

GUADALCANAL STRATEGIES: LESSONS LEARNED FOR ENHANCING NATUNA'S SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM BY INDONESIA COAST GUARD

STRATEGI GUADALCANAL: PELAJARAN YANG DIPETIK UNTUK MENINGKATKAN SISTEM PENGAWASAN NATUNA OLEH BAKAMLA RI

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Abstrak – The reconquest of Guadalcanal by U.S troops on 9th February 1943 marked a pivotal moment in reclaiming Pacific islands from Japanese occupation. The strategic conditions of Guadalcanal during the Pacific War era bear similarities to Natuna facing Chinese aggressiveness, particularly regarding the 'Nine Dash Line' claims, which extend to Indonesian waters around Natuna. This research aims to derive lessons from the Japanese defeat at Guadalcanal to emphasize the critical importance of developing a robust surveillance system in Indonesia's outermost regions, especially Natuna. Utilizing a combination of Case Study and Historical Research methodologies, this study identifies strategic parallels between the U.S military actions in Guadalcanal and Chinese actions in the South China Sea. The findings underscore the necessity for the Indonesian Coast Guard (Bakamla RI) to enhance surveillance capabilities in Natuna to safeguard national sovereignty.

Keywords: Chinese agresivity, Coast guard, Natuna, Guadalcanal, surveillance system

Abstrak – Perebutan kembali Guadalcanal oleh pasukan AS pada 9 Februari 1943 menandai momen penting dalam merebut kembali pulau-pulau di Pasifik dari pendudukan Jepang. Kondisi strategis Guadalcanal selama era Perang Pasifik memiliki kesamaan dengan Natuna yang menghadapi agresivitas Cina, terutama terkait klaim 'Nine Dash Line' yang meluas ke perairan Indonesia di sekitar Natuna. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengambil pelajaran dari kekalahan Jepang di Guadalcanal guna menekankan pentingnya mengembangkan sistem pengawasan yang kuat di wilayah terluar Indonesia, terutama Natuna. Dengan menggunakan kombinasi metodologi Studi Kasus dan Penelitian Sejarah, studi ini mengidentifikasi kesamaan strategis antara tindakan militer AS di Guadalcanal dan tindakan Cina di Laut Cina Selatan. Temuan ini menegaskan perlunya Bakamla RI untuk meningkatkan kemampuan pengawasan di Natuna guna menjaga kedaulatan nasional.

Kata kunci: Agresivitas Tiongkok, Bakamla, Natuna, Guadalcanal, sistem pengawasan

Introduction

Rising of Imperial Japan as the new power in the Pacific started after the Russo-Japanese War (1905) when Imperial Japan surprisingly defeated the Russian Empire, especially in the Battle of

Tsushima, which showed the supremacy of the Japanese Imperial Navy (Britannica, 2024). After the victory, Japan continued the expansion by annexing its neighboring territories, including the Korean Peninsula, the

Chinese (Manchuria) Region, and the Indochina Region. However, Japanese supremacy on the Pacific Islands had been started later after its attack on Pearl Harbour (1941). Japan continued its expansion to the south until the occupation of Guadalcanal on 3rd June 1942 by the British government (centered in Tulagi), a tiny island whose 5,302 km² area laid 9°35'24" S and 160°14'6" E, exactly in Southeast Pacific. Today,

Guadalcanal is the place of Solomon Island's capital city, Honiara, on the island's north side (*Guadalcanal*, n.d.). Guadalcanal was the southernmost part of Japanese Imperial territory because its defeat in the Battle of Coral Sea (8th May 1942) practically stopped the southern expansion of Imperial Japan. Japan tried to expand to the east but was defeated again in the Battle of Midway (3rd - 4th June 1942) (Mueller, 2012).



