

Strengthening the Strategic Role of the Indonesian Diaspora in Non-Military National Defense and National Resilience

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the Indonesian diaspora can be positioned as a strategic non-military asset to strengthen national defense and national resilience. Against a backdrop of evolving security threats ranging from AI enabled warfare, cyberattacks, critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, climate change and disasters the study argues that defense can no longer be confined to territorial and military dimensions alone. Instead, it adopts a qualitative approach through an integrative literature review on defense diplomacy, national resilience, and diaspora studies, complemented by analysis of recent Indonesian and international research on health diplomacy, economic resilience, climate adaptation, and identity politics. The findings show that Indonesian diaspora communities already contribute de facto to non-military defense: as health professionals in strategic health diplomacy, entrepreneurs and MSME partners in economic resilience, religious and community leaders in ideological resilience, and knowledge brokers in climate and disaster risk reduction. However, these contributions remain fragmented and under-institutionalized in current policy frameworks. The article proposes several strategic directions, including diaspora health and DRR corps, digital security and narrative training, economic defense partnerships, and transnational environmental networks. It concludes that recognizing and systematically empowering the diaspora will extend the ethos of bela negara beyond borders and help build a genuinely networked Indonesian national resilience.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary security is no longer defined only by tanks, missiles, and conventional war. New risks arise from artificial intelligence (AI), drones, cyber operations, critical infrastructure vulnerability, pandemics, and climate change. Discussions about lethal AI weapons, for example, show how autonomous systems compress decision-making time, blur accountability, and raise civilian-protection concerns (Adam, 2024; Qiao-Franco & Bode, 2023). Strategic debates on grand strategy, alliance politics, and arms procurement also show how security decisions are shaped by domestic politics, symbolism, and trust, as seen in the EU's security-policy evolution, post-Brexit cooperation, Turkey's S-400 and drone policies, and Australian-French ties after AUKUS (Sus, 2024; Sweeney & Winn, 2022; Hintz & Banks, 2022; Rossiter & Cannon, 2022; Staunton & Day, 2023; Takagi, 2022; Mello, 2021; Alcaro, 2021).

At the same time, security now clearly includes infrastructure and information. Maritime studies highlight the vulnerability of critical sea-lane and port infrastructure (Bueger & Liebetau, 2023), while analysis of multilingual public diplomacy and intelligence disclosure shows how states use communication, Twitter campaigns, and selective declassification to frame conflicts and shape public opinion (Moreno-Mercado & Calatrava-García, 2023; Riemer, 2021). Research on phishing attacks reveals how cyber operations exploit social trust and target citizens, not just governments (Lee et al., 2021a). In Asia, evidence from Taiwan, Rwanda's deployments in Africa, and Philippine diplomacy toward China illustrates that soft power, signals, and narrative management are central to national security policy (Wang et al., 2023; Cannon & Donelli, 2023; Takagi, 2022).

Within this complex environment, diasporas become important non-state security actors. The Indonesian diaspora—nurses, students, religious leaders, entrepreneurs, migrant workers—forms a global network that connects Indonesia with host societies (Efendi et al., 2024; Srimulyani, 2021). Their everyday activities intersect with strategic health diplomacy, public diplomacy, tourism recovery, economic resilience, and identity politics (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Rengganis et al., 2023; Yayusman et al., 2023; Webster, 2022).

Parallel literature on national resilience in Indonesia shows how climate change, environmental degradation, disasters, and economic shocks test the robustness of institutions and communities. Studies highlight climate and anthropogenic pressures on islands and forests, vulnerabilities to floods, and the importance of community knowledge, DRR education, and local government leadership (Setiawati et al., 2023; Octavia et al., 2023; Hartoyo et al., 2022; Hernawan et al., 2023; Langlois et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2022; Oktari et al., 2022; Willetts et al., 2022; Amri et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2021; Bosshard et al., 2022). Economically, MSME and banking studies show that dynamic capabilities, digital transformation, and targeted recovery policies are crucial for surviving crises (Putritamara et al., 2023; Supari & Anton, 2022; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Lines et al., 2022).

Conceptual Background

Evolving defense diplomacy and security practices

Recent defense-diplomacy scholarship demonstrates that security policy is increasingly made in complex governance settings rather than purely in military headquarters. EU security and defense reforms, captured in the Strategic Compass, depend on policy entrepreneurs who navigate bureaucratic politics and shifting threat perceptions (Sus, 2024). Post-Brexit arrangements on internal and external security illustrate how legal frameworks, trust, and domestic politics determine the level of cooperation attainable between the UK and the EU (Sweeney & Winn, 2022). Studies of Europas's efforts to defend the Iran nuclear deal show how middle powers use diplomacy to prolong multilateral agreements in the face of great-power pressure (Alcaro, 2021).

