

## National Security Threats in the Indonesian Border Areas with Timor Leste

Yudhi Yahya<sup>1\*</sup>, Joni Widjayanto<sup>2</sup>, Afrizal Hendra<sup>3</sup>  
Universitas Pertahanan, Indonesia

**Corresponding Author:** Yudhi Yahya [emaliyantnurhayati@gmail.com](mailto:emaliyantnurhayati@gmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Threats, National Security, Indonesia-Timor Leste, Border

*Received :* 14 February

*Revised :* 20 February

*Accepted:* 22 March

©2024 Yahya, Widjayanto, Hendra: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



### ABSTRACT

The border area between Indonesia and Timor Leste is an area that is vulnerable to national security threats. This situation is caused by various factors, such as differences in socio-economic conditions, illegal cross-border activities, and the potential for conflict between countries both countries. Some of these problems certainly require the role of the government, institutions and society to be resolved properly. The purpose of this writing is to analyze national security threats in the border area between Indonesia and Timor Leste. This paper uses qualitative methods which can provide a description and description of the phenomenon being studied. The results of this research show that the conditions of the RDTL and NKRI border areas in NTT Province do not yet show an ideal picture. The advice that author can give are to increase cooperation in exchanging intelligence data and joint border security operations; build and modernize border post infrastructure and patrol roads; increasing TNI and Polri personnel stationed in border areas; carry out outreach and empowerment of border communities, encourage ratification of the extradition agreement between Indonesia and Timor Leste and establish cooperation and capacity building assistance for Timor Leste in border control.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Defense is all efforts to defend state sovereignty, the territorial integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, and the safety of the entire nation from threats and disturbances to the integrity of the nation and state. In implementing national defense, Indonesia refers to a universal defense system that involves all citizens, territories and other national resources, and is prepared early by the government and implemented in a total, integrated, directed and ongoing manner. to uphold state sovereignty, territorial integrity and the safety of the entire nation from all forms of threats (Defense White Paper, 2022). Meanwhile, national security is a broader concept that includes all aspects that can influence the stability and survival of a country, not only from military threats but also nonmilitary threats. country is In the preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian Government was expressly mandated to realize the national goal of protecting all the Indonesian nation and all of Indonesia's blood, advancing general welfare, making the nation's life intelligent and participating in implementing world order based on independence, eternal peace and social justice. This provides insight into thinking in the context of implementing national defense, including in formulating general national defense policies (Mulyawan, 2012). National defense and security need to be implemented comprehensively, including on Indonesia's border with Timor Leste. The border region is a strategic area where the area nationally concerns the livelihoods of many people, both from the point of view of political, economic, social, cultural, environmental and defense and security interests.

Border areas include border areas on land, at sea and in the air with neighboring countries. Determining the area of the border area done with consider the realization of the functions of state borders, namely functions "security"and function"prosperity"by paying attention to the reality of developments in environmental conditions in the region through measurable field studies and observations. State borders have a strategic position, because state borders are the face or front door of a country. In the context of spatial planning, borders have a lot of potential because they originate from various kinds of activities that take place within the borders, generally in the form of social, political and economic activities. This is one of the reasons why spatial planning needs to be done.

To maintain its continuity, space needs to be organized, controlled and planned so that it can have a positive impact on the living things above it in the long term and sustainably. Spatial planning is a development approach with a spatial dimension that gives primary attention on the regulation of human behavior in utilizing space and the natural resources contained therein with the aim of creating a comfortable, productive and sustainable living space based on archipelagic insight and national resilience within the Republic of Indonesia.

Problem Underdeveloped development in border areas is the direction of regional development policy which has so far tended to be oriented“inward looking”, so it seems as if the border area is only the backyard of state development. As a result, border areas are considered not to be development

priority areas by the central and regional governments. Development regions borders must change the direction of development policies which have tended to be oriented inward looking become outward looking, so the area main from It can be used as a door gate trade with neighboring countries (Emanuel, 2007). The condition of the RDTL and NKRI border areas in NTT Province in Belu Regency, North Central Timor Regency and Kupang Regency does not yet show an ideal picture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic problems faced by the people in the NTT border area are found starting from the low level of community welfare in the border areas in these 3 districts, which is characterized by low people's income and limited business opportunities because most of the area is dry land. This is exacerbated by the lack of skills in managing dry land resources and limited capital facilities to build investment in the plantation sector, the low level of public health which is characterized by high infant and maternal mortality rates, cases of malnutrition, activity economy And 2 increasing HIV-AIDS from year to year, as well as the unavailability of healthy housing and inadequate clean water supplies (Uly, 2023).

