Extending the discourse of environmental securitization: Indonesia’s securitization of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and China’s belligerence at sea

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Abstract. The securitization of an environmental subject has been prevalent in recent history. The urgency of mobilizing mass resources and putting the issue into a state’s political agenda has led to state actors to undergo the process of ‘Securitization’ to advance the level of threat the subject poses. This research attempts to analyse Joko Widodo’s first and second term responses to the issue of IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) fishing in Indonesia. The paper first attempts to analyse the addition of fields that have been securitized by state actors, and elaborate on the strategic reasoning of such decisions. Secondly, this study analyses the forms of securitization of Joko Widodo’s first term presidency through its Ministry of Marine and Fisheries, by the act of bombing illegal fishing boats and extending the rhetoric of IUU from a pure environmental discourse, to one that is incorporated to the security discourse. Thirdly, this research identifies a number of securitized policies amid the second term of Joko Widodo’s presidency in the case of IUU, including political postures, mobilization of resources and Indonesian Navy, and extraordinary measures implemented, specifically in facing China in the Natuna Islands. Furthermore, the securitization of Indonesia’s IUU response can be attributed to the external geopolitical affairs that have surfaced in Asia, including tensions in the South China Sea and China’s recent acts of belligerence at sea.

1. Introduction

The problem of IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) is an issue that has been framed as an environmental concern. The environmental discourse that has been well vocalized by environmental activists and government stakeholders is its insurmountable impacts on the socio-economy of a state, and biodiversity implications. It causes a number of major issues, including a detrimental effect on coastal communities, damages the ecosystem and fish habitats, affects the food security of a state, and many more. Therefore, implementing specific policies to tackle IUU has been correlated with how the urgency of the issue relates to possible environmental destructions if not responded suitably. But this research will focus on expanding such a discourse, from a purely environmental concern to one that causes existential threats to both the environment and territorial integrity of Indonesia.

The environment as an existential security threat has been well evident since the late 20th century, with the securitization of several environment subjects/objects. Having a particular subject/object of a threat being securitized means that not only will the issue be added in the political agenda of a state, but the additional mobilization of resources and the implementation of extraordinary measures can also take place instantaneously. Meaning, the securitization of an issue will lead it to prompt additional attention among policymakers and lead it to attain the required attention to take the matter
seriously. Securitization in the issue of terrorism, for example, has led states to reallocate their budgets to counter-terrorism efforts, even to the intervention of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 [1]. An example of an environmental issue that has been securitized is climate change, with several rhetoric including ‘war on climate change’ being implemented by several states, signaling the urgency of an enemy that needs to be eradicated [2]. But climate change is just one example of several environmental issues that have been securitized as of late, as it follows the level of urgency in tackling prevalent issues of the environment.

Specifically, in the case of Indonesia, IUU has long attracted mass attention from policymakers of Indonesia, not only because of the environmental impacts associated with such illegal activities but also because of Indonesia’s need to secure its sea borders as an archipelagic state. In responding to the issue of IUU, there has been evident proof that the policies enforced, constitutes as a form of securitization based on the basic criteria it fulfills, including the presence of (1) securitizing actor, (2) existential threat, (3) referent object, and (4) audiences. This paper thus aims to provide an initial analysis of the possibility of IUU and Indonesia’s securitization of this issue, by attempting to crosscheck Joko Widodo’s policies in his first and second term of presidency, to the possible characterization of the issue being securitized by Indonesian policymakers.

2. Methodology
The type of research adopted is descriptive qualitative. This type of research is used to explain the issue of IUU in Indonesia, and further focus on the process of its securitization.

The data collection technique used in this research is library research. Data obtained include secondary data that relates to the topic of IUU and Securitization, from books, electronic books, journals, electronic journals, documents, and relevant news articles. Meanwhile, the research focuses on attaining secondary data, which are related to the case of IUU in Indonesia since Joko Widodo’s first term presidency, until the present time. The time period for the data collected starts from 2014 to early 2020.

The data analysis technique that is used by the author is qualitative analysis technique. It draws on existing facts and aims to provide the links between the facts attained, eventually leading to supporting arguments. The research focuses on evaluating the variables of the research in general, then narrow the scope of discussion to focus on the nexus between environmental securitization and IUU in Indonesia.

3. Results and discussion
3.1. Expanding the discourse of IUU: environment as an existential security threat
The issue of IUU falls in the discourse of environmental degradation. It is well known as a fishing activity that has gone beyond the ordinary practices, and provided grounds for both violations of the law and environmental destructions. Illegal Fishing for example, in which the conduct has been deemed as condemned as it fails to attain permission and valid licenses from the state. But the major issue of IUU that falls under the environmental discourse is the issue of unreported and unregulated fishing. In both those cases, there has been overwhelming evidence of how the actions fail to acknowledge efforts of conservation and management measures, undermining living marine resources that are subjected to protection under International law.