Beyond Europe, Rwanda's deployments in Africa, Australia-France relations after AUKUS, and the Philippines' grand strategy toward China show how emerging states and middle powers use military missions, narratives of trust, and hedging to navigate regional competition (Cannon & Donelli, 2023; Staunton & Day, 2023; Takagi, 2022). Turkey's decisions around S-400 procurement and combat-drone development reveal how symbolic politics and domestic legitimation concerns can lead to suboptimal weapons choices which nonetheless bolster regime image (Hintz & Banks, 2022; Rossiter & Cannon, 2022).

Other work focuses on security practices beyond weapons: strategic health diplomacy, intelligence disclosure, and multilingual communication campaigns. Strategic health diplomacy sees militaries and health professionals collaborating on pandemics and humanitarian crises, making health a central site of foreign and defense policy (Horne & McCrae, 2021). Public diplomacy research shows how armed forces use multilingual Twitter messaging to justify operations, manage crises, and address foreign publics (Moreno-Mercado & Calatrava-García, 2023). Intelligence studies emphasize that political leaders selectively disclose or withhold intelligence to support narratives and alliance management (Riemer, 2021).

In addition, the rise of AI and cyber threats complicates defense diplomacy. AI weaponization and human machine interaction in Chinese military practice raise questions about control and escalation (Qiao-Franco & Bode, 2023), while discussions on lethal AI stress the difficulty of setting global norms for emerging technologies (Adam, 2024). Applied studies on phishing-email attack profiling underscore that information systems and citizens are front lines of modern security (Lee et al., 2021a).

Taken together, these works suggest that defense diplomacy is now a multi-actor, multi-domain enterprise, in which diasporas, digital platforms, health professionals, and private actors all play roles alongside militaries and diplomats.

The Indonesian diaspora as transnational community and soft-power resource

The Indonesian diaspora is diverse: skilled health professionals, restaurant owners, students, religious scholars, and migrant workers spread across Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific. Health research documents how Indonesian nurses working abroad expand professional networks, generate remittances, and enhance Indonesia's reputation for caregiving, while also navigating regulatory and ethical challenges (Efendi et al., 2024). Gastrodiplomacy research on Indonesian restaurants in Australia shows how food becomes an instrument of soft power, making Indonesia visible and relatable through everyday dining experiences (Yayusman et al., 2023). Tourism studies reveal that diaspora actors can help restore tourist confidence and speed up crisis recovery by narrating Indonesia as a safe and attractive destination (Cahyanto et al., 2023).

Diaspora communities are also embedded in religio-cultural networks. Work on Muslim cultures of the Indian Ocean highlights Indonesia's place in broader historical circuits of trade, scholarship, and pilgrimage (Pradines & Topan, 2023). Studies of Ba 'Alawi Sufi traditions show how female preachers in the diaspora preserve and transmit religious teachings, maintaining continuity across borders (Husein, 2021). Research on Nahdlatul Ulama's multi-track diplomacy in Europe demonstrates how religious organizations deploy dialogue and fiqh-based arguments to counter Islamophobia and promote tolerance (Taufiq et al., 2022).

At the community level, Chinese-Indonesian hometown associations in Singkawang illustrate how diasporic imaginings of kampung halaman are built through sentimental narratives, ritual, and philanthropy (Hertzman, 2024). Studies of the Indonesian diaspora's shift from "political" to "social" roles show how organizations reorient from high-profile lobbying to development, social services, and image-building as political opportunities change (Dewansyah, 2021). Work on affect and narratives in Southeast Asian migration examines how migrants' emotions and stories shape transnational politics and solidarity (Picos, 2021).

These studies collectively show that the Indonesian diaspora already performs diplomatic and developmental functions – as informal envoys, cultural brokers, and knowledge transmitters even when these roles are not formally recognized in defense policy.

National resilience in Indonesian research

Indonesian resilience research highlights multiple interlinked dimensions: environmental, social, economic, and institutional. Environmental studies diagnose climate change and anthropogenic pressures on Bintan and other islands, assessing local policy responses (Setiawati et al., 2023); explore how smart agroforestry sustains soil fertility and livelihoods (Octavia et al., 2023); evaluate carbon stocks in traditional agroforestry systems (Hartoyo et al., 2022); and map blue-carbon seagrass habitats crucial for climate mitigation (Hernawan et al., 2023). Urban studies combine remote sensing and media analysis to map flood vulnerability in Jakarta (Nasution et al., 2022) and examine the usability of global and national data sets for flood-risk assessments (Langlois et al., 2023).