The next problem is inadequate facilities and infrastructure for education, health, transportation, lighting and communication, causing residents in border areas to become isolated. Environmental damage as a result of the conversion of forests to agricultural land. Excavation of manganese and marble mines that does not pay attention to environmental sustainability, as well as low community awareness in managing river watersheds (DAS) at the border. This is exacerbated by border order and security still showing high dynamics. There are still disputed land issues related to the incompleteness of state boundaries, as well as non-compliance with crossborder regulations which have resulted in illegal border crossings. Problem solving in the NTT border area seems ineffective. Because of the diversity of development actors, both government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the business world, which have different priorities, are egosectoral, and are not supported by a good coordination system. Then also because of the inadequate capacity of officials at the sub-district and village levels as the main development actors on the front line of the border, the limited authority of regional governments in handling borders, and the limited budget allocation for border area development. The main question in this paper is: "What is the security situation on the Indonesia - Timor Leste border and what are the threats to national security on the border?"

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method that understanding based on different traditions and an investigative methodology that explores social or human problems. Researchers build complex images, analyze words, report detailed views from informants and conduct studies in the field (Mc Millan. Et. al, 1997). With the qualitative method, the author can find out what threats there are on Indonesia's border with Timor Leste and how to deal with these threats so that with this method he can describe the general condition or situation in the

region. In qualitative studies carried out by researchers, the initial steps in designing a research design are determining what will be investigated, choosing the right data collection method and identifying the right sources. Therefore, the established qualitative methods can be applied objectively and in a way that does not differ from scientific principles. In this chapter the researcher wants to outline the "phases" or research design (attending, telling, transcribing, analyzing, reading, and validating) that need to be carried out in the right way to collect reliable and valid qualitative data. In this article, triangulation techniques were used to check the validity of the data. Triangulation is applied to see the validity of the data obtained by analyzing the data source, so that the data obtained is correct data according to existing reality. The essence of triangulation is to see the truth of the data or information that will later be analyzed. Triangulation is used by researchers to see the relationships and interconnections of data as a whole.

## **RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesia's national security in the border region with Timor Leste is an important issue involving a number of strategic and historical factors. Timor Leste, a neighboring country to Indonesia, has been the focus of Indonesia's national security attention since its independence in 2002. Several main aspects influencing security dynamics between Indonesia and Timor Leste involve history, foreign policy, potential conflict, economics, and bilateral cooperation.

### **Security situation at the Indonesia –Timor Leste border**

Discussions regarding the border areas of the RDTL and the Republic of Indonesia cannot be separated from the history of border formation caused by Portuguese and Dutch colonialism (Seran, 2018). The struggle for this territory first occurred in 1701 through the Contract of Paravinici agreement where at that time the Portuguese proclaimed Timor Leste as their colony and at almost the same time the Dutch also claimed West Timor as their territory, so that since then the boundary between western Timor has been NTT, which is the territory of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia with the eastern part of Timor, namely the Republica Democratica Timor Leste, was formed. The history of relations between And Indonesia and Timor Leste begins with Indonesia's occupation of East Timor (now Timor Leste) in 1975.

The occupation sparked a protracted conflict, with many incidents of violence and human rights violations. In 1999, through a UN-supervised referendum, Timor Leste voted for independence, and this became the starting point for the development of bilateral relations between the two countries. After Timor Leste's independence, Security challenges arise mainly related to borders, economics and political stability. The long border between Indonesia and Timor Leste is an issue crucial, with the potential for conflict related to maritime boundaries and natural resources.

