Strategic Evolution of Maritime Defense Capabilities through a Network-Centric Warfare Gap Analysis at the First Fleet Command

Muhammad Zulkifli[1], Moeljadi[2], Herman Suryokumoro[3], Nurjannah[4]*

[1] Postgraduate Program, Doctoral Program in Resilience Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.

[2] Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.

[3] Department of Law, Faculty of Law, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.

[4] Department of Statistics, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.

Corresponding Author:

Muhammad Zulkifli[1]*

Postgraduate Program, Doctoral Program in Resilience Studies, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia.

Email: mzulkifli.navy@gmail.com

Abstract: The rapid proliferation of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies has fundamentally disrupted traditional maritime defense paradigms, shifting the arbiter of naval superiority from kinetic mass to information dominance. This study examines the strategic positioning of the Indonesian Navy's First Fleet Command (Koarmada I) in response to an increasingly complex threat landscape in the North Natuna Sea and the Malacca Strait. Utilizing a macro-environmental PESTLE analysis and a structured Gap Analysis, the research evaluates the systemic requirements for transitioning from a platform-centric operational model to a network-centric engagement framework. Data were synthesized from deep-dive functional interviews with senior naval commanders and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. The findings reveal critical capability gaps in digital infrastructure, cyber resilience, and specialized human capital. To bridge this divide, the study proposes the Network-Centric Maritime Capability Augmentation (N-MCA) model. This holistic leapfrog strategy integrates Artificial Intelligence (AI), autonomous systems, and encrypted K4IPP (Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) architectures. This model facilitates a transition toward Smart Power, enabling Koarmada I to achieve shared situational awareness and cognitive deterrence against grey-zone tactics and hybrid threats. By prioritizing architectural, cognitive, and human augmentation, the N-MCA model ensures the fleet remains resilient and operationally dominant within the volatile geostrategic landscape of Western Indonesia. This strategic framework provides a scalable roadmap for maritime modernization in emerging economies facing nonlinear warfare spectrums.

Keywords: Maritime Security, Network-Centric Warfare, Gap Analysis, Koarmada I, Strategic Modernization..

Introduction

The contemporary global maritime security landscape is experiencing profound discontinuity, driven by the convergence of geopolitical volatility and radical technological disruption. For over a century, naval power was fundamentally understood and quantified through the lens of industrial-age metrics: the displacement of hulls, the range and caliber of kinetic projectiles, and the physical presence of carrier strike groups. However, the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has introduced a digital disruption that fundamentally challenges these classical paradigms. In the modern maritime

battlespace, information, specifically the velocity of its collection, the precision of its processing, and the security of its dissemination, has superseded mass as the primary arbiter of strategic advantage (Afriansyah et al., 2024).

This article examines the strategic positioning and evolution of the Indonesian Navy's First Fleet Command (Koarmada I) in this shifting landscape. Koarmada I operates at one of the world's most critical geostrategic intersections, overseeing the Western Indonesian maritime theater. This operational area encompasses the Malacca Strait, a primary global economic artery, and the North Natuna Sea (LNU), a region characterized by overlapping jurisdictional claims, intensive military projections, and the frequent application of grey-zone tactics. The strategic significance of these waters cannot be overstated; they represent both the chokepoints of global trade and the frontlines of national sovereignty (Arifin et al., 2024).

The central thesis of this research is that the traditional platform-centric model of naval operations, in which units operate in relative isolation or limited coordination, is increasingly insufficient to secure Indonesia's interests against a spectrum of modern threats. These threats include low-signature (stealth) platforms, state-sponsored cyber-espionage, and autonomous swarming technologies that operate on nonlinear timelines (Amelia et al., 2021). To maintain a credible deterrence posture in this environment, Koarmada I must undergo a Strategic Leapfrog: a systemic transition from a traditional naval force into a Network-Centric Maritime Capability.

The theoretical foundation of this transition lies in the concept of Network-Centric Warfare (NCW). NCW is an operational framework that derives greater combat power from the robust networking of sensors, decision-makers, and weapon systems. By fostering shared situational awareness and increasing the speed of command, NCW allows a fleet to achieve disproportionate effects, turning data into a decisive force multiplier (Arifin et al., 2024; North et al., 2026).

