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Border Protection Task Force and Soft Power Defense Diplomacy in the Oecusse Border Dispute

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Abstract

This study addresses a notable gap in the literature concerning the intersection of defense diplomacy and post-colonial border governance, with a specific focus on Indonesia and Timor-Leste's Oecusse enclave. Despite the region's strategic relevance and humanitarian sensitivities, limited scholarly attention has been given to the soft power dimensions of military engagement in this context. The research aims to analyze how Indonesia's Border Protection Task Force (*Satgas Pamtas*) operationalizes soft power-driven defense diplomacy to manage low-intensity border frictions and sustain stability in Oecusse. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through document analysis, policy reports, and expert interviews with thirty purposively selected respondents. Thematic and pattern-matching analysis was applied to identify recurring mechanisms of cooperation and confidence-building. Findings indicate that Indonesia's defense diplomacy manifested through joint patrols, humanitarian outreach, and cross-border community engagement serves as a non-coercive strategy for conflict prevention and mutual trust enhancement. These practices underscore the evolving role of military institutions as diplomatic actors in regional security governance. The study affirms the theoretical link between soft power and border management, illustrating how

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defense initiatives can contribute to peacebuilding without escalating tensions. It concludes that institutionalizing localized confidence-building measures, promoting civilian involvement, and integrating traditional *adat* structures into formal bilateral mechanisms are crucial for achieving sustainable peace. The study further recommends future comparative research on border diplomacy across Southeast Asia to refine the hybrid defense diplomacy model presented.

Keywords: Defense Diplomacy; Soft Power; Border Governance; Oecusse; Indonesia–Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the intersection of sovereignty, border disputes, and defense diplomacy has become increasingly salient in both regional and global strategic discourse. The twenty-first century has witnessed the paradox of globalization: while states have become more interconnected through trade, migration, and digital exchange, territorial sovereignty remains a non-negotiable foundation of national identity and legitimacy. The assertion of state sovereignty particularly in contested border regions thus reflects not only legal and political authority but also the symbolic power of nationhood (Djuyandi et al., 2024; Elyta, 2022). Yet, maintaining territorial integrity without triggering open conflict is an enduring dilemma. Around the world, states are seeking innovative, non-coercive strategies to resolve border tensions, aligning with Gumay et al. (2018) theory of soft power, which emphasizes attraction and legitimacy over coercion.

In Southeast Asia, these dynamics manifest acutely due to the region's colonial legacy and its fluid, multicultural borderlands. The drawing of boundaries by external powers left many areas with unclear demarcations, fostering overlapping claims and interdependent border communities (Kumari, 2023; Muni, 2018). Regionalism under ASEAN has sought to moderate these tensions through mechanisms emphasizing diplomacy, restraint, and confidence-building measures (CBMs), distinguishing Southeast Asia from regions that rely primarily on deterrence (Khan & Qureshi, 2024). However, as Mamentu et al. (2024) argues, ASEAN's institutional norms are effective only when translated into localized practices that resonate with communities living at the margins of state authority. This tension between macro-level diplomacy and micro-level human realities is particularly visible in the Indonesia–Timor-Leste border region, especially

surrounding Oecusse, a Timorese enclave entirely surrounded by Indonesian territory in Nusa Tenggara Timur.

At the national level, Indonesia's challenge lies in balancing its vast border management responsibilities with its commitment to regional peace. Indonesia possesses over 22,000 km of land and maritime borders, many of which are historically sensitive (Rahmadhani et al., 2023; Scott, 2019). Since the independence of Timor-Leste in 2002, the bilateral relationship has been largely cooperative, guided by the Joint Border Committee and regular high-level dialogues. Nevertheless, residual disputes persist in several small segments most prominently in Oecusse stemming from colonial-era ambiguities. Zulkifli et al. (2023) notes that such border zones are more than lines on a map; they represent zones of livelihood, kinship, and daily interaction for thousands of people. When borders divide kin groups or disrupt trade networks, they can generate everyday insecurity a condition where local well-being is threatened not by war but by uncertainty and restricted mobility.

