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STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR STRENGTHENING INDONESIA'S NATIONAL DEFENSE RESILIENCE AGAINST HYBRID WARFARE THREATS

Edmund Gultom^{1*}, Asep Adang Supriyadi², Sundring Pantja Djati³,
Priyanto⁴, Sri Sundari⁵

¹Doctoral Program in Defense Science, Defense Management Concentration,
Universitas Pertahanan, Indonesia

^{2,4,5}Universitas Pertahanan, Indonesia

³Universitas Esa Unggul, Indonesia

Corresponding author: Edmund Gultom

E-mail: edmundg97@gmail.com

Abstract:

Changes in the international security environment, particularly the expanding use of hybrid warfare, require Indonesia to develop strategic leadership capable of integrating military and non-military dimensions to strengthen national defense resilience. This article examines the role of strategic leadership in reinforcing Indonesia's defense resilience against hybrid warfare threats. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach based on a conceptual review and a literature study of academic sources and official Indonesian government policy documents. The findings map the conceptual ambiguity between hybrid threats and hybrid warfare; the operational dimensions of hybrid threats in the maritime, information, and extremism domains; the strategic leadership competencies needed to manage defense capability and complexity; and Indonesia's strategic leadership position in Indo-Pacific regional defense diplomacy, ranging from multilateral exercises to ASEAN strategic partnerships. The study concludes that strengthening Indonesia's defense resilience requires five pillars of strategic leadership: conceptual clarity, capability-based leadership, cooperative diplomacy, ethical-resilient leadership, and leadership grounded in institutional learning. Based on these findings, the article recommends developing a doctrinal framework that distinguishes hybrid threats from hybrid warfare, reforming defense acquisition toward selective self-reliance, strengthening multilateral defense diplomacy, developing ethics-based strategic leadership programs for Indonesian military officers and defense officials, and establishing a permanent interministerial and interagency coordination forum.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Hybrid Warfare, Indonesia's Defense Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, international security has been reshaped by a spectrum of threats that blur the traditional boundary between war and peace, most visibly through hybrid warfare. This form of conflict simultaneously employs military and non-military instruments—such as diplomatic coercion, economic pressure, cyber infiltration, and structured information operations—to achieve strategic political objectives without escalating into open conventional war (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023). At its core, hybrid warfare relies on ambiguity: kinetic and non-kinetic means are combined opportunistically to advance political interests within a fluid global geopolitical landscape (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023). The strategy is designed to exploit an opponent's institutional gaps and disrupt strategic decision-making in an uncertain grey zone (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023). Since 2014, the term has become especially prominent within NATO and the wider Western security



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community, largely in response to Russia's geopolitical conduct in Ukraine, and it remains influential in both academic and policy debates (Libiseller, 2023).

The conceptual difficulty of defining hybrid warfare has direct consequences for the formulation of Indonesia's national defense strategy. When the term is used too loosely, routine security problems may be conflated with existential threats, leading to inefficient resource allocation and inadequate operational preparedness. An analysis of the United Kingdom's security strategy highlights the problem of "loose language and concepts," which often produces a rhetoric-action gap: ambitious policy statements are not matched by actual capabilities or implementation (Rauta & Monaghan, 2021). It is therefore essential to distinguish hybrid threats – non-state disruptions or activities below the threshold of armed conflict – from hybrid warfare, in which a state actor coordinates multiple hybrid instruments to pursue broader strategic objectives (Rauta & Monaghan, 2021). For Indonesia's strategic leadership, this distinction is necessary to prevent national defense doctrine from remaining at the level of political rhetoric and to translate it instead into resilient, measurable, and operational practices for managing grey-zone dynamics (Rauta & Monaghan, 2021). A clearer distinction also enables military and civilian leaders to align threat perceptions more consistently across theory, policy, and action.

For Indonesia, hybrid threats are an immediate geopolitical concern because of its position as the world's largest archipelagic state at the center of the Indo-Pacific. The country faces a complex combination of conventional and non-conventional strategic pressures, particularly in the maritime domain, which is central to national sovereignty. Indonesia's maritime security is confronting increasingly serious challenges from China, while the national capacity to respond remains constrained by a low military-expenditure-to-GDP ratio (Matthews et al., 2025). Persistent budget limitations have led Indonesia to adopt an acquisition strategy heavily dependent on export credit – accounting for approximately 85 percent of total procurement financing – and on second-hand defense equipment to close capability gaps quickly (Matthews et al., 2025). This approach has created a substantial gap between the ambition to build a respected defense force and the reality of limited fiscal space (Matthews et al., 2025). Indonesia's strategic leadership must therefore move beyond routine procurement management and navigate the defense innovation ecosystem under economic pressure so that military investment remains financially sustainable and supports long-term strategic autonomy (Matthews et al., 2025).