Figure 1. The Greatest Extend of the Japanese Imperial Region during the Pacific War.
Source: Alex, 2015

At the time of their occupation, the Japanese Army only built less defense infrastructure, including an airfield captured easily by U.S Marines only one day after their landing on 7th August 1942, practically without any resistance (Mueller, 2012). Henderson Airfield, the airfield so named, had proven its

usefulness to the U.S Marines, both for defending Guadalcanal from Japanese counterattacks and recapturing territories previously occupied by Japan. It showed two facts: firstly, two months (counted from the Japanese occupation until the U.S recapture) were not used by the Japanese Army to build a solid

defense base, which means that the successful U.S. Marines's landing only exploited the Japanese negligence (Soewarso, 1986); secondly, Japan had enough forces to defend Guadalcanal longer. During their counterattacks, Japan lost 25,400 soldiers and ±25 main vessels (Mueller, 2012), which showed that Japan could build a solid defense base in Guadalcanal with the existing soldiers and vessels.

The Reconquest of Guadalcanal totally by U.S. Marines (on 9th February 1943) opened ways to reconquest other Pacific islands from Japanese occupation. It proved that Japan had never learned from its defeat on Guadalcanal. Even the Enola Gay plane that later brought the atomic bombs was taken off from Tinian, North Mariana Islands, also former Japanese territory (Prefer, 2012). Destructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (caused by atomic bombs) might have been prevented if Japan had built strong defense bases on each occupied island. Another probability is that Japan could detect each threat earlier to arrange a strategy for facing those threats.

The condition in Guadalcanal during the Pacific War Era could be similar to that in Natuna (one of the Republic of Indonesia's outermost regions), which

faced Chinese aggression. The Chinese aggression started in 1947 when China published a map of the South China Sea with dashed lines that covered almost its whole region, famously called the 'Nine Dash Line.' China used that map to claim that the whole region inside the Nine Dash Line was part of Chinese territory. It was followed by the subsequent claims on the Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands (BBC, 2023).

Not stopping there, China continued its expansion until it reached the Indonesian sovereignty region on Natuna. This is shown by Chinese patrol vessels around the Nine Dash Line and sometimes even the outbreak Indonesian sovereignty border. Moreover, the primary purpose of this research is not to analyze or compare strategies of both sides (Japan and U.S) but to make the Japanese defeat of Guadalcanal a lesson learned about the importance of surveillance system building in the outermost region, especially on Natuna.

Viewed from a historical perspective, archaeological evidence supports the Chinese claim around the Nine Dash Line (including Natuna), except for some old maps suspected of being made unilaterally. On the contrary, research held by the Center of National

Archaeological Research (Puslit Arkenas) in 2016 showed some archaeological evidence in Natuna that is similar to Austronesian culture (Harkantiningih & Wibisono, 2016). It proved that the Austronesian people had settled in Natuna for a long time, as it is generally known that the Austronesian is the ancestor of the present Indonesian people.

This study aims to use lessons from Japan's defeat at Guadalcanal to underscore the critical importance of developing a robust surveillance system in Indonesia's outermost regions, particularly in Natuna. The research analyzes this historical event and emphasizes the urgent need for adequate surveillance infrastructure to safeguard national sovereignty and security in the strategic Natuna region.

Research Method

This research is a combination/mix of case study research and historical research. This research cannot be entirely determined as case study research because case study research is bounded by time (Sugiyono, 2018 from Creswell, 2012). In contrast, this research was 'time crossing' (past into present and future). Also, this research cannot be entirely

determined as historical research because it did not follow steps of joint historical research, e.g., (1) Heuristic, (2) Analysis, (3) Interpretation, and (4) Historiography (Bachri et al., 2023), whereas this research only used the historiographic products as data resources.

The combination/mix between case study research and historical research here was explained as Military Historical Writing Research, adopted by the Indonesian Navy Education and Training Command (Kodiklatal) in 1981, contained three steps: Memory, Reflective, and Creative (Soewarso, 1982). Memory means remembering a historical event or collecting some historiographic products as data resources (Soewarso, 1982), e.g., maps and memories about the Battle of Guadalcanal. Reflective means comparison between a past event (gotten from historiographic products) and a related present event or lesson learned analysis of a present event to a related past/historical event (Soewarso, 1982). In this research, the increase of Chinese aggressivity in Nine Dash Line is a present event related to the recapture of Guadalcanal by U.S troops using Japanese failure to defend Guadalcanal is an unexpected event by Indonesia to

prevent threats on Natuna. Creative means closing steps of this research to make the analysis result (Soewarso, 1982) as a base to describe the importance of the Surveillance System to be built in the Natuna region.