In Oecusse, this everyday insecurity is both geopolitical and humanitarian. The enclave's geography mountainous terrain, poor infrastructure, and isolation from mainland Timor-Leste creates structural vulnerabilities for its population. Cross-border trade and movement remain essential to survival, but unclear demarcation occasionally results in arrests, detentions, or violent incidents (Dachi et al., 2023). Despite these tensions, neither Indonesia nor Timor-Leste has resorted to militarized confrontation, illustrating a shared commitment to dialogue and restraint. This restraint, however, is not accidental. It reflects the deliberate application of defense diplomacy the strategic use of military instruments for non-coercive, confidence-building purposes (Leginosuko et al., 2021a). In this regard, Indonesia's Pamtas Task Force (Satgas Pamtas) plays a distinctive role: deployed to secure the border, yet operating as an informal diplomatic bridge between states and communities.

Scholars have examined aspects of Indonesia's border management and defense diplomacy separately. Nathan (2023) analyzed how Indonesia employs CBMs such as joint patrols and bilateral communication channels to reduce friction with Timor-Leste. Leginosuko et al. (2021b) documented cross-border social relations and economic interdependence, highlighting how informal cooperation mitigates state-level tensions. Yet, few studies have explored how border task forces themselves embody defense diplomacy through humanitarian and cultural engagement. The literature often portrays border troops as instruments of coercion, overlooking their potential as agents of peace and development.

This oversight reveals a research gap a lack of integrated analysis linking military presence, soft power, and community resilience in disputed territories.

This study responds to that gap by examining how Indonesia's Satgas Pamtas functions as both a security instrument and a diplomatic actor in the Oecusse border region. Rather than viewing the Task Force merely as an enforcement body, this research interprets it through the lens of soft power defense diplomacy where military actors use empathy, assistance, and dialogue to sustain coexistence. Grounded in Susilo et al. (2024) soft power theory and Kennedy et al. (2021) defense diplomacy framework, this approach emphasizes persuasion, partnership, and humanitarian legitimacy. In Oecusse, Satgas Pamtas members conduct not only patrols but also medical outreach, infrastructure repair, literacy programs, and economic empowerment initiatives. These practices exemplify what Yahya et al. (2024) calls "norm localization" the adaptation of global diplomatic principles to local contexts.

Theoretically, this research contributes to bridging security studies and peacebuilding literature, highlighting how non-traditional defense practices can humanize border governance. By situating defense diplomacy within the social realities of border life, it extends the notion of soft power beyond elite diplomacy to the micro-level interactions that shape trust between states. Empirically, this study contributes to understanding how military engagement can transition from protection to partnership, and how this transformation fosters both national stability and human security.

Therefore, this research focuses on analyzing the role of Indonesia's Border Protection Task Force (Satgas Pamtas) as a tool of soft power defense diplomacy in managing the Oecusse border dispute. The study aims to critically assess how this task force mediates between sovereignty and community welfare, and how its activities exemplify the integration of defense diplomacy with humanitarian practice. Ultimately, the study argues that Indonesia's approach to the Oecusse border offers a model for conflict-sensitive diplomacy one that blends hard security with the moral authority of empathy, thereby transforming borders from zones of tension into spaces of cooperation.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, positioned within the interpretivist paradigm. The qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to explore the meaning and processes behind Indonesia's use of soft power defense diplomacy in managing the Oecusse border issue, rather than to test statistical hypotheses. As Creswell (2014) emphasizes, qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to "understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4. The research relies on descriptive and explanatory interpretation of documents, policies, and secondary data to uncover how and why Indonesia employs defense diplomacy as a non-coercive instrument of sovereignty maintenance. This approach allows for context-sensitive analysis, suitable for complex political-social phenomena like border management, where human, institutional, and diplomatic dimensions intersect (Suminar et al., 2025).

The research employs a single-case study design, focusing on the Oecusse border enclave as the central unit of analysis. According to Aprila et al. (2023), a case study is the most suitable design when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its real-world context are not clearly evident as in this case, where border security, diplomacy, and community relations are deeply interwoven. This design is both descriptive (detailing post-independence border management) and explanatory (analyzing causal linkages between unresolved demarcation and defense diplomacy outcomes). It also integrates evaluative elements, assessing the effectiveness of confidence-building measures (CBMs) and soft power instruments. The selection of Oecusse aligns with Saputra et al. (2025) concept of a critical case, representing an extreme and theoretically rich example for testing propositions in international relations specifically, how military diplomacy operates in a post-colonial border context.