Contemporary hybrid threats also extend well beyond the military and economic domains; they increasingly penetrate the information and cyber environments. Research on Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows how large-scale disinformation on social media can function as an instrument of "asymmetric warfare" intended to erode public trust in state institutions and national leaders (Morejón-Llamas et al., 2022). This development prompted active participation by international fact-checking organizations – reportedly at least 341 organizations across 105 countries – which acted as content curators to filter false narratives spreading virally online (Morejón-Llamas et al., 2022). Through collaborative initiatives such as #UkraineFacts, content curation became an important method for separating verified information from digital "noise" on platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok (Morejón-Llamas et al., 2022). Although this evidence comes from Europe, the use of bots and emotionally charged content is highly relevant to Indonesia, where internet penetration is high and digital polarization remains a serious vulnerability. For Indonesian strategic leaders, information security is not merely a technical issue; it is a strategic requirement for preserving social cohesion under grey-zone uncertainty. Without precise information governance, society's cognitive sovereignty can be manipulated by external actors that weaponize information to weaken national resilience from within (Morejón-Llamas et al., 2022).



These leadership demands are particularly relevant in defense and security. A review of 314 articles on capability and complexity in the military sector shows that sound decision-making requires a nuanced understanding of how capabilities interact with system complexity. The literature spans capability development, technology, cyber issues, defense industry, and policy implications (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024). This places strategic leaders at the center of resource allocation, capability prioritization, and institutional design for responding to dynamic hybrid threats.

Strengthening Indonesia's defense resilience also requires strategic intelligence in defense diplomacy, not only leadership within the armed forces. Indonesia has sought to broaden its defense diplomacy through multilateral exercises such as the Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo (MNEK), which involves a wider range of international partners than the bilateral format that previously dominated (Inkiriwang, 2021). At the regional level, ASEAN has developed several forms of institutional strategic partnerships (ISPs)—including functional enhancement, functional maintenance, norm and rule formation, and strategic signaling—to manage relations with external partners in the Indo-Pacific (Koga, 2026). Yet the proliferation of partnership statuses may also reduce their marginal value, requiring regional leaders, including Indonesia, to act more selectively and strategically (Koga, 2026). Other countries' experiences provide useful lessons for the design of national resilience. Singapore's Total Defence model rests on the recognition that defense and development are interdependent; it combines social resilience, which fosters collectivism and national identity, with industrial and technological dynamics that build defense capability (Matthews & Timur, 2023). In Sweden, meanwhile, Total Defence encompasses several distinct strategic logics depending on how "total war" is understood, demonstrating that a single label may conceal a multifaceted set of strategies (Angstrom & Ljungkvist, 2024).

These examples show that defense resilience models are political and historical constructions that must be adapted to national circumstances, including Indonesia's geostrategic position, budget constraints, socio-political structure, and domestic information environment. In this context, national strategic leadership becomes the decisive factor: it defines the vision, integrates military and non-military dimensions, leads reforms in acquisition and capability development, and orchestrates defense diplomacy and regional partnerships. Recent leadership research emphasizes moral dimensions and leader-follower dynamics, as well as a shift toward authentic, ethical, and servant leadership. It also questions existing measurement approaches and calls for power and authority to be incorporated more explicitly into modern leadership theory (Liden et al., 2024). Within the spectrum of hybrid warfare, ethics and public trust are foundations of state legitimacy. Without strong moral integrity, extending defense instruments into civilian, information, and economic domains can generate public resistance and weaken national cohesion. The effective combination of positional authority and personal influence, relational transparency, and servant-leadership principles that prioritize the community over individual interests is therefore central to leadership effectiveness and national social capital (Liden et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, examining strategic leadership for Indonesia's defense resilience in the era of hybrid warfare requires an interdisciplinary approach. Such an approach must combine the conceptualization of hybrid warfare, analysis of military capability and complexity, lessons from other countries' resilience models, and theories of strategic and adaptive leadership. This article systematically reviews the relationship between strategic leadership and Indonesia's defense resilience against hybrid warfare, with particular attention to: (1) mapping the concepts of hybrid threats and hybrid warfare and their implications for national defense design; (2) examining the role of adaptive and globally oriented strategic leadership in directing capability development and



defense diplomacy; and (3) assessing the relevance of comprehensive Total Defence models to Indonesia. Through this framework, the article offers both a sharper conceptual understanding and a normative foundation for strengthening Indonesia's strategic defense leadership amid increasingly complex hybrid threats.

