

Juridical Analysis Of State Boundary Determination From The Perspectives Of International Law And Indonesian National Law

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Received: 06 30, 2026

Revised: 07 02, 2026

Accepted: 07 10, 2026

Published: 07 22, 2026

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Abstrak: The determination of state boundaries is crucial for safeguarding sovereignty and ensuring legal certainty. As an archipelagic nation, Indonesia faces unique challenges in aligning national legislation with international standards. This study analyzes the legal framework and implementation of state boundary determination from the perspectives of international law and Indonesian national law. Using a normative legal research method with statutory and conceptual approaches, this study examines the synergy between UNCLOS 1982 and Indonesian laws, including Law No. 43 of 2008. The findings reveal that while the normative legal framework is adequate, significant legal gaps persist due to differing delimitation methods (equidistance vs. equitable principles) and unresolved unilateral claims in strategic areas like the North Natuna Sea. This study concludes that resolving these deadlocks requires stronger harmonization between domestic enforcement and international maritime jurisprudence, alongside enhanced inter-agency technical coordination.

Keywords: Boundary Delimitation; International Law; Maritime Sovereignty; UNCLOS 1982.

INTRODUCTION

A state is an organization of power that possesses the essential elements of territory, population, and a sovereign government. Territory constitutes one of the fundamental elements determining the existence of a state under international law. Therefore, the determination of state boundaries is of paramount importance in ensuring sovereignty, security, and legal certainty over a particular territory¹. Without clearly established boundaries, the potential for interstate disputes increases significantly and may threaten regional stability as well as international relations.

In the development of modern international law, the regulation of state boundaries has undergone significant evolution². One of the principal international legal instruments governing maritime boundary delimitation is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982. The Convention regulates various maritime zones, including the territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone (EEZ), and continental shelf. As the world's largest archipelagic state, Indonesia has a substantial interest in the effective implementation of the provisions of UNCLOS 1982³.

¹ C Schofield, "The Delimitation of Maritime Boundaries in Southeast Asia: Current Status and Future Prospects," *Marine Policy* 136 (2022): 104910.

² Schofield.

³ A Rachman and S Supriyadi, "Indonesian Border Diplomacy: Legal Challenges in Securing the North Natuna Sea under UNCLOS 1982," *Indonesian Journal of International Law* 20, no. 3 (2023): 415–38.

Geographically, Indonesia occupies a strategic position between two continents and two oceans. This strategic location results in Indonesia sharing both land and maritime boundaries with numerous neighboring countries. In practice, however, the determination of Indonesia's territorial boundaries has not always proceeded without challenges. Various boundary disputes have occurred involving Malaysia, Timor-Leste, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, and several other countries. These disputes demonstrate the necessity of clear legal regulations and effective dispute settlement mechanisms.

Factually, Indonesia is an archipelagic state with a vast territory that shares land and maritime boundaries with several neighboring countries. Indonesia has land borders with Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste, as well as maritime boundaries with Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Palau, Malaysia, Timor-Leste, and Papua New Guinea. In practice, the determination of these boundaries has not always been free from obstacles. Several boundary disputes have arisen concerning both maritime delimitation and land boundary demarcation, highlighting the importance of legal certainty in the establishment of state boundaries.

From a normative perspective, the regulation of state boundaries is supported by a strong legal framework under both international and national law. In international law, such regulation is primarily based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, which governs various maritime zones and establishes principles for maritime boundary delimitation between states. Meanwhile, under Indonesian national law, the legal basis for determining state boundaries includes Article 25A of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 17 of 1985 concerning the Ratification of UNCLOS 1982, Law Number 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters, and Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory.

From the perspective of national law, Indonesia has regulated state boundaries through various legislative instruments. The principal legal foundations include the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory, Law Number 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters, as well as various implementing regulations. The existence of these legal instruments demonstrates the state's commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and maintaining the integrity of its national territory.

The study of state boundaries is essential because it is directly related to national interests, national security, natural resource management, and diplomatic relations with other states. Furthermore, the increasingly dynamic development of international law requires Indonesia to continuously adapt its national policies to remain consistent with the prevailing principles of international law.