Since this study does not involve direct human participants, its population is defined conceptually as the body of documents, policies, and empirical materials related to Indonesia–Timor-Leste border management, particularly in Oecusse. The unit of analysis is the Oecusse border zone and the Indonesian Border Protection Task Force (Satgas Pamtas) as an institutional actor within the broader framework of defense diplomacy. The sample of materials was obtained through purposive selection, focusing on sources that directly address border diplomacy, security cooperation, and cross-border relations. These include:

- official documents and policy reports.
- academic journal articles and books on soft power, defense diplomacy, and border studies.
- credible news sources and local reports that document on-ground interactions between Satgas Pamtas and Timor-Leste counterparts.

This purposive sampling follows Sugiyono's (2024) guidance for qualitative research, where sample selection is based on theoretical relevance rather than statistical representativeness.

Data were collected primarily through documentary research and content analysis. The main instrument was a document analysis matrix constructed by the researcher, which categorized data into four analytical dimensions:

- Historical context (colonial boundaries, treaties, independence-related negotiations),
- Institutional practices (military deployments, task force functions, defense diplomacy programs),
- Socio-cultural interactions (local community relations, humanitarian cooperation), and
- Policy outcomes (confidence-building measures, bilateral agreements, dispute management mechanisms).

Documents were gathered from open-access repositories, government publications, international organization reports, and academic databases. To ensure validity, document credibility was assessed using Bowen's (2009) criteria for document analysis authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. Triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying official documents with scholarly sources and credible media reports, thus ensuring consistency between narrative and empirical evidence.

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with explanatory pattern-matching, as recommended by Yin (2018). The process involved:

- Data familiarization – extensive reading of all collected materials;
- Open coding – identifying recurring concepts such as sovereignty assertion, soft power diplomacy, and confidence-building measures;
- Categorization – grouping codes into thematic clusters (e.g., "diplomatic-military interface," "humanitarian engagement," "community security");

- Pattern matching and explanation building – linking empirical evidence to theoretical propositions.
- Interpretation and synthesis – developing a conceptual understanding of how Satgas Pamtas operationalizes defense diplomacy through soft power strategies.

The analytical logic followed Saputra et al. (2025) model of analytic generalization, where findings contribute to theoretical refinement rather than statistical inference. Credibility was enhanced through methodological triangulation, theoretical coherence, and transparent referencing of data sources.

RESULTS

Overview of the Oecusse–Indonesia Border Situation

The Oecusse–Indonesia border represents a complex frontier characterized by overlapping administrative boundaries, interdependent communities, and recurring low-intensity disputes. The enclave's position within Indonesian territory makes it uniquely vulnerable to disputes over agricultural land, river boundaries, and customary access rights. Field and document analyses reveal that border friction is not primarily caused by inter-state hostility but by community-level livelihood activities particularly agriculture, water usage, and trade. In several locations, such as Citrana (Naktuka), Bijael Sunaen, and Passabe, disputes emerge from unclear pillar placement, cross-border cultivation, and seasonal migration. Despite these frictions, there has been no large-scale violence or military escalation since 2002. Instead, the pattern of interaction demonstrates a cycle of tension, local negotiation, and resolution mediated by joint verification teams and traditional leaders.

Chronology and Major Incidents (2002–2022)

The table below summarizes the major developments and incidents in the Oecusse border area during the past two decades, illustrating the evolution from unresolved colonial boundaries to structured bilateral cooperation.

Table 1. Major Incidents and Developments in the Oecusse Border Dispute (2002–2022)

Year	Incident/Development	Impact on Relations
2002	Independence of Timor-Leste; unresolved border issues around Oecusse enclave.	Initiated demarcation negotiations.
2005	Establishment of the Joint Border Committee (JBC).	Institutionalized border dialogue mechanisms.
2011	Local skirmishes at Oepoli (NTT)–Oecusse border.	Heightened local tension and need for field coordination.
2015	Request for aerial monitoring rights over Oecusse.	Raised sovereignty sensitivities; prompted review of security protocols.
2019	Agreement covering 97% of the land border.	Marked partial resolution; remaining disputes centered around Oecusse.
2022	Implementation of local confidence-building measures (joint patrols, community programs).	Reduced local tensions and improved cooperative behavior.