However, implementing NCW in a developing maritime force presents unique challenges, ranging from infrastructural legacy systems to human capital deficits. To address these complexities, this paper employs a dual-framework methodology: PESTLE Analysis to map the macro-environmental drivers of modern warfare, and a structured Gap Analysis to identify the specific requirements for transforming Koarmada I. PESTLE allows for a comprehensive scan of the Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental variables that necessitate modernization. At the same time, the Gap Analysis compares the Current State of operational readiness with the Desired State of a fully integrated, network-centric force. The study proposes the Network-Centric Maritime Capability Augmentation (N-MCA) model. This model is not merely an incremental upgrade of existing hardware; it is a holistic organizational and technological pivot toward Smart Power. Smart Power, in this context, refers to the strategic combination of hard naval presence with advanced digital dominance. The N-MCA model prioritizes three core pillars: architectural resilience (cybersecurity), cognitive superiority (Artificial Intelligence), and human capital specialization. In addition, this research contributes to the broader discourse on defense management and maritime security by providing a scalable roadmap for naval modernization. It recognizes the need to move beyond budget-based planning toward a capability- and threat-based response. As the Western Indonesian maritime theater becomes increasingly crowded and contested, Koarmada I is ability to adapt to the network-centric paradigm will determine Indonesia's capacity to uphold maritime sovereignty and ensure regional stability in the digital age (Phayal et al., 2026).

Literature Review

The conceptualization of modern naval power has undergone a radical transformation, moving from the classical emphasis on physical mass to a contemporary focus on information dominance. To understand the strategic necessity of the Network-Centric Maritime Capability Augmentation (N-MCA) model for Koarmada I, we need to trace the evolution of maritime strategic thought and the disruptive impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) through a structured lens. This review is divided into two distinct parts: the first explores the grounded theories of maritime power and the emergence of the network-centric paradigm. In contrast, the second examines the macro-environmental

drivers and the systemic Capability Gap they create.

2.1 Grounded Theories of Sea Power and the Network-Centric Paradigm

The foundational pillars of maritime strategy are traditionally anchored in the works of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Julian Corbett, whose theories provide the grounded basis for understanding naval influence (Wirtz et al., 2022). Mahanian theory emphasizes the Command of the Sea through the concentration of force and the pursuit of a decisive battle between capital ships. In Mahan's view, naval power is an instrument of national greatness, quantified by the number of ships of the line and their ability to annihilate the enemy's fleet. While Mahan's focus on the offensive remains a core component of naval identity, his reliance on physical mass has been challenged by the vulnerability of large platforms to asymmetric digital threats. In contrast, Julian Corbett offered a more nuanced perspective, viewing Sea Control not as an end in itself but as a means to protect communications and support land operations. Corbett's emphasis on the lines of communication resonates deeply with the modern era, where the most critical lines of communication are no longer just sea lanes, but the digital data links that bind a fleet together. The synthesis of these classical theories in the 21st century suggests that, while the physical presence of a fleet remains necessary for deterrence, its effectiveness now depends entirely on its connectivity and informational reach (McCranie, 2024).

The shift toward Network-Centric Warfare (NCW) represents the most significant doctrinal evolution since the introduction of steam power. First articulated by Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski and John Garstka, NCW is built on the premise that robust networking of geographically dispersed forces enables a transition from platform-centric to network-centric operations. The core of NCW theory rests on four tenets: a robustly networked force improves information sharing; information sharing enhances the quality of information and shared situational awareness; shared situational awareness enables collaboration and self-synchronization; and these, in turn, dramatically increase mission effectiveness. For a maritime command like Koarmada I, NCW offers a mechanism to overcome Bounded Rationality, the cognitive limitation of commanders faced with an overwhelming volume of sensor data. By creating a unified sensor-to-shooter grid, NCW accelerates the decision cycle, commonly referred to as the OODA loop (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act). In the volatile waters of the North Natuna Sea, the ability to complete this loop faster than an adversary is the definitive factor in maintaining maritime control (Arto et al., 2019).

