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Australia–Indonesia Cooperation in Maritime Security (2017–2020)

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ABSTRACT: Amid significant fluctuations in maritime security in the Asia–Pacific region during the 2017–2020 period, Australia and Indonesia intensified their cooperation to address both traditional and non-traditional maritime challenges. Grounded in shared strategic interests and Indonesia's pivotal geopolitical position, the two countries established a cooperative foundation through policy dialogues, legal frameworks, and bilateral mechanisms. In practice, cooperation focused on joint patrols, maritime information sharing, capacity-building assistance, and training for maritime law enforcement forces, as well as coordinated responses to issues such as piracy, smuggling, and irregular migration. These activities contributed to strengthening regional maritime security and enhancing strategic trust between the two countries. Nevertheless, cooperation continued to face certain limitations stemming from differences in capabilities, strategic priorities, and political factors. Despite these constraints, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation has played a significant role in regional stability and the evolving maritime security architecture.

KEYWORDS: Maritime cooperation; Regional security; Australia–Indonesia; Non-traditional security challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, maritime security has emerged as one of the central concerns in the Asia–Pacific region, which hosts some of the world's most critical sea lanes and constitutes a strategic space closely linked to the economic, political, and security interests of numerous states. The period from 2017 to 2020 witnessed an escalation of both traditional and non-traditional maritime security challenges, including sovereignty disputes, piracy, terrorism, smuggling, illegal fishing, and irregular migration. These developments have underscored the urgent need for regional states to enhance cooperation in order to maintain maritime order, stability, and freedom of navigation.

Within this context, Australia and Indonesia have emerged as two key actors in the regional maritime security architecture. Australia, as a maritime nation, has strategic interests closely tied to safeguarding sea lines of communication and upholding a rules-based order. Indonesia, by contrast, occupies a particularly significant geostrategic position, controlling vital maritime chokepoints such as the Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda Straits, while also being the world's largest archipelagic state. This position renders Indonesia an indispensable partner in Australia's maritime security initiatives and strategies.

Although Australia–Indonesia relations have experienced periods of fluctuation, they have made notable progress in security cooperation, particularly in the maritime domain. The 2017–2020 period marked sustained efforts by both countries to strengthen dialogue mechanisms, expand joint patrols, enhance intelligence and information sharing, and build capacity for maritime law enforcement agencies. Such cooperation was aimed not only at addressing bilateral concerns but also at contributing to broader regional stability and security.

Despite these positive outcomes, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation has continued to face considerable challenges. Differences in capabilities, strategic priorities, and security approaches, as well as political and historical factors, have at times affected the depth and effectiveness of cooperation. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment of the context, practices, and impacts of bilateral maritime security cooperation during the 2017–2020 period is necessary, not only to clarify its achievements and limitations but also to draw implications for the future enhancement of cooperation.

Based on these considerations, the study of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation during 2017–2020 holds both theoretical and practical significance. It contributes to a clearer understanding of the role of bilateral cooperation in addressing maritime security challenges, while also providing a reference for policy formulation and the strengthening of security cooperation in the Asia–Pacific region.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study primarily employs the historical method in combination with the logical method to examine Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation during the 2017–2020 period. The historical method is used to reconstruct the process of formation and development of bilateral maritime security cooperation within a context of significant regional and international changes, thereby clarifying key events, policies, and representative cooperative activities in chronological order. On this basis, the logical method is applied to analyze the causal relationships between the regional security environment, the strategic interests of each country, and adjustments in the content and forms of maritime security cooperation.

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The integration of these two methods enables the study to move beyond a purely descriptive account of events and to provide a deeper explanation of the nature, driving forces, and evolving trends of bilateral cooperation. As a result, the conclusions drawn are systematic, coherent, and methodologically sound, contributing to a comprehensive assessment of the achievements, limitations, and broader significance of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation for regional security.

