

**NAVAL EXPEDITIONARY STRATEGY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS:
INDONESIA'S MILITARY OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR IN THE MV SINAR KUDUS RESCUE**

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Abstract

How do naval expeditionary operations conducted under Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) function within International political systems? While existing scholarship on maritime security and anti-piracy emphasizes operational effectiveness or multinational cooperation, it insufficiently theorizes how expeditionary military strategy interacts with domestic political dynamics in emerging maritime democracies. This article addresses that gap by analyzing Indonesia's 2011 rescue of the hijacked vessel *MV Sinar Kudus* as an explanatory case of long-range naval force projection under governance. The article develops a dual-level analytical framework integrating operational effectiveness (time, space, and force) with grand strategic alignment and International political management (contestation and politicization). Employing process tracing based on elite interviews, official documents, and contemporaneous media discourse, the study demonstrates that expeditionary success in MOOTW contexts depends not merely on logistical reach or joint-force integration, but on multilevel synchronization between military execution, strategic objectives, and domestic legitimacy. The findings show that Indonesia's deployment achieved operational coherence through calibrated escalation, peripheral maritime maneuver, and joint integration, while simultaneously maintaining political authorization and narrative legitimacy within an international environment. The article contributes to strategic studies by reconceptualizing expeditionary capability as a multidimensional synthesis of force projection, grand strategy, and International civil-military governance. In doing so, it extends naval expeditionary theory beyond great-power contexts and highlights how International political processes can structure—rather than constrain—limited maritime force projection.

Keywords: Naval expeditionary strategy, Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), International civil-military relations, Maritime force projection, Anti-piracy operations.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The expansion of non-traditional security threats has significantly transformed the operational and strategic roles of modern armed forces. Among these threats, maritime piracy represents a complex challenge that blurs the boundaries between law enforcement, national defense, and international security governance (Björnehed, 2022). Unlike conventional interstate warfare, piracy involves non-state actors operating across vast maritime spaces, exploiting jurisdictional gaps, weak coastal governance, and the legal ambiguities of international waters (Danzell et al., 2023). As a result, states increasingly deploy military assets under the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) to safeguard national interests and protect global sea lines of communication.

Within this evolving security landscape, naval forces have assumed a critical expeditionary function. Expeditionary naval operations require the projection of force beyond national territorial waters, often into distant and politically sensitive theaters (Del Toro, 2023). Such deployments demand more than maritime maneuver and logistical endurance; they involve strategic calibration, diplomatic coordination, and legal justification (Firmanto, 2024). Expeditionary capability in non-war contexts thus operates at the intersection of operational execution and political legitimacy. In International states, the decision to project military power abroad is rarely a purely military calculation. It is embedded within domestic political contestation, media scrutiny, inter-agency coordination, and concerns about constitutional and normative legitimacy (Martin, 2023). While conventional war has long been studied through the lens of international peace theory and civil-military relations, limited-force deployments under MOOTW have received comparatively less theoretical attention (Muttaqin & Al Fatony, 2021). Yet these operations often generate intense domestic visibility while unfolding in legally and strategically ambiguous environments.

Existing scholarship on maritime security and anti-piracy operations has predominantly emphasized operational effectiveness, multinational cooperation, and technological innovation (Putra et al., 2023). Studies of naval expeditionary warfare, meanwhile, have largely focused on great powers with established blue-water capabilities. What remains under-theorized is how expeditionary strategy functions in emerging maritime democracies, where logistical capacity is developing, and political oversight plays an increasingly significant role in defense policymaking (Phayal et al., 2022). In particular, the interaction between operational performance and International political dynamics remains insufficiently explored.

This article addresses that gap by examining Indonesia's 2011 rescue operation of the merchant vessel *MV Sinar Kudus*, hijacked by Somali pirates in the Arabian Sea. The operation marked a significant moment in Indonesia's defense history: it represented one of the country's rare long-range naval expeditionary missions conducted beyond its immediate regional waters. Executed under the framework of Military Operations Other Than War, the mission combined naval deployment, special forces readiness, intelligence coordination, logistical projection, and diplomatic engagement in a distant maritime theater.

The study is guided by four interrelated research questions. First, how did the characteristics of Somali piracy shape Indonesia's decision to deploy naval forces? Second, how did the doctrinal framework of MOOTW structure the operation? Third, how was long-range expeditionary strategy operationalized in terms of time, space, and force? Fourth, to what extent was the strategy effective at both operational and strategic international levels? These questions allow the case to be analyzed not merely as an anti-piracy episode but as a test of broader theoretical propositions regarding expeditionary force projection under governance.

The article advances two central arguments. First, the effectiveness of naval expeditionary strategy in MOOTW contexts cannot be understood solely through operational metrics such as speed of execution, theater control, or joint-force integration. Instead, it must be analyzed through a dual-level framework that integrates operational performance (time, space, and force) with strategic alignment to national interests and diplomatic objectives. Second, in military systems, expeditionary military operations are structured by processes of political contestation and politicization that shape authorization, escalation management, and legitimacy consolidation.

Empirically, the findings demonstrate that Indonesia's deployment achieved operational coherence through calibrated temporal management, peripheral spatial maneuver, and integrated force application. However, operational success alone does not explain the broader outcome. The expeditionary mission remained strategically effective because it was embedded within coherent national objectives and managed through structured civil-military coordination under conditions of media visibility. International political processes did not paralyze decision-making; rather, they structured and stabilized it. Theoretically, the article contributes to three strands of literature. It enriches scholarship on MOOTW by providing a detailed analysis of long-range naval projection beyond conventional war contexts. It extends naval expeditionary theory by embedding operational analysis within grand strategic and domestic political frameworks. Finally, it advances security

studies by conceptualizing expeditionary capability as a multidimensional synthesis of force projection, strategic alignment, and political governance—thereby extending analysis beyond great-power cases.