2.2 4IR Drivers, Grey-Zone Challenges, and the Strategic Capability Gap

The implementation of NCW is inextricably linked to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which has introduced disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data analytics, and the Internet of Military Things (IoMT). As noted by scholars of military innovation, 4IR technologies act as force multipliers, redefining the spectrum of conflict. AI, in particular, has emerged as a critical enabler for maritime domain awareness. In an environment crowded with commercial shipping, fishing vessels, and potential grey-zone actors, AI algorithms can process vast datasets to identify anomalous behavior that might escape human observation. This technological shift has given rise to the concept of Smart Power in naval strategy, the ability to combine the hard power of traditional Alutsista (weapon systems) with the soft power of information superiority and digital resilience. This evolution is particularly crucial for emerging naval powers that cannot compete in a pure arms race of hull counts but can achieve parity or superiority through superior digital integration and specialized human capital (Arif & Kurniawan, 2018).

Furthermore, the literature on maritime security in Southeast Asia highlights the increasing prevalence of Grey-Zone Warfare and hybrid threats. Unlike conventional warfare, grey-zone tactics involve coercive actions that remain below the threshold of open armed conflict, such as the deployment of maritime militias or the strategic use of white hulls (Coast Guards) to assert sovereignty. Scholars argue that traditional naval deterrence, based on kinetic escalation, often fails against grey-zone actors because the political costs of lethal force are too high. Therefore, modern naval commands require a Cognitive Deterrence posture. It is achieved through persistent surveillance and Information Transparency, where the ability to document and broadcast incursions in real-time serves as a deterrent by stripping the aggressor of plausible deniability (Octavian, 2019). The N-MCA model aligns with this

requirement by prioritizing ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) and real-time data dissemination over traditional offensive armaments. It necessitates a strategic Gap Analysis to identify the distance between current platform-centric capabilities and the desired state of networked dominance. Bridging this gap is not just a technological challenge; it is an organizational one, requiring a shift in military culture from a need-to-know basis to a need-to-share basis, fostering a common operational picture that enhances the fleet's collective intelligence and operational sovereignty under the framework of UNCLOS 1982.

Method

This study employs a structured Gap Analysis methodology, integrated with a PESTLE macro-environmental scanning framework, to evaluate Koarmada I's strategic transformation toward a network-centric posture (Quiroga, 2025). To ensure academic rigor while maintaining operational security, the research employed a qualitative-quantitative approach, centered on consensus-building interviews with six senior functional commanders (Asstisants) within Koarmada I, whose insights were analyzed using NVivo 12 for thematic coding and weighting (see Figure 1). The PESTLE framework was first applied to map the external technological, legal, and geopolitical drivers of the modern warfare spectrum, which subsequently informed the Gap Analysis used to measure the distance between the fleet's current platform-centric Baseline State and a desired Network-Centric Ready state. By synthesizing these primary functional perspectives with secondary strategic data, the study formulates the Network-Centric Maritime Capability Augmentation (N-MCA) model as a systemic solution to address identified deficits in digital infrastructure, cyber resilience, and specialized human capital.

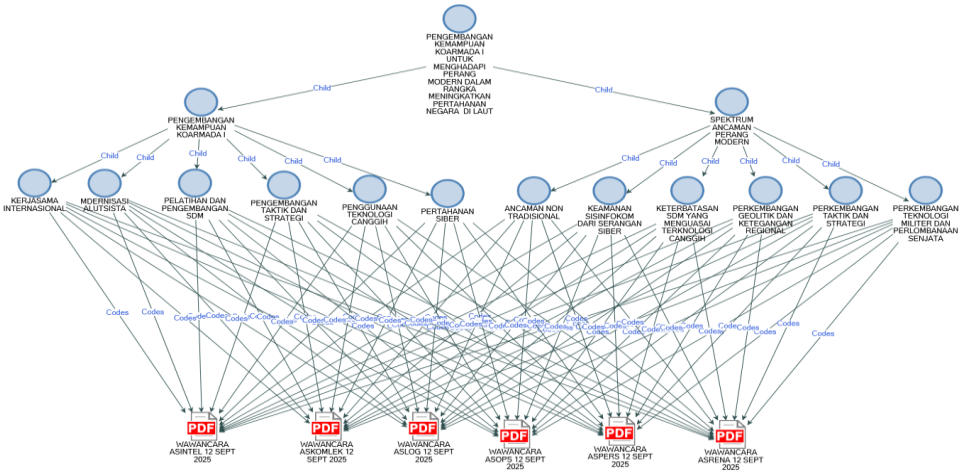

Figure 1. NVivo Thematic Analysis

Findings and Discussion

Processing primary empirical data on functional leadership within Koarmada I using the PESTLE environmental scanning and Gap Analysis frameworks reveals a complex landscape with both operational challenges and strategic opportunities. The evidence suggests that Koarmada I has significant internal strengths, notably its critical geostrategic positioning and strong organizational collaboration. However, there are deep-seated systemic gaps that must be bridged to achieve credible network-centric readiness. These results are categorized into the three primary pillars of the proposed N-MCA model: Digital Resilience, Human Capital Mastery, and Force Modernization.