3. REGIONAL CONTEXT AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF AUSTRALIA–INDONESIA MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

3.1. The Regional Maritime Security Environment (2017–2020)

Within Australia's regional security strategy, Indonesia occupies a particularly important position in both geostrategic and political–security terms, especially against the backdrop of an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific security environment during the 2017–2020 period. As Australia's closest northern neighbour and the world's largest archipelagic state, Indonesia exerts a direct influence on Australia's maritime security environment, particularly with regard to the strategic sea lanes linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Critical maritime chokepoints such as the Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda Straits, which fall within Indonesia's sphere of influence, are regarded by Australia as vital arteries of trade and national security. Consequently, maintaining stability in these areas has become a long-term strategic priority for Australia (Bateman & Bergin, 2018).

In its defence and foreign policy documents, Australia has consistently identified Indonesia as a key partner in upholding a rules-based maritime order and ensuring freedom and safety of navigation. Australia's Defence White Papers and bilateral joint statements repeatedly emphasize that Indonesia's stability, unity, and prosperity are of direct significance to Australia's own security (Department of Defence, 2019). This reflects Australia's strategic assessment that instability in Indonesia or in adjacent maritime areas could rapidly spill over and adversely affect the broader regional security environment.

Beyond geostrategic considerations, Indonesia also plays a central role in the regional security architecture through its leadership position within ASEAN. Australia views ASEAN as a cornerstone of the regional security order, and Indonesia—one of ASEAN's founding members and most influential actors—is regarded as a crucial bridge through which Australia can advance multilateral cooperation and security dialogue in Southeast Asia (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). Through cooperation with Indonesia, Australia is better positioned to engage more deeply in ASEAN-led mechanisms, thereby contributing to the shaping of maritime norms and principles that align with shared regional interests.

The 2017–2020 period also witnessed intensified strategic competition among major powers in the region, particularly in the South China Sea, further underscoring Indonesia's importance in Australia's strategic calculations. Although not a direct claimant state, Indonesia has a clear interest in maintaining maritime stability and compliance with international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Australia has highly valued this position and regards Indonesia as a like-minded partner in supporting a rules-based maritime order, thereby contributing to the restraint of conflict risks and the prevention of escalation in regional tensions (Storey, 2020, pp. 10–12).

On this basis, the elevation of bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and the adoption of the 2020–2024 Plan of Action demonstrate that Indonesia is not merely a neighbouring state but a central pillar of Australia's regional security strategy. Close cooperation with Indonesia enables Australia to safeguard its immediate security interests while also contributing to the construction of a stable, balanced, and sustainable regional security environment amid the rapid transformations of the Indo-Pacific (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2020)..

3.2. Indonesia's Position in Australia's Regional Security Strategy

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3.3. Foundations of Bilateral Maritime Security Cooperation

The formation of bilateral maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia has not been driven solely by shared strategic interests or regional security pressures, but has also rested upon a combination of legal, historical, and long-standing practical foundations of cooperation. One of the most important legal bases is the Lombok Treaty, signed in 2006, which established a comprehensive framework for defence and security cooperation between the two countries, including maritime security and border management. This treaty is widely regarded as the starting point of systematic cooperation in the maritime security domain between Australia and Indonesia (As'ad & Nafilah, 2022). Beyond providing a legal framework, the Lombok Treaty laid the groundwork for bilateral strategic trust, enabling both sides to build confidence and progress toward more concrete and coordinated activities.

Building upon the Lombok Treaty, the 2017 Joint Declaration on Maritime Cooperation and subsequent plans of action further consolidated cooperative mechanisms in the field of maritime security. This development marked a significant turning point, as maritime security was formally placed at the core of the strategic partnership between the two countries. It was reflected in commitments to enhance coordinated patrols, information exchange, and capacity-building support for maritime law enforcement agencies (Ramadhany & Olivia, 2020). Moreover, cooperation expanded beyond strictly bilateral activities and became increasingly integrated into broader regional frameworks, particularly in initiatives addressing non-traditional security challenges such as drug trafficking, irregular migration, and cross-border illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

A clear practical foundation for cooperation lies in the fact that Australia and Indonesia share one of the world's longest maritime boundaries, making transnational maritime security threats a direct concern for both Canberra and Jakarta (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2025). These challenges encompass not only non-traditional criminal activities such as IUU fishing, but also issues related to the management of exclusive economic zones and the maintenance of uninterrupted freedom of navigation. Any incident or conflict in these maritime areas could potentially disrupt trade flows and undermine the economic security of both countries. Consequently, bilateral cooperation in areas such as maritime domain awareness, maritime data sharing, and coordinated patrols has become an essential necessity, as these complex and legally transboundary issues cannot be effectively addressed through unilateral measures alone.