On the social and institutional side, research in fragile and post-conflict countries shows that decentralization can both strengthen and weaken health systems depending on how responsibilities, resources, and accountability are designed (Brennan & Abimbola, 2023). Work in Indonesia on co-developing climate adaptation evidence with local governments illustrates that participatory processes increase the legitimacy and usability of resilience strategies (Willettts et al., 2022). Disaster studies highlight how community knowledge creation and DRR education—through school curricula and tsunami lullabies—build long-term preparedness (Oktari et al., 2022; Amri et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2021).

Economically, resilience depends on the capacity of firms and financial institutions to absorb shocks. MSME studies show that dynamic capabilities and digital transformation improved business resilience for beekeeping enterprises during COVID-19 (Putritamara et al., 2023). Banking research indicates that Indonesia's National Economic Recovery Program and digitalization boosted MSME resilience among Bank Rakyat Indonesia clients (Supari & Anton, 2022). Family-business research finds that entrepreneurial orientation, family involvement, and gender can strengthen resilience and performance even in turbulent environments (Rachmawati et al., 2022). Longitudinal analysis of shelter transitions in Lombok shows how social, spiritual, and institutional factors interact during post-disaster recovery (Lines et al., 2022). At the global level, analyses of critical-mineral supply chains underscore how node resilience to disruptions is crucial in the energy transition (Shen et al., 2022).

Overall, this body of work conceptualizes resilience as co-produced by states, markets, communities, and networks. The Indonesian diaspora, as a global network, can contribute to each dimension: environmental advocacy, DRR knowledge flows, economic support, and institutional learning.

Indonesian Diaspora Contributions to Non-Military Defense Health diplomacy and strategic health resilience

Strategic health diplomacy points out that militaries and health professionals increasingly collaborate on infectious disease control, humanitarian missions, and health-system strengthening (Horne & McCrae, 2021). Indonesian nurses and clinicians in the diaspora extend this logic: they serve in foreign health systems, engage in professional organizations, and often participate in humanitarian responses, positioning themselves as informal ambassadors of Indonesia's competence and solidarity (Efendi et al., 2024).

Research on mental health during COVID-19 demonstrates that both personal factors (social support, coping strategies) and national factors (trust in institutions, perceived effectiveness of policy) shape depression and resilience (Lee et al., 2021b). Studies of Indonesian Muslim diaspora communities in South Korea reveal how digital capital and online social support networks helped maintain religious practice, mutual aid, and wellbeing during the pandemic (Shin et al., 2022; Srimulyani, 2021). These findings suggest that diaspora health professionals and communities form a distributed health-resilience infrastructure, connecting Indonesian institutions with frontline experiences abroad.

Integrating diaspora health actors into Indonesia's broader health-security planning – through registries at embassies, training modules, and crisis-response protocols – would align with global trends in strategic health diplomacy and strengthen Indonesia's capacity for pandemic and humanitarian preparedness.

Public diplomacy, information security, and narrative competition

In today's environment, national security is deeply entangled with narratives. Public diplomacy research shows how the Israeli Defence Forces used multilingual Twitter strategies to manage perceptions during conflict (Moreno-Mercado & Calatrava-García, 2023). Intelligence studies reveal that states selectively disclose information to shape domestic and international debates (Riemer, 2021). Studies of phishing attacks emphasize that citizens' email behaviours and vulnerabilities form part of the security landscape (Lee et al., 2021a).

Indonesian diaspora communities are both producers and targets of these narratives. Research on Indonesian Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries examines how they navigate Islamophobia, represent Islam Nusantara, and engage in local politics (Pradines & Topan, 2023; Taufiq et al., 2022; Srimulyani, 2021). Work on intergenerational "hauntings" in Dutch-Indonesian families explores how memories of colonial violence, displacement, and silence shape identity and political sensitivities (Doornbos & Dragojlovic, 2022). Studies on West Papuan identity construction in the Pacific show how international networks and racialized narratives influence self-understanding and activism (Webster, 2022).

These arenas are directly relevant for Indonesia's image and territorial integrity. Diaspora actors can correct misinformation, explain complex issues, and promote narratives of Indonesia as a plural, democratic, and resilient state. But they can also unintentionally amplify polarizing discourses. Building digital-literacy and communication skills among diaspora leaders – informed by insights from phishing profiling, public diplomacy, and intelligence studies – would strengthen Indonesia's non-military defense in the information domain (Lee et al., 2021a; Moreno-Mercado & Calatrava-García, 2023; Riemer, 2021).