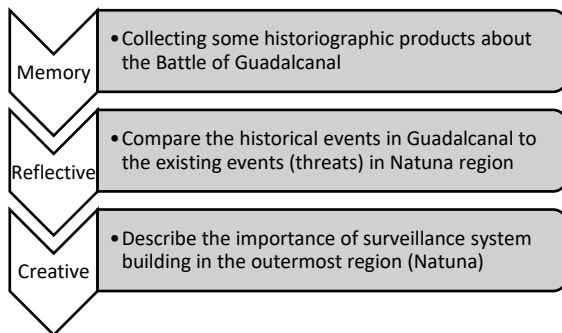


Figure 2. Military Historical Writing Research.
Source: Soewarso, 1982

Result and Discussion

Analysis of Japanese Defeat in the Battle of Guadalcanal

Since the 19th century, the Japanese Military had an offensive base doctrine that includes surprise attacks and fast troop movement (Abrianto, 2022, cited Evans & Peattie, 2012). However, in the Guadalcanal case, the Japanese Army was surprised by the U.S. Marines' attack. The following Japanese response was more curative (facing the U.S. troops) than preventive (preventing the U.S. troops from landing). Besides that, U.S. troops always brought many construction and communication engineering workers

(Handoko et al., 2018) to build defense bases on every recapturing island.

The main reason for the Japanese failure to defend Guadalcanal is the lack of a Surveillance System (or Surveillance Strategy) after the Guadalcanal Occupation on 3rd June 1942. Japanese Army built an unfinished airfield as the only defense infrastructure in Guadalcanal that was captured easily by U.S. troops on 8th August 1942. By counting the Japanese number of casualties (25,400 troops and 25 main vessels), there was the probability that Japan might deploy all of the troops and vessels around the island to make a Surveillance System. However, in reality, 10,000 troops of U.S. Marines had been landed with no resistance (Kent, 2016).

On the contrary, U.S. troops captured the unfinished airfield soon after landing on Guadalcanal (later named Henderson Airfield), even though they could build a second airfield near Henderson Airfield. Another memory is that during the Morotai Recapture (known as Tradewind Operation), U.S. troops also brought many construction and communication engineers to build radar stations around the island soon (Handoko et al., 2018).

By analysis using Sun Tzu (544-496 BBC.) War Strategy: U.S troops succeeded in making a surprise attack and making their attack plan 'dark and tight' (unknown); ironically, the strategy was applied by Japan itself (Soedarto, 2003). It was caused by the role of the U.S Surveillance System to get information and data about weather, terrain, and opponents. It gathered the data with high accuracy as the basis of strategy determination to destroy Japanese troops. Another irony is that Japan faced

it all by negligence (Kurniawan et al., 2022).

Analysis of Chinese Aggressivity in Natuna

A 2016 report from the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) showed an increase in Chinese aggressivity regarding Chinese military bases' building activities in the Spratly Islands, especially in Gaven, Hughes, Johnson, and Cuarteron reefs (AMTI, 2016).



Figure(s) 3. Air View of Johnson Reef in 2016 (left) and in 2022 (right).
Sources: AMTI, 2016; AMTI, 2024

Further proof is the China Coast Guard (CCG) patrol that intrudes into the Indonesian sovereignty region, which is even closer to Natuna island. The intrusion was triggered by the determination of Paracel as Xi-Sha district and Spratly as Nan-Sha district in 2020 (Kurnia, 2022). This means that China has assumed seriously that the region inside

the Nine Dash Line is Chinese territory, giving it the right to arrange patrol operations, including building military bases. Then, the same year, CCG patrol vessel numbered 5204 was detected intruding the Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the north Natuna Sea. The vessel left after 48 hours (Yahya & Erdianto, 2020).

