

Strategic Leadership and National Defense Adaptation: Navigating Multidimensional Security Threats in Indonesia

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Abstract : The contemporary security environment has shifted from conventional interstate threats toward interconnected, multidimensional insecurity spanning military, cyber, economic, social, informational, and cognitive domains within a gray zone that blurs the line between war and peace. This study applies a qualitative approach using library research and conceptual analysis of defense-policy literature, strategic-leadership theory, and national-security scholarship, examined descriptively and analytically to construct a new conceptual framework. The findings indicate that defense-strategy adaptation is a manifestation of dynamic capabilities operating through sensing, seizing, and transforming, while strategic leadership functions as the principal driver through sense-making, strategic agility, and bridging leadership in developing adaptive human capital. The two constructs operate reciprocally within a continuous cycle of organizational development. The study concludes that the effectiveness of a national defense system is determined not merely by military strength or technological superiority, but by leadership capable of managing change in an adaptive, consistent, and sustainable manner.

Keywords : Strategic Leadership; Defense Strategy Adaptation; Multidimensional Threats; Dynamic Capabilities; National Security

Abstrak : Lingkungan keamanan kontemporer telah bergeser dari ancaman antarnegara konvensional menuju ketidakamanan multidimensi yang saling terhubung, yang mencakup ranah militer, siber, ekonomi, sosial, informasi, dan kognitif di dalam zona abu-abu yang mengaburkan batas antara perang dan perdamaian. Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan penelitian pustaka dan analisis konseptual terhadap literatur kebijakan pertahanan, teori kepemimpinan strategis, serta kajian keamanan nasional, yang ditelaah secara deskriptif dan analitis untuk membangun kerangka konseptual baru. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa adaptasi strategi pertahanan merupakan manifestasi dari kapabilitas dinamis yang beroperasi melalui proses mendeteksi, memanfaatkan, dan mentransformasi, sementara kepemimpinan strategis berfungsi sebagai pendorong utama melalui pembentukan makna, kelincahan strategis, dan kepemimpinan yang menjembatani dalam mengembangkan sumber daya manusia yang adaptif. Kedua konstruksi tersebut beroperasi secara timbal balik dalam siklus berkelanjutan pengembangan organisasi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa efektivitas sistem pertahanan nasional tidak hanya ditentukan oleh kekuatan militer atau keunggulan teknologi, tetapi oleh kepemimpinan yang mampu mengelola perubahan secara adaptif, konsisten, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci : Kepemimpinan Strategis; Adaptasi Strategi Pertahanan; Ancaman Multidimensi; Kapabilitas Dinamis; Keamanan Nasional

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary security environment has undergone a profound transformation, shifting from conventional interstate threats toward increasingly complex, interconnected, and unpredictable forms of insecurity. Security can no longer be understood solely through traditional military dimensions; rather, it has evolved into a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing the cyber, economic, social, informational, and cognitive domains. Modern conflicts are increasingly taking the form of hybrid warfare, which blurs the line between war and peace and involves both state and non-state actors within the same spectrum of confrontation (Hoffman, 2007). These developments demand a strategic approach that is not only adaptive but also capable of interpreting rapidly evolving threats amid ever-increasing uncertainty.

In such situations, conventional strategic thinking often faces limitations in grasping the complexity of contemporary conflicts. Changes in the strategic environment rarely occur gradually or predictably; rather, they often emerge as disruptive events that challenge the basic assumptions of conventional defense planning (Betts, 2000). Contemporary threats increasingly operate in what is known as the “gray zone,” where confrontations are waged through information operations, economic pressure, cyberattacks, and other non-kinetic instruments rather than open military combat. Consequently, the linear approach that has long guided threat assessments is no longer adequate to explain the fluid and multidimensional nature of security.

For Indonesia, these dynamics hold particular significance given its strategic geographic position in the Indo-Pacific region, where the interests of major powers are increasingly intertwined. However, national security challenges do not stem solely from external pressures but are also shaped by domestic vulnerabilities, including uneven development, social disparities, and limited digital literacy among certain segments of the population. As the nation’s critical infrastructure becomes increasingly dependent on digital technology, vulnerabilities related to information leaks and cyberattacks pose a major risk to national stability (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012). Thus, Indonesia’s national security challenges should not be viewed as separate internal and external phenomena, but rather as mutually reinforcing dimensions that collectively shape an increasingly complex strategic environment.