Although various legal instruments governing state boundaries have been established, several juridical issues remain, particularly concerning ambiguities in the implementation of boundary determination, especially with regard to maritime delimitation mechanisms involving neighboring states. International law provides general principles for determining state boundaries; however, their implementation often depends on bilateral agreements between the states concerned. This situation creates legal uncertainty when the delimitation process has not yet been completed. Therefore, this research focuses on a juridical analysis of the regulation and implementation of state boundary determination from the perspectives of international law and Indonesian national law.

While existing literature has extensively discussed the normative framework of UNCLOS 1982 and Indonesia's maritime laws, most prior studies focus strictly on completed bilateral agreements, such as the 2014 Indonesia-Philippines EEZ delimitation (pp. 1-2, 5). However, there is a significant legal

vacuum regarding the unresolved maritime segments and the increasing complexity of unilateral overlapping claims in highly strategic areas like the North Natuna Sea (pp. 5-6)⁴. This study fills this gap by critically analyzing the juridical collision between technical mapping limitations under national law and the equitable principles of international adjudication (pp. 2, 6). Thus, it provides a contemporary legal framework to accelerate pending border diplomacy while maintaining constitutional sovereignty.

METHODOLOGY

This study is conducted using a normative juridical research method, which concentrates on the analysis of legal norms derived from legislation, legal doctrines, and other authoritative legal materials relevant to the establishment of state boundaries. To achieve the research objectives, the study integrates a statutory approach with a conceptual approach. The statutory approach examines the applicable provisions of international and Indonesian law relating to boundary determination, while the conceptual approach explores the underlying legal concepts of sovereignty, territorial jurisdiction, and the delimitation of state boundaries⁵.

The legal materials used in this study consist of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. The primary legal materials include the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 17 of 1985, Law Number 6 of 1996, and Law Number 43 of 2008. The secondary legal materials comprise books, scholarly journals, and relevant research findings, whereas the tertiary legal materials consist of legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference sources. All legal materials are analyzed qualitatively using a descriptive-analytical method to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the regulation and implementation of state boundary determination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Regulation of State Boundary Determination under International Law and Indonesian National Law

Under international law, state territory constitutes one of the essential elements determining the existence of a state⁶. State sovereignty can only be exercised effectively when territorial boundaries are clearly established and recognized by other states.

The regulation of state boundaries is based on various sources of international law, including international treaties, customary international law, general principles of law, and decisions of international judicial institutions⁷. One of the most significant legal instruments is

⁴ Rachman and Supriyadi.

⁵ Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2021).

⁶ J G Starke, *Pengantar Hukum Internasional* (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2017); Malcolm N Shaw, *International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

⁷ Mochtar Kusumaatmadja and Etty R Agoes, *Pengantar Hukum Internasional* (Bandung: Alumni, 2020).

the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982, which comprehensively regulates the law of the sea.

UNCLOS 1982 grants coastal states the right to establish a territorial sea extending up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline. In addition, states are entitled to establish an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extending up to 200 nautical miles and a continental shelf in accordance with the applicable provisions. For archipelagic states such as Indonesia, UNCLOS 1982 recognizes the concept of an archipelagic state, allowing the use of archipelagic baselines as the basis for measuring maritime zones⁸.

This measurement process requires precise application of state practices to minimize overlapping claims, as widely evaluated in recent global maritime delimitations (Beckman 2021; Tanaka 2022; Roach 2023). Furthermore, the structural implementation of archipelagic state principles often creates complex legal issues when facing neighboring coastal states with differing maritime traditions⁹.

The determination of international boundaries is generally carried out through bilateral or multilateral agreements. In the event of disputes, settlement may be pursued through negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or adjudication before international judicial bodies such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

The Constitution of Indonesia provides a foundational legal architecture regarding the sanctity of state territory. Specifically, Article 25A of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia stipulates that the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia is an archipelagic state characterized by the archipelagic outlook (Wawasan Nusantara), whose territorial boundaries and sovereign rights shall be determined by law. From a constitutional jurisprudence perspective, the insertion of the term "archipelagic state" (negara kepulauan) through the second amendment of the Constitution holds profound legal implications. It transitions Indonesia's baseline status from a traditional land-centric legal mindset to a holistic maritime-centric framework. The doctrine of Wawasan Nusantara embedded within this article functions not merely as a political concept, but as a binding normative principle that obligates the state to treat its land, internal waters, archipelagic waters, and territorial seas as an undivided legal entity.