In 2021, a Chinese research vessel named Hai Yang Di Zhi 10 was reported approximately 80 nautical miles from the Natuna coastline. It appeared to be escorted by a CCG patrol vessel, sparking concerns about its activities (CNN Indonesia, 2021). Similarly, in 2023, another Chinese research vessel, the Nan Feng, operated by the Chinese Academy of Fishery Science (CAFS), was detected in the Natuna Sea. This occurred after its departure from Fiery Cross Reef in the Spratly Islands, exhibiting movements consistent with hydroacoustic survey operations (IOJI, 2023).



Figure 4. Air View of Fiery Cross Reef in 2022. Source: AMTI, 2024

The latest information from January 2024 showed that a 98-meter CCG patrol vessel numbered 5409 entered the EEZ of three states: Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Powell, 2024). The presence of a Fregat-sized CCG patrol vessel in the

South China Sea shows that China is not kidding about the Nine Dash Line claim.



Figure 5. Intrusion of CCG Patrol Vessel 5402 Crossing EEZ of Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Source: Powell, 2024

The similarity is shown by comparing the U.S. troops' scheme to recapture Guadalcanal with the following islands and the Chinese aggression in Natuna. During the recapture of Guadalcanal and later the following islands, U.S troops did not start with territorial claims. However, the troops moved island by island and fought to recapture every island landed. Meanwhile, Chinese aggressivities were triggered by a claim known as the 'Nine Dash Line,' after the claim, China moved its troops (by patrol vessels) island by island, starting from the Paracel Islands until the Spratly Islands. Then, its patrol vessels were detected closer to Natuna

Island, which means there is a probability that Natuna Island may be the following claim target after Paracel and Spratly.

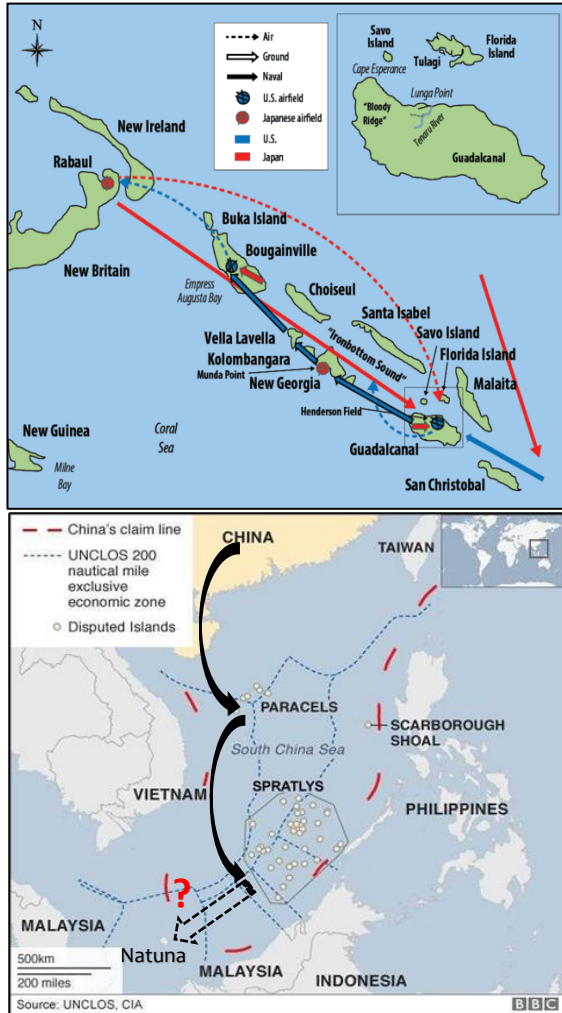


Figure 6. Comparison of forward movement of U.S. Marines (blue arrows) after recapturing Guadalcanal, *above* and Chinese aggressivities as Nine Dash Line (red lines), *below*.