Through an explanatory case study employing process tracing, elite interviews, official documentation, and media analysis, this article demonstrates that the MV Sinar Kudus rescue was not merely a tactical anti-piracy success. Rather, it represented a formative episode in the consolidation of Indonesia's naval expeditionary strategy under international conditions. For emerging maritime democracies, the findings suggest that expeditionary capability depends as much on political legitimacy and institutional synchronization as on material naval capacity. In this sense, expeditionary power in MOOTW contexts is not solely a matter of hardware and logistics, but of strategic-political integration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) and the Transformation of Military Roles

Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) emerged as a doctrinal response to the changing character of security threats in the post-Cold War era (Amarasinghe, 2024). As interstate war declined in frequency relative to intrastate conflicts, terrorism, piracy, and transnational crime, armed forces increasingly undertook missions that fell short of conventional war but still required the use of organized military force (Anindya, 2025). These operations include humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, evacuation missions, counterterrorism, maritime security, and anti-piracy operations (Bagheri & Kamrava, 2024).

The central feature of MOOTW is its hybrid character: it occupies the space between war and law enforcement (Susilo, 2019). Unlike total war, MOOTW requires calibrated force, political sensitivity, legal justification, and coordination with civilian authorities (Bastari et al., 2024). The use of force must be proportionate and strategically coherent with broader national objectives. Consequently, operational success in MOOTW is not measured solely by battlefield dominance but by the ability to achieve limited political aims without escalation (Jakobsen & Henningsen, 2024).

In maritime contexts, MOOTW frequently involves the protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs), suppression of piracy, and safeguarding nationals abroad (Jiang & Lu, 2020). However, much of the existing literature treats these operations primarily as technical or cooperative security exercises, emphasizing multilateral frameworks, maritime domain awareness, and tactical coordination. Less attention has been devoted to the strategic logic underpinning unilateral long-range deployments conducted by states outside traditional great-power navies (Jin & Techera, 2021).

This gap is particularly significant for emerging maritime democracies, where MOOTW operations serve not only security objectives but also strategic signaling, alliance positioning, and domestic legitimacy management.

2.2. Naval Expeditionary Warfare and Long-Range Force Projection

Naval expeditionary warfare refers to the deployment of maritime and joint forces beyond national territorial waters to conduct sustained operations in distant theaters. Historically associated with major naval powers, expeditionary strategy has been central to theories of sea power, peripheral warfare, and maritime maneuver (Chapsos & Malcolm, 2017).

At the operational level, expeditionary warfare is commonly analyzed through three interrelated dimensions: time, space, and force.

- a. Time concerns speed of deployment, duration of sustainment, and tempo of execution (Riber, 2022).
- b. Space relates to the geographical characteristics of the theater, including distance from home bases, maritime chokepoints, and peripheral versus central engagement zones (Raharjo et al., 2024).
- c. Force involves the integration of naval, air, and land components in joint and combined operations (Rim, 2025).

Operational success in expeditionary missions depends on logistical endurance, intelligence superiority, command and control integration, and mobility (Toprani, 2025). However, strategic studies scholarship emphasizes that expeditionary operations cannot be understood purely as tactical enterprises. They are instruments of grand strategy.

Peripheral naval operations historically allowed states to influence conflict outcomes without directly engaging an adversary's core territory (Tănase & Chiorcea, 2024). In contemporary settings, expeditionary operations in non-war contexts often serve signaling functions: demonstrating capability, protecting economic interests, and reinforcing international credibility (Widyaksa et al., 2024).

Yet most expeditionary warfare literature focuses on great powers, particularly the United States and European NATO states (Saalbach, 2025). Less attention has been paid to how middle or emerging maritime powers conduct expeditionary operations under constraints of limited blue-water capability and domestic political scrutiny (Haripin, 2019). This limitation creates a theoretical blind spot in understanding how expeditionary capacity develops outside established naval hegemons.

2.3. International Politics of Military Intervention

The decision to deploy military force abroad in an international systems context is shaped by political contestation and politicization (Seyle et al., 2018). Unlike authoritarian regimes, international governments must navigate parliamentary oversight, media scrutiny, public opinion, and bureaucratic competition. Two concepts are central to understanding this dynamic:

- a. Contestation – the presence of competing views among political elites regarding the appropriateness, legality, and necessity of military action (Tsioufis et al., 2023).
- b. Politicization – the transformation of a security issue into a publicly debated and potentially polarizing political matter (Strachan, 2023).

International politics affects expeditionary strategy in at least three ways:

- a. It shapes the authorization and timing of deployment (Setiyawan, 2023).
- b. It influences rules of engagement and operational constraints (Strachan, 2023).
- c. It determines post-operation legitimacy and narrative framing (Wiratama, 2023).

While the International peace literature has extensively analyzed war initiation, fewer studies examine how international dynamics affect limited, non-war expeditionary operations (Rakhmadi et al., 2025). MOOTW cases are particularly underexplored because they often fall below the threshold of major conflict yet still require politically sensitive decisions regarding sovereignty, international law, and risk exposure (Robitaille, 2020). In emerging democracies, these dynamics may be even more pronounced due to evolving civil-military relations, media activism, and institutional consolidation (Suharyo et al., 2017).

2.4. Theoretical Gap and Analytical Contribution

Existing scholarship has treated MOOTW, naval expeditionary warfare, and international politics largely as separate domains of inquiry. Operational military studies focus on logistics and joint coordination. Security studies emphasize international cooperation against

piracy. Political science literature examines international constraints on war decisions.

This article argues that long-range naval expeditionary operations in MOOTW contexts must be analyzed through an integrated framework combining:

- a. Operational effectiveness (time, space, force)
- b. Strategic alignment with national interests and diplomatic positioning
- c. International political management (contestation and politicization)

The MV *Sinar Kudus* rescue provides a critical case to explore this intersection. It represents:

- a. A long-range naval expedition beyond Indonesia’s immediate strategic environment.
- b. A non-war operation requiring calibrated force.
- c. A mission conducted under International political conditions with media visibility and bureaucratic coordination.