Furthermore, the shared commitment to a free, stable, and rules-based Indo-Pacific has brought Canberra and Jakarta closer in maritime security cooperation. Both countries have expressed strong support for a rules-based international order at sea, with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) serving as a central regulatory framework for maritime conduct. This commitment aims to reduce the risk of conflict while enhancing cooperation in maritime law enforcement (As'ad & Nafilah, 2022). Such a foundation not only reflects strategic convergence but also clarifies the guiding principles of cooperation, namely the resolution of challenges through dialogue, respect for sovereignty, and adherence to international law.

Overall, the foundations of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation represent a complex combination of bilateral legal frameworks (such as the Lombok Treaty), practical declarations and plans of action, shared needs to address transboundary threats, and a common recognition of the importance of a rules-based maritime order. These elements have collectively established a solid basis for the development of a comprehensive, flexible, and context-responsive cooperation agenda amid an increasingly challenging regional security environment.

4. PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF AUSTRALIA–INDONESIA MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION (2017–2020)

4.1. Dialogue Mechanisms and the Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation

During the 2017–2020 period, maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia was implemented on the basis of increasingly institutionalized bilateral dialogue mechanisms and a relatively comprehensive cooperation framework. This evolution reflected both the convergence of strategic interests and the growing level of political trust between the two countries. The development of cooperation took place against the backdrop of a volatile Indo-Pacific security environment, which compelled coastal states to enhance coordination in order to respond effectively to both traditional and non-traditional maritime security threats.

A key foundation for Australia–Indonesia security dialogue mechanisms lies in pre-existing bilateral agreements, most notably the 2006 Lombok Treaty. This treaty established a comprehensive framework for defence and security cooperation, including maritime security, thereby providing the legal basis for sustained dialogue and the implementation of long-term coordinated activities (Weatherbee, 2017). Building on this foundation, during the 2017–2020 period both countries continued to strengthen high-level political–security consultation mechanisms aimed at exchanging views on regional developments and guiding bilateral cooperation.

One of the most important dialogue mechanisms has been the Australia–Indonesia Foreign and Defence Ministers' Meeting (the "2+2" mechanism), which has been maintained as a high-level strategic consultation channel. Through this mechanism, the two sides discussed prominent regional security issues, with maritime security consistently identified as a priority area. Joint statements issued within the framework of the 2+2 dialogue emphasized both countries' commitment to upholding a rules-based maritime order, respecting international law, and enhancing cooperation to address maritime security challenges. The strategic significance of this mechanism lies in its role in translating political commitments into concrete forms of cooperation at the implementation level.

In addition to high-level dialogue, Australia and Indonesia also developed specialized consultation mechanisms directly related to maritime security. Dialogues among defence forces, navies, and maritime law enforcement agencies were organized to exchange information, share operational experience, and strengthen coordination in the management and protection of maritime spaces. These channels have contributed to enhancing mutual understanding among relevant agencies while reducing the risk of misperceptions or uncoordinated responses to incidents at sea (Ramadhany & Olivia, 2020). Regular engagement at the technical and professional levels has thus been regarded as a key factor in ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of bilateral maritime security cooperation.

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Alongside dialogue mechanisms, the maritime security cooperation framework between the two countries during 2017–2020 was further consolidated through joint declarations and bilateral plans of action. These documents clearly identified priority areas of cooperation, including maritime information sharing, the enhancement of maritime domain awareness, training and capacity-building for maritime law enforcement forces, and coordinated responses to non-traditional security challenges. According to As'ad and Nafilah (2022), the operationalization of cooperation through concrete plans of action has increased both feasibility and implementation effectiveness, while also reflecting the pragmatic approach adopted by Australia and Indonesia in the field of maritime security cooperation.