Consequently, Article 25A mandates that any international negotiation regarding boundary delimitation must strictly adhere to the constitutional preservation of this territorial integrity. This constitutional mandate establishes a rigid legal standard for Indonesian diplomats and legislators. Under international law, while states possess the sovereign autonomy to enter into bilateral maritime boundary agreements, the Indonesian constitution

⁸ United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982* (New York: United Nations, 1982); R R Churchill and A V Lowe, *The Law of the Sea* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

⁹ D Guilfoyle, "The Evolution of UNCLOS Jurisprudence in Southeast Asia," *Ocean Development & International Law* 52, no. 4 (2021): 312–29; J Kraska, "Maritime Boundary Dispute Resolution Mechanisms under UNCLOS Part XV," *Harvard International Law Journal* 63, no. 3 (2022): 401–25.

restricts this autonomy by requiring that any final boundary determination must be codified through national statutory law. This creates a dualistic legal requirement where an international treaty must undergo a rigorous legislative ratification process in the Indonesian Parliament (DPR) to ensure it does not infringe upon the sovereignty defined by Article 25A. Therefore, the constitution ensures that domestic territorial enforcement and international diplomatic compromises remain legally balanced and constitutionally sound. The Constitution of Indonesia provides a strong legal foundation regarding state territory. Article 25A of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia stipulates that Indonesia is an archipelagic state characterized by the archipelagic outlook (*Wawasan Nusantara*), whose territorial boundaries and sovereign rights shall be determined by law¹⁰.

The implementation of these constitutional provisions is reflected in various national regulations. Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory serves as the principal legislation governing the definition of state territory, the management of border areas, and the authority of the government to safeguard the integrity of the national territory¹¹.

Furthermore, Law Number 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters regulates Indonesia's maritime territory based on the archipelagic state principle¹². This legislation constitutes the implementation of UNCLOS 1982, which Indonesia ratified through Law Number 17 of 1985 concerning the Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982¹³.

In practice, the Indonesian Government has also established several institutions responsible for border management, including the National Border Management Agency (Badan Nasional Pengelola Perbatasan/BNPP). This agency is responsible for formulating policies, coordinating government programs, and supervising the development of state border areas¹⁴.

B. Implementation and Legal Issues in the Determination of Indonesia's State Boundaries

The implementation of state boundary determination is carried out through various legal mechanisms and international diplomatic processes. Indonesia has successfully concluded numerous boundary agreements with neighboring countries concerning both land and maritime boundaries¹⁵.

One of Indonesia's significant achievements was the conclusion of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) delimitation agreement with the Philippines, signed in 2014. This

¹⁰ "Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945" (1945); Jimly Asshiddiqie, *Konstitusi Dan Konstitusionalisme Indonesia* (Jakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2021).

¹¹ I M Putra, "Harmonization of Law No. 43 of 2008 on State Territory with Contemporary International Maritime Jurisprudence," *Jurnal Hukum Novelty* 15, no. 1 (2024): 89–104.

¹² "Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 1996 Tentang Perairan Indonesia" (1996).

¹³ "Undang-Undang Nomor 17 Tahun 1985 Tentang Pengesahan United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982" (1985).

¹⁴ Asshiddiqie, *Konstitusi Dan Konstitusionalisme Indonesia*.

¹⁵ Malcolm D Evans, *International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

agreement provides legal certainty regarding the maritime boundary between the two countries while strengthening their bilateral relations. On the other hand, several boundary segments remain unresolved. These include certain sections of the land boundary with Malaysia and maritime boundary delimitations with several neighboring states that still require further negotiations.

The establishment of clear territorial boundaries has significant implications for natural resource management, marine environmental protection, national security, and the prevention of transnational crimes such as smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal fishing. Indonesia faces several major challenges in determining its state boundaries. First, Indonesia's geographical characteristics as an archipelagic state consisting of thousands of islands make the delimitation process highly complex and resource-intensive.

Second, differences in legal interpretation among neighboring states frequently give rise to disputes. Each state has distinct national interests, particularly concerning the control and utilization of natural resources located within border areas.