By situating the case within this integrated framework, this article contributes to strategic studies by demonstrating that expeditionary capability is not solely a function of naval hardware or logistical capacity. It is equally shaped by political legitimacy, institutional coherence, and strategic narrative construction within international systems.

3. Theoretical Framework: Naval Expeditionary Strategy within International Grand Strategy

Table 1. Theoretical Framework: Multilevel Model of Naval Expeditionary Strategy in MOOTW

Analytical Level	Core Components	Key Variables	Theoretical Function
Operational Level	Time	Deployment speed; tempo control; sustainment endurance	Demonstrates capability, escalation management, and signaling credibility
	Space	Theatre characteristics; strategic reach; legal-diplomatic environment	Enables peripheral maneuver while shaping sovereignty and legitimacy dynamics
	Force	Joint integration; calibrated application; command coordination	Translates capability into controlled coercive leverage under MOOTW constraints
Strategic–International Level	Grand Strategy Alignment	National interests; diplomatic positioning; normative commitments	Embeds military action within broader political objectives
	Contestation	Elite deliberation; civil-military coordination; risk-cost assessment	Structures authorization and constraints overreach
	Politicization	Media framing; public expectations; reputational stakes	Shapes the legitimacy and domestic acceptance of force projection
Integrative Proposition	Multilevel Alignment	Synchronization between operational coherence and international political Management	Determines expeditionary strategic success (effective + legitimate outcome)

Table 1 summarizes the theoretical architecture underpinning the study. It conceptualizes naval expeditionary operations in MOOTW contexts as a multilevel process linking operational variables (time, space, and force) with grand strategic alignment and International political dynamics (contestation and politicization). Strategic success emerges when these dimensions are mutually reinforcing rather than disjointed.

3.1. Expeditionary Operations Beyond War: Reframing Analytical Levels

Naval expeditionary operations conducted under the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) challenge conventional analytical categories in strategic studies. Traditionally, expeditionary warfare has been conceptualized in relation to interstate conflict, peripheral campaigns, or imperial power projection (Merino Laso et al., 2025). However, in contemporary security environments, states increasingly deploy naval forces in limited, non-war contexts where coercion, signaling, protection, and legitimacy coexist.

To analyze such operations adequately, a dual-level framework is required. Expeditionary missions cannot be reduced to tactical maneuver or logistical endurance. Nor can they be fully explained through macro-level political analysis alone. Instead, they operate at the intersection of operational performance and grand strategic integration.

This article advances a two-level analytical model:

- a. Operational Level – concerned with the execution of expeditionary force projection.
- b. Strategic-International Level – concerned with the integration of military action within national strategy and domestic political structures.

The central theoretical proposition is that long-range naval expeditionary operations in MOOTW contexts succeed not merely when operational objectives are achieved, but when operational performance is aligned with strategic coherence and domestic political legitimacy.

3.2. The Operational Level: Time, Space, and Force

At the operational level, expeditionary warfare may be understood through three interdependent dimensions: time, space, and force.

a. Time

Time encompasses speed of deployment, tempo of execution, and duration of sustainment. In long-range naval operations, time is not simply a logistical variable; it shapes strategic signaling. Rapid deployment may demonstrate resolve and capability, while prolonged sustainment tests logistical depth and institutional endurance. In MOOTW contexts, where escalation control is essential, the temporal dimension must balance urgency with restraint.

Operational timing also affects political legitimacy. Delayed responses may invite domestic criticism, while precipitous action may be framed as reckless. Thus, temporal management becomes an operational and political variable.

b. Space

Space refers to the geographical characteristics of the theater of operations. Expeditionary naval operations frequently occur in

peripheral or distant maritime zones, where lines of communication are extended and jurisdictional complexity is high. The maritime domain offers mobility advantages, yet distance from home bases imposes constraints on sustainment, reinforcement, and evacuation.

In MOOTW settings—particularly anti-piracy operations—space is characterized by legal ambiguity, multinational presence, and asymmetrical adversaries. The spatial dimension, therefore, intersects with questions of sovereignty, international law, and diplomatic coordination.

c. Force

Force concerns the integration of naval, air, and land components in joint operations. Expeditionary capability depends on the ability to coordinate special forces, intelligence assets, logistical support, and maritime maneuver under unified command.

In non-war contexts, force must be calibrated. Excessive application risks diplomatic fallout; insufficient application risks mission failure. Therefore, expeditionary force in MOOTW is not defined by maximal firepower but by controlled, politically aware application of coercive capability. Together, time, space, and force constitute the operational architecture of naval expeditionary strategy. However, operational coherence alone does not ensure strategic success.

3.3. The Strategic-International Level: Grand Strategy, Contestation, and Politicization

Operational action becomes strategically meaningful only when integrated into a broader grand strategy. Grand strategy refers to the alignment of military means with national political objectives, economic interests, diplomatic positioning, and normative commitments.

In international relations systems, this integration is mediated by political processes. The use of military force beyond national territory must be justified not only externally but internally. Therefore, two political mechanisms become central:

a. Contestation

Contestation refers to elite-level disagreement regarding the appropriateness, necessity, or legality of military deployment. It may occur within the executive branch, between civilian and military actors, or between government and legislature.

In expeditionary MOOTW contexts, contestation may revolve around:

1. Risk exposure to personnel,
2. Financial costs,
3. Diplomatic repercussions,
4. Precedent-setting implications.

Contestation does not necessarily prevent deployment; rather, it shapes the parameters under which deployment occurs. It influences mandate scope, rules of engagement, and duration.

b. Politicization

Politicization occurs when military operations become subjects of public debate, media framing, and societal polarization. Unlike contestation, which may remain elite-driven, politicization transforms military action into a broader political issue.

In maritime rescue or anti-piracy operations, politicization may emerge around:

1. Protection of nationals abroad,
2. National prestige,
3. Perceptions of state strength or weakness,
4. Civil-military relations.