The defense resilience model is a political and historical construct that must be adapted to the national context, including Indonesia's geostrategic position, budget constraints, socio-political structure, and domestic information environment. In this context, national strategic leadership plays a key role: formulating a vision, integrating military and non-military dimensions, leading acquisition and capability reform, and orchestrating defense diplomacy and regional partnerships. Recent leadership studies emphasize the importance of the moral dimension and leader-follower dynamics, as well as the trend toward authentic, ethical, and servant leadership styles. They also critique existing measurement methods and the need to integrate the concepts of power and authority into modern leadership theory (Liden et al., 2024). In the spectrum of hybrid warfare, the ethical dimension and public trust are the foundations of state legitimacy: without strong moral integrity, the expansion of defense instruments into the civilian, information, and economic spheres risks triggering public resistance that undermines national cohesion. The integration of positional authority and personal power, relational transparency, and the principle of servant leadership that prioritizes community interests over personal interests are key to effective leadership and national social capital (Liden et al., 2024). Conceptual ambiguity surrounding hybrid threats is not unique to the Indo-Pacific. An analysis of European threat perceptions following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine found that even NATO allies facing broadly similar dangers experienced a "strategic cacophony" – deep disagreement over the nature and urgency of their shared threats (Haas et al., 2026). If highly integrated European allies still struggle to align threat perceptions, the challenge is likely to be greater for Indonesia, which must harmonize views across the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other civilian institutions without a formal alliance structure.

The DIME framework is increasingly relevant for understanding how states respond to multidimensional pressure. Computational text analysis of China's reactions to various DIME instruments indicates that authoritarian states tend to respond more negatively to informational pressure than to diplomatic, military, or economic pressure (Fisher et al., 2025). This finding reinforces the need for Indonesian strategic leaders to map hybrid threats systematically rather than viewing them only through a military lens. A similar lesson emerges from the Nordic-Baltic region after Russia's invasion of Ukraine: among the eight countries examined, only three showed clear evidence of a shared security culture, largely because of differences in threat conceptualization and interstate interaction preferences (Wrangé et al., 2024). For Indonesia and ASEAN, this demonstrates that conceptual alignment on hybrid threats cannot be assumed merely on the basis of geographic proximity; it requires explicit and sustained diplomatic and institutional effort.

The hybrid threats facing Indonesia must also be understood within broader regional and global trends. Bibliometric research on military capability shows growing scholarly attention to the interaction between capability and defense-system complexity, including capability development, technology, cyber issues, and cross-domain policy implications (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024). Indonesia's challenges are therefore not isolated. They form part of a wider shift in the global security paradigm, in which the boundaries between military and non-military threats, state and non-state actors, and domestic and international domains are becoming increasingly indistinct. For Indonesia's strategic leadership, understanding the country's position within these global trends is



a prerequisite for formulating defense policies that respond to present threats while remaining adaptable to threats that will continue to evolve.

METHODS

This article uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on a conceptual review and a literature review. The approach was selected because the study seeks to construct a strategic leadership framework for addressing hybrid warfare rather than test causal relationships among variables using primary quantitative data. The literature was analyzed through thematic categorization covering: (1) the conceptualization of hybrid warfare and the grey zone; (2) operational dimensions of hybrid threats relevant to Indonesia; (3) strategic leadership competencies; (4) defense capability, complexity, and innovation; and (5) Indonesia's strategic leadership position in regional defense diplomacy. The resulting categories were then synthesized to formulate policy implications for strengthening Indonesia's national defense resilience, as presented in the Result and Discussion section. Literature was selected purposively, with priority given to publications from 2021 to 2026 to ensure that the findings reflected contemporary security dynamics, especially developments following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which substantially reshaped academic debate on hybrid warfare. Priority was also given to reputable international journals thematically relevant to one of the study's six analytical dimensions. Perspectives from Europe, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and North America were included to reduce dependence on a single academic tradition or regional context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conceptualizing Hybrid Warfare, the Grey Zone, and Its Implications for Indonesia

Ambiguity as the defining feature of hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare is best understood as a manifestation of a changing political environment rather than an entirely new form of war (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023). Russia's framework of strategic deterrence combines nuclear and non-nuclear coercion across domains and continues to be adjusted in light of lessons from the war in Ukraine (Adamsky, 2025). Western analysis can be misleading when it applies a universal deterrence logic without accounting for Russia's own strategic culture. The defining feature is ambiguity: kinetic and non-kinetic instruments are blended to achieve political objectives, as seen in the 2014 war in eastern Ukraine and disputes in the South China Sea (Mumford & Carlucci, 2023). Academic debate expanded rapidly after NATO adopted the term; many analysts imported NATO's definition, assumed that it accurately described Russian behavior, and treated hybrid warfare as a fashionable concept without sufficient theoretical scrutiny (Libiseller, 2023). For Indonesia, conceptual clarity is essential if defense policy is to move beyond jargon and identify the hybrid threats that are operationally relevant, including information operations, sustained maritime pressure through non-military vessels, and coordinated political-economic operations.