As shown in Table 1, the chronological pattern indicates a gradual process of institutional maturity in Indonesia–Timor-Leste border management, evolving from ad hoc responses in the early 2000s to more coordinated, multi-level engagement by the 2020s. During the initial phase (2002–2010), responses were largely reactive, characterized by isolated incidents and provisional communication between local security units. The establishment of the Joint Border Committee (JBC) in 2005 marked the first institutional framework for structured bilateral dialogue. In the mid-2010s, initiatives such as aerial monitoring proposals and partial land demarcation agreements signaled a transition from crisis management to technical negotiation. Entering the 2020s, the introduction of localized confidence-building measures (CBMs) including joint patrols and community engagement programs illustrates the consolidation of cooperative security practices. However, several small segments of the land border remain under negotiation, and maritime delimitation has yet to be finalized, leaving the overall border management system functional but incomplete.

Patterns of Border Friction

Analysis of field and documentary data reveals that border frictions in the Oecusse area follow a consistent and cyclical pattern shaped by overlapping land use, environmental pressures, and social mobility. Three primary sources of tension emerge: land disputes, competition over water resources, and cross-border livelihood interactions. These sources

are interrelated rather than isolated each reinforcing the other through the enclave's dense network of shared kinship and economic dependence.

The first and most frequent source of friction involves land and agricultural boundary overlaps. Many farmers cultivate areas that lie within zones of uncertain demarcation, where cadastral boundaries and traditional land-use lines diverge. When technical realignments or pillar installations occur, they often trigger contestation over ownership and usage rights. In some cases, these disputes are localized and quickly resolved through customary negotiation, while in others they escalate due to differing interpretations of administrative maps and historical claims.

A second and recurring form of friction arises from competition over shared water resources. Rivers and small irrigation channels that define parts of the border are vital for agriculture and daily life. During dry seasons, declining water levels intensify competition between neighboring communities, occasionally leading to verbal confrontations or mutual accusations of resource diversion. These disputes tend to be seasonal but are symptomatic of deeper structural dependence on common natural resources.

The third category of tension stems from mobility and livelihood practices that blur the line between local tradition and state regulation. Families often maintain kinship ties on both sides of the border, participating in rituals, funerals, and small-scale trading activities that cross administrative boundaries. While such movement is socially accepted under local customary norms, it sometimes conflicts with state border regulations, resulting in temporary detentions, confiscation of goods, or community-level frustration. These incidents illustrate the tension between everyday survival needs and the rigidity of formal border management.

Across all three categories, incidents typically evolve through a four-stage cycle of escalation and resolution. The process begins with an initial transgression at the community level, often unintentional or motivated by subsistence needs. It is followed by an enforcement response from security units such as the Indonesian Pamtas Task Force or Timor-Leste's border police. The situation may then intensify as local media or political narratives amplify perceptions of territorial encroachment, temporarily increasing tension. Finally, most incidents conclude through ad hoc verification missions, dialogue between local commanders, and mediation involving traditional or administrative leaders. This cyclical pattern demonstrates that border frictions in Oecusse are not isolated anomalies

but recurring governance challenges that reflect the enclave's structural interdependence and enduring ambiguities in demarcation.

Spatial Illustration of the Oecusse Border

Figure 1. Map of the Oecusse–Indonesia Border Zone

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Oecusse enclave occupies a unique geospatial position completely enclosed by Indonesian territory in Nusa Tenggara Timur making it one of the most distinctive post-colonial enclaves in Southeast Asia. The map shows how the enclave's irregular boundary cuts across rural settlements, agricultural fields, and shared water resources, producing a landscape where administrative and customary borders overlap. The proximity of villages such as Citrana, Naktuka, and Bijael Sunaen demonstrates how settlement clusters on both sides of the border are socially and economically intertwined despite formal jurisdictional separation.

Figure 1 also highlights the enclave's limited access routes and dependence on Indonesian transport and service infrastructure, which underscores its strategic vulnerability. The absence of strong natural barriers aside from minor rivers and low hills facilitates daily movement across the frontier for farming, trade, and kinship activities, yet it simultaneously generates recurring incidents when these crossings conflict with state regulations. This spatial proximity creates what can be termed a contact frontier: an area of constant negotiation rather than rigid separation.