High levels of politicization increase the reputational stakes of success or failure. They may amplify strategic gains but also magnify potential backlash.

3.4. Integrative Proposition: Expeditionary Success as Multilevel Alignment

This article advances the following theoretical proposition:

Long-range naval expeditionary operations in MOOTW contexts achieve strategic success when operational effectiveness (time, space, force) is coherently integrated with grand strategic objectives and managed within International political constraints (contestation and politicization). Failure at any one level may undermine overall success:

- a. Operational success without political legitimacy may produce domestic backlash.
- b. Political approval without operational coherence may result in tactical failure.
- c. Strategic ambition without logistical capacity may expose institutional weakness.

Thus, expeditionary capability is multidimensional. It is not solely a function of naval tonnage, fleet size, or technological sophistication. Rather, it reflects the state's ability to synchronize military execution with political authority and strategic narrative.

3.5. Emerging Maritime Powers and Expeditionary Legitimacy

The framework carries particular implications for emerging maritime powers. Unlike established naval hegemons, emerging powers operate under resource constraints, evolving doctrines, and heightened sensitivity to international and domestic scrutiny.

For such states, expeditionary MOOTW operations serve dual purposes:

- a. Functional protection of national interests.
 - b. Symbolic consolidation of maritime identity and strategic credibility.
- However, expeditionary projection without established blue-water dominance intensifies dependence on political legitimacy and institutional coordination. In this context, the consolidation of expeditionary capability becomes as much a political achievement as a military one.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design: Explanatory Case Study and Process Tracing

This study employs an explanatory single-case design to examine the interaction between naval expeditionary strategy and international politics in Indonesia's 2011 rescue operation of *MV Sinar Kudus*. The case is selected as a critical and revelatory instance of long-range naval force projection conducted under the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).

The operation is analytically significant for three reasons. First, it represents one of Indonesia's rare expeditionary deployments beyond its immediate regional maritime environment. Second, it involved a calibrated military force in a non-war context characterized by legal, diplomatic, and political sensitivity. Third, it unfolded within an international political system subject to media scrutiny and bureaucratic coordination. These characteristics make it an appropriate case for examining the multilevel alignment between operational execution and

strategic international integration.

Rather than treating the case descriptively, this study adopts process tracing to identify causal mechanisms linking operational performance (time, space, force) with strategic alignment and domestic political management (contestation and politicization). Process tracing allows for the reconstruction of decision sequences, institutional interactions, and strategic choices that connect military execution to political outcomes. The aim is not statistical generalization but analytical generalization: refining theoretical propositions about expeditionary operations in international relations contexts.

4.2. Data Sources and Evidence

The analysis draws on three primary sources of evidence:

a. Elite Interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior military officials and policy actors directly involved in planning, authorizing, or executing the operation. These interviews provide insight into strategic deliberations, operational constraints, inter-service coordination, and political considerations shaping the deployment.

b. Official Documents and Policy Records.

Government statements, defense policy documents, parliamentary discussions, and official briefings were analyzed to reconstruct institutional decision-making and formal strategic framing. These materials illuminate the public justification of the operation and its positioning within national security discourse.

c. Media and Secondary Analysis.

Contemporary media coverage and scholarly analyses were examined to assess levels of politicization, public framing, and external perception. Media discourse provides evidence of how the operation entered public debate and how political narratives were constructed.

Triangulation across these sources strengthens internal validity by cross-verifying operational claims, political interpretations, and institutional narratives.

4.3. Analytical Strategy

The analytical strategy proceeds in three stages:

First, the operational dimension is assessed through reconstruction of deployment timing, logistical sustainment, force composition, and command integration. This stage evaluates whether expeditionary execution demonstrates coherence across the dimensions of time, space, and force. Second, the strategic dimension is examined by analyzing how the operation aligned with national interests, diplomatic positioning, and maritime security objectives. This stage assesses whether military action was embedded within a broader grand strategic framework.

Third, the international political dimension is evaluated by identifying evidence of contestation and politicization. This includes examining parliamentary discourse, executive deliberation, media framing, and bureaucratic coordination. The objective is to determine whether political dynamics constrained, enabled, or reshaped operational decisions.

Causal inference rests on identifying observable implications predicted by the theoretical framework. If expeditionary success requires multilevel alignment, then we should observe:

a. Operational coherence accompanying political legitimacy;

b. Strategic framing linking the operation to national interests;

c. Political management minimizing destabilizing contestation or polarization. Evidence inconsistent with these expectations would challenge the theoretical proposition.

4.4. Scope Conditions and Limitations

This study focuses on a single expeditionary MOOTW case and therefore does not claim universal applicability across all naval operations. The findings are most relevant to emerging maritime democracies conducting limited, long-range missions under political visibility.

Furthermore, while elite interviews provide privileged insight into decision-making processes, retrospective accounts may contain strategic rationalization. This limitation is mitigated through triangulation with documentary and media sources.

The study does not attempt to evaluate alternative counterfactual strategies in detail (e.g., ransom-only resolution or purely diplomatic approaches), as its primary objective is to explain the strategic-political integration of the chosen military course of action.

5. RESULT

5.1. Operational Execution: Time, Space, and Force in the MV *Sinar Kudus* Rescue

Table 2. Operational Dimensions of the MV *Sinar Kudus* Expeditionary Mission

Operational Dimension	Analytical Focus	Empirical Manifestation in the MV <i>Sinar Kudus</i> Case	Strategic Implication
Time	Deployment speed, tempo control, and sustainment endurance	Rapid long-range deployment to the Arabian Sea; sustained presence while negotiations continued; calibrated escalation	Demonstrated resolve without reckless escalation; enhanced coercive leverage while preserving political flexibility
Space	Theatre characteristics, geographic reach, and legal-diplomatic environment	Operation conducted beyond Indonesia's immediate maritime periphery; navigation of a multinational anti-piracy environment; jurisdictional ambiguity	Projected force without interstate confrontation; reinforced maritime responsibility and international credibility
Force	Joint integration, calibrated application, command coordination	Deployment of naval surface assets with special forces readiness; modular force composition; proportional use of coercive capability	Strengthened expeditionary credibility; reflected doctrinal adaptation to MOOTW and hostage recovery contexts

Table 2 synthesizes the operational execution of the expeditionary mission across the dimensions of time, space, and force. It

demonstrates that effectiveness is derived not from overwhelming military dominance, but from calibrated long-range deployment, peripheral spatial maneuver, and integrated joint-force coordination. These operational dimensions created the necessary conditions for strategic international alignment discussed in subsequent sections.