Source: Rein, 2018; BBC, 2023

To counter Chinese aggression, an early warning capability is needed. This capability will detect every movement of Chinese troops so that every further implication can be prevented. However, it needs to be activated by building a surveillance system.

Role of Surveillance Systems to Build Early Warning Capability

The second important thing in the Japanese defeat in Guadalcanal was the role of Coastwatcher, established by Lieutenant Commander Eric Feldt from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) to monitor Japanese activities in the Solomon Islands (Mueller, 2012). Commonly, the Coastwatcher was a part of the Combined Operation Intelligence Center (COIC) centered in Townsville, Australia. The gathered information was delivered to the Area Combined Headquarters by radio communication (in Coastal Radio Service). Coastwatcher recruited some local people as the personnel who work (Duffield, 2022):

- Port/Harbour Masters
- Railway Officials
- Local Police
- Teachers
- Civilian Pilots
- Etc.



Figure 7. A photo was taken at Coastal Radio Service near Henderson Airfield, Guadalcanal. Source: National Park Service, n.d.

Admiral William Halsey from the U.S. Navy appreciated the Coastwatcher's role as a surveillance system. He said, "The Coastwatchers saved Guadalcanal, and Guadalcanal saved the South Pacific" (National Park Service, n.d.).

The Coastwatcher can be matched with the Coast Guard, which still exists. However, during the Pacific War, the U.S. sent its Coast Guard (U.S Coast Guard/USCG) to the battlefield of Guadalcanal with similar duties to the Coastwatcher. One of the legendary personnel of USCG at that time is Signaller 1st Class Douglas Albert Munro. As the signaller, he volunteered as a Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel/LCVP operator. On 27th September 1942, he operated LCVP (equipped with machine gun caliber .30') filled with 500 U.S Marines to the landing point at Point Cruz near Matanikau River, Guadalcanal. However, the LCVP had been bombarded soon with gunfire from Japanese troops. Munro was shot in his breast while operating the machine gun to protect the U.S Marines. He is the only U.S. Coast Guard personnel as the Medal of Honour's receiver (Lin, 2018).

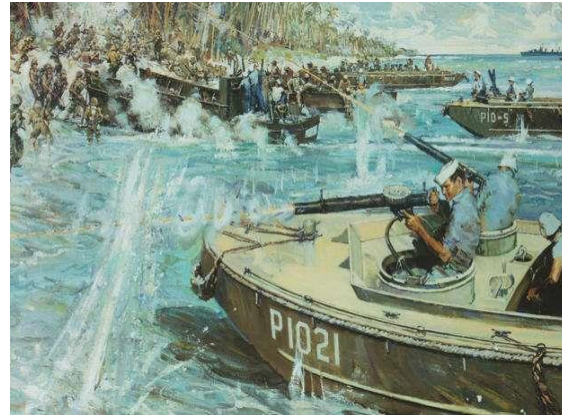


Figure 8. Illustration while Signaller 1st Class Douglas A. Munro and the other USCG Personnel operated the LCVP.
Source: Lin, 2018

Both explanations above showed the critical role of organizations such as Coastwatcher and USCG in building Surveillance Systems (including providing military support if needed). Indonesia has its own Coast Guard organization named Bakamla RI/*Badan Keamanan Laut Republik Indonesia* (also mentioned Indonesian Coast Guard/IDNCG). The existence of Bakamla RI is the implementation of the 3rd Section of Article No. 59 of Law No. 32 of 2014, which reads:

“To enforce the law in the Indonesian territorial and jurisdiction region, especially to implement security and safety patrols in the Indonesian territorial and jurisdiction region, *Badan Keamanan Laut* has been established.”

The principle of *Lex Posterior Derogat Legi Priori* (which means the

newer regulations abolish the older) emphasizes the existence of Bakamla RI as the only authorized agency/organization to handle several maritime security problems (Sudiro et al., 2023). Then Law No. 32 of 2014 also mentioned several functions of Bakamla RI (see Article No. 62) which are two of which correlate with the roles of Coastwatcher and USCG, those are:

1. We are arranging a surveillance system for security and safety in Indonesian territory and jurisdiction regions.
2. We are serving side duties in the National Defense System.