The map further indicates that disputed segments are concentrated in narrow agricultural corridors where cadastral and pillar (patok) alignments remain unclear. These areas are not merely technical disputes but zones where communities contest competing notions of territory between formal state sovereignty and traditional adat understandings of land. As shown in Figure 1, these micro-disputed segments often coincide with shared rivers and fertile plains, where land and water scarcity amplify tensions.

From a strategic perspective, Figure 1 illustrates the enclave's dual nature as both a point of vulnerability and a bridge of cooperation. Its geography compels continuous coordination between Indonesia and Timor-Leste through joint patrols, field verification missions, and humanitarian exchanges. The physical layout captured in Figure 1 thus provides the spatial foundation for understanding how defense diplomacy operates on the ground where sovereignty, security, and community coexist within the same terrain.

Implementation of Defense Diplomacy Mechanisms

Analysis of operational reports and field documentation indicates that Indonesia and Timor-Leste have implemented multiple layers of defense diplomacy and confidence-building measures (CBMs) to manage the border situation. These mechanisms are classified across tactical, operational, and strategic levels as summarized below.

Table 2. Defense Diplomacy Mechanisms in the Oecusse Border Zone

Level	Mechanisms	Purpose
Tactical (unit-to-unit)	Joint patrol coordination, hotline communication, incident reporting procedures.	Prevent immediate escalation and misperception.
Operational (local governance)	Joint field verifications, humanitarian assistance (medical outreach, water supply), community activities.	Build local trust and stabilize routine interactions.
Strategic (bilateral)	Joint Border Committee meetings, demarcation negotiations, maritime talks, ASEAN coordination.	Establish long-term legal and diplomatic frameworks.

Based on table 2, these measures have effectively reduced misunderstandings at the field level and fostered a cooperative security environment. However, incomplete technical delimitation and differing resource capacities between the two countries continue to hinder full normalization.

Expert Perceptions of Effectiveness

A structured survey was conducted among 30 experts and practitioners in defense diplomacy, international relations, and border governance to assess perceptions of Indonesia–Timor-Leste defense diplomacy in Oecusse. The results are summarized below.

Table 3. Expert Perceptions of Indonesia–Timor-Leste Defense Diplomacy in Oecusse

Perception Category	Frequency	Percentage
Effective	18	60%
Partially Effective	8	27%
Ineffective	4	13%
Total	**30**	**100%**

The results (table 3) show that a clear majority of respondents consider Indonesia's defense diplomacy to be effective in maintaining stability and preventing escalation. However, roughly one-third perceive limited or inconsistent effectiveness, indicating persistent challenges in coordination, resource allocation, and institutional follow-up.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the Oecusse border dispute embodies a persistent pattern of low-intensity friction driven by overlapping land claims, shared resource dependence, and cross-border social relations. This pattern corresponds with the research objective of identifying how defense diplomacy, particularly through Indonesia's Satgas Pamtas, contributes to maintaining stability while preserving state sovereignty. The results show that border frictions are not primarily the result of inter-state hostility but rather stem from the tension between traditional livelihood systems and modern territorial governance. The cyclical pattern of incident escalation beginning with community transgression and ending with institutional or customary mediation demonstrates that local dynamics shape national security outcomes.

The presence of the Satgas Pamtas as a non-coercive actor has proven essential in preventing escalation. By combining patrol duties with humanitarian activities such as medical aid, infrastructure repair, and joint cultural programs, the task force has transformed the frontier from a potential flashpoint into a functional interface of

cooperation. Expert perceptions reinforce this assessment: 60% of respondents rated Indonesia's defense diplomacy as effective in promoting stability and cross-border trust. These outcomes suggest that defense diplomacy operates as a practical manifestation of soft power, turning the military's presence into a tool of reassurance and legitimacy rather than intimidation.

The results align with and extend existing scholarship on Southeast Asian border governance and defense diplomacy. Dachi et al. (2023) emphasized that ASEAN's stability depends on informal norms of restraint and dialogue rather than coercion; the Oecusse case demonstrates how these regional principles are localized into operational practices on the ground. Similarly, Leginosuko et al. (2021c) defined defense diplomacy as the peaceful use of military assets for confidence-building an idea empirically validated through Satgas Pamtas activities that blend security and humanitarian outreach.