5.1.1. Time: Rapid Deployment and Controlled Escalation

The temporal dimension of Indonesia's expeditionary response reveals the interplay between urgency, strategic signaling, and escalation management. The hijacking of *MV Sinar Kudus* occurred in March 2011 in the Arabian Sea, a region far removed from Indonesia's immediate maritime periphery. The geographic distance posed immediate logistical and operational challenges, requiring long-range deployment of naval assets and supporting elements.

Indonesia's decision to deploy naval forces signaled a departure from purely diplomatic or commercial negotiation pathways. The speed of deployment was not merely operationally relevant; it functioned as a political signal of state resolve. In MOOTW contexts, particularly hostage crises, time shapes both adversary expectations and domestic perception. A delayed response risks projecting weakness, while excessive haste risks miscalculation.

The Indonesian approach reflected controlled escalation. Naval assets were dispatched to the broader operational theater while diplomatic and negotiation channels remained active. This dual-track strategy—military readiness combined with negotiation—demonstrates that expeditionary timing was calibrated rather than reactive. The presence of deployed forces created coercive leverage without immediate offensive engagement.

From an operational standpoint, the ability to sustain deployment across extended sea lines of communication underscored Indonesia's growing logistical reach. Expeditionary endurance, rather than instantaneous assault capability, became the central indicator of temporal effectiveness. The operation thus illustrates that in MOOTW contexts, temporal success lies not in rapid kinetic action alone but in maintaining credible force presence while political options unfold.

5.1.2. Space: Operating Beyond the Immediate Strategic Periphery

Spatially, the operation unfolded in a distant maritime theater characterized by multinational naval presence, legal complexity, and asymmetric threat dynamics. Unlike conventional naval warfare in contested littorals, anti-piracy operations in Somali waters involve non-state actors operating in vast, weakly governed maritime spaces.

For Indonesia, the Arabian Sea constituted an extended operational space outside its routine naval patrol zones. Conducting operations at such a distance required extended logistics, intelligence coordination, and adaptation to an environment shaped by international anti-piracy coalitions.

Operating in this space imposed three constraints:

- a. Jurisdictional ambiguity under international maritime law;
- b. Diplomatic sensitivity vis-à-vis other naval forces operating in the region;
- c. Intelligence asymmetry against decentralized pirate networks.

However, spatial distance also offered strategic advantages. By projecting force into a peripheral maritime theater, Indonesia avoided confrontation with state actors while reinforcing its commitment to protecting sea lines of communication. The maritime domain provided maneuver flexibility and reduced escalation risks compared to land-based intervention.

Importantly, the spatial dimension intersected with diplomatic signaling. Indonesia's presence in the broader Somali maritime zone communicated willingness to assume responsibility for the protection of its flagged vessels abroad, reinforcing its identity as a maritime state with outward-looking security commitments.

5.1.3. Force: Joint Integration and Calibrated Application

The force dimension of the operation involved naval deployment supported by special forces readiness, intelligence coordination, and command integration. Expeditionary capability was expressed not through overwhelming firepower but through integrated, modular force composition.

The deployment included surface combatants, special operations elements, and supporting logistics. Crucially, force was applied in a calibrated manner. Although ransom negotiations reportedly preceded the final phase of resolution, the presence of naval forces created strategic depth and contingency capacity.

In MOOTW hostage scenarios, the application of force must remain proportionate. Excessive coercion risks endangering hostages and triggering diplomatic repercussions. Insufficient readiness undermines credibility. Indonesia's approach illustrates the delicate equilibrium between preparedness for kinetic action and restraint.

Joint coordination between naval and special forces components demonstrated institutional learning in expeditionary integration. The operation required synchronization of maritime maneuver, intelligence assessment, and political authorization. This coordination reflects more than tactical competence; it indicates evolving doctrinal adaptation to expeditionary MOOTW missions.

5.1.4. Operational Assessment

Evaluated against the three operational dimensions, the *MV Sinar Kudus* rescue demonstrates:

- a. Effective temporal management through sustained deployment and escalation control.
- b. Strategic use of peripheral maritime space to project force without interstate confrontation.
- c. Calibrated joint force integration suited to non-war hostage recovery contexts.

However, operational effectiveness alone does not establish strategic success. The expeditionary mission must also be assessed in relation to national interests, diplomatic positioning, and domestic political dynamics.

5.2. Strategic Alignment and International Politics

Table 3. Strategic Alignment and International-Political Dynamics in the *MV Sinar Kudus* Operation

Analytical Dimension	Core Focus	Empirical Manifestation in the MV <i>Sinar Kudus</i> Case	Strategic Effect
National Interest & Grand Strategy	Protection of economic interests; safeguarding SLOCs; maritime identity consolidation	Deployment framed as protection of nationals and commercial assets; limited and calibrated mission consistent with maritime norms	Reinforced Indonesia's maritime credibility and protective obligation without escalation
Defense Diplomacy & International Signaling	External legitimacy; positioning within the multinational maritime security environment	Operation conducted within an anti-piracy framework; avoided confrontation with other naval actors; respected international law.	Balanced sovereign autonomy with cooperative posture; enhanced international reputation
Contestation (Elite-Level Politics)	Executive deliberation; civil-military coordination; cost-risk evaluation	Debate over necessity, cost, and risk; adoption of dual-track approach (negotiation + deployment)	Structured escalation control; strengthened civil-military alignment; prevented operational overreach
Politicization (Public & Media Dynamics)	Media framing; public expectations; reputational stakes	Media emphasis on national dignity and protection; high visibility of the hostage crisis	Increased pressure, but also enabled legitimacy consolidation through successful resolution
Strategic-International Alignment	Multilevel synchronization between military execution and political authority	Operational coherence is embedded within grand strategy and managed political processes.	Expeditionary success is defined by legitimacy + effectiveness, not military performance alone.