Notably, the bilateral maritime security cooperation framework was designed with a high degree of flexibility, allowing both sides to adjust the scope and intensity of cooperation in response to changing circumstances and practical needs. Rather than relying on rigid, binding commitments, Australia and Indonesia have prioritized open and adaptive forms of cooperation, emphasizing information exchange, technical assistance, and capacity-building (Kuik, 2019). This approach has enabled the two countries to sustain cooperative momentum even amid uncertainties in the regional security environment, while also facilitating the expansion of cooperation into new areas when necessary.

Moreover, bilateral dialogue mechanisms and cooperation frameworks have been embedded within broader regional security structures. Both Australia and Indonesia attach importance to the role of ASEAN and regional maritime security forums, thereby integrating bilateral cooperation into multilateral efforts. This linkage has not only enhanced the transparency and legitimacy of bilateral maritime security cooperation but has also enabled the two countries to coordinate their positions in promoting shared norms and principles governing maritime conduct.

Overall, during the 2017–2020 period, dialogue mechanisms and the framework for Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation were strengthened in both breadth and depth. The combination of multi-level strategic dialogue and a flexible, pragmatic cooperation framework provided a critical foundation for the implementation of concrete cooperative activities, while also contributing to the consolidation of strategic trust and the enhancement of both countries' roles in maintaining regional maritime security stability.

4.2. Cooperation in Maritime Patrols and Information Sharing

In the process of advancing maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia during the 2017–2020 period, maritime patrols and information sharing gradually emerged as among the most substantive and strategically significant areas of cooperation. The growing prevalence of non-traditional maritime security threats—such as illegal fishing, smuggling, transnational crime, and irregular migration—created an urgent need for the two neighbouring countries to enhance coordination in the management and control of their shared maritime spaces. In this context, cooperation in patrols and information exchange not only aimed to improve the effectiveness of maritime law enforcement but also contributed to confidence-building, the reduction of misperceptions, and the timely management of emerging maritime incidents.

In practice, Australia and Indonesia progressively intensified coordinated patrol activities involving their navies and maritime law enforcement agencies, particularly in adjacent maritime areas and along critical sea lines of communication. Such coordination enabled both sides to expand their surveillance coverage, enhance early detection and interdiction capabilities against maritime law violations, and optimize the use of limited national resources (Streher, 2024). Through joint or coordinated patrol operations, personnel from both countries also gained familiarity with each other's operational procedures and coordination mechanisms, thereby reducing risks associated with managing sensitive situations at sea.

Alongside patrol activities, maritime information sharing was regarded as a core determinant of the effectiveness of maritime security cooperation. During the 2017–2020 period, the two countries placed increasing emphasis on exchanging data related to maritime security conditions, the movements of suspicious vessels, and potential threats through both bilateral and regional mechanisms. According to Joseph and Perwita (2024), timely information sharing significantly enhanced maritime situational awareness, supported decision-making processes, and facilitated flexible force deployment, particularly as maritime security violations became increasingly transboundary in nature.

Notably, information-sharing cooperation between Australia and Indonesia was not confined to bilateral arrangements but was also integrated into broader regional cooperative mechanisms. Through participation in maritime information-sharing networks and initiatives across Southeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific, both countries promoted a multilateral approach to maritime security governance while improving collective capacity to respond to region-wide security challenges (Marsetio, 2025). This approach demonstrates that cooperation in patrols and information sharing served not only bilateral interests but also contributed to the broader objective of maintaining regional maritime security and stability.

Overall, cooperation in maritime patrols and information sharing between Australia and Indonesia during the 2017–2020 period clearly reflected a transition from political commitments to substantive and increasingly regular operational cooperation. By enhancing coordinated patrols and expanding maritime information exchange, the two countries not only improved the effectiveness of maritime control and law enforcement in adjacent waters but also significantly strengthened maritime situational awareness and response capabilities in the face of non-traditional security threats. At the same time, these activities contributed to confidence-building between relevant agencies, reducing the risk of misperceptions and uncoordinated responses at sea. Despite certain limitations related to resources and coordination mechanisms, cooperation in patrols and information sharing has become a central pillar of bilateral maritime security cooperation, providing a favourable foundation for the expansion and deepening of other forms of cooperation in subsequent period.