Identity, religion, and ideological resilience

Non-military defense also depends on the resilience of national identity and the ability to resist extremist ideologies. Studies on Indonesian diaspora identity in General Santos City show how community organizations, consular outreach, and education programs jointly strengthen a positive sense of Indonesianness among long-settled communities (Rengganis et al., 2023). Research on communication patterns in mixed-culture families finds that Indonesian women often play key roles in language and cultural transmission to children, balancing host-country norms with Indonesian heritage (Indriani & Mulyana, 2021).

Religio-legal scholarship examines how Muslim women in Indonesian diaspora marriages in Russia navigate rights and protections within Islamic law frameworks (Mesraini et al., 2023), while other work highlights how Ba 'Alawi Sufi preachers in the diaspora maintain spiritual teachings across generations (Husein, 2021). Studies on Nahdlatul Ulama's diplomacy demonstrate that

Islamic organizations can serve as soft-power actors to counter Islamophobia and promote moderation (Taufiq et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, Southeastern migration narratives research and ethnographies of Indonesian Muslim minorities in South Korea show how migrants negotiate belonging, participation, and transnational solidarity (Picos, 2021; Srimulyani, 2021). Taken together, these works indicate that diaspora communities are critical arenas where Indonesian identity, religious practice, and political loyalty are negotiated. Supporting inclusive, pluralist, and rights-respecting forms of identity work abroad is therefore a key component of ideological resilience and non-military defense.

Diaspora, Development, and National Resilience

Economic linkages, entrepreneurship, and financial resilience

Resilience research on Indonesian MSMEs, banks, and family businesses highlights the importance of adaptive capabilities and digitalization. Dynamic capabilities and digital transformation enhanced the resilience of beekeeping MSMEs during COVID-19, allowing them to adjust markets and operations (Putritamara et al., 2023). The National Economic Recovery Program and digital support strengthened MSME resilience among Bank Rakyat Indonesia's clients by easing liquidity constraints and enabling new business models (Supari & Anton, 2022). Family-business studies show that a strong entrepreneurial orientation, combined with family involvement and gender-aware management, supports long-term performance and adaptability (Rachmawati et al., 2022). Longitudinal research on shelter transitions in Lombok further highlights the role of social capital and institutional support in building durable recovery (Lines et al., 2022).

Indonesian diaspora entrepreneurs add an external dimension to these dynamics. Gastrodiplomacy research on Indonesian restaurants in Australia shows that diaspora-run businesses create demand for Indonesian products, build networks with suppliers at home, and project a positive image of Indonesia (Yayusman et al., 2023). Studies of Southeast Asian migration narratives point out that affect, aspiration, and transnational ties influence investment and mobility decisions (Picos, 2021).

Positioning diaspora entrepreneurs as partners in economic defense would mean linking them to export promotion agencies, MSME clusters, and investment platforms. In an era where critical-mineral supply chains and digital platforms are themselves security concerns (Shen et al., 2022), diaspora-supported diversification and innovation can enhance Indonesia's long-term economic resilience.

Climate, disasters, and environmental stewardship

Environmental change is a central challenge for Indonesia's security. Studies show that climate change and local pressures are degrading ecosystems on Bintan and elsewhere, necessitating integrated policy responses from local authorities (Setiawati et al., 2023). Smart agroforestry initiatives demonstrate how combining traditional knowledge with innovation can sustain soil fertility and livelihoods (Octavia et al., 2023), while carbon-stock assessments of

agroforestry systems and seagrass habitats reveal their importance for climate mitigation and community resilience (Hartoyo et al., 2022; Hernawan et al., 2023). Urban flood research finds that Jakarta's vulnerability is shaped by land-use change, governance capacity, and how media narratives highlight or obscure risks (Nasution et al., 2022; Langlois et al., 2023). DRR education work shows that integrating disaster themes into school curricula and using cultural forms such as songs and lullabies can embed preparedness knowledge deeply in communities (Amri et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2021). Studies of community knowledge creation and co-developed adaptation evidence emphasize that resilience depends on learning processes, trust, and feedback loops between communities and authorities (Oktari et al., 2022; Willetts et al., 2022; Bosshard et al., 2022).

Diaspora environmental professionals and organizations can contribute by channeling global knowledge and funding into local adaptation projects, supporting capacity building, and promoting Indonesia's environmental diplomacy. For instance, diaspora researchers involved in forest-landscape restoration or climate adaptation abroad can share best practices and tools with Indonesian agencies and NGOs (Bosshard et al., 2022; Willetts et al., 2022). Diaspora networks can also mobilize solidarity and resources during disasters, complementing domestic efforts (Lines et al., 2022).