Debate over the conceptual boundaries of hybrid warfare also intersects with the broader discussion of contemporary deterrence. Russia's strategic deterrence framework, which combines nuclear and non-nuclear coercion, continues to evolve in response to lessons from Ukraine and reflects an adaptive strategic culture that cannot be understood solely through a universal Western model of deterrence (Adamsky, 2025). For Indonesia's strategic leadership, the implication is clear: the country needs a contextual understanding of hybrid threats that reflects its archipelagic geostrategic conditions rather than an uncritical importation of concepts developed for Europe or NATO. This ambiguity is not merely academic. It directly shapes defense-resource allocation. A definition that is too broad risks treating limited disruptions as existential threats, while one that is too narrow risks overlooking emerging patterns not yet captured in existing doctrine.



Operational Dimensions of Hybrid Warfare Relevant to Indonesia

The maritime domain. Studies of naval combat show that effectiveness depends not only on technology, but also on organizational behavior and the way systems are employed (Severini & Biddle, 2026). Analysis of a potential maritime confrontation between major powers such as China and the United States reveals a strategic paradox: relatively low-technology weapons, including naval guns, can still play a decisive role in hybrid-war and amphibious scenarios designed to create pressure in the grey zone (Flynn, 2021). China's assertiveness in the South China Sea has consistently involved coercive tactics, including deliberate ship collisions and the use of guns against fishing vessels and rival coast guards to enforce territorial claims without triggering a large-scale open war (Nguyen, 2023, p. 132). For Indonesia, these patterns are directly connected to growing instability around the Natuna waters and increasingly serious challenges to sovereign rights in its Exclusive Economic Zone (Nguyen, 2023). Indonesian strategic leaders must respond to this reality by navigating defense-budget constraints through intelligent acquisition strategies that strengthen the national maritime-defense posture (Matthews et al., 2025). Defense policy should combine stronger independent patrol capacity for maritime law enforcement, deeper regional maritime diplomacy through multilateral forums and joint naval exercises, and precise escalation management so that limited incidents do not develop into open conflict (Inkiriwang, 2021). By integrating active defense diplomacy with operational readiness, Indonesia can protect its territorial integrity while contributing to Indo-Pacific stability (Inkiriwang, 2021).

Developments in China's military strategy after 2019 also shape the maritime threat environment facing Indonesia. Analysis of China's new-era military strategic guidance suggests that recent changes reflect continuity and political consolidation under Xi Jinping more than a fundamental doctrinal transformation, although further adjustment remains possible as military capabilities continue to modernize (Wuthnow & Fravel, 2022). For Indonesia, this suggests that coercive tactics in the North Natuna Sea are likely to persist in a gradual and calculated form rather than through sudden escalation. Indonesian strategic leaders therefore need a consistent long-term response instead of ad hoc reactions to individual incidents.

The tactical dimension of maritime confrontation also requires close strategic attention. Combat effectiveness at sea is not determined by technological superiority alone; it is also shaped by organizational behavior and by how weapon systems are used in specific operational settings, as demonstrated by historical analysis of naval battles involving both advanced and relatively simple technologies (Severini & Biddle, 2026). This principle is directly relevant to Indonesia's maritime-defense posture. Additional patrol vessels or sophisticated defense equipment will have limited effect unless supported by a clear doctrine for the use of force and measured escalation protocols, especially against gradual coercive tactics deliberately kept below the threshold of open conflict. Strategic leadership must therefore ensure that maritime modernization – whether undertaken by the Indonesian Navy or the Indonesian Maritime Security Agency – is accompanied by an explicit escalation-management doctrine so that operational responses are not merely reactive.

Strategic Leadership: Core Concepts and Competencies

Characteristics of strategic leaders in complex environments. In an uncertain defense environment, effective strategic leadership is a critical foundation for managing contemporary threats that are hybrid and multidimensional. In practice, this requires leaders to navigate carefully between public demands for transparency and the strict operational secrecy required to protect national interests. It also requires the organizational and political savvy to manage international partnerships without compromising national sovereignty. Leaders who possess these qualities can



identify opportunities in the midst of crisis and mobilize defense institutions to respond to geopolitical change that is rapid, complex, and difficult to predict.

More broadly, the evolving leadership literature highlights the importance of moral approaches such as authentic, ethical, and servant leadership, while also calling for power and authority to be integrated more fully into leadership studies (Liden et al., 2024). This is particularly relevant to defense because strategic leadership must respond to hybrid threats without eroding democratic legitimacy. Research on Indonesian firms shows that transformational leadership can influence digital business-model innovation through organizational readiness and IT-enabled dynamic capabilities (Montasser et al., 2023). By analogy, defense governance in the hybrid-warfare era requires transformational leadership that develops institutional readiness and digital capabilities—including C4ISR, cyber systems, and big data—in a deliberate manner rather than through isolated, ad hoc technology projects. Structures of authority, accountability mechanisms, and organizational culture must support rather than obstruct the strategic leadership practices needed to confront hybrid threats.