4.3. Capacity-Building Assistance and Training of Maritime Forces

Within the framework of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation during the 2017–2020 period, capacity-building assistance and the training of maritime forces constituted a key area of cooperation, directly complementing activities related to maritime patrols and information sharing. This dimension of cooperation reflects the shared understanding of both countries that the effectiveness of maritime security cooperation depends not only on dialogue mechanisms or operational coordination, but also on the institutional capacity, professional expertise, and interoperability of maritime law enforcement forces.

Given Indonesia's status as a vast archipelagic state with extensive maritime domains and uneven maritime law enforcement capacity, Australia implemented a range of assistance programmes aimed at enhancing the capabilities of Indonesia's maritime forces, including the navy, coast guard, and other relevant agencies. Such assistance focused on personnel training, the sharing of maritime governance experience, improvements in maritime surveillance capabilities, and the strengthening of inter-agency coordination. According to Streher (2024), these capacity-building

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programmes not only improved Indonesia's effectiveness in maritime control but also facilitated greater procedural compatibility between the two sides, thereby enhancing bilateral coordination in real-world operational scenarios.

Training activities were implemented through a variety of formats, including joint training programmes, bilateral exercises, and officer exchange initiatives. These programmes typically focused on essential skills such as maritime search and rescue, maritime law enforcement, maritime border control, and responses to non-traditional security threats. Participation in joint training enhanced mutual understanding of organizational structures, equipment, and command procedures, thereby reducing barriers to operational coordination. At the same time, joint training was regarded as an effective instrument for confidence-building and for maintaining regular communication channels among relevant agencies.

In addition to direct training, Australia also supported Indonesia through technical advisory programmes and the transfer of expertise in maritime security management. These initiatives included enhancing maritime domain awareness, improving capacities for maritime information collection and analysis, and strengthening coordination mechanisms among Indonesia's maritime law enforcement agencies. As noted by Tertia and Perwita (2024), long-term capacity-building assistance has contributed to Indonesia's gradual ability to take a more proactive role in ensuring maritime security, while reducing reliance on short-term reactive measures.

Notably, capacity-building assistance and training cooperation between Australia and Indonesia carried significance beyond the bilateral level, as it was closely linked to broader regional maritime security objectives. By strengthening Indonesia's maritime capacities—given its central role in Southeast Asia's security architecture—Australia indirectly enhanced the effectiveness of ASEAN-led regional security mechanisms. This approach aligns with Australia's strategy of supporting regional partners in developing self-reliant capabilities, thereby contributing to the maintenance of a stable and rules-based maritime order (Marsetio, 2025).

Nevertheless, capacity-building assistance and training cooperation also faced certain limitations, including disparities in levels of development, resource availability, and strategic priorities between the two sides. Despite these challenges, during the 2017–2020 period cooperation in this area was widely regarded as a positive and substantive aspect of Australia–Indonesia maritime security relations, providing a sustainable foundation for deeper and more comprehensive forms of cooperation in the future.

4.4. Cooperation in Addressing Non-Traditional Maritime Security Challenges

During the 2017–2020 period, cooperation in addressing non-traditional maritime security challenges increasingly became an integral component of Australia–Indonesia maritime security relations. The proliferation of threats such as transnational maritime crime, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, irregular maritime migration, human trafficking, and other non-military security risks has reshaped states' approaches to maritime security, placing greater emphasis on cooperation, coordination, and multi-layered governance. In this context, both Australia and Indonesia recognized that these challenges are inherently transboundary in nature and cannot be effectively managed without close bilateral coordination.

One notable area of cooperation concerned the prevention and suppression of transnational maritime crime, particularly smuggling and organized criminal activities that exploit maritime spaces to evade law enforcement oversight. Regional assessments indicate that Southeast Asian waters and maritime routes linking the region with Australia have frequently been used by criminal networks for illicit transportation activities. In response, Australia and Indonesia enhanced information sharing, strengthened coordination among maritime law enforcement agencies, and expanded capacity-building support aimed at detecting, preventing, and responding to maritime violations, thereby contributing to the mitigation of maritime security risks.