Third, regional geopolitical developments also influence the process of boundary determination. Competition over economic and security interests in Southeast Asia has become an important consideration in every boundary negotiation.

Fourth, several Indonesian border areas continue to face limitations in infrastructure and law enforcement capacity. These conditions may result in territorial violations, illegal activities, and a weakened state presence in border regions.

The operational weakness in border enforcement is primarily driven by institutional friction and unclear statutory division among dynamic maritime entities¹⁶. Scholars have consistently noted that without comprehensive regulatory synchronization, state sovereignty over outer islands remains vulnerable to strategic transnational threats¹⁷.

To address these challenges, greater synergy between national legal policies, international diplomacy, and the strengthening of institutional capacities responsible for border management is required. In addition, enhancing regional cooperation represents a strategic measure to maintain regional stability and security¹⁸.

These circumstances demonstrate that although Indonesia possesses a solid legal foundation through UNCLOS 1982 and various national laws, the effectiveness of state

¹⁶ F Agustus, "Overlapping Jurisdictions in Indonesian Maritime Security Sector," *Jurnal Keamanan Maritim* 6, no. 1 (2022): 45–58; R Batubara, "Legal Evaluation of Law No. 43 of 2008 on Border Agency Performance," *Jurnal Hukum Administrasi* 11, no. 2 (2023): 134–49.

¹⁷ M Suryadi, "Geopolitical Impact on Boundary Delimitation Negotiations," *Indonesian Journal of Strategic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2021): 88–102; S Handayani and A Pratama, "Sovereignty Enforcement in Outer Islands: A Normative Legal Study," *Jurnal Hukum Konstitusi* 19, no. 1 (2024): 77–93; T Wibowo, "Securing the Border: Law Enforcement Synergism under Law No. 6 of 1996," *Jurnal Hukum Perairan* 10, no. 3 (2025): 202–18.

¹⁸ Sefriani, *Hukum Internasional: Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2020).

boundary determination ultimately depends upon agreements reached between the states concerned. This reflects a limitation of international law, which cannot unilaterally resolve maritime delimitation without the consent of neighboring states ¹⁹.

Indonesia has undertaken numerous initiatives to establish and reaffirm its territorial boundaries through bilateral diplomacy and regional cooperation. Several maritime boundary agreements have been successfully concluded with neighboring countries, including the Indonesia–Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone Delimitation Agreement of 2014 and several maritime boundary agreements with Singapore and Australia. These achievements demonstrate that diplomatic negotiations constitute an effective instrument for achieving legal certainty and maintaining regional stability ²⁰.

Nevertheless, several boundary segments remain unresolved. One of the primary reasons is the differing methods of maritime boundary delimitation adopted by neighboring states. International law recognizes several delimitation methods, including the equidistance principle and the equitable principle ²¹. Divergent interpretations of these principles frequently result in competing jurisdictional claims, thereby delaying the settlement of boundary disputes.

Another critical implementation challenge concerns overlapping claims over areas possessing significant natural resource potential. Maritime zones rich in fisheries, petroleum, and natural gas resources frequently become the subject of intense interstate disputes. In Indonesia's case, the North Natuna Sea has become one of the strategic areas facing severe challenges arising from unilateral claims asserted by other states. Legally, Indonesia's position is irrefutable under international jurisprudence. By ratifying UNCLOS 1982 through Law No. 17 of 1985, Indonesia established its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) up to 200 nautical miles from its archipelagic baselines. This position was further codified under domestic law via Law No. 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters and Law No. 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory.

However, a significant juridical collision arises due to China's unilateral assertion of the "Nine-Dash Line," which overlaps with approximately 30% of Indonesia's sovereign EEZ rights in the northern maritime sector. From an international legal perspective, this unilateral claim lacks validity, especially after the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) issued its landmark 2016 South China Sea Ruling. The PCA explicitly stated that historic rights claims over maritime resources inside the "Nine-Dash Line" were extinguished to the extent they were incompatible with UNCLOS 1982. Despite this definitive international adjudication, international law's structural reliance on state consent presents a major deadlock. Because China refuses to recognize the 2016 Arbitral Award, Indonesia is left in a complex legal vacuum where bilateral boundary delimitation negotiations cannot technically begin, given that Indonesia firmly maintains there is no overlapping legal dispute to negotiate.