Table 3 synthesizes the strategic international dimension of the expeditionary mission. It demonstrates that expeditionary success was contingent not only upon operational coherence but also upon alignment with grand strategic objectives and effective management of International political dynamics. The table illustrates how contestation and politicization functioned as structuring mechanisms rather than purely constraining forces.

5.2.1. National Interest and Grand Strategic Positioning

The expeditionary deployment to secure *MV Sinar Kudus* cannot be understood solely as a hostage rescue mission. It was embedded within Indonesia's broader maritime grand strategy: the protection of national economic interests, safeguarding sea lines of communication, and asserting responsibility for citizens and commercial assets beyond territorial waters.

Indonesia's dependence on maritime trade routes makes the security of international shipping a structural national interest. The hijacking occurred along one of the world's most critical maritime corridors linking Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Failure to respond decisively would have risked

signaling vulnerability—not only to non-state actors but also to commercial partners and domestic constituencies.

From a grand strategic perspective, the operation served three functions:

- a. Protection of nationals and commercial assets abroad, reinforcing the state's protective obligation.
- b. Strategic signaling of maritime capability, demonstrating that Indonesia would not rely solely on multinational forces for the security of its flagged vessels.
- c. Institutional consolidation of expeditionary doctrine, advancing operational learning within the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW).

Crucially, the operation did not aim at territorial control or escalation. It remained limited, calibrated, and consistent with international maritime norms. This restraint strengthened its strategic coherence: military action remained aligned with political objectives without generating disproportionate diplomatic friction. Thus, at the strategic level, expeditionary deployment functioned as an instrument of grand strategy rather than as an isolated tactical response.

5.2.2. Defense Diplomacy and International Signaling

Operating in Somali waters required navigation of a complex diplomatic environment shaped by multinational anti-piracy operations and international maritime law. Indonesia's deployment occurred in a maritime space already populated by naval forces from major powers and regional actors. The expeditionary presence, therefore, carried diplomatic implications. It signaled Indonesia's willingness to contribute to global maritime security while acting primarily to protect its own nationals. This dual posture—autonomous yet cooperative—reinforced Indonesia's identity as an outward-looking archipelagic maritime democracy.

Importantly, the operation avoided confrontation with other state actors and did not disrupt multinational coordination mechanisms. Instead, it operated within the normative framework of counter-piracy efforts, maintaining legitimacy under international law.

This diplomatic management is essential to understanding expeditionary success. Naval projection without diplomatic calibration risks reputational damage. In contrast, Indonesia's approach balanced sovereignty assertion with normative restraint.

5.2.3. Contestation: Elite-Level Deliberation and Civil-Military Coordination

Within international political systems, the decision to deploy military force abroad is rarely uncontested. Although the operation ultimately received political authorization, elite-level deliberations shaped its scope and parameters.

Contestation emerged around several questions:

- a. Whether military deployment was necessary given ongoing negotiation channels;
- b. The financial and operational costs of long-range deployment;
- c. Risks to personnel in a distant and uncertain theater.

These debates did not prevent deployment but influenced its calibrated nature. Rather than immediate kinetic escalation, decision-makers adopted a multi-track approach: naval readiness combined with negotiation and diplomatic coordination.

The management of contestation reflects institutional maturity in civil-military relations. Military planning was embedded within executive authorization, and political leaders retained ultimate decision-making authority. This alignment prevented operational autonomy

from exceeding the strategic mandate. In this sense, contestation functioned as a moderating mechanism rather than as an obstacle. It constrained excessive risk while preserving operational credibility.

5.2.4. Politicization: Media Visibility and Public Narrative

The hijacking of an Indonesian-flagged vessel attracted significant media attention. Hostage situations inherently generate public anxiety and political scrutiny. In International contexts, such visibility raises reputational stakes.

Politicization manifested in media framing emphasizing:

- a. National dignity and sovereignty;
- b. Protection of Indonesian citizens;
- c. Expectations of decisive state action.

High politicization increases the cost of failure. A botched rescue or prolonged paralysis would have generated domestic criticism. Consequently, political leaders faced pressure to demonstrate both resolve and responsibility.

However, politicization also produced a strategic opportunity. Successful resolution reinforced public confidence in state capability and strengthened narratives of maritime responsibility. By managing media communication carefully and framing deployment as protective rather than aggressive, political leaders mitigated polarization. The operation, therefore, illustrates how politicization does not automatically undermine expeditionary missions. When strategically managed, it can consolidate legitimacy and enhance state authority.

5.2.5. Strategic-International Alignment

Evaluating the case through the integrated framework reveals multilevel alignment:

- a. Operational coherence was achieved through calibrated time management, spatial maneuver, and joint force integration.
- b. Strategic objectives—protection of national interests and reinforcement of maritime credibility—remained clearly articulated.
- c. International contestation was managed without paralyzing decision-making.
- d. Politicization was navigated through narrative framing, emphasizing protection and responsibility.

This alignment suggests that Indonesia's expeditionary success rested not solely on naval capability but on synchronization between operational execution and International political management.

6. DISCUSSION

This section revisits the four core research questions and situates the empirical findings within broader strategic studies debates. The discussion proceeds by integrating threat characteristics, doctrinal adaptation, operational execution, and strategic international alignment.