Besides how it undermines International law, IUU fishing also creates detrimental impacts to the socio-economy and biodiversity. In the aspect of socio-economy, the food security of local coastal communities can be at threat, as cases of overfishing have proven to be destructive for communities that live in littoral states and living close to the marine ecosystem. Furthermore, biodiversity will face a major pushback due to cases of IUU. The issues of habitat loss, destructive fishing (the use of fish bombing, trawling, push net, and other destructive methods) will impact to the sustainability of the marine biodiversity and ecosystem, as well as increase the possibilities of extinction. Without neglecting the impacts of IUU on the environment, this research will focus on an evolving discourse
related to the IUU. Throughout the years, countries have shown consistent policies of mobilizing larger resources in the fight against IUU. In an effort to understand such trends, this research will analyse how IUU has been consistently been securitized by Indonesia, through the Securitization Theory.

In the 21st century, discourses related to the securitization of the environment have slowly, but consistently surfaced in International politics. Securitization though is not a new discourse. The Copenhagen School provided a distinctive contribution to Security Studies by coining the term securitization, defined as altering the discourse of a subject/object becoming an existential threat. In assessing whether a subject has successfully altered into a security matter, the securitization theory focuses on whether an actor has successfully changed the discourse of the subject to one that is oriented in the security discourse. If the securitization succeeds, the securitizing actor is able to implement extraordinary measures, which in many cases, has contravened acceptable norms. For context, several of the most recent securitized fields include military, political, economic, society, and environment [1].

In assessing whether the securitization process has succeeded, several basic phases have to be fulfilled. First, there must be a securitizing actor that aims to alter the discourse of a subject/object to one that is of security concern. Several examples of this actor include state policymakers, relevant ministries, and departments, etc. Secondly, the securitizing actor must prove that there is an existential threat that is identified as a possible harm that urgently needs to be responded. After the existence of a securitizing actor and an identified existential threat, there must be a referent object that is identified to require protection. Lastly, evidence of a successful securitization will need to include an audience that accepts the possible threat. In the last phase, several forms include policy, bureaucratic, or technical changes that take place [2].

A number of subjects and objects have been successfully securitized throughout the past. It has been most prevalent since the early 21st century when discourses on human security becomes supreme to state actors, then in comparison to traditional security. Concerning the spheres of human security, several subjects/objects that have securitized in the past include terrorism (military), HIV/AIDS (health), and climate change (environment). In the case of terrorism, we have witnessed how the discourse of ‘war on terrorism’ prevailed since the 9/11 attacks, which was hoped to mobilize domestic and international support for the upcoming wars that the U.S. would be involved in since 2001 [3, 4]. The securitization lead to the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003, and a number of interventionist agendas in the Middle East. The securitization process succeeded, as the U.S. was able to mobilize mass resources for the wars to eradicate terrorism, and violated a number of International laws including the Geneva Conventions, for torturing suspects of terrorists in Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghrair prison [5]. Surprisingly enough, the issue of HIV/AIDS also represented a health security issue that has been securitized in the past. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in 1981, approximately 25-35 million people have died worldwide. Seeing the developments of the outbreak, the U.S. through the U.S. Department of State has developed the rhetoric that HIV/AIDS is a risk that requires mass mobilization of resources at an accelerated rate. Furthermore, the CIA and the UN both declared the pandemic as a threat due to its ability to undermine International and national security [6]. Lastly, the issue of climate change has not only been framed in the discourse of environmental degradation, but it has of late, been framed as a grave global security threat that leads to chaos, conflict, and loss of lives [7]. This research thus will contribute to the existing discourses of securitization, by seeing a specific study case of IUU beyond its traditional discourse of environmental degradation, but also its securitization by the Indonesian government.

3.2. Indonesia's Securitization of IUU: Environmental Justifications for a Securitized Response in Facing a Belligerent China at Sea

3.2.1. Indonesia’s IUU Securitization in Political Rhetoric and Policymaking. In order to assess whether IUU has successfully been securitized, this research will crosscheck each aspect of securitization, and provide evidence of its success. The core analysis of the securitization is the actor
that securitizes the issue of IUU. Since Joko Widodo’s administration in 2014, Susi Pudjiastuti, Indonesia’s Minister of Marine and Fisheries, has maintained a tough stance on all cases of rhetoric. She has institutionalized the securitization of IUU by constantly referring to strict and tough rhetoric in describing possible actions in response to IUU, such as ‘sink,’ ‘major violations of law,’ and ‘law cannot be compromised.’ Consistent to the rhetoric adopted, the Ministry since 2014 has sunk 558 ships [9], with hopes of instilling a deterrent effect for fisherman who conduct illegal fishing. Thus, the existential threat identified by the Ministry is perpetrators of IUU, with the referent object that is threatened include Indonesian sovereignty, national borders, Law of the Sea, the livelihood of fisherman, marine ecosystem, and economic repercussions [10].