Translating these requirements into Indonesia's domestic context calls for a deeper transformation toward an adaptive and visionary model of transformational bureaucratic leadership in the defense sector. Indonesian strategic leaders carry the responsibility of integrating national resources in a coordinated and sustainable manner, as mandated by Law No. 3 of 2002 concerning National Defense. These resources include citizen preparedness through state-defense participation, the use of national territory as a defense space, and the management of natural and artificial resources as integrated components of the universal people's defense system. The central purpose of this integration is to build credible deterrence across a wide threat spectrum, from terrorism and radicalism to social conflict that external actors may exploit within a hybrid-warfare strategy. Under transformational leadership, the defense bureaucracy should no longer be treated as a static institution, but as a dynamic system capable of mobilizing the potential of both society and the state against asymmetric infiltration aimed at domestic socio-political vulnerabilities.

As catalysts for defense transformation, future strategic leaders must actively promote change, creativity, and responsible risk-taking in response to increasingly difficult global challenges, particularly the need to manage ambiguity and make rapid decisions under crisis pressure (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). This requires a shift toward more sophisticated defense-policy management, especially in strengthening the national cybersecurity architecture to mitigate multidimensional crises capable of disabling critical infrastructure (Matthews & Timur, 2023, p. 651). Integrated crisis management supported by appropriate regulation is essential for protecting government authority from destructive disinformation campaigns (Dov Bachmann et al., 2023). The success of this strategy depends heavily on stronger cyber awareness as a key instrument for neutralizing the informational component of hybrid warfare (Dov Bachmann et al., 2023, p. 9). This transformation should also advance alongside the Revolution in Military Affairs, enabling the TNI to build a competitive advantage against transnational threats and non-military maritime and air-security challenges (Matthews & Timur, 2023, p. 644). By combining digital intelligence, strategic diplomacy, and a commitment to democratic values, Indonesian defense leaders can identify and counter manipulation by political-campaign industries and foreign influence operations. Such integration is necessary to protect both the cognitive and physical sovereignty of the nation as grey-zone dynamics become increasingly prominent in international security.

A comprehensive review of strategic leadership research shows that the field has moved beyond its early focus on the personal characteristics of senior executives. It now encompasses leadership-team dynamics and the interaction between leadership and complex organizational



contexts (Singh et al., 2023). Effective strategic leadership cannot therefore be reduced to individual attributes; it emerges from the dynamic relationship among leaders, executive teams, and organizational structures. For Indonesia's defense sector, strengthening strategic leadership requires improvements in command-team structures and collective decision-making mechanisms, not only stronger competencies among individual officers.

This political-organizational competence is also reflected in a strategic leader's ability to manage major doctrinal transitions without sacrificing operational continuity. The shift from the Minimum Essential Force to the Optimum Essential Force, for example, inherently involves negotiations among the military services, between the TNI and the Ministry of Defense, and between long-term modernization needs and short-term fiscal constraints. Effective strategic leaders must understand the technical substance of defense while also building coalitions across competing interests—including the Ministry of Finance, the House of Representatives, and the domestic defense industry—so that major strategic decisions have sufficiently broad institutional support to survive beyond a single political leadership cycle. Contemporary leadership literature describes this capacity as political-organizational savvy: the ability to navigate diverse interests without losing the strategic direction established at the outset.

Capability, Complexity, and Defense Innovation

Capability versus complexity. A comprehensive bibliometric review of 314 scholarly articles on military capability identified ten central themes that currently shape the global security discourse (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024, p. 137). These themes include capability development and assessment, regional defense studies, advances in military technology, operational tactics, defense-industry dynamics, and critical issues involving cyber systems and networks. The findings underline the need for a coherent theoretical framework to guide strategic decision-makers in acquiring defense capabilities effectively and efficiently. Without a sound conceptual foundation, defense procurement can become a heavy logistical burden rather than a strategic force multiplier amid rapid advances in asymmetric military technology. Defense planners must understand how individual capability elements interact within a wider defense ecosystem in order to avoid functional redundancy. The integration of rigorous academic research with practical policy is therefore a prerequisite for building a defense posture that can adapt to increasingly unpredictable international geopolitical dynamics. By mapping these themes, Indonesia can prioritize the capabilities most relevant to its geographic characteristics and the specific security challenges of the Indo-Pacific.