Border security is the main focus in efforts to maintain stability and prevent potential bilateral tensions. Indonesia's foreign policy towards Timor Leste reflects a commitment to building good and constructive relations. At the bilateral level, the two countries have tried to increase cooperation in various

fields, including the economy, education and health. At the multilateral level, Indonesia and Timor Leste's involvement in regional organizations such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the East Asian Democratic Community (EAS) creates platforms for broader dialogue and cooperation. Geneologically, the mainland tribes of Timor are still of the same descent. The fraternal relationship between the two communities on the border gives rise to the local community's perspective on the border which is at a certain level different from the political perspective constructed by the state.

There are at least several problems that arise at the RI-RDTL land border, including the mental readiness of the people of Indonesia and Timor Leste, the implementation of cross-border passes (PLB) for local residents, the division of power in border management between the TNI, Polri, Quarantine, Customs and Immigration and overlapping authority of the central government and regional governments. This problem can be explained as follows; First, the border terminology is more relevant when viewed politically, but less relevant when viewed from a socio-cultural perspective because of the socio-cultural connection between the tribes in Timor Leste and West Timor who still come from the same lineage. This can be interpreted as meaning that there are no socio-cultural restrictions between West Timorese and East Timorese.

The socio-cultural relations of the people on the border (Oepoli-Oecussi) are characterized by intense crossing residents to attend each other's traditional ceremonies both held in Amfoang-Kupang and Oecussi-Timor Leste. People from both countries do not use passports, but only get certificates from village heads and subdistrict heads, which are submitted to the border security task force (Satgas Pamtas).

Second, it is related to the mental readiness of both the government and the Indonesian people to accept the fact that East Timor has no longer been part of the unitary territory of the Republic of Indonesia since 1999. The government did not prepare in advance the conditions that would occur if East Timor separated from Indonesia. In this way, it seems as if they were not ready for the impact of the release of East Timor, such as the flow of refugees from East Timor to East Nusa Tenggara. In the initial period of displacement, NTT residents were not ready to accept the presence of these refugees, and vice versa, the East Timorese who were displaced were also not ready to live in refugee camps and were not mentally ready to become foreigners in NTT (Indonesia).

Third, it relates to the CrossBorder Pass (PLB) which has not yet been implemented. Considering the close socio-cultural and economic relations between the two communities, PLB is a solution for local residents who want to meet their relatives or trade with local residents across the border. In this context there are concerns about infiltration by exmilitia into Timor Leste and creating political instability by using PLB. Communities on the border often question the meaning of legality when they are accused of breaking the law when bringing in their own garden products without documents. The border between Indonesia and Timor Leste also still has several problems, one of which is experiencing economic backwardness, low quality of human resources, Public service infrastructure is still limited and supervision is lacking from security forces,

resulting in widespread violations occurring in border areas, smuggling and illegal cross-border activities that threaten Indonesia's national security. Some of these problems certainly require the role of government, institutions and society to be resolved properly.

Regarding the handling of the RI-Timor Leste border, so far it has been handled directly by 2 (two) institutions, namely Joint Border Committee (JBC) RI-RDTL which is coordinated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as the Technical Sub Commission Border Demarcation And Regulation RI-RDTL and also coordinated by the Ministry of Defense and Bakosurtanal. The land border between the Republic of Indonesia and Timor Leste is 268.8 km long, which crosses 4 districts in East Nusa Tenggara Province, namely Belu Regency, North Central Timor, Kupang Regency and Malaka Regency. The Republic of Indonesia's land border with Timor Leste is divided into two sectors, namely: (1) Eastern Sector (main sector) in Belu Regency and Malaka Regency which directly borders Covalima District and Bobonaro District in Timor Leste for 149.1 km; and (2) West Sector in Kupang Regency and North Central East Regency which directly borders the Oecussi District which is an area enclave Timor Leste is 119.7 km long. Most of the land boundaries between the two countries are in the form of natural boundaries watershed and thalweg (deepest part of the river). Crossing the border between Indonesia and Timor Leste on Timor Island refers to the agreement between the Dutch East Indies Government and Portugal in 1904 and Permanent Court Award (PCA) 1914, as well as the agreement between the governments of Indonesia and Timor Leste on 8 April 2005.