6.1. Asymmetric Maritime Threats and the Logic of Expeditionary Deployment

The first research question asked: *How did the characteristics of Somali piracy shape naval force deployment?*

The findings demonstrate that Somali piracy represented a non-traditional, asymmetric maritime threat operating in legally ambiguous and geographically expansive waters. Pirate groups relied on mobility, opportunistic targeting, and the exploitation of weak coastal governance. Unlike conventional naval adversaries, they did not hold territory in the traditional military sense but leveraged maritime vastness and hostages as bargaining instruments.

Such threats challenge traditional naval deterrence models. Conventional sea control or fleet engagement doctrines offer limited utility against decentralized non-state actors. Instead, expeditionary response becomes necessary when:

- a. National economic interests are directly affected.
- b. Hostages are involved.
- c. Multinational frameworks cannot substitute sovereign responsibility.

In this case, the asymmetric character of piracy required Indonesia to project force into a distant maritime theater not for territorial dominance, but for controlled coercive leverage and strategic signaling. Thus, expeditionary deployment in MOOTW contexts emerges not as a function of power maximization but as a response to vulnerability exposure in globalized maritime trade networks.

6.2. Doctrinal Adaptation: MOOTW and Expeditionary Strategy

The second research question examined: *How did the MOOTW doctrine frame the operation?* The findings reveal that the operation was doctrinally situated within Indonesia's framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). Unlike warfighting doctrine oriented toward territorial defense, MOOTW emphasizes limited objectives, calibrated force, and integration with political and diplomatic instruments. This doctrinal positioning had three implications:

- a. Limited Objective Orientation – The mission was framed as hostage recovery and protection of national interests, not punitive expedition or territorial intervention.
- b. Escalation Control – Deployment maintained readiness without immediate kinetic engagement.
- c. Civil-Military Integration – Strategic authorization remained embedded within executive political oversight.

The MV *Sinar Kudus* case demonstrates that expeditionary capability can develop within non-war doctrine, expanding the functional repertoire of naval forces without redefining the state's grand strategic posture. In strategic studies terms, this suggests that expeditionary power does not require revisionist or expansionist intent. It can evolve as a protective mechanism within status quo maritime democracies.

6.3. Operational Effectiveness: Time, Space, and Force

The third research question addressed: *How was long-range naval expeditionary strategy operationalized?*

The empirical findings confirm coherence across the three operational dimensions:

- a. Time
Indonesia managed a temporary escalation by deploying forces while maintaining negotiation channels. Rapid projection combined with sustained presence allowed flexibility without reckless escalation.
- b. Space
Operating in distant Somali waters required logistical extension beyond routine patrol zones. Spatial maneuver was achieved without confrontation with other state actors, preserving diplomatic legitimacy.
- c. Force

Joint integration between naval assets and special operations forces demonstrated institutional learning and adaptability. Force was applied in a calibrated manner consistent with hostage risk management. However, operational coherence alone does not define success. What distinguishes this case is that operational execution remained subordinate to political objectives, rather than generating autonomous military momentum.

6.4. Strategic and International Effectiveness

The fourth research question examined: *How effective was the strategy from operational and strategic perspectives?*

From a strategic standpoint, effectiveness is measured not solely by hostage recovery but by alignment with national interest and international legitimacy.

a. Grand Strategic Alignment

The operation reinforced Indonesia's maritime identity and commitment to protecting its citizens abroad. It strengthened perceptions of state responsibility without triggering diplomatic backlash. The deployment signaled emerging expeditionary capacity while remaining consistent with international maritime norms.

b. Contestation and Institutional Management

Elite-level contestation shaped operational calibration but did not paralyze decision-making. This suggests mature civil-military relations in which military planning operates within political mandate rather than beyond it.

c. Politicization and Narrative Control

Media visibility elevated the stakes but also provided an opportunity for legitimacy consolidation. By framing the mission as protective and defensive, policymakers reduced polarization and enhanced public confidence.

The interaction between operational execution and international management demonstrates that expeditionary capability in democracies depends on narrative construction and institutional coordination as much as on hardware and logistics.

6.5. Theoretical Implications

Expeditionary Power Beyond Great Powers, much of the literature associates expeditionary capability with established naval hegemony. This case illustrates that emerging archipelagic maritime democracies can conduct limited expeditionary operations when:

a. Objectives are constrained.

b. Escalation is controlled.

c. Political legitimacy is maintained.

Thus, expeditionary power should be conceptualized as scalable rather than binary.

Multilevel Alignment as Condition for Success: Operational excellence without strategic coherence is insufficient. Likewise, political authorization without logistical capacity produces vulnerability. The *MV Sinar Kudus* rescue demonstrates that expeditionary success emerges from alignment between:

a. Operational performance (time, space, force),

b. Strategic objectives (national interest, maritime credibility),

c. International management (contestation and politicization).

This integrative proposition refines existing naval expeditionary theory by embedding it within domestic political structures.

International Constraint as Strategic Asset, conventional realist perspectives often treat international constraint as a limitation on military flexibility. However, this case suggests that managed contestation and politicization can enhance legitimacy and international credibility. International oversight did not prevent deployment; it structured it. Political scrutiny encouraged calibrated force, reducing escalation risk while strengthening normative legitimacy. Thus, International politics may function not merely as a constraint but as a stabilizing architecture for expeditionary MOOTW missions.

6.6. Light Comparative Reflection

Compared to U.S. or European expeditionary models—often embedded in alliance systems and global basing infrastructure—Indonesia's operation relied on limited resources and ad hoc long-range logistics. Yet the strategic logic was similar:

a. Peripheral deployment,

b. Controlled force,

c. Political signaling.

The key difference lies in scale, not principle. Emerging maritime democracies operate under tighter logistical margins and heightened domestic sensitivity. Consequently, political-strategic synchronization becomes even more critical.

7. CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine how long-range naval expeditionary strategy operates within the framework of Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) under international political conditions. Using Indonesia's 2011 rescue operation of *MV Sinar Kudus* as an explanatory case, it addressed four central research questions: the nature of the piracy threat, the doctrinal framing of MOOTW, the operationalization of expeditionary strategy, and the effectiveness of the strategy at both operational and strategic levels. The first research question concerned the characteristics of Somali piracy as a basis for naval deployment. The findings demonstrate that piracy in Somali waters represented an asymmetric, non-state maritime threat operating within expansive and weakly governed maritime spaces. This form of threat did not lend itself to conventional naval deterrence or territorial defense doctrines. Instead, it exposed vulnerabilities in global maritime trade networks and required expeditionary force projection for the protection of nationals and economic interests. The logic of deployment, therefore, emerged not from power maximization but from vulnerability mitigation within a globalized maritime system. The second research question examined how Indonesia's MOOTW doctrine framed the operation. The analysis shows that the operation was embedded within a doctrinal structure emphasizing limited objectives, calibrated force, and integration with diplomatic instruments. Unlike traditional warfighting operations, the mission was not designed to impose decisive defeat upon an adversary but to secure specific political outcomes—hostage recovery, protection of national assets, and preservation of maritime credibility. The MOOTW framework thus provided institutional and legal scaffolding that allowed expeditionary action without altering Indonesia's broader grand strategic orientation. The third research question addressed how the long-range expeditionary strategy was operationalized. Evaluated through the dimensions of time, space, and force, the operation demonstrated operational coherence. Temporal management combined rapid deployment with controlled escalation. Spatial

maneuver extended naval reach beyond Indonesia's immediate strategic periphery without provoking interstate confrontation. Force integration reflected joint coordination and calibrated application consistent with hostage risk management. These operational features illustrate that expeditionary capability in MOOTW contexts depends less on overwhelming firepower and more on endurance, coordination, and restraint. The fourth research question assessed effectiveness from both operational and strategic perspectives. Operationally, the mission achieved its immediate objectives while maintaining escalation control. Strategically, the operation reinforced Indonesia's maritime identity, protected its economic interests, and demonstrated responsibility toward its citizens abroad. Crucially, expeditionary success was not solely a function of naval deployment. It depended on multilevel alignment between operational execution, grand strategic objectives, and International political management. At the International level, elite contestation shaped but did not obstruct decision-making. Political oversight structured the parameters of deployment, ensuring civil-military coherence. Politicization, amplified through media visibility, increased reputational stakes but also created an opportunity for legitimacy consolidation. The operation's narrative framing as protective and defensive mitigated polarization and strengthened public confidence. Rather than functioning solely as a constraint, international politics provided a stabilizing architecture for calibrated expeditionary action.

Taken together, the findings support the article's central theoretical proposition: long-range naval expeditionary operations in MOOTW contexts achieve strategic success when operational effectiveness (time, space, and force) is coherently integrated with grand strategic objectives and managed within International political structures. Expeditionary capability is therefore multidimensional. It is not reducible to fleet size, technological sophistication, or logistical depth alone. It reflects the state's capacity to synchronize military execution with political authority and strategic narrative.

The case also contributes to broader strategic studies debates in three ways. First, it expands understanding of expeditionary power beyond traditional naval hegemony, demonstrating that emerging archipelagic maritime democracies can conduct limited but effective long-range deployments under constrained conditions. Second, it refines naval expeditionary theory by embedding operational analysis within International political processes. Third, it challenges the assumption that international constraints necessarily weaken expeditionary effectiveness, showing instead that managed contestation and politicization can enhance legitimacy and strategic coherence.

For policymakers in emerging maritime democracies, the implications are clear. The consolidation of expeditionary capability requires not only investment in naval assets and logistics but also institutionalized civil-military coordination, strategic communication capacity, and doctrinal clarity regarding non-war operations. Expeditionary credibility is as much a political achievement as a military one.

In sum, the MV *Sinar Kudus* rescue was not merely a successful anti-piracy mission. It represented a formative moment in the consolidation of Indonesia's naval expeditionary strategy under international conditions. By integrating operational coherence with grand strategic alignment and political legitimacy, the operation illustrates how emerging maritime democracies can navigate the complex intersection of force projection, non-war missions, and domestic political accountability in the contemporary security environment.

Limitations

This study is based on a single explanatory case and therefore does not claim statistical generalizability. The MV *Sinar Kudus* rescue is treated as a critical instance to refine theoretical propositions on multilevel alignment between operational execution and International political management. The findings are intended for analytical generalization rather than universal application. Moreover, part of the empirical evidence relies on elite interviews and official documentation, which may contain retrospective rationalization despite triangulation with media and policy sources.

The analysis focuses primarily on state-level and elite-level dynamics, leaving broader societal attitudes and longitudinal public opinion trends outside its scope. In addition, the study does not systematically evaluate counterfactual crisis-management alternatives. Finally, because the framework is derived from the experience of an emerging maritime democracy with limited expeditionary capacity, its applicability to major naval powers or authoritarian systems requires further comparative research.

Future Research

The limitations of this study open several avenues for further inquiry. Comparative research across multiple maritime democracies would allow systematic testing of the multilevel alignment proposition advanced here, examining whether expeditionary success in other MOOTW contexts similarly depends on synchronization between operational coherence, grand strategic objectives, and International political management. Cross-regime comparisons could clarify whether international contestation functions primarily as a constraint, stabilizer, or strategic asset in expeditionary deployments, thereby contributing to debates in civil-military relations and international peace scholarship.

Longitudinal studies may further assess whether limited expeditionary missions serve as institutional learning mechanisms that gradually expand doctrinal adaptation and maritime capability. Additionally, future research should explore how unilateral expeditionary actions interact with alliance structures and multinational governance regimes. Finally, theoretical refinement is needed to examine the relationship between expeditionary signaling and maritime identity formation, particularly among emerging maritime democracies seeking to consolidate strategic credibility in global security affairs.

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