4.1 Macro-Environmental Pressures and the PESTLE Scan Results

The PESTLE analysis provides the external baseline for these findings, identifying the multifaceted pressures that require an immediate transition away from traditional platform-centric operations. In terms of technological and legal drivers, the most significant external pressure identified is the rapid proliferation of low-signature stealth technologies and autonomous systems within the Western Indonesian maritime theater. Respondents emphasized that the regional arms race is no longer

a competition of hull quantity but rather a contest of the kill web quality. Legally, the persistent ambiguity of grey-zone tactics in the North Natuna Sea creates a constant state of sub-kinetic friction. The data indicate that traditional naval power is often an overly blunt instrument for such encounters. What is required instead is transparency in information. The capability to document incursions via persistent, networked sensors and broadcast them in real-time serves as a far more effective deterrent than the threat of kinetic escalation, which inevitably carries prohibitive political costs under the UNCLOS 1982 framework (Arifin et al., 2024; Chang, 2018). From a political and economic standpoint, there is strong support for the Global Maritime Fulcrum policy, which creates a favorable environment for systemic modernization. However, economically, the findings highlight a significant budgetary gap. While the strategic intent to modernize is clear, current procurement cycles remain tethered to budget-based planning rather than capability-based planning. This discrepancy often leads to the acquisition of individual platforms that lack the integrated digital infrastructure essential to operating in a truly network-centric environment (Amelia et al., 2021).

4.2 The Connectivity Gap and the Transition to Network-Centric Architecture

The core finding of the Gap Analysis concerns the current state of connectivity and the K4IPP architecture. Regarding the baseline state, the data suggests that Koarmada I currently operates in a predominantly platform-centric mode. While units at sea demonstrate exceptional individual tactical proficiency, their ability to share a Common Operational Picture in real-time is frequently hindered by legacy communication systems. Data silos persist between different staff functions, leading to a fragmented understanding of the battlespace. Respondents noted that critical radar and sensor data are often confined to a single vessel's bridge rather than fused into a command-wide grid (Rochwulaningsih et al., 2019).

In contrast, the desired state is an integrated sensor-to-shooter grid where every platform from frigates and maritime patrol aircraft to coastal radar stations operates as a node in a unified network. Achieving this state requires implementing the N-MCA Architectural Augmentation, which includes high-bandwidth, encrypted satellite data links and a centralized maritime data cloud. Bridging this gap is not merely a matter of hardware procurement but involves establishing a security-by-design digital spine capable of withstanding intensive electronic warfare and jamming (Chou et al., 2022).

4.3 The Resilience Gap and the Imperative of Cyber-Hardening

A critical, highly sensitive finding is the vulnerability of existing infrastructure to non-kinetic disruption. Regarding cyber vulnerabilities, functional leaders consistently identified cyber warfare as the most immediate threat in the modern warfare spectrum. The results suggest that the current command-and-control infrastructure is increasingly susceptible to spoofing of GPS or AIS data and to persistent hacking attempts by state-sponsored actors. There is a recognized gap in digital resilience, as cyber-defense is still frequently treated as a technical administrative task rather than a foundational element of combat readiness. To address this deficit, the findings point toward the urgent requirement for a Fleet Security Operations Center. This facility would serve as the digital guardian of Koarmada I, monitoring the network integrity of its dispersed assets in real time. The transition from analog command structures to a cyber-resilient command posture is identified as a mandatory leapfrog step. No amount of kinetic weaponry can compensate for a fleet that remains digitally paralyzed before physical engagement even commences (Zou, 2023).