The growing reliance on digital systems has simultaneously elevated cyberspace to one of the primary domains of contemporary conflict. Modern attacks are no longer limited to physical targets but are increasingly directed at data infrastructure, communication networks, and public perception—all of which can erode the legitimacy of state institutions. Under these circumstances, information risk management has become an integral component of national security strategy to protect increasingly digitized governance systems (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). Various information security breaches have even demonstrated significant consequences for economic stability and public trust, thereby reinforcing the urgency of strengthening national cybersecurity capabilities (Gordon *et al.*, 2015).

Addressing such complexity requires a strategic framework capable of integrating diverse dimensions of threats into a coherent national policy architecture. The concept of grand strategy provides a crucial foundation for aligning national objectives, available resources, and policy instruments in the face of an increasingly complex global environment (Brands, 2016). Adapting defense strategy cannot be separated from the concept of dynamic capabilities, which emphasizes an organization’s ability to respond to environmental changes through the processes of sensing change, capitalizing on opportunities, and continuously transforming structures and resources (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Without adequate adaptive capacity, defense organizations risk

becoming institutionally rigid and losing their strategic relevance amid the accelerating pace of global change.

Nevertheless, strategic adaptation is shaped not only by technological advancements or organizational structures, but also by the quality of strategic leadership. The upper-echelons perspective argues that organizational outcomes are strongly influenced by the characteristics, experiences, and cognitive orientations of top leaders, which ultimately shape strategic choices and institutional responses to environmental challenges (Hambrick, 2007). Strategic leadership also relies on the cognitive capability to understand the complexity of the environment and interpret its strategic implications to support decision-making (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). In conditions of high uncertainty, leadership serves as a bridge between analytical reasoning and strategic intuition, enabling organizations to respond quickly without losing alignment with their long-term goals.

Based on this, this study aims to develop an analytical framework that integrates strategic leadership and the adaptive capabilities of defense strategies into a single, cohesive conceptual perspective. The article focuses on explaining how strategic leadership serves as the primary driver in building the adaptive capabilities of defense organizations, thereby enabling defense institutions to maintain their relevance and effectiveness amid an increasingly volatile strategic environment. Thus, this article emphasizes that the success of defense strategies does not depend solely on military strength or technological superiority, but rather on leadership capable of managing organizational change through an adaptive, innovative, and sustainable approach.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research combined with conceptual analysis. This approach was chosen based on the conceptual and theoretical nature of the research problem, namely the effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between strategic leadership and the adaptation of national defense strategies in addressing multidimensional security threats. The literature review method was chosen because it allows for the collection, examination, and integration of various theoretical ideas scattered throughout the body of strategic and defense scholarship into a single coherent argument.

The data in this study are derived from secondary sources collected through a review of various literature, including defense policy documents, strategic leadership theories, strategic management studies, and academic journals related to national security and strategic studies. These sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and recency in relation to the issue under study, thereby providing an adequate conceptual foundation for the development of the analytical framework. The literature review focused on works discussing the concepts of dynamic capabilities, upper echelons theory, strategic agility, and bridging leadership in the context of national defense.

The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach. In the descriptive phase, various concepts and findings from the literature were systematically presented to obtain a comprehensive overview of the transformation of threats and the demands for adaptation in defense strategy. In the analytical phase, these concepts were critically examined and related to one another to reveal patterns of interconnection between strategic leadership and adaptive capabilities. Through this synthesis process, a new conceptual framework was developed—one that positions strategic leadership as the primary driver of defense strategy adaptation within a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

The Evolution of Multidimensional Threats and Strategic Complexity

As we enter the mid-2020s, the global security environment—including that of Indonesia—is undergoing a fundamental transformation rather than a gradual evolution. The conventional security paradigm, which emphasizes a linear and military-oriented approach, is increasingly inadequate for explaining the complexity of contemporary threats. Security challenges are now multidimensional, encompassing interconnected military, cyber, economic, social, informational, and cognitive domains (Hoffman, 2007). This transformation is also characterized by the intensification of conflicts in the gray zone, where threats rarely manifest as direct military confrontations but rather take the form of disinformation campaigns, economic pressure, and cyber operations capable of producing significant strategic effects. Thus, modern warfare no longer features a clear-cut distinction between peace and conflict but operates along a fluid continuum.