In many speeches brought, Susi has explained how the use of bombs and chemical substances in Indonesian waters has led to the destruction of both the ecosystem and the Indonesian economy. Presenting the case of economic aftermaths can be essential in the process of securitizing a subject/object, with IUU being included as an illegal action that has caused the Indonesian economy 200 trillion dollars’ worth of damage [11]. The last phase of the securitization theory is the audience in which the security threat has eventually been accepted or changed policy discourses. National Law No.45/2009 on Fisheries elaborates in the second clause states how the Indonesian government is able to enforce special measures in the form of burning or sinking foreign vessels if sufficient evidence of illegal fishing can be proven [8]. Therefore, although the Ministry during the period of 2014-2019 was not responsible in the policymaking of such a stance on illegal fishing, Susi was able to successfully enforce the law by directly sinking the vessels proven to conduct IUU in Indonesian waters. As a result of the securitization and the mass mobilization of resources as a result of it, approximately 80% of illegal fishing and foreign vessels trespassing Indonesian waters have dropped [10].

Based on the theoretical assessment, IUU is by no question a subject of securitization by the Indonesian Government, through the Indonesian Marine and Fisheries Ministry. But several studies have pointed out that one of the other implications of securitization is the actions taken that are against acceptable norms [13]. Although still debatable as to what constitutes as acceptable norms and what is not, the action of sinking cannot be seen as a friendly gesture in International politics. As several studies have indicated [13], the action of sinking illegal fishing vessels is known to be an act of belligerence for Indonesia, an action that goes against Indonesia’s foreign policy core values of ‘free and active policy,’ and preferring multilateralism in its foreign policies. But the issues evaluated above goes to show how the securitization process of IUU shows great success, as it proves the evolving security concerns of IUU has been a policy that does not go align to the acceptable international norms of diplomacy.

3.2.2. Contemporary developments: China, IUU, and Indonesia’s exacerbated response. During the second term of Joko Widodo, the Indonesian Ministry of Marine and Fisheries abandoned its securitization of IUU through the sinking of ships, by implementing a different route of response to IUU. A rhetoric emerged, in which the deterrence effect that was the primary aim of implementing the securitized response of Susi in the past has been fulfilled, leading to the need for a more diplomatic approach in facing IUU.

Based on the early political rhetoric adopted, it would be safe to assume that the securitization of IUU has returned back to the discourse of environmental concerns, and no longer of a security concern. However, the political dynamics that emerged during late 2019 and early 2020 show that Indonesia cannot fully abandon securitization of IUU, but in fact, must be implemented in different forms. The form of securitization that has recently surfaced in securitization is over exploitation rights between Indonesia’s 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone, and China’s Nine-Dash Line.

Late 2019, a video of Chinese vessels escorted by the Chinese Coast Guard caught the national attention of the Indonesian public [14]. Recently, there have been several cases in which Chinese fishing vessels, guarded by Chinese Coast Guards, have operated in the Natuna Waters of Indonesia, violating the territorial integrity of the Republic of Indonesia. There have been clashes between the Indonesian Navy and the Chinese Coast Guard, which indicates a high level of concern for Indonesia.
In concluding the recent developments that have occurred, this article lists several basic indicators of the recent securitization of IUU for the second term of Joko Widodo’s presidency.

First, the signalling of Indonesia’s strict political posture on the Natuna Islands. In early 2020, in the mid of several instances in which the Chinese Coast Guards have infiltrated Indonesian seas, Joko Widodo decided to visit the Natuna Islands, along with a list of high-level officials, to check the readiness of the Indonesian Navy [15]. Formal visits have always been the defining characteristic of Joko Widodo, with a term in Javanese ‘blusukan,’ which means the act of visiting areas that are not common to visit. It is difficult to define forms of securitization from this act, as the visit was more described as a tool to frighten possible conductors of IUU in the Indonesian waters. The very fact that he visited the islands with a number of high-level officials and the Indonesian Navy indicates the seriousness of the issue of IUU in the Natuna Islands, despite it being only in the form of political posture, not rhetoric.