In response to these dynamics, Indonesia is gradually transforming its defense system through the Revolution in Military Affairs to build a competitive advantage against multidimensional modern threats. The strategy is designed to address a broad spectrum of challenges, ranging from transnational movements and international terrorism to non-military maritime and air-security issues. Indonesia's national defense strategy must be prepared in advance through strong deterrence, with defense doctrine providing a common frame of reference for all defense components when responding to global challenges. Stronger national cyber policy is inseparable from this effort. Integrated cyber-crisis management is required to confront asymmetric threats that exploit systemic state vulnerabilities through information warfare (Prem, 2026). The development of artificial intelligence appears to provide greater advantages to cyber defense than to cyber offense, an important consideration for national resilience in the digital domain (Maschmeyer, 2026). Military capability supported by high levels of cyber awareness can enable TNI personnel to identify and neutralize disinformation attacks within hybrid-warfare schemes more effectively and measurably. By adopting RMA principles, Indonesia can move beyond the physical modernization



of defense equipment and pursue the doctrinal reform required for national preparedness in the grey zone.

The central challenge for strategic leadership in defense, however, is recognizing that adding physical capability without managing internal complexity can create new vulnerabilities. This complexity arises from the number of components involved, the interdependence among those components, and the many organizational and human actors participating throughout the capability life cycle, from initiation to maintenance (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024, p. 134). Strategic leaders in a global environment need the strategic intelligence to understand organizational capabilities (Riggio & Newstead, 2023). Defense-policy management must therefore anticipate crises through adaptive regulation that integrates national resources in a coordinated manner (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024). By managing system complexity intelligently, defense leaders can ensure that technology investment genuinely strengthens deterrence without undermining long-term military operational flexibility, thereby protecting both the nation's cognitive and physical sovereignty.

Capability complexity also creates a need for a more systematic framework to evaluate the effectiveness of defense investment. Academic research on military capability spans ten major themes—from capability assessment to cyber and network issues—showing that acquisition decisions cannot be separated from a comprehensive understanding of the wider defense ecosystem (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024, p. 137). In Indonesia, procurement decisions should therefore be assessed not only in terms of technical specifications and price, but also their effect on interoperability with existing systems, long-term maintenance burdens, and compatibility with current operational doctrine. Without such an evaluation framework, functional duplication and budget inefficiency are likely to recur in each procurement cycle. Strategic leadership should therefore institutionalize an independent acquisition-review unit with authority to evaluate major procurement proposals from a system-complexity perspective rather than solely from the short-term operational requirements of a single service.

Indonesia's Strategic Leadership in the Indo-Pacific Regional Environment

Defense diplomacy: from bilateral to multilateral engagement. The Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo marks a significant transformation in Indonesia's defense diplomacy, shifting from the previous dominance of bilateral exercises toward broader and more strategic multilateral engagement (Inkiriwang, 2021). The initiative has strengthened cooperation between the Indonesian Navy and a wide range of international partners while reinforcing Indonesia's reputation as a credible regional security provider (Inkiriwang, 2021). Analysis of MNEK shows that its success and orientation are shaped by the interaction of external factors—including major-power rivalry—national-level dynamics, and the important role of national leaders in articulating a maritime vision (Inkiriwang, 2021). MNEK therefore serves as an important instrument through which Indonesia can strengthen leadership on regional maritime issues while contributing to stability in an increasingly complex environment.

Indonesia's defense diplomacy after 2024 must also be understood within the broader shift in foreign policy under President Prabowo. This includes the decision to join BRICS and a new approach toward China in the South China Sea, reflecting a combination of anti-oppression motivations, a military background, and economic interests (Putra, 2025).

Beyond MNEK, Indonesia has expanded large-scale multilateral defense diplomacy through Super Garuda Shield. The exercise evolved from a bilateral format in 2007 into a fully multilateral exercise beginning in 2022; in 2025, it involved more than 6,500 personnel from 13 countries and covered land and air domains, while the first cyber exercise introduced in 2024 complemented



MNEK's maritime focus (Montolalu et al., 2023). From a balance-of-power perspective, Super Garuda Shield enables Indonesia to respond to major-power competition in the Indo-Pacific without entering a formal alliance, consistent with its independent and active foreign policy and its role as a middle power (Paisal & Burhanuddin, 2025). Together, the two exercises reflect a dual diplomatic-leadership strategy: deepening functional cooperation while preserving strategic autonomy amid major-power rivalry.

In the context of multilateral defense diplomacy, Indonesia's strategic leadership must ensure that diplomatic flexibility at the presidential level is matched by doctrinal consistency at the operational level. A more pragmatic foreign policy creates greater opportunities for defense cooperation and investment, but ambiguity over overlapping regional claims can be exploited by external actors as an opening for grey-zone strategies. Every Indonesian engagement in multilateral exercises – whether MNEK or Super Garuda Shield – should therefore communicate a consistent strategic position on sensitive regional issues. This is necessary to prevent participation in multilateral forums from being interpreted as implicit alignment that could undermine the independent and active foreign-policy principle that has long anchored Indonesia's defense diplomacy.