Border negotiations between Indonesia and Timor Leste began in 2001 with meetings held First Technical Sub-Committee On Border Demarcation and Regulation (TSCBDR) RI-UNTAET (United Nations Transactional Administration For East Timor). The state boundary between Indonesia and Timor Leste is 907 coordinate points which have been determined in the agreement on land borders (Provisional Agreement) which was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Timor Leste on 8 June 2005 in Dili but there are still segments that have not been resolved and that have not been surveyed/measured by the survey teams of the two countries. To date, demarcation has been carried out in the form of installing 42 boundary pillars in the East Sector and 8 boundary pillars in the West Sector. Meanwhile, the length of the line that has been traced (Delineation) is around 95% of the total boundary length.

Apart from that, CBDRF activities and joint mapping have been carried out along the boundary lines. The problem with the RI-Timor Leste boundary is that there is a mismatch between the agreement stated in the legal basis (1904 treaty and 1914 PCA) with the reality on the ground and what is known by the people around the border. The explanations given by residents around the border between the two countries sometimes conflict with each other, apart from that there are indigenous people who have their own views regarding the border. They traditionally view boundaries as recognized from generation to generation by different tribes among border communities.

On the other hand, the existing evidence does not support the claims between these tribes, this is something that cannot be brought to the negotiating table between the two countries. This problem is very clearly visible in the Western sector, especially the Manusasi and Naktuka Regions.

### **National Security Threats on The Indonesia - Timor Leste border**

National security threats refer to various factors or conditions that can endanger the sovereignty, territorial integrity and stability of a country. These threats involve various dimensions, including military, economic, political, social and environmental threats. Indonesia's security threat in Timor Leste involves a number of factors that can affect national stability and security. Some of the main aspects to consider involve the dynamics of bilateral relations, conflict history, potential ethnic conflict, border issues, and nontraditional security issues. Here are some security threats to be aware of:

a. History of Conflict and Bilateral Relations

The history of conflict between Indonesia and Timor Leste, especially related to the integration of East Timor into Indonesian territory in 1975 and its independence referendum in 1999, can create historical tensions and sensitivities between the two countries. The impact of the problem instability in border areas, affecting Indonesia's national security.

b. Ethnic and Cultural Conflict

Ethnic and cultural diversity in Timor Leste can be a potential source of conflict, especially if ethnic issues are not managed well. The impact of potential ethnic conflict could threaten stability in the region and harm Indonesia's national security, especially if the conflict spreads and triggers greater security disturbances.

c. Border Issues and Territorial Claims

Issues related to borders and territorial claims, especially in terms of maritime claims and natural resources in the Timor Sea, can create uncertainty and potential conflict. The impact of disputes related to borders and territorial claims can be detrimental to bilateral relations and trigger instability in border areas, affecting Indonesia's national security.

d. Maritime Security

Threats related to maritime security, such as illegal fishing, and other maritime security activities, can create instability in waters that are jointly owned by Indonesia and Timor Leste. Weak maritime security can provide an opening for illegal activities and influence economy, as well as harm security national Indonesia.

e. Extremism and Radicalization

The potential for radicalized extremism in border areas needs to be considered. Factors such as poverty and inequality can create an environment vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. The impact of the existence of extremist groups can complicate national security and create threats to stability in the region.

f. Humanitarian Issues and Human Rights

Humanitarian and human rights issues, especially those related to refugees, human rights violations, and transitional justice, can affect

regional stability and image. The impact of human rights violations can create instability in the region and harm Indonesia's reputation in the eyes of the international community.

g. Non-Traditional Threats

Nontraditional threats of human trafficking, narcotics and weapons smuggling also need to be considered because they can undermine national resilience and security. The impact of this illegal activity can create vulnerabilities to national security and requires joint efforts to handle and prevent it.

**Efforts to overcome national security threats on the Indonesia - Timor Leste border**

The following of several solutions that can be implemented to overcome national security threats in the border areas between Indonesia and Timor Leste:

- a. Conduct bilateral negotiations and joint patrols to resolve land and sea boundary issues which is not finished.
- b. Increase cooperation in exchanging intelligence data and joint border security operations between Indonesia and Timor Leste.
- c. Build and modernize the infrastructure of border posts and patrol roads, including improving mobility facilities and surveillance sensors.
- d. Increase the number of TNI and Polri personnel stationed in border areas and improve their training and skills.
- e. Do socialization empowering border communities so that they are not involved in illegal cross-border activities.
- f. Push ratification agreement extradition between Indonesia and Timor Leste to facilitate the arrest of perpetrators of cross-border crimes.
- g. Establish cooperation and assistance capacity building for Timor Leste in border control and law enforcement.