In this landscape, information has become a crucial instrument of power in geopolitical competition. Vulnerabilities in information systems open opportunities for adversaries to escalate broader security challenges, especially when cyber operations and disinformation campaigns can erode public perception, weaken institutional legitimacy, and undermine political stability without resorting to conventional military force (Johnson et al., 2011). For Indonesia, these dynamics are particularly significant given its position in the Indo-Pacific, a region increasingly shaped by rivalries among major powers. Nevertheless, Indonesia's strategic vulnerabilities also stem from domestic factors, such as socioeconomic disparities, political fragmentation, uneven digital literacy, and dependence on digital infrastructure. It is the interplay between these internal and external factors that shapes a multidimensional security environment.

Rapid advances in digital technology are accelerating the transformation of the threat landscape by making cyberspace one of the primary domains of modern conflict. Contemporary attacks increasingly target data infrastructure, communication networks, and even public perception through social media algorithms and artificial intelligence technologies, rather than relying on physical destruction. Disinformation campaigns, in particular, can erode a state's legitimacy without triggering open armed conflict, making information risk management an integral component of national security strategy (Gordon et al., 2015). Reliance on globally interconnected digital technologies has also given rise to new vulnerabilities, including the possibility of cyber sabotage against critical infrastructure that could trigger cross-sectoral ripple effects and threaten national resilience.

These developments underscore the need for a more integrated strategic framework. The concept of grand strategy offers an appropriate foundation by integrating various sources of national power into a coherent and adaptive policy framework (Brands, 2016). For Indonesia, this implies a fundamental reorientation of defense policy from a purely military-centered perspective toward a comprehensive approach that mobilizes the collective capabilities of the government, the private sector, academia, and civil society. Cross-sectoral coordination is a prerequisite for an integrated—rather than fragmented—response to threats; therefore, Indonesia's defense strategy should be built upon three mutually reinforcing pillars—adaptation, collaboration, and innovation—to establish a proactive security system capable of preventing conflict escalation.

Adaptive Defense Strategy Capabilities as a Manifestation of Dynamic Capabilities **Kapabilitas Strategi Pertahanan Adaptif sebagai Manifestasi Kapabilitas Dinamis**

Kemampuan mengadaptasi strategi pertahanan telah menjadi kebutuhan fundamental dalam merespons lingkungan keamanan yang semakin kompleks dan dinamis. Ketika ancaman berevolusi dari tantangan konvensional yang terisolasi menjadi risiko multidimensi yang saling terhubung, institusi pertahanan harus secara berkelanjutan menyesuaikan cara mereka merumuskan, menerapkan, dan mengevaluasi kebijakan strategis. Adaptasi strategis dengan

demikian melampaui penyesuaian prosedural semata, mencakup transformasi pola pikir organisasi, budaya kelembagaan, dan struktur tata kelola. Dalam konteks ini, kemampuan beradaptasi merepresentasikan sebuah kapabilitas dinamis yang memungkinkan organisasi pertahanan tetap relevan secara strategis meski dihadapkan pada ketidakpastian dan perubahan lingkungan yang cepat.

From the perspective of contemporary organizational theory, adaptive capacity is conceptualized as a dynamic capability based on three interrelated processes—sensing, seizing, and transforming—which serve as core mechanisms for maintaining strategic competitiveness in a highly dynamic environment. Sensing refers to the ability to detect emerging changes and identify potential threats and opportunities early on. Seizing involves the capacity to mobilize resources and formulate timely strategic responses, while transforming reflects an organization's ability to reconfigure its structure, culture, and operational processes to maintain long-term relevance (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Without these three capabilities, defense organizations will struggle to keep pace with the evolution of increasingly unpredictable threats.