Implications for an Indonesian Strategic Leadership Model

The synthesis of the preceding discussion produces five interrelated pillars of strategic leadership for strengthening Indonesia's defense resilience against hybrid warfare, as presented in Figure 1.

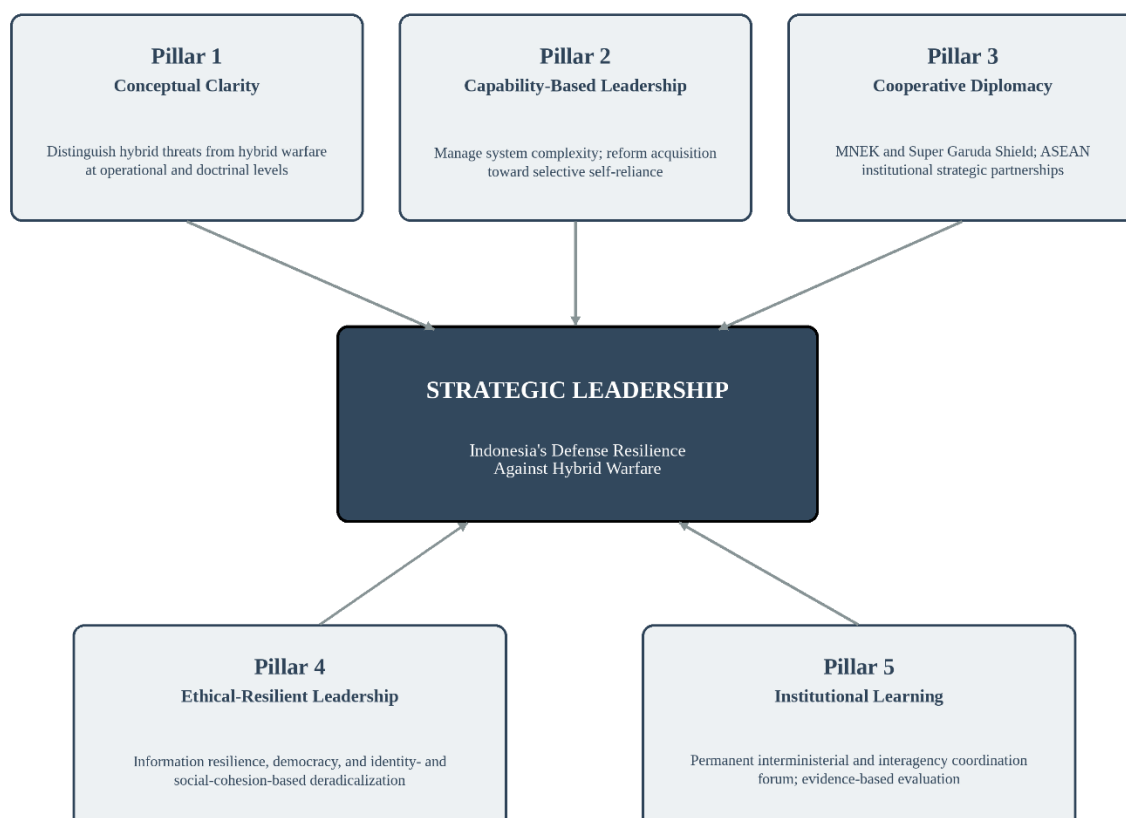


Figure 1. Five Pillars of Strategic Leadership for Indonesia's Defense Resilience Against Hybrid Warfare

Conceptual clarity. The first pillar is a clear distinction between hybrid threats and hybrid warfare so that the terminology does not become merely an academic "fashion" without operational substance (Libiseller, 2023). Strategic leaders must bridge the gap between political rhetoric, or stagecraft, and concrete state action, or statecraft, when confronting grey-zone challenges (Rauta & Monaghan, 2021). Without precise definitions, defense policy can become trapped in ambiguity and fail to generate an effective response. Theoretical understanding and policy implementation must therefore be synchronized so that Indonesia has a consistent and measurable basis for identifying and mitigating hybrid attacks against national sovereignty.

Capability-based leadership. The second pillar emphasizes realistic capability priorities and the careful management of military-system complexity. Leaders must understand the interaction between technology and operational missions when choosing which capabilities to develop (Bakhshi & Efatmaneshnik, 2024). This is particularly important for Indonesia, which remains dependent on foreign financing and therefore needs acquisition reform to move beyond a narrow cost-minimization approach (Matthews et al., 2025). Building a defense-innovation ecosystem compatible with fiscal constraints requires creativity in financial and capability management.

