

1. UNCLOS: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

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