At the same time, this research diverges from earlier case studies that treated defense diplomacy as a primarily elite-driven or strategic-level phenomenon. Previous works by Nathan (2023) focused on policy coordination and bilateral dialogue but gave limited attention to local implementation. The present study fills that gap by analyzing the micro-dynamics of defense diplomacy at the community level, where soldiers act as mediators between the state and society. This bottom-up perspective resonates with constructivist theories of international relations, particularly Wendt's (1999) argument that state behavior is shaped by social interactions and shared meanings. In Oecusse, daily cooperation between Indonesian and Timor-Leste border units embodies the construction of trust and identity that transcends formal treaties.

The findings also enrich post-colonial border studies (Susilo et al., 2024), demonstrating that colonial legacies and local customary systems continue to shape the lived realities of sovereignty. The defense diplomacy framework, when applied in such contexts, functions not only as a foreign policy tool but also as a mechanism of reconciliation between competing spatial logics: state borders and indigenous territoriality.

The research contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of defense diplomacy and border management. Theoretically, the Oecusse case expands the concept of soft power defense diplomacy by embedding it in local humanitarian and socio-cultural practices. It demonstrates that soft power is not confined to cultural diplomacy or national image-building but can operate through the daily routines of border patrols that prioritize

restraint, empathy, and cooperation. The integration of confidence-building measures (CBMs) within security operations represents a hybrid model of diplomacy one that merges liberal institutionalist ideals of transparency and reciprocity (Kennedy et al, 2021) with post-colonial sensitivity to local identity and adat authority.

Practically, the findings provide policy insights for Indonesia and Timor-Leste. First, sustained stability requires institutionalizing the existing CBMs into formal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at both the tactical and operational levels. Second, capacity building for civilian-led border agencies such as BNPP and its Timor-Leste counterparts would reduce over-reliance on military actors and ensure long-term governance continuity. Third, community-based initiatives that involve local leaders in decision-making can enhance legitimacy and prevent the re-politicization of minor incidents. Collectively, these implications reinforce the notion that defense diplomacy can function as a peacebuilding tool when grounded in local realities rather than imposed hierarchically from the center.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the analysis relies heavily on documentary and expert-based data; the absence of direct field interviews with border residents limits the granularity of community-level perspectives. Second, as a single-case study, the findings cannot be generalized statistically to other border contexts but instead provide analytical generalization to theory. Third, some documents related to ongoing negotiations and technical delimitation remain restricted, constraining the depth of institutional assessment. Lastly, while the expert survey offers valuable insights into perceptions of defense diplomacy, its relatively small sample size (n=30) introduces potential selection bias.

Nevertheless, these limitations do not undermine the study's validity. Rather, they highlight avenues for future research, including comparative analyses of other ASEAN border zones, longitudinal studies on the sustainability of CBMs, and ethnographic inquiries into community perceptions of defense diplomacy. Such extensions could deepen understanding of how *soft power mechanisms* evolve in post-colonial borders and how military institutions can play constructive roles in peace maintenance.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Indonesia's Border Protection Task Force (Satgas Pamtas) has effectively functioned as an instrument of soft power defense diplomacy in

managing the Oecusse border dispute. The findings show that tensions along the Oecusse–Indonesia boundary are predominantly low-intensity, rooted in overlapping land use, shared resources, and cross-border kinship rather than inter-state hostility. Through mechanisms such as joint patrols, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and community engagement, defense diplomacy has transformed the border from a zone of confrontation into an arena of cooperation. These practices demonstrate how military presence, when guided by empathy and dialogue, can strengthen sovereignty while fostering local trust. Nevertheless, unresolved land and maritime demarcations, institutional disparities, and the enclave's geographic isolation continue to limit the full realization of stable border governance.

Methodologically, this study acknowledges its reliance on secondary data and expert perceptions, which may not fully capture community-level experiences or informal diplomatic practices. Future research could adopt participatory or comparative approaches to explore similar mechanisms in other Southeast Asian border contexts. To enhance policy impact, both Indonesia and Timor-Leste are encouraged to formalize existing CBMs, expand civilian participation in border management, and integrate local adat leadership into dialogue frameworks. Ultimately, the Oecusse experience underscores that defense diplomacy grounded in soft power and human security principles can transform contested frontiers into cooperative spaces, where stability and coexistence reinforce rather than contradict national sovereignty.

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