Cooperative diplomatic leadership. The third pillar strengthens Indonesia's strategic position through cooperative diplomacy. Multilateral military exercises have enabled Indonesia to shift from traditional bilateral patterns toward broader engagement and to strengthen its standing as a regional security provider (Inkiriwang, 2021). Leaders must nevertheless remain alert to declining functional benefits when partnership statuses proliferate excessively (Koga, 2026). By using multilateral platforms selectively, Indonesia can exercise leadership on maritime issues, moderate major-power rivalry, and generate practical defense benefits without sacrificing strategic autonomy.

Ethical and resilient leadership. The fourth pillar combines democratic protection with societal resilience. As political-campaign industries increasingly engage in the "engineering of consent," leaders must protect digital space from disinformation and polarization that damage social cohesion (Rakhmani & Saraswati, 2021). Effective rehabilitation and deradicalization models are also needed to address extremism through identity- and social-cohesion-based approaches that evolve with changing conditions. This is consistent with the conceptual distinction between non-state disruption and coordinated hybrid action, which is necessary for proportionate policy responses (Rauta & Monaghan, 2021). Strategic leadership must balance national security with civil liberties so that defense policy does not erode democratic values.

Institutional learning. The fifth pillar is strategic leadership grounded in institutional learning. Fragmented implementation of Indonesia's defense policies – whether in doctrine, defense acquisition, or cyber policy – repeatedly reflects poor alignment among institutions. The underlying challenge is not only a shortage of resources, but weak mechanisms for learning and coordination across ministries and agencies. Effective strategic leadership should establish a permanent coordination forum that regularly brings together the Ministry of Defense, the TNI, the National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN), the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other relevant institutions. Such a forum would allow lessons from one policy domain to be transferred systematically to another. Without this institutional-learning mechanism, defense-resilience initiatives will remain caught in a recurring pattern: normatively comprehensive policies implemented through fragmented operations, reproducing the gap between doctrinal ambition and practical execution identified throughout this article.

CONCLUSION

Strategic leadership plays a decisive role in strengthening Indonesia's national defense resilience against hybrid warfare. In an increasingly complex and unpredictable security environment, defense leaders can no longer rely solely on conventional military expertise. They must be able to recognize multidimensional threat patterns that combine military, political, economic, informational, cyber, and socio-cultural instruments. Strategic leadership is therefore the foundation for directing national vision, formulating policy, integrating resources, and orchestrating all components of the nation within an adaptive and resilient defense framework.

The discussion demonstrates that hybrid warfare challenges traditional boundaries between war and peace, domestic and international domains, and state and non-state actors. National resilience can consequently no longer be understood only in terms of military power. It must be treated as a comprehensive capacity that includes ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural, informational, and technological resilience. Strategic leadership is required to develop comprehensive situational awareness, formulate cross-sector strategies, and ensure effective coordination among defense institutions, security agencies, relevant ministries and government bodies, the private sector, academics, and civil society.

Indonesia's defense leadership must also be able to manage change and uncertainty. Leaders need a long-term perspective while remaining agile enough to respond to rapidly changing threats, especially in the cyber and information domains. This capability is reflected in anticipation, innovation, and continuous learning through doctrinal development, defense-equipment modernization, stronger intelligence capacity, and the construction of a secure defense digital ecosystem. Responses to hybrid threats should therefore be proactive, measurable, and sustainable rather than merely reactive.

A further requirement is strategic leadership grounded in character, ethics, and the national interest. When confronting information operations, disinformation, and attempts at social destabilization, leaders must model integrity, transparency, and accountability. Such leadership strengthens public trust in defense and security institutions, which in turn improves society's ability to resist information manipulation and polarization. Reinforcing national values, an archipelagic outlook, and state-defense awareness should form an integral part of the strategic leadership agenda for protecting national unity from non-conventional threats.

Ultimately, strengthening Indonesia's defense resilience against hybrid warfare requires comprehensive transformation driven by strategic leadership at every level, from policy-makers to operational personnel. The alignment of a national defense grand strategy, cross-sector policy, human-resource development, and advanced technology will determine Indonesia's ability to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national safety. Without visionary, adaptive, collaborative, and principled leadership, defense-resilience initiatives will remain fragmented. With strong strategic leadership grounded in transparency and moral accountability, however, Indonesia has a substantial opportunity to build a robust defense posture that can address future threats while remaining socially and diplomatically resilient, not merely militarily capable.

The synthesis also confirms that Indonesia's ability to confront hybrid warfare is inseparable from a deeper institutional problem: recurring fragmentation in policy implementation across agencies and domains. Visionary strategic leadership must address this fragmentation not simply by adding more regulation, but by building a durable culture of interagency coordination in which lessons from one policy field are transferred systematically to others. Indonesia's success will therefore depend not only on whether defense resources are sufficient, but also on whether strategic



leaders can transform institutional complexity from a persistent weakness into an adaptive strength that supports comprehensive national resilience, in line with the five pillars and five policy recommendations developed in this article.

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