In addition, cooperation in addressing irregular maritime migration and human trafficking constituted a central focus of bilateral maritime security relations. Given its geographical location along key maritime migration routes, Indonesia often functions as a transit country, while Australia represents a major destination for irregular maritime migration flows. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), irregular maritime migration not only poses significant risks to maritime safety but also raises serious humanitarian and border management challenges (IOM, 2018). Against this backdrop, Australia–Indonesia cooperation emphasized information sharing, enhanced coordination in maritime border control, and capacity-building for managing incidents related to irregular migration, thereby reducing risks for both countries.

Furthermore, non-traditional maritime security challenges also encompass risks associated with piracy and armed robbery at sea, although the severity of these threats in the region remains lower than in certain other parts of the world. Nevertheless, reports by the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre indicate that such incidents retain the potential to resurge in specific strategic areas in the absence of timely surveillance and coordinated responses (ReCAAP ISC, 2019). In this regard, Australia and Indonesia regarded information sharing and coordinated response mechanisms as essential tools for maintaining a safe and stable maritime environment.

Notably, cooperation in addressing non-traditional maritime security challenges between Australia and Indonesia was implemented in a pragmatic and flexible manner, reflecting the specific characteristics and capacities of each side. According to assessments by the Lowy Institute, this approach enables middle and smaller powers in the region to enhance their self-reliant security capabilities while avoiding the escalation of strategic tensions amid intensifying great-power competition (Lowy Institute, 2020). As a result, bilateral cooperation not only served the immediate security interests of both countries but also contributed to the maintenance of regional maritime stability and order.

5. ASSESSMENT OF AUSTRALIA–INDONESIA MARITIME SECURITY COOPERATION

Maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia in recent years, particularly during the 2017–2020 period, clearly reflects a growing trend toward substantive coordination between two neighboring countries occupying strategically significant positions in the Indo-Pacific region. Based on intertwined security interests and mutual dependence on maritime stability, the two countries have gradually overcome past differences and constraints to promote increasingly diverse and in-depth forms of cooperation. An overall assessment of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation reveals both notable achievements, existing limitations, and important implications for future cooperation.

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First, bilateral maritime security cooperation has achieved significant progress in terms of institutional development and coordination mechanisms. The regular maintenance of bilateral dialogue channels and the integration of maritime security issues into broader strategic cooperation frameworks have established a relatively solid political and legal foundation for the implementation of concrete cooperative activities. Through dialogue, both sides have gradually developed shared understandings of maritime security challenges, thereby reducing the risk of misperceptions and enhancing their capacity for coordinated responses to emerging issues. This has been a crucial factor in sustaining the stability of maritime security cooperation amid a volatile regional security environment.

From a practical perspective, cooperation in patrols, information sharing, training, and capacity-building has contributed substantially to improving the effectiveness of maritime governance and control for both countries. Through coordinated patrols and information exchange, Australia and Indonesia have enhanced maritime domain awareness and strengthened their ability to detect and respond promptly to violations of maritime law. At the same time, capacity-building and training programs have helped maritime forces on both sides improve professional skills, enhance operational coordination, and gradually develop procedural interoperability, thereby increasing the effectiveness of cooperation on the ground. These outcomes demonstrate that maritime security cooperation has gone beyond political commitments and has been translated into concrete and practical activities.

Another positive aspect of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation lies in the emphasis placed on addressing non-traditional maritime security challenges. In the context of increasing threats such as illegal fishing, smuggling, irregular migration, and transnational crime, bilateral cooperation has played an important role in enhancing the prevention and management of challenges that exceed the capacity of unilateral control. This approach not only contributes to maintaining security and order in adjacent maritime areas but also carries humanitarian and sustainable development significance, particularly in search-and-rescue operations and marine environmental protection.

Despite these achievements, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation continues to face certain limitations. Foremost among these is the disparity in capabilities, resources, and levels of development between the two countries, which poses challenges to the balanced and effective implementation of cooperation. In many cases, Indonesia still requires substantial technical and training support, while Australia assumes a more proactive role in designing and leading cooperative programs. This dynamic may create a degree of asymmetry in the partnership and could affect long-term sustainability if not appropriately addressed.