4.4 The Human Capital Gap and the Specialization Paradox

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study relates to the personnel dimension of maritime modernization. The Gap Analysis reveals a stark deficit in specialized human capital. While Koarmada I possesses a core of highly professional naval officers, there is a critical shortage of technical specialists, including data scientists, cyber analysts, network engineers, and drone operators. The results indicate that current human resource structures tend to favor generalist career paths. It creates a systemic risk: sophisticated weapon systems are acquired but cannot be utilized to their full potential because operators lack the deep technical expertise required for fourth industrial revolution warfare. Furthermore, the research identified a cultural gap regarding information flow. Traditional military culture often prioritizes the need-to-know principle. However, for a network-centric force to function,

the organizational culture must shift toward a shared basis. Achieving mastery of human capital requires more than just technical training. It demands a doctrinal shift where information is recognized as a collective resource rather than a departmental asset (Wicaksono et al., 2024).

4.5 The Deterrence Gap and the Shift from Hard Power to Smart Power

The final finding concerns the effectiveness of Koarmada I is deterrence posture. The data shows that the current state of deterrence relies heavily on physical presence and the implied threat of force. However, in the North Natuna Sea and the Malacca Strait, this approach is increasingly inefficient against grey-zone actors operating just below the threshold of military response. The gap here is a lack of cognitive deterrence. The findings suggest that the N-MCA model bridges this gap by pivoting toward smart power. By integrating AI-driven surveillance and autonomous systems, Koarmada I can maintain a persistent eye over contested waters. The results confirm that achieving information dominance, where the command understands the location, identity, and intent of every vessel in its theater, creates a far more credible deterrence than physical hulls alone. This information superiority forces an adversary to reconsider aggressive maneuvers, knowing they are being monitored within a shared digital grid (Sudiro & Rizqoh, 2024).

4.6 Synthesis and the N-MCA Model as a Strategic Bridge

The synthesis of these findings indicates that Koarmada I is at a strategic inflection point. The gap between the current platform-centric baseline and the desired network-centric state is significant, but external environmental factors create a unique opportunity to leapfrog the transformation. By focusing on the three pillars of architectural resilience, human capital mastery, and force augmentation, the N-MCA model provides a scalable roadmap to close these gaps. The findings emphasize that modernization must be holistic. Acquiring drones without training analysts or building a network without cyber-hardening will only result in isolated islands of excellence rather than a cohesive and resilient naval force. Ultimately, successfully bridging these gaps will transform Koarmada I into a modern entity capable of upholding maritime sovereignty in the twenty-first century (Klein, 2021; Mamahit, 2020).

Conclusion

The strategic transformation of Koarmada I from a platform-centric maritime force to a network-centric entity is essential in the face of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This research, through a rigorous Gap Analysis, has demonstrated that the traditional reliance on kinetic mass and individual hull capabilities is increasingly inadequate in the face of the nonlinear spectrum of modern warfare. The contemporary maritime battlespace, particularly in the geostrategically sensitive waters of the North Natuna Sea and the Malacca Strait, is now defined by information velocity, digital resilience, and the ability to maintain shared situational awareness across a unified sensor-to-shooter grid.

The findings confirm that while Koarmada I possesses strong organizational collaboration and a superior geographical posture, significant gaps remain in digital infrastructure and specialized human capital. The current Baseline State is characterized by informational silos and legacy vulnerabilities that could lead to operational paralysis in a high-intensity cyber-electronic environment. Therefore, implementing the Network-Centric Maritime Capability Augmentation (N-MCA) model is the primary strategic bridge to move the command toward a Desired State of smart-power dominance. This leapfrog strategy ensures that modernization is not merely incremental but transformative, aligning technical procurement with doctrinal evolution.

To facilitate this transition, the following policy recommendations are submitted for institutional consideration. First, there must be a shift from Budget-Based to Capability-Based Planning, where procurement priority is given to the digital spine encrypted data links and cloud-based C2 over traditional armaments. Second, the Navy must formalize Specialist Career Tracks for cyber analysts and data scientists, ensuring that technical expertise is retained and rewarded within the military hierarchy. Third, establishing a Fleet Security Operations Center (SOC) is a mandatory prerequisite for combat readiness, providing a persistent digital shield for all assets at sea. Finally, the defense diplomacy must be leveraged to accelerate the Transfer of Technology, focusing on interoperability

with modern networked navies to ensure that Koarmada I remains a credible and resilient guardian of Indonesia's maritime sovereignty in the 21st century.

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