Both functions (supported by the other functions mentioned in Article No. 62) are highly important for Bakamla RI to build a Surveillance System in Indonesian territory and jurisdiction regions, especially in the Natuna region.

There is an available Surveillance System to be built by Bakamla RI based on artificial intelligence/A.I. technologies while still optimizing the internal budget and the available equipment (Sudiro & Jupriyanto, 2022) to monitor every maritime condition and activity real-time and to deliver the result to the Headquarter to be followed-up (Sudiro et al., 2023). Building the Surveillance

System also considers the capacity and capability of the national defense industries (Sudiro et al., 2023). Then, the Surveillance System was modeled as shown in the figure below:

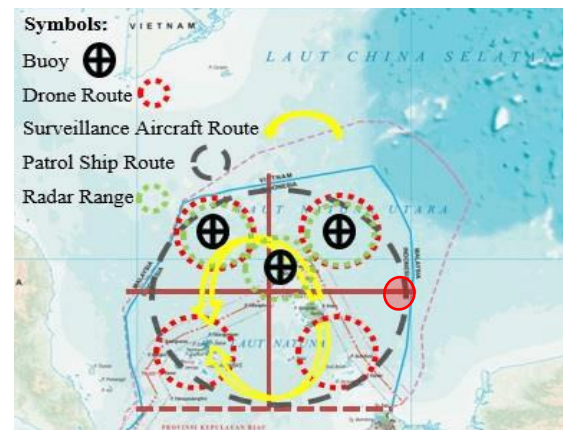


Figure 9. The model of the available surveillance system is to be built in the Natuna Region (the red sign shows the latest position of the CCG patrol vessel).
Source: Sudiro et al., 2023

The Surveillance System has been planned to integrate manned equipment contained in Surveillance Aircraft and patrol Vessels and unmanned equipment contained in passive radar and drones based on AI. Furthermore, Figure 9 shows that building and applying the Surveillance System will improve the early detection of threats (in this case, threats from CCG Patrol Vessels) so that Bakamla RI can prevent the implication of the threats earlier.

Conclusions, Recommendation, and Limitation

The main reason for the Japanese defeat on Guadalcanal is the lack of early warning capability. Japan failed to detect the threat of U.S. troops reconquering the island and then suffered high casualties that actually could be placed to build a surveillance system. Soon after reconquered Guadalcanal, U.S. troops landed island by island and reconquered those all. This research tries to explain that the reconquest of Guadalcanal and the following islands by U.S. troops has a similar pattern to Chinese aggressivities known as 'Nine Dash Line' that triggered to claim island by island in the South Chinese Sea, starting from Paracel island then Spratly Island. Later, Chinese troops (by CCG Patrol Vessels) intruded into the Indonesian sovereignty region and closer to Natuna Island. To monitor every threat on Natuna and to prevent its implication earlier, the Surveillance System must be implemented and applied by Bakamla RI as the Indonesian Coast Guard.

Following the result, there are several recommendations for its follow-up. The first is to strengthen Bakamla RI as an Indonesian Coast Guard using support from capable equipment and personnel. Bakamla RI will be the subject of the Surveillance System built. Secondly is the building of a Surveillance System in

the Indonesian sovereignty region. It will apply early warning capability to detect every threat and prevent the implication earlier. The last recommendation is to conduct further research about the Surveillance System's concept design, focusing on integrating each piece of equipment. Some national defense industries are available to produce each piece of equipment, but those still need a software or integration system to synergize into the Surveillance System.

Several things could be improved during finishing this research. The main limitation is the need for primary sources or related academic articles, so this research used literature mostly from history textbooks or encyclopedias as primary resources. The other limitation is that this research is limited to literature research using only some resources from historiographic and updated mass media. Hence, one of the fundamental purposes of this article is to enrich the literature about the application of defense strategy by analyzing historical events.

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