Governance, learning, and human capital

Effective national resilience depends not only on resources but also on governance, learning, and human capital. Comparative studies of decentralization in fragile and post-conflict countries highlight that the way powers and responsibilities are distributed between central and local governments affects health outcomes and crisis response (Brennan & Abimbola, 2023). Indonesian research on co-developed evidence for climate adaptation supports the idea that participatory governance strengthens policy relevance and acceptance (Willetts et al., 2022).

Defense-diplomacy and leadership studies also show that soft skills—communication, collaboration, leadership—are increasingly important in complex security environments. Serious-game based work on FLIGBY, for instance, demonstrates how experiential tools can develop soft skills relevant to conflict management and team leadership (Almeida & Buzady, 2022). Diaspora experiences in navigating multicultural workplaces, managing businesses abroad, and engaging with foreign institutions represent a valuable reservoir of such skills.

Integrating diaspora perspectives into national policy discussions—through advisory councils, online consultations, and joint training programs—can enhance Indonesia's institutional learning. Comparative insights from German foreign policy, Europe's response to AUKUS, or Philippine grand strategy can inform Indonesian debates about alliances, hedging, and autonomy (Mello, 2021; Staunton & Day, 2023; Takagi, 2022).

Policy Implications and Strategic Directions

Building on the integrated literature, several strategic directions emerge

Diaspora Health and DRR Corps

Establish rosters of diaspora health professionals, DRR experts, and community organizers at embassies. These corps could be engaged in training, simulations, and real responses, operationalizing strategic health diplomacy and DRR knowledge flows (Horne & McCrae, 2021; Efendi et al., 2024; Amri et al., 2022; Shin et al., 2022).

Digital Security and Narrative Capacity-Building

Develop training modules for diaspora leaders and student associations on digital literacy, phishing awareness, narrative framing, and responsible use of social media, informed by phishing-profiling research, public diplomacy, and intelligence disclosure studies (Lee et al., 2021a; Moreno-Mercado & Calatrava-García, 2023; Riemer, 2021).

Economic Defense Partnerships with Diaspora Entrepreneurs

Create mechanisms linking diaspora businesses to Indonesian MSMEs and family firms, leveraging diaspora capital, market knowledge, and digital tools to enhance resilience. This could include diaspora investment platforms, export consortia, and mentorship programs (Putritamara et al., 2023; Supari & Anton, 2022; Rachmawati et al., 2022; Yayusman et al., 2023).

Transnational Environmental and DRR Networks

Facilitate research collaborations and project partnerships between diaspora scientists, Indonesian universities, and local governments on climate adaptation, blue-carbon protection, agroforestry, and DRR education (Setiawati et al., 2023; Hartoyo et al., 2022; Hernawan et al., 2023; Willetts et al., 2022; Sutton et al., 2021).

Identity, Religion, and Civic Education Platforms

Support programs in diaspora mosques, churches, schools, and cultural associations that integrate bela negara and civic education themes in inclusive, pluralist ways—drawing on successful experiences from General Santos, Ba 'Alawi networks, and NU diplomacy (Rengganis et al., 2023; Indriani & Mulyana, 2021; Husein, 2021; Taufiq et al., 2022).

Implementing these directions will require coordination between Indonesian ministries (Foreign Affairs, Defense, Religious Affairs, Environment, Home Affairs), agencies (BNPT, BP2MI), local governments, and diaspora organizations themselves.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the Indonesian diaspora should be recognized as a strategic component of non-military national defense. The literature shows that diaspora communities contribute to health diplomacy, economic resilience, climate adaptation, DRR education, public diplomacy, and identity formation across multiple regions. Global security trends AI weaponization, cyber threats, critical-infrastructure vulnerability, and climate crises mean that defense can no longer be confined to territory or military institutions (Adam, 2024; Bueger &

Liebetrau, 2023; Qiao-Franco & Bode, 2023; Setiawati et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2022). By designing policies that systematically empower diaspora professionals, entrepreneurs, religious leaders, and community organizers, Indonesia can extend the ethos of *bela negara* beyond its borders and build a genuinely networked national resilience.

Future research should develop detailed case studies of specific diaspora communities, evaluate pilot programs implementing the proposed strategies, and compare Indonesia's approach with other diaspora-rich middle powers. But the evidence already suggests that the Indonesian diaspora is not peripheral: it is poised to become a frontline non-military defense asset, provided that institutions recognize and cultivate its potential.

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