The integration of defense resources is another critical dimension in ensuring the effectiveness of strategic adaptation, both at the organizational and national levels. A nation's defense system should be understood as an integrated framework within which core, reserve, and support components operate in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing manner. Equally important is the development of an organizational knowledge management system that enables operational experience to be systematically transformed into institutional learning. This kind of learning process reduces the likelihood of repeating mistakes while strengthening the organization's capacity to respond to future challenges (Argote, 2013). Weak coordination, on the other hand, has the potential to result in fragmented responses, duplication of efforts, and strategic inconsistencies that ultimately erode the effectiveness of defense policy.

Technological transformation and digitalization are also key drivers of adaptive defense strategies. The integration of cutting-edge technology is not limited to the modernization of major weapons systems but also encompasses fundamental changes in organizational processes, command structures, and strategic decision-making. However, the growing reliance on digital technology simultaneously creates new vulnerabilities that require careful management. Therefore, strategic leaders must possess adequate digital literacy to ensure that strategic decisions are not only conceptually sound but also technically feasible and operationally effective. Nevertheless, the human dimension remains the most decisive factor; advanced technology will not produce effective defense outcomes without competent personnel who possess strategic thinking skills and the ability to adapt to change.

The Role of Strategic Leadership in Building Human Capital

Amid an increasingly complex and uncertain security environment, strategic leadership has emerged as a decisive factor shaping the direction and effectiveness of modern defense organizations. Leadership can no longer be viewed merely as an administrative function for managing organizational routines, but rather as an adaptive capacity to interpret environmental changes, manage uncertainty, and guide institutional transformation over time. Strategic leadership is, by its very nature, dynamic, continuously connecting defense organizations with their ever-changing strategic environment while ensuring that institutional goals remain aligned with rapidly evolving geopolitical, technological, and social conditions.

One of the greatest challenges facing strategic leaders is decision-making under conditions of incomplete and imperfect information. In the contemporary security environment, decisions often must be made before comprehensive intelligence is available, thus requiring strong sense-

making abilities. Going beyond simply processing information, strategic leaders must recognize meaningful patterns, interpret ambiguous signals, and translate uncertainty into coherent strategic actions. This underscores that effective leadership depends not only on analytical competence and evidence-based reasoning, but also on strategic judgment, cognitive flexibility, and well-developed intuition.

Tantangan lain bersumber dari kecenderungan organisasi pertahanan terjebak dalam kekakuan institusional. Rutinitas organisasi dan struktur birokrasi yang mapan, meski penting untuk menjaga stabilitas, dapat menghambat respons terhadap ancaman yang berevolusi cepat seperti serangan siber, peperangan hibrida, dan operasi berbasis kecerdasan buatan. Mengatasi kekakuan ini menuntut kelincuhan strategis (*strategic agility*) yang memungkinkan organisasi tetap fleksibel dalam menyesuaikan struktur, proses, dan prioritas operasional tanpa kehilangan koherensi dengan tujuan jangka panjang (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Kepemimpinan yang lincah dengan demikian menyeimbangkan kesinambungan institusional dan inovasi organisasi, sehingga institusi pertahanan tetap responsif sekaligus konsisten secara strategis.

Strategic leadership is equally important in building an adaptive workforce capable of supporting defense transformation. The upper echelons theory suggests that organizational outcomes are heavily influenced by the characteristics, cognitive orientations, and experiences of senior leaders, which in turn shape institutional culture, strategic priorities, and decision-making processes (Hambrick, 2007). Therefore, leadership quality encompasses the creation of an organizational environment that fosters continuous learning, innovation, and adaptive thinking. In the Indonesian context, strategic leadership takes on additional significance due to the country's vast archipelagic geography and diverse security challenges, which demand "bridging leadership"—that is, the capacity to reconcile institutional differences, align diverse stakeholders, and promote the coherent implementation of policies across organizational boundaries.