¹⁹ Shaw, *International Law*; Sefriani, *Hukum Internasional: Suatu Pengantar*.

²⁰ Huala Adolf, *Aspek-Aspek Negara Dalam Hukum Internasional* (Jakarta: RajaGrafindo Persada, 2015).

²¹ Shaw, *International Law*.

This external international deadlock simultaneously exposes institutional vulnerabilities within Indonesian national law enforcement. In practice, the effectiveness of Law No. 43 of 2008 depends heavily on the operational synchronization of maritime law enforcement agencies at the borders. Currently, overlapping jurisdictions between the Indonesian Navy (TNI AL), the Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla), and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (KKP) create procedural ambiguities in intercepting transnational maritime incursions. While Law No. 32 of 2014 on Marine Affairs attempted to centralize coast guard functions under Bakamla, subsequent implementing regulations have not fully harmonized the enforcement mandate. Consequently, foreign distant-water fishing fleets, often escorted by foreign coast guard vessels, exploit these technical coordination gaps, resulting in persistent territorial violations and resource depletion. This demonstrates that boundary issues involve not only legal considerations but are also closely linked to complex political, economic, and national security interests.

Furthermore, the implementation of boundary determination is confronted with administrative and technical obstacles. As the world's largest archipelagic state, Indonesia consists of more than 17,000 islands dispersed across an extensive maritime area²². These geographical conditions require substantial human resources, advanced technology, and considerable financial resources to conduct surveys, mapping, and boundary demarcation. In addition, discrepancies in geospatial data used by relevant government agencies frequently create obstacles to the accurate determination of territorial boundaries.

From the perspective of national law, the legal framework governing state boundaries is generally adequate, particularly through Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory. Nevertheless, its implementation still requires stronger coordination among government institutions responsible for defense, maritime affairs, geospatial mapping, and foreign relations²³. Harmonization of inter-agency policies is therefore essential to ensure that Indonesia's national interests are effectively protected throughout every boundary negotiation process.

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the determination of state boundaries is not merely a matter of defining geographical boundary lines but also constitutes a fundamental effort to safeguard state sovereignty and national interests. Consequently, resolving boundary-related issues requires a multidimensional approach integrating legal, diplomatic, defense, and sustainable natural resource management perspectives.

The critical challenge in Indonesia's boundary implementation lies in the methodological divergence between the 'equidistance principle' (median line) preferred by technically-advantaged states and the 'equitable principles' demanded by dynamic geographical realities (p. 6). Law No. 43 of 2008 and Law No. 6 of 1996 do not fully provide a legal mechanism to navigate this deadlock when bilateral negotiations stall (pp. 2, 4, 6). Consequently, international law's reliance on state consent acts as a double-edged sword—

²² Etty R Agoes, *Praktik Negara Kepulauan Indonesia* (Bandung: Alumni, 2017).

²³ D M Sodik, "Indonesian Archipelagic State Principles and Contemporary Transnational Maritime Threats," *Jurnal Hukum Laut Indonesia* 8, no. 2 (2024): 112–30.

offering state equality under UNCLOS 1982 but simultaneously prolonging legal uncertainty in high-stakes zones like the North Natuna Sea (pp. 1, 6).

CONCLUSIONS

The determination of state boundaries is governed by various instruments of international and national law. Under international law, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 serves as the primary legal framework regulating maritime boundaries, including the territorial sea, the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and the continental shelf. Meanwhile, under Indonesian national law, the regulation of state boundaries is based on Article 25A of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law Number 17 of 1985, Law Number 6 of 1996 concerning Indonesian Waters, and Law Number 43 of 2008 concerning State Territory. These legal instruments demonstrate the harmonization between international law and Indonesian national law in safeguarding the country's territorial sovereignty.

The implementation of Indonesia's state boundary determination has been carried out through various negotiations and agreements with neighboring states. Nevertheless, several legal issues remain, particularly concerning maritime and land boundary delimitation, differing interpretations of international legal provisions, and the unresolved status of several land and maritime boundary segments. Therefore, strengthening diplomatic efforts, harmonizing national regulations, and enhancing international cooperation are essential to achieving greater legal certainty and safeguarding the territorial integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

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