Viewed from a national perspective regarding borders, the government must eliminate discrimination against former East Timorese refugees. Apart from that, development of border areas, especially the RI-RDTL land border, should be made a priority to prevent the emergence of the idea of a Greater Timor State. This can be caused if development in Timor Leste is much more advanced than NTT (Indonesia), so it is feared that some West Timorese will choose to join Timor Leste and form the State of Greater Timor. Another thing that also needs to be considered is the importance of developing national insight through education in border areas, so that the young generation in border areas does not want independence like neighboring Timor Leste. National insight will also not be interpreted by people in border areas if their welfare is not taken into account by the government. With these various solutions, it is hoped that national security threats in the Indonesia - Timor Leste border region can be prevented and minimized in order to maintain the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The condition of the RDTL and NKRI border areas in NTT Province in Belu Regency, North Central Timor Regency and Kupang Regency does not yet show an ideal picture. The basic problem is And faced by people in the region The NTT border is found starting from the low level of community welfare border area. The main problem of underdeveloped development in border areas is the direction of regional development policy which has so far tended to be oriented "inward looking", so it seems as if the border area is only the backyard of state development. Problems that pose potential threats can be minimized with the following solutions, namely conducting bilateral negotiations, increasing cooperation in exchanging intelligence data and joint border security operations, building and modernizing the infrastructure of border posts and patrol roads, increasing TNI and Polri personnel stationed in border areas, carry out outreach and empowering border communities, encouraging ratification of the extradition agreement between Indonesia and Timor Leste as well as establishing cooperation and capacity building assistance for Timor Leste in border control.

## **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

In writing this article the researcher realizes that there are still many shortcomings in terms of language, writing, and form of presentation considering the limited knowledge and abilities of the researchers themselves. Therefore, for the perfection of the article, the researcher expects constructive criticism and suggestions from various parties.

## **REFERENCES**

- Anggoro, K. 2003. Keamanan nasional, pertahanan negara, dan ketertiban umum. In Seminar Pembangunan Hukum Nasional VIII. Diselenggarakan Oleh Badan Pembinaan Hukum Nasional.
- Arifin, B. 2019. Komentar Ahli terhadap Monograf Kelembagaan Pembangunan Pertanian (oleh M. Arsyad, A Nuddin, M.H. Jamil, S. Yusuf). Nas Media Pustaka. Makassar.
- Emanuel, Ulu. 2007. Model Perencanaan Stratejik Pendidikan untuk Wilayah Lintas Perbatasan (Disertasi), Bandung: Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia.
- Fauzi, R. D. 2021. Role of Regional Autonomy in the Indonesian National Defense and Security System (Sishankamrata). *Journal of Law and Legal Reform*, 2(1), 15-38.
- Mulyawan, R. 2012. Implementasi Kebijakan Pembangunan Bidang Pertahanan di Wilayah Perbatasan Antaraneegara dalam Konteks Otonomi Daerah (Studi Kasus di Wilayah Perbatasan Indonesia dengan Timor Leste). *Jurnal Sosial Politik*, 2(1).
- Raharjo, S. N. I. (2018). Analisis dan upaya penyelesaian konflik antara warga perbatasan Timor Tengah Utara, Indonesia dengan warga distrik oecussi, Timor Leste pada 2012-2013. *Jurnal Pertahanan dan Bela Negara*, 4(1), 155-174.
- Seran, R. 2018. Strategi Pemerintah Republik Indonesia dalam Penanganan Masalah Pelintas Batas Indonesia-Timor Leste (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Airlangga).
- Suwito, A. 2017. Sishankamrata sebagai upaya peningkatan ketahanan nasional Indonesia. In Seminar Nasional KeIndonesiaan II Tahun 2017.