Second, the mobilization of budgets allocated for patrols and airborne surveillance in the Natuna Islands. One of the indicators of securitization in the aspect of ‘Audience,’ in which there is a successful change of policies and mobilization of resources, as the object of securitization has caught up to the political agenda priority of a government. Due to the massive publications and pressure given to the government, the Indonesian government responded not only in the form of political postures but also budget allocation [15]. The action thus does not define the issue of IUU merely as an environmental concern, as it is arguable that the issue of IUU has been moved high to the Indonesian political agenda.

Third, an extraordinary measure implemented as a response to the illegal fishing that has been apparent in late 2019. Besides the mobilization of resources and the Indonesian Navy to strengthen Indonesia’s posture in the Natuna Islands, the Indonesian Coordinating Minister for Politics, Law, and Security, Mahfud MD, decided to allocate a number of large fishing boats to operate in the Natuna Islands [15]. What makes this policy different, is because the consideration for the allocation of fishing boats had were not introduced under the rhetoric of environment protection, nor to advance fishing activities, but solely to showcase the presence of Indonesian boats in Indonesian legal sea territory.

Based on the three analyses of the recent securitization of IUU, it is difficult to view the issue merely as an issue of environmental concern related to illegal fishing. In both terms of Joko Widodo’s presidency, we can see that the issue of IUU has been heavily securitized by the Indonesian government, which indicates a higher level of concern for the government. The bombing of IUU perpetrators, and the high mobilization of resources (militarily and financially), as well as exacerbated response, indicate that securitization is well evident in the case of IUU in Indonesia. This research believes that there are a number of strategic reasons for the securitization of IUU in Indonesia. Indonesia since the Djuanda Declaration of 1957, announced its status as an archipelagic state, a status that only a handful of states can declare as. Furthermore, one of the biggest security concerns for Indonesia is how it is able to secure the thousands of territorial fronts of the sea it acquires, in order to maintain its territorial integrity. If cases of IUU does not exceed the discourse of environmental concern, it is difficult to see Indonesia to put the issue of IUU in its main political agendas, which eventually can be detrimental to Indonesia’s territorial integrity. Therefore, in order to force it into its political agenda, the securitization of IUU must be securitized firstly.

But beyond Indonesia and IUU as a major political agenda, the securitization of IUU can be attributed to the rise of China, and China’s recent belligerence at sea. China’s claim over the Nine-Dash Line shows how China is willing to take assertive measures to solidify its territorial claims [15]. The construction of artificial islands in the Scarborough Shoal and Spratlys Islands have led to a number of violent confrontations at sea between China and the Philippines and Vietnam [15]. Despite warnings from the International community, China has disregarded all warnings and neglected any negotiations and forums to discuss the issue. As a claimant state, Indonesia’s Natuna Island has now come to the flashlighthouse of Chinese concern, which hopes to also secure the region by implementing similar measures.
Therefore, in order to counter China’s belligerence at sea, it needed to apply a strict political posture on sea-based non-traditional threats, to show how it will be strict in facing sea territorial infiltrations, but not become a belligerent state actor at the same time. The process of securitizing the IUU is one of the strategies taken in order for Indonesia to be able to be both implementing a strict political posture but not transform itself as a belligerent actor in International politics. This is where the analysis of how Indonesia successfully securitized IUU takes place.

4. Conclusion
In conclusion, Indonesia’s policies in responding to IUU during Joko Widodo’s first and second term of the presidency are forms of securitization. Although Joko Widodo’s first and second term differed in how he handled issues of IUU, both constitute as acts of securitization. For the first term of presidency, Indonesia’s Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Affairs were in the forefront of tackling IUU by implementing war-based rhetoric in responding to perpetrators of IUU such as ‘bombing’ and ‘eliminate,’ as well as the extraordinary measure that is implemented in fighting IUU, which includes the bombing of illegal vessels. During the second term of the presidency, Indonesia’s securitization of IUU took a different course, as it focused on (1) political posture, (2) mass mobilization of financial and military resources, and (3) extraordinary measures, in responding to IUU. Although the forms were different, it is well concluded that the issue of IUU has been securitized by the Indonesian government. In understanding why the securitization took place, China’s recent belligerence at sea can provide sufficient explanations of Indonesia’s caution in sea-based non-traditional security issues such as IUU. China’s recent assertive posture in defending the Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea has been alarming for Indonesian policymakers when it comes to sea-based security issues with China. The recent developments in the Natuna Islands just show how the issue of IUU is viewed by Joko Widodo as not only an issue of environmental concern, but an issue of territorial sovereignty and national security.

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