Challenges and Implementation of Non-Military Defense Strategies

Although the concept of adaptive defense strategy has been widely developed in academic literature, its implementation in the field remains constrained by a series of structural, cultural, and institutional challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is organizational resistance to change, particularly within defense institutions that traditionally emphasize stability, hierarchical authority, and strict adherence to standard procedures. Practices and doctrines that proved effective under previous strategic conditions are often maintained even though the security environment has changed substantially, giving rise to institutional inertia that slows transformation and limits innovation. The challenges of strategic adaptation are thus embedded in organizational culture, leadership traditions, incentive systems, and institutional perceptions of risk.

In addition to internal challenges, institutional fragmentation is another major obstacle to the implementation of a multidimensional defense strategy. Coordination among the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and civilian institutions is often hampered by differences in mandates, bureaucratic structures, and policy priorities. In such a complex governance environment, strategic leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inter-organizational connectivity and preventing coordination failures when responding to cross-sectoral threats. Without effective integration, defense strategies risk becoming fragmented and inconsistent, thereby reducing their operational effectiveness. Given the asymmetric and rapidly evolving nature of contemporary threats, the ability to establish seamless coordination across institutional boundaries has become a strategic necessity, not merely an administrative preference.

Resource constraints are also a critical factor affecting the implementation of adaptive defense strategies. Defense modernization requires significant investment in cutting-edge military

capabilities, technological innovation, infrastructure development, and human resource development. However, fiscal constraints require policymakers to establish clear strategic priorities in allocating limited resources. Under these conditions, risk-based resource management is essential to maximize defense effectiveness while minimizing strategic vulnerabilities. This challenge is further complicated by reliance on foreign defense technology—particularly for developing countries like Indonesia—which has the potential to create long-term strategic dependence and erode national autonomy if critical defense systems rely on supply chains controlled by external parties.

The fourth dimension of the proposed framework is collaborative leadership in the context of non-military defense, which is an essential element in addressing hybrid and multidimensional security threats. Modern security challenges can no longer be managed solely through conventional military instruments; rather, they demand coordinated action across government institutions, the private sector, academia, and civil society. Within this framework, strategic leadership serves as an integrative mechanism that connects stakeholders with differing institutional responsibilities, interests, and perspectives. The capacity for bridging leadership is indispensable in transforming institutional diversity into collective strength, reflecting a paradigm shift from a state-centered conception of security toward a more inclusive, community-based approach to national resilience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that the contemporary security environment has transformed into an increasingly complex, interconnected, and multidimensional landscape, blurring the traditional boundaries between war and peace and rendering conventional defense paradigms inadequate. In such a strategic environment, strategic leadership emerges as a determining factor in a defense organization's capacity to adapt effectively, while the adaptive capabilities of defense strategy are the practical manifestation of effective leadership through the processes of sensing, leveraging, and transforming. The analytical framework developed confirms that strategic leadership and adaptive capabilities do not function as separate variables, but rather as mutually reinforcing elements within a continuous cycle of organizational development; leadership drives institutional adaptation through vision and decision-making, while the outcomes of adaptation strengthen the effectiveness of leadership through learning and the accumulation of institutional experience.

Thus, the effectiveness of a nation's defense system is not determined solely by the quantity of resources it possesses, but rather by its capacity to manage change in an adaptive, consistent, and sustainable manner. A nation that successfully combines strategic leadership with strong adaptive capabilities will be better prepared to anticipate uncertainty, respond to multidimensional threats, and maintain strategic resilience amid a volatile global security environment. Adaptation should not be understood as a reactive response to external changes, but rather as a long-term strategic capability that enables defense institutions to maintain their relevance and strengthen their institutional resilience.

Based on these findings, defense policymakers are recommended to prioritize strengthening strategic leadership through sustained investment in defense education, research, and technological innovation, while fostering an organizational culture that values learning and openness to change. Strengthening interagency coordination through integrated information systems and institutionalized strategic communication forums should be prioritized to prevent policy fragmentation, while defense technology self-reliance should be bolstered through the development of the domestic defense industry and the national innovation ecosystem. Further research is expected to empirically test this conceptual framework within the context of Indonesia's defense institutions, while also exploring the interrelationships between strategic leadership, digital

transformation, and defense innovation to enrich the body of knowledge on national security studies.

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