In addition, bilateral maritime security cooperation is influenced by fluctuations in the broader political and strategic relationship between the two countries as well as by regional developments. Differences in policy priorities, approaches to regional issues, and changes in the strategic environment can affect levels of trust and commitment to cooperation. At certain times, political and diplomatic factors outside the maritime domain may also indirectly shape the trajectory of maritime security cooperation, potentially disrupting or constraining the scope of bilateral coordination.

Another limitation concerns the level of institutionalization and inter-agency coordination in maritime security cooperation, which remains insufficiently harmonized. Although considerable efforts have been made to enhance coordination among naval and maritime law enforcement forces, differences in organizational structures, mandates, and internal coordination mechanisms occasionally hinder the effective implementation of joint activities. The absence of robust and long-term inter-agency coordination mechanisms may reduce the overall effectiveness of cooperation, particularly in addressing non-traditional maritime security challenges that require the involvement of multiple agencies.

From a regional perspective, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation carries significance beyond the bilateral framework. Enhanced coordination in maritime governance and security contributes to maintaining maritime stability and order in Southeast Asia and the broader Indian Ocean region. At the same time, this bilateral cooperation supports regional efforts to promote a rules-based maritime order and shared norms. However, to fully realize this potential, Australia–Indonesia cooperation needs to be more closely aligned with regional and multilateral mechanisms, thereby enhancing transparency and reducing strategic mistrust.

Overall, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation during the 2017–2020 period made substantial progress in institutional development, substantive content, and practical implementation. These achievements have contributed to building mutual trust, strengthening maritime governance capacities, and enhancing responses to increasingly complex maritime security challenges. Nevertheless, for cooperation to become more sustainable and effective in the future, both countries will need to further narrow capability gaps, strengthen institutionalization, improve inter-agency coordination, and proactively adapt to changes in the regional security environment. These factors will be decisive in shaping the depth and quality of Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation in the next phase.

CONCLUSION

The 2017–2020 period can be regarded as a notable phase in the development of maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia, during which this bilateral relationship gradually adapted to the rapid and increasingly complex changes in the Indo-Pacific regional security environment. As maritime security challenges became more transnational and non-traditional in nature, cooperation between the two countries was driven not only by the need to safeguard individual national interests but also by a shared recognition of the importance of maritime stability for the regional order.

From an institutional perspective, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation has been built upon a relatively solid legal and political foundation, with the Lombok Treaty, along with joint statements and bilateral action plans, providing long-term strategic guidance. These frameworks have helped create a stable space for cooperation, enabling both sides to maintain regular dialogue and to manage maritime security issues in a structured and predictable manner. Through multi-level consultation and dialogue mechanisms, strategic understanding has been gradually enhanced, thereby reducing mutual suspicion and strengthening trust in the bilateral relationship.

At the practical level, cooperation in patrols, information sharing, training, and capacity-building has emerged as key pillars of bilateral maritime security relations. These activities have contributed to improving maritime domain awareness, enhancing the effectiveness of maritime law enforcement, and strengthening responses to cross-border threats such as illegal fishing, smuggling, irregular migration, and organized crime.

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The emphasis on capacity-building and training also reflects a sustainable approach to cooperation, highlighting the importance of strengthening internal capabilities rather than relying solely on short-term reactive measures.

Nevertheless, the cooperation process has also revealed certain limitations. Disparities in resources, levels of development, and enforcement capacities between the two countries pose challenges to the balance and depth of cooperation. In addition, maritime security cooperation remains subject to the influence of broader political and strategic factors, including fluctuations in bilateral relations and shifts in the regional security environment. These factors have, to some extent, affected the stability and continuity of cooperative programs.

From a regional perspective, Australia–Indonesia maritime security cooperation carries significance beyond the bilateral dimension, contributing to the consolidation of a broader maritime security architecture in Southeast Asia and adjacent regions. By promoting principles such as a rules-based order, respect for international law, and the cooperative management of security challenges, this partnership has generated positive spillover effects. In the long term, continued efforts to narrow capability gaps, strengthen institutionalization, and more closely align bilateral cooperation with regional mechanisms will be decisive factors in determining the effectiveness and sustainability of maritime security cooperation between Australia and Indonesia.

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